

Call for Papers:

Reluctant heritage: Revisiting museums and memory sites in Central and Eastern Europe in a transnational perspective

Bucharest, CEREFREA, 4-5 November 2016

Deadline: September 15th 2016

A troubled and segmented East-European history has given rise to a troubled and segmented museum history. Museums in Central and Eastern Europe have found themselves, time and again, faced with difficult and uncomfortable choices. Immediately after the Second World War, museums had to update their exhibitions in order to narrate radically different stories. One of the major changes also included exhibiting the socialist present, such as the accomplishments of the regime, and the recent past: the violent, revolutionary coming to power of communist parties all over Eastern Europe became part of the permanent exhibition of local and national museums. Museums also had to literally hide entire collections that were suddenly found inappropriate. After the fall of communism, these collections were brought back to museum halls (although much of their history, documentation and context had been lost) and it was time for the communist collections to become bothersome and thus be hidden or even destroyed.

The workshop seeks to explore the specificities of reaction to political and social change in the context of museums and heritage sites. Museums could be considered in terms of their historiographic and political foundations, as the outcome of mobilizations of a wide variety of actors who have contributed to their creation or their dismantling (museum professionals, architects, academics, public historians, victims' associations and other cultural brokers). In some contexts, the heritage process has contributed to a discursive criminalisation of previous regimes – for instance the transformation of detention centres in museums or memory sites. In others, it has facilitated implicit forms of rehabilitation, under the guise of commercially exploiting the legacy – architectural, artistic, political – of the former regime. Finally, a significant number of museums and memory sites were faced with the challenge and task of reinvesting their collections with a new meaning and a new narrative, framed in new historiographies and nation-building projects.

Within this framework, our workshop will bring together contributions that respond to one or more of the following aspects, relating to the central concern on whether museum displays and heritage sites have been remade to conform to new scientific and political narratives/ agendas:

- will examine case-studies of metamorphoses of East-European museums and built heritage during the Cold War and in post-communism.
- will discuss whether museums are sometimes in the vanguard of social and political change or are they merely reacting to societal transformations.
- will analyse how museums and heritage sites have been mobilized to qualify, and at times to criminalize the socialist period

- will seek to highlight the emergence and circulation of heritage models at national, regional and trans-regional levels, evident in the museums established in former detention centres, in the management of heritage assets related to past dictatorial regimes, and in the reconfigurations of exhibitions in museums around the area.
- will expand the debate by bringing case-studies of transnational processes going beyond the European borders (with a particular interest in Latin America)
- will bring theoretical and methodological insights into the study of processes of heritage-making from a transnational perspective.

Please submit 300-word abstracts and a short bio (in English or in French) to reluctantheritage@gmail.com by September 15th. The successful participants will be notified by September 20th.

While the conference will be bilingual, in English and French, no simultaneous translation will be provided.

Funds are available to cover the expenses (travel or accommodation) for a limited number of participants. Please indicate in your paper proposal whether you will be seeking this funding.

Convenors:

Gruia Bădescu, University of Oxford

Simina Bădică, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant

Nelly Bekus, University of Exeter

Damiana Oțoiu, University of Bucharest

The workshop is organized by the Regional Center for Advanced Francophone Research in Social Sciences (CEREFREA Villa Noël), University of Bucharest

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- Museums and Controversial Collections. Politics and Policies of Heritage-Making in Post-Colonial and Post-socialist Contexts project of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-2368, New Europe College, Bucharest.

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- Political Science Department, University of Bucharest.