



Field of Architecture

PhD THESIS
- ABSTRACT -

Sângeorz-Băi
between imaginary and disappearance

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Personal argument

Completing my studies at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism in Cluj-Napoca in 2016 and obtaining my architect's diploma – one that crowns the six years of studies spent in the aforementioned educational institution – I have found myself, like many others before me, at a crossroads. On one hand, finishing a long-term college, the knowledge that I have gained seemed to be at least enough in order for me to be able to start the activities of the profession – for which I have been so thoroughly educated – with optimism. On the other hand, however, I knew that the understanding of my own specialization had just begun. I noticed that the school did not offer me a clear, or imposed destination, but rather more of an ability to select my own vocation from a wide range of horizons. I was beginning to understand that the generic question that first-year architecture students are asked – “What is an architect?” – had an equally multi-layered answer both in the heads of those questioned, as in the ones of the teachers who asked the question. To reach my own answer, I resorted to an identity exercise. My understanding of *the architect* was going to be shaped by my values and by what I wanted in life. This reflection found a favourable context within the Doctoral School of Architecture, in which other architects, with plenty more extensive experience, could advise me in my searches. And since it is impossible for me to separate my identity from the places that formed me, my beginnings in architectural research take the direction of Sângeorz-Băi, the resort town that was and is my home. Where else to take the first steps in the architect's ambition to change the world for the better than in the place where he took his first steps?

About the Romanian spa heritage

Romania's spa heritage, like a worrying majority of our national cultural inheritance, is in a difficult situation. Witnesses of bygone times, the towns from the country's territory, that intersected during their development with the spa phenomenon, find themselves to be situated today between uncertainty and neglect, presenting unfortunate fates. The entire historical course of Romania's sojourn culture is, moreover, marked by continuous searches, efforts, upheavals of perceptions and interferences with the world of politics. The sum of the factors that contributed to its evolution has inevitably turned the spa phenomenon subject into an entangled one. Talking about spas becomes a process of unravelling a complex, multidisciplinary historical phenomenon, a place of intersection between social behaviours,

medical sciences and several cultural areas, with the overlapping of various cultural fields – each with its own narrative and discourse – generating new urban and architectural typologies.¹

The area of a spa town, regardless of its geographical coordinates or the historical period in which it is studied, becomes an environment of cultural exchange, a space of absorption and emanation of values and conceptions, with the semiotic charging of these places becoming an organic process, fed by different entities such as the visitor, the local, or the landscape, characters which, in turn, are transformed by the spa phenomenon. This set of relationships also branches out in the interdependence between spa heritage as a whole and the particular cultural path each of these urban entities take. The thesis proposes a documentation and analysis of the key moments in the narrative of such a *permanently role-playing territory*² – Sângeorz-Băi – a resort town with a spa area that has been in a constant calibration process with the defining spirit of each historical period it found itself in, a process which also reflects the evolution of the perception regarding Romania’s cultural spa phenomenon.

The current state of the Sângeorz-Băi spa town is fragile. The different eras in which its baths represented an important name in the Romanian holiday repertoire have left traces of different intensities in its structure, the particularities of this place being generated by their overlap – the marks of past times revealing the efforts behind their emergence at the moments of the appearance of the spa phenomenon within the borders of our country, the difficulties of administrating a territory dependent on the collaboration of a series of sensible components, the idealistic aspirations catalysed by the political spectrum, or the consequences of a systematic indifference. Even if this kind of stratification inevitably leads to a symbolically rich place, it becomes equally responsible for the current circumstances in which the resort finds itself in. Hence the title of the paper – ***Sângeorz-Băi, between imaginary and disappearance***, the present research implying both the analysis of the resort as a cultural asset in a precarious state, but also the interpretation of its position as an exponent of a vulnerable heritage.

¹ Liliane Gallet-Blanchard, Marie-Madeleine Martinet, “Hypermedia navigation in an Eighteenth-Century English Spa:Bath,” in *Spas in Britain and in France in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Annick Cossic, Patrick Galliou (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 411.

² Ibid.,411.

Specifications

Seeing as the territory of Sângeorz-Băi does not refer only to its spa area, it should be emphasized that this paper will not investigate the evolution of the town's entire territory, but only that of its sojourn components. Obviously, the two sides form an inseparable whole, so that along the thesis there will be inevitable intersections between the information referring to the territory of the baths, respectively those referring to the perimeter of the entire settlement. We will also observe that at certain times in the history of the town, its spa area was managed by local authorities, for which the convergence of the two entities in the narrative thread of the paper will be, in some places, more pronounced.

At the same time, a particularly important aspect is the alternating geographical affiliation that the baths of Sângeorz have had over time. Being located in Transylvania, it became part of the various transformations of the historical Romanian region, consequences of these transformations being reflected in the small town at the foot of the Rodnei Mountains. Thus, political changes have seen the region's borders alternate between those of The Austro-Hungarian Empire, Greater Romania, The Kingdom of Hungary, The Socialist Republic of Romania, and those of the country's current form, with the territorial oscillation having a major impact on the cultural route of the aforementioned spa town. One of the observable ways in which these aspects will be revealed during the paper will be that of toponymy - *Oláhszentgyörgy, Băile Sângeorz, Sângeorzul Român, Sîngeorz, Sîngeorz-Băi, or Sângeorz-Băi* - being different names of the same spa town, the different spelling of the place's name describing its historical coordinates. In this sense, the fragments of text will be faithful to the time periods brought into light, the variations of the letters "î" and "â" in *Sângeorz* or *Sîngeorz* being intentional.³

³ Coriolan Suciu, *Dicționar istoric al localităților din Transilvania*, (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1968), 127-128: Sîngeorz-Băi, Sîngeorgiul Român, Sîngeorzul Român, u. Oláhszentgyörgy, r. Năsăud, R. Cluj. 1440 Zenthgyurgh, 1450 Zentghergh, 1535 Senthjerg, 1542 enthgeorgh, 1547 Sentjerg, 1552 Zent Jörg, 1576 Szent Gyeorgy, 1577 St. Georg, 1559 Zentgeorgy, 1564 Simzdordzu, Simdzords, 1593 Zentgeorgie, 1598 Singeordz, 1599 Zentgeorgy, 1600 Zenthgeorgi, Zent Gergii, 1602 Zentgiorgenau (Drăganu, Top. 116-117), 1587-1589 Sanctus Georgius (Jakó, Adatok 71), 1607 Oláh Szentgyörgy (Veress, Doc. VIII 38), 1636 Szent-Giorgi, 1643 Szent-Gyorgyen, 1667 St. György, 1695 Szent György, 1717 Szent Georg, 1723 ingiordz (Drăganu, Top. 116-117, 161), 1733 Szent György (c.K.), 1750 Simborzu <=Simgiorzu> (c.A.), 1760-1762 Sz <ent> György (c.B.), 1805 Sîngeorz (c.D.), 1808 Sanct-Georgen, Szin Giorss, Szin Gyuru (Lipszky), 1839 Oláh-Szent-György sive Szent György, Szint-Zsorzs (Lenk), 1850 Szint Sorsu (st. Tr.), 1854 Szent György, Sîngeorz (Bul. 70), 1909 Sîngeorzul Român (harta Mazere).

Purpose

The glory days of Romania's spa towns seem today to be in the distant past, with the offer through which they can attract visitors being also limited. The tourist himself is a changed entity, the times in which his steps were passively directed towards a target being also past, with his current necessities requiring an imperative restructuring of the essence of the possible destinations.⁴ The past, seen as an inheritance through the lens of a specialized reading, becomes, in fact, an autobiography of the place and of the people who passed through it.⁵ The purpose of the paper becomes that of reading the autobiography of the baths of Sângeorz in a critical manner, and to bring to light its essence. However, the thesis will not merely be a retrospective, the different immersions in the precedent of the resort town and the quantification and analysis of the cultural assets from different historical periods being carried out in view of using them as *semiotically charging instruments*⁶, whereas beyond *"being somehow 'behind' the present, the past exists as an accomplished presence in public understanding. In this sense it is written into present social reality, not just implicitly as residue, precedent or custom and practice, but explicitly as itself – as History, National Heritage and Tradition."*⁷

Regarding the use of the word "heritage", we need to mention the rarity of official recognition of Romania's cultural spa phenomenon products marked by the offering of a 'historical monument' statute. In the case of Sângeorz, for example, only one building benefits from this official recognition. During the paper, however, the word 'heritage' will represent an umbrella term that will cover the entirety of places and architectural objects that are part of the spa phenomenon's cultural inheritance.

⁴ Russel Staiff, Robyn Bushell, Steve Watson, "Introduction – place, encounter, engagement," in *Heritage and Tourism. Place, encounter engagement*, ed. Russel Staiff, Robyn Bushell, Steve Watson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

⁵ Steve Watson, "Country matters: The rural-historic as an authorised heritage discourse in England," in *Heritage and Tourism. Place, encounter engagement*, ed. Russel Staiff, Robyn Bushell, Steve Watson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 107.

⁶ Staiff, Bushel, Watson, "Introduction", 2.

⁷ Patrick Wright, *On living in an old Country. The national past in contemporary Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 128.

Organization

The course of the paper was an organic one, as the process of revealing the historical sources has presented a sinuous trajectory. Initially, a division of the thesis related to different points of inflection from Romania's chronology – of the type *“Before 1900 / Between 1900 and the First World War / The interwar period / From the Second World War to the establishment of the socialist regime / From the Romanian Revolution of 1989 to present-day Romania”* – but it was found that although the interferences between the studied spa town and the spa phenomenon inevitably gravitate around these key moments, the analysis of the relationship between the baths of Sângeorz and sojourn culture becomes more interesting by focusing the study around the particular micro-histories of the territory and their intersection with the narrative of Romania's entire cultural spa phenomenon. So, the entire thesis becomes, in fact, divided in two, the first part referring to the time segment between the emergence of the organized use of mineral waters on the territory of the town, and the establishment of the socialist regime, with the second part consisting of the interval between the establishment of the socialist regime and present times. The two parts are called *“From a place for no one, towards a place for everyone”*, and *“From a place for everyone, towards a place for no one”*, the keys to understanding these two phrases being revealed throughout the text of the paper. The word *“towards”* was used both for the fact that it indicates a direction, emphasizing the idea of the cultural journey of the spa town with regards to the entire spa phenomenon, as well as due to its uncertainty, going *“towards”* an objective being not entirely equal to *reaching that certain objective*.

Beyond these aspects, the paper focuses on four main historical periods. The first one is defined by the second half of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth century respectively, being mostly overlapped with the *Belle Époque* period. The second targeted historical segment is represented by the interwar period, with the third time demarcation being focused on socialist Romania's embodiment of the spa phenomenon, the last interval analysed being the one between the fall of the socialist regime and present times. It should be noted that the general literature concentrated on Romania's spa phenomenon offers only the first two mentioned stages the quality of being sources of valuable inheritance in said field, the socialist manifestation of sojourn culture being seen merely as a succession in time and space of the historical resorts, constituting a subject of rather limited interest.

During the research, there haven't been identified any works that concentrate their attention on the socialist expression of the spa town spectrum. Other doctoral theses, such as Ada Hajdu's "*Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă*" ["*Sojourn architecture in modern Romania*"] or Kovacs Ferenc's "*Stațiuni balneare pe drumul sării în Transilvania începând cu secolul al XIX-lea până la începutul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial*" ["*Spa resorts on Transylvania's salt road from the nineteenth century until the beginning of the Second World War*"], by treating the subject in larger territorial limits, reduce the researched time periods. In this case, given the limitation of the studied area to a single spa town, an exhaustive research of its territory, from the first moments of its appearance to its modern-day expression, is considered imperative.

Thesis structure

The paper consists of six chapters, divided into two parts. The first part contains chapters *1. Historical and cultural premises*, *2. The culturally charged spa phenomenon*, *3. In search of the organized spa phenomenon*, and *4. An inventory of the historical baths of Sângeorz*. The second part contains the chapters entitled *5. Sângeorz-Băi in socialism*, and *6. What have we inherited?*. Except for these two components – which do not represent halves of the doctoral thesis, but rather the delimitation of the critical inflection point in Romania's spa town narrative – the paper also includes a separate chapter of *Conclusions*, and last but not least, the *Bibliography* and the *Annex*.

The first chapter – *1. Historical and cultural premises* – describes the context of the appearance of organized mineral water use within the town's territory, the presentation of the characters behind the first architectural objects related to the spa phenomenon that were built here, and the meanings behind the initiation of the entire cultural field. The second chapter – *2. The culturally charged spa phenomenon* – deals with the semiotics of spas in both a national and European context, analysing the sum of their cultural components. The continuous searches and efforts behind the good management of the perimeters that benefit from the presence of mineral waters are presented in the third chapter – *3. In search of the organized spa phenomenon* – the general narrative behind the evolution of this type of urban entities being one marked by constant appeals and approaches by their representatives in order to change the perception and legislation regarding the sojourn field. One of the most

valuable components of the thesis – the reconstruction of the architectural repertoire of the Sângeorz-Băi spa town – is included within the fourth chapter – *4. An inventory of the historical baths of Sângeorz* – where the architectural objects built from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century are being identified, analysed, and placed within specific time frames. This inquiry within the built environment of the baths of Sângeorz through the architectural programs present within its area is both a quantitative and a qualitative one, with the discussion being held both in the context of the regional manifestation of spa culture, but also that of the entire cultural spa phenomenon. The changes within the spa narrative which came with the establishment of the socialist regime are included in the fifth chapter – *5. Sângeorz-Băi in socialism*. This part of the thesis deals with the way in which Romania's sojourn architecture prior to the country's transition to a totalitarian regime of Soviet influence becomes insufficient to the needs of the new man, concentrating on the way in which the paradigm shift influences the further development of the Sângeorz baths. The last chapter of the second part of the paper – *6. What have we inherited?* – is an analysis of the current state of the spa town and an inventory of the traces left by all its previous manifestations, highlighting the turning point in which Sângeorz-Băi finds itself in.

Besides the two parts of the thesis resides the *Conclusion* chapter, which represents the sum of the critical reading of the cultural narrative of the spa town with regards to the evolution of the perception of the entire spa phenomenon, the importance of spa heritage as a national cultural asset, and the dangerous position in which both Sângeorz-Băi and the entire spa heritage are today.

The bibliography and the annex conclude the structure of the paper, but the ending of the thesis is left open, resembling Sângeorz-Băi's own fate, which, in fact, contrary to the author's ambitions, does not depend solely on his efforts. In this sense, in a desire to reduce the sensitivity of the vocabulary of this paper – a condition of the author that could damage the scientific character of the thesis – in almost an escapist way, a series of excerpts from a volume of prose is attached to the paper, with which the author aims at providing another cultural layer to the narrative of the resort.

Bibliography presentation

The cultural dimensions of the different stages in the evolution of Sângeorz's baths were analysed with the help of a wide range of sources. First of all, because it concerns the evolution of a historically rich place, the National Archives of Romania – the County Archive of Bistrița-Năsăud were consulted, a significant part of the bibliography being composed of unique or unpublished documents, which offer special accents to the recomposed portrait of the historical resort. Historical guides have also been equally useful excavation tools into the past. Though often romanticized and subjective, they represent portholes through time to the image of the resort during different historical moments, highlighting both the real and the desired cultural landscape of the baths of Sângeorz. An important role in the research is being played by postcards and vintage photographs, which have been used both as exponents of the resort's atmosphere and as a platform for the rediscovery of the architectural objects that are lost today, with the memory of the disappeared buildings being largely kept in the collective mentality through the means of these framed testimonies of past times.

A crucial aspect in the evolution of spa towns is that of their administration. In the case of Sângeorz, beyond the archival documents that reproduce the characteristics of the relationship between the resort and the various entities that would come to govern it, there were several works that were considered important because of the way in which they describe the searches within the spa phenomenon at a national level – such as, *Stațiunile Balneo-Climatice din Ardeal cu stațiunile principale din Vechiul Regat [The Spa towns of Transylvania, with the main resort towns from the Old Kingdom]*, by Emil Țeposu and Liviu Câmpeanu, or *România Balneară și turistică [The spas and tourism of Romania]*, also conceived by the same Emil Țeposu with the help of Valeriu Pușcariu, at the initiative of the Touring Club of Romania, or *Stațiunile BalneoClimatice din Republica Populară Română [The Spa Towns from the Socialist Republic of Romania]*, made at the initiative of the *Central Council of Unions*. These sources reflect the efforts that led to what today comprises the vast majority of the spa town heritage elements that are generally accepted as being valuable, highlighting in the same time the position that the baths of Sângeorz have occupied in the broad subject of the spa phenomenon – or in relation with other territories from the same field. In the same time, seeing as they offer characterizations of the resorts from several time periods, they also constitute an instrument for measuring the built inventory of the Sângeorz resort area, the

architectural repertoire of the spa town being subject to various fluctuations throughout its history.

In the same note we should mention the *Curierul Băilor, Stațiunilor Climatice și Turismului – Organ de Propagandă Economică și Popularizare* [*The Courier of Baths, Resort Towns and Tourism - An Outfit for Economic Advertising and Popularization*] periodical, a platform for the different appeals and efforts of the main actors behind the spa phenomenon created at the initiative of the Romanian Medical Hydrology and Climatology Society. Becoming a place of discussion and exchange of ideas, the publication led to major changes in the perception of spa towns, creating pressure for legislative reforms that would help the entire sojourn realm.

Interesting details from the cultural course of leisure architecture during Romania's socialist period are found within the pages of *Arhitectura - Journal of The Socialist Republic of Romania's Union of Architects*, which has offered for discussion various articles, studies, and projects that are representative of Socialist Romania's understanding of the spa phenomenon. A central voice within these sources is that of the architect Cezar Lăzărescu, who also contributes to the bibliography of the thesis through his work *Construcții Hoteliere* [*Hotel Constructions*]. This part of the bibliography sheds light on lesser-known aspects of the socialist manifestation of the Sângeorz resort and other similar spa towns.

Due to the transnational character of the studied phenomenon, an important component of the bibliography consists of studies and articles from abroad on the spa and touristic phenomena, the cultural loans being confirmed by drawing clear parallels between the Romanian spa narrative and those of countries such as France, England, or Germany.

Historical and cultural premises

Analysing the current situation of Sângeorz, the traces and features of different historical periods become obvious. We are referring to the resort, and not the entire town, because the spa area of Sângeorz represents but a fragment of the entire development, being located in its northwest. In consequence, the present paper will mainly focus on the resort

part of Sângeorz, with the inevitable dives into the history of the entire town being realized due to the intertwined destiny of these two parts of a whole.

The present built and natural repertoire of the spa town sums up two sanatorium complexes and three water pavilions from the socialist period, three interwar buildings – left in a precarious state both because of the lack of interventions, but also because of improper interventions – a park, and a forest. The last change regarding this inventory came in the year 2018, through the demolition of Villa 13 – the old Hebe Hotel, brought to the brink of collapse by the passage of time and by a gradually accumulated negligence. This demolition – with a questionable legality which is not the subject of the present study – is only one of the consequences of the continuous process of rewriting the fate of the resort. The continuation of the cultural journey of the place, however, will depend exactly on the power of capitalizing on the present overlapping of its different historical memories, to the extent of understanding the mechanism behind the several attitudes that have defined its trajectory, with the different vocabularies of the discourses that have shaped the history of this type of places hiding a common grammar. The space in which the history of this place unfolded must thus be seen through the terms of the relationships between the elements that make it up today, and through analysing how the imprints of each period appeared and what meaning they bear today.⁸ This chapter examines the first writings on the baths of Sângeorz, the interference of its narrative with the Frontier Regiments, and the convergence of the efforts behind the first organized use of mineral waters with the spa town's territory.

The culturally charged spa phenomenon

Spa towns are multifaceted urban entities. In these enclaves, the global had to be in a permanent negotiation process with the local, and the relationship between the elements that were familiar to the visitor, and those which held more of a surprising and exotic nature, had to be in a delicate balance.⁹ In his work *The Tourist: A New Theory for the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell describes attractions as being either “*souvenirs*” or “*true sights*”. While *souvenirs* describe small-scale, or less-important attractions that gather around them individuals, *true*

⁸ Marcel Roncayolo, “Les guides comme corpus de la connaissance urbaine,” *In Situ*, no. 11 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.4000/insitu.559>, accessed in December 2019.

⁹ John K. Walton, “Spa and Seaside Culture in the Age of the Railway: Britain and France Compared,” in *Spas in Britain and in France in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Annick Cossic, Patrick Galliou, (Newcastle: Cambridge Schollars Press, 2006), 494.

sights are collected by entire societies.¹⁰ It is clear that the universe created by the spa phenomenon forms, in itself, *a true sight*, the whole idea of visiting these territories and enjoying their facilities becoming almost a ritualistic activity, akin to pilgrimage.¹¹ The comparison between pilgrimage and the social mechanisms behind touristic travel highlights the similarities between the two: the need for escapism from the routine of daily life, and a “*mutual wish to be transported to some kind of ‘magical’ place possessed of regenerative or transformative powers*”¹², with the area of the spa town serving as an identity threshold. Spending one’s time within the borders of a historical resort wasn’t limited to the “*static boundaries of the place of ‘residence’, but to a dynamic space of exchange, circulation and communication*”, with these places coming to represent spaces of “*migrants established within the limits of the territory, open to new images and representations*”¹³. The second chapter, “*The culturally charged spa phenomenon*” involves the identification of the cultural components of the expression of the spa phenomenon in Sângeorz’s territory, proposing at the same time an examination of these aspects in relation to a variety of socio-cultural narratives tangent to the historical manifestation of the European spa phenomenon.

In the search of the organized spa phenomenon

The transition from an “*empirical to a scientific thermalism*”¹⁴ is synonymous with the appearance of spa administration companies, given as the vast majority of places in which the spa phenomenon unfolded don’t serve an exclusively touristic purpose. The attentive management of the resorts presented the need for a carefully orchestrated organization, which proved difficult in the absence of specially dedicated groups. Thus, the relationship between local authorities and spa administration companies was born. In the case of Sângeorz, the administrative role was carried out by the Hebe Society, with the collaboration periods between the town’s local authorities and the medically driven management company representing the generator behind most of the spa town’s historical inheritance. The present

¹⁰ Dean MacCannel, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹² Jill Steward, “The Culture of the Water in Nineteenth-century Austria 1800-1914”, in *Water, Leisure and Culture, European Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan C. Anderson, Bruce H. Tabb, (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 24-25.

¹³ Bernard Toulter, “Les réseaux de la villégiature en France,” *In Situ*, no. 4, (2004), <http://journals.openedition.org/insitu/1348>, accessed in December 2019.

¹⁴ Marie-Reine Jazé-Charvolin, “Les stations thermales: de l’abandon à la renaissance. Une brève histoire du thermalisme en France depuis L’Antiquité,” *In Situ*, no. 24 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4000/insitu.11123>, accessed in December 2019.

chapter deals with both the historical and cultural framework that led to the proper organization of these types of territories, but also with the way in which it influenced the territory of the aforementioned historical baths.

An inventory of the historical baths of Sângeorz

The present chapter proposes a rundown of the architectural programs that are particular to the sojourn phenomenon and to spa towns, and an analysis of the way in which they are manifested within the territory of the historical baths of Sângeorz. This investigation will include both the constructions mentioned in the historical touristic guides and leaflets, but will also comprise of architectural objects that weren't mentioned in the various advertising instruments that were used to present the resort to possible visitors. The scanning of the old historic resort will be divided by the various functions that the buildings have held, ranging from architectural objects that were built for the internal and external use of mineral water, constructions for accommodation, or for leisure. The analysis aims to have both a qualitative and quantitative approach, taking into account both the precarious state of the elements of spa heritage that are currently preserved, as well as investigating, interpreting, and deciphering the architectural objects in the context in which they appeared, through the means of the aforementioned written sources and through the lenses of old photographs.

Sângeorz-Băi in socialism

On December 30th, 1947, the transformation of the Romanian State into the Socialist Republic of Romania, marked the country's transition from a democratic regime to a socialist one of Soviet influence. On this day, through the means of The No. 363 Law, Adunarea Deputaților [The Assembly of Deputies] *"takes note of the abdication of King Mihai I for himself and his successors" and the 1866 constitution with its March 29th, 1923 and September 1st, 1944 amendments are revoked"*, with the law being approved unanimously by the two hundred and ninety members of the assembly.¹⁵ These major political changes influenced the entire country's collective mentality, to its very core. Even today, the entire period between 1947

¹⁵ The No. 363 Law from December 30th 1947 for the formation of the Socialist Republic of Romania, published in *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 300, from December 30th, 1947.

and 1989 still has a strong echo, with reverberations in the social, cultural, and industrial spheres, outlining identities and worldviews. These metamorphoses did not exclude the spa phenomenon, with the socio-cultural changes highly affecting its becoming. The present chapter implies a thorough research of the way in which the entire sojourn subject has been transformed at a national level, highlighting the way in which Romania's socialist understanding of leisure has influenced the case-study spa town's narrative.

What have we inherited?

If in the previous stages of the spa town's existence, its territory was the subject of an attentively orchestrated preoccupation that generated various components which worked together towards a common goal – that of attracting and satisfying the needs of potential visitors – today, the same perimeters outlines a space defined by uncertainties. The country's complicated return to capitalism, ignited by the Romanian Revolution of 1989, has generated an unclear context for the spa town's entire touristic area. Questionable privatizations in the field, accompanied by a lack of clear policies from the state in regards to Romania's spa phenomenon heritage, have brought this type of territories on the verge of dismantlement. The relationship between the several types of spa heritage from different historical periods, as interesting as it proves to be, becomes more and more difficult due to its complicated legal and organizational conundrums, with old architectural objects – with clear architectural and cultural value – either being returned to their old owners, which seldom have the financial resources needed for their rehabilitation, either being taken over by different institution and companies with similar difficulties, or interests which are divergent from the appreciation of their qualities.

Before discussing the current built inventory of the spa town, we need to analyse the way in which the different expressions of this historically rich place have overlapped during the spa phenomenon's manifestation within its territory. We noticed that the socialist systematization plan for the resort would have supposed, in accordance with the industrial vision that followed the socialist understanding of the touristic imaginary, an almost complete erasure of the elements that were once part of the historical baths. If this vision would have succeeded, the preserved historical spa heritage would have been reduced to only two interwar villas – the old Hebe Sanatorium and its neighbouring architectural kin. Even though

at first it seemed that the partial realization of the constructions that were meant to be built after the implementation of the systematization plan would represent a safety net for the buildings which escaped this reconfiguration, the present state of the historical buildings still present in the spa town's territory comes to highlight the opposite.

Conclusions

The research involved a reconstruction of the spa town's cultural route, concurrent with a critical reading of its narrative thread. However, the story that was unravelled and analysed, does not simply represent a series of events and features that are specific only to the resort town from the north of the Bistrița-Năsăud county, with Sângeorz-Băi representing an illustration of the entire spa phenomenon's manifestations and interpretations within Romania's territory.

By searching to reveal Sângeorz-Băi's position within the national history of sojourn architecture, other interesting aspects have been brought to light. The process of excavating the past of the spa town has highlighted both particular aspects characteristic to the resort – through the analysis of its microhistories – as well as lesser-known features of the entire spa and touristic fields. Thus, the country's entire understanding of the spa phenomenon has been decoded, outlining the connections between the ways in which the European expression of leisure culture ignited its appearance within our borders, generating an autochthonous interpretation of the values and behaviours that define it. The entire affair became one marked by efforts of synchronization with the more civilized Western Europe, a process which is exemplified and confirmed by lesser-known sources specific to Sângeorz-Băi – enriching the scope of the subject – but also complemented it with new nuances that enhance the understanding of these distinct urban entities.

Highlighting the efforts and difficulties behind the administration of these territories has been an integral part of the research, seeing as in their absence what we today call 'spa culture heritage' would be in an even less favourable position. By analysing the thesis as a story, it can be said that its role was also one of discovering the characters that shaped the identity of the mineral water town of Sângeorz, with the narrative arc of this place calling attention to the many-sided distribution which was necessary for these types of formations to

initially emerge. Starting from locals empirically using mineral waters, the story has led to the place's popularization through the means of several noblemen's writings, to the chemical analyzation of its waters by members of the medical community, to the involvement of military organizations in the process of providing better arrangements for the use of the resort's natural goods, to the territory's appreciation by the local historical powers which recognized the need of finding a more efficient way of managing its gifted area. All these actions worked together towards the emergence of a place which was unlike any of its historical neighbouring settlements, that by intertwining its course with the narrative threads of other characters tangent to its becoming have created an enclave of Latinity, a place which nested new ideas - outlined by the very cultural changes that it nurtured, a space which required and defined architectures that did not exist until then in the territory of Sângeorz, Transylvania, or the entire country. Differences between the times in which the spa town was governed by a specially dedicated administration company and those in which the resort's built repertoire was in the care of the local authorities have been observed, with the latter inevitably having not only the task of managing their touristic areas, but the town's territory as a whole.

Even though Romania's spa phenomenon is shaped by ripples from the larger European spa culture, it has been observed that both its general characteristics and the architecture that it has occasioned are strongly influenced by a certain Romanian spirit, with the specific traits of each place in which the use of mineral waters have ignited the emergence of sojourn related activities being reflected in their identity - which in turn has become equally autochthonous and European. We have noticed that these places have become even more important after the union of Transylvania with Romania of 1918, the Romanian spas likely representing, by their socio-cultural scene nature, one of the places in which the great ideas behind the country's unification were discussed, given the fact that throughout the continent's history it was common for resort towns to become territories that favoured the occurrence of diplomatic activities, such as the discussion and signing of international treaties - *"and even, as at Vichy [...] the exercise of government."*¹⁶ It comes as no surprise that after the reunification of Romania's historical regions the subject of spa towns has gained increased attention. The efforts of the vast net of actors involved in the process of organizing these territories emphasize the importance of the places which they so thoroughly fight for, making

¹⁶ Walton, "Spa and Seaside Culture", 483.

it clear that visiting these places surpassed the simple desire to imitate the socio-cultural values specific to the more civilized West, becoming equally defined as an almost national right to access the country's natural treasure.

A new perspective offered by the thesis is represented by the way in which it highlights the features behind the socialist understanding of the spa phenomenon, the principles behind the socialist hotel industry, and its behaviour in regards to the historical spa inheritance being discussed only broadly in the existing scientific literature that covers spa towns. The analysis of the articles from the *Arhitectura* journal that deal with the subject outlines a landscape defined by continuous research, risk-taking decisions, and trial and error processes which generated innovative architectural results, marked by buildings with experimental, functional, and spatial qualities. Although criticizing the ways of the soviet manifestation of spa culture is entirely justified – especially due to the ways in which it handled the built inheritance left from previous expressions of the phenomenon – behaviour which led to a substantial loss for Romania's present spa heritage – it also manifested a certain sensitivity towards architectural objects considered especially valuable, this aspect being highlighted, in the case of Sângeorz, by preserving the two interwar villas even in the event of the total fulfilment of the spa town's systematization. In present times, in a context in which the socialist regime's politics are rightfully contested, the two buildings have been preserved, albeit in unrecognizable states – one due to the lack of interventions, and the latter as a result of inappropriate interferences – seeming that Romania's spa town heritage finds itself under threat both in the case of action as well as of inaction.¹⁷

The use of touristic guides and postcards as research materials has been marked by a specific decision to recapture - through these windows in time – Romania's perception and interpretation of this particular cultural phenomenon, with print culture containing, but at the same time generating, symbolic meaning for the places that they present, both defining and representing an integral component of their imaginary. These advertising instruments thus become testimonies of worldviews, outlining the pantheon of a specific destination through images and texts, becoming tools of attraction and anticipation in relation to the potential visitors. Through their analysis, observations have been made that beyond the obvious differences that reside between the architectural products and cultural goods from different

¹⁷ Jazé-Charvolin, "Les stations thermales".

stages of the evolution of this type of urban entities, they retain a similar rational structure, with both promotional materials dating to the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and those of a socialist nature – apart from being generated by different political and cultural mechanisms – placing, at their very center, the human being. Needless to say, the *esteemed public* has been succeeded, gradually, by *the new man*, but both the bourgeois tourist, and the worker who needed to rest from his continuous efforts were entities caught in a wave of social change, both being participants in eras defined by a powerful cultural dynamism. Societal balneotherapy did not turn into social balneotherapy overnight, the change being achieved gradually, with small steps, initiated since the end of the nineteenth century. The balance towards a medical manifestation of spa culture was not a specific trait of its socialist expression, with this tilt becoming visible even in countries in which this political type of regime has never materialized, such as the very nations which initiated the historic spa phenomenon.¹⁸

Once again, the necessity of understanding Romania's spa heritage as a uniform entity – formed by complementary cultural products that spotlight the core beliefs of each historical period that brought them into being – is highlighted. The cultural heritage defined by the spa phenomenon did not interrupt its development with the establishment of the socialist regime, but merely added a new layer to its narrative, which augmented its becoming. Sângeorz-Băi's uniqueness arises precisely from this cultural overlapping. Analysing the course of the spa town as a historical text can generate different levels of meaning¹⁹, seeing as one of the characteristics of historically charged territories is the fact that their importance increases to an ever greater extent in the moments in which they seem to be less important²⁰, on account of their uniqueness. Full acceptance of Romania's spa heritage, in which heredity is expressed not only in the case of historic resorts, but also in their socialist-era counterpart, can provide a present approach towards the spa culture subject, since tourist *"attractions, in their natural, unanalysed state may not appear to have any coherent infrastructure uniting them, and insofar as it is through the attraction that the tourist apprehends society, society may not appear to have coherent structure, either"*²¹ – with the current state of the country's tourism patrimony

¹⁸ Marie-Eve Férérol, "Lust, tranquillity and sensuality in French spa towns in the heyday of balneotherapy (the belle époque and the roaring twenties)," *Via*, no. 11-12, 2017, <http://journals.openedition.org/viatourism/1763>, accessed in December 2019

¹⁹ Watson, "Country matters", 107.

²⁰ Staiff, Bushell, Watson, "Introduction", 8.

²¹ Maccannel, *The Tourist*, 57.

reflecting a clear lack of coherent strategies concerning its salvation. Understanding the different elements from the historical repertoire of a spa town as possibly new touristic attractions would enable their coalition under the umbrella of a modern social attraction, “*a new unity, or a new universal solidarity, that includes the tourist*”²² - a crucial entity in the case of territories dependent on visitors, but towards which administrations have a rather reactive attitude – based on resources which are clearly inferior to those held in their previous historical stages, instead of a more proactive attitude, directed towards attracting possible visitors.

The titles of the two parts of the thesis “*From a place for no one towards a place for everyone*” and “*From a place for everyone towards a place for no one*”, have announced, to an extent, the cultural path of the spa town. The cautionary warning of the nobleman which initiates the narrative thread within Sângeorz-Băi’s analysis – even before the spa phenomenon’s emergence between the town’s borders – remains valid. Sângeorz-Băi will become, in the absence of a major change in the understanding of its cultural heritage, a town with a sojourn past, with fewer and fewer traces and witnesses from its earlier days. Even if in the current context this scenario increases in probability, the situation isn’t beyond repair. The mineral waters are still present, the picturesque landscape has not yet been lost, and the air is still clean. There are groups of people who, through their unselfish initiative, create new cultural goods that add fresh layers to the spa town’s heritage. The challenge will however come from the proper calibration of any new approaches which are tangent to the spa phenomenon with the understanding of the cultural values created by the field’s previous expressions. A quantification of natural and inherited cultural products is essential, becoming a starting point for any future initiatives. The understanding of each of the spa phenomenon manifestations’ legacies and assembling their outcomes into a series of means of promotion of the places that they defined as destinations, while at the same time providing an educational component to their rediscovery process, can become a safety net for these historically and symbolically charged places, under the shelter of a new kind of tourism – a cultural one.

²² Ibid.,83.