

MEDIATING THE RECENT PAST: MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS DEALING WITH COMMUNISM IN ROMANIA

Claudia-Florentina Dobreⁱ

Abstract:

Museums dealing with communism and/or communist repression often perform traditional museum-type functions, but simultaneously attempt to become memorials, sacred places performing the role of conservation and teaching while appealing to social values such as identity, honour and humanitarianism. My article proposes a short reflection on three museums dealing with communism: The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance from Sighetul Marmăției/The Sighet Memorial, Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov and the established but non-existing Museum of Communist Horrors. I argue that while the Sighet Memorial blurs the boundary between museum and memorial, Tales of Communism Museum fuels nostalgia, while the Museum of Communist Horrors aims at displaying an all-embracing perspective on communism as a 'criminal and illegitimate' regime.

Rezumat:

Muzeele care se ocupă de comunism și/sau represiunea comunistă continuă să exercite funcțiile tradiționale de tip muzeal, dar în același timp încearcă să devină memoriale, locuri 'sacre' care îndeplinesc rolul clasic de conservare și predare, făcând totodată apel la patriotism, onoare și valori umanitare. Articolul meu propune o scurtă reflecție asupra a trei muzee care se ocupă de comunism:

ⁱ Senior researcher within the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History in Bucharest, of the Romanian Academy.

Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței de la Sighetul Marmației, Muzeul Amintirilor din Comunism din Brașov și inexistența deși legal înființatului Muzeu al Ororilor Comunismului în România. Încerc să demonstrez în acest articol că: în timp ce Memorialul Sighet estompează granița dintre muzeu și memorial, Muzeul Amintirilor din Comunism alimentează nostalgia, iar Muzeul Ororilor Comunismului își propune să prezinte o perspectivă atotcuprinzătoare asupra comunismului, văzut ca regim „criminal și ilegal”.

Keywords :

Recent past, communism, victims, horrors, museums, memorials.

Cuvinte cheie:

Trecut recent, comunism, victime, orori, muzee, memorial.

INTRODUCTION

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner noticed that “the creation of permanent objects of remembrance draws on one of our most fundamental experiences as human beings”¹, the need to see, to touch, to interact with people and objects in order to establish a connection. The proliferation of museums and memorials in the last decades was fuelled by this necessity to create bonds with others, with the community and the nature, and with the past and the present.

A museum used to be conceived as an institution meant to conserve artifacts which were considered important for the community or the nation which established and financed it and played an important role in educating the audience to value and preserve these objects². On the contrary, a memorial was seen as, “an artifact that imposes meaning and order beyond the temporal and chaotic experiences of life”³. Museum’s objectives used to be saving, recording producing a heritage of the past for the present and the future⁴. Memorials performed a civic duty

¹ Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, “A space of loss: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial”, in *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 50, nr. 3, 1997, p. 157.

² Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum”, in *History and Theory*, vol. 36, no. 4, Theme Issue 36: *Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy*, December, 1997, (hereafter, Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion”), p. 44.

³ Yi-Fu Tuan, “The Significance of the Artifact”, in *Geographical Review*, no. 70, 1980, pp. 462-472.

⁴ Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion”, p. 48.

of remembering while giving moral value to the past⁵. In a traditional perspective, which opposed the two enterprises, the museum was a profane place while a memorial represented a sacred space.

Mircea Eliade argued that a profane place has amorphous meaning, being a space where people get fragmented life experiences. The sacred space entrusts the place with sacredness, which goes beyond unique individual experiences providing a sacrosanct meaning about the world, giving a sense to the chaos of life⁶.

This traditional perspective on museums and memorials has changed in the last 40 years. Museums altered dramatically their functions becoming more consumption oriented, interested to gratify their public⁷, especially in the case of museums dealing with controversial, and/or dreadful human rights' topics such as genocide, colonialism, war crimes, etc. In this new context, museums, while aiming at carrying out their unchallenged mission of collecting, classifying, displaying, and teaching, also try to shake-up their audience, thus blurring the line between museums and memorials.

Furthermore, museums dealing with contemporary issues are not the defining mediator of the very issue displayed in their rooms, but merely another interpreter of such a topic. They experience the same fate as historians, who are not playing anymore the role of professionals charged with telling the truth about the past events, figures, symbols, etc. but, as Nora put it, they are simply witnesses of "second rank", "des témoins de second degré"⁸.

Based on these assumptions, my study deals with the role played by three museums in the process of building a polyvalent memory of communism in post-communist Romania: The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance (Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței) from Sighetul Marmăției, also known as Sighet Memorial, Tales of Communism Museum in Brașov (Muzeul amintirilor din comunism, Brașov), and the official but still non-existing Museum of Communist Horrors (Muzeul ororilor comunismului).

In my study, I argue that while the Sighet Memorial blurs the boundary between museum and memorial, Tales of Communism Museum epitomizes a type of nostalgia, which haunts today Romanian society, being an in-between

⁵James M. Mayo, "War Memorials as Political Memory", in *Geographical Review*, vol. 78, no. 1, January, 1988, p. 62.

⁶Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959, pp. 23-24.

⁷Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, Routledge, London - New York, 2000, p. 1.

⁸Pierre Nora, "Pour une histoire au second degré", in *Le Débat*, no. 122, 2002, pp. 24-31.

museum/memorial. As for the non-created but formally existing Museum of Communist Horrors, it was designed by law to perform museum role, but its functioning through cooperation with other memorial entities are more related to memorial type of activities. Furthermore, the first two museums are private and display the perspective of their creators as well as of their supporting community while the third one, established and financed by the Romanian state, is inscribed in the anti-communist paradigm, which characterizes the today Romanian official discourse on communism.

My aims are twofold: on the one hand, to analyse the main discourse displayed by these museums in order to pinpoint the perspective on communism they promote and, on the other, to infer their role in building a polyphonous cultural memory of communism in Romania. In order to achieve my objectives, I will look for answers to several questions, such as: What perspective of communism is 'museumized' in the above-mentioned museums? Is this perspective a marginal or a consensual one? What is at stake in promoting such perspective? What are the strategies and tactics used to deliver their message and to promote it to their audiences?

THE MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM AND TO THE RESISTANCE IN SIGHET

The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance (*Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței*) is situated in Sighetul Marmăției, a small town in the northern part of Romania, on the border with Ukraine. I argued in another study that, "its location is very symbolic for the place occupied by the memory of communist repression in post-communist Romania, which stays marginal even today"⁹. The place itself is very symbolic as well, as it epitomized the important goal of the communist regime to destroy the old elite through political violence: the Sighet penitentiary hosted the main representatives of the political, intellectual and religious interwar elite, 54 of them dying there. The founders of the Memorial, who are the inheritors of this persecuted elite, have struggled since the fall of communism, in December 1989, to preserve their memory and to pass it on to the next generations while making it known to the world.

⁹Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Une mise en scène de la mémoire: le musée de Sighet", in Izabela Skorzyńska, Christine Lavrence, Carl Pépin, (eds.), *Inszeniyacje Pamięci* (Staging memory/Mettre en scène la mémoire), Poznan, Wydawnictwo Poznanskie, p. 183.

The Sighet Memorial was founded by Ana Blandiana, a well-known poet, and her husband, Romulus Rusan (1935-2016), a writer. Both of them had their fathers incarcerated for political reasons, their entire family being persecuted in various ways in the '50s and early '60s. Established writers during communism, they were considered dissidents in the '80s, especially Ana Blandiana.

After struggling to be admitted to the university due to her father imprisonment, Ana Blandiana eventually became a famous writer who won several national and international prizes such as the prize of the Romanian Union of Writers in 1969, the prize for poetry of the Socialist Romanian Academy in 1970, but also the Herder prize in 1982¹⁰. Her fame grew higher, in Romania and abroad, in the '80s, when she published several poems, which were eventually banned by the censorship, being considered critical towards Ceaușescu's regime (the 4 poems published in 1984 in the cultural magazine, *Amfiteatru*¹¹) and his persona (the tomcat Arpagic, the main character of her poem 'A star from my street' in her book, *Tales from my street*¹², was believed to impersonate Ceaușescu himself). Despite the regime attempts to marginalize her in the late '80s, the censored poems made Ana Blandiana more famous, so famous that during the events of December 1989, people in the street ask for her lead¹³.

In the '90s, Ana Blandiana and Romulus Rusan were very much involved in the political life of Romania, being among those who opposed the takeover of power by neo-communists, the second rank nomenklatura, officers of the former Securitate and officers of the army, who sized power after Ceausescu's execution. To counteract the neo-comunist power, Ana Blandiana founded the Civic Alliance in November 1990, an association of people with lenient anti-communist ideals, played a prominent role in the opposition mass gathering in Piața Universității in the

¹⁰ <https://www.anablandiana.ro/ro/premii-literare/> (retrieved November 14, 2024).

¹¹ The first poem, *Eu cred* (I believe), challenged the very nature of the Romanian people, who is called a 'vegetal people', a people who do not revolt and accept its destiny like the nature itself; the second entitled, *Cruciada copiilor* (The Children's Crusade), subtly mentioned the banned abortions and its dramatic consequences; *Delimitări* (Curtailments), which define the situation of the Romanian people who experience hunger, fear, and cold but are curtailed to do nothing, including to escape; and *Totul* (Everything), which synthesizes the very nature of the Ceaușescu's regime, enumerating all the actions, people and events taking place in the '80s. The poem, *Totul* was translated into English and published by the newspaper, *The Independent*, which also explained every word and its meaning to its audience. Irina Munteanu, „Amintirile Anei Blandiana”, in *Jurnalul Național*, April 13, 2005: <https://www.memorialsighet.ro/jurnalul-naional-amintirile-anei-blandiana/> (retrieved November 15, 2024).

¹² Ana Blandiana, *Întimplări de pe strada mea* (Tales of my Street), Bucharest, Editura Ion Creangă, 1988.

¹³ Information given by Micaela Chițescu in an interview from 2003. Personal archive of Claudia-Florentina Dobre.

spring of 1990 (known as Piața Universității phenomenon) and supported the historical parties during the electoral campaigns (in 1990, 1992 and 1996) being one of the founders of the political alliance of democratic forces, the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR).

At the same time, she also designed a memory center aiming at the preservation and transmission of the memory of the repressed. Encouraged by the European Council, on April 21, 1994, Ana Blandiana together with 175 people founded the Civic Academy Foundation whose goal was to develop the civic education through “a better knowledge of the recent past of our country and of Eastern Europe and thus restoring the truth of recent history falsified during the years of the communist dictatorship”¹⁴. The board of trustee and Blandiana herself made an official request to the state in order to receive the derelict prison of Sighet, which was to be transformed into a museum.

The Sighet prison, built in 1897, under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, was an ordinary jail until 1944, when it was turned by the pro-nazist Hungarian authorities into a transfer centre for Jews and antifascists heading to concentration camps in Germany and Poland. Beginning with 1948, it became a political prison, transformed after 1955 into a prison for common-law criminals until 1977. Afterwards, the buildings hosted a factory, being eventually abandoned.

After constant struggle, The Civic Academy Foundation eventually received the buildings in 1995, but no funds from the state. With the generous help of foreign sponsors, mainly former political prisoners who lived in exile or their inheritors, but also some international foundations, the prison was transformed into a museum, which was inaugurated in 1997. By the time of its opening, the Democratic Convention of Romania came to power (in 1996), which gave an impetus to the museum activities and visibility.

¹⁴ <https://www.memorialsighet.ro/jurnalul-naional-amintirile-anei-blandiana/> (retrieved November 15, 2024).



Figure 1
The Sighet Memorial, facade;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

The Sighet museum has now 60 thematically and chronologically arranged rooms, two courtyards, a conference center, and a book shop. The first courtyard hosts a prayer space with a chapel. In the second courtyard, which is bigger and conserve its mirador, are located several statues forming a compact group, called 'The procession of martyrs'. A branch of the museum was opened in Bucharest in 2013 where also functions the International Centre for the Study of Communism, which organizes conferences, meetings, debates, etc.



Figure 2
The Sighet Memorial, the entrance hall;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

The main narrative, which can be inferred from museum's description on its website (www.memorialsighet.ro), from the museum's display of items, and from the leaflets and other memorabilia, which can be bought at the museum shop, describes the Romanian communism "as a realm of terror, in which opponents became outlaws in order to save the country"¹⁵. It 'museumizes' the communist period from a 'Manichean' angle as a struggle between 'the Good', namely the anticommunist fighters and opponents, and 'the Bad', the communists. After 44 years of resistance, those incarnating the 'Good' eventually won and the museum's mission is to display, preserve and pass on their experience and 'heroic' deeds.

¹⁵ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Communism at the Museum: Staging Memory at the Sighet Memorial", in Izabela Skorzynska, Christine Lavrence (eds.), *Performing the Past: Post-Communist Poland and Romania*, Poznan, Instytut Historii UAM, p. 38.



Figure 3
The Sighet Memorial, The Cortège of the Sacrificed;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

The Sighet Memorial also performs a pedagogical role through its “Memory Schools”, organized constantly in the first 10 years of its existence, where pupils had the opportunity to meet with historians, witnesses and other public anti-communist figures. The proceedings of these meetings were published by the Academy Civic Foundation publishing house under the title *Analele Sighet*. The ‘Memory Schools’ kept on being organized on various occasions, but they lately lost their rhythmically features.

As part of the activities of the foundation, in line with its goals to preserve, educate and promote the memory of the repressed, the International Centre for the Study of Communism organized an archive of interviews with witnesses and their off-spring, with journalists, historians and other intellectuals, archiving other artifacts as well such as photos, objects, books, journals, drawings, etc. Making a good use of its own archive and of researches by Romanian and foreign scholars, the The Civic Academy Foundation published extensively on the political persecutions in Romania, but also in other (former) communist countries.



Figure 4
The Sighet Memorial, museum room;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

Furthermore, based on its publications and archives, the members of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, appointed on April 5, 2006 by the president of Romania, and lead by Vladimir Tismăneanu, an established researcher of the Romanian communism, draw a *Final Report*, which eventually led to the official condemnation of the communist regime in Romania on December 18, 2006.

The acknowledged contribution of the foundation to the official condemnation of the communism as a “criminal and illegitimate” regime emphasized the role played by the Sighet Memorial in interpreting the recent past. Furthermore, it legitimizes the perspective promoted by the founders of the museum, which became the main paradigm of remembering communism in post-communist Romania. It is focused on three principles: the ‘invasion’ of the communist ‘disease’¹⁶, the genuine anti-communist resistance, and the victimhood of the Romanian nation¹⁷.

MUSEUM OF COMMUNIST HORRORS IN ROMANIA

The official anti-communist narrative on communism was meant to be broadly displayed in the state founded Museum of the Communist Horrors in Romania (*Muzeul Ororilor Comunismului în România*), established by law on July 25, 2019. The creation of this museum was a proposal of the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania¹⁸, assumed by the president of the country in December 2006. However, it took 13 years to enshrine the proposal into a law and probably many other years to see the museum properly functioning.

According to the Law 157, as stated in its first article, the museum is “a public institution of national importance” under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and

¹⁶ The concept of communism as a disease was coined by Gabriel Liiceanu in January 1990 when he published his essay, „Apel către lichele”, in the journal 22, no. 1, 20 January 1990, re-published in the subsequent years in his book entitled *Apel către lichele*. Gabriel Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele* (Appeal to Dregs), Bucharest, Humanitas, 1992, p. 85.

¹⁷ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, “Avatars of the Social Imaginary: The Myths about Romanian Communism after 1989,” in Claudia-Florentina Dobre, Cristian-Emilian Ghiță, (eds.), *Quest for a Suitable Past: Myth and Memory in Central and Eastern Europe*, New York-Budapest, CEU Press, pp. 101-117.

¹⁸ Raportul final al comisiei prezidențiale pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România (The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania), Bucharest, 2006, pp. 637-645.
https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADC R.pdf (retrieved August 10, 2024).

National Identity¹⁹. The objectives of this museum, according to the provisions of the law, are: "... to present the realities of the socio-economic and cultural life in Romania during the period 1945-1989, with the aim of correctly informing the public about the abuses, crimes, tortures of the opponents of the communist regime; ... to collect, study, preserve, display and enhance the items that make up the Museum's heritage"²⁰.

The collections of the museums should be created, according to this law, through collaboration with other public and private institutions from Romania, mainly with the Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (Institutul de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc), through donations and public acquisitions. The museum is financed by the state budget through the Ministry of Culture and National Identity, but also through donations, sponsorship, and lucrative activities²¹.

However, the legal foundation of the museum was not followed by a proper functioning of the institution as it has no headquarters and buildings of its own in order to organize permanent exhibitions and other related activities. Since its foundation, the 'museum' has been involved in co-organizing or financing exhibitions on communist repression, Bărăgan deportation, the royalty and its role in modernizing Romania, on the 1989 Revolution, on 1977 earthquake, on local memory and on various personalities such as Ion I. C. Brătianu, the liberal politician who played a pivotal role in the unity of the Romanian inhabited territories at the end of the Second World war and thus creating the Greater Romania in 1918, or Gheorghe Ursu, an engineer who kept a diary about the communist shortages and sent letters to Radio Free Europe, who was eventually arrested by the Securitate, tortured and murdered in the '80s.

The 'museum' has also been involved in (co)-organizing several workshops, national/international conferences, books launches, debates, guided tours for pupils, and workshops for children. The topics of these activities are various and, although the main concern remains communism and its repression, the museum took part to events on other issues as well such as: the local memory of Bucharest, the contemporary art and its rapport to the past (in cooperation with the Maps Museum in Bucharest), and the artistic memory of Țipoia family (in partnership with Țipoia art museum).

¹⁹ Legea nr. 157/2019 privind înființarea Muzeului Ororilor Comunismului în România.

<https://lege5.ro/gratuit/gm2damztgeyq/legea-nr-157-2019-privind-infiintarea-muzeului-ororilor-comunismului-in-romania> (retrieved November 15, 2024).

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.



Figure 5
 Snapshot of the on-line site of Museum of Communist Horrors in Romania.

The ‘museum’ has an administrative office within the National Library of Romania in Bucharest. Within the library, there is a quasi-permanent exhibition, dedicated to the late political persecutions (1977-1989), which can be visited free of charge but upon request (if the curators respond to the request which is not always the case). The exhibition (as I can infer from the online information) displays an anti-communist vision of the fallen regime which is consistent with the official paradigm of remembering communism in Romania.

As I have previously stated the anti-communist paradigm was enshrined in the official discourse on communism in December 2006 when the fallen regime was proclaimed “criminal and illegitimate”. However, this perspective is not consensual among Romanians as people value and promote different memories of the communist regime. Polls have constantly measured a rather positive perception of communism. In 2006, the year of the official condemnation of the communist regime, a poll by Open Society Foundation showed that 12% of Romanians considered communism a good idea, applied well, 41% believed that communism was a good idea, badly applied, and only 34% declared communism a bad idea, badly applied. Only 8% of people above 34 years old stated that they had suffered during communism²². In November 2023, a poll by CSOP also measured a positive evaluation of the communist period with 48,1% of

²² www.osf.ro ; (retrieved February 7, 2007).

Romanians believing that communism was a good regime while 46,4% estimated that life was better during communism²³.

TALES OF COMMUNISM MUSEUM IN BRAȘOV

This positive image of communism might explain the success of a private museum located in the city center of Brașov. Tales of Communism Museum (*Muzeul amintirilor din Comunism*) was founded in 2020 as a social enterprise, co-financed by the European Social Fund, by two female artists and entrepreneurs from Brașov.

The museum displays a story of everyday communism from Romanian citizens' perspective in 6 rooms situated in a former famous hotel of Brașov, built during communism, still functional after the fall of the regime, but recently abandoned.



Figure 6

Tales of Communism Museum in Brașov, the former Hotel Continental facade;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

The museum's mission (as stated on its website) is to contribute to non-formal education through interaction, emotion and involvement, both from civil society, authorities and media representatives. It is meant to support children from

²³ "Sondaj INSCOP: A crescut numărul românilor care cred că regimul comunist a însemnat un lucru bun" (INSCOP Poll: The number of Romanians who believe that the communist regime was a good thing grew), in Euractiv.ro, 13 December 2023. <https://www.euractiv.ro/social/sondaj-inscop-a-crescut-numarul-romanilor-care-cred-ca-regimul-comunist-a-insemnat-un-lucru-bun-64854> (retrieved December 16, 2023).

vulnerable groups and integrate them into the community through dedicated programs, camps, trips, visits to museum, etc. It also aimed at becoming “one of the most important tourist attractions in Braşov, generating the necessary profit to grow the business and, implicitly, the mission and social impact”, according to the creators’ declarations²⁴.



Figure 7
Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, the entrance of the museum;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

The museum is visited mainly by pupils and/or foreigners, and it covers all the aspects of daily life during communism, from political, religious, ethnic and sexual persecutions to work, education, and various forms of leisure, which were

²⁴ <https://macd.ro>.

prohibited or allowed during communism. It portrays family life during communism through objects and comments, it exemplifies the formal and informal education through items and activities related to it, as well as the work conditions and uniforms through artifacts and comments as well as through music and radio broadcasts.



Figure 8
Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, the main room of the museum;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

The museum has very active social media accounts where the curators/founders are constantly posting information about communism, pictures from the period, fragments of testimonies of people who experienced communism, objects from that time as well as songs and other memorabilia, which are introduced to younger generations who did not live during communism but want to learn about it. Although, the museum aims to inform, to educate and to collect, it also proposes a certain image about the fallen regime, which is rather nostalgic mirroring the polls which measure a constant appreciation for communism among Romanians.

This dynamic and complex nostalgia of communism covers several aspects of longing for the past. Gerald W. Creed argued that nostalgia makes its presence felt at times when communities and individuals realize the impossibility of returning to the past, when the future presents itself as a real break with the past²⁵. For Duncan Light and Craig Young, nostalgia for communism represents a form of counter-memory²⁶, while Stephane Legg argues that it represents a refusal to conform to official memory²⁷.

In the museum, one might detect two forms of nostalgia already defined by Svetlana Boym in her seminal work, *The Future of Nostalgia*²⁸: 'the restorative' and the 'reflective'. Both type of nostalgia are "ways of giving shape and meaning to longing". The 'restorative' type proposes to 'restore the lost home', to 'patch up the memory gap'²⁹ while the 'reflective nostalgia' dwells in dreaming of another place and another time. The restorative nostalgia wants the past to be restored in its accurate condition while the reflective nostalgia is longing for a time which is forever gone³⁰.

The museum accurately illustrates these two type of nostalgia. On the one hand, the display of the items in the rooms, the artifacts themselves, and the coziness of the place indulge a 'restorative nostalgia', but on the other, the critical comments on the leaflets disseminated everywhere in the museum's room as well as the black and white documentary, introducing Ceausescu and his epoch, played obsessively on a small TV in an austere room, invite people to take a distance from the past, to be critical towards it, but also to enjoy its reconstruction from bits and pieces.

²⁵ Gerald W. Creed, "Strange Bedfellows: Socialist Nostalgia and Neoliberalism in Bulgaria", in *Post-communist Nostalgia*, ed. Maria Todorova, Zsuzsa Gille, New York-Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2010, p. 38.

²⁶ Duncan Light, Craig Young, "Local and counter-memories of socialism in post-socialist Romania", in *Local Memories in a Nationalizing and Globalizing World*, ed. M. Beyen, B. Deseure, London-New York, Palgrave, 2015, pp. 221-243.

²⁷ Stephan Legg, "Reviewing Geographies of Memory/Forgetting," in *Environement and Planning A*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2007, pp. 456-466.

²⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, pp. 41-64.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 50.



Figure 9
Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, a room with a view;
©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

CONCLUSIONS

The Sighet Memorial and Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov are private museums and display the perspective of their founders as well as of their supporting community. The Museum of the Communist Horrors was created and it is financed by the Romanian state. Its founding document inscribes the museum in the official anti-communist paradigm.

The three museums museumize different perspectives on communism, which are not consensual within the Romanian society. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that the communist regime is still a 'milieu de mémoire', as Pierre Nora would say³¹, in the process of becoming a 'lieu de mémoire'³².

On the official level, the anti-communist paradigm is prevalent through legislation, public policies, institutions, official discourse. However, people evoke communism from a personal perspective, which can be positive or negative, or both, and they look to the fallen regime through their own lens, which are more colorful than the black and white official image, and eventually more nostalgic.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Blandiana, Ana: *Întîmplări de pe strada mea* (Tales of my Street), Bucharest, Editura Ion Creangă, 1988
- Boym, Svetlana: *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, pp. 41-64
- Crane, Susan: "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum", in *History and Theory*, vol. 36, no. 4, Theme Issue 36: *Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy*, December, 1997
- Creed, Gerald W.: "Strange Bedfellows: Socialist Nostalgia and Neoliberalism in Bulgaria", in *Post-communist Nostalgia*, ed. Maria Todorova, Zsuzsa Gille, New York-Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2010
- Dobre, Claudia-Florentina: "Avatars of the Social Imaginary: The Myths about Romanian Communism after 1989," in Claudia-Florentina Dobre, Cristian-Emilian Ghiţă, (eds.), *Quest for a*

³¹ Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1, *La République*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. 20.

³² According to Pierre Nora, a "lieu de mémoire" is defined by its material, functional and symbolic dimensions. The material dimension do not relate to its material form, but rather to its cultural objectivation of a place, person, event, literary text, art, etc., to its capacity to "break a temporal continuity". It is functional because it performs a function in the society, and symbolic as it is invested with meaning by the society which created it. Pierre Nora, "Entre memoire et histoire", in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1, *La République*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. 19.

- Suitable Past: Myth and Memory in Central and Eastern Europe*, New York-Budapest, CEU Press, pp. 101-117
- Dobre, Claudia-Florentina: "Une mise en scène de la mémoire: le musée de Sighet", in Izabela Skorzynska, Christine Lavrence, Carl Pépin, (eds.), *Inszeniyacje Pamieci* (Staging memory/Mettre en scène la mémoire), Poznan, Wydawnictwo Poznanskie
- Dobre, Claudia-Florentina: "Communism at the Museum: Staging Memory at the Sighet Memorial", in Izabela Skorzynska, Christine Lavrence (eds.), *Performing the Past: Post-Communist Poland and Romania*, Poznan, Instytut Historii UAM
- Eliade, Mircea: *The sacred and the profane*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959
- Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen: *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, Routledge, London-New York, 2000
- Legg, Stephan: "Reviewing Geographies of Memory/Forgetting," in *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2007, pp. 456-466
- Light, Duncan; Young, Craig: "Local and counter-memories of socialism in post-socialist Romania", in *Local Memories in a Nationalizing and Globalizing World*, ed. M. Beyen, B. Deseure, London-New York, Palgrave, 2015, pp. 221-243
- Liiceanu, Gabriel: *Apel către lichele* (Appeal to Dregs), Bucharest, Humanitas, 1992
- Mayo, James M.: "War Memorials as Political Memory", in *Geographical Review*, vol. 78, no. 1, January, 1988
- Munteanu, Irina: „Amintirile Anei Blandiana”, in *Jurnalul Național*, April 13, 2005
- Nora, Pierre : *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1, *La République*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984
- Nora, Pierre : "Pour une histoire au second degré", in *Le Débat*, no. 122, 2002, pp. 24-31
- Ochsner, Jeffrey Karl: "A space of loss: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial", in *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 50, nr. 3, 1997
- Tuan, Yi-Fu: "The Significance of the Artifact", in *Geographical Review*, no. 70, 1980, pp. 462-472
- Raportul final al comisiei prezidențiale pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România (The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania), Bucharest, 2006, pp. 637-645
- Legea nr. 157/2019 privind înființarea Muzeului Ororilor Comunismului în România,
<https://www.anablandiana.ro/ro/premii-literare/>
<https://www.euractiv.ro/social/sondaj-inscop-a-crescut-numarul-romanilor-care-cred-ca-regimul-comunist-a-insemnat-un-lucru-bun-64854>
<https://lege5.ro/gratuit/gm2damztgeyq/legea-nr-157-2019-privind-infiintarea-muzeului-ororilor-comunismului-in-romania> <https://madc.ro>
<https://www.memorialsighet.ro/jurnalul-naional-amintirile-anei-blandiana/>
www.osf.ro
https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: The Sighet Memorial, facade; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

Figure 2: The Sighet Memorial, the entrance hall; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

Figure 3: The Sighet Memorial, The Cortege of the Sacrified; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

Figure 4: The Sighet Memorial, museum room; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2011.

Figure 5: Snapshot of the on-line site of Museum of Communist Horrors in Romania.

Figure 6: Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, the former Hotel Continental facade; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

Figure 7: Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, the entrance of the museum; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

Figure 8: Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, the main room of the museum; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.

Figure 9: Tales of Communism Museum in Braşov, a room with a view; ©Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2024.