

# Brave New World

---

**Romanian Migrants'  
Dream Houses**



# **Brave New World**

**Romanian Migrants' Dream Houses**

Edited by Raluca Beta and Beate Wild

Bucharest 2016

#### CIP Description of the National Library of Romania

#### Brave New World – Romanian Migrants' Dream Houses

ed.: Raluca Betea, Beate Wild. – Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Institute, 2016

Includes bibliographical references

ISBN 978-973-577-679-4

I. Betea, Raluca (ed.)

II. Wild, Beate (ed.)

314.7

Generously supported by



## Contents

- 4** Dreams Realised  
The Exhibition Project  
**Beate Wild**

### The Exhibition

- 10** Exhibition Concept  
**Xaver Victor Schneider**

### Essays

- 40** Romanian Migration and the Construction Boom:  
Multidisciplinary Perspectives  
**Raluca Betea**

### Migration and Social Recognition

- 48** Reading a House.  
Migration, Households and Modernity  
in Post-communist Rural Romania  
**Vintilă Mihăilescu**

- 58** Prestige or Economic Calculus?  
Reflections on Migrants' Houses in Romania  
**Remus Gabriel Anghel**

- 68** From Occidental Houses to *case făloase*.  
Material Cultures of Success in Oaş Country, Romania  
**Daniela Moisa**

### Transnational Dimensions

- 84** Reflections on the State's Role in the Development-  
Migration Nexus: Romania at the Turn of Millennium  
**Romana Careja**

- 94** "We feel at home, away from home."  
Changing Domestic and Public Spaces  
between Romania and Italy  
**Pietro Cingolani**

- 106** Objects that Travel with Emigrants from Maramureş  
**Anamaria Iuga**

- 118** The Left-Behind Kids are Alright  
**Lina Vdovii**

- 124** Photographing the New Romanian Village  
**Petruț Călinescu**

### Urban Architecture in a Rural Setting

- 134** Houses of Cajvana:  
Concrete Past, Uncertain Future  
**Amelia Tue**

- 146** The Transformation Experienced in the Domestic  
Space of Romanian Migrants' Homeland:  
the Village of Marginea  
**Andra Jacob Larionescu**

- 156** Travelling in Architecture through Europe  
**Rudolf R. Gräf**

### The Old vs a New Cultural Landscape

- 170** Assembled Territories.  
Constructing Houses, Socialising  
Resources in Moisei, Maramureş  
**Iulia Hurducaş**

- 178** Rural Landscape and Migration  
**Mihaela A. Hărmănescu**

- 186** The Changing Face of Bukovina.  
The Transformation of the Cultural Landscape  
**Carmen Chaşovschi**

- 198** Biographies

- 200** Impressum

# Romanian Migration and the Construction Boom: Multidisciplinary Perspectives

Raluca Betea

After letting the exhibition photos and texts speak for themselves, the next part of this volume brings together under one roof a number of essays offering a variety of interpretations and approaches to the manifold aspects of Romanian migration. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a good deal has been written on this theme. The last few years have witnessed the diversification of the topics analysed here, explored not only by individual and group initiatives but also within the framework of large, international projects. The phenomenon of the conspicuous houses erected by Romanian migrants in their home culture has also begun to receive more attention, becoming the subject of sustained research conducted by scholars and artists alike.

The exhibition project *Brave New World – Romanian Migrants’ Dream Houses*, which was on display in Berlin between November 2015 and June 2016, makes use of the available research results with the aim of presenting various facets of this widespread, present-day phenomenon that is representative of the Romanian countryside as a whole. Taking into consideration the complexity of the topic and the wide range of interconnected subjects, the exhibition was accompanied by a rich and varied programme of events including film screenings, book presentations and talks which explored the theme in more depth. The interdisciplinary dimension was revealed at its best in the workshop entitled *Brave New World – Migration, the Construction Boom and its Consequences* which took place from 21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015. From very different perspectives, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, photographers, journalists, ethnologists, architects, and landscape architects all shed light on this phenomenon. Many of the participants elaborated on the issues and conclusions addressed in the workshop in the form of essays included in this volume. With the purpose of presenting even more approaches and case studies besides those of the workshop’s participants, we have invited other specialists to contribute here on topics which were only briefly dealt with in the exhibition. Furthermore, the aim of this volume is to contribute to debates in migration studies and constitute a starting platform for broader, cooperative projects on an international scale.

The architecture of the home is one of the most important forms of cultural production through which the inhabitant’s status is asserted. In their quest for better opportunities, Romanian migrants decide to make use of this medium even more by constructing imposing houses in their country of origin. Only here, in the middle of their native community, do the new buildings manage to become a validation of the prosperity and social position of their owners. In view of this prominent aspect, the essay section of this volume opens with the topic of *Migration and Social Recognition* by placing under scrutiny various concepts such as status change, identity, prestige and success.

Anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu structures his text around the meanings of the new constructions, offering a valuable summary of different approaches to answering the question of why migrants are building such houses in Romania’s rural regions. Seeking to reveal the

causes of the occurrence and the spread of this phenomenon, Mihăilescu undertakes a historically contextualised analysis focusing on the social and economic dimensions prevalent during the communist era and the beginning of the 1990s. One of the most exciting aspects of this article is that it sheds light on the dynamics of the process and its most recent changes. If for more than a decade the ‘must-haves’ – continually replaced by newer fashionable trends – have always been Western-oriented, recent years have seen a rapid and contrastive shift with the appearance of ‘rustic’ houses. Although these new buildings stage the rural existence, they simultaneously represent a symbol of modernity for their inhabitants.

If the preceding article analyses the whole phenomenon on a national scale, Remus Gabriel Anghel focuses in his paper on its regional variations inside Romania. From the position of a researcher who has dealt extensively in his PhD dissertation with the status and transnational lifestyle of different ethnic migrants, Anghel now addresses for the first time the topic of migrants’ houses. He proposes a new comparative analysis of four localities in distinct geographical areas. The different socio-economic developments and infrastructure of these localities, together with certain migratory patterns, have caused significant distinctions regarding migrants’ investments in their houses. With respect to the town of Borșa, which is characterised by a massive process of building large constructions, Anghel argues that besides the economic argument we are also dealing with another factor, namely individual and kinship prestige.

Daniela Moisa’s contribution narrows the centre of focus even more, from a regional level down to that of the specific area of Oaş Country. This case study is of utmost importance because Oaş has experienced a high emigration rate from the very beginning, and the construction boom in the context of transnational mobility has witnessed a great expansion here. This essay takes one step further the author’s PhD results involving the dream houses erected by the Oaş people. It goes beyond the analysis of the relationship between architecture and identities by proposing an anthropology of success that manages to provide insightful results. Moisa focuses on special developments characteristic to this area, such as the significant role of the new buildings in matrimonial alliances and the achievement of recognition within the bounds of social compliance.

The focus of the following papers shifts from the social meanings of the new houses to the transnational level of the phenomenon, with the aim of offering a deeper understanding of the lives of migrants who move across national borders. Various aspects of the topic *Transnational Dimensions* are placed at the heart of the analysis.

Of all the volume contributors, Romana Careja is the only one who makes use of a political-economic approach by extensively analysing a very important facet of the large-scale Romanian labour migration. She examines the Romanian state policy with regards to the effects of mobility and the use of migrants’ transnational resources towards economic growth. The local and national authorities have tried through regulatory frameworks and both tangible and intangible support to sustain the Romanian migrants in generating productive economic activities back home. The present research comes to the conclusion that, despite these measures, the outcomes have not managed to achieve the expected results.

Pietro Cingolani sheds light on migrants’ home-making practices using valuable field research material collected over a period of almost a decade from both a typical migrant-producing village (Marginea) and a popular destination city (Torino). In this way, the author proposes a long-term analysis and a multi-layered comparative perspective in order to explain how Romanian migrants relate to their homes in both countries. If the focus of the other articles is concentrated especially on the private sphere, a distinctive point of view is given in Cingolani’s essay, which pays special attention to the transnational strategies developed to appropriate the public spaces.

The broad theme of home-making is also examined by ethnologist Anamaria Iuga, but from another perspective, that of migrating objects which travel in a transnational space. The centre of interest is shifted in this case to Maramureş migrants working in southern Spain. Anamaria Iuga brings into sharper focus the traditional home-made art objects brought by the Romanian villagers into their host countries by studying their usage and meanings. Further, the interior decoration of the new constructions is compared to that of villagers' traditional houses and the ones they currently inhabit in Spain.

A completely different aspect of transnationalism forms the subject of the essay *The Left-Behind Kids are Alright*. Journalist Lina Vdovii examines in depth the so-called 'Euro-orphans' phenomenon, which constitutes a significant consequence of the East-West migratory movement. The author moves away from those studies which present only the multiple negative effects of the phenomenon by proposing an emphasis on the long-term positive outcomes as well. Writing in a very personal style, including interviews with young people and making use of her direct experience, Vdovii argues that the transnational advantages offered children by having migrant parents, of which many indeed make use, should ultimately not be underestimated.

From the photographer's point of view, Petruţ Călinescu describes how he experienced the ongoing changes to the countryside caused by migration during his project *Pride and Concrete*. This represents the most ample photographic documentary project to record the complex mechanism underlying the building process of 'proud houses' in Romania. Many of his photos taken between 2000 and 2015 are to be found in the exhibition *Brave New World*. In his essay *Photographing the New Romanian Village*, Petruţ Călinescu also examines the lives cut across national boundaries of migrants from Oaş County. By commuting between Certeze village and Paris, their activities, social interactions and even their relationship to their houses vary between the two different worlds.

With the section *Urban Architecture in a Rural Setting*, the perspective moves again to the national scale and to the buildings erected in the home country. This time, however, it pays special attention to the impact of the new architecture on rural settlements and the relationship between modernity and traditional values. Amelia Tue presents the results of her anthropological field research on the new houses carried out in the 'village town' of Cajvana. Her examination of the building process reveals different aspects of the often practiced 'architecture without architects'. A formal analysis of the architectural elements and interior design shows that differences exist between the new and old houses not only in terms of size and materials, but also in certain features inspired from the owners' host countries. Even though the initial phase of this phenomenon was characterised by buildings of quite considerable size, Tue notices a fast-changing countermovement caused by the economic crisis and its future uncertainties, which prefers as an alternative the construction of ground-level houses.

The case study of Marginea village again comes under scrutiny in the paper by Andra Jacob Larionescu. A comparison of the old and new reveals dissimilarities in architecture, but also differences in other aspects that are only briefly addressed by other contributors, such as the interior decorations, distribution of space and room functions. Even though the buildings integrate urban elements adopted from Western models, the old practices still survive through the preservation of the outbuildings' traditional layout and the use of a second kitchen.

During the *Brave New World* exhibition and its research phase, we discovered that especially in Western societies misunderstandings of the Romanian reality persist which can often lead to prejudices. One of them consists in the fact that the construction boom phenomenon in the context of external labour migration is often mistaken for the immense houses built by Roma communities. In order to correct these misinterpretations and provide a better understanding,

we make use of the already existing research and field documentation undertaken by architect Rudolf R. Gräf. He has studied extensively the architecture of the so-called 'gypsy palaces'. His essay is the first attempt to compare the houses built by a small subsection of the Kalderash people with those belonging to Romanian migrants in the Oaş region. Here, we face two distinctive phenomena characterised by completely different cultural and historical contexts, even though the initial examination may indeed reveal some common features. With respect to the architectural language, both ethnic groups integrate urban elements into their buildings. Yet, if the houses in Oaş are very diverse in typology while still alluding directly to the 'modern' Western aesthetic, the 'gypsy palaces' have initially developed a specific architecture which combines elements inspired from the Romanian national style and other features. However, the dissimilarities are not at all reduced to forms and appearances. The 'symbolic' analysis undertaken by Gräf emphasises the fact that there are different meanings embedded in the new houses stemming from the traditional customs of the Roma people.

The volume ends with a look at the future developments of the phenomenon, by focusing on the complex interactions between people and their natural environment. *The Old vs a New Cultural Landscape* brings into discussion and raises questions about the ongoing transformation of the rural landscape and the ecological consequences of the construction boom.

An interesting approach is suggested by Iulia Hurducaş, who takes into consideration the recent shift 'from form to process' in the field of architecture. She applies it fruitfully to the case of houses in the village of Moisei, Maramureş County. Her research redirects from the focus on formal architectural language and the people who play an important role in the creation of these forms (foremen, owners and architects). The novelty of this paper is that it proposes a territorial approach to the process of house-building. By comparing the three types of houses arising over the last century – the 'elderly houses', the brick houses of the 1980s and the new buildings erected by migrants – the author analyses in depth all the aspects included in the process of construction: materials, relations that socialise these materials, and the social relations of the people involved.

A theoretical framework around the notion of cultural landscape represents the biggest part of Mihaela A. Hărmănescu's paper. The author also refers to certain recent dynamics which are taking place within the cultural landscape of Romania's rural regions as a result of external migration. One important conclusion that can be derived from this essay is that the construction boom affects the rural landscape through changing settlement and household typologies, intensification of leisure-oriented and non-agricultural activities, and the purchase of rural properties for tourism.

If the impact of tourism was mentioned only briefly before, Carmen Chaşovschi's paper takes the time to examine the subject in detail. The author devotes her study to the region of Bukovina, one of Romania's well-known destinations promoted intensively as authentic and traditional. Taking into account the high rate of tourism investment enjoyed by this area, the research identifies various causes leading to disruptions in the cultural landscape of the villages. A non-interventionist policy of public administration, limited restrictions in landscape planning, and the inappropriate refurbishing of public spaces and of public and private constructions are listed among the most important.

Just as the phenomenon itself is one still in process, exposed to different unpredictable shifts, so is its research. Even more as yet unconsidered aspects and case studies wait to be addressed, and we hope this volume will be a step towards further interdisciplinary research discussions and will arouse interest in new questions and directions.



**ISBN 978-973-577-679-4**