

The specific museum presentation forms of cultural heritage in rural areas, based on the example of the Hont ecomuseum and educational public footpath¹

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This study focuses on forms of museological presentation for the mediation of natural, cultural, historic and social values, with specific reference to ecomuseums and educational public footpaths. The object of the study is to characterise these forms and on the basis of real examples, in order to highlight opportunities in the field of museological communication that lead away from the traditional interpretation of forms focused on the object, towards contemporary flexible modes of communication directed towards the experience within its context. It also explores the utilisation of such approaches for the development and promotion of the locality and its attractions. The subjects of the research are the ecomuseum and educational public footpath in the village of Hrušov. These features are identified with the locality and accentuate specific aspects of its cultural heritage, presenting them to visitors. The study is the result of ethnological research undertaken periodically since 2017 and it represents an introductory probe into the chosen area.

Keywords: ecomuseums, educational public footpath, natural and cultural heritage, tourism, Hrušov

Introduction

This paper analyses two specific museological forms of presentation, the ecomuseum and educational public footpath in the village of Hrušov. These features mediate the natural, cultural, historical and social values of the local community, supporting the development and promotion of the locality and helping make it more attractive to tourists. These tourism features are strongly rooted in the locality and accentuate specific aspects of the village's natural and cultural heritage.

There are no Slovak ethnology studies on the theme of educational public footpaths, and only a few isolated publications are available in other fields, mainly in the field of geography, environmentalism and forestry. The theme of the ecomuseum has been discussed mainly in museological literature, although a complex picture has yet to be built up with regard to the existence of ecomuseums, their characteristics, or their regional distribution in Slovakia. It is

¹ The study has been based on research funded by the VEGA grant No. 1/0232/19 Cultural Heritage as Part of the Socio-Cultural Potential of Tourism Development in Local Communities.

for this reason that the present exploratory research represents an introductory probe that I conceptualise as an introduction to this area.

The objectives of the case study are to present the basic findings of the central theme; to research the non-traditional ways of presenting the material and spiritual values of the locality to potential visitors; and to highlight the opportunities for museological communication using contemporary flexible forms which interconnect country, human beings and culture. I perceive the stated forms as a demonstration of one of the many possible interpretational approaches, but not as a museum in its true nature as a memory institution. The legitimacy of focusing on Hrušov village's Hont Ecomuseum and public educational footpath for ethnological research follows from the fact that the country, human beings, culture, environmental connection, and the overlap of natural and cultural heritage are interdisciplinary topics that cross the sciences and humanities.

The choice of the educational public footpath (in Slovak language: NCH) and ecomuseum and their locality reflect practical options that were available to me as a researcher. Methodologically, basic ethnographic qualitative approaches were followed. The present study follows on from several pieces of short-term field research, conducted mainly between 2017 and 2019. These were mainly based on controlled interviews with local inhabitants, leaders and stakeholders (members of self-governing bodies, associations and clubs; primary school teachers). Other significant research methods were also applied, such as non-participating observation, supplemented by studying local development plans, territorial plans, SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) analyses, newspapers and web pages. My research was based on materials associated with the Ecomuseum Hont project, which is now completed. However, the project's activities and compilation of collections continue and they are interwoven with the educational public footpath's information points. In the 2015–2024 development plan for Hrušov village, both the ecomuseum and the educational public footpath are presented as active rural tourism attractions, based on domestic resources and implemented by local citizens.²

This study draws not only on the academic ethnological and museological literature, but also on environmental studies and methodological manuals.

Ecomuseum – the specific presentation form for natural and cultural heritage

At the beginning of the 1970s, the development of various alternative forms of museum was supported by the movement for so-called 'New Museology', the foundations of which were laid with Georges Henri Rivière's ecomuseum concept. The concept was enhanced and elaborated on by Hugues de Varine (who was inspired by Scandinavian open-air museums) for the French Ministry of the Environment, as a supporting measure for the development of agricultural, mountain and fishing villages.³ In the 1980s, researchers shifted their attention to ecological and environmental issues, which then transferred also into the relationship between

² Website of the Development Programme of the village of Hrušov for 2007–2013, accessed December 2020, www.hrusov.sk/program-rozvoja-obce-na-roky-2015-2024.html.

³ STRÁNSKÁ, Edita, STRÁNSKÝ, Zbyněk. *The basics of museological studies*. Banská Bystrica: Mateja Bel University, 2000; ZAPLETAL, Miloš. New indicators for proposals and evaluation of ecomuseums – contribution to new museology. In: *Acta Historica Universitatis Silesianae Opaviensis*. Opava: Silesian university in Opava, Faculty of philosophy and natural sciences in Opava, The Institute of Historical Sciences, 2012, pp. 231–243.

museums and society.⁴ Despite the fact that to this day there is still no clear definition of or individual criteria for this type of museum, its nature lies in the presentation of reality, accompanied by partial a revitalisation in its natural environment. It is precisely the revitalisation which in this case serves as the medium for the presentation of the tangible and intangible essence of culture heritage elements in their social and cultural relations.⁵ Rivière conceived of the ecomuseum as presenting the relationship between the local inhabitants and their environs, interpreted in terms of both the contemporary situation and its historical evolution, along with critical realisation of the future development. According to him, the ecomuseum sets human beings within their cultural and natural setting through the system of time – the evolution of the given locality from historic to modern.⁶ The ecomuseum model presents the effects of industrial development, not only in the economic sense but also with regard to the social and cultural context of a specific area.⁷

According to Wilke Heijnen, the ideas of new museology emerge in two interwoven courses: firstly, through the emergence of new types of museums – for example ecomuseums, neighbourhood museums and community museums;⁸ and secondly, via the opportunity to reach a wider audience and offer them a more active role in the activities of museums. Participation, representation and social inclusion are crucial to these approaches.⁹ Ecomuseums directly involve local communities, local citizens, and representatives of local governance bodies, organisations and associations in their activities and management. It is precisely these figures who should perform a key role in gaining support for projects and activities that directly respond to their specific circumstances. To achieve this, the museum has to be understood and structured as something organic and living, where the culture of a community can be determined by the geographic limits that the community occupies, and within which both culture and community coexist.¹⁰ As Nunzia Borrelli and Peter Davis point out, the establishment of an ecomuseum is a dynamic process through which communities are able to identify, conserve, interpret and manage their natural and cultural heritage resources for sustainable development.¹¹ An innovative ecomuseum exists in immediate interconnection with the environment, history, heritage and life of the local society, and that society participates in an active way in its existence. A museum oriented in this way is not about objects, but rather the needs and feelings of the society it serves at first hand.¹² Thus, it is also a place for social gatherings and cooperation, owing to which, the museum and its locality also generates a high

⁴ KAČÍREK, Euboš, RAGAČ, Radoslav, TIŠLIAR, Pavol. *Múzeum a historické vedy*. Krakow: The Slovak Associations in Poland, 2013, p. 16.

⁵ KRIŠKOVÁ, Zdena. The role of research in the process of preservation and scientific evaluation of cultural heritage in the museum. In: *Museology and Cultural Heritage*, Vol. 2, Is.1, 2014, p. 37.

⁶ RIVIÈRE, Georges, Henri. The ecomuseum – an evolutive definition. In: *Museum. Images of the Ecomuseum*, 1985, pp. 182–184, cited by: ZAPLETAL, New indicators..., p. 231.

⁷ DOLÁK, Jan. New museology and ecomuseology. In: *Journal of the Association of museums and galleries in the Czech Republic*, 2004, p. 13.

⁸ The first and best-known museum of this kind is Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in Washington DC.

⁹ HEIJNEN, Wilke. The new professional: Underdog or Expert? New Museology in the 21st century. In: dos SANTOS, Paula, Assunção, PRIMO, Judite (eds.). *Sociology. To understand New Museology in the 21st Century*, Lisbon: Universidade Lusófona, 2010, p. 14.

¹⁰ NAVAJAS CORRAL, Óscar. Ecomuseums in Spain: an analysis of their characteristics and typologies. In: *Museology and cultural heritage*, Vol. 7, Is. 1, 2019, p. 9.

¹¹ BORRELLI, Nunzia, DAVIS, Peter. How Culture Shapes Nature: Reflections on Ecomuseum Practices. In: *Nature and Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2012, p. 31.

¹² DOLÁK, New museology and ecomuseology..., p. 15.

level of social capital.¹³

Ecomuseums in their focus, in the cooperation and the participation of their stakeholders, and in their use of interaction and varied means of communication, offer an interesting and promising approach to the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage, particularly when it comes to sustainability and supporting local development. In addition, their contribution towards preserving cultural memory and supporting community identity is not negligible. The ecomuseum is designed, among other things, as an education tool, helping people to (re)discover their unique heritage and to preserve elements from the past which would otherwise risk being lost from the collective memory. At the same time, it offers a specific form of cultural tourism. Ecomuseums interpret local history and specific cultural and natural phenomena through active engagement, presenting them in an easy-to-understand form for local inhabitants and tourists.¹⁴

An attempt to redefine museums in cooperation with diverse communities followed from the ICOM 2019 conference, *Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition*.¹⁵ Museums perform a vital role in mediating the sociocultural and economic potential of villages, towns and regions as tourist destinations. Some time ago, the word “enjoyment” was added to the definition of the museum, thus broadening its original functions – memory and education – with a third one: an experience. At the same time, none of these functions can exist independently. If we conceive of museums as regional tourism players, the “experience” element becomes crucial.¹⁶ It directly correlates with one of the main forms of tourism, experience tourism, in which tourists seek out experiences different from their everyday life; in other words, a certain kind of excitement and adventure. Within this context, a tourist’s presence and their participation in the action is important, it enhances the intensity of the experience.¹⁷ A similar viewpoint is shared by Janka Beresecká and Lukáš Varecha, who note that when planning future tourism and creating offerings for tourists, it is necessary to bear in mind that people seek out life experiences; they want to satisfy their curiosity, experience diverse cultures and adventure, and ‘feel’ the places they have visited. They long to be involved in people’s stories and participate actively in the culture and community. In this environment, it is no longer tourist products that are sold, but authentic experiences.¹⁸ Recently, the tourism sector has seen a growing interest in active learning about the culture and history of the visited region and the everyday lives of

¹³ KREISSLOVÁ, Sandra. Searching for lost identity. Community museum in Dedkov as a place for reconstruction of collective memory and local identity. In: TICHÁ, Jana (ed). *Museum and identity. Ethnological views*. Rožnov pod Radhoštěm: Wallachian Open Air Museum in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, 2016, p. 35.

¹⁴ ZAPLETAL, Miloš, MURÍN, Ivan. The role of the ecomuseum in natural heritage protection. In: KUMINKOVÁ, Eva (ed.). *Open-air museums. A unique way in museology*. Rožnov pod Radhoštěm: The National Open-air Museum, 2019, pp. 45–52.

¹⁵ ICOM KYOTO: Museums as Culture Hubs – the Future of Traditions, accessed November 2020, <http://icom-slovakia.mini.icom.museum/icom-kyoto-muzea-ako-kulturne-centra-buducnost-tradicie/>; DARULOVÁ, Jolana, KOŠTALOVÁ, Katarína. Museums of minorities’ cultures as a specific form of tourism. In: Klímová, Viktorie, Žitek, Vladimír (eds.). *Proceedings of the 23rd International Colloquium on Regional Sciences*. Brno: Masaryk University, 2020, p. 372.

¹⁶ PŮČEK, Milan, Jan, PLAČEK, Michal. Museums as regional players in the tourist industry – difficulties in museological statistics. In: *Proceedings of the 19th International Colloquium on Regional Sciences*. Brno: Masaryk University, 2016, pp. 1040–1046.

¹⁷ DARULOVÁ, KOŠTALOVÁ, Museums of minorities’ cultures... p. 372.

¹⁸ BERESECKÁ, Janka, VARECHA, Lukáš. Rural tourism product. In: *Proceedings of the 21st International Colloquium on Regional Sciences*. Brno: Masaryk University, 2018, p. 562.

people in specific settings.¹⁹ Jiří Langer takes a particular interest in this issue, describing a visit to ecomuseums in Western Europe as follows:

The participants worked in the field during the day; in the evening they cooked traditional food using local ingredients; they learned local songs and also tasted local wine. Engaging visitors in traditional activities is popular in West European museums, and even more so in American museums. Arching one's back on a half-frozen potato field with a hoe in your hand is just one of the adrenalin experiences. The entire activity leads to the realisation and much stronger rooting of such ethnographic findings, which guides the present passively in our museums. ... These museums should enable the visitor to slow down their everyday race with time ... Here we discover that our museology (by which I mean generally central European) is lacking in the theory of psychology of the visitor and attendance.²⁰

I would add that neither have we started to elaborate on the sociology of museology.

Óscar Navajas Corral, who analysed the development and key characteristics of ecomuseums in Spain, also drew attention to several problems they faced, such as the ambiguity of terminology, methodology and typology, as well as the heterogeneity of ecomuseums' key characteristics. He observed, for instance, that ecomuseums in Spain are a mix of those that applied for the designation due to their theoretical and methodological knowledge of ecomuseology, and those that adopted it for reasons other than its philosophy. In most cases, this reflects a given moment in the evolution of museums and museological thinking in Spain, but also points to possible methodologies of intervention in territory and heritage management beyond those of the conventional museum. The evolution and conceptualisation of ecomuseums is very much country dependent. For example, the origin of ecomuseums in Spain cannot be sought in open-air museums or in Natural Parks (as the case may be, for example, in France, Scandinavian countries or Japan), even though both have had their influence. Rather, their origin lies in the evolution of local museums and territorial museums marked, on occasion, by micro-nationalisms, decentralisation and opposition to an ever more intense globalisation. These initiatives derive from the "need" for a form of community recognition that can embrace identity, heritage and territory.²¹

The importance of ecomuseums in the sustainable development of society and the environment is indisputable, but their establishment and expansion is certainly not without its problems, both in Europe and the rest of the world. In Slovakia, the phenomenon of ecomuseology is gaining ground only very slowly. The concept of development, record-keeping, databases and, alternatively, mutual internet promotion does not exist.

Some Norwegian examples of ecomuseums also include educational public footpaths, a topic dealt with in the next section.²²

¹⁹ BITUŠÍKOVÁ, Alexandra. Cultural heritage and globalisation: The story of one locality. UNESCO. In: *Museology and cultural heritage*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2014, p. 16.

²⁰ LANGER, Jiří. The status of museums in nature and tourism (three basic deficiencies of our work). In: *Ethnological debates*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 2005, pp. 82–83.

²¹ NAVAJAS CORRAL, Ecomuseums in Spain..., p. 12, 17.

²² ZAPLETAL, Miloš. The evaluation of the role of open air museums in northern Norway. In: Andráš, Peter, Zelen, Ján (eds.). *Acta Universitatis Matthiae Belii, the series Environmental management*, Banská Bystrica: Matej Bel University, 2014, pp. 28–34.

Educational public footpaths – the specific presentation form for natural and cultural heritage

Educational public footpaths (EPFs) include a wide range signposted tourist trails with diverse subject matter, differing in length and degree of difficulty, which were created to highlight the nature, countryside, history and culture of interesting locations or regions.²³ In a particular way, they contribute to the formation of the image of the locality and its natural and cultural heritage on a physical level, as well as the symbolic and cultural identification levels. The overlap of physical and symbolic phenomena provides a more complete picture of the country and life of an individual.²⁴ Educational footpaths demonstrate not only the level of cultural progress and cultural values, but the identity of the local society and how its inhabitants identify with the environment in which they live and are a part of. On an immaterial plane, such routes express a relationship between human beings and the local environment, animals, plants, visions, faith, values, aesthetic feelings and craft skills. They are also specific presentations of phenomena from traditional culture and folklore. Several definitions of educational footpaths emphasise their educational importance: as tourist and leisure functions, as active ways of spending free time, or as organised experiences and activities. According to Karolína Paukner and Jiří Woitsch, educational footpaths represent a specific medium, by means of which negotiating, influencing and acquiring knowledge of a specific country, its physical, natural, cultural-historic characteristics and memory happens for inhabitants of the regions and visitors – tourists. They are a purposefully developed network of meanings, which their creators add to the other layers of meanings in the country.²⁵

In this context we can perceive EPFs as a means of communication that assists in developing awareness of the country, its cultural heritage and its attitudes towards environmental protection.²⁶ For the villages and towns through which EPFs lead, they present a significant local representative feature; they enhance the attractiveness of the area; participate in the presentation of local governing bodies and micro-regional associations; and promote the activities of various institutions and clubs, thus contributing to improving the local economy, developing tourism and creating an image of the locality. EPFs are mainly established by organisations concerned with nature and environmental protection, forestry organisations, schools, towns, villages, NGOs and community groups.²⁷

Educational footpaths in Slovakia – history and current database

The beginnings of the construction of educational footpaths can be traced to the USA, in the 1920s, and in Germany, in the 1930s. Over time, more were built and used, primarily

²³ BURKOVSKÝ, Július, KRÁLIKOVÁ, Katarína. *Educational facilities in open air settings. Handbook for creating, operating and maintaining educational footpaths, locations and points*. Banská Bystrica: State Environment Protection Agency of the Slovak Republic, 2015; PACHINGER, Patrik, CIMERMANOVÁ, Ivona, SKUBINČAN, Peter et al. *Educational footpaths. Preparation, implementation, maintenance*. Banská Bystrica: Slovak Environmental Agency, 2016.

²⁴ PAUKNEROVÁ, Karolína, WOITSCH, Jiří. Bearers of memory or sources of false notions. Educational footpaths in the Czech Republic in an ethnological perspective. In: *Studia ethnologica Pragensia. Contemporary European Ethnology*, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2017, pp. 66–95.

²⁵ PAUKNEROVÁ, WOITSCH, Bearers of memory..., p. 67.

²⁶ GEBHARD, Katrin, MEYER, Michael, PARKYN, Morwenna et al. *Educational footpath planning*, accessed February 2021, https://www.oete.de/images/dokumente/projekt_napant/ETE_2006_Trail_Planning_Guide_sk.pdf.

²⁷ See, for example, the educational footpaths created by Modra beautifying club and MČ Bratislava – Rusovce, as described in: KACÍREK, Euboš, TIŠLIAR, Pavol. Múzejné exkurzie vo vyučovaní : minulosť a súčasný stav na Slovensku. In: *Museologica Brunensia*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2013, p. 13.

in Poland, Czechia, Hungary and Russia.²⁸ The initial prototype of an educational footpath was established in Slovakia in 1926, in the Štiavnické mountains, in the surroundings of Piarg (Štiavnické Bane). It had 32 stopping points and a special focus on forestry. The first official educational footpath in the Slovak Republic was Dunajec Breach, established in 1960 in Pieniny National Park; it is still in use today, after several restorations.²⁹ The first EPF count in Slovakia in 1984 recorded 12 of them in total. In the following decades their number increased steadily and, according to available information, in 2007 there were more than 230 educational footpaths.³⁰ It is difficult to establish accurate records, since neither their construction nor the end of their use falls under any record-keeping requirement or regulation. In this context I would like to mention, as a positive example, the project *Terrain geosciences teaching through using selected educational footpaths* (2017–2019), run by the Department of Physical Geography and Geoecology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava. This project resulted in an actively maintained webpage detailing educational footpaths in Slovakia.³¹ The established database is continuously updated as new information is added, providing basic information about paths and their characteristics, interesting facts, suggestions for use in education, map coordinates and terrain photographs. The filters enable users to make an initial search according to location, such as the higher territorial units and natural features. Based on the information provided by this source, there are currently 411 educational footpaths in Slovakia. The expanded filter offers several search options, for example according to topic (archaeological, mining, historical, cultural, religious, forestry, fruit-growing, etc.). Out of 79 culture-oriented footpaths are the Footpath of Jozef Kroner, the Čičmany Educational Footpath, the Bradlo Educational Footpath, the Educational Footpath in the Steps of Mining in Dobšiná, and the Educational Footpath of Hrušov village, presented in this paper. To classify educational footpaths according to topic is demanding, since only very few are monothematic, and none of the observed phenomena can be isolated from others. The prevalent method of presentation is under united topics (for instance, forestry and hunting, historic and cultural, forestry and cultural, etc.). It is precisely the above-mentioned topical blending which offers a positive and enriching perception of the country.

As mentioned at the beginning, there has been minimal research directed towards EPFs, and none from ethnologists. The fact that scientific and popular educative contributions are very rare does not reflect the reality of an ever-increasing number of educational footpaths and a growing interest among the population in this kind of educational approach to the natural environment, not to mention the use of EPFs as a tourism-based leisure activity, or their use in specific educational processes.

The angle we take when looking at this theme is truly interdisciplinary, intermingling natural, social, agricultural and technical scientific disciplines. The information sources include tourist leaflets and news bulletins mainly produced by the founders of educational footpaths and various other organisations. They differ in their content and graphic quality, depending on

²⁸ WOITSCH, Jiří, PAUKNEROVÁ, Karolína. *Methodology for presenting settlement and landscape heritage by way of creating educational footpaths*. Plzeň: Western Czech University in Plzeň, 2014, accessed February 2021, http://www.antropologie.org/sites/default/files/files/downloads/reports/metodika_naucne_stezky_2015_final.pdf; PAUKNEROVÁ, WOITSCH, Bearers of memory..., pp. 66–95; BURKOVSKÝ, KRÁLIKOVÁ, Educational facilities..., p. 36; PACHINGER et al. *Educational footpaths...* p. 47.

²⁹ BURKOVSKÝ, KRÁLIKOVÁ, *Educational facilities...*, p. 3.

³⁰ PACHINGER et al., *Educational footpaths...* p. 8.

³¹ Educational Footpaths in Slovakia, accessed January, 2021, <http://naucnehodniky.eu/>.

their objective, financial means, and the authors' expertise. Several experts refer to the fact that educational footpaths are often built spontaneously and amateurishly, with inadequate levels of content, visual graphics and architectural execution and inappropriate use of funding. For these reasons, in 2015, the State Environment Protection Agency of the Slovak Republic published a methodology guide, followed, in 2016, by one from the Slovak Environment Agency. These guides aimed to highlight good practice, tried and tested principles and consequent rules, as well as a list of deficiencies in the creation, implementation and management of EPFs, drawing on positive and negative examples of existing educational footpaths.³² Even though the numerous educational footpaths present cultural heritage in its tangible and intangible forms, methodological analysis or critical evaluation from the viewpoint of ethnologists is still missing.

Lately, EPFs have become popular spaces which, thanks to their specific means of illustrative presentation, provide not only tourism and sporting activities for individuals, but also experiences and information. They are built in order to promote the region or locality and make it more visible, and in their relation to the tourist industry, they offer substantial cognitive aspects linked with experience. The educational footpath user is not merely a passive observer; he or she has the opportunity to perceive a wider context when visiting the area. In this context, it is also necessary to draw attention to the negative environmental impacts EPFs can generate as a result of their operation, including overcrowding, damage to the surrounding environs, generating waste, harming wildlife, and noise pollution, among others.³³

Hrušov – characteristics of the locality and pre-conditions for the establishment of the ecomuseum and educational footpath

The researched locality of Hrušov lies in the historic-cultural region of Hont, in the district of Veľký Krtíš. It is situated on a boundary populated by Slovak and Hungarian inhabitants (in the neighbouring village of Vinica, the majority of the population are of Hungarian nationality). Hrušov has a population of 835, mainly of Roman Catholic confession. Of this total, 144 are Roma people who live in the separated settlement of Kopanička. The inhabitants used to live mainly from agriculture and occasional seasonal work in agriculture, construction and forestry. Today many people from Hrušov commute for work to the district towns of Krupina, Zvolen and Banská Bystrica.

The scattered hill settlement is typical of the historic-cultural determinants which form the distinctive character of the country. One characteristic of village life in the past was double residency, where during the week inhabitants lived and worked on their farms in the hills, and on Sunday they all met in the village, where they had second homes (without farms). Several researchers have mentioned that villagers' former properties in the hill settlements are now frequently used as recreational cottages.³⁴ The original owners from the hill settlements

³² BURKOVSKÝ, KRÁLIKOVÁ, *Educational facilities...*, p. 36; PACHINGER et al., *Educational footpaths...* p. 47.

³³ BURKOVSKÝ, KRÁLIKOVÁ, *Educational facilities...*, p. 8–9.

³⁴ DARULOVÁ, Jolana. Lazy – a constituent of social and cultural capital and development potential of a village/region (on the example of the villages of Hrušov and Oravská Lesná). In: *Slovak ethnography*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 2019, pp. 293–307; PRIEČKO, Martin. Social-political changes after 1948 and their impact on the way of life in Kysuce region “hill settlements” (definition of the factors leading to extinction of life in Lower Kysuce remote settlements in the second half of the 20th century). In: *Ethnography anthology*, Vol. 14, 2003, Martin: Matica slovenská, pp. 135–151; PRIEČKO, Martin. *Socioeconomic perspectives of scattered settlements in Slovakia: (comparison of the localities of Málince, Nesluša a Valaská Belá)*. Trnava: University of S. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Philosophy, 2015, p. 172.

mostly live in new brick houses in the village centre, so the original houses are used only occasionally – seasonally and at the weekend. In other cases, they are used for a combination of recreation and farming. In 1991 in Hrušov, not a single house out of 158 unoccupied houses was used for recreation, but by 2001 almost 30 houses out of 184 unoccupied ones were used in this way.³⁵ In 1995, local council representatives established the Association for Rural Tourism and Agrotourism with the aim of realising the potential of the hill settlements as places for a relaxing holiday. Transforming the function of the hill settlements, gaining a new perspective on their use in the development of tourism, and attracting new visitors to the village were the original motivating factors that led to the establishment of the ecomuseum and the educational public footpath in Hrušov. There were secondary motivations which were also very important, namely, supporting strong social relations and villagers' relations to traditional values, from which the members of the local community can find inner strength and security. Efforts towards ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions are also thriving through active connection with the younger generation.³⁶ According to ethnologist Ján Botík, the potential of Hrušov and its inhabitants lies in the preservation of the folk traditions and their relation to cultural values, as well as the willpower and social cohesion of the local community, manifested when organising and participating in various presentations.³⁷ In the community's collective identification processes, cultural heritage plays a key role, and also represents a significant local presentation tool. The local council therefore takes a long-term approach to protecting cultural heritage, on both a conceptual and practical level. This is evidenced by the council's exceptional efforts to prepare and publish a series of books about Hrušov under the traditional folk culture edition and project, the *Fund for Traditional Folk Culture of the Village of Hrušov*.³⁸ The project is the result of long-term council administration efforts to document and create an online cultural heritage database. The above-mentioned social cohesion creates endogenous cultural and social capital, which the ethnologist Ľubica Falťanová understands as “the ability of individual subjects of the settlement society to initiate, preserve, develop or refine from within and [to apply] their own power and local growth in its varied spheres”.³⁹ The village has a rich and captivating societal life, as expressed, for example, by the folk group Hrušov, the children's folk ensemble Ragačinka, several other music bands, the sport club, the voluntary fire fighter corps, the hunting association and other organisations that are active there.

The instigators of the Ecomuseum Hont and Educational Public Footpath of Hrušov projects applied the experiences they had gained from organising local and regional events, such as the well-established regional Hont Parade (founded in 1996), visited by 12–15,000 people every year. The village leaders and organisers had gained extensive experience in forming cooperative regional partnerships and in grant application and management via various projects which came in useful when formulating their objectives.

³⁵ DARULOVÁ, Hill settlements – the part..., p. 303.

³⁶ DARULOVÁ, Jolana, KOŠTIALOVÁ, Katarína, KRIŠKOVÁ, Zdena. *The countryside, traditional, modern and inspirational. The villages of the year – Hrušov, Dobrá Niva, Oravská Lesná, Spišský Hrbov*. Banská Bystrica: Signis, 2020, p. 9.

³⁷ BOTÍK, Ján. *Hrušov and the people of Hrušov*. Hrušov: The village of Hrušov, 2014, p. 200.

³⁸ This project has been running since 2020.

³⁹ FALTĀNOVÁ, Ľubica. The role of community groups in endogenous development of small villages. In: FALTĀN, Ľubomír, ed.: *Small rural settlements in Slovakia at the beginning of 21st century*. Bratislava: IRIS, 2011, pp. 189–226.

The Ecomuseum Hont project

We do not have a lot of derelict houses or damaged fences, like you can see elsewhere. We are trying to preserve the houses and show how people lived a long time ago. The older people here are willing to talk about it. They are happy when other people are interested. (Woman, 51–60 y.o.)

It took several years to create the Ecomuseum Hont project and it had several variants. In the initial period (2002–2004) it was organised by the Association for Rural Tourism and Agrotourism Hont and the community group of Hrušov (OSOĤ), supported by the Association Amber route. It was developed as a regional tourist attraction and the villages of Baďan, Brhlavce, Čelovce, Počúvadlo, Prenčov, Sebechleby and Sucháň also joined in. The aim of the project was to create a tourist attraction which offered a week-long or weekend stay in the Hont region. The target group was tourists and spa guests from the nearby spa of Dudince. During their stay, visitors could get to know local places of natural, architectural and historical interest, as well as experience rural life, traditional cuisine, folk phenomena and the nature of the local people.⁴⁰ The idea of the ecomuseum was updated and elaborated on in 2011 via a cooperative Ecomuseum project under the name *Get to Know the Life of the Hont Villages* (2011–2012). The project arose from the cooperation of two local activity groups, the Golden Route (MAS – Local Activity Group) and Krtiš Poiplic Partnership. Its primary objective was to publicise Hont as a cultural and historical region, that has

well-preserved cultural heritage manifested in original architecture, traditional customs, folk costumes, cuisine and crafts. Additionally, the natural environment is not negatively affected by modern times. ... The image of Hont is completed by its people, who are kinder and more hospitable than in other parts of Slovakia. Our aim is to show the true nature of the region – with its rich and typical past, as well as a varied and amiable present. (Man, 51–60 y.o.)

The project was also initiated as a way to attract tourism by drawing on local resources, and focused on the use and promotion of local distinctiveness and the area's natural and cultural heritage as a means of developing the Hont region. It involved inhabitants in presenting elements of the local culture typical of all the participating villages via activities such as presentations, tasting sessions, authentic cultural displays and physical activity.⁴¹ The inclusion of local businesses, groups, associations and councils was an essential aspect, due to their relation to the material and religious sphere, as well as social identification.⁴² Local villages could participate in the project and be included in the network of ecomuseums only after fulfilling the following criteria:

1. Local uniqueness – the protagonists should be aware of the area's unique characteristics and originality, arising from the local natural and cultural heritage (crafts, famous figures, culinary specialities, customs, tales and legends, natural features, historic sights, etc.) and offer active participatory experiences (dance tuition, craft workshops, etc.).

⁴⁰ AUGUSTÍNNOVÁ, Mária. The Ecomuseum Hont. In: *Hrušovské noviny*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2002, p. 6.

⁴¹ ZLATÁ CESTA [The Golden Way]. Cooperation project *The Ecomuseum Hont – get to know the life of Hont villages*, accessed December, 2020, <http://www.zlatacesta.sk/ekomuzeum-1/o-projekte.html>

⁴² KRIŠKOVÁ, Zdena. Utilisation of social and cultural potential of the local societies by presentation of their cultural specifics. In: *Slovak ethnography*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 2019, pp. 308–323.

2. Revival – the ecomuseum is founded on direct contact and communication between visitors and local inhabitants in such a way that there is direct community participation when making information and cultural specifics available, enriched by live presentations.
3. Cooperation – there is an emphasis on mutual respect for diverse cultures and the individual topics/ themes of the protagonists, which must not be duplicated across different projects.
4. Responsibility – the persons who manage the cooperative's working teams and are responsible for the successful execution of activities should be mainly drawn from the pool of cultural value bearers (members of clubs and groups, volunteers, craftspeople, musicians, business people).
5. Viability – the collaborating parties demonstrate the ability to achieve the stated intentions and objectives of the project, with the aim of achieving sustainability.⁴³

The list of participating villages and the attractions they developed is as follows: Bátorová (Village Life – Traditions and Crafts); Čelovce (Čelovská Chrupka);⁴⁴ Hontianske Tesáre (The Seven Wonders of Tesáre); Svätý Anton (The Farmers' Yard); Štiavnické Bane (The Village of World's Firsts); Veľká Čalomija (History and Relaxation along the River Ipel'); Vinica (Looking into a Vineyard and Cellar). Hrušov named its offer A Day in a Hrušov Yard and in their publicity materials they mention the small-scale version of the Hrušov parade. Hrušov presented itself in a more complex way, using an effective blend of tried and tested activities which took place during the Hont Parade festival and in locations that are part of the Educational Public Footpath (for example, visiting the distillery, blacksmith's workshop, folk house, fire station, farming equipment, etc.). In order to educate the public in the cultural context of the local society, the physical exhibitions were complemented by interactive programmes designed to enhance the emotional experience for the visitors, such as local food tasting (*lepničky* pasties baked in a stone oven), drink tasting (pear schnapps, local wines), and folk presentations (meeting with local folk musicians and accordion players). The project fulfilled the important aim of promoting the village to the outer world. As well as publishing bulletins and information leaflets, the people of Hrušov promoted the area at the international tourism and gastronomy trade fair, ITF SlovakiaTour and Danubius Gastro, in 2003 and 2004. Another facet of the project was methodological meetings and professional training organised by local leaders. One of the most important aspects of the project was its viability: even after its completion, the established collections are constantly being added to with the newly acquired exhibits. In addition, the village is creating new thematic collections in individual buildings, by placing the emphasis on their original intended use.⁴⁵

The Educational Public Footpath of the village of Hrušov

The educational public footpath connects all the significant values the village possesses: the natural, architectural, landscape and spiritual values, because it is pointless to walk across the country unless you stop and meet the local people, have a little chat in the local dialect, to talk about life values, because the people from the hills like sharing their experience with the visitors from towns. (Man, 51–60 y.o.)

⁴³ ZLATÁ CESTA...; KRIŠKOVÁ, Utilisation of social and cultural..., pp. 314–315.

⁴⁴ Chrupka is an old variety of black hard cherry.

⁴⁵ KRIŠKOVÁ, Utilisation of social and cultural..., pp. 315–316.

The idea of establishing an educational public footpath in Hrušov started to form in the mid-1990s. The footpath has been frequently modified and added to with new activities and experiences sometimes as a result of other projects (such as the Ecomuseum Hont project), or as new needs are identified. Initially, the footpath had six points where the visitor could stop and read information, but the newer (2012) version offers thirty. It is polythematic and provides visitors with a deeper understanding of the locality, the terrains covered in different segments of the path, and the relationship between nature and the people, offering an example how to blend the landscape, natural heritage and cultural specifics of a village within a single attraction. The path consists of a northern and southern circuit, interconnected in the shape of a number eight, the midpoint being the village centre. The southern circuit, with a length of 6 km, is relatively easy, passing through orchards and vineyards and leading up to viewpoints at the Hrušov hill settlements. The northern circuit is 9 km long and is more difficult. Its stopping points (which include features and information boards) include the bread-making ovens, the folk house, the sand mine, the coal mine, forest herbs, the Calvary, invertebrates, the solar power plant, the watchtower on Prášny Vrch, vertebrates, hunting, a traditional wooden house, the giant's pot, and traditional hill farming. The southern circuit stopping points are the amphitheatre, the church, the apiary, fruit farming, cellars, mushrooms, flora in dry areas, a viewpoint, birds, wine making, European mountain ash, the King's Well, hemp-soaking facilities, farm machinery and the distillery.⁴⁶

As Ján Lacika and Ján Hanušin observe, the hilly country of Hrušov has been only subtly transformed and has retained its authentic traditional appearance up to the present day.⁴⁷ The route is demarcated in such a way as to provide visitors with a sense of the existing landscape and natural features, as well as points of unique historical and cultural interest. The individual stopping points reflect the genius loci, the harmony between people and nature, the hilly geography as a distinctive type of cultural landscape which reflects the human life within it, and the spiritual values of the local community, all contained within the authentic environment.

One of the stopping points presenting the natural–architectonic specifics of Hrušov is the tuffaceous sandstone wine cellars which, due to the natural attributes of the stone, maintain a favourable temperature for storing vegetables, fruit and wine. The close connection between the people and nature is illustrated by the cascade of small cisterns, dug into the hillside, through which water flows. Until fairly recently (just after WWII), the women of Hrušov used these cisterns for soaking hemp. Some segments of the path illustrate occupational activities, such as the private collection of farming machinery, the collection of firemen's helmets, the coal mine, the blacksmith's forge and the distillery. The farming machinery collection was started in 1999 by a native of Hrušov, Anton Matušov; it now comprises more than 100 exhibits. Matušov's collection mainly focuses on stabilisers – technical machines with stable positioning, used to distribute power and activate threshing machines, circular saws, grinders and other farming devices.

In terms of the connection between the role and viability of the ecomuseum and the educational public footpath, it is worth drawing attention to the folk house and the House of Folk Clothing, which is currently still under development. Folk house No. 178 presents a number of characteristic elements of Hont folk architecture of the nineteenth century, and is regis-

⁴⁶ DARULOVÁ, KOŠTIALOVÁ, KRIŠKOVÁ, Zdena. The countryside, traditional..., p. 59.

⁴⁷ LACIKA, Ján, HANUŠIN, Ján. Selected geographical aspects of hill settlement development in K.Ú. Hrušov. In: *Geographical information*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2018, p. 269.



Fig. 1: *The farming machinery collection*
(photo: Katarína Košťalová, 2019)



Fig. 2: *The folk house*
(photo: Katarína Košťalová, 2018)

tered on the central list of cultural monuments of Slovakia. Its walls are built from sandstone with clay mortar. The roof has a carved wooden gable and a gable-end vent jutting forward on ornamental wooden beams. A cross and two skylights are carved into the gable. The roof was originally thatched with straw, but the thatch was replaced with ceramic roofing tiles in the 1960s. The carved wooden windows and doors retain their original decorations.⁴⁸

The house has a traditional layout with three rooms (a multi-purpose chamber, a black kitchen and a small entrance-way) and furniture is arranged to reflect that of a typical Hrušov house. Collections of products made by craftsmen – for example those of a shoemaker and furrier – can be found here. The items are not exhibited in the style of a typical museum collection but are set out as they would have been used in real life, with the deliberate intention of not merely preserving them but actually showing the life of Hrušov's community to visitors. The folk house – along with other features on the educational public footpath, such as the distillery and blacksmith's forge – comes alive during the Hont Parade, when it becomes one of the focal points of the festival. Bread with lard and onions is on offer in front of the house, women bake traditional *lepničky* pasties in the yard, and inside the house older people, the bearers of traditional culture, communicate with visitors in the local dialect. In this way, direct interpersonal contact is established between the people of Hrušov (the performers) and the visitors (the recipients). Thanks to the active participation of the local community, the whole space becomes a presentation of the way of life and traditional culture, offering not only information, but also atmosphere and experiences.

The latest project is the House of Folk Clothing, which will join the local network of museums and EPFs. The project involves reconstructing and extending the original farmhouse and furnishing it to create an appropriate space for the presentation of traditional Hrušov clothes. The village will assemble, protect, manage, preserve and present collections of clothing and accessories according to gender, age, status and occasion (festive attire, work clothes, etc.). The local council has been buying various garments from villagers for several years, and the collection thus far consists of more than 460 exhibits.

⁴⁸ Website of the Development Programme of the village of Hrušov for 2007–2013, accessed December 2020, www.hrusov.sk/program-rozvoja-obce-na-roky-2015-2024.html.



Fig. 3: *The blacksmith's forge*
(photo: Katarína Košťálová, 2019)

We still wear those clothes here; it's not only older women who wear them, but also younger people on festive occasions. Children and youths also have traditional folk costumes. We felt sad when resellers started coming to the village and buying up traditional folk costumes cheaply from our people, so we decided we would buy them ourselves. We collect traditional folk costumes and what we can't do, older women who know how to will sew for us, so they will look and be real, and not fake, for the future generations. (Woman, 51–60 y.o.)

In the reconstructed house, there will be space for training courses, conferences, and meetings between experts and members of the public, as well as exhibition and deposit rooms. The project is funded by the EU, with the financial participation of the council.

Its objective is as follows:

We intend to continue rescuing traditional houses in Hrušov and gradually change them into museums. We want the House of Folk Clothing to complete the building of Hrušov's cultural heritage collection, and make the offer of local features more attractive to rural tourism. (Man, 51–60 y.o.)

Conclusions

In the past few decades, a shift has taken place in the way museums communicate, present and mediate facts and realities. Contrary to the traditional museum, which focuses on objects, museums today concentrate their efforts mainly on context.⁴⁹ Communication with visitors creates conditions for a more complex perception of the correlation between nature, the landscape, and historic and sociocultural phenomena. Alternative types of museums – such as local and community museums, ecomuseums, reconstructed historical sites in situ and educational footpaths – enable this, to a certain extent, offering the visitor a clearer understanding of the uniqueness of local elements in the context of their evolution.⁵⁰

The objective of this explorative study was to present some basic knowledge about ecomuseums and educational footpaths, which have thus far received little attention in the ethnological literature. It examined two specific examples of museological presentation – the Ecomuseum Hont project and the Educational Public Footpath of Hrušov village – highlighting the opportunities they represent in terms of museum communication by their ability to connect the landscape, the people who inhabit it, and the material and spiritual features of the area and local community.

These activities established themselves in the village due to the particular conditions of its existence. On the one hand, the difficult living conditions arising from Hrušov's geographical

⁴⁹ WAIDACHER, Friedrich. *General museology manual*. Bratislava: Slovak National Museum, 1999, p. 477.

⁵⁰ KRIŠKOVÁ, Zdena. *Ethnocultural contexts in blue print production: the blue print workshop in Hranovnici*. Banská Bystrica: Matej Bel University, Institute for Social and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts, 2012, pp. 131–132.

and cultural isolation restricted the local community; on the other hand, these same conditions motivated the community towards mutual cooperation, trust and a desire for shared experiences.⁵¹

The village representatives emphasised the importance of drawing on local resources and natural and cultural heritage; these are treated as fundamental factors by the council when developing strategic plans for the future. They conveyed their vision for promoting the locality as a characteristic area with a farming hill settlement and discussed the search for new ways of expressing this when presenting heritage elements. Their approach arises from direct knowledge of local values; the council systematically supports research into traditional culture and cultural heritage, and compiles collections to which it continuously adds new exhibits. These local leaders connect tradition and innovation, stability and a dynamic approach, reproduction and creativity under the current circumstances⁵² in a manner that benefits local tourism. An important aspect of their success lies in cooperation with local and regional associations and the proactive creation of partnerships to apply for funding from the state and the EU.

The Ecomuseum Hont project and the Educational Public Footpath of Hrušov are closely related and, in a sense, blend into each other, together representing a fine example of the utilisation of new museological forms. They were in essence created to present the natural and cultural heritage of the locality in relation to the authentic environment and local community life, while reflecting current trends towards contextual experience (as provided by the hemp-soaking cisterns, bread ovens, coal mine, and tuffaceous sandstone wine cellars). In the wider context, they are involved in the process of promoting the village by means of revitalised traditional spaces (the folk house, distillery, blacksmith's forge, house of pears, house of folk clothing, and others) and regional and national events (A Day in a Hrušov Yard, tasting homemade bread and the Hont Parade festival), but the key aspect is the local community cohesion, with local participants heavily involved in the sustainable development of the village.

Both the ecomuseum and the EPF convey information to visitors in an interactive form. Features such as the Calvary, Prášny Vrch viewpoint and the hill settlements offer cultural and aesthetic experiences, while also providing outdoor activities (such as hiking and running) and relaxation for tourists. The ecomuseum and educational footpath bring to life objects that are part of the cultural and social life of the village. Their collections and activities represent local sites of memory and reconstruct images of past in order to present the ethnocultural traditions of Hrušov. In addition, these forms of presentation serve an important role in the creation of local identity, fostering a mutual sense of belonging. They also have a role in ethnic identification, local representation, education and experience.

On the basis of the case study presented here, it is reasonable to view rural ecomuseums and educational footpaths as a viable alternative to traditional museums. They represent important opportunities for localities, but it is important not to regard these themes as a romantic ideal.⁵³ I perceive them as an example of good practice, offering tools and applications that support the presentation and protection of cultural heritage while offering educational elements, facilitating experiences, and supporting tourism.

⁵¹ KOŠTIALOVÁ, Katarína. The Hont Parade – A positive example of the marginalised village of Hrušov. In: *Ethnography review*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2020, pp. 213–222.

⁵² For further information, see: BESSIERE, Jacinthe. Local Development and Heritage: Traditional Food and Cuisine as Tourist Attractions in Rural Areas. In: *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1998, pp. 21–34.

⁵³ BORRELLI, DAVIS, How Culture Shapes Nature..., p. 44.

This article has shown that we can perceive these specific forms of museological presentation in several ways. However, further research – focusing not only on a greater number of ecomuseums and educational footpaths but also varied localities – is necessary to form theoretical generalisations or carry out critical evaluation and comparison.

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