

## Reference

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For the dissertation work for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences, in the "Ethnology" Programme, at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", on the topic: "Institutional development and musealization of folk culture in modern times. (Based on the example of crafts and organized craftsmanship in Bulgaria)", with author Dimitar Ivanov Vassilev

The set of materials presented by Dimitar Vassilev is in accordance with the approved Regulations for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and includes all necessary documents. The dissertation has a total volume of 359 pages and is structured in an Introduction, three Chapters, Conclusion and 46 pages of Appendices. The bibliography includes a total of 266 titles of scientific works, of which 26 are foreign. 17 publications on the topic of the study are attached.

Dimitar Vassilev is an ethnologist and master of cultural studies with a qualification in cultural heritage management, who acquires skills and experience in Bulgarian and international training, programs and collaborations, allowing him to establish himself as a researcher, with a profile and scientific interests in the field in which the present work is developed. A lecturer with experience at the National Academy of Arts, Dimitar Ivanov Vassilev has developed a critical view of key elements of the history of crafts in our country, which can turn out to be variable or contradictory, thereby affirming his own contribution to important issues related to their development and life in the present day. The PhD candidate worked at the museum at IEFSEM - BAS, and today he is in the ranks of the National Museum of History in Sofia, where he is the head of a department. This almost 20 years of experience is of great importance for the successful implementation of the present study, as D. Vassilev knows the material world of Bulgarian ethnography in its past forms and current incarnations. As he himself says, "My daily contact with artifacts clearly demonstrated to me how forms and aesthetic criteria change", p. 4. And also – "My daily work and curiosity grew into a desire to understand what determines this change. This to some extent led me to consider crafts as part of a broader socio-political process, a process that transforms and

completely changes the social environment. An environment in which aesthetic criteria are imposed from top to bottom, in which a compromise is sought between traditional and modern uses of craft production”, p. 11.

The object of the study in this work is crafts as elements of folk culture and the changes and transformations that occurred in it in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Crafts in the text are almost constantly defined as "folk", without necessarily giving additional cognitive meaning. The author problematizes folk culture, which is used to invent national identity, by placing emphasis on crafts and their production, which offer a key to the analysis of the processes under consideration.

The subject of the study is the institutionalization of craftsmanship and the new roles and functions that crafts and craftsmen acquire through cooperation, musealization, the creation of a centralized branch organization, a modern market economy, as well as the transformation of some crafts into cultural heritage. These processes are examined both in breadth and through individual cases that help to perceive the situation in depth. Various methods of work and analysis were used in the research process, which makes it possible to outline the functions of past forms of associations subject to time. Through a series of interviews, the author has presented us with his own point of view of the individual craftsman, but also of the researcher who has been in contact with craftsmen in a diverse environment. Thus, we understand that it is important for the author to trace the transformation of craftsmen and crafts into an element of cultural heritage and a marker of national identity, processes that are relevant to the development of modern society and the definition of individual and personal identity through the prism of heritage. It is undeniable that the functioning of crafts in a new environment, such as the museum, as well as the impact of ideology in the period up to 1989 through a centralized craft organization, show the changes in the perception of this type of livelihood, as well as the attitude towards folklore culture, which is seen as an element of the national one.

The author traces the challenges of the time facing crafts – the introduction of mechanization into production, the imposed forced cooperation, the invention of survival strategies, the contraction of production due to the decline of use, standard production, the transformation of crafts into museum values, the loss of their vitality and applicability, a new legislative framework, the transformation of some of them into cultural heritage (p. 8). But the view of crafts is not enough for him, which is why he examines reflections that provoke reactions from the

masters to what is happening around them - "Thus, the desire to focus my research on a traditional production, on its changes and adaptation strategy as an integral element of folk culture in its transformation process, I believe would be successful" (p. 8). It is this research moment that is particularly important for the narrative, defined by the author as one of the main contributions of the study – to show how symbolic and utilitarian values are combined in the invention of survival mechanisms in spheres of different function and role.

**Chapter One** "Institutionalization and Transformation of Crafts and Organized Crafts in Modernity" reveals the changes in the sphere of crafts in a broad chronological framework, tracing both initial forms of association and violent ones, after the changes of the mid-twentieth century. The author offers our attention the cases from Pavlikeni – where the unification of all craftsmen into cooperatives is traced in order to liquidate private property, as well as the case from Rouse – where the changes in a cooperative existing for previous decades are traced, which show the transformation of the individual craftsman into a hired worker, the products – into standardized objects, created according to a plan and with a norm, in which their artistic value is also lost. The change in everyday life directly affects the livelihoods under consideration, since their tangible world is oriented towards another time. It is for this reason that D. Vassilev focuses on the emergence of the ZMNHZ, as an organization that restores the halo of crafts as a specific activity, although subordinated to new needs – the country's orientation towards foreign tourism, the search for identity before others, as well as the search for artistry in the work of craftsmen, both in the present and in the past. By examining the relations between the Cooperative, the Union of Bulgarian Artists, as well as the individual leaders in the organization, among whom is the ethnographer Hristo Vakarelski, the doctoral student places the situation in the context of the political and ideological development of the country at that time, making the important clarification that the Cooperative is an organization that manages to unite artists and create conditions for their realization. Thus, the Exhibition in Oreshak appeared, which not only continued the inherited Fair at the monastery from the past, but also became a factor in the development of crafts.

As a special case, the story of the master potter Petar Gigov, who is associated with the phenomenon of Businska ceramics, unfolds here, a theme that probably continues in the present, after the physical end of the local livelihood in the 1950s.

The exposition in **Chapter Two** "Museification of folk crafts. Development of craftsmanship as part of open-air exhibitions" focuses on the institutionalization of crafts through their musealization. For this purpose, it is necessary to present in a historical context the emergence and development of the idea of open-air museums, their functioning and structure, which the doctoral student does, relying on the special role of world exhibitions and their example.

Through the theme of open-air museums, the motive for the view of the national state and enlightened researchers on the "disappearing village" is traced, in which open-air museums present the nation at a glance through various artifacts, while simultaneously showing the social stratification in society. However, this topic is summarized only in historical terms, and the development of open-air museums traced is according to a vision from 1974 - Zippelius 1974. Thus, in practice, there is no modernity, where they appear as community museums, as ecomuseums (mentioned by the author), as archeological parks, develop museum activism and are far from stopping only on past forms of folklore culture and areal ethnography. We will have to note that in fact, for the needs of the specific study, the doctoral student relies only on examples of the creation of similar types of museums, abroad and in our country, without necessarily indicating the evolution in the development of open-air museums, since it is not of direct importance for the life of crafts.

The PhD candidate has traced the manifestation and part of the development of the open-air museum "Etar", of the so-called architectural and ethnographic complexes and the protected territories of settlements declared architectural or historical reserves, with the focus of this study being the attitude towards crafts, where they are placed in the context of museum representations, as well as their connection with tourism.

However, it seems to me that a different perspective on the topic of architectural reserves, which from being outdated and unnecessary are turning into nationally significant elements of cultural heritage, is not superfluous - (Alexander Vezenkov 2010. How the sad reality turned into cultural heritage: our ancient towns, In: In search of the Bulgarian. Networks of national intimacy, XIX-XXI century, comp. Stefan Dechev (Sofia: Institute for the Study of Arts, 405-410).

As a long-time and experienced museum worker, D. Vassilev knows that the museum's event calendar is the tool that turns individual initiatives into significant events, which is why he recognizes the strategic place of the International Fair of

Traditional Crafts held by REMO "Etar". Its support from the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Gabrovo shows national and local strategies for interpreting this type of heritage, which in practice fit into policies presenting Gabrovo as a UNESCO Creative city. Thus, through systematic support of crafts achieves sustainable development of the museum, the city's inclusion in a global network and the understanding of knowledge, skills and cultural practices related to crafts.

The examples examined show how, through various activities, the museum manages to add value to its static exhibitions, contribute to the preservation of disappearing crafts and livelihoods, and promote the skills and work of craftsmen. Particularly important are the activities related to supporting craftsmen in times of global crisis, when they do not have the opportunity to work and demonstrate in the museum (p. 168). The researcher distinguishes two different categories of activities on the part of the craftsmen themselves - practicing crafts for the purpose of production and for the purpose of demonstration (p. 210), which is clearly necessary in the last decade, due to modern trends for inclusion and participation of the public. This observation is consistently repeated in the following parts of the study.

In **Chapter Three**, "Institutional Development and Museumization of Folk Crafts. Transformation of Organized Craftsmanship (Following the Example of the Town of Troyan)", the emergence of the museum in Troyan, as well as the subsequent Permanent Crafts Exhibition from the 1930s, which is considered by the local museum as the predecessor of today's Crafts Museum in Troyan, is traced on many pages. This thesis is not relevant, and the doctoral student emphasizes the large time distance of over 30 years between the emergence of the Exhibition and the creation of the Museum - while examples from around the world show otherwise (the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, followed by the Victoria and Albert Museum). The functions of the Exhibition were continued rather by the exhibition in the "Nutcracker", rather than by the museum, and the doctoral student quite logically emphasizes the role of the exhibition in supporting local business. We will confirm his conclusions with our observations in a wide area in our country, where since the beginning of the 20th century there have been numerous examples of local exhibitions, sometimes called "museums", which are initiatives of chambers of commerce and industry, with the aim of developing business, but not with a thought for cultural heritage.

Later in time, the "Atelier of the Troyan Masters", the "Museum of Folk Crafts and Applied Arts" in the town of Troyan and the "National Exhibition of Crafts and Arts" in the village of Oreshak, emerge as three elements that inherit the former association of masters, the fair near the monastery and the museum, as guardians of knowledge about value and places for its realization. Their convergence and divergence is shown as subject to time, but their existence emphasizes their important place in the life of the observed craft and its performers. Nowadays, the Exhibition even acquires the status of a regional cultural institute, which makes it a leading competitor, determining the dynamics in the researched processes. In this way, the dissertation gains even more importance, since it is focused on the present and the future, and does not describe only the past, and this is its very important contribution.

The researcher follows all contemporary forms of expression of potters from the Troyan region, weaving them into the museum policy and that of the local municipality. In this way, we see the interweaving and incorporation of the craft, recognized as a value, and its representatives, into city holidays. The festivalization of culture in recent years also reflects on the observed processes, whereby craftsmen manage to gain their presence even in thematically different occasions for a holiday, such as the Plum Festival.

The case of the Yovkov's is indicative of the described situation in the region, in which the family representatives participate in all the changes that have occurred in the transformation of the craft, in the processes of transmission of knowledge and training, in its public presentation, the variability in forms and functions, as well as the preservation of local patterns and awareness of the value of the craft, the craftsmen and their products.

In the Conclusion, the doctoral student presents the main theses, including the one that the process of institutionalization and museumification of craft production changes its character, turning it into a living exhibit. This is an important conclusion, which represents a qualitatively new level of development of an element of inherited pre-modern culture, which is inscribed in national, regional and local dimensions, recognized as a value. It is precisely the tracking, carried out by the author, of the metamorphoses of crafts in our country, subject to various policies, that is key to understanding and using the topic under consideration in modern times. I emphasize this among the merits of this study, since it builds a bridge between the ethnographic view of specialized occupations and the heritological perspective of modernity.

At the same time, I find the statement that in the era of state and institutional support “some crafts die at the expense of others” (p. 284) to be controversial, since it is clear that manual crafts have been in the process of dying out since the beginning of the industrial revolution, but this is especially clear due to the change in the way of life, in which the material world is changing. Therefore, saddlebags, saddlebags, slippers and kopankas are no longer needed. At the same time, the criterion of artistry stimulates the preservation of some knowledge and skills to a greater extent than leading to their death, since it shows a value that will later be used to recognize cultural heritage. Overall, the text is well written and scientifically sound, with no plagiarism or use of artificial intelligence noticeable. However, I will note the use of words such as “bit” and “tradition”, for which their meaning and significance are not indicated. Insofar as terms in science are important because of their unambiguous meaning, we will emphasize that these examples require clarification, since they are present in many contexts and it is not clear what they mean. I will also point out the incorrect use of the wording “home crafts” (weaving, spinning, embroidery, embroidery, dyeing fabrics, weaving baskets and baskets) from p. 142 and others, which are actually “occupations” or “occupations”, but not crafts, as is customary to indicate in Bulgarian ethnographic science. Of course, these clarifications do not prejudice the indisputable contribution of the presented study.

The abstract adequately reflects both the structure of the dissertation and the main results. Goals, tasks, theses are presented, the development of the individual topics of the study and specific cases from the field are traced, which gives me reason to confirm its quality. The research, conducted by Dimitar Vassilev, uses an interdisciplinary approach to realize the set goals, and the result is an impressive corpus of systematic studies, which, without describing all known crafts, constitute a basis that serves as a representation of the specified topic as a whole. Thus, crafts, in order to reach new audiences, are supported by museums, and in this specific environment, crafts simultaneously retain specificity and implement change. It is this change that proves to be particularly valuable – not only for crafts and craftsmen, but also for museums, which implement inclusion, experience, immersion, thus changing the environment in which they develop.

The dissertation contains real scientific results that represent an original contribution by Dimitar Vassilev and meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADSRB), the

Regulations for the Implementation of the ADSRB and the Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The dissertation on the topic "Institutional Development and Musefication of Folk Culture in the Modern World. (Based on the Example of Crafts and Organized Crafts in Bulgaria)", testifies that Dimitar Vassilev possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professionalism, demonstrating qualities and skills for scientific research. Therefore, I confidently give my positive assessment of the dissertation work and the achieved results and propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Dimitar Ivanov Vassilev, in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, in the doctoral program "Ethnology", at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

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Reviewer:

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