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## **Memories of Travel – The *Europeana Migration* project in Romania**

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### **Abstract:**

*Throughout 2018, the European Year of Cultural Heritage, cultural institutions and associations ran a plethora of cultural projects and activities across Europe in order to get people interested and involved in cultural heritage.*

*Europeana – Europe's cultural digital platform, has focused on migration stories to and from Europe aiming in this way to prove that geographical moving of people makes culture richer. In the frame of the Europeana Migration project, Europeana organized 18 collection days in 12 countries collaborating with several museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Europe. The paper describes the outcomes of the Europeana Migration campaign in Romania, organized in partnership with the Library of the 'Lucian Blaga' University in Sibiu in July 2018. Here people have shared their migration stories and have brought also pictures, postcards, embroideries or other objects that had a particular significance for them.*

*Their stories, memories and 'the values they have brought with them' in the new territories and sometimes back home, illustrate the richness of our cultural heritage and common history. They also emphasize the fact that Europe today is the result of a rich flow of people, ideas and values and in fact migration enriches our everyday lives in many ways.*

**Keywords:** migration, European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, digital archive, community engagement

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## The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

In the year 2018 which was declared by the European Parliament and Council ‘*the European Year of Cultural Heritage*’<sup>1</sup> ( EYCH ) a plethora of activities, projects and initiatives related to cultural heritage have been developed across Europe .These activities, run under the slogan : ‘*Our Heritage : where the past meets the future*’ aimed at encouraging more people to discover, better understand and be more involved with Europe’s rich cultural heritage . Reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common European space was another major objective of the Year.

In fact, the *European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018* succeeded<sup>2</sup> in illustrating the important place that cultural heritage occupies in our daily lives, in all its’ shapes and forms: tangible, intangible, natural or digital.

Because cultural heritage shapes our identities and everyday lives and it can be found not only in Europe's towns and cities, natural landscapes and archaeological sites but also in literature, art and objects, in the crafts we learn from our ancestors.

## Europeana Migration and the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

As part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, *Europeana* - Europe’s Digital Platform for cultural heritage, has developed community collection days on the topic of migration.

In frames of the *Europeana Migration* project, these campaigns have been organized in partnership with museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Europe – a truly collaborative work involving more than 40 partners.

### *Why focusing on Migration?*

The Europe we inhabit today is the result of migration, as generation after generation of people spread across the continent and beyond and carried their ideas, values and traditions with them.

The goal of the project was to use people’s objects and memorabilia, ranging from family photographs to letters and postcards or recipes to create a digital archive that tells the story of Europe and the people who live here. These objects and stories are harvested alongside items from museums across Europe, the digital archive being available for all to discover and use for education, research, inspiration or pleasure.

Harry Verwayen, acting Executive Director of the Europeana Foundation explained better the objectives of these campaigns:

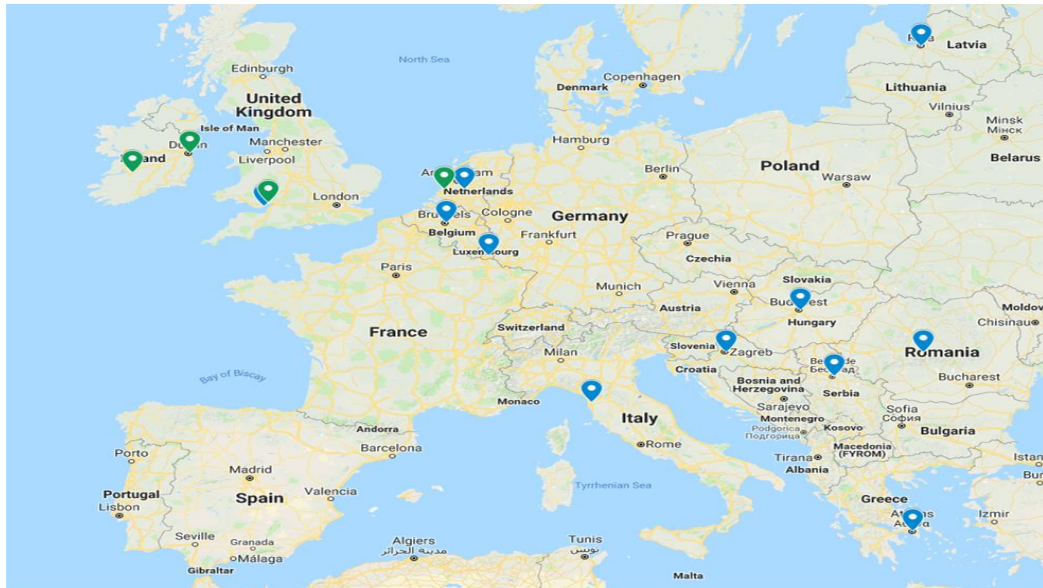
‘Everybody has a story to tell about their origins, and the moments that shaped their lives. We want people to share those stories and the objects that tell them, and to help us bring them

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<sup>1</sup> Decision (EU) 2017/864 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on a European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2017/864/oj>

<sup>2</sup> [https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/news/european-year-cultural-heritage-what-are-outcomes\\_en](https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/news/european-year-cultural-heritage-what-are-outcomes_en)

together online. In that way we can celebrate the diversity and richness of the cultural heritage that is being passed on generation after generation, all over Europe’



**Figure 1. 18 Collection days have been held in 12 countries, Europeana Migration CC BY-SA**

### **Europeana Migration collection days in numbers:**

- More than 600 stories were shared, with nearly 1,000 objects digitized at museums, galleries, libraries and archives throughout Europe
- 18 collection day events took place in 12 countries
- More than 3,000 people attended
- Stories are available in 16 languages, from 100 countries across the world

### **The Europeana Migration Campaign in Romania**

The Europeana Migration event in Romania<sup>3</sup>, which was the 6<sup>th</sup> in the collection days’ series<sup>4</sup> has been held on 13-14 July 2018 at the University Library ‘Lucian Blaga’ in Sibiu, in cooperation with the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Romanian Academy in Sibiu.

At this event, entitled [Roads of Remembrance and Identity – Migration Stories from Romania](#)<sup>5</sup>,

<sup>3</sup> <https://pro.europeana.eu/event/europeana-migration-collection-day-sibiu-roads-of-remembrance-and-identity-migration-stories-from-romania>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/collections/migration/collection-days.html>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/search?q=proxy\\_dcterm\\_isPartOf%3A%22Roads%20of%20Remembrance%20and%20Identity%20-%20Migration%20Stories%20from%20Romania%2C%20Sibiu%2C%20Romania%2C%202018-07-13%E2%80%932018-07-14%22&view=grid](https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/search?q=proxy_dcterm_isPartOf%3A%22Roads%20of%20Remembrance%20and%20Identity%20-%20Migration%20Stories%20from%20Romania%2C%20Sibiu%2C%20Romania%2C%202018-07-13%E2%80%932018-07-14%22&view=grid)

contributors of different ages (from 20 to 90 years old) took part and shared their personal or their family's migration story.

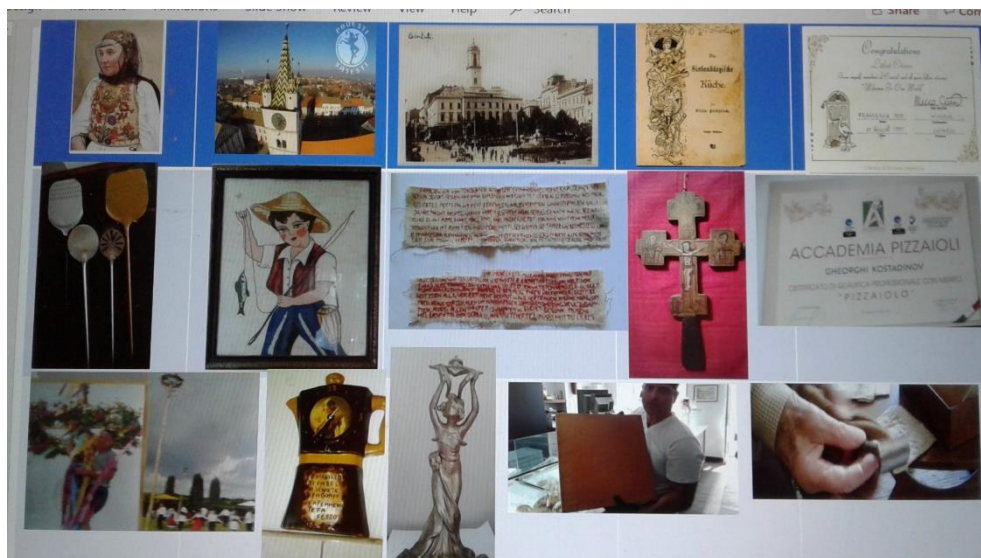
Stories involved seven countries from two continents like Germany, United States of America, Canada, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine and have been written in Romanian or English.

27 digitized items and 16 interesting stories have been added to the Europeana Migration archive.

The event was organized in a similar format with the *Europeana 1914-1918* project, the other successful crowdsourcing project developed by Europeana and based on the [Oxford Community Collection Model](#)<sup>6</sup>.

According to this model, the public was invited to participate either directly on the established community collecting days or by adding a picture of an item or type in a story online on the Europeana migration online platform dedicated to contributors. At the collecting days, people were invited to bring their documents, objects, personal stories and other migration related memorabilia to be digitized and the stories to be recorded.

People have been specifically encouraged to bring with them some objects that tell part of their family's migration stories, as when someone is asked 'tell us your family's migration story', they may not know where to start from. But stories built around some objects become more concrete and tangible and the resulted digital collection, more like a 'museum' one. Objects are also, many times concrete testimonies about important moments of life or historical times, about family traditions or just happy times in someone's life.



**Figure 2. Objects and documents collected during Europeana Migration Campaign in Sibiu  
Europeana Migration CC BY-SA**

<sup>6</sup> <http://blogs.it.ox.ac.uk/runcoco/2013/06/24/the-oxford-community-collection-model/>

## Stories and objects related to diverse topics and themes

People have told stories about objects/ themes that speak to their family's culture and identity, covering also some important moments of a daily life:

- Customs and traditions: The Saxon Kronenfest, Old German Saxon Dances
- Traditional food and recipes: old family cookbooks, family recipes, objects used to make traditional pizza and pastry
- Happy times from childhood: family embroidery to remember those moments
- Traditional costumes or handmade embroideries
- Study abroad
- The story of creating a blog especially dedicated to the life, traditions, stories of the Saxons in Transylvania
- Stories about persecutions in the communist regime or the exodus of Romanians from Ukraine during the Soviet invasion in WWII

## Pizza and traditional food: a slice of migration history

Stories about food have been collected at all the events, involving famous international dishes as pizza, or family recipes or cookbooks and their' marvelous travel. A theme so important for people daily's life like food, was very likely to be illustrated at a migration roadshow, so we have discovered in Sibiu the travel story of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Transylvanian cookbook between Germany and Romania or the necessary ingredients to make a traditional good pizza.

Gheorghii, a Bulgarian man who trained in Italy to be a pizzaiolo and now owns a pizzeria in Romania, shared us his desires :

'My strong wish is to carry on the tradition of making a good and healthy food, to preserve the old pizza recipes, innovating at the same time. I have brought with me from Italy four traditional pizza peels and even some high quality oven plates made from refractory materials from the Vesuvius Area'.

So, even around a so well known dish as pizza, we can have lots of stories about the ingredients and where these have come from, about the best tools and ovens we need to make a pizza like in old times and above all about the communities who have migrated around the world and helped this dish from Italy become a world favourite.

## Important testimonies about historical events

Very interesting stories about important historical events have been gathered at the Europeana Migration Campaign in Sibiu, like the story of Maria Luise Höppner- Roth<sup>7</sup>.

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[https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2084002/contributions\\_7219f250\\_af69\\_0136\\_3cc\\_c\\_6eee0af44847.html?q=europeana\\_collectionName%3A2084002%2A#dcId=1565098492250&p=1](https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2084002/contributions_7219f250_af69_0136_3cc_c_6eee0af44847.html?q=europeana_collectionName%3A2084002%2A#dcId=1565098492250&p=1)

“I emigrated from Romania to Germany in the year 1968, taking with me as important treasures these "letters" sewn on pieces of canvas, which reminded me of the hardest time of my life.” began her story Maria Luise.

Between 1958-1964, I endured the regime of the communist prisons in Romania for the guilt "of having received a letter from a person in Germany".

I remember the extremely hard life in prisons, where you had nothing, not even a piece of paper or a pencil to write a few lines to your loved ones. There were times of complete censorship and control from the communist authorities. I still managed to send some messages to my mother, ‘sewn’ with red thread on some textile pieces cut from my white shirt. The thread came from my blouse and the needle was borrowed from the ‘Men's Room’ (which was handmade from a wire from the beds) (...).

During all that hard times, the only ‘joy’ was that my father, the famous political man Hans Otto Roth was no longer alive at the time I and my brother Herbert were arrested. He died in the year 1953 in the prison of Ghencea. After I was released from prison, in the year 1964 it was impossible for me to find employment suitable to my professional qualification (I graduated the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics in Bucharest in the year 1952).

Unable to find work both for me and my brother, we had to emigrate to Germany. We left the country in 1969 with a lot of sorrow in our souls, without ever really wanting to do this. In Germany I have built a beautiful life for myself, obtaining the PhD in Physics in the year 1972 and working as a researcher in the field of astrophysics.

However, right after the events of December 1989 in Romania, I decided to turn back to my country. From 1990 I have been living in Sibiu with my husband, as I always felt that this is the place I can really call “home”.

And my ‘embroidered’ letters came back with me at home’.

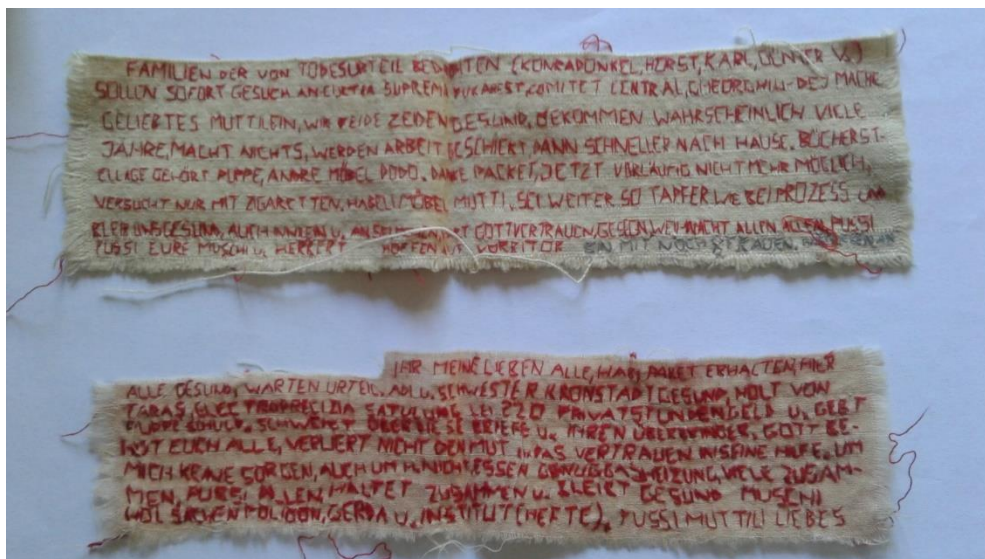


Figure 3. Maria Luise’s letters for her mother, ‘embroidered’ on pieces of shirt  
Maria Luise Höppner-Roth CC BY-SA

## Why is important to share our migration stories?

The contributors have been asked about the reason they wanted to take part in the campaign and about their thoughts regarding migration.

As they described the significance of the objects they brought at the roadshow, they also offered a lot of personal considerations related to the topic:

‘My grandfather brought ‘The Lucky Lady’ statue from USA, to remember he was there, in the ‘country of all possibilities and hopes’. He survived difficult times and the statue was a symbol of that times. It brought him luck all his life ‘.

‘I decided to share my story in order to preserve the historical memory of my family’  
‘It is always important to record contemporary history’

‘We can learn from each other and we can also learn to respect and cherish our common European values and cultural heritage’

‘Knowing history as it was, from first hand testimonies, is important for the actual and future generations’.

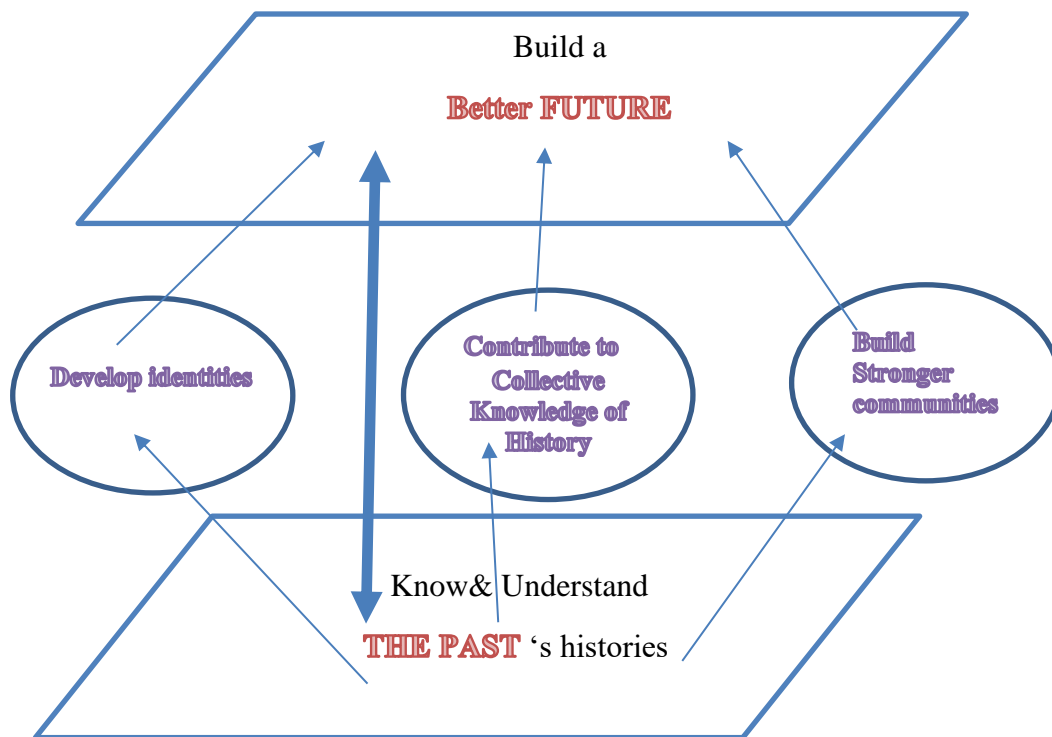


Figure 4. Understanding our past, we can build a better future for our communities

All the contributors agreed that ‘it is important to tell our migration stories’. In this way we know better who we are and where we come from, we contribute to the collective knowledge of history and we build stronger connections within our communities.

In this sense we couldn’t agree more with Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian writer who so much praised storytelling:

“The power of storytelling is exactly this: to bridge the gaps where everything else has crumbled. Because if we still can understand the stories and legend of our neighbor, even if we don’t understand anything else, we will realize that we are not strangers, and we share a lot of values in common”<sup>8</sup>.

## Conclusions

At a time when the word ‘migrant’ is often used in with ‘crisis’, the project managed to present a positive side of migration - that it is not simply a part of European culture, but it has enriched it.

As in other crowdsourcing projects, the event brought new audiences to the hosting library and built new communities of interest around it.

Libraries, along with other cultural institutions play an important role in gathering testimonies and engaging local communities with their history.

Helping people to re-discover their roots and make them aware of the value of diversity and inclusivity , alongside with building such kind of digital archives – ‘a world of memory and remembrance’, are very good ways to build bridges between countries and people and to promote our common cultural heritage.

Because our migration stories describe a whole world where ‘the past meets the future’.

## References

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<https://pro.europeana.eu/post/europeana-celebrates-european-heritage-by-collecting-family-migration-stories-all-over-europe>
- 2 Europeana collections , retrieved July 2019:  
<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/collections/migration>
3. Europeana pro (April 17,2019) , *Looking back at the Europeana Migration campaign*,  
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<sup>8</sup> <http://paulocoelhoblog.com/2008/12/15/todays-question-by-stephane/>