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Anca Gogîltan

Mining Museums. Mining Communities

The Weak and the Strong in Museum Narrative at Baia Mare, District of Maramureş in Romania

The years after 1989[1] meant, for the mining region in north-western Romania, the beginning of a phenomenon that occurred decades ago in regions like Cornwall in England or Erzgebirge in Germany and Czech Republic, namely the process of closing of unprofitable mining centres. These used to provide some of the main occupations to the inhabitants of the region of Baia Mare (Maramureş), meaning production and process of precious and non-ferrous metals such as gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, tin, mercury, stibium and bismuth.

The region of Maramureş is considered now among disadvantaged areas. Unemployment, poverty, disorientation followed the closing decisions. However, even more problematic in this situation is the fact that mining tradition, as a particular feature of regional and local identity of Maramureş, is menaced by the gradual disappearances of its physical context. Therefore, the problem is not only to save the region from an economic point of view but also to preserve its distinctive, historical identity.

Located in the capital town of Maramureş District, the History Museum and the Mineralogy Museum at Baia Mare could play a central role in this case as treasuries of public memory and history as well as places of

[1] I am indebted to Dr. Ulrich Heß, Dr. Maria Crăciun and to Lucia and Dan Pop from the History Museum at Baia Mare, Romania for their advice and professional help.
In the year 1997 the Autonomous Administration of Lead and Zinc at Baia Mare [Regia Autonomă a Plumbului şi Zincului Baia Mare] was reorganized by Government Decision nr. 832. In the same time the National Company of Precious and Non-ferrous Metals ›Remin‹ S.A. Baia Mare [Compania Națională a Metalelor Prețioase şi Neferoase ›Remin‹ S.A. Baia Mare] was created together with three other joint-stock Commercial Companies. ›Remin‹ proposed the closing of 38 mines situated in Maramureş, Bistrița-Năsăud and Satu Mare Districts.

education. How do these museums transmit information and insight into the history of the people and their traditional mining occupations? What is their contribution to the creation and recovery of local identity and self-esteem that is endangered by the difficult economic situation in the region? As public institutions of culture, museums represent the official, scientific discourse in the exhibition space, whereas the historical community appears as the passive subject of museum representation. However, one must keep in mind that museums in Romania were only apparently in positions of power during communist times. Being the keepers and the ›voice‹ of the ›true‹ history of the Romanian people, they were under politically centralized control. One the other hand it is important to recall that, although the represented mining communities might seem passive and voiceless in the present exhibitions, they were the ones that made the local history.

One may ask in this case, which are the conditions that permit the weak to become or seem strong in the museum concept? Is the museum really powerful now, when the political situation in Romania has changed? In which ways may former mining communities become stronger with the help of the museum? My present analysis focuses on the existing and planned strategies of these institutions taking part in the general efforts of survival and change in the region of Maramureş. It also explores some possible ways to shift the focus of the museum from an educator of passive visitors to a mediator of culture and an active representative of the local community.

The geographic location of the mining centres

The most important mining centres of Maramureş[2] are located in the area surrounding the town of Baia Mare. This was and still is the main administrative and political centre of the district. The region is famous not only for the earth treasures but also for its outstanding landscapes. No wonder

[2] The most important mining centers were at Baia Borşa (Burloaia, Colbu, Dealul Bucăţii, Gura Băii), Baia Sprie, Băiţa, Băiuţ, Cavnic, Herja, Ilba, Nistru, Poiana Botizei, Şuior and Vişeu (Măcârlău, Novicior). See: Bălănescu, Staicu, Achim, Valeriu, Ciolte, Aurel, *Istoria conducerii mineritului, a metalurgiei neferoase şi preţioase din nord-vestul României* [*The history of directing the mining, the non-ferrous and precious metalurgy in north-western Romania*]. Baia Mare 2002, p. 19.

that the Romantic poet Petöfi Sandor described it in 1847 as follows: »At the foot of a crescent of mountains of immense height nestles Nagy-Banya [Baia Mare] ... with its old-fashioned buildings and Gothic tower, like a piece of the Middle Ages forgotten here by time. Above the town and the whole valley, there is a peculiar blue mist, as if the sky had come completely down to earth. You can't believe you're not dreaming, or you think it's just memory, that you're not here now, but have been here long, long ago and spent happy hours here.«[3]

The town Baia Mare is placed on the middle course of Săsar River, in a depression area at an average altitude of 194 meters above the sea level.[4] he picturesque image of the town is enhanced by the volcanic mountains Ţibleş and Gutâi that surround it. The mountains are easily accessible from the city, famous routes being: Igniş (1307 meters), Mogoşa (1246 meters), Gutâi (1445 meters), Creasta Cocoşului (1450 meters) etc.[5] Besides their importance as mining centers several places like Baia Borşa, Cavnic and Mogoşa are known as locations for winter sports.

Going back in time to the Middle Ages, Baia Mare or Rivulus Dominarum and Baia Sprie or Medius Mons, as they appear in a document of 1329, developed around the oldest mines of gold and silver in the region.[6] These brought prosperity, privileges and work to the town and the inhabitants of the neighboring villages.

The historical development of mining in the region of Baia Mare

Generally any historical presentation of the town Baia Mare or the neighboring town Baia Sprie emphasizes the antiquity of mining activities in

[3] See Réti, István: *The Nagybánya artists colony. Excerps.* In: The Hungarian Quarterly, (2001), vol. XLII, nr. 164.

[4] The municipality of Baia Mare includes a number of surrounding villages like Tăuţii Măgherăuş, Recea, Groşi, Firiza, Valea Neagră and Blidar. See: Feştilă, Aurel S., Pintilie, Ioan I., Cădariu, Ioan I., Sabău, Ioan I., Achim, Valeriu: *Monografia Municipiului Baia Mare* [*The monograph of the municipality Baia Mare*] Vol. 1, Baia Mare: Intreprinderea Poligrafică Maramureş, p. 20.

[5] Roşu, Alexandru: *Geografia fizică a României* [*The physical geography of Romania*], Bucharest 1973, p. 194–199.

[6] See doc. nr. 544 in: *Documente privind istoria României, veacul XIV, C*, Transilvania, vol. II (1321–1330), Bucharest 1953, p. 289–290.

this area. According to one of the authors of a local monograph published in the 70's, mining at Baia Mare »has its roots deep down in the history«[7]. The argument is based on archaeological discoveries dating from the Bronze Age, such as deposits of bronze and golden objects.[8] There are also some mentions/references, especially in the secondary literature from the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century, about traces of Roman mines in the area.[9] However, no systematic research that documents the beginnings of the mining in the region has been published yet.

One of the earliest preserved written sources emphasizing the importance of the mines at Baia Mare and Săsar (Zazúrbánya, now included in Baia Mare) is dating from the first half of the 14th century. Issued by the chancellery of Louis I of Anjou, King of Hungary on September 20th 1347, the document contains a list of privileges granted by the king to these mining centers and their inhabitants.[10] At that time Baia Mare had the status of a free royal town.

It is interesting to observe that the presence and production of precious metals had a specific impact on the local historical development. Mining became the symbol of both towns as indicated by representations of mines, miners and their working tools on the official seals of Baia Mare and the neighboring town Baia Sprie (dating from the 14th century).[11]

7 See I.I. Pintilie, *Mineritul*. In: Feştilă, Aurel S., Pintilie, Ioan I., Cădariu, Ioan I., Sabău, Ioan I., Achim, Valeriu: *Monografia Municipiului Baia Mare* [*The monograph of the municipality Baia Mare*] Vol. 1, Baia Mare: Intreprinderea Poligrafică Maramureş, p. 243; Bălănescu, Staicu, Achim, Valeriu, Ciolte, Aurel, *Istoria conducerii mineritului, a metalurgiei neferoase şi preţioase din nord-vestul României* [*The history of directing the mining, the non-ferrous and precious metalurgy in north-western Romania*]. Baia Mare 2002, p. 30.

8 Kacsó, Karol: *Descoperiri pre şi protoistorice la Baia Mare* [*Pre- and Protohistorical discoveries at Baia Mare*]. In: *Marmaţia* (2005) 8/1, p. 153–181. About the antiquity of salt quarries see idem: *Date cu privire la exploatările vechi de sare din Maramureş* [*Data concerning the old salt exploitations in Maramureş*]. In: Cavruc, Valeriu, Chiricescu, Andrea, Sarea: *timpul şi omul. Catalog de expoziţie* [*The Salt, the time and the man. Exhibition catalogue*]. Sfîntu Gheorghe 2006, p. 96–121.

9 Crişan, Gheorghe: *În subteranele cu comori. Carte despre minele de aur şi mineritul din Regiunea Baia Mare* [*In the underground with treasures. Book about the gold mines and the mining in the Region of Baia Mare*], Baia Mare 1940, p. 9

10 See doc. nr. 577. In: *Documente privind istoria României, veacul XIV, C, Transilvania, vol. IV* (1341–1350). Bucharest 1955, p. 400–404.

11 See Pop, Lucia: *Un patrimoniu de excepţie valorificat în expoziţia de istorie a mineritu-*

Throughout time, the importance and the need to increase mining production determined repeatedly acknowledgements of existing privileges and granting of others. This happened, for example, in 1454 in connection with John Hunyadi[12] or in 1469, when his son Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary granted Baia Mare the right to surround itself with protecting walls.[13] Hunyadi was the one who commissioned Saint Stephen cathedral whose Stephen Tower remains a landmark of the city to this date. It is also important to point out that Baia Mare had minting rights.[14] A document from 1411 mentions the Mint at Baia Mare, one of the oldest and most famous in Transylvania.[15] In the 15th century this was directed by a comes monetarum, that, according to the documents, had quite a strong position in relation to the town officials. It is also known that in the 16th century, around 1552, the mint with its workshops was located in a building protected by the town walls.[16]

Therefore, mining and minting explain why the domain of Baia Mare[17] as a desired possession. In the course of time it became the property of various rulers or powers of the day like the Hungarian King, the Transyl-

lui. In: *Acta Musei Porolissensis. Istorie-Etnografie-Artă* (2005), vol. XXVII, p. 463. See good representations of the seals in idem: *Mining history in Maramureş*. Permanent exhibition, Baia Mare 2005, p.12.

12 John Hunyadi or Iancu de Hunedoara (Romanian), was at that time Count of Bistriţa and Captain General of the Kingdom of Hungary. See the document nr. 5/I, from the fund of the town of Baia Mare in the Maramureş District Branch of the National Archives.

13 Document nr. 10/I, from the privilege acts, latin original, the seal is lost, preserved in the Maramureş District Branch of the National Archives.

14 Goldemberg, Samuel: *Contribuţii la o istorie a cămării şi monetăriei din Baia Mare* [*Contributions to a history of the chamber and of the mint at Baia Mare*]. In: *Anuarul Institutului de istorie din Cluj*, 1958–59, I.II, p. 153.

15 The information appears in a letter written by King Sigismund of Hungary in which he mentions the fact that he donated the town and its incomes including minting to the Serbian Despot Stephan Lazarevici. See Ioan Sabău, „Despre monetăria din Baia Mare în secolele XV-XVII" [About the Mint at Baia Mare in the 15th -17th centuries] în Marmaţia, (1977), vol. 3, p. 56. See also Lukinich, Imre, Balog, Jolán: *Mátyás Király emlékkönyv születésenek ötszázéves fordulójár* [*Album 500 years from the time of King Mathias*]. Budapest: A Korvin Mátyás Magyar-Olasz Egyesület megbízásából kiadja a Franklin-Társulat 1940, vol. I, p. 560, 568.

16 *Monografia Municipiului Baia Mare*, [*Monograph of the municipality of Baia Mare*] vol.1, Baia Mare: Intreprinderea Poligrafică Maramureş 1972, p. 250.

17 *Monografia oraşului Baia Mare*, p. 137–156.

vanian Principles, or the Austrian Emperor. They were all interested in controlling and supporting the good functioning of the mines and of the mint that contributed to their economic power.

For a short period, from the beginning of the 18th century until 1748, the mines were under the control of the Mining Direction at Košice. After that, a Superior Mining Inspection Office was created at Baia Mare.[18] This was meant to increase the mining efficiency. It supervised the activity of several institutions like the mint, various Mining Offices as well as some of the mining rural courts of law.[19]

After 1918, when Maramureş became a part of the Romanian Kingdom, the mines were included in the state property.[20] They were administrated by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and set under the rule of the Direction of Mining and Metallurgical Plants of Baia Mare.[21] Several mining companies were organizing the metal production, some of them based on foreign capital: Austro-Hungarian, French, German, and English.[22]

18 In 1864 the Superior Mining Inspection Office was replaced by a Mining Master's Office that functioned until 1918.

19 Other institutions under its jurisdiction were the Royal Mining Office at Baia Sprie, the Mining Office and the Furnace at Cavnic, the Furnace and the Royal Woods at Ferneziu, the Copper Furnace and the Royal Woods at Băiţa, the Mining Office and the Royal Woods at Nistru, the Royal Mining Office at Băiuţ, the smithies on the whole territory of Belső-Szolnok district, the Royal Mining Office at Borşa, the territory of Chioar Castle, the central financial office of the Mining Inspection Office, 4 laboratories and the rural mining courts of law at Baia Sprie, Cavnic and Borşa. See the Document nr. 1707/1900, Fund of the Mining Direction and Metallurgic Factory at Baia Mare in the National Archives at Baia Mare. See also See: Bălănescu, Staicu, Achim, Valeriu, Ciolte, Aurel, *Istoria conducerii mineritului, a metalurgiei neferoase şi preţioase din nord-vestul României* [*The history of directing the mining, the non-ferrous and precious metalurgy in north-western Romania*]. Baia Mare 2002, p. 51.

20 These were the mines of Valea Roşie, Dealul Crucii, Baia Sprie, Cavnic, Băiuţ, Rodna Veche, Roşia Montană and Săcărâmb as well as the Metallurgic Factory at Firiza de Jos and Zlatna.

21 Bălănescu, Staicu, Achim, Valeriu, Ciolte, Aurel, *Istoria conducerii mineritului, a metalurgiei neferoase şi preţioase din nord-vestul României* [*The history of directing the mining, the non-ferrous and precious metalurgy in north-western Romania*]. Baia Mare 2002, p. 88–89.

22 For more details see Bălănescu, Staicu, Achim, Valeriu, Ciolte, Aurel, *Istoria conducerii mineritului, a metalurgiei neferoase şi preţioase din nord-vestul României* [*The history of directing the mining, the non-ferrous and precious metalurgy in north-western Romania*]. Baia Mare 2002.

During and after the Second World War, mining in the region was precarious and had to be reorganized again under the Direction of Mining and State Factories (MINAUR) created in 1940.[23] Due to the state interest to increase the metal production in the region, in the following decades investments were granted, mining technology and process were improved. The working and living conditions of those involved in mining activities and of the local population were influenced as well. However, technical development of the mining industry had in time negative consequences for the local environment. Until recently, the region of Baia Mare was considered among the most polluted in Romania.

The recent situation of the mining sector in Maramureş

The decline of the mining industry in Maramureş began in the 90's and it was the consequence of bad administration and growing costs of production. Beginning with 1997/1998 a large number of mining personnel was disposed and mining activity was limited. In the years 2004 and 2006, more measures for reshaping the mining sector of north-western Romania were issued by the Government.[24] Consequently, until 2006, out of a number of 38 mining sites considered unprofitable 16 were closed and 9 others are in the process of closing. The Government Decision nr. 565/2006 founded a Society for Closing Mining Sites ›Econord‹ [Societatea Comercială Filiala de Inchidere a Obiectivelor Miniere ›Econord‹ – S.A. Baia Mare] with the role of coordinating the whole process.[25]

It is evident that the Romanian state tried to impose a gradual closing of the unprofitable mines in order to diminish the social impact. The pro-

[23] Ibidem, p. 126. Throughout time, this institution bore various titles like, for example, The Mining Trust Baia Mare, The Mining Enterprise Baia Mare, The Central Office of Non-Ferrous Ores and Metallurgy Baia Mare, The Central Office of Non-Ferrous Ores Baia Mare. The Autonomous Administration of Lead and Zinc Baia Mare, The National Company of Precious and Non-Ferrous Metals ›Remin‹ – S.A. Baia Mare (1998–2001).

[24] Government Decision nr. 615/2004.

[25] Government Decision nr. 565/26.04.2006, published in Monitorul Oficial nr. 412/12.05.2006. Until 2010 several other mines are on the closing list as for example Valea Blaznei and Făget of the Mining Center Rodna, Gura Băii Inferior, Dealu Bucății-Dealu Negru and Colbu of the mining center Borşa, Văratec, Breiner Superior, Cisma of the mining center Băiuț as well as the mines Ilba, Nistru from the mining enterprise Aurum and the mine Şuior.

cedure was supported by money from the national budget being negotiated with the Mining Trade Union of Maramureş. However, a large number of social and economic problems already appeared and are to be expected still.[26]

How does the museum participate in the process of conserving and interpreting the local and regional identity?

The museum is one of the institutions taking part in the mission of saving and preserving what once constituted the main economic source of the region. Recently a cooperation project (called PIMM) started in order to create a thorough documentation and propose solutions concerning the future fate of the mining sites in the area. The goal was to explore the possibilities to preserve certain mines, locations and buildings as natural or industrial archaeological heritage values. The project involved several local and regional institutions among which were the Museum of Mineralogy and the Museum of History and Archaeology.[27] Completed in 2006 the final report of the research teams indicated a number of 13 mining sites and 8 natural areas at Baia Borşa, Baia Mare, Baia Sprie, Băiuţ, Cavnic, Ilba, and Nistru that present practical conditions as well as elements of interest to be conserved as touristy attractions and heritage sites.[28] Tourism is seen as a resourceful possibility of regional development in the future. Some locations like Borşa or Cavnic already had some initiatives in this

[26] One recent incident happened this year in June at the mine at Cavnic: 150 miners menaced that they will barricade themselves in the underground if the mine is closed until the situation will be solved. See the article from June 4th 2007 of Meda Muntean, ›Mineritul din Maramureş a încetat să mai existe. Revolta minerilor din Cavnic‹ in the electronic news journal edited at Baia Mare on the site www.emaramures.ro, p. 6090.

[27] Other institutions involved in PIMM are the Council of the Maramureş District, the Maramureş Mining Community Union, the National Mining Company ›Remin‹, the Maramureş District Office for Culture, Religion and National Cultural Heritage, the North University at Baia Mare, the Speology Club Montana etc. See: Bud, Ioan, Duma, Simona, Iştvan, Dumitru, Jurje, Maria, Kacsó, Carol, Pop, Lucia, Pop, Sorin, *Studiu de potenţial privind patrimoniul industrial minier al judeţului Maramureş şi al oportunităţilor de valorificare a acestuia în scopuri muzeal turistice* [*Study of potential concerning the industrial mining heritage of Maramureş district and of its valorification opportunities with museum tourism goals*]. Baia Mare, 2006, p. 2.

[28] Ibidem, p. 27–34.

respect in improving their services and offerings for winter sports, hiking and mountain tourism. At Cavnic, the opening of a local museum related to mining is planned by the local authorities as a future point of tourist attraction.[29] These are just a few indicators of the development potential of the region.

An interesting idea, appearing also in the report, is the creation of a ›Museum of the mining civilization (including mining, mining civilization – history and ethnography, mineralogy and spaces for cultural activities)‹. According to the authors this is supposed to »offer specialized assistances to the administration of the mining sites of the local integrated tourist circuits.«[30] Directed by competent staff this is planned to be more than a simple museum. It is destined to be a museum and tourism center that would represent a model and a help for local heritage sites and would contribute to their cultural and tourism promotion. As a centralized structure this would concentrate all the resources and the management of specific projects, would coordinate the closing and preserving of the mining sites and would eventually develop into a profit center. Finally, the center and the local sites are expected to form a cluster of museums that will be integrated into tourist circuits of the region.

The text also suggests that this ideal structure of coordination and development may encounter some problems concerning the distribution of financial resources (between the center and the local sites) and formation of personnel. However, there are no details of the actual roles played in this future centre by existing state cultural institutions, like the Museum of Mineralogy and the Museum of History and Archaeology. Also mentioned is the idea of including representatives of these museums in the Center's Council of Administration. However, the whole concept of collaboration still needs to be analyzed in detail. It is important to emphasize that both museums possess important collections related to mining, namely histo-

[29] See the article of Mircea Crişan, Ioana Lucăcel: *Mineritul maramureşan, între închideri, redeschideri şi muzee.* [*The mining of Maramureş between closings, reopenings and museums*]. In: Gazeta de Maramureş, April, 30, 2007.

[30] Bud, Ioan, Duma, Simona, Iştvan, Dumitru, Jurje, Maria, Kacsó, Carol, Pop, Lucia, Pop, Sorin, *Studiu de potenţial privind patrimoniul industrial minier al judeţului Maramureş şi al oportunităţilor de valorificare a acestuia în scopuri muzeal turistice* [*Study of potential concerning the industrial mining heritage of Maramureş district and of its valorification opportunities with museum tourism goals*]. Baia Mare, 2006, p. 57.

rical objects and documentation (in the permanent exhibition dedicated to the history of mining in the Museum of History and Archaeology) and a large number of mineral samples (in the Museum of Mineralogy). Will these collections be totally or partly united in the new institution?

This is only one question that both museums will probably be confronted with in the near future if the project obtains the desired financial support.[31]

The present exhibitions of mining and mineralogy

The role of the museum in collecting, preserving and displaying historically meaningful objects is literally evident in the permanent exhibition dedicated to the history of mining in Maramureş.[32] This was opened in 2003 as a separate section of the Museum of History and Archaeology of the Maramureş District at Baia Mare. The exhibition is based on an already existing collection of specific objects (at hand since 1976), but its opening to the public is clearly related to radical changes in the mining of Maramureş.[33]

The location of the exhibition is significant because it occupies several rooms in the building of the 18th century mint (for a while also the headquarters of the Mining Trust; now the History and Archaeology Museum of the Maramureş District), which is situated in the historical centre of the town. The curator Lucia Pop pointed out that in this exhibition »history

[31] The proposed financial resources should be supplied by the World Bank (through the program entitled *Romania Mine Closure, Environmental and Socio-Economic Regeneration Project*), the Romanian Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Cultural National Fund, and the Operational Regional Program. Bud, Ioan, Duma, Simona, Iştvan, Dumitru, Jurje, Maria, Kacsó, Carol, Pop, Lucia, Pop, Sorin, *Studiu de potenţial privind patrimoniul industrial minier al judeţului Maramureş şi al oportunităţilor de valorificare a acestuia în scopuri muzeal turistice* [*Study of potential concerning the industrial mining heritage of Maramureş district and of its valorification opportunities with museum tourism goals*]. Baia Mare, 2006, p. 50–51.

[32] This is the third and most recent exhibition in Romania dedicated to mining after the one by the Town Museum at Petroşani, dedicated to coal mining at Valea Jiuluiand opened in 1961, and the one by the local museum at Roşia Montana, created in 1971 and presenting the mining activity at Roşia Montana.

[33] See Lucia Pop, *Un patrimoniu de excepţie valorificat în expoziţia de istorie a mineritului*. In: *Acta Musei Porolissensis. Istorie-Etnografie-Artă* (2005), vol. XXVII, p. 459.

is combined with science and technique as well as with statistics, journalism and literature«. The goal is to display the most important stages of development of this traditional local occupation »with the help of documents, but above all with objects, hundreds of years old«.[34] From the very beginning, the exhibition may be described as a celebratory presentation of political, administrative and technological aspects related to mining in the region. The content is organized in three halls that focus on specific topics each: the first one is dedicated to ›Witnesses and documents of time‹, the second displays ›The History and Evolution of Mining in Maramureş‹ and the third presents ›Working Procedures‹. The visitor's tour begins in every room with an introductory text that exposes the significance of the displayed objects and documents. Moreover, a short dictionary (in Romanian) is to clarify the meaning of selected specific terms related to mining.

In the entire exhibition space, one is able to observe glass boxes and panels displaying copies of charters, documents, newspapers, maps, schemes and photos. Some of the documents represent the most important privileges given to the towns of Baia Mare and Baia Sprie. These are meant to point out the antiquity and the importance of mining for the town, the region and for political sovereigns like the Hungarian King Louis I at the beginning of the 14th century, John Hunyadi (15th century) or the Principle of Transylvania Gabriel Bethlen (17th century) etc. The displayed objects are supposed to »make possible the historical reconstruction of this old trade in north-western Romania«.[35] However, taking a closer look at the ›intellectual space‹ between the objects, the intention of the curator, the label and the visitor is enormous.[36] The exhibited documentary material is just identified (through dating, place, authority of issue and present location) and only very little or not at all explained by the labels. As Colin Sorensen put it, objects »are expected to perform unaided the immense task of explanation and evocation«.[37] Some documents are translated into

[34] Ibidem, See also: *Mining history in Maramureş. Permanent exhibition.* Baia Mare: 2005, p.3.

[35] Ibidem.

[36] See Baxandal, Michael: *Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects.* In: Karp, Ivan, Lavine, Steven D. *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display.* Washington [u.a.]: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, p. 33–41.

[37] Sorensen, Colin: *Theme parks and time machines.* In: Vergo, Peter ed., *The New Museology.* London 1989, p. 71.

Romanian, but they are quite uncomfortable to read because of the size of the text included. Only few labels are also translated into English. The imaginary reconstitution depends in this case heavily on the visitor's patience, creativity, intellectual and cultural background.

Several images like the portrait of Georgius Agricola (1494–1555)[38], considered to be the father of the mining, or the decoration of a plate from Essen (presenting activities related to mining), occur without any explanations about their significance or the links between what they represent and the concept of the exhibition itself. The first room also includes a large number of working tools (among which shovels, barrows, hammers etc., the oldest ones dating from the 18th century), primitive mining illumination devices and old means of transportation (like a wooden Hont type wagon). The museum's tendency towards objectification of culture is emphasized in this case by the attention given to the quantity and the typological evolution of these objects in time. This preference recalls older museological theories that singled out material culture and documents as the only objective evidence of history.[39]

The same pattern is also visible in the other rooms that present *The History and the Evolution of Mining in Maramureş* and *Working Procedures*. There, prominence is given to measuring and drilling instruments as well as to devices used in minting, separating and refining gold and silver. The treasury and some of the machines of the gold and silver mines were restored and kept in situ. However, although they look impressive, it is difficult to understand their role and importance in the working process without the necessary technological background or proper explanations. In a few cases there are some indications about the way certain devices were utilized, like for example the wooden model of an ore mill. But still the problem is that there are no explicit visual connections between images, that should function as explanations, and some of the displayed objects and models. The solution would be, as Ettema put it, a different attitude towards objects: »rather than simply representing a concept with an object and relying

[38] Agricola wrote a comprehensive book in 12 volumes on mining entitled *De re metallica*, published in Basel in 1556.

[39] The object-centered approach is opposed to the people-centered ethnographic model also mentioned by Fitzgerald in the case of technology museums. See: Fitzgerald, Lawrence: *Hard Men, Hard Faces and Heavy Metal: Making Histories of Technology*. In: Kavanagh, Gaynor: *Making Histories in Museums.* London, New York 1996, p. 118.

on the viewer to read some understanding, artefacts should actually be part of the concept«.[40]

The exhibition also includes a large variety of old photos (19th or beginning of the 20th century) showing mine entrances and mining landscapes at Baia Mare, Baia Sprie, Cavnic, Băiţa, Lăpuş and Borşa. Some of them display people ›captured‹ in working scenes or disposed in group pictures taken in order to commemorate festive moments. These images would be in themselves interesting material to explore. They feature long disappeared urban or rural landscapes of the region. They present people whose families had lived and worked in these places for generations. Thus, there is rich material to explore for the historian or museum specialist interested in the social history of the area.

Unfortunately, the exhibition applies the photos more like illustrations in the background. The way they are installed, their size and number do not suggest any intention to help visitor's imagination to visualize locations that have already become history. It is difficult to think that not long ago these sites were microcosms of human bonds, of social and economic interaction. The recreation of the context is only little taken into consideration in general. One of the few exceptions is a niche (in the first hall) containing a transportation wagon and some tools placed in front of a mining entrance drawn in the background. Above, the crossed hammers and the typical greeting of the Romanian miners ›Noroc bun‹ (Good luck), appear. It is, however, a poor suggestion of what this difficult and dangerous profession once represented.

One has the impression of a mining history without miners. It is a didactic presentation of the political, administrative and technical evolution of the mining trade, but there is little interest in the social aspects, the human contributions that made all this possible. This feeling is even more acute when visiting the permanent exhibition by the Museum of Mineralogy. This is based on a collection of minerals sold in 1979 by the Central Office of the Mining and Non-ferrous Metallurgy at Baia Mare to the Maramureş District Museum.[41] It also contains a large number of samples

[40] Fitzgerald, Lawrence: *Hard Men, Hard Faces and Heavy Metal: Making Histories of Technology*. In: Kavanagh, Gaynor: *Making Histories in Museums.* London, New York 1996, p. 124.

[41] Bălănescu, Staicu, Achim, Valeriu, Ciolte, Aurel, *Istoria conducerii mineritului, a metalurgiei neferoase şi preţioase din nord-vestul României* [*The history of directing the*

gathered gradually from the mining canters. In 1989, a separate institution was established and received a new location in a building situated in the ›modern‹ centre of the town.

The permanent exhibition displays a large collection of rocks and mine stones shown as impressing pieces of nature's creation. It is interesting to observe that the samples are presented only because of their aesthetic qualities. The paradox is that the natural beauty of the minerals helps visitors ignore the long local history of human efforts and losses that led to their discovery. The only information concerning the exhibited objects refers to their geographical provenance and their geological identification. It is difficult to associate all this natural beauty deriving from the middle of the earth with the acute social and economic problems of the miners of Maramureş today. In this case one has to question the role of the museum in the new social realities of the town and of the region.

The role of the museum and its relation to the community in Romania

The second International Conference of Museums organized at Bucharest in September 2006 focused exactly on aspects of the relation between ›the museum and the community‹. This is not a new issue regarding museums in general. A variety of problems, cases and solutions were explored, already 15 years ago, in the volume Museums and Communities, edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen-Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine.[42] However, this is quite a recent matter in the case of museums in Romania.

One of the conclusions of the conference at Bucharest was that ›museums have changed or they will have to change‹. They will have to redefine their relations with the communities which they belong to.[43] The process is not a simple one in this particular case. As treasurers of the Romanian past museums, together with historical writing, were important elements of the Romanian national discourse especially beginning with 1918 (when

mining, the non-ferrous and precious metalurgy in north-western Romania]. Baia Mare 2002, p. 266.

42 Ivan, Karp, Mullen-Kreamer, Christine, Lavine, Steven D. eds.: *Museums and communities. The Politics of Public Culture.* Washington 1992.

43 Sălăgean, Tudor: *Încotro se îndreaptă muzeele?* [*Where are museums heading?*]. In: *Tribuna* (2006) nr. 99, p.12.

Transylvania was united with Romania and the Big Romanian Kingdom was created).[44] In 1922, Coriolan Petranu, the head of the newly created Inspectorate for Museums, argued that the main role of the museums in Romania was to »increase the love for the country and elevate the general cultural level of the people«.[45]

Historical writing and museums played an important role in the construction of the Romanian national discourse before and after the Second World War. It is interesting to observe that similar ideas about the didactic role of the museums occur 66 years later in the book by Ioan Opriş. Dealing with heritage protection in Transylvania and the Banat region after 1918 the author emphasized the importance of the services rendered by museums for »the presentation, research and dissemination of the cultural and artistic values«.[46]

During communist times, the ideological role of the museums as well as that of the historical research continuously increased. They were key instruments in defining, proving and illustrating the theory of the ›manifested destiny of the Romanian people‹. As Verdery argued, this was one of the most important elements in the symbolic-ideological mode of control used by Ceauşescu, beginning with the 70s.[47] In this scheme historians and museums were the ones that produced and controlled the historical discourse. However, their power was only apparent. Belonging to the state-funded institutions they were under the supervision of the Party and their discourse was strongly censured.[48] As a consequence of the fact that the museum perceived itself first of all as a scientific institution, the emphasis was on scholarly values, namely collecting, preserving and publishing scientific contributions. Besides, the museum was responsible for organizing

44 Verdery, Katherine: *National ideology under socialism. Identity and cultural politics in Ceauşescu's Romania.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 1991, p. 70.

45 Petranu, Coriolan: *Muzeele din Transilvania, Banat, Crişana, şi Maramureş.* Bucharest 1922, p. 43, 76–77. He also urged the museums to recuperate the Romanian historical evidence that were ignored by previous institutions (of Transylvania) in the period before the Union of 1918. See also: Opriş, Iona: *Protejarea mărturiilor cultural-artistice din Transilvania şi Banat după Marea Unire.* Bucharest 1988, p. 206.

46 See Opriş, Iona: *Protejarea mărturiilor cultural-artistice din Transilvania şi Banat după Marea Unire.* Bucharest 1988, p. 251.

47 Verdery, Katherine: *National ideology under socialism. Identity and cultural politics in Ceauşescu's Romania*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 1991, p. 90.

48 Ibidem, p. 101.

its collections according to a scientific discipline in order to present them to the public. The characteristic model of communication, in this case, was based on transmission that sees the visitor as a passive recipient.[49] The most important goal of the museum was to teach visitors the great moments in the country's history, art etc. The main obsessions of the museum narrative were (and still are) the national as opposed to the local, the nation as opposed to the community. In this didactic approach was only little space for the local history as well as for interactive and creative learning, or for entertainment. Within the last decades, such traditional museum strategies were continuously challenged by the worldwide post-modern society in which they function.[50] The necessity of change in the Romanian museums was also acknowledged at the Bucharest International Museums Conference of 2006. The question is, how may this change be done?

Re-evaluating the history of mining in the museum space at Baia Mare

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill pointed out that especially the domination of curatorial voices started to be contested in many museums. Moreover, she argued, »formerly silent voices are being heard, and new cultural identities are being forged from the remains of the past«.[51] Could this be a possibility for the two museums at Baia Mare? Might this be a viable solution for the preservation of the disappearing local mining community?

In countries like Great Britain, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg or Germany, experience showed that recovery and re-evaluation of various industrial traditions as well as their presentation to a larger public constitute valuable sources for local and regional regeneration. Connected in a resourceful network of industrial-archaeological sites called the European Route of Industrial Heritage, several mining museums offer a variety of examples of attractive concepts that are appealing to a large range of heritage attendants. Many of these exhibition concepts unfold a special

[49] Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean: *Changing Values in the Art Museum. Rethinking Communication and Learning*. In: Messias Carbonell Bettina ed., *Museum Studies. An Anthology of Contexts.* Oxford 2004, p. 556–575, esp. p. 560–562.

[50] Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean: *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge.* London, New York 1992, p. 204.

[51] Ibidim, p. 563.

interest in the social-historical approach. They explore various aspects related to the living and working conditions of the miners. Good examples are the German Mining Museum in Bochum (Germany) and the Big Pit Museum in Blaenafon (United Kingdom). According to the internet presentation of the museum at Bochum the visitor is shown the »life between colliery and carrier pigeons, strikes and settlements, the decline of the coal industry and structural transformation. All these themes are reflected in a huge number of every-day objects, models, diagrams and photographs which also include the paintings and statues of the Belgian artist Constantin Meunier, whose powerfully expressive images of miners bear witness to the increasingly industrialised conditions in the 19th century.«[52] In both cases the visit also includes the possibility to experience the atmosphere of a mine. At Bochum, a replica of a coal mine, with all the necessary equipment, was built 20 m below the ground level, whereas at Big Pit an original one was preserved as it was in the moment of its closing in 1980.[53]

Rhondda Heritage Park (United Kingdom) has even bigger ambitions claiming to recreate the real atmosphere of the work underground. Visitors are given the chance to experience the effects of their own detonated ›explosion‹.54 In some cases former miners and workers are employed as guides who, in Davies' opinion, might help overcoming misrepresentations in the museum context.[55]

Another impressive example is the complex of Jugenstil buildings and industrial installations of the mine Zollern II/IV at Dortmund. Together with other industrial sites located in the Ruhr region, Zollern is a significant witness of the decay of the mining industry in this area. Now it is a part of the Industrial Museum of Westfalia representing one of the oldest preserved German industrial heritage sites of international value.[56] Being since 1969 under legal protection, the site is an exceptionally beautiful and

52 See the internet site of the Mining Museum at Bochum. www.erih.net

53 About Big Pit see the analysis of Davies, Kath: *Cleaning Up the Coal-Face and Doing Out the Kitchen*. In: Kavanagh, Gaynor: *Making Histories in Museums.* London, New York 1996, p. 108–109.

54 Davies, Kath: *Cleaning Up the Coal-Face and Doing Out the Kitchen*. In: Kavanagh, Gaynor: *Making Histories in Museums.* London, New York 1996, p. 109.

55 Ibidem.

56 Gärtner, Ulrike, Kift, Dagmar: *Zeche Zollern II/IV in Dortmund. DKV-Kunstführer Nr. 299* / München, o. J.

well preserved model of an industrial mining complex. It has a lot to offer viitors of all ages. The desire to introduce the public into the every-day aspects of the life of the workers is one of its main goals. This was recently evidenced by a new section added to the permanent exhibition called ›Ich hatte einen Kameraden‹ opened in September 2007. The presentation focuses on the exceptional moments in the life of the pit workers, namely the accidents. It includes documentation of 161 tragic accidents making more then evident the dangers of this old occupation.[57]

At the mining museum in Bexbach (Saar region, Germany) visitors may touch technique and history[58] whereas at the Graubünden Mining Museum (Davos Platz, Switzerland) on museum nights visitors are able to extract concentrate form iron ore by working stamps.[59]

In all these cases didactics, visual culture, information and entertainment are combined with the goal to preserve history and memory alive.

Compared to countries like the United Kingdom or Germany, Romania has little experience with concepts and goals of industrial heritage. One of the reasons is, that, supported for a long time by state subventions, mining industry survived until the 90's when the process of decline began and it is still not finished yet. Although there is enough material to document, museums lack both financial resources and specialized experience in this field. In order to overcome this state of facts the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Cults has initiated, since 2001, a program of internationela yearly meetings in order to facilitate interdisciplinary exchange of information and strategy planning for the protection and re-evaluation of the national industrial patrimony.[60]

Collaboration with other, more experienced institutions is a viable solution in this case. This is suggested by the successful series of publications and the wandering exhibition (in Germany and Romania) dedicated to the history of silver and salt production in Transylvania (in the year 2002). These were the results of a project of collaboration among several Romanian and German institutions, such as the District Museum of Bistriţa-

57 For more information see: www.lwl.org/LWL/Kultur/wim/S/zollern

58 See the webpage of the museum at www.besucherbergwerke-saarland.de/Bergbau/bexbach.htm

59 See the webpage of the museum www.silberberg-davos.ch

60 On April 2007 the 5th meeting took place at Bucharest, Timişoara and Resita.

Năsăud, the Cluj-Napoca District Section of the Romanian National Archives, the Transylvanian Museum at Gundelsheim on Neckar and the German Mining Museum at Bochum.

The Museum and/as the voice of the local community

Another solution would be to shift the focus of the present exhibition on the history of mining and make the voice of the community to be ›heard‹. Emphasis on social and cultural history is the way to change the approach from a ›heroic‹ presentation of the development of mining technology in the region of Maramureş to aspects of every-day life of the pit workers. From the point of view of a differently perceived public at Baia Mare it might be more interesting to explore, how did the miners live? How did they deal with the difficulties of the work? Which were their coping mechanisms with accidents and death that represented constant menaces of the work underground?

Unfortunately, until now all these questions have preoccupied very little not only museum curators, but also historians themselves. And this is not only the case for Romania. Knapp argued that the tendency of the scholarly study to focus more on technological factors or on economic and labour histories than on social aspects of mining communities is an acute problem of the study of mining in general.[61]

However, the social-historical approach opens new possibilities for a different kind of museum narrative. Some of the objects already exhibited, such as the typical (19th or beginning of the 20th century) clothing and uniforms used by miners, an identity card with the photo of a mining master from 1931 and photos with working pitmen represent hits to the human side of this occupation.

Trying to collect, besides objects, other forms of evidence provided by oral history one could learn more about a variety of topics. Interesting details concerning work organization or the obligations of the miners occur in archive material, in charters and documents. Among others, these

[61] See Knapp, A. Bernard: *Social approaches to the archaeology and anthropology of mining*. In: Knapp, A. Bernard, Pigott, Vincent C., Herbert, Eugenia W.: *Social Approaches to an Industrial Past. The Archaeology and Anthropology of Mining*. London, New York 1998, p. 2.

inform about rules issued by the town council at the end of the 16th century (1570, 1575, 1578, 1587) that were to regulate not only the salary and the working time according to each type of work, but also the public behavior of miners and moral issues concerning money matters. Moreover, in case of accidents it was stipulated that the owner had to help the families of miners that remained without any financial resources.[62]

Indications about the number of workers employed in the mines of the region occur in the beginning of the 19th century. In a book recounting the travels of Wilhelm Gottlieb Ernst Becker (of Freyberg) across Hungary and Transylvania, it is mentioned that in 1805 in one of the state mines called Dealul Crucii (the Cross Hill mine) a number of 186 workers were employed, whereas in the whole mining basin worked about 400 people.[63]

With the development of the mining technology the number of workers at Baia Mare increased in the year 1892 up to 941, out of which 709 were men, 9 were women and 223 were children. The value of the gold, silver and lead production equaled 612.085 Florins. In the neighboring town of Baia Sprie, 1144 people were employed in mining activities, out of which 851 were men, 7 were women and 286 were children. It is known that the value of the yearly production reached a total of 8.433.652 Florins.[64]

The exhibition does not contain any references about such facts, namely the work of women and above of all about the large number of children employed in the mines. Before the First World War, the number of mining children ranged from 562 to 782. Their salaries were smaller than those of men. Depending on the mine, at the end of the 19th century, men received about 60-80 Crowns a day, whereas the salaries of women were between 20 to 35 Crowns and children were paid between 20 and 30 Crowns.[65] Another missing aspect is connected with the multicultural background of the town and of the region. In 1910, Baia Mare had circa 13.000 inhabitants,

62 Prodan, David, Goldemberg, Samuil: *Inventarele din 1553 şi 1556 ale minelor şi monetăriei din Baia Mare* [*The inventories from 1553 and 1556 of the mines and mint at Baia Mare*]. In: *Anuarul de Istorie din Cluj,* 1964, p. 140–143.

63 Becker, Wilhelm Gottlob Ernst: *Journal einer bergmännischen Reise durch Ungarn und Siebenbürgen.* Freyberg: 1816, p. 147–151.

64 Kálmán, Palmer: *Nagybánya és környéke* [*Baia Mare and the surroundings*]. Baia Mare: 1894, p. 106–107.

65 Ibidem, p. 106.

out of which 78% were Hungarians, 21% Romanians, 1.4% Germans. The situation in the surrounding rural area showed a different proportion. Out of 30.500 inhabitants 83% were Romanians and only 15% were Hungarians.[66] Presently, the population of the town is 150.000 inhabitants, out of which 82% are Romanians, 15% Hungarians, 1.51% Roma, 0.36% Germans, 0.25% Ukrainians. Before the Second World War, there was a large Jewish community – more than 10.000 Jews, out of which only 70 still live in the city. The shift in the ethnic composition of the town was the consequence of the policy of the Romanian communist state. This had a long term impact on the cultural and social life of the town, which might be a problematic but extremely interesting topic to explore.

Any process of reconstruction in a museum entails, as Michael Ames put it, a shift in power and status of the object, of those formerly and presently associated with it.[67] The power of the exhibition makers is manifested in the choice of themes, of objects to be displayed and of explanations given to the public. In the present case this is motivated by a variety of reasons, among which are lack of financial resources, of specific professional experience as well as of detailed research in cultural and social history. The lack of studies on the role played by the religious devotion in the mining community before the communist regime is only one typical example. In a corner of the exhibition, an image of Saint Barbara, the most popular sacred protector of the miners, as well as the lines of their special prayer represent just a few hints in this sense. The impressions of a visitor at the mines of Valea Roşie around 1940 about the ceremony of the common prayer of the pitmen before starting work offers a suggestive glimpse into this strong moral and psychological support of the underground workers.[68]

66 Meruțiu, Radu V.: *Regiunea Baia Mare-Baia Sprie* [*The Region Baia Mare-Baia Sprie*] Cluj 1936, p. 36–37.

67 Ames, Michael: *Cannibal tours, glass boxes and the politics of interpretation.* In: Pearce, Susan M.: *Interpreting Objects and Collections.* London 1994, p. 98–106, esp.p. 102.

68 The Romanian Communist state supportes the rapid industrialization of the country and the concentration of industry in or near urban centres. One of the outcomes of this strategy was the massive migration of rural population towards the cities. On the other hand, the increasing nationalism of the regime was well as the demographic policy of the communist state int the time of Ceauşescu had important consequences on the structure and distribution of the population in general. See: Verdery, Katherine: *National ideology under socialism. Identity and cultural politics in Ceauşescu's Romania.*

Old pictures show huge crosses placed above mine entrances. At Valea Roşie and Dealul Crucii, Crişan saw (in 1940) underground altarpieces carved in the rock, lightened by permanent candles and decorated with fresh flowers. At Valea Roşie, an inscription mentioned that the cross above the altar was donated in 1936 by the head of the mine, the engineer Traian Ştefănescu, and the chief of the gallery, Iosif Ilia. The importance of this underground altar was suggested by Ilia, who mentioned that »no worker passes by without a Christian bow«.[69] Other symbolic connections between religious devotion and miners can be seen in one of the side chapels dedicated to the Virgin in the Catholic Church at Valea Roşie. This looks like a beautiful mine interior due to the stones that create a special decoration for the niche of the statue of the Virgin and Child. It is more than possible that a social and critical approach to the mining history might be more appealing to both the mining community and a larger public. Besides focusing on the social history, the museum could also explore and explain the ways in which mining and industrialization influenced or changede the life as well as work of numerous people in the region. It could be also interesting to show how the increasing and the recent decreasing importance of mining represents a history in itself and is connected to the evolution of industrialization as a global process.

Another section of the museum could display visual materials destined to broaden public appreciation for the special aesthetic of th industrial architecture and landscapes.[70] It would be also important to emphasize the irreparable impact of the mining industry on the local and regional environment. Another important direction of development would be to improve and intensify the interaction of the museum with children.

Opened on March 2007, the educational program of the History and Archaeology Museum at Baia Mare, entitled the ›Living Museum‹, represents an attempt to offer activities of informal learning to school children. The designed workshops and theme-oriented visits propose topics related to

Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 1991, p. 406. For the demographic policies see for example Kligman, Gail: *The policy of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Ceauşescu's Romania*, Berkeley California 1988.

69 Ibidem, p. 28–29, 49

70 Good examples for the aesthetic approach towards industrial landscapes are the photographs of Bernd and Hilla Becher. See for example: *Industrial landscapes*, Camebridge 2002.

school disciplines and oriented towards transmitting school-like knowledge. A significant change would be to shift the pattern of education in the museum from the transmission of information to a constructivist, meaning-making way of learning.[71] Rowe explained that this approach is based on theories that »focus on everyday cognition as it is grounded in socio-culturally and historically situated social activity«.[72] This type of learning offers the visitor more authority to determine the correctness of an interpretation. It also provides multiple ways of interacting and organizing social activity (that determines meaning-making) around and with objects.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to argue that the strengths of both museums in the future would be to open themselves towards the needs of the local community. This should be the focus of the social, cultural and oral historical research led by museum specialists and scholars. The voice of the local community should become an important element in the museum narrative. Collaboration with similar institutions, especially those participating in the European Route of Industrial Heritage, is essential for the modernization of the museum concepts and services. Showing a different attitude towards the visitors museums in Romania in general would have to modify their role in society from educating the people to active and creative mediators of culture. Only such an open cultural approach could lead to the creative ›light and sound performances‹ in the industrial museum Energiefabrik Knappenrode[73] (Hoyerswerda, Germany) organized in October 2007 by Axel Tonn, the technical director of Neue Bühne Senftenberg. The unconventional interior of the factory offered both creator and public a totally different way of experiencing an industrial space.

71 See Rowe, Shawn: *The Role of Objects in Active, Distributed Meaning-Making.* In: Paris, Scott G. ed., *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums.* Mahwah 2002, p. 19-36, esp. p. 20.

72 Ibidem, p. 72–73.

73 See for more information abourt Nachtschicht Nr. 5 2007 on the web page of the Energiefabirk Knappenrode at Hoyerswerda at www.saechsisches-industriemuseum.de/-html/www/knappenrode/home.htm