

# **Educational and research co-operation in the field of architectural theory, history and heritage**

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## **1 The Chair of History & Theory of Architecture and Heritage Conservation**

Created after 1989, built on a strong tradition of research by important personalities of Romanian culture, the Chair is open towards the more recent developments within the fields of history of arts and architecture, heritage conservation, criticism and critical theory of architecture.

## **2 Expertise**

Our faculty work as heads of various local or national bodies in the field of monument protection and conservation, editors or members of editorial boards of local and international architectural journals. The chair has the largest number of publications in research journals among the faculty in the university. The members of the Chair attend regularly local, European and American Post-graduated Courses in the field of History, Theory of Architecture, as well as in different domains regarding Heritage Conservation. Many of them are part of national and / or international scientific bodies within related fields. Theorists and practitioners from outside the school, the field and sometimes the country are invited to lecture or to teach in our programs.

The broad spectrum of disciplines also encompasses a diverse array of teaching and research methods. The Chair offers specialization in heritage conservation principles and practice to students at various levels up to postgraduate and doctoral studies.

Our Chair is the initiator of the Post-Graduate School of Monuments Conservation (since 1991), of the Master Degree Course in Sacred Architecture (since 2000). The new College of Restoration and the Master Degree Course in Heritage Management (since 2002) constitute another way by which the Chair becomes a polarization nucleus of specialists in Conservation – researchers, practitioners, small and medium enterprises working in the field.

## **3 Participation in European projects**

- Exhibition on Secular Architecture in the Balkans and its Preservation, 1996-1997
- Interreg II - 2000
- Culture 2000 – from September 2001 to July 2002

Additionally, our Post Graduate School of Monuments Conservation has had a long collaboration with the School of Conservation of Chaillot (France).

As individuals, the members of the Chair have participated in European and regional projects in the field of theory and history of architecture.

## **4 Objectives**

Numerous international documents (among others the UNESCO World Heritage Convention Section 5c, The Council of Europe European Architectural Heritage Convention Section 8, 17, 18, and 19, The Council of Europe Archaeological Convention Section 12) emphasized the need for research in the field of conservation as well as international collaboration and sharing of results.

While important steps have been taken in the area of networking, especially through the European Union 5th Framework Program, there is still much to do with respect to applying the results of research in the field of higher education or training of skilled professionals in conservation. In our opinion, networking between Universities and research centers will bring the outputs of research to the attention of future professionals in the field of conservation.

## **5 Future projects at the national and European level, requesting European expert's competence**

Since 1991, the Chair has developed educational programs for training in the field of architectural theory, history and conservation. As one of the leading training units in architecture in South Eastern Europe, our University has professional relationships with more than twenty faculties of architecture throughout Europe. Our purpose is to develop these links further and to strengthen them especially in the field of architectural criticism, cultural heritage preservation and research. Some of the specific actions are as follows:

- Establishment of a Research Excellence Centre
- Establishment of a UNESCO Chair in Local Communities Management of Cultural Properties
- Participation in a UNITWIN network and creating training units in architectural conservation within universities
- Participation together with other European Universities to European Conservation Programs (as Culture 2000, etc.)
- Participation of different European organisms / individuals to the improvement of our educational strategies.

### **5.1 A new project**

Geographically, Romania should not be considered a Balkan country. The Danube was not a real frontier though, and Lower Danube basin constituted an important area of exchanges, a space of communication between people belonging to different ethnic backgrounds. The similar cultural features found on the two sides of the Danube serve as proof that cultural borders, unlike political borders, never overlap with geographical boundaries.

Unfortunately, following W.W.II our country was culturally isolated not only from Western Europe but also from the neighboring communist countries including the Balkan countries. While the historians of the pre-1944 Romanian architecture realized that they had to look around in order to put the basis of their own history of architecture, after 1944 it was quite difficult to connect the Romanian architecture to the general background to which it was belonging. Thus the continuity of research was lost and most of the international architecture community was referring to Romanian architecture as a "local original" product. It was during the past twenty years that some punctual studies treating the matter in its natural broader context appeared. After 1990, the situation changed again as we started evaluating integration into the Western Europe overlooking our regional common links. The cultural perspective removes to the largely pejorative connotations of the term "the Balkans", as used in recent years to define a zone of almost permanent conflicts. Our belonging to the Balkans was seen as creating a "negative perception" for our countries, and the ethnic and cultural diversity were taken into account more as sources of conflict rather than as components of the unique and complex cultural heritage of the area. It is also clear that the major difficulty that architectural historians encounter is mere linguistic.

From a cultural view point we all agree that our region is extremely interesting; we can not deny the complexity resulting from its ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as from the permanent changes, influences, circulation of patterns that finally determined a certain cultural unity.

From my perspective, as a professor teaching the history of Romanian architecture and a researcher in this field, I need to stress the importance of studying the various connections that, in different periods of time, led to specific developments in the Romanian architecture. Some of the typologies and forms of the Romania architecture can be really understood only within the framework of the evolution of Balkan architecture. Meanwhile, in my experience students need to be aware that, as original as it may be perceived, the Romanian architecture is a part of a whole, which appears to be the Balkan culture and civilization.

On the other hand, as successors of the Balkans cultural background, I am deeply interested that our studies concerning the architectural history of the area are recognized at European level. As the organizers of the 1997 Thessaloniki Conference stated: "*Recognition of Balkan cultural heritage and its proper integration into the European context is imperative both from the Balkans, and from the European perspectives*".

Starting with a fairly safe assumption that Romanian school of architecture is heading towards the common European higher education space, the crucial element for building an environment of collaboration which is favorable to this goal is the issue of mobility. In this context mobility refers primarily to transfer of ideas and experiences, and not merely to student/teacher "traveling abroad". Mobility with this respect covers the transfer of ideas and experiences in the fields of theory, research, education and practice as the major areas of concern of architectural knowledge. The exchange of theoretical developments, joint research projects, various forms of exchanges in the process of education, as well as the critical relationship between school and professional practice could be just some elements of the co-operation/mobility.

Therefore our Chair intends to establish a network of Balkan universities / institutions involved in the research and protection of the cultural heritage. The title of the project is: *Heritage Conservation in the Balkans - architecture, practices, common policies*.

#### Objectives:

- The creation of a network of institutions / universities involved in the research of the urban and architectural heritage and its preservation. The network will enable universities to share information and to organize exchange programs for both professors and students.
- The realization of a Web site having as aim the gathering of data related to the urban and architectural heritage, their common or distinguishing features, the conservation practices, the educational impact and the cultural policies related to it. It will be a continuous presence in the cultural and educational fields in the Balkan area, and it will promote its common values as an important part of European culture.
- The site will be made and administrated by our school, the participants having the possibility to administrate their own chapters/items and to introduce their materials free of charge for a period of three years. All the materials published on the site will be in English.

## 6 Conclusion

In our opinion integration in the European Research Area would help us accomplish our objectives and finalize our projects. With this respect we think that KOWI can act like as a "broker" disseminating the information about our chair and our projects within the European Academic / Research field and finding partners for our projects or recommending us as partners for other European projects.