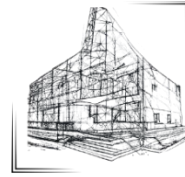


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(IN)VISIBLE TRACES.
ARTISTIC MEMORIES OF
THE COLD WAR

(In)Visible Traces. Artistic memories of the Cold War

Cultural Heritage in Romania – General Considerations

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The 1989 Revolution against the totalitarian communist regime brought forth important changes in the cultural heritage protection system, which after 1974 had weakened considerably due to the excessive ideologization of the field. After the collapse of the communist regime, experts immediately seized the opportunity to revive the field. They initiated the Decree 91 of February 1990 for the establishment and organization of the National Commission of Monuments, Ensembles and Historical Sites. The decree will be followed in subsequent years by a significant number of regulations that repeatedly do and redo the legislative and institutional structures in the field. Various types of cultural heritage gain recognition, extending the protection also towards less outstanding – in terms of architectural and artistic quality – and more representational objects and places. Heritagization, as throughout the world, becomes more inclusive and complex and the legislation follow the same path. During the last thirty-five years, the state authorities worked to put together a functional system, appropriate to the complexity of the field and to national specificities. The creation of new categories of cultural heritage, the intensified dialogue with the Romanian civil society and international actors, and the continuous institutional development demonstrate the increased awareness regarding the importance of cultural heritage for the contemporary society.

Currently, three main categories of cultural heritage are established by the Romanian law: historical monuments, movable heritage and intangible heritage, each of them benefiting from specific laws and dedicated experts' commissions. The field of historical monuments is regulated by the Law 422 of 2001, which defines them as “immovable assets, buildings and terrains located in Romania, significant for the national and international history, culture and civilization”. The law operates with a broad concept of cultural heritage and has a broad perspective on what ‘protection’ means, namely “the set of scientific, legal, administrative, financial, fiscal and technical measures aimed at ensuring the identification, research, inventory, classification, record, preservation, including guarding and maintenance, consolidation, restoration, putting in the value of historical monuments and their socio-economic and cultural integration in the life of local communities”. The phrase conveys the idea that historical monuments have a social vocation and should be accepted and used by local communities according to their needs and aspirations. Important international recommendations already stressed the same idea, such as the European Charter of the Architectural Heritage adopted by the Council of Europe in 1975 or the Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1987. Engaging the local community in the process of heritagization is the strong recommendation of many experts in the last decades, one of the most noteworthy examples of being the “Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society” (or the Faro Convention) from 2005 of the Council of Europe. This document introduces, among others, the innovative concept of ‘heritage community’, defined as the “people

who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations”. Though difficult to implement, and that is the reason why the Faro Convention has been signed and ratified by less than half of the states, the document has the merits of bringing the local communities into the center of discussion. Heritage thus becomes “a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions”. Furthermore, it assumes that there are not fixed identities to be expressed through a common heritage, but multiple and fluctuating identities that should have the right to claim their different heritages, upon people’s choice.

Clearly affirming the relationship between historical monuments and nowadays local communities leads to the explicit affiliation of the field to the broader field of public policy oriented towards development: “protection of historical monuments is part of the strategies of sustainable economic, social, tourism, urban and spatial planning development at national and local level”. The idea outlined in this paragraph – that historical monuments are economic and social resources – is an innovation in Romanian legislation in the field. Introducing the phrase ‘sustainable development’, which appeared in the 1980s in international law and formulates a new principle that should be the basis of public policies, is part of the process of connecting Romania to the international legislation and an attempt to put basis for a new conception of what cultural heritage is. Today, ‘sustainable development’ is understood as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, the responsibility we have towards the future generations involves using our resources without depleting them and the same principle should be applied in the case of the cultural heritage. Protecting it and preserving it from destruction ensures next generations the opportunity to benefit from this invaluable resource.

Other important regulations refer to the classification criteria of historical monuments, established in 2000, 2003 and 2008, as they reveal values that are assigned to monuments and basically represent a way of defining them. The laws establish four classification criteria: a) age, b) architectural and urban planning quality, c) rarity and uniqueness and d) memorial-symbolic value. If the first two criteria broadly correspond to historical and artistic values which are stated since nineteenth century, the other two criteria are a first in the Romanian legislation. The third criterion values both the intrinsic quality of the building, as well as those relative and relational qualities that depend on context. The memorial-symbolic criterion concerns a) the link between an edifice and a personality or certain historical, cultural, political or social moments and places; b) the monument’s engagement in the memory the community, at European, national or local level, and c) the attachment to local traditions. Valuing the memorial-symbolic weight of an edifice is one of the consequences of widening

heritage consciousness and accepting that its value derives not just from its relative or intrinsic qualities, but also from its social dimension, from the emotional and memorial weight assigned by the community, as well as from its role in the construction of collective identity.

In 2010, a Report of the Presidential Commission for built heritage, historical and natural sites was issued. The main danger for the survival of cultural heritage that the commission identifies is the people's lack of interest and low awareness of its importance and value. Therefore,

"We need education in this sense, at the individual and community level, especially after the long period of the savage politics carried out by the communist regime to erase the memory and, in fact, to cancel the genuine respect due to the deeds of those of the past."

Currently, 30,148 historical monuments, ensembles and sites – including archaeological sites, architecture, public art and funeral monuments – are listed on the Romanian List of Historical Monuments. While the National and the Zonal Commissions of Historical Monuments, formed by experts, are in charge with the process of identification and selection, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage is the main public body with responsibilities in research, preservation, restoration and promotion. Also, the regional directions for culture have important attributions in the field of heritage protection and for enhancing its visibility, through local programs. However, along the effort of public authorities and professionals, the public knowledge and awareness with regard to the importance of cultural heritage for the well-being of nowadays and tomorrow society needs to be enhanced. Many projects at European level, coordinated by organizations and institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Commission, are targeting it as a crucial condition for an effective safeguarding of the heritage. Bringing together experts, curators, public educators, and artists to find and implement new and innovative ways to promote heritage in all its forms proves to be a successful approach.