

# **An Ethnographic Study of Romanian Vernacular Museums as Spaces of Knowledge-Making and their Institutional Legitimation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This poster presents the findings of an ethnographic study investigating vernacular museums as interactive spaces of embodied knowledge-making for museum makers and visitors at personal levels; and their legitimation through cultural programs and policies at institutional levels. The research approach incorporated autoethnography, collecting data from in-person visits to four vernacular museums. Visits were audio-recorded and photographs captured the researcher's notable moments of self-reflexivity. Visitor impressions from interviews and guestbook comments were also analyzed, as were documents produced by and related to the national-level cultural program that worked to legitimate the 24 vernacular museums that are a part of this study.

Findings suggest that makers present their museums as conceptual journeys that foreground how each maker's idiosyncratic knowledge world entwines with the objects arranged in museum spaces. Museum makers' distinctive perspectives on the past were often a response to perceived problems in the present. Visitors recognized vernacular museums as both contiguous-with-yet-distinct-from institutional museum experiences because of the person-to-person connections they made with museum makers. Vernacular museums are a distinctive type of knowledge institution because of how they foreground personal interpretations of the past that contrast with those found in institutional museums. Museum experts cultivated vernacular museums by adapting and improvising around common museum practices. Vernacular museums are hybrid institutions that insert personal, local and individual perspectives on the past as a complement to and commentary on official institutional representations of heritage in ways that exemplify the participatory and visitor-focused tenets of new museology.

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

museums

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

vernacular museums; knowledge-making; institutional legitimation; Romania; auto-ethnography; embodiment; museum visitor studies; cultural heritage