

# CAIS Poster: “We combined the old culture with modern civilization”: Cultural motion in the local museum in Horodnic de Jos, Romania

## Mini-abstract submitted 3/26:

This poster investigates temporality in a local museum in Horodnic de Jos, Romania. Greg Urban’s work on cultural motion provides theoretical foundation for mapping constructions of *past* and *future* within the museum site, revealing zones of proximity. Museum-making activities take place across these zones, creating new connections between past and future.

**Abstract:** This poster investigates how past and future connect in a local museum in Horodnic de Jos, Romania. The research site is revealed as a matrix of movement exemplifying Greg Urban’s accelerative and entrepreneurial forces of cultural motion. Figurative linguistic constructions of *past* are juxtaposed with literal built constructions of *future*, mapped as zones of proximity that catalyze new modes of interaction to bridge the perceived gap between past and future.

## 1. Introduction

Researcher: How [do you] see the past and future connect through [your] work in the museum?

Proprietress: *There is no continuity.*

...

Translator: *It’s like we’re at the epicenter where two worlds collide.*

...

Proprietor’s sister: *We combined the old culture with modern civilization.*

This poster investigates a local museum in Horodnic de Jos, Romania as a site of cultural motion. Participant statements that express perceived distance between past and future informed the research question: How do past and future connect in a local museum? Greg Urban’s work (2001) that describes how accelerative forces of culture effect trajectories of cultural movement provides the theoretical foundation. Data collection focused on the experience of the museum tour led by husband-and-wife proprietors. Analysis shows how the spatial proximity between the activities of museum-making, a science museum (amateur planetarium and observatory), a new tourism venture (guest cabins) and the activities of daily life catalyzed new modes of interaction between old and new within the site. Figurative, linguistic constructions of the past and literal, built constructions of the future are also presented. In this case study, local museum-makers emerge as entrepreneurs (Urban 2001), an exemplary accelerative force who facilitate movement of the old, or *what was*, into the new, or *what will be*.

## 2. Background/Context

Local museums are personal expressions of heritage preservation prized for their unique approaches to preserving heritage. This museum form is one way in which the peasant, a

national symbol of Romania, is preserved within the context of wider discourses on cultural heritage preservation. In 2008, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant gathered twenty-four local museums into an association ([www.recomespar.ro](http://www.recomespar.ro)). This legitimating effort brings these personal, amateur and individual creations into the fold of official, professional museums within Romania, making it a salient time to study this emerging phenomenon.

### **3. Methodology and Methods**

In local museums, proprietors lead visitors through their museums on personal tours. Two visits to the research site (located in Horodnic de Jos, population ca. 2,700, Suceava County, Romania) documented visual and verbal aspects of the museum tour in the form of audio recordings, photographs, field notes and informal interviews. A grounded theory approach to analysis allowed themes to emerge from the data, a strategy further supported by the ethnographic approach to data collection that focused on capturing the words and actions of the respondents and the visual and material experience of the site.

### **4. Findings**

#### *Zones of proximity*

The local museum is located on a family property, the spatial configuration of which shapes the context for constructions of past and future. *Figure 1* maps the spatial organization of the property:

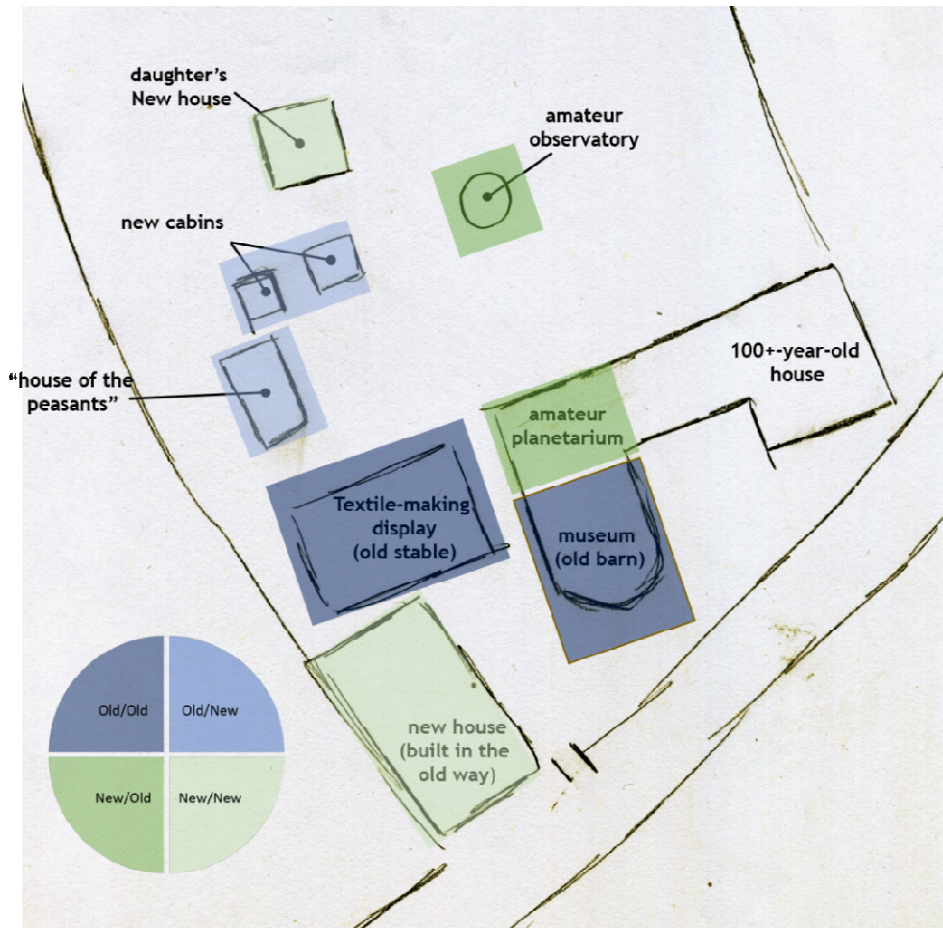


Figure 1: Zones of proximity, local museum at Horodnic de Jos, Romania

While it is not unusual for local museum spaces to be situated alongside proprietors' living spaces, this site included the atypical features of an amateur observatory, a planetarium and tourist guest cabins. *Figure 2* describes the degrees of oldness and newness of spaces and things within the different zones. The proximity of these zones facilitate cultural motion.

		Things	
		Old	New
Spaces	Old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority traditional things</li> <li>• Old/refurbished space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority traditional things</li> <li>• New space</li> </ul>
	New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combined traditional/new things</li> <li>• Old/refurbished space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combined traditional/new things (minority old things)</li> <li>• New space</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Degrees of oldness/newness present in the zones of proximity

*Figurative constructions of the past*

Figurative linguistic constructions of the past included the expressions *pe vremuri* and *se asta folosea la*. *Pe vremuri*, literally “past times,” is often translated as “back in the day.” This expression frames a generalized past in which museum objects were used. It emphasizes distance between the present and “past times.” *Se asta folosea la* translates as “This was used for . . .” As with *pe vremuri*, this phrase frames knowledge about the past in terms of a generalized “they” that has the potential to invoke different points of connection for different types of visitors.

#### *Literal constructions of future*

Literal constructions of future include newly built constructions: a house for the proprietor’s daughter (who resides in Italy), two tourist guest cabins, and a new “house of the peasants.” Asking participants questions about plans for these newly-built structures provided a vehicle for talking about the future: a child living abroad for work will be able to return home to live permanently; tourists will come from around the world to stay and experience village life; the peasant will inhabit a new house that is better-able to demonstrate how life was lived *pe vremuri*.

## **5. Discussion**

Urban (2001) describes how accelerative culture has the potential to reshape social space because it modifies elements of inertial or traditional culture into new configurations. In the local museum in Horodnic de Jos, linguistic/material constructions of the past and future take place within zones of proximity that contain different degrees of oldness/newness. This spatial proximity encourages accelerative expressions of culture that allow visitors and proprietors to re-conceptualize the past, or *the way things were* and the future, or *the way thing will be*. In this case study, local museum-makers exemplify Urban’s (2001) entrepreneur precisely because they facilitate this movement old into new. The space museum-makers have created not only preserves material elements of cultural heritage but allows heritage to remix and persist in new ways. In this context, accelerative culture shepherded by these entrepreneurs exposes the disjuncture between past and future as it attempts to overcome the perceived gaps expressed by respondents.

## **6. Conclusions and future directions**

The local museum represents an emerging institutional form and a new space of knowledge production around cultural heritage. The pathways created in the space/time of the local museum allow for new ways of conceptualizing and classifying knowledge about past, present and future. Future studies of local museums will also investigate the dynamics between amateur and professional museum workers to understand how the categories of “amateur” and “professional” are influenced by these kinds of cultural shifts.

## **7. References**

Urban, Greg. 2001. *Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World*. Minneapolis, MN: Univ Of Minnesota Press.