

ECOMUSEUMS, A NEW FORM OF REVITALIZATION OF SPACES AND THEIR ROLE IN TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES

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Abstract: The present paper sets on contributing to transcend the idea of associating ecomuseums with the rural vernacular heritage, which reflects the current approach to this new form of museums nationwide, by drawing up a model of organization for ecomuseums with a general level of implementation. Essential in the conservation of local identity, ecomuseums can compete for the revitalization of spaces when they are based on clear legislation and a complex management that allows for a wide range of decisional participants. Aside from the part these can in economic terms, the study focuses, based on worldwide experience applied at a national level, on the contribution of ecomuseums to the process of territorial planning and which can become a tool in territorial management policies.

Key-words: ecomuseums, economuseums, incorporation into the patrimony, territorial management

1. Introduction

The term ecomuseum was introduced to specialized literature by Hugues de Varine and represents the museum version suggested by Georges Henri Rivière alongside Varine's aspiration of creating community museums founded by and for the inhabitants. The definitions attributed over time to this concept were frequently in etymologic contradictions and contradictions in meaning.

The idea of ecomuseum, launched by Georges Henri Rivière in the early 1950s and tested as starting with 1968 in regional natural parks in France and in 1971 in Creusot, became over time a cultural phenomenon of European and international significance. Georges Henri Rivière, whom we owe the concept of ecomuseum to, mentions this type of museum in 1958 during his participation in a regional UNESCO seminar which he associates with the term of community museum. In his Rivière's conception (1985, defined in 1980), an ecomuseum is: an instrument conceived by the public authority and the local population, a mirror in which the population observes its own image, but also that of previous and future generations; a mirror that it shows to visitors so they can understand them, but, especially, respect their industry, customs and identity; a laboratory as long as it contributes to the study of the past and the present of the population in its environment and that promotes the training of specialists; a conservation center as long as it supports the preservation and development of the natural and cultural heritage of the population; a school as long as it involves the population in the study and protection of itself, but also encourages it towards a clearer understanding of its future.

Rivière's ideas spread throughout the '60s in Germany and other areas of Europe, whilst still remarkably applicable in decolonized countries as well. Whereas by the UNESCO *Complete Museums* roundtable of 1972, organized in Santiago de Chile, the concept was confined to the European space, since then a genuine movement has emerged in the Latin world in favor of founding community museums (Hoobler, 2006, p. 447).

In terms of etymology, the meaning of the ecomuseum concept becomes confusing when we refer to the origin of the "eco" prefix: ecology, oikos (habitat), economy etc. Over

time, concepts contradicting that of ecomuseum emerged, such as the concept of economuseum. Whereas ecomuseums are identified as receiver spaces of the collective memory of a territory, economuseums attach the idea of self-financing. Nevertheless, relations that are established at the level of the two museums are different. Whereas in the case of ecomuseums they concern cultural relations, based practices, ways of life and the local economic savoir faire, the economuseum is based on instituting an economic and commercial relation with its visitors; culture becomes in the latter case a strategy to ensure to commercial aspect. Even though both cultural and commercial relations are represented in both museum cases, the difference lies in the part they play in the process to ensure their functionality.

Cyril Simard (1989), considered to be the inventor of economuseology, believes an economuseum represents a small hand-made-type enterprise which produces traditional objects and/or objects contemporary to cultural significances; this presents a center for the animation and interpretation of production emphasizing the qualities of the environment and the heritage of a building and/or site and whose fundamental objective is to succeed in completely financing itself (Simard, 1989, p. 19., quoted by Cousin, 2000, p. 115).

In the Larousse dictionary (2010), the ecomuseum is defined as a cultural institution that ensures within a given territory research, conservation, presentation and exploitation functions for an ensemble of natural and cultural goods representative for a space and the ways of life that succeed one another.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this study falls into the framework of a complex approach, from the comparative method, direct observation and inductive method to the method of modeling that enables the recommendation of general organization model for ecomuseums. On its journey of becoming a new instrument integrated in the process of implementing territorial management policies in Romania, an analysis of this new museum organization form in correlation to the principles of territorial management and local development, oriented towards the idea of respecting the interests of the local communities in the decision process, is required.

3. Datas

Organizing and managing ecomuseums

The museum becomes through this form of organization, that of the ecomuseum, an instrument incorporated within the local political life which is based on important objectives such as the local heritage, history, identity and memory.

Self-financing represents for some structures the stability that enables it to find a balance between political and economic. Overall, an ecomuseum is implanted where there is a need to support collective memory threatened by the disappearance of the activity that first represented the economic basis of the settlement. The ecomuseum can thus be defined as the *incarnation* of a continuity of economic activity.

The conclusions of the ICOM¹ colloquium, organized in France in 1971 and entitled *Museums and Environment*, refer to the museum instrument, analyzed multidisciplinary and framed within an environment not only conceptually, but also physically, in the form of an ecomuseum, respectively: international cooperation between museums, revising the statutes and the definition of the museum, affirming the importance of the environment in the vocation of museums, the emergence of the political dimension in the concept of museum.

The ecomuseum, aside from dealing with the environment, represents the environment itself: natural, cultural, social. Ecomuseology does not analyze environment

¹ International Council of Museums

issues in terms of content, but issues connected to the museum's own nature and, especially, its different relations to the environment such as its population and territory, leading to a an awareness over these. Instead of the museum remaining an exterior object that presents interest or not, which we will visit or not, in order to render it appropriately functional, the population is necessarily involved by the environment it inhabits. For instance, in the natural environment, the ecomuseum could become the driving force behind a park where the management of aspects connected to geology or biology with the purpose of maintaining conservation is well known, or, in the cultural environment, the ecomuseum could contribute to choices previously reflected when discussions will waver between the destruction of a culturally significant good and a development of high economic importance (ICOM Conference, 1990, p. 47).

The ecomuseum is not a museum like any other, but more than this, it is a space jointly exploited by the population in the territory it functions together in order to pass on, to future generations, the knowledge, the behavior, the customs and work techniques. The example of the *Le Creusot* museum in France is most suitable when we refer to museums testimony to a complex industrial activity, with a historical and economical significance for a certain area. The Le Creusot ecomuseum was established in 1972 under the name of Museum of Man and Industry, with the purpose of collecting, studying and capitalizing on the heritage of a territory marked by a development of major industrial activities (metal works, coal, glass and ceramics industry) starting in the late 18th century.

The actors involved in the management of ecomuseums, enterprises based on the idea of functionality organized around the notion of project, enter a wide category that encompasses public authorities (local, regional and central) and non-governmental organization and the population as well. The professional training centers in culture have an important role in training specialized personnel, thanks to whose programs specialists gain skills in the field of adequate conservations and development.

The worldwide organization and distribution of ecomuseums

At European level, there is the European Network of Ecomuseums. In 2004, the declaration of intention was signed by the participants at the *Long Networks, Ecomuseums and Europe* reunion, which took place in Trento during May 5 and May 8, 2004, and which defined an ecomuseum as: a dynamic method through which communities can conserve, interpret and manage their heritage in the spirit of sustainable development, based on community agreement.

The common objectives are: local identity; involvement of the local community; the status and the role of the ecomuseum; training and educational activities; sustainable development of traditional production activities and services; fund raising; the creations of networks and research. These targets can be achieved by applying the following strategies: establishing collaborations with other ecomuseums, creation of research groups; offering mutual support at local roundtables; maintaining communication among the signatories of the agreement. The worldwide ecomuseum guide is created by the *Outlook on Ecomuseums* association and is aims at classifying them in three categories, depending on their development stage and regardless of the quality of the initiative: under development, operational or extinct. Out of a total number of 354 ecomuseums worldwide (table no. 1), 12.72% are under development, 86.72% are operational, while 0.56% are closed. Most ecomuseums under development are recorded in Italy (15), Poland (7), Spain (5), Brazil (4) and Portugal (4).

The fact that of all ecomuseums recorded, only 2 have disappeared, namely ecomuseums in Italy that exploited different aspects connected to local agriculture and ethnography, is worth mentioning.

Table no. 1 World distribution of ecomuseums

Country	Number of ecomuseums	Under development	Operational	Closed
France	87	-	87	-
Italy	86	15	69	2
Spain	41	5	36	-
Poland	22	7	15	-
Brazil	16	4	12	-
Portugal	13	4	9	-
Canada	13	2	11	-
Sweden	12	-	12	-
China	10	1	9	-
Japan	9	-	9	-
Belgium	4	-	4	-
Czech Rep.	4	1	3	-
Denmark	4	-	4	-
Switzerland	4	-	4	-
Argentina	4	-	4	-
Costa Rica	4	1	3	-
Great Britain	3	2	1	-
Germany	2	-	2	-
Norway	2	-	2	-
Australia	2	-	2	-
Vietnam	2	1	1	-
Finland	1	-	1	-
Greece	1	-	1	-
Netherlands	1	1	-	-
Slovakia	1	-	1	-
Turkey	1	1	-	-
India	1	-	1	-
Mexico	1	-	1	-
Senegal	1	-	1	-
USA	1	-	1	-
Venezuela	1	-	1	-

In France, the country with the highest number of ecomuseums, the Federation of Ecomuseums and Society Museums (FEMS) was founded in 1989, at the initiative of 28 founding ecomuseums and the Foundation for Cooperative Credit, in order to promote the French ecomuseum concept. FEMS is currently participating as an important player in territory development, facilitating meetings and dialogue with the population, socio-professional groups and local authorities. FEMS currently has 134 members that represent more than 200 museums and museum spaces, 54% of which are managed by the state and 46% operate within private associations. The activity of the federation is based on organizing debates, colloquiums, applying questionnaires, organizing training stages and consultancy and expertise missions as well in support of its members and publishing syntheses. FEMS is characteristic to the Francophone world, spreading across the French territory, alongside Belgium and Quebec.

In art. I of the March 4 1981 Directive of the Ministry of Culture and Communications in France, the ecomuseum is defined as the cultural institution that

constantly ensures, with the participation of the population, the research, conservation, presentation and development of a set of natural and cultural goods, representative to an environment and ways of life that succeed each other. In 2004, a FEMS operating regulation was adopted as well. At this time, ecomuseums in France operate in a combined system, public and private, with the purpose of private management and a public service mission.

The notion of ecomuseum understood at national level

Accreditation of museums at a national level is non-existent in many countries and the founding or disbandment of museums is carried out at the initiative of some universities, companies, institutions, foundations, central, regional or local authorities (Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2005, p. 98).

The idea of an ecomuseum necessity in Romania is represented in a recent article (Dumitru, 2009, p. 92-93): Romanian museums must learn to host the younger generation as do those in the West and, especially, in the United States and Canada, some of which have become genuine meeting spots and places to spend leisure time for families with children of all ages, but for the young and the old as well. Therefore, these museums educate in a pleasant way and compete with other offers to spend leisure time of a doubtful cultural nature, but, at the same time, provide income for museums and ensure their existence and development.

In Romanian legislation, the concept of ecomuseum is included in Decision no. 14 of January 5 2011 concerning the passing of the *Annual tourism marketing and promotion program* and of the *Annual development program for tourism destinations, forms and products*, respectively *Appendix No. 2 – Annual development program for tourism destinations, forms and products* (first mentioned in the national legislation in Decision no. 77 of January 29 2010). Art. 2 provides the annual program for tourist destinations, forms and products which aims at creating seven objectives. In objective 1, entitled the improvement of tourist services quality in Romania, among the activities provided in order to accomplish this are also the elaboration of criteria for the designation of ecotourist and ecomuseum destinations.

Attempts to introduce and implement the term date back from 2003, when the Industrial heritage between land and sea-for a European eco-museum network program was launched, initiated as part of the *Cultura 2000* program. Destined to the research and integrated protection of the heritage of industrial activities in areas of contact between land and sea-lagoons, estuaries, deltas, basins, gulfs and archipelagos, the project includes various areas in Portugal, Spain, France, d'Hyeres Isles, Italy, Finland, Greece and Romania. The Sulina workshop was organized in 2006 with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Cults and the Ecomuseum Research Institute in Tulcea. A remarkable objective of the project was the establishment of an ecomuseum network in the Mediterranean area as well.

Even though the term ecomuseum is present in some documentary resources even since 2006, we can state that it was only in 2009 when a strategy that would consider the role of ecomuseums in the ensemble of tourism reaffirmation attempts at national level was conceived.

In the National strategy for the development of ecotourism in Romania, Phase II – Strategic plan to develop ecotourism in Romania in 2009, the necessity for the development of the ecomuseum concept at the level of certain destinations with the purpose of protecting and developing the existing cultural and natural heritage was tackled. Among other strategic actions to develop ecotourism in Romania, in domain B. *Tourist infrastructure and territory development*, one of the actions provided for the development of infrastructure refers to the Development of ecomuseums in ecotourist destinations (Action no. B.1.3).

The steps that need to be taken in order to create an ecomuseum are identified: a) the development of counseling/exchange of experience seminars; b) the association between

partners involved in such a project; c) assessment of natural and cultural objectives, traditional occupations, local legends etc from every location of the ecomuseum; d) setting up projects to support and promote them; e) the creation and promotion of certain visiting circuits for the ecomuseum.

For the 2010-2020 period, the development of ecomuseums in ecotourist destinations nationwide is provided by: development of counseling/exchange of experience seminars; association between partners involved in such a project; assessment of natural and cultural objectives, traditional occupations, local legends etc from every location of the ecomuseum; setting up projects to support and promote them; e) the creation and promotion of certain visiting circuits for the ecomuseum. These can only be possible under the responsibility of partnerships between the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, County Councils, National Parks' Administrations, Local Councils and Non-governmental Organizations. Financing sources could come from these public institutions, sponsorships or could be developed as part of Axe 5.1 of the Regional Operational Program – Restoration and sustainable development of cultural heritage, as well as the creation/modernization of connected infrastructures. Local public administrations are involved in the development of local general and tourist infrastructure projects, as they can be co-opted by parks' administrations in the development of visiting and information infrastructure and in the development of cultural projects within the ecomusems. Likewise, they play an important part in the development of the awareness process, in stimulating business and preserving local traditions.

The ecomuseum, in terms of the legislation in Romania, appears to be interpreted in a different manner than at international level. On the one hand, it appears to be destined only to the rural environment, relying significantly on the natural and traditional valences of a village, township or set of townships. On the other hand, it is set to be specific to one form of tourism alone, namely ecotourism. Unfortunately, this incomplete adaptation of the concept does not encourage the development of ecomuseums in cities, of the so-called urban museum category.

Urban museums pan out as dynamic institutions, whose goal is not research and preservation alone, but education, entertainment and enriching the cultural heritage of cities (Varosio, 2006, p. 57). About the same urban museums, Steven Thielemans (2000) considered they were museums about and in cities, connected in terms of involvement both in the strategy of local authorities and citizens as well (Steven Thielemans, 2000, quoted by Kistemaker, 2006, p. 12).

As the museum needs to be alive and the individual who becomes a visitor needs to keep himself as alive as in his daily or personal life (Batolescu, 2006, p. 61), the ecomuseum requires all the more to be developed so as to deliver the past in the present and the experience of those traditions, customs, manufacturing techniques etc. as faithful as possible to the reality that once was.

4. Results

The number of ecomuseums in Romania is insignificant compared to the situation recorded worldwide, with their emergence and development directions differing largely, a consequence of the fact that their goal and destination vary from case to case.

The best example in Romania is the *Sibiu Regional Ecomuseum*, an NGO founded in 2007 and a project developed as part of the Sibiu – European Capital Program and that reunites locations such as Săliște, Gura Râului, Biertan, Valea Viilor and Săsăuș-Chirpăr that commonly decided, wishing to promote sustainable social and economic development, protection of the heritage and improvement of the quality of life and environment, to found the Sibiu Regional Ecomuseum Association and accede to the Sibiu Regional Museum

Charter. These locations have established a series of common objectives: the creation of local and regional development projects in order to obtain extra-budgetary financial resources; the creation of an optimal environment for research and local communities and tourist information activities; printing their own publication; cooperation with other similar organizations that promote the same principles and values at local, national and international level; conservation of popular customs and traditions; the creation of an agro-tourist network; local community involvement in the protection of heritage, supporting actions and initiatives that serve the purpose of the association. The association has an informing publication, which includes articles on the valuable sites and objectives in the area, some of which forgotten, but also information on township development policies.

The *Danube Delta ecotourist Center* represents an integral section of the Ecomuseum Research Institute in Tulcea, founded in 1993 by reorganizing previously existing museum units and that promotes in its annual publication PEUCE archeological researches in Northern Dobrogea. Inaugurated in 2009, the Danube Delta ecotourist Center is an example of ecomuseum, meeting most of the determination criteria, including the participation of the community to its operation: it shows specific elements of the natural heritage existing in the Danube Delta Biosphere reservation, it imitates the image from a marine environment and the experience, it is a recreational and socialization spot and it sells objects hand-made by locals.

The *Natural Sciences Museum in Suceava* went through two attempts to transform it into an ecomuseum: the 2006 cultural project – An ecomuseum for the future and the 2008 project – An ecomuseum of reference for Bukovina.

In 2006, discussions took place at the *Porțile de Fier Natural Park* concerning the initiation of a network of ecomuseums in the county of Mehedinți, testified by the exhibit at the Natural Sciences Department of the Porțile de Fier Region Museum, Șvinița – The environmental and cultural heritage.

Likewise, in 2011 the initiative to create an ecomuseum for *Țara Moșilor* in the Apuseni Natural Park was discussed.

The *Țara Crișurilor Ecomuseum* project within the Oradea Museum Complex is a first attempt of this kind in Romania, which aims at developing from a natural habitat that includes the “Pârâul Pețea -”Pădurea stelară” Natural Reservation in the vicinity of Băile 1 Mai in terms of science, culture and museums. Conceived as a village museum, it reproduces the general image of a village in Țara Crișurilor, with a traditional civic center, with a structure and texture specific to the area.

An example of another project is the *Herești Monastery*. As of 2002, this site belonging to the Bucharest Romanian Peasant’s Museum accommodates two manorial mansions from the 17th and 18th centuries and a church dating back from approximately 1600. Through exhibits organized periodically, it tends to gradually turn into an ecomuseum.

In order to outline an model of organization for ecomuseums in Romania, considering the wide range of a future patterns imposed precisely by the multiple conditions that can underlie their development, research carried on with the analysis of an ecomuseum in France, Le Port des Salines.

The *Le Port des Salines* ecomuseum was created in 1989 out of the will to reimplement a traditional economic activity of significance to Île d’Oléron, namely the culture of salt. In the early 1990s, rehabilitation works have begun on an old abandoned site that operated as a salt collector, under the responsibility of the Le-Grand-Village-Plage municipality and the Charente-Maritime General Council. Aside from commissioning the old collector, the development of an ecomuseum was also considered, along with a salt storage facility and a harbor with lodges (fig. no. 1).

Inaugurated in 1994, it was included in the Natura Poles network in 1996. Following a fire in 1999, the collections pertaining to the history of salt were destroyed, but, with the

support of the community, the ecomuseum was reopened. As of 2006, the management of the Port des Salines complex was transferred to the Ile d O'léron community, which holds cultural expertise.

The ecomuseum suggests the following services to visitors: discovering how a sea salt collector worked, the stages of harvesting salt, using and selling it (including the tasting of local products) through a tour guide visit, collections comprised of tools used to manage salt collectors, post cards, video footage and an interactive model. In addition, the ecomuseum also offers an educational tour that includes a set of questions that allows visitors to explore the ecomuseum and its collections. Also, it presents a research space comprised of papers for all the categories of audiences and even a game for children, along with three temporary exhibits. Port de Salines takes part in the European Cross-Border Cooperation project whose main objective is a mutual, complete and sustainable development of tourism based on the cultural and natural heritage of traditional salt producing locations in the Atlantic area.



A.



B.



C.



D.

Fig. no. 1 Le Port des Salines Ecomuseum: A. Sea salt collector; B. Tools specific to the exploitation of sea salt inside the ecomuseum; C. Harbor with lodges; D. Track designed for recreational tourism (authors, July 2011)

5. Discussions

Based on the aforementioned example, we can make out that developing an ecomuseum involves the existence of certain resources, natural or anthropic, alongside the participation and involvement of a wide range of players whose part is not only to compete to create an ecomuseum, but also to ensure its integrity locally, through the advantages offered in economic, social, cultural and terms of identity.

We suggest in the lines that ensue the outline for a model of founding an ecomuseum considering the importance of cultivating the roots for the future already, through actions of incorporation into the patrimony that lead to the drawing of a new direction in the evolution of territory and, finally, territorial management policies (fig. no. 2).

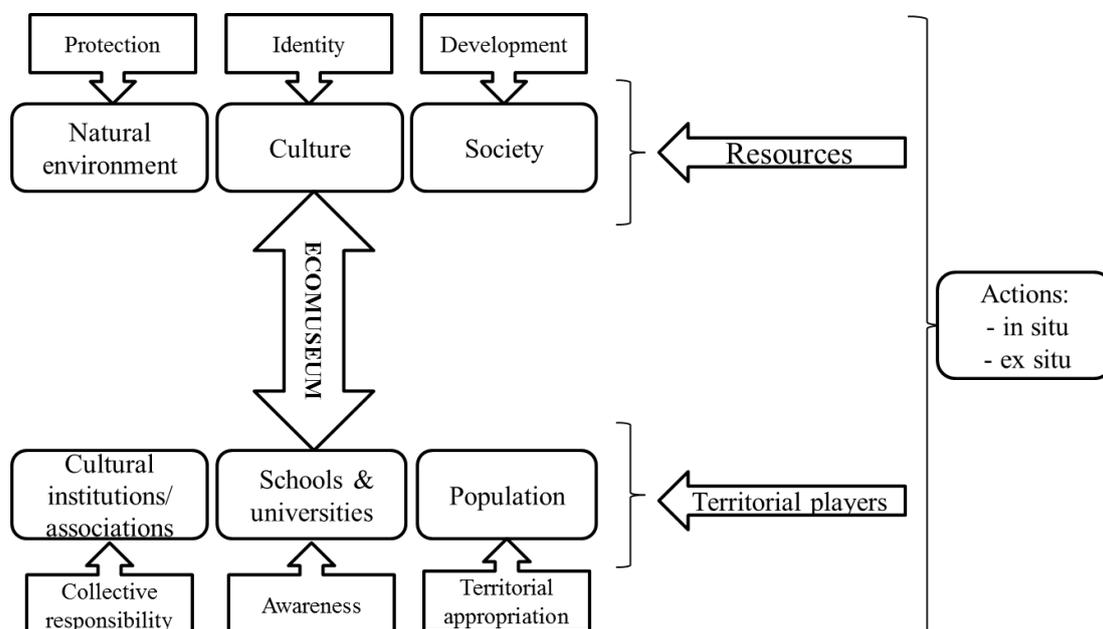


Fig. no. 2 General ecomuseum organizing model – an instrument in territorial management policies

The ecomuseum, a new instrument in territorial management actions, is a laboratory space that suggests the integration of elements pertaining to the past in the present and future life of the community. The development of ecomuseums implies the presence of two components: a) *resources*, natural and/or anthropic, whose exploitation is essential to territorial development; b) *territorial players* and their ability to interfere in the modeling of territorial evolution. The actions undertaken fall into different economic and political dimensions and are based on public, private or public-private initiatives. The goal of the development of ecomuseums is multiple, usually encompassing aspects such as conservation, improvement, raising visibility of identity and the center of the action is always the place and the community.

The general model presented above could be applied successfully at national level and the scenario of ecomuseum development in Romania would involve covering several stages: a) the existence of clear legislation in terms of defining ecomuseums and their determination conditions; b) identifying spaces with a potential in terms of ecomuseum development; c) determining responsibilities at the level of authorities in managing ecomuseums, alongside awareness on the phenomenon in terms of education; d) using the experience of already operating ecomuseums in the founding of new ecomuseums or the transformation of classic museums into ecomuseums; e) impact studies concerning the involvement and the support of the population in developing ecomuseums; economic forecasts, including on tourist activities.

The contribution of ecomuseums to territorial management actions will emerge through the implementation of two important principles:

- on the one hand, it concern the principle of subsidiarity, which is based on the decentralization of decisions and actions, based on local, regional and national partnership

and cooperation; initiatives promoted by local communities will be emphasized, with the project and program development and control fully belonging to local factors;

- on the other hand, the principle of public-private partnership will offer the advantage of drawing different factors interested locally or regionally in the decision making process and, finally, of expanding the decision making basis.

A means of support in the development of ecomuseums in Romania is represented by professional training programs. Nationally, the Center of Professional Training in Culture, founded in 1964, is the first institution created with the goal of ensuring personnel training in culture-related institutions. In the field of protecting the cultural heritage, different courses are organized: museum specialist, inventory and classification of cultural goods, restaurateur of cultural goods, protection of cultural heritage in special situations and digital mapping of archeological sites; likewise, the center offers professional development courses for socio-cultural animators. The Cultural Memory Institute – cIMeC, a branch with legal personality subordinate to the Center of Professional Training in Culture and founded in 1978, is the national organization for the management of cultural heritage databases.

6. Conclusions

In a space where the local population is simultaneously the subject, the object and the receptor, the ecomuseum takes part in ensuring both the economic life of a settlement and the preservation of local identity. Considered a form of museums characterized by an obvious vitality, ecomuseums have introduced innovative means of passing on the history of a place, which, in developed states, no longer represents a novelty in the dissemination of information.

The elaboration of an organization model for ecomuseums can be conjoined with the introduction of a new direction in territorial management policies, thus taking part in an adaptation of the said policies in the inherent changes that occur in the attempt to preserve a balance between the economic, social and environmental planes.

Faced with a reorientation phenomenon in terms of museum functions, in which the ever increasing number of ecomuseums is further proof of the connection between the museum as an institution to the actual life, needs, aspirations and living environment of the population that represents the potential audience (Popa, 2003, p. 178) and in which examples of incorporation into the patrimony become symbols of the local community (for instance, the Doré Doré, Fontaine-les-Grès township in France, to whose textile industry existing in the early 19th century the local social evolution is connected), the ecomuseum has to become a basic instrument in national territorial management policies. Moreover, in the context of a Romania whose traditional values are increasingly appreciated by modern societies affected over time by the negative effects of globalization and cultural standardization, the interest of central and local authorities in the conservation of resources could focus in the direction of developing ecomuseums in both the urban and the rural environment.

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