

CRAFTS AND CRAFTSMEN IN THE HUNGARIAN OPEN AIR MUSEUM

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The Hungarian Open Air Museum was founded on 55 Hungarian hectares in 1967, in Szentendre. Choosing the right site, it was influential that this town, located 20 km away from Budapest is a significant tourist centre.

The Museum was founded with the aim of presenting the vernacular architecture and interior furnishings of Hungary with the help of relocated buildings (from the original spot) and authentic objects. The territory of Hungary was divided into nine regions (The Upper-Tisza region, Upland Market Town, Northern-Hungary, Middle-Tisza region, Great Plains, Southern-Transdanubia, Balaton-Uplands, Western-Transdanubia, Kisalföld (or Small Plains)) of which five have been built up so far. Last time the regional unit, representing the vernacular architecture of Southern-Transdanubia was opened, for the time being, the Upland Market Town is being built.

In our lecture, we would like to highlight the role of craftsmen in the life of the museum. The presentation of the craftsmen's activity is significant, as the visitors get in touch with the vernacular culture by means of the programs going on in the houses.

We would like to touch upon the issue of constructing the buildings, utilising the already built up regional units and inviting craftsmen for opening ceremonies – in our case, the opening ceremony of the Southern-Transdanubian region, opened in 2005.

1. The birth of a regional unit

Before realising a new regional unit there are lots of preparations to be done: from choosing the appropriate house, then demolishing and relocating it, till the rebuilding. At that time those parts of the house, which are

too old to be used again are exchanged for authentic copies. Besides, there are houses, which are preserved as monuments after being chosen for relocation and that building has to be preserved on the original site. In the museum, these houses are made as authentic copies.

In this work, those craftsmen who apply authentic methods of construction – known in the vernacular architecture as well – play a great role. Examples are the following: carving beams, making thatched roof, making tinwork, fabricating shingles, constructing stone walls without any binding materials,

producing curbing for the doors and windows from wrought-iron. Approximately 110–130 labourers take part in these works in the construction of the Upland Market Town regional unit, which will be open for visitors from May, 2006.

Visitors can try out the traditional methods during the Architectural Festival, organised yearly, in August. In the confines of this event, our guests can learn the methods of making adobe bricks, earth wall and different technologies of roofing. Besides, children can create maquettes.



*The Upland Market Town:
making shingled-roof*

2. The opening ceremony of a regional unit

The Southern-Transdanubian region opened on 23rd of June, with nine houses. When organising the programs of the opening ceremony we had a special aim: we wanted those to “occupy” the houses, who are from the same villages, as the house. The descendants of the previous owners of the buildings also came, among them those, who spent their childhood



Making adobe bricks

in the house. It was a pleasure to see, how they relived the past and identified some of the objects. The inhabitants of the village baked cakes, so the visitors could taste the characteristic dishes. Besides, in each and every house, there was a craft presented. (Embroidering, broom-making, fabricating bread-basket from mat, etc.) Some of the craftsmen came from the given settlement or its surroundings. E.g. a szekler woman was weaving in the house from Hidas, making traditional szekler textiles. The best example is the house from Ócsény. The village itself is situated along the Danube. The river was drained in the 1860s, and then the inhabitants had the chance to exploit a very good quality soil and earn lots of money. That is why they were able to build huge houses and create richly decorated costumes. On the day of the opening ceremony a folk dance group from the neighbouring village performed a show, in which the visitors could participate; a bride was dressed in the house; and on the porch of the house visitors had the opportunity to make characteristic necklaces, worn by young girls originally, with the help of women from Ócsény.

However, there are settlements, which have not preserved the authentic methods and traditions, that is why the craftsmen, working originally in the museum were the ones presenting the craft. (e.g.: Embroidering

in Drávacsehi, in Zádor making potato-sample with which the walls of the kitchen were painted: the potato was put into lime and pressed onto the wall.) In this case the museum undertook to represent something already forgotten.

In September, 2005 this regional unit was the site for the Wine Festival, because one building of the regional unit, the vineyard with a 35-meter long cellar is from the famous wine region of Szekszárd. Visitors could taste the freshly pressed must and try the folk dances of Southern-Transdanubia. Children made scarecrows, crafts



Weaving in the house from Hidas

were presented in the houses. The spacious main square became a market, here the adults had the possibility to buy handmade objects, while puppet-shows were organised for the children

This is the first regional unit in the museum, which has wall-heating in the buildings. Therefore, the houses can be used in winter too: such as the house, in which Christmas decoration can be seen. (Christmas table and green branch, which was the predecessor of the Christmas tree.)

3. The utilisation of the regional unit

PROGRAMS IN 2005

FESTIVALS

Easter: 27th–28th of March

Red-hot crafts – creative day: 1st of May

Pentecost: 15th–16th of May

Week of the Earth: 24th–27th of May

The opening ceremony of the Southern-Transdanubian region: 23rd of June

Architectural Festival: 20th–21st of August

Harvest Crowd: 10th–11th of September

Corn day: 2nd of October

Festival of the new wine on St. Martin's day: 12th–13th of November

EACH WEEK:

Thursdays: Busy Days

Friday: Busy Days, during the summer holiday: holiday extra

Saturdays: Fiddling about on Saturday

Sundays: Old-fashioned Sunday

The Museum is open from Easter till St. Martin's Day, that means from the end of March till the 13th of November this year. During this period there is one greater festival (such as the architectural festival) monthly in the museum. From Thursday till Sunday, there are different programs,



Fabricating of leather bracelet

held by the craftsmen, recurring weekly. On certain days of the week, visitors can try the following crafts: pottery, weaving, bone-lace making, candle-making, wickerwork, game-yard – traditional games can be tried, embroidering, home-made dough making, carving, leather-works – e. g. bracelet-making, floral painting in the blue-dyer's workshop, bead-necklace making, gingerbread baking.

For children, there are separate thematic programs: they can get to know the profession of millers, bakers, blue dyers or tanners in the



Children at work

given workshop, they can participate in a traditional lesson in the village school. In a playful way, they can relive the life of the servants, and after watching the craftsmen, they can learn the different methods on simpler objects. Among pupils, the experimenting of different chores is very popular: e.g. calendering, sweeping, housing, sawing, barrowing. These programs are in close connection with the school curriculum. The joint assimilation is helped by thematic workbooks, which can be filled in on the basis of the children's own experiences.

Most of the caretakers regularly embroider, which results in a snugger atmosphere for the visitors, when they enter the house.

4. The Educational Centre

The Educational Centre was founded two years ago, where programs are organised for pupils: although not in original buildings, but they can touch objects, which are demonstrative and not works of art. Here – in the earlier office building of the museum – a significant ethnographer, K. Csilléry Klára's memorial room can also be visited.

This summer, summer camps were held here, for the first time, for pupils between the age of 6–12. From Monday till Friday the children could get to know the different regional units of the Museum and

learned handicraft methods. Here, courses are also organised for teachers, so that the pupils in the school can learn more and more folk traditions.

A folk dance – afternoon is also organised here monthly: in the afternoon children can learn dances, as in the evening adults have the possibility to dance.

Visitors can buy books, hand-made objects and folk music CD-s in the museum shop at the entrance. Besides, there is a building in the museum, in which an authentic shop is furnished. Here, hand-made objects also can be bought.

The Museum intends to build new regional units and will have the possibility to present more crafts and workshops as well.