

## **The Cultural House – The Legislative Context and the Institutional Evaluation** **Căminul cultural – context legislativ și evaluare instituțională**

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### **Abstract**

The present work has the goal to depict a real image concerning the present functioning conditions of the Cultural House – the main rural institution of adults' education. The elements of the legal nature are presented in a slight opposition that resides or should reside at the base of organizing and functioning of this institution. Because, while making this research, the traditions of the Cultural House have drawn our attention in a positive way; we also considered necessary to present them in this work, because this deserves and it has to be a part of the present through their reminiscent power.

### **Rezumat**

Lucrarea își propune să prezinte o imagine cât mai reală privind starea actuală de funcționare a căminului cultural – principala instituție rurală de educație a adulților. În paralel, și într-o ușoară antiteză, sunt prezentate elementele de natură legislativă care stau (sau ar trebui să stea) la baza organizării și funcționării acestei instituții. Deoarece, în decursul cercetării întreprinse, ne-au atras pozitiv atenția tradițiile specifice căminului cultural, am considerat necesar să le înfățișăm și în lucrarea de față, pentru că acestea merită și trebuie să fie parte a prezentului prin puterea lor evocatoare.

### **Introduction**

The law 292/2003 was published in the Official Monitor 1 part, no. 473 on 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2003 the good organization and functioning of the Cultural House, the chapter III of the present law was named the Cultural House, making reference to this institution or to the cultural place. In almost the same time an empirical research has also done for almost 3 years in 61 rural places in Mures county and which had as a goal the evaluation of the rural system of education, a significant role in this having the cultural house. Making a simple comparative analysis between the results of research and the articles stipulated by the above mentioned law, we are right to ask ourselves: how long it will take so that the institution – The Cultural House – assume its parts that are meant to be according to the law. In the following pages we will try to underline not only the big discrepancies found between the desired objective and hard facts, but also the positive elements – certain indicators – which may stand at the foundation of outlining of some intervention programs of rebuilding this cultural house or education institution of the adults in the countryside. We also insist on the past of this institution because, many of the traditional-cultural and educational values specific to the cultural house deserve and must be a part of the present through their reminiscent power.

### **A Short History of the Culture Houses – Interviews with the Old People of the Villages**

The repeated discussions with the old people of the villages, that took place as a part of the above mentioned research, they put in evidence the educational and cultural values of the past. The Cultural Houses – as we learned from the old people – have been built after 1950's and only in one of the places investigated after 1991.

In exchange, many of the activities of the cultural houses took their place, before the foundation of such of institution, in one of the villager's house, in a shed at “the leaders of the villages” or in the yard of the shop; in other words, the cultural house, at its beginnings, was only an institution that took over or carried on some of the cultural – educational activities that had already had a tradition in the village community. We also learned from the old people that the main activities of the Cultural House, depending on its specific, were directed to the following objectives:

a) Preparation and presentation of the artistic programs of non-professionals of which the folks groups, the groups of the village theatre, the coral groups, the dance bands, the vocal soloists and the instrumentalists were in charge of it. Many of the folk village groups were trying to put on stage at “a quiet high artistic level and with a high degree or authenticity” – as an old man of the village stated – various customs and local traditions, as well as the local folk dances (Sarba, De-a Lungul, Rara, Barbuncul, Invarțita etc.).

b) The organization of the courses for the illiterate people, the education of the villagers and their information in different fields: agriculture, politics, medicine, veterinary, folk art, good manners etc. The old people of the villages have often enumerated the village courses of agriculture, medicine education (“did by a person who came from the town, a doctor”), the meetings of “the educated people” concerning the life of the village, “the study” meant for all the categories of age having the goal of teaching the illiterate people. The old people of the villages didn't forget the propaganda activities “for the indoctrination of the mass citizens” particular to the communism epoch.

c) The organization and the spending of free time true watching films, folks dancing organization, horas, sport activities etc.

The teacher of the village was in charge of the organization and taking place of the activities mentioned above, and later after the building of the cultural houses so after the institutionalizations of this activities, the manager of the cultural house together with some other educational agents of the villages were in charge of this.

In the past, many of the educational forms that represented the base of what it meant the cultural uprising of the Romanian peasants diminished their activity until it almost didn't exist any social life of the community. The causes of disappearing, according to the old people of the villages, of some customs, local traditions – as well as the dances, state labor, group work activities – were the cause of “the young people living the villages, the excessive politicizing of the

cultural manifestations during the communism, the impact of mass-media on the life of the villagers and even the democratization that imposes the power of the money”.

“The Cultural House was cultural for a while, but now the culture moved in night clubs, bars and television” as an old man stated. Indeed, The cultural house, which according to tradition, except the school and the church, it was supposed to be an institution to answer the needs of civic, moral, scientific, economic and artistic education etc., it has lost its meanings, becoming”a real place for night clubs, weddings, baptizes” or in some of the villages being only “a building in a state of neglect”.

Because of the serious conditions that they are, many of them cannot satisfy the request at least for the organization of the cultural activities that usually take place in the villages. Moreover, according to our research, the persons involved in the administration and coordination of the activities of the cultural houses, aren't satisfactory, the major part of them not having the proper education and coming from different professional fields not belonging to the culture field, the peasants facing the lack of experience and authority of some of the managers of the institutions.

### **The Cultural House – Continuity and Discontinuity Elements**

In view of the art.6 of the law 292/2003, (1) the Cultural House is a public institution having legal personality, without any work objective, that functions in all the main villages under the authority of the local council. Indeed, in all the villages where our research was made there is a building that is called the cultural house, and which, as we will see, “works”... A part of the indicators in function that succeed to measure the level or the degree of functionality of the cultural House, and on which we will insist in the followings, are: the special education of the managers of the Cultural House; the material conditions that they had, fixed funds financial means; forms and methods of organizing the specific activities.

### **The Management of the Cultural Houses**

The operative management of the cultural house, as it is stipulated in art. 8 of the same law, it is assured by a manager elected in a contest (...) organized by the local council together with the county direction for culture, the cults and the national cultural patrimony. Moreover, from art.9 we learned that as a part of the cultural house a consultative council is organized which is made up of 5-11 volunteer members – the head representatives of the village, of the school, of the cults, of the town hall of young people retired and who meets once in a three months or whenever is necessary, it pronounces on the annual programs of activities and the financial priorities, analyzes once in a three months the activity made and the way of financing the activities and make propositions concerning the necessary changes in the structure of the institution, and they submit the request to the local council. Unfortunately, contrary to this law, at the head of this cultural houses there are persons who come from other professional fields having very little experience of “managing” from six months to twenty-four years, the majority of them, not having a specialized education, as for the volunteering stipulated by the law, it is not at the case.

Only two of the ten cultural houses managers have got o proper education so far, in a organized way and in different periods of time. It can be mentioned here the specialized education that the cultural house manager from Sarmasu got for several years and precisely: English courses, PC operation, formation and education of the adults, European integration project writing, financial resources and administration of the project. Also, the manager of the cultural house that had the benefit of preparation for the work that he does in Deda, participating at the courses of cultural animators, the duration of training being for one month beginning with year 1999.

### **The Material Conditions of These Institutions**

According to the new functioning regulation of the cultural houses, these institutions have been relying on their own financing from the local budget, occasionally by the state budget (art. 40). Their existence and their functionality depend on the way in which they deal with the management institutions (the managers of the cultural houses) know to administrate it from the financial and cultural point of view. The fact that only two of the ten managers have got a specialized training explains, in a certain way the financial conditions in which these institutions are, whose means of cultural practice, very little, come from an old epoch. As for the fixed funds – locations, material equipment – this varies from 3 billions (it's about the cultural house in Rusii Munti, recently rebuilt in 2002) to 110 millions (Suplac village) the major part of the cultural houses being buildings in a state of neglect, the means of the cultural practice also suffering degradation from a physical and moral point of view. Judging by the small values of the means of cultural practice, by their general material conditions, we were right to ask ourselves of the provenience of the financial means, in the majority of cases coming from practices “less cultural” as wedding taxes, funerals, commemorations, parties, discos, and in less cases from taxes on the shows or organization of cultural meetings.

That explains the quiet poor life, as you will see, from cultural – educational point of view that characterizes these institutions.

### **Objectives and Organized Activities**

In art.7 the main objectives of these institutions are stipulated:

- a) Organization and taking place of cultural – artistic activities and of permanent education;
- b) Preservation and the carry on of the moral, artistic and technique values of the local community, of the national and universal patrimony;
- c) Organization supporting of non-professional artistic groups, of contests and folk festivals, including the participation

of the groups at cultural manifestation between villages and between counties;

d) Organization and supporting of documentation activity, of temporary or permanent exhibitions, elaboration of monographs and works of tourist presentation;

e) Spreading of feature films and documentaries;

f) Organization of scientific and technique meetings, of folk art and peasantry housekeeping;

g) Organization and taking place of civic education courses and those of permanent professional formation;

h) Organization and taking place of activities for the benefit of the community.

All these objectives seem to belong to the past, because as a result of analyzing some archive documents and discussions with the old people of the villages, it was certified a gradual decrease of the activities of the cultural houses.

We can speak about a gradual decrease of the number of cultural meetings moreover, what they represented in the past as main activities of the cultural houses, with a great contribution at the teaching of illiterate peasants, we can't say it represents anymore nowadays.

In the past, in most of the villages where the research took place, there was at least one literary meeting and various artistic circles or of other nature: musical groups (vocal female group, instrumental group and mixed vocal group), tailor's meetings (folk costume making), folk art meetings (beads silk sewing, on cloth sewing), sport meetings (chess, table tennis, football), medical meetings (first aid), pedagogical meetings. The number and variety of these was quiet big, so it is explained the rich cultural life of which the traditional village enjoyed. At present the villages where we can speak about the existence of cultural meetings are decreased in number. From the ten villages where our research was made, meetings are organized only in three of them, the culture activities lack their preoccupation, the major part of them being of artistic and sport nature – musical meetings (instrumental or vocal), sport meeting (chess and tennis) and only in one village it is organized a literary meeting and there is a youth satirical group.

A particular situation was found in Sarماسu village, where, as a part of the cultural house, the Folk University in Sarماسu was founded in 1998, associated member ANUP in 1997, as a part of which a series of educational activities take place: dance courses – ballet, choreographic dances, society dances, painting courses, graphics courses, engraving courses, PC operations, foreign languages courses.

As for the artistic activities an amount analysis proves their superiority in number in the past. In each village in the past, there was at least a team of folk dances, an artistic meeting and a vocal and instrumental group. All the villages also had a village theatre and an artistic group. Moreover, the vocal groups were as much as for women as for men and also mixed groups. The instrumental groups were also mixed groups, whistlers, accordions and harmonicas. Each village had a band and an artistic group, which participated at different cultural – artistic contests, as well in the native village as in the neighboring villages or the further ones. Some of the bands have preserved during the time their customs and traditions, although adding new members, as in the case of “Junii Calimanului” band from Deda village or “Cununa Spicului de Grau” from Rusii-Munti village, both mountain villages. In exchange, in three of the ten villages we can speak about the existence of artistic bands, and in the rest of them dominating folk dances bands and very few instrumental and vocal bands, and only in one village there was a theatrical troupe.

Reviewing the cultural-artistic manifestations that took place at the cultural house in the past it was found a rich value and symbolic variety, putting in evidence not only the spirituality of which the traditional village was enjoying, but also the wish of permanent enrichment of the universe of values common to the village communities. The creativity of the enlightened Romanian peasant was put in evidence by a series of cultural – artistic manifestations, many of them being bound to the main events of life, but also to the religious historical or literary events – that had a great significance during one year – as well as the basic occupation, the agriculture. Therefore, every village was commemorating the unification of the Romanian Provinces, the national day of Romania, the Heroes Day. The manifestations began with putting flowers at the heroes' cemetery, being at its peaks with artistic shows. The birth of the great men of letters as Mihai Eminescu, the 8<sup>th</sup> March Day or some other important days in the village life, for example, “the school's day”, were also celebrated at the cultural house. The religious events – Easter, Christmas, Whit Sunday etc., were moments of joy and celebration in the whole village. They represented the moment in which the traditions and customs, the folk local customs were put on the stage both by the young people and by the old people. Each village also had its particularities concerning the artistic manifestation being bound to the local events or annual agriculture periods (from the traditional balls fancy-dress balls until the gathering crops balls).

The participation to the contests like “the village's artists” or putting into light of their talents on the stage in other neighboring or far away villages, represented for them an “stimulant” for developing, for the utmost accomplishment. In this way the village was directed to the discovering of the local talents, the old people being continually preoccupied that the young men carry on the cultural traditions, the ancestors customs, being at their turn real instructors, teachers for the new comers. There were also educational activities at the cultural house in many villages, study for all age categories being an activity that was daily found inside the cultural house. Also the meeting with the accomplished writers represented an opportunity for the villagers to discover new truths, to enlarge their knowledge. The head educated people of the villagers beginning with the teacher and continuing with the agronomic engineer, with the doctor and ending with the old wise man of the village, all together were in charge of the intellectual life of the peasant in all fields, not lacking the aesthetic, moral, religious education, community education, road traffic education, medical education, women's education which, in most of cases was an hygienic, medical one, being done regularly by the doctor of the village.

Unfortunately, the cultural house which was “cultural for a while” as an old man said, it now became an institution where the main activities are of “night activities”, where the weekends mean discos or parties, where the natives celebrate baptisms, weddings or where the politic leaders organize their meetings and the villagers take various decisions for the life of the village, as well as the watchman election, setting the land's taxes, the community custody, the shepherd and the heard keeper. The really cultural-educational manifestations almost lack in the majority of places and, where they take place, they are in the form of the school celebrations.

However, some of the villages prove quiet the contrary, it means that, there is and there will be a cultural institution. Even if their number decreases, however, they prove the fact that *"It is possible!"* that the institution called the cultural house has and must have a unique social and educational role in the village community. Not only the educated people from the village but also the whole community is responsible for the good function of it. This also is found in our research. In villages like Deda, Rusii Munti, Raciu, Sarmasu, especially the teachers know their social role and they assume it as a part of village community, their activities surpassing the school confines. Their involvement in the village's cultural life is easy to be unraveled following the course of cultural- educational manifestations as a part of the cultural houses, organization of which they are in charge of. In the past, many of the organized activities find themselves as being continue, being permanent through the time, even appearing new elements, proving the receptivity degree of village community for the new, for the modernism. Therefore, the heroes and the great writers commemoration, the artistic manifestations dedicated to the main events in the village's life or putting into the light of the local traditions and customs with the occasion of the Christian celebrations and many other events that we find even in the present on the stages of the cultural houses. As well as the traditionally balls, that in multicultural villages marks the identity of each ethnic people, adding its contribution to mutual knowledge and respect. For example, in Batos village, the winter celebrations are represented in theatre plays both by the gipsy and by Romanians and Hungarians: Christmas represented by gipsy, New Year's Eve by the Hungarians, Epiphany by the Romanians. Inside the cultural houses, symposiums dedicated to the national and international personalities (Deda), history contests organized as usually on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December (Raciu), folk festivals, the retired day celebration (Raciu), have recently took place. As an educational manifestation, the aesthetic education and the education for women are predominant as a reply at the women's numerical domination, but also recognizing their important part in the village and family community. Modern dance course, society dances, aerobic gymnastics etc., have appeared as a part of the organized activities at the cultural house, making the village to be almost alike to the town, to the new contemporary culture elements.

### **Conclusions**

The conclusions of the village's research led to the main negative findings regarding the functionality of the cultural house, so that our main interventions which have in view a new becoming of the cultural house, must be carefully and professionally directed to the following objectives: cultural house manager's specialized education; the modern equipment of the cultural houses giving a new proportion to the cultural-educational practices. The main problem is always the financial one, because culture and education without money cannot be done, that's obvious. It can't be done anymore. There are few people who still try to do education with little money.

It seems that post revolutionary evolution of Romanian society has brought with it also the culture and education with its social and financial determination. "Losing" a status of ideological conditions, the culture "has gained" the economic censorship that few of the people, in their post revolutionary elation, have taken it into account. Although, one cannot put censorship to the culture because the society cannot go on without culture. The fact of not being educated costs more than should be necessary for the education. The education may seem to cost a fortune in a country where it doesn't find its economic rhythm and where the social problems have increased from one year to another. However, who believes that can live without education is utterly wrong. Maybe nowadays, the education is most needed than ever, and maybe it remains the last hope for finding our identity.

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