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UDC / UDK 069.53(497.5 Kumrovec)

Review / Pregledni rad

Received / Primljeno: 21.10.2004.

Accepted / Prihvaćeno: 28.12.2004.

Zagorski štacun: the Old-Fashioned Shop of Zagorje: Reflections on the New Permanent Museum Display

The interior of the restored residential house at the entrance to the Old Village Museum in Kumrovec is planned to be redesigned on the model of small village shops, called štacuni, typical of the 1930s. Since the house was redecorated twenty years ago and equipped with inventory necessary for the souvenirs sale (a massive sales counter - pult, as well as shelves for textile goods with small compartments for various wooden containers and earthenware containing grains, flour or sugar), minor preparatory interventions on the existing wooden equipment will be necessary.

Ključne riječi: Old Village Museum (Kumrovec), ethnographic collections, permanent exhibition

Introduction

An open-air museum, such as the *Old Village Museum* in Kumrovec, makes it possible to present some specific themes in an existing ethnographic space. Based on this, we proposed another permanent museum display - *The Old-Fashioned Shop of Zagorje (Zagorski štacun)* - to be set up. It would be situated in the former souvenir shop at the main road through Kumrovec, just at the Museum entrance. This small low-rise masoned house (*zidanica, hiža mazanka*¹) of rectangular layout is made of stone² and thatched with straw

¹ *hiža mazanka* - a wooden low-rise house painted with blue vitriol

² lomljenjak - construction stone quarried by the villagers out of the river Sutla and the nearby stone-pits

(šop).³ Reconstruction works were carried out to remove the rear-view annexes and the interior partition walls. The well-preserved fireplace was left intact, as well as the tiled baker's oven. The house is separated from the old shop by what used to be the road leading to the nearby river Sutla.

The shop in Kumrovec

The first shop in Kumrovec was owned by a certain Stanišić or Staničić. The informant Hilda Broz could not remember the exact time and site of the shop, because she was very young when her parents told her about it. However, based on relevant data and a faded photograph we can establish with certainty that the shop in the 1880s was owned by Martin Broz. Its rear-view space, looking at the yard, was adapted by the shop owner for his family's housing purposes. The right part was turned into a shop, while the left part was ceded to the elementary school in 1889 and used as a classroom. The shop itself was adapted to the needs of villagers and travellers in horse-drawn or bullock carts taking the well-trodden dirt road from Zagreb to the villages and towns of Zagorje or Styria. The travellers stopped for some refreshment in the form of good home-made plum brandy and the store was also frequently a meeting place for the village men (*muži*) after business was done. When the new elementary school was built next to the shop in 1891, the owner transformed the former classroom into an inn. The shop and the inn, situated under the same roof, became the social meeting-place of the village, a place for daily discussions, reading fresh newspapers and the imperative enjoyment of drinking home-made spirits out of typical glasses called *fraklec*.⁴

By 1935/1936, the Kumrovec shop changed several owners. One worth mentioning is Josip Ahec, the owner of a grocer's shop dealing primarily with the purchase and sale of eggs, walnuts, beans, poppy seeds, carobs (*rožičak*), tartar,⁵ gallnuts,⁶ bleaching agents (*plajbalo*)⁷ and other foodstuffs and household articles.

In compliance with new legislation adopted in 1947, the shop became a subsidiary of Josip Ahec's main store located in the nearby Zagorska Sela. In the same year the shop was nationalized and transferred to the ownership of the Peasant Procurement and Sales Cooperative (Seljačko-nabavno-prodajna zadruga) Kumrovec, then tran-

³ šop – rye or wheat straw used as roof thatch

⁴ *fraklec* – a half-decilitre glass for brandy or other spirits

⁵ tartar (vinski kamen, srijež) – deposit formed on the sides of wine barrels; removed after wine racking and used in the chemical industry

⁶ gallnut – irregularly-shaped outgrowth on oak leaves caused by the parasite gall gnat; used since old age in tanning due to its high tannin content

⁷ *plajbalo* (Germ. Bleiweiss) – white lead in the form of balls; added to the laundry washing water

sformed into the company *Pobjeda* (Victory) and was later partly managed by *Tigocenttar* of Zabok, a major store chain of the time. After the opening of the new department store *NAMA* (*Narodni Magazin; People's Warehouse*) with Zagreb-based management, the old shop was closed in 1962 following a political directive.

In this context it should be mentioned that 1936 saw the opening of the shop *Pavlin*⁸ in the Slovenian village Bistrica na Sutli across the river Sutla. A part of the customers switched from Kumrovec to *Pavlin*, a habit that was passed on from father to son and still exists in many families. At that time, people went shopping once a month, with the exception of smokers who visited the shops more frequently, trading eggs for cigarettes.

In the 1930s, the size of the shop mattered less important than the size of the warehouse, which was usually situated on the back side. The warehouse space was important because shop owners purchased large quantities of goods delivered by travelling salesmen on horse-drawn carts once or twice a year. Inhabitants of the surrounding villages also brought their products (eggs, walnuts, mushrooms, apples, beans, prunes, raisins and other dried fruit) to the warehouse, which was called the *purchase of land products*. Cash was seldom used in trading. Men and children would collect hen eggs in the morning to trade them for a couple of cigarettes, two decilitres of oil, half a litre of paraffin, a dozen dekagrams of sugar, or a package of colourful bonbons at the store.

The new display

The idea to set up a new display in the described house (*hiža mazanka*) is justified because the existing inventory, formerly used by the souvenir shop, can be partly utilized after minor preparatory interventions. This refers to wall shelves and the massive counter over which goods were sold (*pult*). It will be necessary to remove glass on some shelves and parts of the counter and redo the existing shelves to resemble the ones typical of village stores from the early twentieth century. It will also be necessary to paint the entire room in the traditional whitewash technique, renew the thatched roof and paint the exterior wooden areas with appropriate paint or blue vitriol.

However, the entire structure will also require some major interventions. A decade ago, the Museum allowed this small house to be used by the municipality of Kumrovec, after its premises had been destroyed by the great fire in the department store. Now that the local authorities left the house to return to their renovated premises, it is opportune to realize the Museum Plan and Program decision of 2004 and set up a permanent display to represent faithfully the interior of a village shop. The field

⁸ Alojz Pavlin is the founder of the first shop in Bistrica na Sutli in Slovenia. The shop management was passed on to his son and grandson.

research and the acquisition of exhibits started two years ago, representing a basis to begin with the development of a scenario that precedes the setting up of any permanent display.

Besides the basic inventory mentioned, the shop needs to be equipped with a table balance and cattle weighing balance, a fifty litre wooden container with a lid (*fah*⁹) used for storing flour and grains (oats, buckwheat). There were also smaller cases in which shopkeepers stored delicatessen goods, such as rice, sugar, bonbons, biscuits, raw coffee and the like. In the 1930s, people usually purchased raw coffee because it was cheaper than roast coffee, which was sold in protective packaging (*ambalaža*). The flour trough (*meltruga*¹⁰) will also find its place in the shop.

Samples of original trademarked wooden, tin and cardboard packaging will also have to be placed in one corner of the room. It would be possible to acquire, with the help of sponsors, bottles with fruit juices and mineral water, as well as glasses and appliances of old Croatian factories. *Union* bonbons and *Bizjak* biscuits and bonbons, which were in high demand in the 1930s, were regularly delivered in tin boxes up to 5 litres. Bonbons were held in glass jars, out of which the shopkeepers could easily scoop out five or six dekagrams of bonbons for children. Such glass jars with colourful bonbons stood on the counter (*pult*) of every shop, so as to be easily visible and attractive to children. This is just an example illustrating how salespeople always knew how to market their products, not knowing that several decades later such promotion would grow into a respectable economic discipline.

For the purposes of the display, we acquired already an old wooden case with compartments for the transport of beverages, a crate (*kašeta*) with mineral water bottles with old, very picturesque labels of the producer *Rogaška Slatina*, two-decilitre glass bottles with ceramic caps which used to contain *šabesa* (elder-berry juice), once a very popular refreshing soft drink. We also acquired a beautiful, well-preserved object from the old Kumrovec shop – an oval glass cover for cheese, 35 cm in diameter, a 5-kilogram tin container for home-made lard with the label *Gavrilović Petrinja*, a tin biscuit box with the label *Wolf Bjelovar*, a wooden case with compartments of varying sizes used for the classification of eggs offered for purchase, as well as tea and oil tins of several producers.

It will be necessary to equip the display with a range of household articles commonly seen on the shelves of village shops. Tartar (*vinški kamen*) was highly demanded, while tanners often purchased the very sought-after gallnuts (*skipek*). The shops also purchased flax seeds for the factory in Mevode, Slovenia. Seeds were traded between the villagers, often also at fairs. The first factory-made mercantile seeds were sold by shops in cardboard packages or linen bags. It is worth to mention the clover and

⁹ *fah* (Germ. Fach) – case, compartment

¹⁰ *meltruga* – a trough or wooden case, approximately one meter high, with a sliding lid and compartments, used for storing flour, salt, corn or rice

grass seeds produced by the company *Sever*, today *Semenarna* of Ljubljana. Traditional packages and boxes with original trademarks of sugar, salt and oil producers must also be displayed on the shelves. The cases (*fahovi*) and flour troughs (*meltruge*) should contain wheat and corn flour, rice and diverse grains such as oats, rye, barley, millet, wheat and corn, which was ladled out by the shopkeeper with a wooden scoop and weighed on the table balance. The shop should also exhibit bigger metal containers for butter and lard.

Besides foodstuffs, attention should be paid as well to other articles which were indispensable in every household or home craft. Therefore, the shop should offer matches, needles, threads, soaps, whitening agents (*plajbalo*), textiles, materials in roles and bales, home-made hemp and flax woven cloth, head scarves, male caps with brims on the front – visor caps (*šilt kape*, *šilterice*) and handkerchiefs. The shops gradually obtained shirts, socks, trousers, shoe and boot polish from various factories as well. Around the year 1936, Schiff's *Radion* was obtained by the shops (from today's Osijek factory *Saponija*). There were also various types of hemp cord, cattle chains, haberdashery (ribbons, lace, buttons, buckles, etc.). Shelves will also be equipped with special compartments for various types of nails and wedges. The shop must have a place as well for the school equipment of the time, such as writing tables, sponges, little bags made of maize husk (*cekeri*) often used by pupils instead of school bags, ink bottles, penholders, pens and notebooks.

Conclusion

The renovated masoned building (*zidanica*) of the former shop and inn still has a double function. There is a pastry shop in the left part,¹¹ while the souvenir shop was in the right part. A permanent display evocative of a traditional shop would enrich the experience of the Zagorje village at the turn of the century. It is the intention of the curators and other Museum staff to work respecting cultural heritage and the originality of the rural ambience. The authenticity is visible in eighteen renovated objects of traditional architecture, with permanent displays representing the traditional way of life, handicrafts and the spirit of the early twentieth century. The *Old Shop of Zagorje* could come to a new life as a souvenir shop, offering autochthonous ecological food, surrounded by original exhibits and adapted to the museum needs of the twenty-first century.

Translated by Sanja Novak

¹¹ Since 1984 used by the family Đeferi, who have lived in Kumrovec for 40 years.