Solidarity through a Built Medium:
A Case of the Romanian National Architectural Style
in Transylvania

SMARANDA SPÂNU
Centre for Regional Geography
Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj

Abstract: The concept of *nation* that defined the 19th century outlined the socio-political context from which several national architectural styles emerged. By the end of the century the first group of Romanian architects trained in eclectic foreign schools returned and proclaimed the need for a national style illustrating the *national spirit*. In both Wallachia and Moldavia the architectural movement developed rapidly. As a region of Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, Transylvania had a different evolution: here the style manifested late, yet with an explicitly expressed goal – showcasing the solidarity of a united Romanian nation, by displaying their collective identity.The case study of this paper is the Mureşanu District in Cluj-Napoca – part of a program of asserting the national identity and solidarity. What is the reasoning in choosing a residential program and such a material manifestation in shaping national identity? What is the evolution and future of these still compact heterotopic enclaves? Originating from the interpretation of heritage, what is the optimal approach towards these spaces?

Email: smaranda.spanu@gmail.com

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1. *The historical* context. The concept of nation in the 19th century Romania.

At the launch of the series of revolutions of 1848 – also known as the Spring of Nations – in the historical Romanian provinces, the Kingdom of Romania, Moldavia, Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina (under Russian, Turkish and Hungarian domination), a strong collective desire was expressed for the unification of all Romanians under a single autonomous state; the main motifs behind this were their strong ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties and a slight temporary easing of political and cultural censorship. Despite the outright manifesto of the ethnical solidarity ideal and several military events, by the end

of 1849 the previous structures were reestablished, the romanian regions returning under Hungarian, Austrian and Russian administration (Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina and Bessarabia) and Russian and Otoman administration (Kingdom of Romania and Moldavia). In perfect synchronization with the entire European context, this period represents an important stage of crystallization of the concept of nation and the activation of national consciousness.

The later course of events, triggered in 1853 by the outbreak of the Russian-Ottoman War, followed by Austria's involvement, led to the change of the dominant power in the Romanian Principalities from Russian to Austrian. By the end of 1856 the political and administrative situation is clarified: the Romanian Kingdom and Moldavia are each recognised as autonomous principalities. Two years later, the Paris Convention will reinforce their now official status, and in 1859 elections are held. Without breaking the terms of the Convention, the majority of votes in both the Romanian Kingdom and Moldavia will appoint as sole ruler Alexandru Cuza. Thus the unification is achieved, the independence insured and the United Principalities officially take on the name of Romania.

The modern idea of *nation* was thereby not only assimilated by the political and intelectual elites but also put into practice: the aim was to redraw the borders of the country according to the ethnical ones.[1] The 'Greater Romania' aquires a purely occidental Constitution (1866) and a guarantor for the social and political internal stability: the foreign prince Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, appointed as ruler in 1866. At the beginning of 1881, the Kingdom of Great Romania celebrated in Bucharest, the newly designated capital, the *absolute independence*.

The outbreak of the 1848 revolutions manifests also in the Habsburg Empire; as an integral part of it, the Transylvanian region will experience a massive shift, from a poorly represented cultural and political life towards a crystallisation of individual national agendas for each ethnic group. The reference for all these nationalistic programs is the Hungarian revolution, whose agenda included liberal principles (as individual rights, human rights, citizen rights, abolition of censorship etc.) as well as more autocratic measures such as not-recognising national individualities, the imposition of the Hungarian language as mandatory and the unification of the Transylvanian region with Hungaria. Alongside the Romanian community, the Slavic, the Saxon and the Serbian ones will also adopt opposing position towards the Hungarian ideals. Passing through a fruitless first stage of written pleadings and petitions, the intellectual Romanian elites of Transylvania will eventually resort to convening popular public meetings in order to demonstrate the attitude of the people and to weigh in the Romanian claims. These popular public meetings represent the

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[1] Mihai Barbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Şerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României – The History of Romania*, (Bucharest: Corint, 2001), 311.

beginning of the process of organization of the Romanian nation according to *the free and equal right to existence of all nations*. In this same context of public manifestations the Romanian nationalistic discourse will take shape, denouncing the nation's structuring, and demanding firstly the creation of its "own public, cultural, religious and judicial institutions" (based on the historical right and "the right of the majority" in Transylvania) and secondly, equal rights with the inhabiting nations. At the beginning of 1849 the Romanian deputies present to the Austrian court a memorandum requesting the `union of Bukovina, Transylvania and Banat under one government` - `the first single political program based on the principles of ethnic federalism` – seen at the time as the only accessible solution to safeguard the state autonomy of Transylvania and the independence of the nation. However the revolution will not bring the results hoped by the involved nations. Between 1849 and 1860 the political and administrative sistem becomes absolutist and centralized.[1] The administrative system of the Empire is restructured in 'crown provinces' dependant on the Court of Vienna; this applied also to the main Romanian-inhabited regions – Transylvania, Voivodina, Banat and Bukovina. The struggle for national independence of these regions continues by legal means, through numerous pleadings constantly sent to the court of Vienna.

In 1860, the Habsburg Empire suffers a decentralization of power and subsequently chooses the cooperation with the Hungarian nobility, establishing a new organizational structure of the monarchy: the dualist regime. By the end of 1865 the structures that sustained the Romanian claims were dissolved and a new structure (Dieta), mainly Hungarian, votes for the annexation of Transylvania to Hungary.

The Austro-Hungarian Dualist Regime is officially inaugurated in 1867 and will continue until 1914, defining this period through the attempt to counterbalance the Western-European advantage. Although this new political framework was focused on the overall development of society, the non-German and non-Hungarian nationalities of the Empire are underrepresented; the national issue will not be addressed: Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs and other minorities are not recognised their political identity, in favour of the Hungarian identity promoted by institutions and state structures. Having this dualist-regime as background, the recognition of the Romanians as a nation becomes improbable; if the assertion of the nation would have been possible under a federal Austrian tutelage, in the new dualist regime the Transylvanian Romanian elite will refocus its hopes, seeking the help of Greater Romania. The Romanian political

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[1] Some of its measures are: decision making without the involvement of the public society, centralization of power, imposing the German language as official and mandatory, promotion of a state religion to the detriment of other native ones, operating without a Constitution and through an oppressive system: canceling the press freedom, banning of public gatherings and maintaining the state of siege established during the revolution.

action preserves the nationalistic guidelines of 1848 during the dualist regime despite the fact that claims and protests demanding recognition of the nation are punished with imprisonment and financial penalties, embittering public opinion and creating 'martyrs of the national cause'. The claims remain the same: the autonomy of Transylvania, equal representatives in local and central administrative structures, equality between nations, the usage of an official language according to the major population of the administrative unit in question, the right to cultural and educational institutions etc. The tensions between the Regime and the involved nations will gradually worsen, 'the intransigent reaction of a party stimulating the other, intensifying the Hungarisation policy will result in a radicalization of the Romanian nationalism'. From this moment on the Romanian political movement will be fully oriented towards the Kingdom of Romania. In its turn, the Kingdom will show sympathy towards its Transylvanian conationals, manifested as moral and material support – the `financing of various publications, Romanian students, ecclesiastical and educational institutions, and even the National Romanian Party'.

The concept of nation, well defined in ideatic terms, and strongly conveyed at a discursive level, will gain in these circumstances a particular material form. The assertion of national identity will find outlets in the material culture, in various mediums, such as architecture, art, and literature. As stated by H. Kohn and E. Gellner this manifestation of cultural nationalism is a reaction, "a defensive response by educated elites to the impact of exogenous modernization on existing status orders"[1]. But, as J. Hutchinson emphasizes, this phenomenon is not a process of withdrawal "into an isolated agrarian simplicity",[2] but rather a process of identifying traditional ideals, values and features, tested and validated in a previous stage and accepted as essential and defining for the character of the nation. This idealized profile, reconstructed from selected traditional features, is to become the basis on which the "new modern scientific culture" can be constructed by the younger generation of intellectuals, thus turning into a "means to catapult the nation from present backwardness and divisions to the most advanced stage of social development"[3]. This conflicting shift towards both traditional and modern was exactly the phenomenon that occurred in the 19th century architecture of the Kingdom of Romania.

2. Architectural context.

The built object is more than often deliberately politically charged. Its capacity to carry a theoretical message and to express the convictions of the subject or community that has created it is inscribed in its very own visibility. However,

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[1] John Hutchinson, "Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration," in *Oxford Readers: Nationalism,* ed. John Hutchinson, Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 128.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

the theoretical message will always precede the built form. If the political nationalistic discourse was already well defined since the 1840s, in the architectural field the first nationalistic tendencies manifest in a theoretical aspect around the 1860s, through the input of some individual personalities (Al. Orascu, I.D. Berindeiu); the main focus is placed upon the affirmation of the national identity through the creative arts, especially through architecture, the ultimate goal being the achievement of "artistic flourishing/welfare of the country" (D. Berindeiu).

The first built manifestations of the nationalistic discourse occur almost 20 years after, in 1885, year that will mark the coming into being of the Romanian national style.

This gap between the crystallization, the conceptualization and the materialization processes can be easily read into the choice for certain architectural styles that dominate the first half of the 19ᵗʰ century in all of the Romanian regions. The phenomenon that occurred was a rapid succession and interlacing of exogenous styles – *empire*, *classicism*, *romanticism* (translated through the feudal influenced neo-gothic) and *eclecticism* (1790–1840–1870); this is motivated part by the lack of professional Romanian architects, and part as a declared European affiliation. The resistance of this neoclassical expression, although "lacking genuine, real roots"[1] in the Romanian space, will precede and coexist with the new national style, proving the strong cosmopolitan will to rupture the old ties with the Byzantine world.

The political and the social juncture and the cultural interferences present in the Kingdom of Romania make up the context that allowed the assertion and the physical manifestation of the style; in the other Romanian regions, and especially in Transylvania, the process will take a different course.

Most architects practicing in the Romanian space during this period are of foreign origin. Only after the Union of the Romanian Principalities (1859) and their gain of independence (1877) the first generation of Romanian-born, professional architects is formed, through a system of scholarships abroad; they will form the nucleus of the new Romanian Architecture School.

The theoretical base, focused on asserting the national identity through individual and disparate publications (thematic studies, articles etc. starting with the 1860s) and through complex specialized and thorough publications like the '*Annals of architecture and the related arts*' (1890) is complemented by the first organizational structure, *The Romanian Architects Society* in 1891, who, a year later, will initiate the first school of architecture. One of the main directions defined by the new style's guidelines is towards the study of the national

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[1] Gheorghe Curinschi Vorona and Mihai Ispir, "Arhitectura românească in vremea începuturilor societății arhitecților si Revistei Arhitectura" (Romanian Architecture at the beginning of the Architects Society and Arhitectura Journal), *Arhitectura* 4-5 (1981): 21.

historical heritage. By the end of the 19th century, Alexandru Orăscu, a Romanian architect schooled abroad, states:

> Study the remains – no matter how small – of the old artistic creations and use them as origins of a mighty art...don't miss any opportunity to use artistic elements found in the Romanian monuments left from the past, but transform, change and embellish them.[1]

In this climate would Ion Mincu assert himself; a Romanian born architect, trained abroad at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, he completed the process of crystallization as a material form of the ardent nationalistic aspirations of the era, using the theoretical background provided by the existing organizational structures (Romanian Architects Society 1891, Historical Monuments Commission 1892) and the specialized publications that had already disseminated, between 1890 and 1895, the main principles of the style. The focus on vernacular architecture and the entire folk heritage along with the opposition towards grafting, copying and the non discriminatory assumption of exogenous examples are the key vectors of the new Romanian national style, defining it along the lines of the democratic nationalistic ideology of the 1848 period.

Fig. 1. Context and coexistence of the national style: Ion Mincu – The Kiseleff Road Buffet 1892, national Romanian style; Grigore Cerchez – Niculescu-Dorobantu House 1896, Louis XII style (source: *Arhitectura* Journal 1891-1914, VII year, 1941).

> Pedantry, ignorance and our old-fashioned cosmopolitanism, smothering any feeling of love and national pride, gave birth to an excessive and undisputed awe towards everything that arrived from abroad.[2]– Ion Mincu.

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[1] Shona Kallestrup, *Art and design in Romania 1866-1927. Local and International Aspects of the search for the National Expression*, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 100–107, as quoted by Ada Stefanut, *The Romanian national style - architecture and national project* (Bucharest: NOI Media Print, 2004), 17.

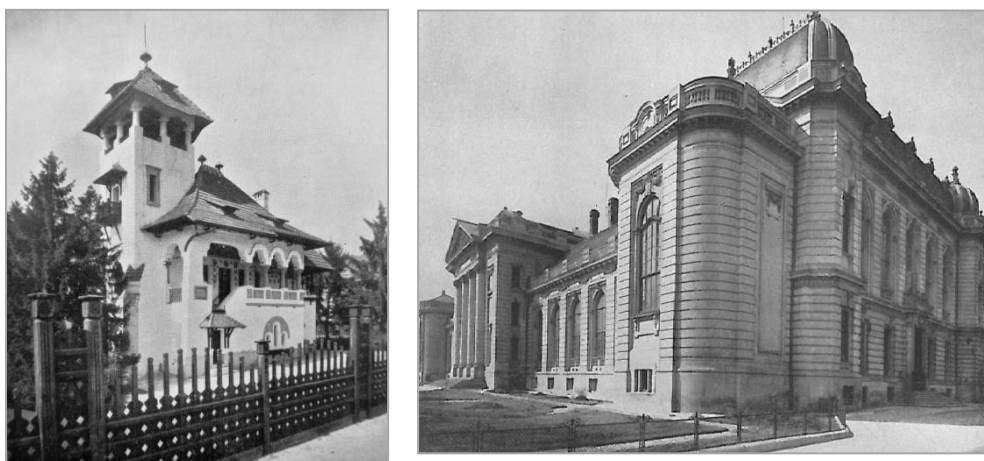[2] Vorona and Ispir, "Arhitectura romaneasca...", 21.

Fig. 2. The coexistence of architectural expressions: Grigore Cerchez – Minovici Villa (Bucharest) built in 1905 in the national style; L.P. Blanc – Medicine Faculty (Bucharest) built in 1903 in neoclassical style (source: *Arhitectura* Journal 1891-1914, VII year, 1941).

Just as a community consciously assumes an identity – and this process converts it into a nation, in the modern meaning of the term (Hobsbaum, 1990), the conscious creation of a style, opposed to the organic development of one, can be seen as an argument of its nationalistic character. The new national style is designed as a material representation of identity, the architecture thus being an extension of the national affirmation initiative. According to Hobsbawm (2012) the national movement is structured into three evolutionary stages: (A) the first cultural creation phase (manifested in literature, folklore etc.), (B) the conceptual transformation phase, when the 'national idea' receives its first political connotations, and (C) the last phase, when the politicized idea turns into nationalistic official program and gets to "acquire mass support"[1]. Based on Hobsbawm's structure an analysis of the national style's evolution can be made.

At the time of its emergence, in the Mincu stage, the new architectural trend represents the transition between Hobsbawm's A and B phases, that is between the object of a purely cultural creation animated by the concept of nation, and the object as manifesto, politically charged, delivered by the militant architect in the service of an ideology. In this initial phase, the direction proposed by Mincu will be rejected on an official level, and the built examples are only a few, small-scaled private commissioned and mostly residential buildings; the style is considered unsuitable for buildings with a representative role. In this stage (1890–1900) almost all commissions are in the domain of

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[1] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12.

private housing. However a number of professionals are starting to adopt the new architectural expression, and the formula gains prestige. By 1904 the School of Architecture is initiated and the style is publicly acknowledged.

Fig. 3. General Romanian Exhibition, Bucharest 1906, *Cula* and The Royal Pavilion (source: *Arhitectura* Journal 1891–1914, VII year, 1941).

At the beginning of the 20th century, through the built examples presented in the General Romanian Exhibition held in Bucharest in 1906, the National Romanian style will prove its ability to serve all kinds of architectural programs[1] and from now on it will permeate the domain of large public architectural programs. Since its recognition and adoption within the official culture promoted by the state, the style will transition into its last stage, its ossification as a nationalist program (Hobsbaum's phase C). the style will be preferentially used for state institutions, town halls, county councils, ministries, palaces of culture, museums etc.

In this stage, the entire architectural language – formal, decorative and functional – developed by Mincu through interpretation of selected motives from various national identitary sources (vernacular architecture, Byzantine background, renaissance decoration and so on) will be transformed into a standardized formal vocabulary – repeating a set of standard images, lacking an authentic creative input. The general shift is towards a more monumental version of the style, the volumetrics tend to be cumbersome and the excessive decoration becomes more important than the functional needs.

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[1] Ada Ştefănuţ, *The Romanian national style,* 42.

This will be the evolutionary process of national style in the Kingdom of Romania, with the capital Bucharest as the core from where the phenomenon irradiated; this condensed coagulation, crystallization and ossification process will eventually lead to an obsolete, antiquated version of the initial style, and will be gradually rejected in the favour of the modernist style. The two will coexist, in contrasting associations in both new residential areas brought by the urban expansion in the after war period, and in the old city centres. This stylistic overlapping is visible in the architectural production, in the built background, as well as in the specialized publishing mediums, the preferred 'arena' for the traditionalism versus modernism never-ending conflict. In its last phase the National Romanian Style would become the very dreaded traditionalism, the conservative classicism against which it initially fought, and the modernism manifested as an avant-garde direction, the new that brought along 'progress', acting as a catalyst.

As the architectural opposing trends, two specialized publications also coexist. On one hand the *Arhitectura* Journal – supporting the national style as the only truthful expression of the Romanian spirit, and thus the only 'path' to follow; this traditional direction will weight heavily in shaping both official and public opinion. In the opposite 'camp' the *Simetria* Journal, led by young architects, will promote the modernist trend and the desire for change and for retrieving the style disparity between global and local architecture.

In Transylvania the nationalistic tendencies of the era manifested in the architectural field takes on a different form. As a part of the Austrian Empire this subdued region is visibly more influenced by continuous exogenous trends, and thus its stylistic evolution more particular. The adhesion to the European 1900 Style (Art Nouveau) is more obvious: if in the Old Kingdom of Romania the affiliation with the style refers merely to the ideological nationalistic purposes and to the sources of inspiration (historicism, folk, traditional architecture), in Transylvania the foreign trends, like the Austrian and the Hungarian one, are assumed as such, with their entire material expression.

Extremely late compared to the rest of Europe, in the first decade of the 19th century, the baroque is slowly replaced by the empire style, locally defined, by its "severe and festive, typically Transylvanian"[1] character. The preferred programs are the institutional buildings – nobility palaces and educational institutions – although the trend will be passed on to the bourgeois urban housing facilities. Between 1830 and 1840, the emphasis on sobriety amplifies, shifting to the use of the classicist repertoire for the full range of programs, without discrimination. Since 1850, the eclectic style, defined by its strongly romantic historicist character, becomes the officially promoted trend. As in many other regions, the adopted historicist background belongs to the feudal era, with predilection for the Gothic style, so that "buildings of most different [architectural] programs […] palaces, bourgeois homes, train stations, hospitals etc. assume, regardless

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[1] Gheorghe Curinschi Vorona, *Istoria arhitecturii in Romania* (History of architecture in Romania) (Bucharest: ed. Tehnica, 1981), 282–283.

their destination, the false decorative crenels, turrets […]"[1]. This stylistic tendency has a simultaneous emergence in the United Principalities as well as in Transylvania, witnessing on one hand the impact of the European influence and on the other hand the wish to even out the economical, social and cultural odds.

Fig. 4. Parallel evolution of styles in Transylvania – eclectic and art-nouveau: Austro-Hungarian architects Fellner and Hellner – National Theatre, Cluj (1906); Hungarian architects Komor Marcell and Jakab Dezső – Vulturul Negru Palace, Oradea (1907); Deutsch K.I Glassware Shop, unknown architect, Oradea (1906-1910); Rimanóczy Kálmán - Moskovitz Miksa Palace, Oradea (1905); Josef Huber – Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Cluj (1910); (source: personal archive).

Simultaneous with the first stage in the affirmation of the National style in Great Romania, the eclectic style will dominate the general trends in Transylvania despite the intense Romanian nationalistic political activity, and numerous claims and protests to recognize the nation and its identity. The architecture promoted by the authorities maintains its exogenous character ignoring the desire for national affirmation and its manifestation as material medium.

Subsequently, overlapping the eclectic layer there are several versions of the Secession, acquired via neighbouring European powers: Austrian and German 'Jugendstil' and Hungarian 'szecesszió'. Until 1918, Transylvania as a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire will maintain this foreign influence regarding its architectural production.

The first Transylvanian aperture towards the national Romanian style occurs in 1906, through the General Exhibition in Bucharest. Here along with the construction of a dedicated vernacular-inspired 'Transylvania pavilion', the Transylvanian representatives

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[1] Curinschi Vorona, *Istoria arhitecturii…,* 282–283.

have a direct contact with the representations of the Romanian national identity as imagined by the architects schooled by Mincu.

> However the nation's benefit was even more important. For the first time in the life of our nation, Romanians in large masses, coming from various provinces many of which subdued, made a direct contact with each other and with the strength and greatness of the motherland of which they remained thrilled. Thereafter, this made the unification desire more vivid and the rhythm of the liberation movement even more rapid.[1]

The actual style will be widely used rather late in Transylvania, only after the unification with the Kingdom of Romania from 1918. Due to this gap, in this region the national style will be synchronous with both the modernist style, a central-European influence, and also with the eclectic and the classical style, both reminiscent of Vienna and the Hungarian 'szecesszió'. The majority of the National Romanian Style buildings are constructed immediately after the end of the war, from 1918 until the 1930s – when the rhythm of the construction production suffered a drop due to the economical crisis; despite this, the neo-Romanian style continued to be used until the 40s.

A special feature of the style's Transylvanian development consists of the preference for two particular types of architectural programs, though not exclusively. Firstly, the religious buildings – the majority of the Transylvanian larger cities would acquire a new Romanian national style orthodox cathedral immediately after the Unification. The reason behind this gesture is linked to historical ethnic struggles dating back to the 15th and 16th century. As Ada Ştefănuţ recalls "the Orthodox faith is intimately related to the idea of the *Romanian spirit*", fact explained through the "resistance to Ottoman domination", a war in which "each victory against the Ottoman Empire was commemorated by building a church"[2]. For an extended period of time the Romanian national style will be the only official architectural expression acknowledged by the Orthodox Church.

The second preferred architectural program is the private housing, with the model of the plot-isolated villa, initially promoted and 'trademarked' by the intellectual elite of the capital. Thus the style is associated with a certain social status, the nationalistic oriented intellectual elite and is seen as a private, individualistic patriotic manifesto of one's national identity. For both the residential and the religious programs, after the initial impact of the style on the local architecture background, regional features developed. The Romanian national style had transmuted into a more specific form, under the influence of and as a response to the capital's centralizing program.

Going back to Hobsbawm's schema and analyzing the architectural pattern developed in Transylvania following the capital's example, one immediately thinks of the third evolutionary stage of a national movement, the national idea transformed into nationalistic program. The evolution process is somewhat reversed; on a solid background strongly influenced by national consciousness, with a strong will to assert oneself but without any form of material architectural identity, the National Romanian

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[1] Antonescu, *Arhitectura* 1/1941, 104.
[2] Ştefănuţ, *The Romanian national style…,* 17.

style created in the country's capital will be adopted as a package, architectural expression along with its political program, exacerbating its national significance.

After the initial urban and architectural `boom`, when the national style bore the most resemblance to the original model, one can observe a mutation process similar to a reversed evolution of Hobsbawms' initial stages: the architectural expression that carried such nationalistic significance gradually looses its political connotation, regressing into an original cultural stage, or even dissolving into a purely esthetical one.

3. A Transylvanian case-study: Andrei Mureşanu district in Cluj.

The national consciousness of the Transylvanian Romanians crystallized in the first half of the 19th century and had, besides the main character of the general Romanian identity, a deeply embedded regional specificity, generated by the "inferior political status of Romanians in Transilvania", "inter-ethnic tensions" and "fierce disputes with other competing nations"[1]. As specified by Mitu, the Transylvanian Romanian identity will be "shaped under the pressure of the constant threat they feel coming from the other"[2], and hence it's manifest and militant character, exhibited as materialised medium through architecture.
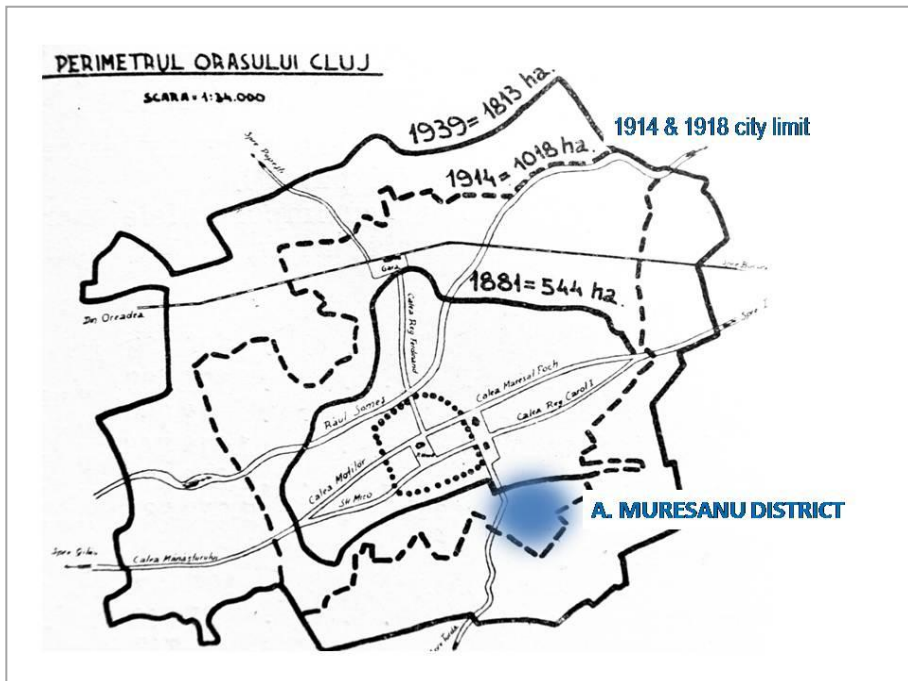.

Fig. 5. Evolution of Cluj city limits, throughout the years

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[1] Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania*, (Central European University Press, 2001), 4.

[2] Mitu, *National Identity...,* 4.

As in all of the big cities of Transylvania, the same phenomenon occurs in Cluj, the capital city of the historical region. After the 1918 Unification, the city develops rapidly, expanding its territory, its industries, and its population and hence its need for locative/housing capacity.

Also, after being an isolated community, with restricted access to the city, and no right to build 'permanent' structures (i.e. most Romanian churches were built in wood technique instead of stone or masonry, both of which being perceived as permanent, lasting) the natural tendency was the assertion of one's presence through a very 'tangible' and visible medium. In Cluj the two main architectural foci were the *residential program* (the Mureşanu and Grigorescu districts) – an independent private initiative, and the *religious program* (the central Orthodox Cathedral) as part of a larger scale program via the capital, both developed using the national style.

In the *Patria* Journal dated 1 December 1936, a special issue celebrating the Unification of Transylvania and Romania of 1918, the articles report the Romanian accomplishments achieved since, focusing on the city of Cluj. The built background increases considerably; numerous public works are carried out – schools, hospitals, commercial buildings are being built, mostly through the Centre for National Houses, a national institution.
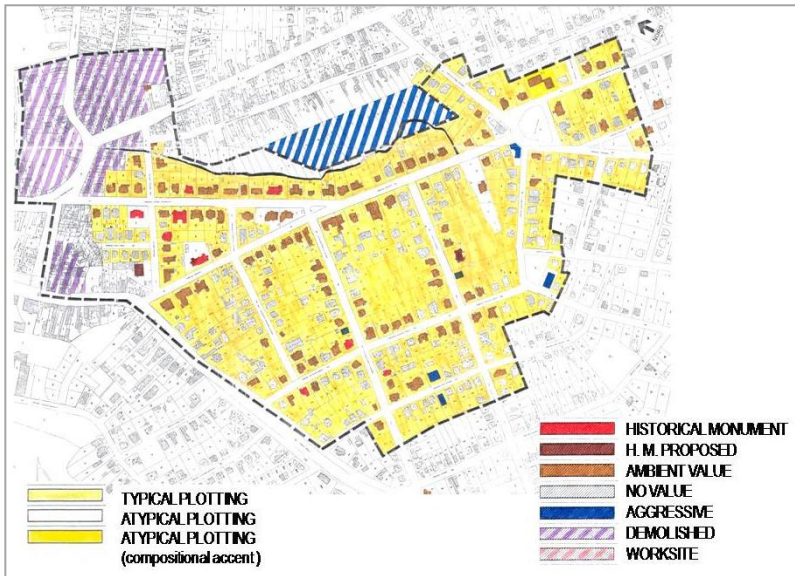
Fig. 6. Mureşanu District, Cluj, qualitative analysis (source: PUG Cluj-Napoca, February 1995).

The most massive growth takes place in the residential field – the city expands "in all directions [with] new Roma-nian neighbour-hoods, with delightful little villas and houses"[1] in order to keep up with a rapid demographics evo-lution: from a surface of 1080 hectares and 83.000 inhabitants in 1920, the city grows up to 1813 hectares and

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[1] "Câte case particulare s-au zidit la Cluj în anii 1922-1935" (How many private houses were built in Cluj between 1922 and 1935) unsigned article, *Patria*, 1 (1936), 15.

115.000 inhabitants by 1938[1]. The need to ensure the living space required by such growth is solved through means of legislation, by issuing favourable laws like "The law for the encouragement of building construction" from 1921[2]. Thus the number of private housing units increases from 6880 up to 9400 units between 1922 and 1935[3], with two peak periods, in 1927–1928 with 230 built units and respectively 348 units in 1934–35. In a fiery and passionate article, published in 1936, Bugnariu records some of the Romanian accomplishments, noting also the newest residential additions:

> [...] the most beautiful neighbourhoods, the most cherished adornments and most representative buildings - we are the ones who created them. The Romanian villas from the Grigorescu and Andrei Mureşanu districts, with their green wonders of their gardens, have renewed and enlightened the sombre image of a citadel of buildings without style and originality. [4]

Besides the superlative description of the two districts, the deliberate program is obvious: the new additions must represent the quintessence of the Romanian spirit, contrasting with the existing foreign-influenced background. The collective identity of the Romanian nation is deliberately showcased. The architectural expression must represent this collective identity, and the intent is clear: one nation, one culture, one single architecture.

The sum of all these interventions seeks to move towards an idealized image of the Romanian *regained* city, a city "of Romanian labour, building, rise, organization and creativity"[5]. The original orthogonal street layout from the Mureşanu districts' nucleus represents an additional argument of an idealized urban image of the city, highly contrasting with the existing old city centre, image distinctively sought by the municipal administration. If the interventions in the fabric of the old city area were architectural forms tailored to the context (although in many cases demolition had been considered the appropriate solution), these new Romanian districts built on vacant or semi-vacant lands were moulded after an idealized urban concept. This is in fact visible in the entire urban structure of the district: the street gauge, the section and profile (exceeding the period minimum needs), the generously sized plotting scheme, reduced height regime, low density of the built fabric, regular shaping of urban islands, good accessibility etc.

Another Transylvanian specific characteristic consists of the modernist influence. This is apparent first of all in the planimetric schemes of the villas that are designed with a greater concern for the functionalist flows and needs of the owners.

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[1] L. Marian, U. Neamţu, M. Bodea, "Realizări clujene dintre cele două războaie mondiale în domeniul caselor familiale" (Residential Achievements in Cluj between the two World Wars) (1983), quoted in Mihaela Ioana Maria Agachi, *Clujul Modern: aspecte urbanistice* (The Modern Cluj: urban planning aspects) (Cluj-Napoca: UT Press, 2009), 73.

[2] Nicolae Lascu, Legislatie si dezvoltare urbana: Bucuresti 1831-1952 (Legislation and urban development: Bucharest 1831–1952) (Phd thesis, Ion Mincu Institute of Architecture, Bucharest, 1997, 8.

[3] „Câte case particulare...", 15.

[4] Teofil Bugnariu, De ce iubim Clujul (Why we love Cluj), *Patria*, special issue 1st of December, 1936, as quoted in Dr. Octavian Buzea, *Clujul 1919-1939,* (Cluj: Tipografia Ardealul, 1939), 72.

[5] "Estetica oraşului" (The aesthetics of the city), *Patria*, 1st December Special Issue, (1936): 5.

Secondly the influence is visible in the urban proportions of the built versus the green areas and in the regulative distances and orientations, beneficial for fresh air and sunshine – by reference to the garden-city and hygienist movement of the 20th century associated with the modernist architecture. And thirdly, the ornamentation will be gradually simplified and removed, until the style can be read only through its volumetric principles and emblematic architectural elements – stylized porticos, roman, bell or trefoil arches, asymmetric entrances, flared cornices etc. – becoming Neo-Romanian Style. This transition between styles and the growing preference for the modernist design is obvious in a 1936 article, debating the esthetical aspects of the city:

> "[...] the colony of villas on the Feleacu Hill, with Andrei Mureşanu Street in the middle of it, is a testimony of Romanian refined taste, in both its endeavour to establish a national style and its predilection towards the cubist style."[1]

The completion of the Andrei Mureşanu District immediately after the 1918[2] Unification grants it the character of a manifesto-program, an act of assertion; the Romanian majority presence in the city is thus acknowledged through a solid built object and its identity cannot be mistaken. Also, assuming the already established national style meant that its material identity is not 'newly built, for one to decipher' but 're-built for one to recognize'.

The solitary and identitary character of this urban and architectural program amplified through the Romanization program of the educational system. Along with the foundation of the Romanian University of Cluj in 1919, an acute need for university academics was manifest: professors and researchers were summoned from the other regions of the country and even from abroad. Some of them chose as their new residence the Mureşanu District. In the first directory of the institution, in a Report on the work of the University since its foundation the rector Sextil Puscariu recalled:

> It was time for the Old Kingdom, to which Transylvania had given throughout an entire century [...] a plethora of teachers and apostles of national culture, to give back to the liberated province the noble duty and to send its fraternal help.[...] Therefore the teaching staff of the University had to be recruited out of the men of science of the Old Kingdom, among which there were also to be found some of Transylvanian origin, who gladly came back to the places they had forcibly left behind.[3]

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[1] "(...) colonia de vile de pe dealul Feleacului cu strada Andrei Mureşanu la mijloc e o mărturie a gustului românesc rafinat, atât în strădania sa de a întemeia un stil naţional cât şi în predilecţia sa pentru stilul cubist". "Estetica...", 5.
[2] Octavian Buzea, *Cartierele cu specificul lor* (The Districts and their specificities), *Clujul 1919-1939*, (Cluj: Tipografia Ardealul, 1939), 75.
[3] "Sosise vremea ca vechiul Regat, căruia Ardealul îi dase în curs de un veac împlinit, (de la descălecarea lui Gheorghe Lazar), pleiada de dascăli şi apostoli ai culturei naţionale, să întoarcă provinciei desrobite nobila datorie şi să-i trimeată ajutorul său frăţesc. (...) De aceea corpul profesoral al Universităţii trebuia recrutat din bărbaţii de ştiinţă ai vechiului Regat, între care se găseau şi câţiva Ardeleni de origine, care cu drag reveneau în locurile părăsite odinioară de silă". – Sextil Puscariu, "Raportul rectorului Sextil Puscariu despre Activitatea Universitatii din Cluj de

Thus the filling of vacancies of the University and the relocation in Cluj of all the invited academics and researchers gained a particular meaning, of "a spiritual joining and a wholeheartedly given support, from brother to brother"[1], an individual contribution to the Unification. Moreover, this 'transfer' aimed to "create a stronger and friendlier tie between all the Romanian Universities" with the deliberate purpose of "aiding each-other for the prosperity of national culture"[2]. Many of them chose to reside in the Mureşanu District creating newly built Romanian style villas. If between 1920 and 1922 only a few academics were listed as residents of the Mureşanu District, by the end of 1932 their number at least doubled.[3] These addresses are part of the old nucleus of the district, the area with the largest density of the national style villas. This also suggests that their initiative influenced the subsequent housing projects that were built in the area; through association with the Romanian spirit, as representatives of the first Romanian University in Transylvania, and through their social class, as the intelligentsia of the city, the resident academics propelled the trend of the Romanian National style villa. Only the original nucleus of the Mureşanu District still maintains a high density of neo-Romanian style villas, otherwise the built fabric consists of stylistic juxtapositions: the new Romanian Style villas opposite the clean rectangular modernist houses, heavy eclectic mansions or alongside delicately embellished secession facades. In time, as the style fused with the modernist principles, a new hybrid emerged: a cross between the volumetric design and dominant characteristics of the new Romanian style and the stripped-down, non-ornamental façades; this type of architecture will be used until the 1960s, maintaining the general atmosphere of the district.

In the contemporary stage, the interlacing of styles has become even more prominent, first of all through uncontrolled urban densification – some plots are divided in two or even three smaller ones – and secondly through lack of unity of the architectural style: no concerns were addressed regarding the contrasting nature of the modern-contemporary houses, ranging from post-modernist tall profile buildings to modern-minimalist or 'displaced' chalet-type villas. Some of the now old Romanian national style villas have been revamped: thick insulation, bright colours, and plastic-like rooftops. The stone carvings and moulds were removed, simplified or covered in insulation, the window carpentry replaced with anonymous PVC double glazing. Some of them have been left in a semi-abandoned state, scantly inhabited and unmaintained.

The style's repertoire, defined in the Mincu phase, can easily be found in the image of the Mureşanu District buildings, acquired *ad litteram* or interpreted.

The basic components of the style – or influence sources – *Byzantine architecture*, with both renaissance and oriental backgrounds, and *vernacular architecture*, with both its traditional Romanian architecture and its medieval one – can be identified, in their processed state, in an analysis of the Mureşanu Districts' built fabric.

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la infiintarea ei" (Rector Sextil Puscariu's Report on the Activity of the University of Cluj since its Foundation), Anuarul Universitatii din Cluj Anul 1 1919-1920 (University of Cluj Directory Year 1), 3-4.

[1] „(..) de amalgamare sufletească şi de ajutor dat din toată inima de la frate la frate", *Idem.*

[2] „(...) a (ne) ajuta la nevoie în vederea propăşirei culturei naţionale", Prof.dr.rector D.Călugăreanu, University of Cluj Directory 1920-21, 8.

[3] Data can be found in the annexes of University of Cluj Directory 1919-1935.
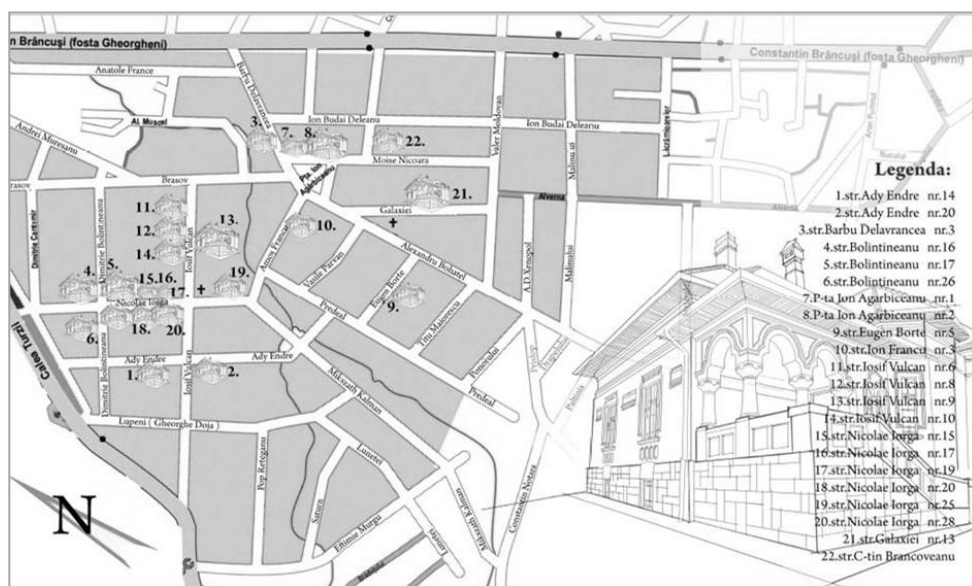
Fig. 7. Mureşanu District, Cluj, layout of the Romanian National style villas; the highest density of villas indicates the original core of the district (source: S.Spânu).

4. The heritage approach

In the country's capital and in the major cities, the majority of the still preserved national style objectives are classified as Historical Monuments and protected by law; these buildings continue to function as headquarters of several state institutions, museums, restaurants or private residences, this being the optimal scenario. On the other end of the spectrum is the state of abandon: these buildings slowly become ruins while an even slower reclaim trial is carried out, temporarily transferring the responsibilities back and forth. When the reclaim trials are won, the appointed owners find themselves unable to maintain a building of such specific requirements, and the previous scenario is resumed.

However this is not the case with the neo-Romanian or Romanian national style buildings in Andrei Mureşanu District. Here only few of the buildings are classified – those which have been the residences of several public figures (8 buildings). Most importantly – and perilously – the

Fig. 8. Mureşanu District, villas from the original core (source: S.Spânu).

district holds no special heritage protection regime, thus becoming victim to various densification and renovation processes. More than often these processes are brought on by the exclusivist allure of a unitary and enclave-like district with updated and downscaled interpretations of the old 18th and 19th century gentleman's (Boyars) estate residences.

Through the densification process the initially generous plots were divided in two or three smaller plots from which narrow secondary accesses were cut out. This process unfolded first at the expense of the green areas, transforming the overall image of the district and depriving the city of one of its main green reserve – A. Mureşanu is still known as garden-district, yet now it's barely maintaining its status – resulting in an alteration of the city's green space per capita ratio. Secondly, the densification process had an impact on the overall architectural image of the district. The new built additions range from the modern-minimal style to the post-modern and chalet-like manors, and hybrids between these, that are often too close to the old elegant villas, too brightly coloured, too tall and too alien to the whole architectural design of the district. While the eclectic and the modern villas of the 30s, built simultaneously with the national style nucleus, did not manage to disrupt the unitary image of the district,[1] the contemporary additions constitute a contrast of scale, design, chromatics and spirit.

As the style gradually evolved from the original designs of the Mincu School to an almost modernist ornament-cleared version, its nationalistic message was diffused. Since its creation as a manifesto of solidarity and unity through its Romanity, the area has evolved into a luxury district, sought for its exclusivist nature, and yet paradoxically overrun by constant alterations and densification. Besides the fact that its residential character has made it prone to mutations, the district has been expanded and engulfed into the ever-growing urban fabric of the city.

Fig. 9. Mureşanu District, villas from the original core (source: S.Spânu).

A minimal heritage oriented policy should consider several aspects: firstly, the identification of the neo-Romanian built nucleus of the district as *a unitary protected architecture reserve*, abiding to *very specific regulation* (i.e. regarding built density, materials used, types of interior /exterior modifications and additions permitted, chromatics, detail preservation, height regime etc.). Secondly, the development of a basic guide or methodology aiming to support local initiative for

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[1] The contrast between the national style and the modern style villas was at the time quite a common sight; as the two views cohabited, so did the built expressions.

preservation – similar to several existing European guides; this should serve and assist both residents and local authority. And thirdly, the *deliverance of sustainable development* through the conservation of the existing built fabric, the signifier, and recovery of its embedded historical meaning, the signification – national solidarity and unity, through public visibility (event, publications etc.).

Faced with rapid transformations, the Mureşanu district is threatened by the gradual loss of its defining neo-Romanian character and with it, its symbolic meaning. Despite this, it is still maintaining its enclave character. Its original symbolic function has gradually morphed into a different one, juxtaposing a different layer of meaning.

The classification as an ensemble or as individual units could reduce the number of destructive arbitrary interventions, providing a somewhat basic protection. The implementation of any conservation of valorisation endeavour requires in the first place the awareness of the hierarchies of value inscribed within the heritage object, and the main target is the user community. The overall and most important goal of conservation interventions bears less on the preserving of the material rather than on "maintaining (and shaping) the values stipulated by heritage"[1], that is the cultural significance of that specific object. This can subsume diverse values such as "historical origins and subsequent development, its association with particular people or events, its visual or townscape qualities, its construction or other technical qualities, a religious or symbolic role and archaeological research potential";[2] these are not mutually exclusive, and an objective, ensemble or site normally cumulates several such values. In the case of the analyzed district the cultural significance is dominated by the nationalistic-identity character, yet it includes several other values such as the historical-documentary one, esthetical (both architectural and urban), technical (such as specific finishes, architectural details, construction technique of the era etc.), and also as a particular evolution urban patch (juxtaposition of several styles, local influences). Gaining awareness of its value and perpetuation of its visibility could maintain the analyzed objective present in the social conscience of the community; as the Declaration of Amsterdam of 1975 highlighted, this community awareness and

Fig. 10. Mureşanu District, contemporary minimalist insert, inter-war insert, contemporary radical alterations of the main facade, neoclassic and eclectic inserts (source: S. Spânu).

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[1] Erica Avrami, Randall Mason, Marta de la Torre, *Values and Heritage Conservation – Research Report* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2000) , 7.

[2] What Is "Heritage Significance"?, in *Local Government Heritage Guidelines*, (NSW Heritage Office, Australia, 2002), 4.

accountability of built heritage represents the sole guarantor of its survival: "The architectural heritage will survive only if it is appreciated by the public and in particular by the younger generation".[1]

Being aware of the cultural significance and the assigning additional value constitutes the first unofficial endeavours available to the using community towards a conservation process, preceding and in most cases even triggering the official ranking and conservation procedures. This assigned value is subjective, and is based on "the way people remember, organize, think about, and wish to use the past"[2] - and ultimately reflecting upon the relation with material culture of the past, the built environment. Lowenthal identifies a series of negative aspects generated by the contemporary management of heritage that are reflected in the public perception and attitude towards the protected object, among which: alienation from heritage (both movable and immovable), refusal of responsibilities and of active involvement, or maintenance of its conflicting character – triggering ownership legal disputes, interpretation and conservation of objectives.[3] In the Mureşanu District case, the estrangement from the meanings embedded into the built medium seems to dominate the general perception of the enclave; the message contained within the built fabric is no longer received. Yet even beyond this lack of accountability, the contemporary interventions seem to be plagued by an interpretative amnesia: since the built form no longer bears a message for its user-public, it undergoes adjustments, travesties, arbitrary reinterpretations or is completely ignored; the interventions fail to consider even the *genius loci*, that identity of the place constituted at the congruence of architectural form, constructive technique, esthetical and urban principles and cultural-identitary message. The genetic print of the place is gradually eroded.

Despite this, the area still maintains its initially given `status` meaning, yet losing its national-declarative connotation in favour of a more pragmatic economical one (the financial status). Through the specified processes – gentrification and densification of the area – the community responsible for this built fund is in turn gradually replaced, no longer sharing the same value hierarchies which were the basis for the neighbourhoods` establishment. Thus, since the direct users are reluctant to assume accountability for the embedded cultural significance – be it the nationalistic identitary character of the area – the initiation of the process may lie outside of the community, in the hands of "external stakeholders: professionals, authorities and public".[4] This type of external intervention – through programs dedicated to recording and classification of buildings and interesting architectural, urban, aesthetic elements, studies and surveys, touristic and educational routes etc. – could refocus attention on the area and initiate the awareness and appreciation from the user community. The inclusion of these built

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[1] The Declaration of Amsterdam (21-25 October 1975), Congress On The European Architectural Heritage, paragraph „i", 1975, http://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/169-the-declaration-of-amsterdam (accessed May 2013).

[2] Mason Avrami, and de la Torre, *Values...*, 8.

[3] David Lowenthal, *Stewarding the Past in a Perplexing Present*, in *Values and Heritage Conservation* **-** *Research Report*, ed. Erica Avrami, Randall Mason, Marta de la Torre, (The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2000), 18-24.

[4] Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre, *Values...*, 8.

objects on the protected official list isn't and mustn't be the final aim of the interventions, for it cannot exclusively guarantee their survival; this can only be achieved through awareness of the values embedded within the built form and its reinvestment with `heritage meaning`, primarily by the using community.

The district`s safeguarding is demanded by its built-in message as well as by the formula through which this message has been embodied, within its regional and temporal stylistic context. Despite the rapid erosion and degrading, the district still maintains its enclave character; its initial symbolic function has gradually transformed, juxtaposing (at least one) new layer of meaning.

Thus, the space of the Mureşanu District, in its material and its symbolic form, displays several particular heterotopic features: its still resilient enclave-like character; its capacity of juxtaposing several spaces – the historical solidarity branded architectural space and its mirrored contemporary opposite, a space devoid of historic meaning and characterized by a continuously morphing architectural style. Both of these juxtaposed spaces are accessible, yet one needs to know `what to look for` in order to enter the historical enclave, whose boundaries have become less and less visible; both historical and contemporary `lived` spaces had and still have a practical economically controlled access.

Another heterotopic feature of the district resides in its compensatory character, in its elite-district character, strongly declared in its architectural expressions. Originally built as a material manifesto of solidarity, a material representation of the nationalistic idea, the district describes a "space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged"[1] as its surrounding space – the city – "is messy (...) and jumbled"[2]. The district and its Romanian national architectural style are both programmatic and demonstrative creations, aiming to illustrate an essentialised and encompassing view of the idea of nation. Through this joint feature, they both verge on a materialised form of utopia.

The national identity and implicitly the solidarity are conceptualized and manifested in the historical context of 1848. Their manifestation as a material form is achieved via the Romanian national style, created as a sum of the essential characteristics of the national spirit. This sense of solidarity had been inscribed, as potential, in the language of the architectural style as it was created in the country's capital; as it was assumed in Transylvania, its meaning was doubled. If the style originally aimed to represent the Romanian spirit, in Transylvania it gained a militant character, produced "under the pressure of the constant threat […] coming from the other"[3], thus leading to a doubling of its solidary character. The architectural unity of the district can be read as an intentional gesture of solidarity, constituted through a process of conversion of national identity into cultural identity.

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1967), in *Heterotopia and the city. Public space in a postcivil society*, ed. Michiel Dehaene, Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008), 21.

[2] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 21.

[3] Mitu, *National Identity...,* 4.