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**THE HISTORY OF THE “HASZMANN PÁL” MUSEUM IN CERNAT.  
THE FOUNDING, INSTITUTIONALISATION AND FIRST DECADES OF  
THE MUSEUM**

*Abstract*

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This research focuses upon the history of the “Haszmann Pál” museum in Cernat, with special emphasis on its foundation, the preparations made for its opening and the first decades of its life.

The main component of this dissertation presents a synthesis of related publications, selected in line with the chosen overall topic, from the beginnings until the present day, it studies the first decades of the museum, as these have proven to be decisive in what pertains to its institutional concept, organisation, development and public relations even today.

During the decades following its foundation and opening, the museum evolved from a rural ethnographical collection into a cultural institution of major significance, important, active participant in community matters, influencing the cultural life of the region and the wider area as well. These are the main reasons behind choosing the topic of this dissertation and the subject matter of the related research: a study and analysis of the history of the museum from its beginnings until the moment of its institutionalisation, with emphasis on the functioning mechanisms of functioning of cultural life in the epoch, on the way the flux of the public was organised in such institutions of the field. The research in this dissertation connects to a series of researches done since 1989 in Transylvania, analysing the preliminaries and correlations in the history of research and the history of Hungarian institutions in Transylvania and in Romania (e.g.: Jakab 2003; Pozsony 2008, 2014a, 2014b; Keszeg – Szalma 2011; Tánzos – Tőkés 2002). On the other hand, in a narrower sense, it is also related to Cluj-based research analysing twentieth century socio-cultural happenings through studying various collective and individual careers and life paths, and also certain ways of writing and keeping track of events.

The main source of my research is the personal archive of Pál Haszmann, revealing a panorama of his life as teacher, an educator, and as the developer and organiser of the collection. Source researches and partial publications have been elaborated based on this spiritual treasure in the past, it has often been successfully used by researchers to procure information but it has never been thoroughly and fully processed. His writings, left in the form of manuscripts to his successors, his autobiographical notes, his works on ethnography and local history, even his short everyday notes add up into a precise and bulky documentary material for the research in the field.

This archive contains private and personal documents but also official ones. Based on the way these documents were selected and kept, I was able to formulate conclusions pertaining

to the world view, the role in the local community, the sense of vocation of the person or family in question. As in this case the documentary archive is one established and developed by several generations, each deciding what is to be discarded and preserved, this also reflects the complex emotional and mental universe of an entire family and not only of the individuals in question.

The secondary sources employed to elaborate on the history of the museum are newspaper articles of the day, recordings of various TV and radio broadcasts, films dealing with the institution and its founding father, also various entries in the museum guest book, memoirs and interviews taken from the documentary film elaborated for the 110th anniversary of the birth of the founding father of the museum. A similar but more specific source is the mass of interviews with the son of the founding father, Pál Péter Haszmann, a material of considerable volume, containing a multitude of pertinent pieces of information.

The dissertation consists of nine chapters, the first five of these contain the actual analysis, the sixth is a synthesis of the study, the seventh contains the bibliography used during the research, while the eighth and ninth chapters present annexes, a complete list of newspaper articles kept in the family archive and also transcripts of the interviews referred to in the dissertation.

The first chapter presents the theoretic frame of the dissertation, the sources researched and the methods used. Part of the latter are of a qualitative type, as they imply the *biographic method*, the *content analysis* and also the *analysis of the network of relations*. From among qualitative analytical methods, the dissertation uses and implements certain results and instruments of the *interview* and of the analysis of the *network of relations*. In the case of studying certain partial topics, the dissertation also makes use of possibilities inherent in quantitative methods, most often in completing qualitative analyses. The dissertation publishes so-called “hard dates”, numeric data, for instance related to the study of the network of relations of the museum, when categorising letters analysed under this aspect, or when it establishes, based on statistic data, radiuses of effect and influence, or various degrees of intensity in maintaining relationships. The dissertation uses the same method to analyse entries in the museum guest book, pursuing, from a methodological point of view, similar goals, in order to formulate related conclusions.

I have studied the main topic of the dissertation, the history of the institution, in organic association with the history of the life and professional career of its founding father. If treated

as a separate entity, the institution cannot be thoroughly studied without examining the person or persons involved in its establishment. This is at the basis of my hypothesis that the history of the institution can be written in correlation with the study of the personality, life history and professional career of its founding father, especially as his work and activity in this respect are taken over and continued by his sons and further on in time by his grandsons and granddaughters, the author of this dissertation among them. The passion for building a collection and the activity in this respect of Pál Haszmann, his ambition to establish a museum have all influenced and impacted the life of the community he lived in. The study of his personal and professional life brings to light functional mechanisms of the communist dictatorship in Romania, as the museum was established during that period. My working hypothesis is also founded on the fact that the history of the life and professional career simultaneously presents a history of the epoch and the society of the time, as it thoroughly presents the individual destiny of a twentieth century intellectual with a complex world view, a varied activity and a special professional career, oriented towards the community and also dedicated to it. This analysis also contains important pieces of information on the functioning and activity of popular educators of the age. In the second chapter of the dissertation (*The life of Pál Haszmann, his career as educator and teacher, the activity of founding the museum*), the analysis uses two types of sources. One type is the group of written documents, a study of the files preserved by the Haszmann family, covering the period 1912-1963, comprising personal papers, study certificates, orders of establishment belonging to Pál Haszmann. This group of documents is completed during the analysis with official papers kept in the archives of the National Szekler Museum in Sf. Gheorghe, dating from the period 1970-1974, related to the archaeological activity in Cernat of dr. Zoltán Székely, the head of the said institution in the said period of time. The other type of source belongs to the circle of “oral history”, implying memoirs and interviews related to the studied period of time and to the founding father of the museum.

The dissertation also focuses on the way in which the essential moments and turns of individual life are related to the main elements in the functional mechanism controlling the functioning of the state headed by the Communist Party, which can also be studied by going through the functional characteristics and particular features of the educational system of the era.

The analysis studies the status and activity of popular educators in the era through the aforementioned individual and specific case study and it also focuses on certain aspects of the

educational system influencing individual professional life in those times. The study also focuses on the network of relationships of Pál Haszmann within a closer but also a wider circle, and the way it contributed to the realisation of his goals. In this sense the dissertation touches upon the archaeological diggings in Cernat and its neighbourhood, as Pál Haszmann participated in these, and the results were often made clearer by his research conducted out of personal passion and initiative. On a theoretical level, the dissertation studies, in organic relation to the analysis of primary information, the way in which an individual professional career can transform into a life history and also the way in which the stories within an individual life can turn into history. The study also focuses on the way in which the memory of a small collectivity can filter and select by preserving and discarding certain types of documents and also stories, narratives. This is especially valid in the case of the Haszmann family, which contributed through all its members to the founding and development of the museum and its collection but it also provided for the functioning of the institution from the beginning to the present day.

The third chapter (*Preparations for the opening of the museum and the beginnings of its functioning – 1970s*) was written based on the analysis of a series of archive documents, the research of documents preserved at the Covasna County Department of the Romanian National Archives, the Archives of the Covasna County Council, the Archives of the National Szekler Museum in Sf. Gheorghe and the Archives of the “Haszmann Pál” Museum in Cernat. The presentation of these documents is completed by interviews and photographs related to the subject. This chapter focuses on the financial and logistic context of the establishment and opening of the institution, and of the first years of its functioning to the degree in which these circumstances made the process of institutionalisation and development easier or more difficult. The chapter also presents pieces of information regarding all those who have participated in the establishment of the institution, their role, the attention dedicated to the new museum and the way in which the institution integrated into the collective conscience of the region within a few decades.

Related to this latter topic, the dissertation discusses the following: what types of organisations and other ethnic structures were formed on a national level, as these provided real chances for the validation of the interests of the ethnic minorities, especially on a cultural level, but also in what pertains to the cementing of collective identity even within the context of a general ideological and propagandistic inoculation through generally compulsory mass programs (the Council of Hungarian Working People in The Socialist Republic of Romania,



the “Praise Thee Romania” National Festival); the way in which the overall cultural scene of the Szekler Land evolved, as reflected by statistic data as well (for instance the number of cultural homes and cinema theatres); important events in written and audiovisual media and also in Hungarian publishing (the founding of new county level periodicals – Hargita, Megyei Tükör –, the launch of Hungarian broadcasts by the Romanian Television, the founding of the Kriterion Publishing House); correlations between the national situation of alphabetisation, the educational system and the economy, and the situation of employment and the degree of unemployment in Covasna county – all these having an influence and impact upon the reception of culture, and also upon the way of functioning of cultural institutions.

Reflecting upon contemporary research in historiography, the dissertation shows that the intense establishment of ethnic minority institutions was possible owing to the following factors: the temporary halt in the impetus of consolidating a totalitarian regime; administrative reorganisation; extending the circle of cultural institutions; a state policy in favour of the study of folklore, even if it was embedded in a highly ideological and propagandistic framework.

The fourth chapter focuses on the process of institutionalisation of the museum, with four sub-chapters.

The first sub-chapter analyses the reception in the mass media of the founding of the museum, which, besides understanding and interpreting the reaction of the visiting public is an important element of authenticating the institution and of helping it integrate into the cultural sphere of the settlement, the region and the wider area. The wider context of this analysis is the fact that during the nineteen seventies, a discourse on popular (folk) tradition was launched. The study also makes reference to the gestures of preserving and transmitting characteristic for the Haszmann family and especially evident in their relationship to the mass media, as the articles published in the press, as popular archives of the biography, with the role to document, promote and activate, are important even today in the afore mention micro-community.

The dissertation also discusses functional transformations of the local, regional and national cultural environment in the period following the establishment of counties in Romania (1968), and further more, the establishment, beside the museum, of the “Bod Péter” Cultural Association and of the People’s University in Cernat, both entities being still functional today. The dissertation allots a separate chapter to the latter, relating its activity to

the movement of popular universities and to the related terminological and conceptual analysis, revealing the fact that the People's University in Cernat was from its very beginnings one of the organic motors of the functioning and activity of the museum, actively contributing to the development of the collection and constantly providing an atmosphere specific for the institution by attracting creative young people, prepared to learn traditional crafts among the walls of the museum.

The establishment in the museum of the exhibition of apiculture is a good example for the elaboration and functioning of a specific part of the collection, while the analysis of this process yields precious information relevant not only for this specific subject matter but it also reflects the methodology and practice employed to organise exhibitions, the way a given group of exhibits was formed using objects gathered by the museum at the time, and it also reveals the system of interpersonal relations that needed to be used in those times in order to implement such a plan, that of an exhibition within an exhibition at the museum.

The analysis of the network of relationships of the museum, at the times of its founding and opening but also during anniversary years, significant years in this sense, is carried out by studying the correspondence of the institution, which turns out to be, for reasons previously listed, simultaneously also of personal nature. The letters are categorised in terms of their sender based on the theory and terminology of strong and weak links established by Granovetter, and implemented in this study. The analysis also focuses on the topic of the researched letters, on the professional and occupational domain of senders, laying special emphasis on the way in which the functioning of the network of relationships contributes to the development of the institution and of the collection, to the establishment of the fame and to the promotion of the museum and also to the widening of its circle influence.

The fifth chapter studies the reception of the institution as reflected in the guest book entries, it analyses these entries written in periods of special significance for the life of the museum. The totality of these entries offers an outsider view of the institution, influencing its way of functioning, proposing certain amendments, widening it, and so on. This method of reflection is very relevant for the way the museum functioned and conceived of its own activity. As the visitors of the museum come from a geographically wide area (which also stands for the circle of influence of the museum and for the sphere of interest of the institution), the overall image of these entries provides information on cultural customs and reflexes, on the orientation, levels and measure of the related attention, as it also indicates a

certain selection reflected in the options expressed by visitors writing in the guest book. The chapter analyses the specific features in language and expression of these entries, the intertextuality manifested on the pages (quotes from poems and songs, wordings that are very similar to the wording of oracles). The study also analyses the way in which, through their form and way of manifestation (written consecutively in a notebook, previous entries can be seen by further guests preparing to write a new entry) these entries, praises and observations penned by guests, can enter into dialogue. The chapter also focuses on the formulation of these entries (written, drawn), on the differences in content, emotion and reaction owing to differences in age of visitors, and also on the mechanism of influence at work in entries formulated by famous persons and personalities.

The sixth chapter offers a synthesis of the analyses in the dissertation while chapters 7-9 contain the literature used to write the dissertation, the annexes of the dissertation and also detailed information on processed press material and the complete texts of the interviews referred to in the dissertation.

The institution was founded among favourable circumstances: the community realises there is a real risk of losing its traditions while the communist state temporarily relates to the matter in a positive and permissive way allowing for the institutionalisation of the ambitions for preserving traditional values, and high ranking Hungarian party officers also contribute to smoothening things out around the founding of such cultural institutions. The Museum in Cernat was established as an outcome of this general situation and it was integrated into a national, regional and local institutional network. Its opening is a noteworthy performance, as it happens in the year 1973, during a period when, after the more liberal atmosphere of the previous years, under the pressure of the totalitarian regime, a gradual reduction and annihilation of the Hungarian cultural and educational institutional network is going on in Romania. Established under the spirit of preserving the community and its outstanding values, and also in the spirit of the educational and collecting work of the founding father, the museum was right from the beginning an answer given to a significant community requirement and need.

The history of the institution and the history of the life of its founder are organically interconnected, while this dissertation proves this fact from varied points of view, employing the instruments of partial thematic analysis and also general analysis. The study of the

personal life is also an analysis of the epoch and society of the day, as defining events of individual life were decisively determined by the socio-political context and its transformations. The presentation of the professional career of the founding father contains remarks on the state and on the way popular educators functioned in the epoch in question. In association to the analysis of the preliminaries, circumstances and conditions of the founding of the museum, the dissertation studies the establishment, simultaneously with the opening of the museum, of the People's University in Cernat and its activity, against the wider background of the history of Romanian people's universities and of the related conceptual terminology.

Beside written sources (documents from the family archives, institutional archives, press material, letters, entries in the guest book, etc.), important sources for this dissertations are those falling into the category of oral history, a set of information procured from interviews and memories, sources that, owing to their spontaneous and natural formulation and direct description of the epoch and of the micro-community context, eloquently complete the data contained in official documents elaborated using a bureaucratic language.

The life of the founding father is divided into precise periods, and these are also the periods of the history of the founding of the museum. The dissertation demonstrates, also through the analysis of the past and present external authentication of the museum (apparitions in mass media and entries in the guest book), and through the study of the network of relations of the institution, that the conscious and pertinent intention of Pál Haszmann to establish a museum as well as his work employed in this direction was passed on to further generations as the museum functions to the present day based on the original basic principles and according to the original conception.