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Hello everyone and welcome to the 42nd edition of the Projects Abroad Romania Newsletter. Late August and September was a time of fulfilment and joy in our team. During this time we enjoyed working and helping the local community on the one hand, while having the best time of our lives – both volunteers and staff members. In order for everyone to know what happened in the last couple of months, we come to you with new information, articles, news, updates, projects and last but not least, culture and tradition.

We begin by presenting an article, written by Natasha Potter, one of our former Journalism volunteers, from Australia. She is presenting a story about her experience in Romania and the struggle between traditional eastern culture and a race to keep up with western conformities and ideals.

To continue, we chose to present to you an update to one of our projects – the Learning Romanian Project. In this article I presented the Language Project as it is at this moment, talking about our second volunteer from this year, Marjolaine Brabander, who chose to come in our country to learn Romanian. Please find out the interesting new facts about the way in which the Language Project works out.

Moving on to other things, we'll give you some details on a recent event that one of our most successful Business volunteers, Mrs Bente Heuch, organised for some NGO's in Brasov. She talks about her experience here and all the ideas that she put into practice in order to help some of our NGO managers to better run their organisations. It was a great and successful experience for both NGO managers and Projects Abroad Romania staff members. Thank you Bente for everything we got the chance to learn from you.

Furthermore, this time the cookery corner gives you a sense of Romanian cuisine. Li Min Teng wrote a recipe and a culinary review on one of our most successful traditional desserts; Rhubarb Cake. Please take notes and try baking it in your own homes.

Before reaching the end, my colleague, Alex Parasca, our Desk Officer had the pleasure to present to you a highlight of one of the social event that happened in this period of time. We hope you enjoy reading his article and he enjoyed writing it and going through all the nice memories from this end of summer.



The last section is the volunteers' stories. In this section you can read two articles that were published in The Village Magazine, written by our former Journalism volunteers, Michiel Bellon and Li Min Teng. In these two articles you will see through their eyes the way traditions and culture are preserved in our Romanian Villages.

I really hope I gave you a bit of the insight into this newsletter. In order to find out more, please read the whole issue and enjoy it at the same time because it's created with loads of good thoughts and love for you all! Thank you everyone for the lovely articles, we appreciate your great work!

One Love... Pupici!

Ali (Alexandra Ichim)

Drama, Journalism, Dance Supervisor, Social Manager

Living in a Material World

(Written by Natasha Potter, Journalism Volunteer, Australia, March – May 2011)

(Article published in The Village Magazine, Issue no 9)



*I*n today's vivid and fast paced society many people live through a screen. A fourteen year old in Australia rushes home from school to turn on her Facebook profile and update her 500 so called friends. A fifty year old American man wakes to log onto his virtual cyber life in the avatar program, Second Life. A five year old Romanian boy fixates on his action computer game, ignoring the sunny, peaceful and beautiful village life that peeks through his very own window.

Millions of examples can be given of people all around the world who live day to day life through a variety of different screens. While technological advances have revolutionised our society and immense gains cannot be measured, our social construct, identity and traditions have been obscured forever.

While such a controversial issue is impossible to explore as a whole, my time as a journalist in Romania has provided me insight into a country which is an eminent example of the ongoing struggle between traditional eastern culture and a race to keep up with western conformities and ideals. Visiting Museums and in particular the 'Mini Village' exhibition directed by Professor Sorin Apan in Braşov, provided me with priceless knowledge into the rich cultural history and tradition of the Romanian past. Most significantly it was the immensely detailed, colourful and intricate sewing of traditional Romanian clothing which captured my interest. The heavily decorated ensembles of clothing from past village life presented a vast contrast to the bulk commercial and manufactured clothing industry which existed outside the exhibition doors. The clothing was embellished with beautiful motifs and designs, and additionally displayed the finest sewing and embroidery skills at work. As many facets of Romania life still lie in flux between the past and present, I saw the importance in discovering whether such skills and traditions are still alive and being practiced in modern life. Such an exploration was possible with the knowledge of Professor Sorin Apan, the friendly staff at Braşov's Ethnographic Museum and the kind people interviewed in the village of Bogata.

In today's society clothing is predominately a disposable good, where our consumer driven industry provides new styles and fashions for any budget. With the influx of technology buying clothing is easily attainable for any generation, where the need to mend, fix or create being eradicated from common ideologies. Significantly the majority of western clothing pieces can mean little to the modern society other than a desire to have or a reflection of status, fashion or wealth. The importance of traditional clothing and costumes from Romania's past is that there is a culturally rich story or meaning behind every stitch sewn. Professor Apan believes in the importance of preserving the traditional clothing and costumes of Romania for this very reason; "I became interested in the clothing and its importance because of the profound spiritual stories and meanings which lie in every motif or symbol", he states. The clothing which I was able to learn about focused on stories revolving around the power of the higher cosmological world, and the connection between earth and sky.

These connections were important to link the earth as a symbol of what we see, and the sky, representing the mystery of life. Motifs and emblems which were embroidered onto the clothing were representative of these stories and were created in the form of a deer for the earth, and stars for the sky.

Additional motifs were of floral ensembles, providing a link to earth and sacerdotal symbols providing a connection to the priests and representing something sacred and solemn. Colours also symbolised a variety of meanings to compliment the stories; green for vegetation, black as fertility, red for mortality and white to represent death. Professor Apan described that the same symbols were kept since 5000BC throughout the clothing as a matter of protection against demons, who were believed to destroy the connection between the cosmological sky and the earth. Professor Apan's revealed how much history lies within every piece of traditional Romanian clothing and how there is a struggle for people today to be interested in the clothing beyond just an aesthetic appeal. The profound meanings behind the intricate creation of the clothing are of great contrast to the consumerist parallel of clothing in today's society, and expose a culturally rich history which struggles to survive.

Such preserved examples of traditional clothing are also seen within Braşov's Ethnographic Museum. Clothing and costumes on mannequins surround traditional looms, furniture, working tools and machines, depicting scenes from hundreds of years ago. Interviewing a woman working at the museum provided me with important history and knowledge beyond the aesthetics of the costumes. While the costumes were much less elaborate than the ones viewed with Professor Apan, the importance of them to the Romanian identity was asserted. Unfortunately it is evident that due to social and political changes traditions and skills have been greatly lost in creating such masterpieces of embroidery, lace, and stitching. Political changes in past decades have introduced large factories, introducing manmade fibres for sewing and thus making materials such as thick wool less readily available.

Therefore it has been difficult for some to have the materials to continue their sewing skills and pass down their knowledge to their children and grandchildren. Additionally and possibly most importantly, mentality has changed. Living in the throes of the 21st Century has ostracised the art of sewing into being solely created for a reason, usually for financial gain to provide traditional dancers or singers with brightly decorated costumes. Holidays such as Easter and Christmas also bring out the traditional costumes, where Romanian culture can be celebrated and appreciated. I was interested in whether any sewing or fine embroidery skills are taught in Romanian, where such an art could be passed on and thus remain alive for generations to come. The woman at the Braşov's Ethnographic Museum informed me that while some villages have time, generally grandparents in the towns have adapted to modern contexts. Classes for children such as orchestrated by Professor Apan allow students to participate in traditional art and skills, however form a rare minority of programs in teaching Romania's rich cultural traditions. The skill and art in the creation of Romanian clothing seems to be predominately held and preserved by such crucial cultural institutions as by Professor Apan and Braşov's Ethnographic Museum.

Noting that some of these sewing traditions in Romania were still alive in more rural villages I held high expectations for a journalism trip to Bogata village. Walking into the village I was once again struck by the clashing evidence of east versus west; crumbling traditional Saxon houses, with free chickens roaming backyards and clothes lines of cheap manufactured clothing swinging in the fresh country side breeze. While the youth in Bogata wore current styles and fashions I noticed the older generation wore more traditional styles and head cloths. As an old woman plowed her vegetable patch with her rusting hoe, I could imagine her house full of traditional sewing looms, materials and clothing which she had spent hours sewing under flickering candlelight. Significantly the interview which prevailed revealed quite the opposite of my preconceived ideals of the woman's current lifestyle.



Any remnants of sewing evidence had disappeared from her life, as she stated that no one in her village practiced these traditions today. Her reasons were aligned with modern ideologies; there was no demand for her to make clothing for any of her children or grandchildren and there was also little time for her to spend painstaking hours making something which would be of little use.

The modern age of a disposable society had seeped into Bogata's traditional lifestyle, where new western attitudes dispelled any notion of Romanian tradition. Significantly while Bogata had become very westernised in such a short space of time, the woman I spoke to at Braşov's Ethnographic Museum did reveal other villages where the tradition of creating clothing was still alive. She explained that many Romanian villages are encouraged to produce the art of traditional clothing and additionally to circulate it and sell it among other village areas. Importantly she stated that this attitude means that the tradition is; "fragile and vulnerable", as that creating different clothing and costumes is of a long process and redeems little reward for the people. The skills and materials required to create these traditional treasures are of evanescent existence in many villages and especially in Romania's modern towns.



My quest to discover the journey of traditional clothing and costumes existing in the escalating modern society of Romania was one which provided me with a wide berth of knowledge and opinion. Living in the centre of Braşov, it is evident how westernised and consumer driven the town has become, with fashion boardwalks lining every road. Stepping out into Romania's countryside, Bogata Village revealed real insight into Romania's struggle with retaining and treasuring traditions that create Romania's cultural identity and ethos. The plight of the people there seemed different to the community of Braşov's modern town.

While there seemed to be a stronger passion to hold onto traditional skills and creations, the infiltration of contemporary ideals and technologies meant that there was little demand for materials and clothing to be produced. Significantly a greater economic gain was also evident within the circulation of traditional clothing among villages, and not singularly for personal passion to create and continue tradition. The most crucial realisation of this exploration was the dedication and aspirations



of the figures of Professor Sorin Apan and the community at Braşov's Ethnographic Museum. Professor Apan revealed the importance of the strong meaning in the stories behind Romania's traditional costumes and the spirituality they hold in uniting Romanian people with a higher cosmological world. His 'Mini Village' exhibition plays a vital role in showcasing such incredible sewing skills and educating Romania's future generations.

Additionally it is museums such as Braşov's Ethnographic Museum which continue to preserve a variety of cultural traditions to keep the past of Romania alive and open for public knowledge. While the future of intricate techniques and creations of traditional Romanian clothing may be fading in practice, the rich culture of its tradition will live on with such wisdom, passion and history arising from Professor Sorin Apan and Braşov's Ethnographic Museum.

Learning Romanian Project

By Alexandra Ichim, Language Project Coordinator

At the end of August we were expecting a new volunteer for the Language Project. Her name is Marjolaine Brabander and she came in Romania choosing the project called 'Learn Romanian'. She was the second volunteer for this year choosing this project. Everyone was curious why she was interested in such a project and why Romanian.



After meeting her everyone had the same question: 'Why learning Romanian'? Her answer was genuine, filled with a big smile: 'Because I am about to live for one year in Romania – Bucharest, studying Architecture', she said.

Marjolaine is from France and she applied for a scholarship in Romania. She chose to come with Projects Abroad first and learn the language directly from the source in the country where she was about to live for one year. She became part of the host family and she did everything possible to learn as many things about the culture, traditions and language.

This project has just become noticeable as a stand alone project (from 30 – 60 hours of language classes) and has started to be searched by people all over the world. The reasons why people choose to apply to this project vary from one person to the other, depending on the context. The language project has the following main points:

- It runs as a stand-alone full time project, not combined with another volunteer project.
- 30 hours' tuition over 2 weeks or 60 hours' tuition over 1 month.
- Tailored to suit your ability and requirements.
- Usually one-to-one tutoring.
- Usually includes course textbooks.
- You choose the start date.
- You'll be part of the Projects Abroad volunteer community in your chosen destination.

So, besides what you find on the internet, you will also find a cosy atmosphere, having an experienced teacher, tailoring the classes according to your needs and interests. Also, choosing the language project in Romania, you will have the chance to do different activities within the community, depending on your main interests.

Marjolaine was our first language project volunteer whose native language was French while the first volunteer on the language project this year was Jack Theis from USA. Each of them chose the Language Project for different purposes and we really hope we made their experience here worthwhile. Now, Marjolaine lives in Bucharest and she talks proudly in Romanian, still doing her homework and studying the language as it is spoken and written. We can say she is a true Romanian now.

Rhubarb Cake

By Li Min Teng (Journalism Volunteer, Malaysia, Feb. – June 2011)
(Article published in The Village Issue no 9)



A tangy dessert popularly served after a meal or as a snack.

The creamy, smooth foam on top accompanied by sprinkles of fried sugar goes harmoniously with the spongy bottom of the cake. It can be indulged, fresh out the oven accompanied by ice cream. Or, it can be served after leaving it to chill in the fridge for a few hours, if one desires for a cold, luscious dessert that leaves your palette satisfied.

A Biertan villager who claims her recipe had been passed down for generations had nobly shared this recipe.

Ingredients:

- * 140 grams Sugar
- * 140 grams Butter
- * 280 grams flour
- * 4 egg yolks
- * 1 cup milk
- * 1 small teaspoon of bicarbonate

Foam:

- * 4 egg whites
- * 200 grams powdered sugar

Method:

Firstly, the sugar and egg yolks are mixed well. After that, add butter (which must be soft) into the mixture. Mix until creamed. Add bicarbonate to the milk and then pour it into the mixture. Add in the flour. Line the baking tin with baking paper and sprinkle it with a little semolina. Pour the cake mixture into the baking tin. Cut the Rhubarb into small pieces and add it over the surface of the cake. Press it in gently.

Put it into the oven for half the cooking time (15-20 mins). While the cake is baking in the oven, make the foam. Whisk egg whites until they form stiff peaks then gradually add in sugar until it is thoroughly mixed. Take the cake out of oven and add the foam on top. Put the cake back into the oven for 15-20 minutes. The foam on top should be a little brown when taken out of the oven.

Business Project

By Bente Heuch (Business Volunteer, Norway, September – October 2011)



When I decided to join Projects Abroad last winter I knew that I had to use my professional background as a manager and consultant to the benefit of the weakest groups who are the children and the handicapped.

So when I went to Brasov in May to find out how I could organise my work it was a great relief and pleasure to meet such a competent manager as Daniela. Together we decided that it would be a challenge to find out how professional the different orphanages and

day centres are in connection with management and fundraising.

When I returned in September I visited, together with one of the professional staff, all the orphanages and day centres where Projects Abroad are involved. I interviewed the managers to understand how they managed and funded their institution.

We told them that we were going to have two workshops where we hoped they would participate with at least two or three members of the staff depending on the size of the institution.

At the workshops I started with summarising the differences, similarities and challenges that I had found between the institutions. Then the participants were divided into groups and worked with three items:

- 1) How can we organise our NGO to be more effective?
- 2) How can we improve our fundraising?
- 3) How can we improve our networking/cooperation?

After an hour the groups presented their results and it was amazing to see how happy and engaged everyone seemed to be with working together in this way. For many of them this was the first time they worked in this way and also the first time they met managers from similar institutions. One of the conclusions was that an organising committee was set down to organise a common meeting in October. Then they can decide how they can continue to work more together and gain more from each others experiences.

In the last week I had separate meetings with each of the institutions where we sat down goals which they have to reach until I am back again in the beginning of February 2012. The cleverness and dedication they will put into this work will also contribute to whether I will suggest them as candidates to get economical support from the Norwegian Government in 2012/13.

If I in any way may have contributed to professionalise some of the managers by being more market and goal oriented I am very happy and content.

Last choc crepe

By Alex Parasca, Desk Officer for Projects Abroad Romania



Late August, early September, things are about to change here – summer volunteers are gone or about to go and our tradition to spend most of our nights out on a terrace having a ‘diet’ based on chocolate crepes and Coca-Cola is about to end also, hard to concentrate on chocolate and cold coke while you have 12 degrees Celsius outside where you serve them. It’s been a short summer, too short for me since I’ve spent two months in a cast after a motorbike accident. Things evolved well after that anyway, I’ve healed fine and the current group of volunteers was very supportive and helped me go through those times; THANK YOU GUYS. Got back on my bike for a while but that’s the end of it since Brasov has a relatively short summer season and you can’t ride a motorbike in winter... Not here at least.

Right, I was about to write about the social events which occurred this summer end, choc crepes, movies at the cinema and my favourites of all – CAKES; chocolate, fruit and rum cakes. One of my friends works in a cake laboratory and she had some new recipes which she wanted to experiment on us so, gladly and anxiously, we accepted. I must say that the rum-chocolate cake was the best and I was waiting anxiously for someone’s birthday so we can get our hands on one of those cakes.

Months have passed and now I am writing this article inside the office admiring the ‘rust’ of the Tampa Mountains at the feet of which I have so many memories with so many friends from abroad. I will never forget all the things that happened in this short summer and I can only wait and hope that the next summer will be right around the corner filled with surprises and great people. Maybe next year I will stay away from casts, hospitals and such other events and if not, I know I will have some great people around me:).

So darlings, along with the end of this summer comes the end of this story.

Stay tuned though because winter is coming and with it the skating season, that’s going to be fun... and painful



Peștera – Where Modernity and Tradition Meet

By Michiel Bellon (Journalism Volunteer, Belgium, April – June 2011)

Awakened by the harsh shakings of the Romanian roads, we were greeted by the arresting beauty of the Carpathian Hills. Its green pastures accompanied with colorful wild flowers were a splendid sight. Huddled closely at the backseat, the three of us observed the contrast between the vast meadows and the stony and snowy mountains.

Peștera, a picturesque village wedged in between two mountain ranges, lied before us. With a population of only one thousand people and an altitude between 900 and 1200 meters, the village is an isolated isle of tranquility in modernized Romania. We continued up the hill and parked our car beside a wooden fence, with the Piatra Craiului Mountains as our background landscape.

The village name was derived from an ancient cave situated in the heart of the village. Therefore, finding the cave was our first objective. After asking a few locals we were directed towards an idyllic country road. Little did we know that the cave was hidden behind high bushes and trees. After five minutes of aimless wandering, we finally stumbled on it in the most random location. Looming on top of a small hill, the cave beckoned us into its opening. Upon entering, one detail in particular struck me. The cave was literally littered with garbage. Even in the most remote places modernity manages to catch up with you. A teacher in the village had told us that this cave had been a sacred place for thousands of years. Hence, seeing it deviled like that was quite disappointing. The same sense of sacrilege had hit me as well while I was walking towards the cave earlier. Although the surrounding hills were extremely beautiful and the traditional houses very scenic, I couldn't help but notice the metal like music that was coming out of some of the windows and that broke the peace of this serene landscape. Still, this brute contrast had a certain charm of its own.

It is a sad but undeniable fact that modernity is slowly but surely invading Peștera. The different people we interviewed while walking in the village revealed that the ancient customs of the village are rapidly dwindling. Miss Stoica, a retired carpet weaver, told us that the elderly people of Peștera who still know traditional crafts (like sewing, weaving and looming) are either dead or too old to still practice them, while the youngsters of the village are simply not interested in these crafts anymore. Nostalgically, she recalled how the young women in her youth used to weave their own clothes.

Unfortunately, nowadays all of them buy their garments in modern commercial shops. With melancholy I pondered the lost heritage of this once quiet country village. The new non-native inhabitants replaced many of the villages' traditional houses with modern holiday chalets and brought the phenomenon of tourism to the town. Despite tourism's obvious advantages (jobs for locals and increased financial support), part of the village's original attraction is getting lost because of it.

Although modernity has firmly invaded the peaceful life of the village, some people keep resisting this frightening trend. Most of the villagers keep animals of their own or send them up to the mountains in the company of local shepherds. Some still know how to prepare traditional food and medicine. Miss Stoica herself is still living according to the rhythm of nature. She wakes up at 5.30 a.m, starts her day with prayers and spends the rest of her hours herding her three sheep and her Dutch cow. But even she wears modern sneakers.



Pester-ian Encounters

of untainted sceneries and village hustle

By Li Min Teng (Journalism volunteer, Malaysia, February – June 2011)
(article published in the Village Magazine, Issue no 9)



The villagers of Pestera received us with open arms. Miss Stoica invited us into her house where she introduced her beehive farm and showcased woven carpets, which she had sewn a long time ago. She stopped sewing after she realized that these sorts of crafts are no longer appreciated. Miss Maria, another lady we affronted on the hills further elaborated that people who are accustomed to these crafts are either too old to work or dead. Hence, time is spent in front of the television and daily routine mainly consist of taking care of their farm animals.

Because of her old age, Miss Stoica owned only a cow and two sheep. Tending to many animals may be too tiring for her. Her cow is an important source for her own food consumption as it produces 20-30 litres of milk everyday. She does not only drink her milk, but also makes butter out of it. With a tinge of pride, she taught us the trick of making good butter. The surpluses of her milk are sold as a source of income. Now, the villagers

are anxiously waiting for the calves of Miss Stoica's cow that is known for her productiveness in conceiving milk.

However, Miss Stoica explained that if she bore a male, he would be consumed during the winter. Taking a trip down memory lane, she expressed that this would be very different during the communism era. This is because the villagers were specifically instructed not to consume any veils for themselves, as it should be contracted to the communist government.

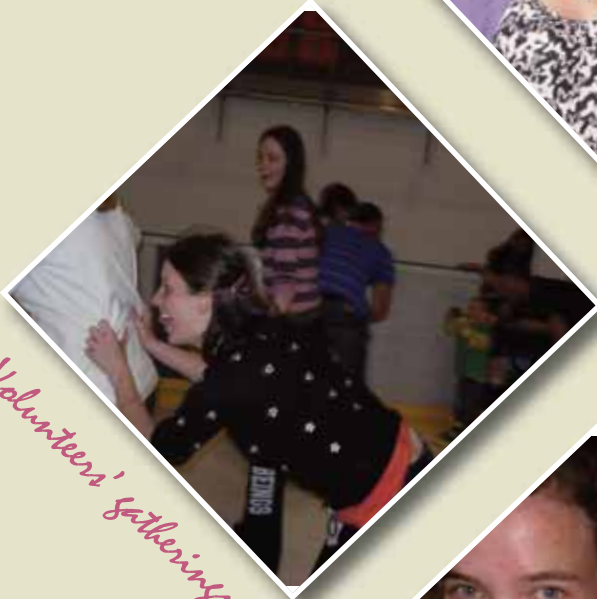
My attention was predominantly apprehended by the condition of the soil and extensive distances between villages, schools, churches and convenient stores. According to Miss Maria, agriculture on a 900-1000 altitude is fallacious. Showing us the meagre size of her "full" grown potato, she sighed in exasperation explaining the village's dilemma with crop growth. The neighboring villagers took advantage of this predicament. Every other week, they head over to Pestera to sell crops like corn, cereals and potatoes. Because of their lack in agriculture, it is important for the villagers to take extra care of their farm animals. Respectively, we stumbled upon a young lady pampering her pigs with 'poison ivy' soup. She said that the mixture of poison ivy and bran is healthy for her twelve pigs in her barnyard. Since they were the source of food consumption for her big family, they needed to be well taken care of to ensure breeding.

It is inevitable to avoid walking a considerable amount when living in Pestera. Trudging down the endless roads, Madam Stoica's remarks on having to walk 7km to get to the next village struck me as we complained how much our feet hurt from the continuous walking. Unless one owns a car, their next option is either to walk or to take a taxi and taking a taxi could be expensive. She explained the irony of having the convenience of at least 4 buses running through the village during the communism period and having no buses at all now. It was also an inconvenience to the school children, especially 8th graders, who have to walk 5-7km to the next village for their classes' everyday.

My idea of a village was somewhat stereotypical; vast green, scattered wooden houses, hence the sight of guest-houses intermingled with the village houses was a stark contrast. To me, this shatters an image of an authentic village, however, Miss Maria happily professed that this business provides job opportunities for the villagers. For example, the young girl we met preparing 'poison ivy' soup for her pigs, worked as a cleaning lady at the guesthouse and earns quite a sum. Foreigners are interested in buying land in Pestera not only because of its scenic view, but mainly because it has all the essentials; like water and electricity in comparison with the other villages.

Stepping into Pestera from a city-girl point of view, this is a village still proud of their tradition. Basking in the last of the warmth of the sun, we hurried into our car, satisfied with the knowledge sponged throughout the trip.

A picture can tell a thousand words and create long-lasting moments. They have a place in the Book of Friendship of Projects Abroad Romania.



Volunteers' gatherings

Special Moments

