

MUSEALISATION – A WAY OF HIGHLIGHTING THE MEDIEVAL HERITAGE IN RURAL AREAS

Proposals for Arad County

Phd Thesis – Summary

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The thesis *Musealisation – a way of highlighting the medieval heritage in rural areas. Proposals for Arad County* discusses a subject that is new in the field literature: musealisation understood as integrated preservation of medieval heritage in rural areas. The novelty of this approach is even more poignant in the Romanian cultural context.

Most of the architectural historic heritage in Romania is located in the rural area [Eurostat:2015], which is currently affected by a slow dissolution of the traditional culture. This phenomenon is caused by massive migration towards the cities, as well as insufficient information and lack of efficient cultural management. Heritage preservation is not a priority for local administrations there. In addition, the study will show that, sometimes, the presence of a ruin within the village is perceived as a discomfort due to the legal restrictions that apply to protected areas. Considering the international contemporary tendencies in heritage preservation and recent museum practices, the research is based on the hypothesis that *musealisation is a solution for highlighting medieval heritage of local importance in rural areas, with minimal interventions in the protected area*. In this respect, it is necessary to fully understand the concept of *musealisation* in order to adapt it to the national context and the particularities of the rural area. One expected outcome is a relationship of interdependence and support between the reactivated heritage and the revival process of the village.

The challenge addressed to the architect is to find a balanced dialogue between the architecture of the present and the one of the past, creating a symbiosis that generates spaces where functions can be accommodated.

The present study pursues four main objectives, each being detailed in a chapter of this work, as follows:

1. Identification and explanation of current meanings of the basic concepts to which the study refers and their adaptation to the Romanian context (chapter I).
2. Pointing out the determining factors which influence the implementation of musealisation in Romania (chapters II and III)
 - a. regarding the place (2nd chapter)
 - b. regarding the attitudes towards the architectural heritage (3rd chapter)
3. Case studies and proposals that prove that musealisation of built medieval heritage in rural areas can happen with minimal interventions. (chapter IV)
4. Drawing conclusions as starting points for further development of the present study, as well as for other similar works. (chapter V)

The research methodology encompasses elements of architecture, urban planning, archaeology, preservation – restoration – conservation, sociology, tourism and other complementary fields. This work is the result of the author's activity as member and creator of an interdisciplinary team of architects, archaeologists, sociologists, artists, designers (professionals and students), historians, art historians, and others. The bibliographic research has been complemented with research on field, discussions with the locals, the authorities and cultural institutions in order to:

- Identify and categorize the historic (architectural and archaeological) monuments in Arad County – *the territorial systematization method* of Dimitrie Gusti [Dumitrașcu, new series, XX, 486-487];
- Zone the territory of Arad County into themed areas – a simplified use of Dimitrie Gusti's *social archaeology method* [ibidem, 487-488]
- Narrow the research and choose the sites that will be investigated as case studies.
- Document three case studies of musealisation of medieval rural heritage.
- Conduct behavioral observations, interviews and questionnaires with a cross-cultural historic analysis of the results. [Rappaport, 1990: 11].

The intention of this thesis is to theorize the musealisation phenomenon and to present practical examples of its principles, promoting musealisation as a result of interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue between professionals, cultural institutions administrations, organisations and locals. In this respect, the web-page *Vernacular*, created and managed by the author as part of this research, is a communication channel between these entities and an efficient and modern mean of advertising the concept and the initiatives of musealisation.

I. ON THE ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENT AND THE CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

In order to adapt the concept of musealization to the Romanian context it is necessary to understand the term in a phenomenological manner and according to the international tendencies, but also to have an overview of the cultural framework and the attitudes towards the monuments in Romania.

Internationally, new ways of participative exhibition emerge due to a process of transformation, abstractisation and dematerialization of the museum. The first discussions regarding musealization appear in field literature in the '60s, at the beginning of the reformation process of museum practices in France, Germany and the United Kingdom [Macdonald, 2013]. By the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, there have been multiple debates regarding the subject, but the distinction between museification and musealization was only stated in 2010 [Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010: 48]. The first term designates the transformation of an object, a place, a space, or a group of objects into exhibits, whereas musealization involves refunctionalization of the heritage and encourages interaction between the observer and the exhibited object. In order to achieve the latter a detailed research of the context is required in order to acquire a phenomenological understanding of the heritage and to generate customized architectural solutions. Therefore, there are no rules for musealisation of built heritage. In other words, musealization refers to ways of thinking and approaches, it is a process, not a set of predefined rules with a predictable outcome.

A particularity of musealisation is the integration through refunctionalization of the ruins because this often requires contemporary interventions meant to (re)define spaces that have been dismantled with the passage of time. The comparative analysis between four

examples from other countries proves that musealisation is feasible and that the approaches may vary significantly. The projects chosen for study are:

- The archaeological park of Praça Nova – Lisbon, Portugal, Saõ Jorge Castle – JLCG Arquitectos – 2010
- Madinat Al - Zahra Museum and Archaeological Interpretation Centre – Cordoba, Spain – Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos - 2010
- The Public Library of Ceuta, Spain – Paredes Pedrosa Arquitectos, 2013
- Northwest Rock Art Visitors’ Centre - architect Nina Maritz, 2005.

The comparison of these projects reveals that:

- Musealisation can happen in unequivocally various ways.
- It depends on the state of the heritage to be preserved and the symbol it carries.
- The long-term success of the act of musealisation is influenced by the needs and the awareness of the local community
- The constraints of the context are decisive factors.

The relevance of the author’s course of action is confirmed by the understanding of the Romanian context compared to the international tendencies in the research area. In this respect, it was necessary to identify and discuss the successful initiatives and projects from Romania, which are concerned with preservation of the national cultural heritage (tangible or immaterial) and putting it to good use. From the author’s perspective, some of these actions are interpreted forms of musealisation. Three such projects concerning Romanian heritage preservation have been chosen for study, all of recent date and each one showing a different approach. At this point, a questionnaire conducted by the author has been addressed to the promoters of these projects. The results, together with the conclusions drawn from studying the projects, emphasize the fact that musealisation is a new practice in Romania, but also, a lack of dedicated methodologies. The present study is to be regarded as a contribution which aims to ameliorate the current perspectives regarding musealisation in Romania. This way of putting heritage to good use is a very complex issue, which can be resolved by having in mind at least two determining aspects, detailed in the following chapters:

- The reference area and place identity (chapter II)
- The potential evaluation of the studied area (chapter III).

Each one of the case studies is an example of a desirable approach of the built heritage musealisation.

II. DEMARCATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE REFERENCE AREA

The second chapter focuses on the reference area and the place identity, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, referring to the area of Arad County. The discussion concerning the heritage – place - locals relationship starts from the implications resulted from the presence of the monument in a certain given location. The monument status of a place or building depends on how it has been invested with cultural value. The author proposes the following categories:

- **Naturally-declared monuments** – the status is traditionally acknowledged.
- **Normed declared monuments** – the status is reinforced by law.
- **Scientifically declared monuments** – the status is determined by historic or other complementary research.

Inconsistency of any of these means of value determinations results in problems which often lead to abandonment of the ruins. The practical part of the study presented in this

chapter consists of a comparison between the way locals interact with monuments in rural and urban areas in Arad County. The results show a cultural crisis in rural areas which is expressed through a passive-destructive attitude towards the built heritage. Therefore, from this point further, the study focuses on rural areas in Arad County only.

The overview of the cultural context in rural areas in Arad allowed the author to create a realistic profile of the contemporary village in the studied area and to set the prerequisites for rural heritage musealisation:

- The contemporary interventions that are meant to highlight the existing potential must blend harmoniously in the rural landscape.
- The proposals must address the locals as well, not only the tourists.
- It is fundamental to preserve the authenticity of the musealised cultural tangible or intangible heritage.

III. ON RELATING TO BUILT HERITAGE. EVALUATION OF THE EXISTENT POTENTIAL IN THE STUDIED AREA

The first section of the third chapter consists of a presentation regarding some ways of approaching the built heritage that have been identified in rural areas in Arad County. The explanation for the generalized disengagement in heritage preservation here can be explained by the inconsistency between the traditional perception of the historic monument, the law-enforced and the scientific one. This usually results in fenced forsaken monuments, fated to destruction. Moreover, in some cases, the dismantling of historic structures was intentional, in order to reuse the building materials. Within this context, the concept of *incorporeal monument* is proposed by the author to describe altogether the ruin and the buildings erected using materials extracted from the historic structure. The incorporeal monument must be approached as a whole. As a metaphor, its musealisation involves unfolding the whole evolution of the monument up to the present state.

Relating to built heritage is a subject approached in a trans-disciplinary manner, emphasizing the implications musealisation has on the tourist sector. The starting point of the study is a critical analysis of the present situation of tourism in Arad County and the development strategies proposed by the county administration. A change of perspective is proposed as an improvement regarding future long-term regional development strategies, namely an approach that pursues a polycentric development. In this respect, the author enlists the monuments and the archaeological sites registered in the List of Historic Monuments in Romania and the National Archaeological Repertoire, as well as some unregistered ruins spotted during the research on field. The present physical state of the historic remains older than the 11th century are of little interest for the unauthorised observer due to perishable building materials they were made of. Therefore the present study does not focus on these. Once the historic buildings were graphically represented on a map of Arad County, it was possible to observe clusters of similar historic landmarks which led to a possible themed zoning of the territory. This approach can be taken into account for a future master-plan regarding sustainable cultural tourism in Arad County. The zoning consists of four themed areas:

- The sacred buildings
- The castles along the river Mureş
- The ethno-tourist area of Zărand Region
- The medieval monuments in the Vineyards of Arad.

Another way of relating to built heritage through musealisation is from the ecological point of view which consists of two approaches: on one hand, musealisation involves

‘recycling’ of spaces and buildings, on the other, the proposed interventions take into account the possibilities offered by new technologies in what energy efficiency is concerned.

Bearing in mind the polycentric development, the present study presents musealisation proposals for some ruins which are part of the architectural heritage of Arad County. These are of local importance and due to their potential they could become tertiary cultural centers. The proposals aim for reducing the costs for the preservation and refunctionalisation of these historic structures and try to create means of using them with zero exploitation costs. This approach is feasible in the villages from Arad County. For a thoroughgoing case study, further consideration was necessary.

Aside from the ruins from before the 11th century, the 18th century or newer monuments have been also excluded because their historic and architectural value is inherent and expressed by their existence in the contemporary landscape. This selection narrowed down the list of rural medieval monuments with potential for musealisation to 74. Of these, the top eight were selected as appropriate for a case study. The selection has taken into account the state of preservation at the moment the research began (2012-2013), the amount of historic and archaeological information available and the impact the presence of the ruin has on local communities.

Only three of the eight selected ruins have been approached in this study, namely the ruins in the villages Vladimirescu, Galşa and Tauţ. These are considered to be the most favorable examples because in these cases musealisation can occur without compulsory intermediate archaeological or historic research. The studies have been conducted relatively simultaneously, pursuing strategies and musealisation proposals that can be presented to local and regional administrations. However, the development of all the three cases differentiated from one another on the way. The musealisation of the other five sites are to be studied in another phase of the research.

IV. CASE STUDIES

In the fourth chapter the case studies are presented. Each case is representative for a given situation:

- Musealisation in the suburban area: the ruins in Vladimirescu (the incorporeal monument).
- Musealisation in a tourist area: the church ruins in the village Galşa, Şiria comuna, in the Vineyards of Arad.
- Musealisation in a village without a clear cultural profile.

Although the three situations are different, they have been approached similarly according to a scheme that also determined the organisation of the subchapters dealing with the proposed musealisation solutions and the process that led to these:

1. The analysis of the cultural context. General overview.
2. The history of the area and the ruin.
3. Previous studies and research.
4. Urban planning analysis, genius loci, possible developments.
5. Proposed strategies.
6. Perspectives of the future and conclusions.

From this point of view, the musealisation of the ruins in Vladimirescu requires an urbanistic approach. Since the intervention consists only in the refurbishment of a public square, no additional maintenance efforts are required. Musealisation in this case involves the usual practices for creating public spaces in the Municipality of Arad. The liveliness of the proposed plaza is to be achieved through activities that involve the local community in the

first place.

In the case of Galşa, the study that preceded the actual proposal was made by a multidisciplinary team formed of volunteer experts and students gathered and organised by the author who was also a participant in every phase of the research. The owners of the neighbouring lands are most interested in the musealisation of the ruin. Therefore, the proposed solution is a corollary of both their visions and the experts' one. This thesis presents the whole process that led to the optimal solution for putting the ruin to good use and critically analyses some preliminary proposals as well. The final solution is reversible, non-invasive and in accordance with the latest trends in monument protection by tensile structures. Furthermore, as an enhancement, the proposal includes a photovoltaic ambient lighting system, which reduces the exploitation costs to zero.

As for the ruins in Tauţ, due to the rich but scarcely expressed cultural context, the musealisation process had to be phased. The first proposed step is to musealise one traditional house from the uninhabited existing ones located in the north vicinity of the site. The refurbished building should host preservation workshops, handicrafts and other creative educational activities. On the long term, similar interventions can be made on more such existing houses. In the second phase, these activities are proposed to focus on the archaeological site which should be excavated and eventually musealised.

V. THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Musealisation is a long process which is based on the coordination of numerous factors, including:

- The willingness of local and regional administrations;
- The open-mindedness of the locals;
- Available funding resources;
- Legal and bureaucratic forms;
- The availability of experts.

In these circumstances and lacking a predefined and universally valid methodology for musealisation, this thesis is a step towards the musealisation of medieval rural built heritage in Arad County. It can be regarded as a preliminary feasibility study in the field.

The author's personal contribution consists of:

1. The creation of a data base concerning the musealisation theory.
2. Introducing the reinterpreted concept of musealisation adapted for Romanian rural areas.
3. Creating and managing the web-page *Vernacular*.
4. Establishing contacts.
5. The realistic selection and inventory of the sites with a potential to be highlighted.
6. Proposals for optimization of the existing strategies.
7. Case studies.
8. Formation and coordination of multidisciplinary teams.

The dissemination of some information from this thesis has been done by publications in scientific journals and participation to scientific events, both indexed in international data bases.

In conclusion, musealisation of a historic building, even in the state of a ruin, is possible with minimal resources if the proposal is a synthetic result of the evaluation and use of the existing potential. Thus, the symbiosis between lifeless ruins and contemporary architectural interventions creates places that are attractive from a cultural, economic and

most of all, social point of view. The present study subscribes to the statement of Irina Oberländer-Târnavăanu: „*The cultural heritage belongs to the people who inherited it and they must be helped to **understand** and **value** it.*” [Oberländer-Târnavăanu, 2002:11]

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