

EXPLANATORY PANELS FOR EXHIBITION OF THEME 3

PANEL 1

THE CULT RURAL PROJECT

This exhibition forms part of CULT RURAL, an international project co-funded by the European Commission in the context of “Culture 2000”, the Framework Programme in Support of Culture. CULT RURAL brings together 14 organisations from seven EU member states, aiming to create a Cultural Area Common to European Rural Communities, by distilling the messages conveyed to present day societies through the cultural heritage of Rural Europe, drawing lessons with a real value for sustainable development.

CULT RURAL has set out to explore the links between rural heritage and sustainable development around three themes, showing the common roots of the European rural heritage and its impact on the sustainable development of present-day rural societies; they include:

- I. Rural cultural landscapes: the interaction between rural communities and the natural environment (elaborated by partners from Greece and Italy).
- II. Inspiration, innovation and technology: the rural perspective and the global pressures (elaborated by partners from Sweden, Hungary and France)
- III. Rural heritage and collective identity: building the sustainability of rural communities (elaborated by partners from Greece, Poland and Bulgaria).

This exhibition deals with the third theme and it is organised by Museum Kresow, Euracademy Association (in cooperation with the Folklore and History Museum of Komotini) and the Museum of National History of Bulgaria.

The CULT RURAL Project partners:

Co-organisers

- Sveriges Hembygdsförbund - Swedish Local Heritage Federation, Project leader, (SE)
- PRISMA Centre for Development Studies (GR)
- European Academy for Sustainable Rural Development – Euracademy Association (EU)
- Muzeum Kresów w Lubaczowie, (PL)
- Hungarian Open Air Museum (HU)
- Institute of Bio-Meteorology, National Research Council of Italy (IT)
- Fédération des Musées d'Agriculture et du Patrimoine Rural (AFMA) (FR)
- National Historical Museum (BG)

Associate Partners

- Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Centre for Regional Studies, West Hungarian Research Institute (HU)
- Musée National des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) (FR)
- Jagiellonian University of Krakow, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Culture (PL)
- Academy of Balkan Civilisation (BG)
- Museum of Cretan Ethnology (GR)
- Cultural Association of Komotini, Folklore and History Museum of Komotini (GR)

PANEL 2

THE EXHIBITION “RURAL HERITAGE AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY”

This exhibition aims to reveal and illustrate the symbolisms that have been preserved in the conscience of rural communities, thus remaining alive as a foundation of their collective identity. Celebrations, weddings, rituals and customs provide a forum for community gatherings and for revival and preservation of long-held traditions reinforcing the community spirit. Symbolic events may have lost their potency in present societies; however their significance remains high, because customary and traditional acts incorporate a nostalgic dimension, relating the past to the present, keeping the collective memory alive and demonstrating, in a unique way, the difference between everyday life and celebrations, the latter having a primary function as sources of joy and cultural expression, usually through dancing, singing and sharing food and drink. The exhibition attempts to interpret the role of such events in the process of social and cultural evolution, to show how social capital is being built and enhanced.

The exhibition is structured along four “thematic units” that reflect manifestations of symbolic acts in the ethnography and current practices of three countries: Greece, Poland and Bulgaria. These units refer to a) apotropaic and protective acts, b) symbolisms of fertility, c) ecstatic rituals and d) rites of passage.

MUSEOLOGICAL STUDY

- Concept: Louisa Karapidaki, *Archaeologist, Museologist* (GR)
- Application in the Museum Kresow: Stanislaw Piotr Makara, *Historian of the art* (PL), Barbara Woch, *Historian, Museologist* (PL)

EXHIBITION SCENARIO

- Louisa Karapidaki, *Archaeologist, Museologist* (GR)
- Fouli Papageorgiou, *Architect* (GR)

EXHIBITION DESIGN

- Chloe Varelidi, *Architect* (GR)

PANEL 3

rites of passage

Rituals celebrating the passage of nature from one season to another and the passage from adolescence to married life and maturity in the lifecycle of humans, have always had a special significance, imbued with symbolic acts and objects. The wedding celebrations have their own symbolic objects and parades: a rich bridal dress with decorated head cover and jewellery, wedding flags, dowry chests and special foods, including decorated breads, cakes and pomegranates, are presented around a dancing circle of life-size photographs and a celebration table with a panorama of foods and various utensils, cutting across all units, to depict the celebration of utmost joy and hope represented by a wedding.

PANEL 4

Symbolisms of Fertility

The fertility of the earth is symbolized by the rituals of Easter and by harvesting celebrations that conclude cultivation cycles. Easter is for Christians the most sacred event of the year, symbolizing also the regeneration of the earth and its preparation for bearing fruits. The dividing line between religious and fertility rituals is very fine: Palm crosses, Lazarines, Easter eggs, epitaphs, specially decorated breads are presented, complemented by audio-visual material depicting parades and ceremonies that transcend faith to symbolize health, fortune and a good harvest. Harvesting celebrations in fields are illustrated by photos and film; and exhibits are presented of symbolic objects such as bowls with grains and fruit, ear corns and special bread.

PANEL 5

Apotropaic and Protective Acts

This unit includes apotropaic and protective rituals and objects related to the 12-day feast of Christmas and to the carnival. Christmas brings with it a rich range of customs expressed by the preparation of special breads and the performance of rituals related to divine adoration and the warding off of evil spirits. The meaning of these customs and rituals is relayed through a diversity of exhibits: animal-head or demonic masks, bells, swords and shepherd's sticks, as well as musical instruments forming parts of masquerades, are worn by children or adults to drive away the evil spirits and the forces of winter and darkness; carolling bells, houses, boats, holy crèches, Christmas decorations and *porte-bonneur* form part of rituals related to the religious character of Christmas; specially decorated breads and wafers depict the hope for affluence and abundance of food

throughout the year. Films from various regions of Greece, Poland and Bulgaria can be selected by the visitor to view, placing the exhibits in the context of the actual happenings.

PANEL 6

ECSTATIC RITUALS

Anastenaria or *nestinar dance* is a representative example of ecstatic rituals practiced in the Balkans, allegedly of pagan origin. With roots in ancient times, these rituals have kept alive the memory and bonds of communities which many generations ago arrived from the Black Sea to Thrace. Barefoot villagers walk over hot coals on St Constantine and Helen's day, performing an ecstatic dance influenced by the sound of a specific tune. Exhibits include dressed ikons, as the central item of the ritual, musical instruments (lyra and drum), sacred kerchiefs (*amanetia*). A film and slide show with an imposing sound track takes the visitor through the ritual, from the preparation of the firewalkers at home to their departure and return for a celebration dinner. Although turned into a tourist attraction in recent years, the ecstatic abilities of firewalkers that are inherited or attained after a lengthy preparation and meditation, remain solid parts of a rural tradition that has managed to stay alive.

PANEL 7

ST JOHN'S DAY – SOLSTICE RITUALS

The summer solstice days are celebrated by fires and divinations, coinciding with St. John the Baptist's day. Fire symbolizes purification, but also protection against misfortune, bad luck and illness. Jumping over fires is illustrated by an allegoric installation. Floating candles on water inside flower wreaths are exhibited and illustrated in photographs, to convey the message of the triumph of light over the darkness. Divinations accompany the solstice celebrations: love fortune-telling, interpretation of dreams and clairvoyance, all connected to future love and marriage are symbolized by such exhibits as water urns, keys, flower wreaths.