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EXTRA FUNERARY VOTIVE CRUCIFIXES - ARTIFACTS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Răzvan Ph.D. Gabriela Rusu-Păsărin
The University of Craiova, Romania

ABSTRACT

The community rites performed in the sacred space of the extra funerary votive crucifixes become social artifacts of social communication, supporting the interpersonal relationships within the same nation or community.

The direct experience on the subject has been proven by designing, developing and disseminating the project on "Votive Crucifixes and Border Crosses. Their Role and Meaning in the Life of Rural Settlements in Olt County." The project was developed by the Olt Center for Preservation and Development of Folk Creation in partnership with the University of Craiova Radio România Olténia Craiova and the Stănișoara and Romanian Diocese and funded by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

The purpose of the project was to bring the votive crucifix and the border cross to the attention of both specialists and the general public — precisely, their importance in the evolution of Romanian culture and to attract community involvement in their restitution. Equally important was the increase in the interest of all categories of recipients in order to preserve and promote cultural values representative for Olténia.

The ultimate goal was to support cross crafting.

The information-gathering techniques were the guided interview and the focused interview. Three types of interpreters were applied: figurative (using images), verbal interpreters and harmonic interpreters. They correspond to figurative representations (votive crucifixes near wells), transposed into words (inscribing texts that reveal the genesis of establishment) and harmonic (the text / picture / photo association).

Research findings: Capitalizing on the field research in producing this national project consisted in radio broadcasting information to diverse audiences and compiling a volume of visual documents about votive crucifixes and border crosses.

Conclusions: The research has also documented the interference of modern life that caused atmosphere of sacralness to alter and placed the votive crucifix in an area without religious significance, generating another receptivity in a social communication that partially supports social communica.

Keywords: extra funerary votive crucifixes, symbolic representations, community rites,
INTRODUCTION

The community rites performed in the sacred space of the extra funerary votive crucifixes become social artifacts of social communication, supporting the interpersonal relationships within the same nation or community. At the same time, they protect the archetypal structures.

Sighting the community artifacts that contribute to identifying the symbolic and ritual space and the sense of belonging to this space is an approach that can be supported by the audiovisual communication, by the promotion of those media images that persuade the public.

It is, essentially, what Gerard Holton names *idiotope*, a concept G. Moscovici has used under the name of source-ideas. The audio-visual excels in using specific images that carry out the role of source-ideas, the communicational target being the transmission of the value circuit and the challenge of reflecting on the projected images. These are related to the forms of communication and social representation. In the volume *La psychanalyse, son image et son public* ([10], 1976), G. Moscovici establishes a correspondence between the communication forms of representation: diffusion, propagation, propaganda and opinions, attitudes and stereotypes. The dissemination generates opinions, the propagation generates attitudes and propaganda - stereotypes (opud Curelaru, [2], 2006, 82). Flamant and Rouquette ([5], 2003) proposed a model called the "global architecture of social thinking" which has 4 levels: the higher tier refers to the specific beliefs, norms, values known as the themes; then come the social representations, attitudes and opinions. The author used these integrating models of the social representation sphere to advocate the role of the audio-visual images in creating opinions, attitudes, representations, values and social artifacts, the extra funerary votive crucifix as a source-idea in configuring these representations. The aim of this approach is to explain the effects of this artifact in social communication and in generating the ritual formation process. In this respect, the radio has a fundamental role in the recovery of the collective memory and in explaining the details of reception, leading to new social representations. This in turn leads to the formation of stereotypes, which enrich reality by providing information, not by filtering it. These are also the beliefs of the community and are assimilated by the new generations from their environment under the slogan "it's how we've always done it", which justifies the functionality of the community rite.

I. BROADCASTING THE FIELD RESEARCH – CAPITALIZING ON THE INFORMATION THROUGH RADIO PROGRAMS FOR A DIVERSE AUDIENCE

Field research and making audio-visual programs are stages of a complex process which has a double impact:

- on the public, a direct receiver, which is circumstantial or loyal for various reasons (the constant reception due to the habit of listening to a certain station, the attachment to neighborhood information, interest in the field, the existence of only one radio station in the household and the selection of the most persuasive family member who asserts his/her preference for a media channel etc.);
- on the specialists interested in recent research that focus on the same area of concern or related subjects.

In both cases enhancing the interest for the issue at hand may occur by publicizing the results of the field research and "the layout" in programs with medium and large audiences (especially the traditional, folk ambit in rural areas with listeners aged over 50). The responsibility of the producer (or of the moderator, in the case of dissociation between the editorial functions of design and execution of the programs) is twofold: towards the circumstantial beneficiaries or loyal recipients and towards the research environment. The impact and notoriety of these programs are also conditioned by the assessment perspective: the pleasure of listening (alternating informative segments with musical illustrations), or the discourse validation based on axiological criteria by environment specialists.

The direct experience on the subject has been proven by designing, developing and disseminating the project on "Votive Crucifixes and Border Crosses. Their Role and Meaning in the Life of Rural Settlements in Olt County". The project was developed by the Olt Center for Preservation and Development of Folk Creation in partnership with the University of Craiova Radio România Oltenuţa Craiova and the Sâlciu and Romanari Dioceses and funded by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

1.1 Two reception coordinates: Expected impact - achieved impact

1.1.1 The goal – impact relationship

The primary purpose of the project was to bring the votive crucifix and the border cross to the attention of both specialists and the general public – precisely, their importance in the evolution of Romanian culture and the involvement of all decision factors in preserving the elements already experiencing various stages of decay and restoring them to the cultural circuit in order to ensure their sustainability.

The main goal was to attract community involvement in the restoration of votive crucifixes and the conservation border crosses. Equally important was the increase in the interest of all categories of recipients in order to preserve and promote cultural values representative for Oltenia.

The ultimate goal was to support cross crafting.

Transmitting field information to a diverse audience to create awareness and save these artifacts from oblivion and deterioration occurred through the implementation of programs on Radio România Oltenuţa Craiova, a regional public station of the Romanian Radiobroadcast Society and a presentation site of the targeted objectives. Folk craftsmen, makers of votive crucifixes and border crosses are fewer and fewer. In this context, cataloguing votive crucifixes and border crosses and record their existence, either in writing or in audio-video materials, is imperative. Cross craftsmen are the only ones able to describe in detail both the work processes and the symbolic importance of these objects.

Transmitting information cascades in a persuasive-aggressive form (in a relatively short time) catalyzes the interest in the information corpus and produces the illusion
correlation phenomenon, D. L. Hamilton and R. K. Gifford [6], 1976) have shown that this phenomenon is related to the formation of stereotypes. By transmitting relevant information, within short time frames, about the rites of passage and the symbolism of extra funerary votive crucifixes, the diverse audiences will respond both in a cognitive and an emotional manner. Cognitive - to satisfy the curiosity regarding what was once important to the community (constructing a votive crucifix near a well or by the road, is a fact that can be spotted in the immediate community); emotional - because traditions and beliefs related to constructing and using extra funerary votive crucifixes are as much appreciated today, if only in the memory register. If one can identify such acts, the desire to be involved increases and the target is reached: the symbolic communication drives communion into the community.

1.1.2. The research goal - target audience relationship

The overall objective of the project was to increase the quality of promotional events and to capitalize on the intangible heritage of cross crafting, on the cultural and aesthetic meanings of votive crucifixes and border crosses from the Olt County, restoration the deteriorated objects and introducing them in the national heritage programs.

Secondary objectives were pursued:

- Improving the quality of cultural events centered on the symbolic and religious meanings of votive crucifixes and border crosses in Olt, by ethnological and anthropological research;
- Increasing the visibility of the settlements in Olt, where the practice of using votive crucifixes and border crosses is still known and preserved;
- Diversifying the public of cultural events focused on figurative-symbolic representations of votive crucifixes and border crosses, the cultural-identity elements for Olt County.

The target audiences were chosen according to the above mentioned objectives.

The dissemination of information from field research occurred at the same time as the implementation stages of the research. Broadcasting project themed programs on the local public radio and television stations resulted in immediate public reaction to the information. The interactive programs on Radio România Olivera Craiova certified the public interest in restoring known votive crucifixes and in purchasing new ones, especially near wells and by the roads.

The responsive publics are mainly the inhabitants of rural communities that have known or still construct votive crucifixes in Olt County.

The following issues were targeted: the increase of the audience (age, education, occupation), the diversification of the cultural events public; the involvement of the local community in reconditioning cultural, religious and public use objects, the involvement of the ethnology and anthropology scientific community.

The intensive media coverage of the identification and research stages were meant to create awareness about the symbolic and ritual meaning extra funerary votive crucifixes.
Mannoni (1998) distinguishes between "downstream" and "upstream" social representations. Mannoni separates the representations derived from sources (mental representations, fantasies) from representations which are themselves a source for other cognitive constructions.

The upstream social representations include superstitions and beliefs, at a first, deep level; stories and myths at the intermediate level, and, cliches, stereotypes and prejudices at a level of evidence. The call for beliefs related to votive crucifixes - either by way of construction (inter-familial behavior ban) or by ritual practices on fixed dates or on holidays, supports upstream representations. Radio broadcasts included not only information about the types of votive crucifixes or geographic location, but also stories about their genesis, superstitions of the elders and miracles that took place after acknowledging them as holy places (worship crosses, a place of rest for the traveler). The revival of votive crucifix symbols, beliefs and superstitions was highlighted by the reception this body of information on public radio and local television.

II. EXTRA FUNERARY VOTIVE CRUCIFIXES IN THE SYMBOLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

The symbolic consciousness of the world is what helps man "look for a sense of existence" giving him "the power of continuously reconstructing the world" (Fuchs, 2014, 38). Symbolic constructions provide the glue between generations, "it's a weak transcendence that leaves room for each individual to participate in the symbolic construction." Extra funerary votive crucifixes and ritual practices arising from their being regarded as social and religious artifacts are included in the space of symbolic communication: a religious artifact in the context of traditional culture, with new meanings at the present time, when the modern mixes with the sacred.

2.1. Votive crucifixes - community documents

Field research offers the possibility of mirroring the document image as it withstood time and as it was stored in the memory of the community. Such an approach requires not only the involvement of the researcher in the act of observation and evaluation, but also the community involvement in reconstructing the history of the place. The reconstruction is twofold: the researcher is interested in oral history and community document whereas the community certifies the document and its layers in accordance to the ages and generations who have contributed to its construction and preservation. The immediate effect is community awareness of the value of our research on Votive crucifixes in Ol County, and the effect on the long term will be community involvement in saving such proof of heritage material from deterioration and abandonment.

The typology of extra funerary votive crucifixes (crossroad crucifixes, road crucifixes - places of worship and confessions, shelter trinity monuments with or without a porch, trinity churches built of stone, chapel trinity, well votive crucifixes) supports our attempt of bio-information identification process in two ways: as expressive processing - expressing reactions to certain types of situations and operational processing, focused on the external environment to meet certain needs (e.g. a shelter).
The records about votive crucifixes attest their functionality over time, as well as their adherence to a particular area. Extra funerary votive crucifixes in Olț County are the most numerous and have multiple meanings.

Hence the role of the radio coverage. These stories are “frames”, the concept developed by Erving Goffman: program producers emphasize issues that matter, activate emotional contexts, rules and rituals of interaction. This is media framing “a scheme of event interpretation generated by the manner in which the media constructs the event” (details in [1], Becciu, 2013). Entman (p. 2003) considers the “frame” to be a mechanism of influencing public opinion. The interpretation frame includes visual elements that have cultural resonance (“they draw attention and have an emotional charge” [3], 2003 p. 417), they are reiterated to impress upon people’s minds, have the power to reactivate the images of the past. Entman’s cognitive mechanism is imperative for the radio communication context of cognitive: “the cascading flow of influence”: uttering a word mentally produces various connections between situations, images, people. It is the process that generates the semantic of the multistage radio discourse. Thus, expectations were created, as well as the desire to recover extra funerary votive crucifixes as symbols and even to acquire them from cross craftsmen in Olț County.

2.2.1. Extra funerary votive crucifixes and their significance in the semantics of community space

They are the most numerous and have diverse functions. Road votive crucifixes have various roles: to provide the sacred dimension of space, to purify the place, to mark the entrance to a village and, in the case a stranger intrudes into family space (in this case, the community), it “cleans up the place”, the stains of possible violations of the thought or deed.

A memorable image in the settlement of Curtigori, Prunășeni village was found. The priest, Mirel Turcanu, turned a road votive crucifix into a place of worship and confession. As the distance between settlements is long, people find it difficult to walk all the way to the White Church. The priest transformed the road votive crucifix, a place of retreat and waiting for public transport, into a religious space, where services are held and people come to give their confession. The Church thus meets the believers needs and turns the votive crucifix into a place of worship.

Road crucifixes have various roles: shelter crucifixes may have a porch, with benches and a wooden table, or just icons painted on wood on the interior walls or just framed icons. By placing them there the space becomes sacred and travelers have a place of rest and worship. Another shelter votive crucifix is in Dejști, Văleniși, it has large painted icons that commemorate name list of the living and the dead. They are impressive due to their many meanings of the interior details: documents, icons, a place of retreat and meditation. The same obvious role of shelter, not only for travelers, but also for votive crucifixes themselves, is held by the votive crucifix at the border between Olț and Valea counties, in the village of Donești, the settlement of Văleniși. Even nowadays two votive crucifixes are made when a person dies: one is put at the “head” in the cemetery, the other is raised 40 days after the death, when the water is poured forth (rites of passage). When they “fall in time”, are brought into this “votive crucifix shelter”. They are thus protected, and the generations recover the symbolic artifacts.
The symbolic communication in this case activates three types of interpreters:

- figurative (using images) – they correspond to figurative representations (well votive crucifixes)
- verbal, translated through words (inscribing texts that reveal the genesis)
- harmonic – they correspond to harmonic representations (text / picture / photo combination).

These interpreters reports to the cultural competence of the receiver.

Ahmed Harri (111), 1974 demonstrated that culture is ultimately reduced to an enormous amount of messages. In popular culture, messages are subject to the same classification made by A. Harri in The Sociology of Culture: audio and visual messages. The audio messages play an intensive role in the radio coverage of social artifacts: speaking into the microphone, the music illustration and soundtrack and the dramatization of the context (sounds, the language of things). McLuhan (18), 1967 called the “medium-message relationship” essential. Radio broadcasts thus become actors of the culture socio-dynamics and catalyze community life. However, one has to keep in mind an important issue. The interference of modern life has altered the atmosphere of sacredness and placed the votive crucifix in the utility zone, lacking religious significance. It is a modern shelter, a trinity monument with a telephone, electricity, chairs, but also commemoration name lists of the dead. The image recalls the idea of crypts designed for residential purposes, or burial chambers that have become homes for family members who cannot let go of a deceased person. Therefore, the interference of the modern bears away the meaning of the ritual pattern.

In Olt, most votive crucifixes are well votive crucifixes. Most are called “Healing Springs” or “Spring of the Virgin”.

They have a complex history and are proof of what was called the festive and ritual “effervescence”. The rites of passage are the most effective as integrators. Individual emotions lead to the awareness of belonging to the community and to freely participating in the events of the community. Well votive crucifixes are the most powerful symbols in this respect. Read votive crucifixes are numerous in Olt county. Wooden or brick, they are home to a spring or just places to relax. All of them have drawn, painted icons or religious paintings, which sanctify the place and enable the passenger to unburden his soul in prayer. Bio-information processes are accessed, such an emotional processing that involves expressive emotional reactions to certain situations.

A higher form of motivation, architectural design, purpose and collective mental representation are church-like votive crucifixes, made of stone, trinity chapels of sacred precinct. From this last category, church votive crucifix for confession and service in Curtișoara, Proșepști village is the most comprehensive representation: a place of prayer, a confession place, a place for holding religious services, a shelter from weather conditions.

From the social communication one gains access to social communion through the rite of incorporation. The rite stimulates the sense of belonging to the community, ritual communions underlying community reunion and the respect for tradition. The regeneration of society has thus been produced and the rites have remained viable in all
historical periods. Social regeneration, the revitalization of belonging to the community and the communication function, as the only way to feel "together" were catalyzed by the radio coverage, which itself has become a ritual. The sequences with the largest audience proved to be those that gave the reason behind the genesis. The empathy and identification process obtained the public reaction.

**CONCLUSION**

Capitalizing on the field research in producing this national project consisted in radio broadcasting information to diverse audiences and compiling a volume of visual documents about votive crucifixes and border crosses.

It has already been noted that the metamorphosis of popular and religious elements, their transition from the spiritual and decorative to social communion. The symbolic communication will enhance social communication and support social communion.

The research has also documented the interference of modern life that caused atmosphere of sacredness to alter and placed the votive crucifix in an area without religious significance, generating another reception in a social communication that partially supports social communication.

The ritual communication highlighted the "interaction ritual" (E. Goffman) socially and culturally integrated (7), P. Lardellier, 2009, an approach supported by the radio coverage of the symbolism of extra funerary votive crucifixes, which certainly revives the collective memory and emotional dimensions of the community.

**REFERENCES**

[1] Buciu C., Sociologia comunicării și a spațiului public, Romania, 2011