

CHANCES OF SURVIVAL FOR HISTORICAL CENTERS OF ROMANIA - EDUCATION

Urban heritage is still a notion that seems not to have much importance for the local administrations in Romania. It is a legacy of a long period of a communist regime that had as a main purpose to erase everything that was done before in order to build new towns that should have reflected the success of its ideology. This happened in almost all Romanian towns and scars are still easy to see from Constanta to Timisoara, from Bucharest to Suceava.

Demolitions and other urban interventions that took place during the sixties within historic towns of western society had a popular reaction during the seventies and historic towns began to be seen as important economic assets. Popular reaction in communist Romania was impossible so demolitions continued even more in the eighties. It is notorious that for "The House of the People" and the boulevards around it, Ceausescu destroyed about a third part (one of the most picturesque and specific) of the old Bucharest.

Today, after almost 14 years since the revolution, the problem of what remained from the historic center of Bucharest is still unsolved. The "official" blame is on the inefficiency of the economy of post-communism period. In fact it has to be considered that the main cause for the continuous decay of the historic center is the persistence of a mentality cultivated decades ago. Urban heritage is seen as an obstacle in the progress of the city, mostly as a burden and an element that forces the designers and the investors to think more, to make decisions one at the time and so on. More, during the communism, property was denied and owners were replaced by tenants, most of them from the lower class, which made investments to be almost

inexistent. Property is still an issue here, making decisions even more difficult to take.

All these aspects could have been surpassed if politicians felt the importance of heritage. Or this is impossible as long as urban heritage is not presented more as a resource for the economic development than a cultural asset. Unfortunately there is no preoccupation for sociologists and economists to study the influence of heritage on people and local economies, leaving restorers into a position of some Don Quixote that nobody understands.

It is very possible, under these circumstances, that the study that is carried out at the present for the historic center of Bucharest will remain just another intellectual exercise as long as there are involved in it only architects and other technical specialists. And it is not the case only of Bucharest.

Almost all of Romanian towns are experiencing these problems with some exceptions: Sibiu, Medias and some other towns created by German colonists hundreds of years ago. The mayor of Sibiu is German ethnic and the identity of the people of Sibiu is still related to the image of the historic town. There is no coincidence that some success in urban heritage rehabilitation occurred in these specific towns where locals still identify them selves with their towns. It means that well trained specialists are not enough and the most important factor in urban heritage preservation is the definition of a cultural identity and the recognition of the role of heritage by the local community.

Even historic center of Bucharest - which is the capital - will still have difficult years to pass as most of its population is only second or even first

generation living in town, have no understanding of heritage as specialists define it, and do not have the resources or the will to spend on urban heritage rehabilitation.

Historic center of Bucharest will not have a chance unless an administration will be able to put together politicians, economists, sociologists and restoration specialists. First of all it will have to try to raise the awareness of citizens of Bucharest, we have to open their eyes as the decisions will hopefully become more and more theirs since the centralization of the former communist regime will come to an end.

But, trying to go on with the process of decentralization, the state is gradually stepping off from managing and financing heritage. We can say that in Romania after 1989, the state was the main investor in restoration of historic monuments. Many of those investments though, were without practical results, some of them not even being finished in several years as direct result of lack of good management and coherent goals. Recently funding level dropped severely and less and less restoration working sites were opened, monuments that are currently taking care off being in a ridiculous number considering the number of listed monuments. In the meantime, private investments in this field cannot be qualified as "restorations". Most of the cases, private owners make all that they can to exclude their monuments from the official list or they simply let them to degrade, to collapse, in order to build something completely new in their place.

It is a situation that will lead to the loss of a large part of our heritage and common memory, unless a campaign of public instruction is not started. And this should start with some key administrative factors.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

There is no coherent program for the education of clergy concerning heritage conservation. Most of the listed monuments are related to religion (church, mosque, synagogue, parish house, cemetery and so on) and we can see that also that most of aggressive actions are related to these monuments. There is a strong trend of erecting new buildings while neglecting the existing ones. It is unbelievable to see a bishop having a GSM antenna installed visibly on the spire of the bishopric church (previously the church received a new plaster, completely altering the baroque appearance). It is not hard to find old churches with new shiny aluminum roofs, new churches built in a range of few meters from listed ones, demolition of houses in historic centers to make room for a new church and so on. All these are happening and are possible because of lack of education. There is also a bad mentality persisting according to which the state has to finance restoration works, as the state is the one responsible for including those churches in a list of monuments.

To associate the religious leaders and especially the lower clergy in protecting the built heritage is a remote target unless those people are aware of the value of their belongings and unless they have minimum knowledge about conservation in order to be able to communicate with conservation specialists. Under those circumstances, an education program has to be imposed and this has to be a priority for the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Lack of education and training in the field of heritage, lack of understanding of the economic potential that heritage has led to clear repercussions at governmental level on

several segments of its activity: tourism, finances, local public administration, and public works. Unfortunately, in Romania there is no effective collaboration between the ministries responsible for those activities and the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs in order to have a common effort to make good use of what remained of our heritage.

TOURISM

It is inadmissible that tour operators or other managers of touristic activities to be required to have a special license that can be obtained without any preoccupation for heritage. Taking into account that a major part of touristic activities are related to what we call "cultural tourism", this seems not to be rational. A direct result of this can be considered the recent intentions of developing a large entertaining park in close vicinity of a World Heritage listed town - Sighisoara, without any relation to the heritage and more, agressing the site. So, the former Ministry of Tourism was promoting a project called Dracula Park (based on the fact that the historic character of Vlad Tepes which served as model for Bram Stoker was born there) in order to exploit the image of the medieval town without any preoccupation for its restoration. This look even more unreasonable since this ministry did not even set an information center there, did not support any smaller scale projects to create hostels or other small hotels, did not financed any rehabilitation projects for the historic monuments that in fact are bringing tourists there. It seems that officials of that ministry are not aware or do not know how to use others' experiences such Italian ones. If someone would say that Italian experience couldn't be compared to Romanian situation, it might be useful to see that in Poland this actually worked well if we take into account

only the example of Krakow. One can see that information is easy to find in Krakow and even a International Cultural Center is putting together people from around the world in order to make the world learn about Krakow and Poland – which is a remarkable action.

It should be both in the interest of cultural administrators and touristic administration to set up a program to educate first of all the persons involved in central administration and then the large touristic operators or other investors in this field. Coming back to the case of Bucharest, it is very clear that it has a tremendous lack of promotion at touristic level as long as its own residents are not able to identify the real values of the city. We can ask ourselves why is that in Constanta, on the board of Black Sea, the former ministry of tourism thought that planting some expensive palm trees that even did not made it through the winter, will stimulate tourism while the historic center is in a state of decay, the museum dedicated to one of the largest roman mosaics discovered in Europe is almost anonymous, the Casino from early 1900's - one of the icons of the town – is still neglected and poorly exploited and so on. Is this an investment for sustainable development?

It is not possible to change mentality and to look for a sustainable development in this filed without a previous educational campaign to develop understanding for the possibilities and also for the needs that heritage has.

FINANCES

It looks in the same measure inadmissible that the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs is not fighting for the financial resources offered by taxes taken from exams of conservation specialists, from taxes raised from building permits in

protected areas, taxes for commercial use of images of historic monuments. Even the law says that these funds should be used in heritage protection, those money are still going to the state budget. In Romania one can see that the only real financial stimulant for owners of historic monuments is exemption for building taxes. No other financial support is offered even the law says that the state might "support" the owners in restoring their monuments. Probably there will not be any future coherent policies in this regard without those clerks trained strictly in economics or accountancy have no knowledge or interest in heritage.

Probably it will be in the best interest of heritage if those people will be put in some training programs in order to learn for instance how the National Lottery works in UK and for what reasons. It might be useful for them to learn how the Swedish government helps farmers to maintain their wooden heritage understanding the fact that this heritage lost its economic value.

It is absolutely necessary that people that can make financial decisions at governmental level to know and understand heritage, to see how other successful administrations do in Europe. All these things are related to training sessions for specialists in their field of expertise that understandable do not know anything about the field of heritage even if in fact their decisions might be of crucial importance for it.

LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Without having any relation of subordination towards the ministry taking care of public administration, the mayors and local councils should be included in a campaign of education concerning the heritage management and legislation. It is sad to see that such a project proposed by a training

center of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs was not accepted by the same ministry in a call for projects. Due to ignorance of local authorities, due to bad quality of urban planning in some cases, a lot of valuable urban structures and historic buildings are lost or mutilated. In Oradea, a former XIXth century brewery was demolished without any preoccupation for its rehabilitation possibilities. One of the first sugar industrial plants in Chitila, in close vicinity to Bucharest, is almost lost as it was never listed and nobody spent a minute trying to find a clever use for it. The park of an early XVIIIth century palace in Mogosoaia, also in close vicinity of Bucharest, is intended to be taken for some luxury housing project even if this is bad for one of the most important monuments in this region. Without any doubt, examples like this might fill dozens of pages and show that heritage and memory do not mean much in present.

Beyond destructive actions made with premeditation, much of the lack of constructive actions coming from local administrators is due to poor education and positive information concerning heritage. A permanent program for instructing those people might prevent bad actions and might raise the awareness for monuments and sites.

PUBLIC WORKS

One might ask why is it that the apparently intense campaign of building social houses is not linked with the idea of rehabilitation of historic centers like those of Bucharest or Constanta? Is there any preoccupation of solving two problems in one coherent action? Of course, for having this kind of action it is required that the promoters to realize the value of historic centers in the first place. Is it possible that the ministry taking care of public works, together with other

investors to build such coherent actions without having the culture to set up such a program?

A minimal training program in urban planning related to heritage should be the first step in making those able to make correct decisions aware of the potential of heritage. They should learn about urban developments in Brugge or Leuven in Belgium, Cesena in Italy or any other positive examples from Europe. Basic education, even if it consists of primary information, is the first step in developing strategies for making good use of urban heritage.

SOME PARTIAL CONCLUSIONS

It looks that for Romanian monuments it is not a priority to train new heritage conservation specialists as those might find themselves later in a situation of unemployment. A priority should be on the other hand a general campaign of education for population and administrators. The aim should be the creation of a market like the market that heritage generates all over Europe. Without creating a real cultural and economic environment for heritage protection, Romania will keep losing what we use to define as our common memory.

The disappearing from the market of the main client for monuments' restoration –the state- should not create a void because this will jeopardize the future of heritage, which will lead to losing also the specialists in the field. Through education we should make sure that in

the future we will have both administrative and economic mechanisms to generate the interest to perpetuate a part – and not the less important one – of the national culture which is the built heritage. This should be even more important in the context of creation of a new Europe because the Romanian heritage is just a part of our common memory. It is then important to start as soon as possible this process making it a complex one by having different targets starting with civil society and ending with ministers in order to reach to the point where the entire society assumes its heritage.

Like in medicine, it is impossible to speak about treatment of an illness as long as the patient is not aware of it and the doctor does not know the complexity of the illness before prescribing a treatment according to he's or she's specialty. And we have to remember that anyway it is better to give more attention for prevention in order not to get sick.

In this respect, without proper education for the society, any discussion about conservation of heritage and common memory will be sterile and without any interest outside the circle of specialists in this field. Without having an educated population, these specialists will find themselves in a constant monologue, without the main ingredient for the dialogue: the advised interlocutor. Without society's instruction we are soon about to loose the object of our interest: the identity given by our heritage.