PRESERVING MEDIEVAL STRUCTURES IN ARAD COUNTY,
ROMANIA: A NEW LIFE FOR OLD RUINS

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Abstract. Arad County, Romania, is located in a cross-border area, formed by Hungarian, Serbian and Romanian districts – the DKMT zone (Danube, Krish, Mureș and Tisa). There are numerous historical and archaeological remains across Arad County, the oldest dating from the Middle Palaeolithic. Most of them are settled in rural areas, not commonly known, not advertised and have no proper monument protection. Giving these monuments a higher profile would catalyse cultural tourism. The purpose of this study is to find viable means of rehabilitation, re-use and valorisation of this cultural heritage, through environmental-friendly interventions on archaeological sites in certain rural areas. Our aim is to implement the innovative concept of musealisation, in order to create a complex and sustainable tourist itinerary, which combines the activity of visiting with learning and experiencing the local traditions. The historical and archaeological remains are closely linked to the evolution of the nearby village. If understood from a phenomenological perspective, these monuments create a narrative web about life standards, economy, defence, specific crafting and building technology. These tourist attractions are intended to become part of a cross-border bicycle itinerary along the Mureș River, an environmental friendly way of travel. Former multidisciplinary studies performed by architects, historians, sociologists, archaeologists, ethnologists and museum workers have contributed with their expertise to attaining important objectives of the research: conservation and valorisation of rural historical heritage of Arad County, increasing the tourist attractiveness of the county, outlining the local specificity by preserving and revitalizing local traditions and endangered handicrafts. The proposals are submitted to the Strategy for Tourist Development for Arad County, elaborated in 2011 by CADI (The Analysis for Institutional Development Centre - Bucharest) and approved by the County Council. Our intention is to emphasize the opportunity represented by architectural and archaeological remains within their context, as resources for rural tourism in Arad County.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Arad County – geographical overview

Arad is a borderline county, located in the western part of Romania. It is part of DKMT Eurozone named after the rivers Danube, Criş, Mureş and Tisa. The 7650 square kilometers defined by two important rivers – Mureş and ‘Crişul Alb’ (The White Krish) and the Western part of the Carpathian Mountains, has varied geographical, historical, demographic and cultural features. Its northern part, named ‘Ţara Zărandului’ (The Zărand Region) is a well-known cultural area of Romania. The presence of the rivers and the proximity of the mountains made ‘Ţara Zărandului’ a rich region from the geographical and cultural points of view.

1.2. Notable historic events[1] and their impact today

The earliest traces of human presence in the Western part of the country, dating from Middle Paleolith, were found in ‘Ţara Zărandului’. Archaeological research has retraced the events which influenced the development of ‘Ţara Zărandului’ up to the present day. Among the attested events, it is worth mentioning the massive migrations of the Indo-Europeans in the 3rd millennium BC. They implemented grazing, an activity which is still practiced today. The civilization formed here prospered during the first period of the Iron Age, the 2nd and the 1st millennia BC.

In Antiquity, the Dacian civilization was conquest by the Roman Empire and became part of the Roman province. Therefore, there has been a great Latin influence. Later, the Sarmat, Goth and Hun invasions also left traces.

The Middle Ages were marked by the expansion of the Hungarian state, begun in the 11th century. The threat of Tatar occupation in the 13th century led to the erection fortresses like Şoimoş, Dezna and Ineu, preserved as ruins until today. The Hungarian domination was ended by the Turkish occupation, followed by the Austrian conquest. The latter, provided military support and protection for the Mureş Area and built the Fortress of Arad and also reorganized the cultural picture on ethnic and urban levels. During Maria Theresa’s reign and that of her son, Joseph II, the ethnic diversity in the territory of Arad increased and many villages were redesigned according to the Josephine Survey Maps of the Habsburg Monarchy.

All these events provided a vast cultural, archaeological, historical and architectural heritage. Today, in Arad County there are 87 archaeological sites registered in the National Archaeological Repertoire [2]. A limited archaeological research has been conducted in most cases, but the scarcity of financial support and the insufficient exhibition space, most of the sites were abandoned and sometimes remains were re-buried, ensuring their conservation, but remaining inaccessible to the public. The only exception is the castle in Săvîrşin (17th century) which is now in use by the former Romanian Royal Family.

Less known sites are Tauţ, Şeitin, Pecica, as well as the stone ruins of medieval churches and the wooden churches which survived the passage of time. It is worth mentioning that the village of Tauţ is one of the most visited by tourists, not because of the presence of the ruins (unknown to most of the tourists), but because other attractions exist: the un-spoilt natural environment, the Tauţ Lake and dam, the holiday village Nadăş.

The oldest remains on the hilltop near the village of Tauţ (known today as ‘La Cetate’ – The Fortress) date from Neolithic. It used to be a graveyard protected by an earth fortification. In the Middle Ages a Romanesque fortified church was built. Gradually, it developed into a gothic bigger fortified church, which functioned until the Ottoman conquest. The interesting evolution to be seen in the overlapping layers of today’s ruins, as well as the tourist assets of the region, make Tauţ an ideal example for a pioneer long-term musealisation undertaking. It implies thorough archaeological research, a correct and non-invasive restoration, the opening
the site to tourists on a permanent basis and the promotion of the vernacular traditional way of life.

In this case, there are two possible approaches. The first, the conventional approach, is to begin a time and money consuming process of research. This does not counterbalance the investment in any way, and is just a form of gathering information with little dissemination. The second approach is a faster valorisation of the archaeological site. It should allow future archaeological research as well as the promotion of the site, in order to attract tourists. The development of this type of tourism creates the premises for the economic development of Tauţ village and is a reversible and sustainable intervention.

1.3. Hypothesis and objectives for the musealisation of the archaeological site in Tauţ

The process of preserving and valorising an archaeological site highly depends on the meaning it has been invested with by the community. Therefore, the image of a certain site is subjective and sometimes even contradictory. An effective management of an archaeological site puts those interpretations to good use. The local community can guarantee the long-term success of the musealisation process of an archaeological site, by being aware of its potential and by taking upon its shoulders the responsibility of developing it as a local tourist resource. Therefore, the hypothesis of the present study is that the Tauţ archaeological site can have one or several of the values related to local communities cited in the literature of the field.[3] In the case study of Tauţ, as in many other similar villages in Arad County, the historic and scientific importance of the archaeological site is obvious. Opening the site to the public by making it a tourist attraction should add the aesthetic, the social and the educational component to its assets. The objective of the present study is to find alternative and environment-friendly means of making a musealised archaeological site economically sustainable. Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, the strategy for the musealisation the archaeological site ‘La Cetate’ in Tauţ, includes complementary activities directly linked to the cultural profile of the community and to the revival of traditions.

2 MUSEALISATION – A DEVELOPING CONCEPT

The necessary condition for defining a realistic strategy for the revival of Tauţ through rural tourism and through the musealisation of the archaeological site is to take into account the wider context. According to Eurostat database [4], 45% of the Romanian territory predominantly rural, 45% mixed and only 10% predominantly urban. This emphasizes the great economical potential to preserve and valorise the villages of Romania, but the field literature approaches very little this subject from the perspective of architecture and urban planning. In order to do so, it is important to understand the evolution of the rural settlements in Romania, related to their history. Until the Communist rule, the Romanian village remained closely linked to its oldest traditions. Two events shaped the profile of the contemporary Romanian villages: firstly, the Communist Regime, by the nationalization of the land; secondly, the evolution of the Romanian society after 1990. In her studies, Monica Iancu [5] defines the typology of the Romanian villages in the last quarter century. The contemporary village is the result of the Communist Age, when the predominantly rural areas were reduced from 80% to 45%, through state planned and forced urbanization and industrialization. The depopulation of the villages, thus the narrowing of local economic activities, continued after the regime changed in 1989, when the reclaiming of properties, the massive emigration in search for work and the aging of rural population compromised the local economy. Most rural areas are now characterized by a lifestyle based on subsistence agriculture. The few exceptions are the villages located close to big cities, which became dormitory suburbs and the tourist villages.
The term musealisation usually depicts the process of putting an object in a museum, but nowadays it is being applied not only to objects but also related to ensembles and urban contexts. It implies restoration, conversion [6], and a process of change, in connection to tourist use. [7] According to André Desvallées and François Mairesse [8], the act of musealisation changes the museum from being a temple, and makes it part of a process which brings it closer to a laboratory. The purpose of this action is to determine the visitor to explore the objects of interest in situ by means of sensory perception, direct experiment and subjective study. It differs essentially from the impersonal contemplation at a conventional exhibition.

3 THE OPPORTUNITIES THE VILLAGE OF TAUŢ OFFERS

The village Tauţ is located in the foothills of Zârand Mountains, in the fields of Cigher, an affluent of ‘Crişul Alb’, 55 km north-east away from Arad, the main city of the county. Tauţ was first documented in 1496. [9]

The economy of the village is mainly based on agriculture, but in the last years, tourism and third sector activities have had a rapid development. The touristic potential of the village is exceptional. Near the lake and the dam, new holiday villages appeared and abandoned villages were reborn as weekend accommodations. The musealisation of the archaeological site can become the starting point of the implementation of a new type of tourism in Tauţ.

3.1 Approach statement

The intention of the present study is to find a solution to include the site of Tauţ in a tourist itinerary, in a manner that will not affect its integrity. The research that has already been conducted was thorough, though not exhaustive. The goal is to valorise in the process of musealising the ruins, as well as the traditional built heritage, to preserve it and reuse it.

3.2 History [10]

The analysis of the Josephine Survey Maps of the Austrian Empire confirms the existence of a former settlement in the area, developed organically, adapted to the local geography. It is probably what the locals now call ‘Sat Bătrân’ (The Old Village). The new, regular planned village with a regular network of streets one can see today dates from the 19th century, when the reorganization of the territory according to the Austrian model occurred. The new settlement has a slightly different position than ‘Sat Bătrân’ (figure 1). The fact that the hill where the ruins are was not affected by the building of the new village, even at the cost of interrupting the street network, means that the medieval building on the hill was of great importance to the community. This is reinforced by the hierarchy of institutions in the traditional societies, where the church was and still is a powerful nucleus.

![Figure 1: Maps of Tauţ in the 18th, 19th century [5] and Tauţ today – source: Google Earth.](image)
The historic events influencing the evolution of Tauţ are closely linked to those of Arad County, of which the Ottoman, Austrian and Austro-Hungarian occupation have greatly influenced the evolution of the village and its community. The history of the region is reflected in the evolution of the former fortified church at ‘La Cetate’.

3.3 Accessibility

Tauţ lies along the DJ708A county road and is crossed by six village roads. There is public transportation available by bus, connecting Tauţ with Arad and other settlements. [11]

The county of Arad is involved in various cross-border partnerships. The cycling marathon between Arad, Romania and Beckescsaba in Hungary is a long living tradition. There are intentions of extending the cyclist itinerary around the county, so that different centres of interest can be visited in a pleasant eco-friendly manner. In this paper, Tauţ is proposed to become accessible by bicycle in the future, due to its location.

3.4 Visibility

Although there is some urban influence, which sets the prospects for tourism and third sector activities, the atmosphere in Tauţ is still rural and subordinated to the natural scenery. The fact that the site is placed on a higher platform ensures its visibility among the forested mountain slopes. One of the proposals in this study is to heighten the silhouette of the structure in a non-invasive way, on the archaeological site, in order to offer the visitor an impressive perspective. Also, this would be a signal for tourists, because it would be visible from the main road. The landscape, including the dam and the lake framed by the mountains is enriched by the presence of the ruins. (figure 2)

Figure 2: Analysis of the visibility to and from the archaeological site ‘La Cetate’ – source: author’s own studies
3.5 Tauţ in the wider context

In the concept concerning revival through musealisation, one has to take into account a wider range of attractions. The main road which crosses Tauţ is known for often being part of the itinerary of the annual event ‘Raliul Aradului’ (The Arad Rally), since 2009, including the dam and the lake. The vineyards in the hillside of Arad County are currently linked by the themed tourist itinerary – ‘Drumul Vinului’ (The Road of the Wine) which passes through Păuliş, Ghioroc, Covâşanţ and Şiria. Since Şiria is also famous for the well preserved ruins of the medieval fortress, and the distance between Şiria and Tauţ is only 27.6 km, the musealised archaeological site ‘La Cetate’ could be an extension to the trip. We strongly believe that including Tauţ in ‘Drumul Vinului’ could bring tourists on a constant basis, thus creating the appropriate context for defining the Tauţ brand.

The interest for ‘La Cetate’ is increased by the connection with the archaeological findings on the mountain crest across the river Cigher, which were not yet subject of thorough research. The possible connection with Tauţ could extend the range of attractions, boost the interest for Tauţ and even trigger the research of the other site.

4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF TAUŢ – LA CETATE

![Aerial view of the site ‘La Cetate’. Archaeological research – source: archaeologist Florin Marginean.](image)

4.1 Evolution of the site [10]

The fortified church of Tauţ is located on the Western side of the road which leads from Arad to Nadăș, on a hilltop of 50 meters above the surrounding area. Until the archaeological research began in 2002, the site was known as dating from the time of the Ottoman occupation. At the end of five years of investigations (figure 4), it has been discovered that the first traces of a fortification are as early as Neolithic. The research focused, though, on the evolution of the fortified church, dating from the Middle Ages, former to the Ottoman conquest probably in the 13th – 14th century.

The platform of 100 meters diameter was first used as a necropolis and was surrounded by an earth fortification which was preserved until today. Later, a stone wall was built in the enclosure, of which 14 m are still visible on the site today. The first stone building was a late Romanesque church (13th century) which was extended with a sacristy and another space to North-West, with unknown destination (15th century). For uncertain reasons, the church extended again, in the Gothic period, almost tripling its surface. Two lateral walls of the Romanesque church were preserved and integrated in the new structure. The sacristy and the other
room were widened as well. The following stages in the evolution of the building were (chronologically): realization of several underground burial vaults under the floor of the church, the building of a bell tower to mark a new entrance in the church and, eventually, building a chapel on the south side of the church. In the end (18th century), the building measured 39 x 22 meters.

These changes occurred during two centuries, which determined the timeframe targeted by the research so far. The gradual degradation of the ensemble was caused by the Ottoman occupation. They conquered the fortified church, inhabited it, divided the space and transformed it into housing and workshops.

5 STRATEGY FOR MUSEALISATION

5.1 Theoretical approach

According to the theories of Corunchio Tancredi [12], during the entropic process of restoration and conservation, every construction material, no matter how stable, transforms and the process implies irrecoverable waste. In other words, even if the ruins are preserved on site and the original material is restored, they are not the same with the initial parts of the building. This means that identifying their original position and rearranging them as if they have never been dislocated is an action of questionable authenticity. The materials used in architecture are subjects to stress and transformation on microscopic levels (natural aging and deterioration) and on macroscopic levels (human action). In Tancredi’s opinion, in order to achieve the harmony of the restored area with the surroundings, the antidote against the harmful factors for the building material should be of the same genre as the causes that affected them. The aging of the materials should be regarded as a natural process and not hidden. On the other hand, the reconstruction after human-made damages can be accepted if marked distinctively, since man is the cause and the antidote of the deterioration. At the same time, the architect must be aware of the unique character of each architectonic body; thus, the interventions for
restoration should not be a mimetic or a fake reconstruction and should involve architectural critique.

In the case of ‘La Cetate’, the information archaeologists provided and analogies with other still standing stone churches of the same time, allowed us to recreate the evolution trajectory of the building (figure 5). Moreover, aside from fragments of stone ornaments which were recuperated and should be exhibited, there are many stone fragments of no special aesthetic value, which once were part of the church and should not be lost (figure 6).

Since the available documentation does not depict the exact appearance of the fortified church, anastylosis is definitely objectionable. Therefore, we propose to gather the stones with archaeological and historical value and use them in gabions and create pavilions on site, wall panels, stands, benches. This approach is respectful and preserves the materials from the site, but also non-invasive and reversible. For the new interventions, wood is an acceptable material. It is not contrasting with the stone ruins, yet remains distinct.

In order for the ruins to be excavated again, this time with the purpose of exposing them to the public, it is necessary to design pavilions near the remains of the historic building. Concrete is not acceptable for the foundations of the new structures, because of its perennial character and because the cement grout is corrosive for stone. Therefore, alternative solutions have to be found. The anchor points in the ground should be chosen depending on the position of the ruins in such a manner that they will not affect them. The proposed solution is the most non-invasive: the fileted foundations used for gabions or for the new wooden structures.

Due to the fact that the research has been limited, it is very possible that the work on site would reveal other archaeological remains. The proposal is, therefore, flexible and adaptable to new valuable discoveries. It is most likely to find numerous tombs on the hilltop, since the archaeological research has shown that the church was placed on a Neolithic necropolis. The
possible archaeological discoveries during the works will be studied and integrated in the musealisation process on site.

5.2 Architectural proposal (figure 7)

The musealisation of the site is intended to define and to show clearly the stages of transformation of the fortified church, from the moment it was built to its collapse. The musealisation should respond to the requirements for designing a museum. The general scheme should be functional, the space sequence – logic and the ambient for the visitors welcoming.

The proposal intends to put to good use as much as possible of the valuable existing features of the site and its surroundings. The village road on the north side of the archaeological reservation will become the access route for visitors. At the end of the road, a parking place for cars and bicycles will be designed, as well as a reception point, where the visitor will be given information and directions. The archaeological site is to be accessible only by foot, so that the visitor has the time to observe the surroundings and gradually arrive at the main point of interest – the ruins’ pavilion. The itinerary climbs the Neolithic earth fortification and passes along the 14 meters of the medieval stone wall, which is currently the only visible construction on site.

Figure 7: Synthetic map of the proposal
The proposed itinerary is an interesting sequence of stops and walks, outdoors or in small exhibition pavilions, during which the visitor is slowly informed about the history of the archaeological site, of the medieval church and of the village. Then, after being prepared with the basic knowledge, the visitor will experience the ruins by entering the main pavilion which protects them. This involves descending on the archaeological excavation, experiencing the transformation of the former building into the nowadays ruins through a symbolically review of the erection and destruction processes. The journey culminates with the exit from the pavilion and the ascent on a designed lookout point from where one can admire the scenery and have a bird’s eye view over the archaeological reservation, the visiting itinerary, but also the village, the lake and the dam.

5.3 Ecological approach

Presently, the ruins lay in the middle of an orchard. Being left unattended, the vegetation developed freely. The species of trees that can be found here are not under any legal protection. This, and their young age allows the selective relocation of the invasive specimens which are growing dangerously close to the ruins. Preserving the orchard is important as well as preserving what is left of the built heritage for two reasons: firstly, the presence and development of the vegetation represents the final transformation of the archaeological site and it has to be acknowledged by the visitors as well. Secondly, with little effort, the orchard can become the green belt of the archaeological reservation and makes the visiting itinerary more interesting and comfortable. Moreover, it will naturally filter the solar radiation which is destructive for the exposed ruins.

5.4 Complementary activities

The distance from Tauț to Arad other towns encourages people to come for a one day trip. In order to give the tourist the opportunity to truly experience the site and the village, more days are needed. This emphasizes the importance of complementary activities and services: housing, shops, catering, leisure activities which, ideally, should be oriented towards tradition and the specificity of the area.

It is forbidden by law to build permanent structures within the archaeological reservation, so these facilities must be accommodated in the village. The houses on the north side of the reservation, across the access road, are all abandoned. They are built in the traditional local manner for this area and are well preserved. (figure 8) There are two ways to use these abandoned buildings for tourist accommodation. Either involve the owners in the process of musealisation, or create an organization for their centralized rehabilitation, preservation and exploitation. Also, at least one of these granges is proposed to be reconverted into an ethnological museum, where visitors can see, learn and even practice traditional handicraft.

The work of restoration or consolidation of these houses is proposed to be done within a workshop led by handicraftsmen, so that the tourist establishes a subjective connection with Tauț as early as possible. The traditional houses are made of cob bricks or baked bricks, wooden flooring and ceramic roofs on wood framing – handicrafts which are to be preserved by this action.
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Figure 8: The abandoned houses built in the local traditional manner.

5.5 Rebranding the archaeological site

Musealisation implies also marketing and promotion, not only interventions on site and managerial skills. Taut should become a brand with reference to the archaeological site ‘La Cetate’ and should have an appropriate logo. This implies continuous upgrade and connection to the touristic market. In this respect, it is important to involve in the process of musealisation, the Arad Museum Complex and other museums in the county, the County Council and the mayor of Taut, as well as tourism companies, universities and private investors.

Once the identity is defined, the site must be promoted online, by flyers, brochures, books, events in Taut and in the City of Arad, and become part of the Strategy for Tourist Development for Arad County [13].

These actions offer the tourists the minimal information needed to raise their curiosity. Once on site, they should have access to a virtual library, to specialized guides, maps, information stands, digitalized ones and souvenir shops. In other words, all the complementary services which exist in any contemporary museum are needed to keep the visitor entertained.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The musealisation of the archaeological site of Taut is a mean of raising the awareness and the interest for the site and the village. The process must be adaptable to new information provided by discoveries and further research, so that the original material should not be affected. In this paper, the process of musealising of the archaeological site is proposed as a process of high complexity, which combines the scientific and museal activities with the recreational ones, while paying attention to local traditions.

Our approach is based on outlining the assets of the place and undertaking actions to emphasise them and to valorise the existing architecture - preserved buildings or ruins - rather than building new structures which would be alien to its surroundings. The new architecture is complementary. The proposed intervention is non-invasive, reversible, but visible.
7 REFERENCES


