

THE STORY OF „ION BORCEA” NATURAL SCIENCES MUSEUM COMPLEX OF BACĂU, ROMANIA 1958 – 2021 (II - 1987 - 2007)

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ABSTRACT

„Ion Borcea” Natural Sciences Museum Complex of Bacau is a public institution of culture that comprises the following museums: Museum of Natural Sciences, Vivarium, "Victor Anestin" Astronomical Observatory and "Ion Borcea" Memorial House, Racova village, Bacau County.

The paper presents the beginnings of Bacau museography (1987 – 2007), in the field of natural science. In order to appreciate the present, we have to know the history and value the past. The author invites the readers to discover the past which created the premises for the emergence of the actual public cultural institution „Ion Borcea” Natural Sciences Museum Complex of Bacau.

In the years between 1987 and 2007, the first permanent exhibition of biology was closed, the building demolished and the museum moved into a new location. The exhibitions of living exotic birds, autochthonous and exotic species of fish were enriched at the Vivarium. The exhibitions of astronomy and organized sessions of astronomical observations were looking for new beginnings in the location of the former water tour of Bacau city. In that time period, the institution was based in several locations that no longer exist today.

Fortunately, over the years, in Bacau, due to the presence of passionate and interested people, the field of museography of natural sciences flourished. In the paper are used photos from the institution’s archive.

The people, that were part of the institution's team, the authorities of the times and the persons who got involved over the years, as well as the public, are the main characters of the story of the „Ion Borcea” of Natural Sciences Museum Complex of Bacau. Without them, this beautiful place of culture would not exist.

Key words: natural sciences, museum, museography, history, Bacau.

Introduction

“Ion Borcea” Natural Sciences Museum Complex of Bacau has a long and beautiful story.

In order to understand how it became the modern institution that you know, I invite you in a time travel, through the history of the museography dedicated to the natural sciences area, in the region of Bacau.

The museography of Bacau has its beginnings in the year 1957, when Iulian Antonescu was appointed director of the first Museum of Bacau - The Regional Museum.

Recognized for his scientific prestige, but also for his oratorical talent, the historian Iulian Antonescu also demonstrated impressive organizational qualities, managing to set up a real museum network that included 15 museums (in the cities of Bacau, Neamț, Roman and Adjud).

Material and methods

The paper presents some glimpses of the Bacau museography between the years 1987 and 2007, in the field of natural sciences.

The paper is an invitation for the readers, to discover the past which created the premises for the

emergence of the actual public cultural institution „Ion Borcea” Natural Sciences Museum Complex of Bacau. The idea of this paper came as a result of the documentation work made (in 2020, during the pandemics) for the exhibition project dedicated to the history of the institution. The data contained in this paper were collected from the institution’s archive, institution’s library, on line sources and also reconstituted with the help of the former director professor dr. Neculai Barabaș. Special thanks go also to Mr. Mihai Ceucă, for being a real source of Bacau history online and offline also. The information sources were scarce and some years of existence of the institution are not fully covered, supplementary data being necessary. The information was organised considering the existing data. In order to illustrate the content, some relevant pictures were selected, scanned, processed and then arranged in chronological order.

Results and discussions

In the year 1987, the building from Karl Marx Street, no. 2 was handed over for demolition, the authorities of that time considering a modernization project of the area. Having already experienced the opening of the first biology

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exhibition in the previous location, the valuable team prepared to open for the public a new modern biology exhibition that was opened for the public in the year 1995 (Fig. no. 1).



Fig. no. 1 - 1995 - The building and the administrative headquarters of Bacau Museum of Natural Sciences.

The theme of the permanent exhibition of the new Museum of Natural Sciences was ample, inviting the visitor on a journey from the beginnings of the Universe to the present times.

In the first hall, the exhibition was presenting the origin and the appearance of the Universe, the appearance of life on Earth, the evolution of living organisms, plants and animals, but also the evolution of mankind (Fig. no. 2).

In the second room, the exhibition referred to organisms and the trophic relations between them in ecosystems (aquatic, forest), with references to the species that are present in Romania. Noteworthy were the exhibits from the malacology collection, which illustrated the fauna of the seas and oceans.



Fig. no. 2 - Images from the hall dedicated to the beginnings of the Universe, the appearance and evolution of life on Earth.



The next room led the natural sciences enthusiast into the world of social insects. Specimens of bees and ants were presented through scientific information and lighted old slides.

Spectacular and very successful at the public was the presence in this room of two hives with living bees and ants, which completed the scientific information.

Next, the visitor was stepping into the world of vertebrates in Romania, namely: amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals. Naturalized exhibits of diurnal and nocturnal species of birds were presented through the prism of their diet but also of their ethology illustrating an important topic for the knowledge of the fauna of our country.

The transition to the next room (of temporary exhibitions), was made through a hall, which, (in order to use the existing space efficiently), was transformed into an exhibition. The main pests of crops were presented there, as well as novelties in the field of biology (cloning, biotechnologies). The theme of nature protection, protection of plants and animals species but also of the habitats in which they live was as relevant as today.

The exhibition was presenting other topics that are relevant even today: the anthropic environment, nature protection and the last room was dedicated to the knowledge of space. The closing message (Fig. no. 3), transmitted by the specialists of that time, for the museum visitors was: to protect the planet and give it to future generations in a condition at least as good as it was when we received it from our forefathers. It was one of the ways in which the work of the first specialists, from the beginnings of the museum, from the opening and presenting of this exhibition reached to the passionate public.



Fig. no. 3 - A message for the future generations.

The collections, established and enriched by a small but well-trained team, offered to the public access to scientific information about the flora and fauna of those times. From its very beginnings, this museum was conceived as a scientific one, in order to facilitate for the general public, the access to the newest topics in the field of natural sciences. But, what endures over time is the patrimony on which a cultural institution is built. From the beginning, the patrimony was in constant development and to the collections, that include pieces of scientific

importance, was added a rich collection of specialized books and periodicals obtained over the years through acquisitions, but also through exchange with over 100 of institutions in the country and from the most distant corners of the world. The team of the museum was bigger now, especially since to the section/museum from the beginning, had been added compartments which later in time became real museums, with a beautiful unexpected course in the following decades.

Some of the specialists from the initial team distanced themselves from the team and found another path. Beautiful years followed, years of development for the institution, but also difficult years that led to the addition of new activities to help fulfil the tasks imposed by years of self-financing. During this period, the "Caravan Museum" was present in the cities of the county, but also in the countryside, the specialists being welcomed with open arms by the public. Around the 90s, even if dark clouds appeared in the sky for the development of the society of those years, it seems that the institution permanently had a guiding star that provided the necessary climate for its development.

Even if the specimens from the collections and exhibitions of the Natural Sciences Museum of Bacau were "sacrificed" to enter eternity, this museum was constantly alive through the sustained and high-level activities organized over the years.

Starting from 1995 and until 2007, when the permanent exhibition was dismantled (and the building was retroceded by a court order), numerous temporary exhibitions which complemented the theme of the permanent exhibition, were opened to the public at the headquarters of the Natural Sciences Museum. The themes chosen by the team of specialists led by Dr. Barabaş Neculai were interesting and successful with the public. Many of these exhibitions were real stories told by the curators to the visitors that stepped into the temporary exhibitions hall (set up especially for such exhibitions). Some of these are illustrated below (Fig. no. 4 a, b and c), each exhibition having its due importance.



Fig. no. 4 a - 1997 – The story of salt.



Fig. no. 4 b - 2000 - Plants in Christian world.



Fig. no. 4 c - 2003 - The story of sugar and chocolate.

The intense scientific activity of the team of those times, as well as the prestige of the specialists, were also noted by the value and number of organized symposiums, round tables and communication sessions, attended by prestigious specialists from the world of Romanian museography and biology. The activities were useful for enthusiasts, specialists but also for the general public, all of them being dedicated to many fields of natural sciences: ecology, protection of ecosystems, the environment, biological sciences and strategies of the 20th century, ornithology, fauna and flora from the region of Moldova and Romania. Attracting specialists from all over the country, the institution initiated and organized the first two editions of the National Conference of Naturalist Museographers, numerous symposia with current topics, colloquiums dedicated to personalities from the field of culture, natural sciences, but also national professional training sessions for specialized staff from natural sciences museums.

The "stories" told to the visitors by museum's specialists brought the museum and its patrimony to their attention. Numerous educational activities were carried out, as well as itinerary projects of several exhibitions organized in institutions in Bacau and in Bacau County. In 1998, the digitization of the collections began, the Museum of Natural Sciences of Bacau being among the first in the country to have a database of its own patrimony. As the specialists evolved, many of the collections already established were redefined and reorganized according to detailed or new scientific criteria. The

patrimony has been enriched through acquisitions and donations. Of great importance for the enrichment of the collections were the field expeditions, on the territory of the county, but also outside of it. That's how new specimens "appeared", pieces of patrimony collected by specialists, prepared by conservators and identified, evaluated and introduced into the collections by the museographers.

In the same year 1998, was established the institution's Publishing House, named after the scientist Ion Borcea. Its existence has developed the publication of the scientific results of researchers, collaborators within the scientific journal of the institution, but also through works, books, brochures and independent publications. The work with similar institutions in the country continued, with several exhibitions exchanges, opened for the public at their headquarters, as well as touring exhibitions at our headquarters.

At the beginning of the 2000s, was initiated a vast project that aimed to create the scientific documentation necessary to declare several valuable territories in Bacau county protected areas (from natural heritage point of view). As part of the projects, were made 15 scientific documentation proposals, 13 of which were approved as Protected Natural Areas of national interest. In order to declare several species as natural monuments, we made also proposals, to the National Commission of Natural Monuments, of the Romanian Academy. As a result, 12 natural monuments were declared for Bacau County.

From the very beginning, it was known that the exhibition space in the building in Gh. Vrânceanu str. no. 44 was insufficient. The cultural, scientific activity, the heritage and the team, developed a lot during this period, through the involvement and passion of all factors.

For the first time, after a long period of time, the context was favourable to develop a modern museum complex. In order to build a new, modern museum, commensurate with the existing heritage, in 1993 the Bacau County Council approved the project of the new building (architect Silviu Lefter).

The building was especially designed to house the Bacau Museum of Natural Sciences and its architecture was inspired by patterns and elements from nature. In the same year, recognizing the importance of the work and life of the great biologist Ion Borcea, the Bacau County Council (led at that time by professor Dr. Lupu Neculai), approved the change of the name of the institution to: "Ion Borcea" Natural Sciences Museum Complex of Bacau.

As in life everything happens for a reason, after searching for numerous locations, the new building of the Museum of Natural Sciences was built at Aleea Parcului street no. 9. This was like a returning of the museum to the place where it was at the beginning, knowing that the first laboratories of the museum – (one of botany and the other of zoology), were located at the headquarters of the block located on Aleea Parcului street, no. 1 assigned to the institution in 1959).

The building was handed over by the builder and became usable in the fall of 2003 (building A – laboratories, administrative headquarters, offices), respectively in 2005 (buildings B and C) and houses the exhibitions of the Museum of Natural Sciences as well as a beautiful greenhouse with ornamental plants. Spectacular for those times was the fact that the project aimed to create a building especially to be a museum. At that time Bacau County Council, set a record, Bacau being the only city in the country where two buildings were built to be museums (natural sciences and history).

The spacious building (**Fig. no. 5**), with a special architecture, has become a landmark in the region over time. It includes modern spaces dedicated to laboratories, storages for collections, which comprise over 200,000 specimens in the field of geology, botany, zoology (invertebrates and vertebrates), over 20,000 volumes (14,000 specialty volumes and 6,000 Romanian and worldwide magazines, publications and periodicals) carefully placed in the institution's library, but also vast spaces dedicated to a permanent exhibition of modern biology.

And naturally, such a building, backed by an impressive heritage, needed a team of specialists to match. The inspired strategy put into practice by the director of the institution, Neculai Barabaş, also Prof. Dr. at the Biology Department of the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau.



Fig. no. 5 - The „Ion Borcea” Natural Sciences Museum Complex headquarters, since the year 2003.

He aimed at developing the team by hiring new specialists, graduates of the above-mentioned faculty, by selecting the best students and then hiring them to the Museum Complex. The strategy proved to be successful and the specialists hired since 1995, perfected themselves under his careful guidance, becoming scientists that increased the patrimony of the institution and its prestige.

If at the beginning the museum had only one biologist, in 1970, 7 specialists were employed full-time, from 1995 to 2002; numerous specialists were hired and brought a young breeze to the team.

In order to improve the quality and level of the new team, the specialists permanently continued their professional evolution and in addition to the preparing and professional training courses, most of them obtained the title of doctor in sciences.

As an acknowledgment of the results obtained by the now enlarged team, under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Neculai Barabaş, the "Ion Borcea" Natural Sciences Museum Complex received numerous distinctions, the most important of which are: the "Cultural Merit" medal cls. I, H category, for scientific research awarded to Prof. Dr. Neculai Barabaş - Excellence Diploma awarded by the Ministry of Culture to the "Ion Borcea" Natural Sciences Museum Complex Bacau for special merits in research, conservation, restoration, valorization and protection of the national cultural heritage, the "Mihai Băcescu" Award (2003) awarded by the Ministry of Culture for the project "Problems of modern biology", organizing storages and laboratories.

In 2005, through an unfortunate turn of events, 85% of the space intended for the permanent exhibitions of the Museum of Natural Sciences was assigned by the County Council to be temporarily occupied by the "Costache Sturza" County Library. Thus, the chance of having a Natural Science Museum with an exhibition with large, generous spaces became remote. The remaining space available for exhibitions was relatively small, the only advantage being that it connected with the greenhouse of ornamental plants offering the chance to create a small visiting tour, with an entrance located at the back of the building, insufficient for the prestige and possibilities of the Museum of Natural Sciences of Bacau.

At the Astronomical Observatory, in 1991 the permanent exhibition was destroyed by a fire. It was rebuilt and updated by the astronomer Matei Alexescu, still being the largest astronomy exhibition in the country. It was opened for the public in the same year. The permanent exhibition (Fig. no. 6) was later modernized (1992) and then

completed by temporary and itinerant exhibitions open at the Observatory headquarters or at those of the partners (mainly schools in the county).

Since 1995, the Astronomical Observatory has been named after Victor Anestin (born in Bacau), the first writer of science fiction genre from our country, the founder of the magazine "Orion" (the first astronomy magazine in Romania) (1907) and of the Romanian Astronomical Society (1907).



Fig. no. 6 - 2013 – Bacau Astronomical Observatory - aspects from the permanent exhibition (1992 – 2014).

In this time period numerous temporary (Fig. no. 7), as well as touring exhibitions were designed and opened for the public by the small team of the Astronomical Observatory of Bacau. Because the exhibitions had success to the public, the number of visitors of this cultural objective increased along with the growing of the number of events dedicated specifically to them. The team of three museographers from the Observatory was coordinated by the head of department Florin Nechita. In 2007, the temporary exhibitions "Destinies in Space" (October 7) and "50 Years of Astronautics" (November 5 - May 2008) were opened for the public and improvements were made to the permanent exhibition, when "The mobile map of the sky" was added.



Fig. no. 7 - 2000 - 2007 – temporary exhibitions.

Starting from the year 1992, a lot of work was carried out to modernize the exhibitions and improve the bird breeders, making the Bacau Vivarium the only museum in the country that preserves and exhibits live specimens. The Bacau Vivarium presents today collections of live animals: native and exotic species of fish, birds, as well as species of amphibians and reptiles. The exhibition space permits the organization of temporary exhibitions in addition to the cultural - exhibition offer of the Vivarium.

Over the years, the collections of live animals have been enriched; numerous species have been added and today are the main source for making exhibitions at this living museum (Fig. no. 8), a special museum. If at the beginning the Bacau Vivarium had in its patrimony several species of fish, species of exotic birds and several breeds of pigeons, today its collections include 1357 specimens belonging to the following collections: canaries (52 specimens), parrots, parakeets (184 specimens), rice birds (124 specimens), pigeons (291 specimens), reptiles (45 specimens) and exotic fish (661 specimens).



Fig. no. 8 - Aspects from Bacau Vivarium permanent exhibitions.

In the recent years, numerous exhibitions have been opened at the Bacau Vivarium. In 2007, on April 12, was opened, with an unusual theme, the temporary exhibition entitled "The world of animals around us" and on November 28 the temporary exhibition entitled "Expovivarium".

Conclusions

The author wrote the paper aiming to emphasize the past and appreciate the present. We have to know the history and value the past.

The author brings in front of the reader 20 years of existence of the institution that covers the natural sciences museography area in Bacau. There are presented the exhibitions of natural sciences and the scientific activity of those times.

In that time period, the institution was based in several locations that are no longer available for the public. This paper and others like it are methods used by the authors to remember people, activities, and buildings that are necessary to be kept in the collective memory. This is also a method to preserve the immaterial patrimony.

The data presented in this paper were collected from the institution's archive, institution's library, on line sources, and from former specialists of the museum.

In the paper are used photos from the institution's archive.

Rezumat

Complexul Muzeal de Științele Naturii „Ion Borcea” Bacău este o instituție publică de cultură, care cuprinde următoarele muzee: Muzeul de Științele Naturii, Vivariul, Observatorul Astronomic „Victor Anestin” Observatorul Astronomic și Casa Memorială „Ion Borcea”, satul Racova, județul Bacău.

Lucrarea prezintă începuturile muzeografiei băcăuane (1987 - 2007), în domeniul științelor naturii. Pentru a aprecia prezentul, trebuie să cunoaștem istoria și să prețuim trecutul. Autorul invită cititorii să descopere trecutul care a creat premisele apariției actualei instituții publice de cultură Complexul Muzeal de Științele Naturii „Ion Borcea” Bacău.

Între anii 1987 și 2007, prima expoziție permanentă de biologie deschisă în Bacău, a fost închisă, clădirea demolată iar muzeul mutat într-o nouă locație. S-a deschis o nouă expoziție de biologie generală și s-a construit o clădire special pentru a fi muzeu. Expozițiile de păsări exotice vii, specii autohtone și exotice de pești au fost îmbogățite la Vivariu. Expozițiile de astronomie și sesiunile organizate de observații astronomice își căutau noi începuturi în locația fostului turn de apă al orașului Bacău. În acea perioadă, instituția își avea sediul în mai multe locații care astăzi nu mai există.

Din fericire, de-a lungul anilor, în Bacău, datorită prezenței unor oameni pasionați și interesați, domeniul muzeografiei științelor naturii a înflorit. În lucrare sunt folosite fotografiile din arhiva instituției. Oamenii care au făcut parte din echipa instituției, autoritățile vremii și persoanele care s-au implicat de-a lungul anilor, precum și publicul, sunt personajele principale ale poveștii Complexului Muzeal de Științele Naturii „Ion Borcea” din Bacău. Fără ei, acest frumos lăcaș de cultură nu ar exista.

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