

Musealisation of *Non-Corporeal Heritage*: Exploring the Permanentisation of the Ephemeral

BICA Smaranda Maria¹, TĂMĂȘAN Maria²

¹ Polytechnic University of Timișoara, Faculty of Architecture, str. Traian Lalescu, Nr. 2/A, 300 223, Timișoara, Jud. Timiș, Romania

² Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Faculty of Design, str. Zimandului, Nr. 8, 300 223, Arad, Jud. Arad, Romania

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Abstract

The present work is a debate regarding the possibility and usefulness of acknowledging of the existence of historic built heritage in an interpreted manner, beyond its physical presence. Studies have been carried regarding approaches for valorisation of medieval ruins. Due to their physical state, and other external factors musealisation is not an option for any historic site. Since the 19th century, the ruin is seen only as a natural stage in the existence of a building. Ruins are usually perceived as historic monuments. However, their musealisation cannot be done without a change of perspective: to accept the dismantlement of the building as a reinterpreted presence of the monument – the non-corporeal monument? In fact, established restoration practices involve highlighting the remains of dismantled buildings. Therefore, in the light of this work, these samples can be seen as marks of a non-corporeal heritage. For higher accuracy, this work focuses on Arad County, Romania.

Rezumat

Lucrarea de față pune în discuție posibilitățile și utilitatea asumării valorii patrimoniului construit, interpretat și transformat, dincolo de prezența lui fizică. Ideile prezentate au fost formulate în cadrul unui studiu mai amplu privind modalități de punere în valoare a ruinelor medievale. Din cauza deteriorărilor și a altor factori externi, muzealizarea nu se pretează oricărui monument. Începând cu secolul al XIX-lea starea de ruină începe a fi privită ca o etapă firească în evoluția clădirilor din perioade anterioare. Muzealizarea acestor structuri nu este fezabilă fără o schimbare a perspectivei asupra conceptului de monument de arhitectură – anume, acceptarea monumentului destructurat ca o prezență reinterpretată a acestuia: monumentul non-corporal. În fapt, printre metodele de restaurare consacrate se numără și practicile de evidențiere a materialului original păstrat în structura monumentelor de arhitectură transformate de-a lungul timpului. În lumina lucrării de față, și acești martori ai trecutului sunt componente ale monumentului necorporal. Pentru acuratețea informației, studiul se concentrează asupra județului Arad.

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¹ Corresponding author: Tel. +040740974619

E-mail address: maria.tamasan@uav.ro

1. Introduction. Musealisation – a recent trend

Changes, may they be social, economic, historic, demographic etc., usually imply adaptation of the landscape, including the architectural surroundings. Due to an increasing rate of changes in today's construction stocks, we are faced with an expanding material and immaterial heritage - a situation difficult to manage, which leaves many historic buildings exposed to irreversible damage. This situation, repeatedly stated by scholars such as Jean Baudrillard [1] or William Heath[2], fuelled the search for new means of preservation and integration.

From another perspective, history records examples of architectural heritage being demolished in order to reuse the building material. On one hand, buildings conceived as permanent at a certain moment in history, in time, tend to become ephemeral due to lack of function, on the other, they continue to exist due to their remaining built parts. Nowadays, this process is accelerated. That is why continuous search for new means of putting old buildings to good use and managing them sustainably is needed.

This sums up the latest trends in cultural tourism in Europe which focus on efficient means of exploiting the existing potentialities. One desirable contemporary approach in what integration of historic buildings is concerned, is musealisation, which involves putting heritage to good use through new functions. This concept has been defined and differentiated from other practices such as *conservation* or *museumification* only in the late 20th century and the early 21st. Desvallées and Mairesse write in *Key Concepts of Museology*:

*“In the accepted understanding of the term, **musealisation** means the placing in the museum², or more generally, transforming a center of life, which may be a center of human activity or a natural site, into a sort of museum. (...) The purpose of this activity is to explore reality by means of sensory perception, experiment, and study of its constituent parts.”* [3]

In this understanding, musealisation of historic buildings is based on experience, subjective perception and sensorial exploration. However, musealisation of ruins is a difficult task and not always possible, since the space which is supposed to accommodate function may be dismantled.

On the other hand, there are numerous examples worldwide which prove the effectiveness of musealisation of historic buildings concerning integration; for instance, the Madinat-al-Zahra Museum and Interpretation Centre in Cordoba, Spain, by *Njeto and Sobejano Architects*, Pousada Mosteiro de Guimarães Santa Marinha in Portugal architect Fernando Távora, the Northwest Rock Art Visitors' Centre in Namibia, by architect Nina Maritz, the St. George Square in Timisoara, Romania, by architect Radu Mihăilescu and many other examples. One can notice that musealisation of the built heritage can take many forms and establishes various relationships with historic structures and in particular, ruins. This creates endless opportunities for integration, preservation and use of historic architectural monuments. A study of the examples listed above and some others, carried by the authors, allowed them to propose three main directions of implementing musealisation:

- a. An independent functional contemporary intervention which is meant to separate the historic structure from possible destructive factors such as tourists, weather or misuse. Such an approach, often employed in several urbanised parts of the world, is the exhibition of ancient Roman ruins in the central square Cluj-Napoca. Being protected by a structure of steel and structural glass, the ruins are visible yet unreachable for the people in the square and are protected from erosion. This approach is very similar to *museumification* because, according to museum specialised literature, this is the process an object undergoes in order to become an exhibit. However, this approach can be regarded as *musealisation* due to the fact that the ancient structure is preserved and exhibited on site and that it is integrated in the

² In this early stage, the meaning of the term *musealisation* is often similar to the meaning of *museumification*.

square as centre of interest.

- b. Contemporary structures intertwined with the historic ones. Two interesting examples are Madinat al Zahra in Cordoba and the archaeological site in Sao Jorge castle in Lisbon. In the case of the first site, the new buildings are conceived starting from the footprint of the former historic structures discovered there. The remains of the ancient buildings are integrated in the new ones and are used as part of the interpretation centre. In the case of Sao Jorge castle, there have been built contemporary pavilions which redefine the dismantled space of the ruins. In this case, the interaction between heritage and visitors increases, resulting in a more subjective experience for the visitor, as well as an increased need for regulations and restrictions meant to preserve the historic structures. These are not only exhibits but also functional elements with a contemporary use.
- c. An approach which highlights historic structures in a certain context, such as the case of the St. George Square in Timișoara, where the remains of the 18th century Austrian fortress are the centrepiece of the square. Although the square is intended for social-cultural activities, being conceived as an auditorium, it also acts as a background which emphasizes the historic walls. Direct interaction with the historic structure is not forbidden and it is not presented as an exhibit, but an exotic presence in a contemporary arrangement.

One can easily argue that, in terms of heritage preservation, there is a constant oscillation between the expectancy for it to be **permanent** and its intrinsic **ephemeral** character. From this point of view, musealisation is a recent practice which involves common restoration and conservation practices, but also aims towards their permanentisation, reinterpretation and use. At the same time, underlines the ephemeral character of buildings by emphasizing the set of transformation the building underwent with the passage of time.

2. Architectural Heritage – permanent? ... ephemeral? ...

One conclusion of the research conducted so far by the authors is that a building's presence can be perceived in two ways: as a physical reality and as virtual reality. The first component is defined by tectonics, materiality, structure, dimension, etc., while the second refers to function and symbols. The correlation of these two components determines the evolution of the building and its architecture. For example, in time, one building is associated with multiple virtual realities through: change of function, abandonment, de-sacralisation/ re-sacralisation, cultural irrelevance, reinterpretation, integration etc. That is the case of two of the most famous buildings in architectural history: Hagia Sophia and the Pantheon. Initially, Hagia Sophia was a church (from 360 to 1453). Starting with the 16th century in has been used as a mosque for four centuries and in 1934 it became a museum. The Pantheon was originally build as a roman temple in 29-19 B.C. but in 609 it became a church. Since modern times until today it is both a sacred space as well as an exhibit at urban scale, a tourist attraction.

Therefore, even if architectural heritage is physically intact and its original form is preserved, the **perception** of these buildings differs in time. In other words, even if the physical reality is permanent, the virtual one can be ephemeral.

On the other hand, if the physical parameters of buildings do not meet the needs of the user anymore, they are adapted. A very common example is the one of churches which have been built to last a very long time. However, their transformation in order to accommodate new facilities for their sacred function has been always accepted. In this case, even if virtually the function remains the same, the physical building can change.

In both cases there is a continuous relationship between the physical and the virtual component of the building and the link between them is in permanent adaptation. Once this relationship is broken due to historic, social, economic or ideological reasons, the building is abandoned, which in most cases leads to destruction. Most of today's ruins have been faced with such a rupture at a certain point in time.

Nezar AlSayyad wrote:

“In today’s world, tradition can no longer be thought of as the static legacy of a past that is handed down from one generation to another. Instead it is and must be always understood as a dynamic project for the reinterpretation of this past in light of the needs of a current present and a future. Traditions are also ever changing but they somehow do not die easily.” [2]

Sometimes this attitude have led to the reuse of building materials with aesthetic qualities for pragmatic purposes. History notes that the need for building material and a certain aesthetic sensitivity determined a pragmatic approach towards these unused buildings. Françoise Choay explains that in the Middle Ages, a common practice was taking valuable building material and ornamentation from unused buildings, with no regard to their historic value at the time, in order to be reused for erecting new ones [4]. The remains of both buildings – the *donor* and the *receiver* – are equally seen today as built heritage. A good example that illustrates this phenomenon is the reuse of decoration from Roman temples for erecting Christian buildings, which has been encouraged by the ideological conflicts between ancient Christians and pagans. Other two comparatively more recent examples are the cathedrals in Saint-Riquier and Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) for the building of which Charles the Great reused marble and columns taken from Rome and Ravenna with permission from the Pope. In Romania, the stone church in Dezna for whose construction were used materials taken from the ancient capital of the Roman province Dacian site Ulpia Traiana Sarmisegetuza is a similar case.

The question that arises in these case refers to authenticity. Is the *receiver building*, made of displaced material, less authentic than the *donor*? Did the transferred material and elements amplify the historic value? Are these two buildings two distinct objects of heritage, or are they part of the same architectural object with historic value since their history is interconnected? Do they disqualify each other? Is one more valuable than the other?...

In the light of all these aspects the present study proposes the concept of *non-corporeal heritage*, which expands the idea of historic building beyond its physical presence.

3. Non-corporeal heritage. A switch of perspective.

The fundament of the proposal debated in the present study starts from the Ruskinian theory that all stages of evolution and all past forms of a historic building are equally valuable. The present study emphasizes that even the present state is as important as the past ones. All the transformations that occurred in time must be emphasized with the same attention, disregarding physical, geographic or any other limitations, using the vast variety of tools technology offers nowadays.

The identification of displaced and reused historic material, its itineraries and interpretations require the expansion of the concept of historic architectural heritage, in order to fully understand it. The result is a non-corporeal heritage which encompasses all the stages, forms and transformations – physical or virtual – of the built heritage. Its valorization involves innovative and flexible approaches and a holistic perspective.

Musealisation of non-corporeal heritage involves restoration and preservation methods but usually results in routes, built areas and narration. Obviously, in the case of non-corporeal heritage, musealisation becomes a complex process which combines architectural, preservation and urban planning on a larger scale. The common limits, such as historic areas, borders, topography, cultural barriers may be ignored if they are not correlated with the transformation path of the heritage in discussion. The story of each piece of historic value belonging to the same initial building dictates the strategy best fitted for understanding and promoting a given architectural heritage.

Therefore, it can be commonly accepted that linking stories, places, people to the present state of the remains of past buildings with heritage value generates a certain degree of ambiguity in sensing the limit between their permanent and ephemeral character.

4. Case studies in Arad County

2.1. The ruin in Vladimirescu

The village Vladimirescu is located in the eastern suburban area of Arad, 8 km far from the city. In the south western part of the village lays the ruin of the former basilica which used to function within the Orod Repository between the 13th and the 16th century. Once it stopped being used as a sacred space due to socio-political changes in the region, locals and new colonists began a systematic extraction of the stone in order to reuse it as building material. Had it not been for the intervention of the Hungarian authorities in 1865, the site might have disappeared completely [5]. Today, what is left of the former basilica is registered in the *National List of Historic Monuments of Romania* (code AR-I-s-A-00469, number 130) and in the *National Archaeological Register* (code 9404.03). In the present layout of the building stock in Vladimirescu, the ruin is part of a dense area with mixed use: private houses, a 19th century church which is said to have been built by German colonists using recycled stones from the former repository and basilica, a school and a former animal farm. (fig. 1) The houses' structure contains historic stone pieces as well. It is known for a fact that the house at number 10 hides a carved stone under the contemporary finishes.

Technically speaking, the former repository and church are “scattered” in the area and transformed within new structures. Therefore, the whole built assembly is the actual architectural heritage of this part of the village Vladimirescu – a non-corporeal heritage. As a consequence, the musealisation of this historic site should not focus on the ruin exclusively, but on the whole area (fig. 1).

Such a proposal was conceived by the authors in a former study. Both the area encompassed by the non-corporeal heritage and past stages of the basilica is marked by different textures and levels of the paving. Circulation is regulated and guided by newly proposed green spaces and ambient lighting marks the ruin and its scattered parts. These are to be preserved and highlighted by traditional means of preservation and restoration.

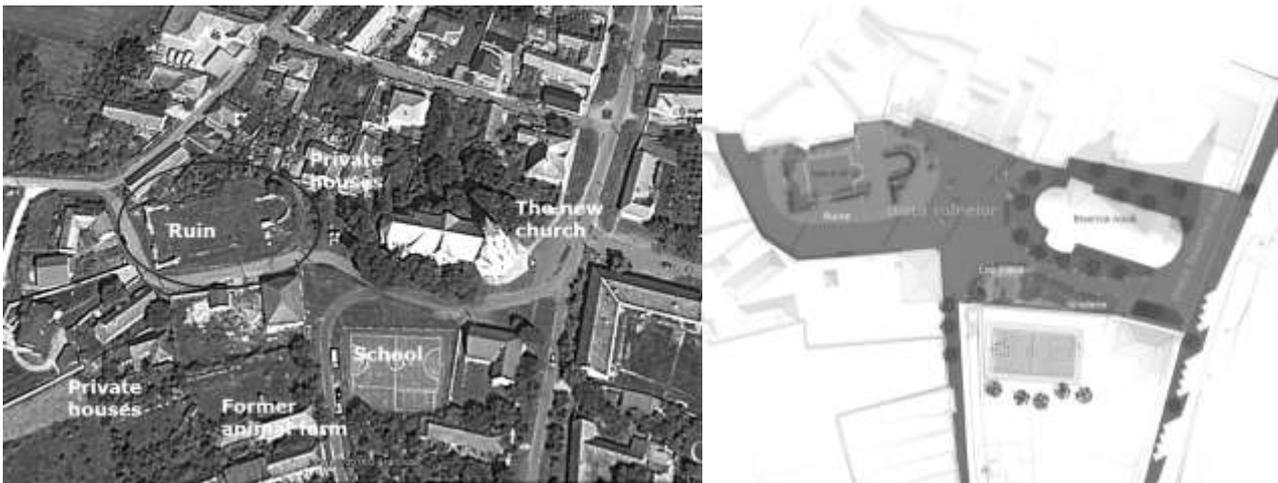


Figure 1. The ruin in Vladimirescu – present state and the proposal for musealisation of the non-corporeal heritage.

2.2. The non-corporeal heritage in Tauț-Șilindia-Camna

Tauț is a village 55 km east from the city of Arad. Here lies an impressive, yet unexploited cultural and architectural heritage. One remarkable site is ‘La Cetate’ (*The Fortress*), which is actually a church surrounded by a stone wall. Originally, in the 13th century, the church was built in the Romanesque style. Until the 16th century it has been continuously modified in order to meet the aesthetic requirements of a certain moment in time, or in order to accommodate the growing congregation. All interventions were in Gothic style, resulting in an interesting hybrid building. It’s

partial demolition started once it was abandoned in the 16th century. It is said that at one point, a nobleman from a nearby village – Șilindia – ordered the best stone to be extracted from the abandoned building and brought to him in order to make a storehouse.

Another potential attraction in Tauț is the central park best known for the rare chestnut species growing here. Apparently, on this site used to exist a mansion owned by a local nobleman. Legends say that the country road arriving from Camna – another neighboring village – to the park in Tauț used to link the nobleman's mansion with his daughter's in Camna so he could watch over her.

Even though there are many unverified pieces of information in these local legends combined with archaeologically proven facts, the rich non-corporeal monument in Tauț is incontestable. If musealisation was to happen here, the whole Tauț-Șilindia-Camna area should be taken into account and included in the same masterplan (Fig.2).



Figure 2. The non-corporeal heritage in Tauț – present state of the ruin and the country road to Camna. Right, a possible approach for musealisation of the non-corporeal heritage in the region.

2.3. Discussion

Both the above described examples of identification and musealisation of non-corporeal heritage are situations of de-sacralisation of a certain place and its re-sacralisation through new meaning and function; in other words, these are samples of pragmatic recycling of buildings. The pragmatism behind the actions of the destructive forces that brought these buildings to the state of ruins acts as a valid excuse. The colonists in Vladimirescu were faced with an abandoned building made of high quality material on the site where they needed to build shelters. The nobleman in Șilindia valued more his need to reaffirm his social status rather than care for an abandoned and already deteriorated structure – a totally understandable gesture for his time. Observing these aspects, the destruction of the two buildings discussed here is definitely not vandalism, but a natural stage in their evolution and reflects the character of past times. This is why musealisation beyond their physical presence is to be taken into account.

Reconciliation of heritage with its present context is the first condition for its long term valorization. Integration within that context is achieved when the aim of preservation actions is not

to transform it into a tourist attraction in the first place, but to make it useful for locals (as in the case of Vladimirescu), or create cultural communities (as in the case of Taut). This proves the fact that musealisation is an approach different for each particular case.

5. Non-corporeal heritage and historic built areas

Although the two concepts might be similar in several cases, non-corporeal heritage does not always coincide with historic built areas. The non-corporeal heritage involves a single architectural object of historic value whose transformation is traced through all periods in time, whereas historic built areas consist of an assembly of buildings of historic value. The non-corporeal heritage is the result of interpretation of the original building due to needs at a certain moment in time. It does not take into account geographical limitations or physical ones since the physical presence of a building with historic value can be substituted by narration. Thus, the acknowledgement of the non-corporeal heritage has less impact on the development of the built environment.

On the other hand, historic built areas resulted from preservation of the original buildings and are determined in space by physical limitations. The perception of their historic value is based on the physical presence of the buildings which require a set of rules for their preservation, which impacts on the development of the built environment.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study is to widen the understanding of heritage in a manner that allows putting it to good use in a wider range of contexts. The non-corporeal heritage dissolves the physical constraints that determine certain perceptions of the built heritage, emphasizing the role of the symbol a building withholds. Musealisation of non-corporeal heritage can be a feasible tool for heritage advertising and tourist activities in areas with little to no tourist infrastructure. Through function, the remains of buildings with historic value are given a new virtual context which echoes in present times, which ensures its preservation and acknowledgement.

This new concept the study proposes invites to further studies yet to come.

7. References

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