



HABILITATION THESIS

ARCHITECTURE AND IDENTITY.

Architectural Microhistories between Local Influences and Confluences

Senior Lecturer Ph.D. Arch. Dan-Ionuț Julean

Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca

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ABSTRACT

Habilitation Thesis: **ARCHITECTURE AND IDENTITY.**

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Candidate: Senior Lecturer Ph.D. Arch. Dan-Ionuț Julean

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The current text synthetically and methodically presents the professional activities pursued by the candidate, mainly subsequent to the defence of the doctoral thesis, focusing on directions and objectives which took shape in time and which are to be detailed following a concept based on *architecture and identity*.

The activities of the candidate, as shown in the table of contents, are structured around three nuclei: *the presentation of the architectural research subjects and instruments, academic and professional accomplishments, the perspectives of career development* – seen in the global context of personal achievements within the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca.

The doctoral thesis, as well as other previous research subjects, distinct from the thesis' topic, tackle certain research results and theoretical aspects in search of palpable formulae regarding the different *embodiments of identity in architecture*, relying on *specificity, authenticity and picturesque* and their meanings, at different layers of interpretation. Actually, the doctoral thesis entitled “Typologies of Jewish Space in Contemporary Architecture. Jewish Community Centres in the European Diaspora”, defended at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, *magna cum laude*, was the threshold of the very vast field of Jewish architecture, approaching even aspects regarding a Jewish “identity” in / through architecture.

Other interesting and original aspects of the research were materialised as: complex architectural investigations which produced different case studies, comparative architecture studies, ethno-cultural studies, studies regarding the philosophical component of architecture, studies regarding issues related to images and studies regarding the opportunities and possibilities to enhance the built heritage. All of these combined also outline *the main research topics*, which are thoroughly detailed throughout Part I and which provide also the subjects of the current and ongoing studies.

The research topics and professional interests mainly consider *the development of qualitative aspects of the educational-academic pursuit*, mirroring certain concrete approaches: the quest for ways to *enhance the cultural heritage through architecture* (projects, partnerships, and research grants), various *interdisciplinary studies* on subjects bordering on fields such as history and theory of architecture, *comprehensive history of architecture studies*. All of these aspects are extensively presented throughout Part II and

respectively Part III, following the same topics which were introduced in Part I. Currently, much of the professional activity is reflected in projects and partnerships carried out through the Research Group “Architecture. Time. Habitudes” – established in 2015, within the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca. Actually, being part of a research group proved to be quite a challenge.

Part II also shows *various contributions in organising and coordinating several scientific events, exhibitions, workshops, etc., as well as a number of institutional activities.* Regarding *the teaching and pedagogical component*, the candidate always pursued *a continuous perfectibility and adaptation* to the necessities of the students, to the institutional conditions, as well as to the realities of the society. This component is addressed throughout Part III.

The scientific articles and national and international conference participations, as well as the educational and applied research endeavours confirm *a constant preoccupation towards the already stated subjects and consistency in structuring an academic career.*

An original contribution to the field of research are *the studies regarding the configurations of identities in architecture, morphologies of certain architectures*, inclusive understandings of various architectures / architectural ensembles regarding aspects related to the “ethnic”, “national”, “identitary” components – shaping various *architectural microhistories*. These are joined by other methodical research ventures focusing on autochthonous architectural history, on a local / regional level (the broader region of the Transylvanian Plateau, spreading towards the Western Plain), which either unearthed valuable new pieces of information regarding the correct dating and coherent interpretation of heritage buildings, or brought to light lesser known architectural aspects. Moreover, a series of practical undertakings were also overviewed (educational or research related issues), which highlight tendencies regarding the enhancement of the built heritage with social and cultural outcome. Thus, one might note the following:

- the continuation of a topic previous to the doctoral thesis, materialised through a series of comparative architecture studies or of architectural investigations bringing forward aspects regarding *the architecture of Transylvanian manor houses and castles*;
- an original approach towards *the issue regarding the Jewish heritage in Romania*, presented in the current context, centring on possibilities of *enhancing the Jewish cultural inheritance*; actually, through a series of ethno-cultural presentations or internationally published studies, a series of aspects regarding the local specificities, cultural traditions and the identity of the Jewish community in Romania were brought to light;
- a series of articles and isolated research insertions which present *the constrains of the monument in its current evolution* and, mainly, the fact that it is possible to state *a new understanding regarding the concept of monument*, as it transcends beyond *the real into the virtual*, thus addressing the issue of *the existence of a virtually, online, built heritage*;
- emphasising, in context, *various interdisciplinary aspects regarding the interpretation of architecture*;

- the outlining of certain *particular approaches*, of historical and theoretical architectural research, related to *defining specific “national styles”*, during the second half of the 19th century, until the first half of the 20th century, which imply *the structuring of their forms of “identity”, oscillating between “style”, “nation” and “tradition”*.

Actually, the theoretical component defines most of the academic development thus far, pursuing *two paths: one from architecture towards theory and the other from theory towards architecture*.

Moreover, an equilibrium between the field of historical and theoretical research and the one of practical activities, which actually define the profession, was sought, always looking for opportunities of collaboration with the socio-economic environment, however, without abandoning the academic sphere. The interest towards research and the practical component of the research are apparent the activities undertaken by the Research Group “Architecture. Time. Habitudes” and, especially by the fact that the Group *became a long-term partner in an extensive project of reconverting and enhancing a major landmark of industrial architectural heritage*, thus trying to implement a vision of reconversion (long-term), alongside small revitalisation projects (medium and short term). Furthermore, the candidate took part and also signed partnerships or research grants with third parties, through which attempted to enhance *punctual researches* (isolated subjects), *focused on particular heritage aspects* (such as *memorial architecture, local museums, mobile heritage, architectural or memorial architectural items, the memory of various personalities, local identity manifestations, typologies of urban dwelling*).

According to the above stated facts, the proposals regarding the evolution of the academic career open broad perspectives, with *varied topics, in the fields of both history of architecture and theory of architecture*. In addition, *enhancing the cultural heritage* is a field of great interest, mainly due to *the focus on social and identitary aspects* – lifestyle and aspects regarding the culture of societies. Moreover, these paths offer opportunities of associations with *related fields such as Art History, Sociology, Psychology, Geography-Tourism, etc.*

In this context, the ability to coordinate doctoral research projects would offer *stability in tracing these paths and professional safety*, due to the energy bestowed upon the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Cluj-Napoca. The educational process in architecture is enriched by the complexity of the research carried out by conducting doctoral theses, while the opportunity to build upon the already established connections, both academic and with the socio-economic environment, with further collaborations, partnerships and research grants could contribute to *the increase in prestige and visibility of the Doctoral School of Architecture and Urban Planning*, within the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, and also of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning. *Last but not least, the thoroughness of the research process in architecture, as an applied methodology of the professional activity, and, at the same time, of the scientific approach itself represent a true contemporary challenge.*