

## ROMANIA – HERITAGE @ RISK!

Eleven years ago ICOMOS International started various initiatives against the policy of systemization run by the Romanian dictator Ceausescu, against his ambition to transform Romania into an industrialized urban society, demolishing and replacing traditional heritage by a new urban architecture consisting of flats and huge “palaces of the people” made of reinforced concrete and marble (as in Bucharest). The exhibition “ICOMOS pro Romania” organized with the financial and logistical support of the German National Committee of ICOMOS opened in May 1989 at the seat of the International Secretariat in Paris with an international press conference. The international concern for the monuments of Romania was thus declared and the interest for the destiny of the Romanian heritage could be raised as the later itinerary of the exhibition through Europe (Munich, Stockholm, Copenhagen, London and Budapest) illustrates.

The events of December 1989 stopped the systematic destruction of the Romanian villages and cities, which due to the bad economic situation of the country had not advanced as far as feared before (although the systematic plans for almost all the settlements had already been prepared). Unfortunately, no inventory of the damage and loss of monuments has been worked out and up to today only very few attempts towards a repair of destruction inside the urban structure of historic cities can be mentioned (Bucharest, Sibiu). It is natural that the few Romanian specialists in conservation who had survived the 13 years without governmental protection and conservation first of all had to face the problem of reorganisation – in fact a remake of the former structures before their dissolution by Ceausescu in 1977. In March 1990, the Romanian National Commission for Monuments, Historic Districts and Sites – a council of honorary members from different special fields acting as decision makers (founded in 1892) – and the State Conservation Office were reinstalled, at the same time as the socialist “Law (for the protection) of the National Cultural Heritage” was abolished.

After ten years of experience it is obvious that both decisions – absolutely necessary and important at that moment – over the years have produced a visible slow down in the development towards normal European standards in conservation. First of all, even today Romania has no protection and conservation law, the daily work being regulated since November 1994 by a decree of the Ministry of Culture. The draft for a new legislation worked out by the State Conservation Office was given to the Ministry for consultation in 1992, but only since summer 1999 the final draft has been on the agenda of the Romanian Parliament for adoption. Secondly, the new State Conservation Office copied the structure of the former one, including a department responsible for the elaboration of all the renovation and conservation projects to be financed by the State. At the same time the government started to support privatization and soon some of the architects of the Conservation Office staff became entrepreneurs and acted as private contractors on some building sites. Conflicts were unavoidable and as a result the State Conservation Office was dissolved again in November 1994, the responsibilities being moved to a department of the Ministry of Culture.

Therefore, the governmental framework for an efficient protection and conservation of Romanian heritage is still incom-

plete and can be solved only by a new protection law which includes on the one hand the creation of a State Institute for Conservation (replacing the Conservation Office), on the other hand – and for the first time in Romania – a decentralization involving the county administrations as protection authorities in the implementation process of the legal monument protection. It is necessary to point out that all the positive steps towards improving conservation work including the final draft for the protection law given to the Parliament would not have been possible without the personal efforts and the very positive attitude of the present Minister of Culture, Mr. Ion Caramitru and his staff, who consider monument conservation as a first priority among all activities.

Three more important problems have to be mentioned concerning the state of the art of Romanian heritage: First of all, after the events of December 1989 a great part of the German population of Romania, who have settled in Transsylvania and the Banat for centuries, emigrated to Germany, mostly in 1990 and 1991, leaving behind empty farmsteads, city houses and even abandoned churches and villages. As a first reaction, the Cultural Council of the Transylvanian Saxons in Germany worked out a program for a comprehensive survey in 1990 of all the former German settlements in Transsylvania, in accordance with the methodology currently used by the German state conservation officers. Financed by the German Federal Government it started in 1991 and was completed in 1998. In the meantime, the first two volumes of the “Topography of historic monuments of Transsylvania” (the series being estimated for 25), presenting the results of the survey have been published, three more are being prepared. For the implementation of the recording project – with Romanian professionals only – a partnership agreement between the German National Committee of ICOMOS and the Romanian National Commission and the State Conservation Office was signed in Bucharest in 1991, the main goal of the partnership being the exchange of experience in all aspects of monument protection and administration. As a part of the project the Romanian conservationists involved in the recording were trained in the corresponding departments of the Rhenish and the Bavarian state conservation offices in 1992 and 1993. Even if this attempt towards a comprehensive inventory of the historic buildings of Romania can be considered as a great success, the methodology and the conception of historic building inventories has not yet influenced the Romanian official listing methodology, the official list of monuments being still restrictive (without taking into consideration e.g. vernacular heritage – and the vast majority of the Saxon heritage in Transsylvania is vernacular) with less than 20,000 items and every inscription needing to be confirmed by a decree of the Council of Ministers.

However, the results of the recording were used by the Ministry of Culture for the nomination dossiers to the World Heritage List of UNESCO to add six more examples to the site of Biertan fortified church and village, which represent different parts of Transsylvania and different types of church fortifications. Romania signed the World Heritage Convention in 1990 and, at the moment, is represented on the World Heritage List with six positions – the monastery of Hurezu, the archaeologi-

cal sites of Dacian time around Sarmisegetuza, the historic city of Sighisoara, the churches with exterior mural paintings in Moldavia, wooden churches of Maramures, village sites with fortified churches of Transsylvania and the Danube Delta as a natural heritage. For the protection and management of the World Heritage sites a special decree was elaborated by the Ministry of Culture at the end of January 2000 including funds for regular maintenance work and training for the local and county administration.

The two other basic components for every future planning of conserving Romanian heritage are financial conditions, i.e. the economic situation and the level of education, that is the training of specialists and craftsmen. Both have been taken into consideration while drawing up the program for the German-Romanian ICOMOS co-operation. Special attention was given to several jointly supervised renovation projects, in particular the restoration of the "church on the hill" in Sighisoara, financed by the Messerschmitt Foundation Munich, where new technologies have been introduced in Romania, like the method of prestressing, a procedure of structural improvement on historic buildings against earthquakes developed by the Technical University of Karlsruhe. For the training of highly qualified restorers needed e.g. for the conservation of mural paintings inside the late medieval churches of Transsylvania an international training course was organized by ICCROM in Sighisoara in summer 1995, co-financed by the Messerschmitt Foundation, the Romanian state and UNESCO. In the meantime, the Messerschmitt Foundation took over and started the restoration work of the "house with the deer horns" in Sighisoara transforming it into a German-Romanian cultural center while the project for the structural repair of the famous "tower of the tin-makers", part of the medieval fortification system, is ready for implementation in 2001.

Other foundations and their activities and contributions have to be mentioned because under the existing problems of the Romanian economy the state will never be able to cover even a small part of the costs necessary only for emergency interventions on the monuments, most of them being in a very bad condition. And the state still holds the ownership over a large number of monuments because the problem of private ownership has not yet been solved and legally clarified. One of the most active foundations is the "Foundation of the Transylvanian Saxons" in Munich which started in 1990 to contribute with small amounts for repair and emergency works on Saxon churches and took over the sponsorship for two fortified churches. The "Foundation of German Heritage in Romania", created in 1992, has made several small contributions to emergency interventions all over the country, and also the German "Cultural Foundation of the States" offered a grant for conservation works on three fortified churches. Since last year, the British foundation "Mihai Eminescu Trust" has started some activities towards conservation and revitalization of the Saxon villages, and in spring 2000 the British-Romanian foundation "Pro Patrimonium" was constituted.

The efforts made by Ion Caramitru, Minister of Culture, should be appreciated: for 1997 he managed to get a ten times higher budget from the Parliament for restoration works and in 1998, due to his initiative, the World Bank offered a loan for conservation work on some important monuments including a research project on revitalization measures for some of the Saxon villages (the latest going back to the interest shown by



Sibiu (Hermannstadt), aerial view of the historic city



Sibiu, lower town, abandoned house

Village of Drăușeni, abandoned Orthodox church (1998)





Sighișoara (Schäßburg), demolition of the historic mill district during Ceaușescu's time (1986)



Sighișoara, view from the upper town onto the demolished mill district (1996)



Hurezu, traditional vernacular farmstead in South-Western Romania



HRH the Prince of Wales in the destiny of the Saxon villages). In 1998, the historic city of Sibiu and its surroundings were declared an area of national interest and priority for the economic and cultural revitalization by the Council of Ministers – again an initiative of the Minister. The project “Sibiu 2000” as part of the Council of Europe’s campaign “Europe a common heritage” includes urban conservation projects, also run and financed by the German Federal Ministry for Development and Cooperation and the GTZ, the society for technical cooperation.

Finally, the level of education and training of specialists is very important. As mentioned already, Romania suffered a period of 13 years without governmental protection, a long period for such a discipline without development, contacts or exchange of experience with other countries. Some of the conservationists had to change their profession, some of them, including craftsmen and highly qualified academic restorers, emigrated. This situation explains the re-introduction of the former (in fact socialist) structures in 1990. Therefore, all the initiatives of co-operation with Romanian specialists are of fundamental importance, such as the partnership with the German National Committee of ICOMOS mentioned above or a partnership between the Romanian and the French Ministries of Culture concerning students exchange and education for conservation. A similar agreement was signed two years ago with the Hungarian Ministry of Culture. Other initiatives are the post-graduate studies in conservation installed at the University of Architecture “Ion Mincu” in Bucharest and the University Babes-Bolyai in Cluj-Napoca, or the annual conference especially for students and young specialists organized in Tusnad by the “Transylvania Trust” Cluj-Napoca in co-operation with other foundations and the ICOMOS national committees of Hungary, Romania and Germany. For a couple of years the Romanian “Union of Restorers” (including the architects specialized in conservation) has been very active fighting for an improvement of education and training for craftsmen in conservation. Two years ago, the Transylvanian section of the Union together with the Transylvania Trust started to run summer training courses for craftsmen in co-operation with specialists from the National Trust of England. The intention is to transform the baroque palace of Bonțida in Northern Transylvania after its restoration into a training centre both for architects and craftsmen in conservation. On the initiative of the “European Foundation for Heritage Skills” and with the sponsorship of the “German Foundation for Monuments Protection” a training for craftsmen will be set up in Sighișoara to cover the needs of Transylvania, a second one is planned in Campina for the southern part of Romania.

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Cincu (Großschenk), abandoned house of Transylvanian Saxons (1994)