

## ***CIVIL, RELIGIOUS AND INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN JEWS***

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**Abstract:** *Quality historical architecture centuries is present all over Transylvania.*

*The purpose of the present study is to document the built heritage of Transylvania, particularly the Jewish buildings and especially those that had been neglected over the last years. The research domain is interdisciplinary because it links History, Architecture and Art history as well. Traveling around, in most of the cities a synagogue, a Heider, a ritual bath, a prayer house or a house where the Schlachter lived and worked can be found. All these are traditional, easily recognizable buildings. But research questions also involve other buildings with Jewish background that are worth talking about. The list continues with Jewish hospitals, schools, houses and cemeteries. This way, a wide range of sources are called upon. Some of the existing buildings are historic monuments today, but most of them are not included on the List of Historical Monuments, although they should be. These are beautiful, valuable buildings, which represent a past that is sadly, not recognized by people. The niche in this domain remains the fact that the buildings are not identified, rehabilitated, or promoted. Previous studies have mostly focused on synagogues and prayer houses.(Aristide Streja 2012) Most of the other precious buildings have been left aside<sup>1</sup>. Continuing the tradition to reveal and explore all the architectural treasures that can be found in Transylvania, recognition studies allow the extraction of relevant data. For the creation of the case studies, buildings have been measured, redrawn, archive research was done, and finally a proposal plan for their restoration process was created. Further research will permit a better interpretation of the buildings by including them into different categories of rehabilitation. The measuring and drawing techniques, used today, offer a great potential for such an analysis.*

*This study offers a new approach to change the point of view of the people who live in Romania, and helps them appreciate the heritage they have received. The beauty of the rehabilitated buildings will also raise the number of tourist attractions in the country.*

**Keywords:***Jewish building; heritage of Transylvania; intercultural dialogue; national identity; globalization problems*

### **The actual problem**

Even though there were many tries to create an inventory of the buildings, most of the people doing the work are known for their will and goals, not for their studies in the discussed domain.(Perczel 2008)(Riczu 1992)

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<sup>1</sup>Example: house no. 16 on Petőfi street Satu Mare city

The fact that the built heritage and patrimony which surrounds us is not known still persists. There is no complete list of the buildings, detailed or otherwise, which should be included on the list of Architectural Monuments. Together with the phenomenon of globalization, a lot of things are being constructed, new buildings appear, and the valuable past represented by the existing built heritage, is being ignored because it is unknown and thus unprotected. This problem has arisen in other countries as well, for instance in Hungary.(Perczel 2008)

In Transylvania there are various interesting settlements which include land and parcels full of history and tales of the past.

The ethnic composition of Satu Mare municipality in the interwar period:

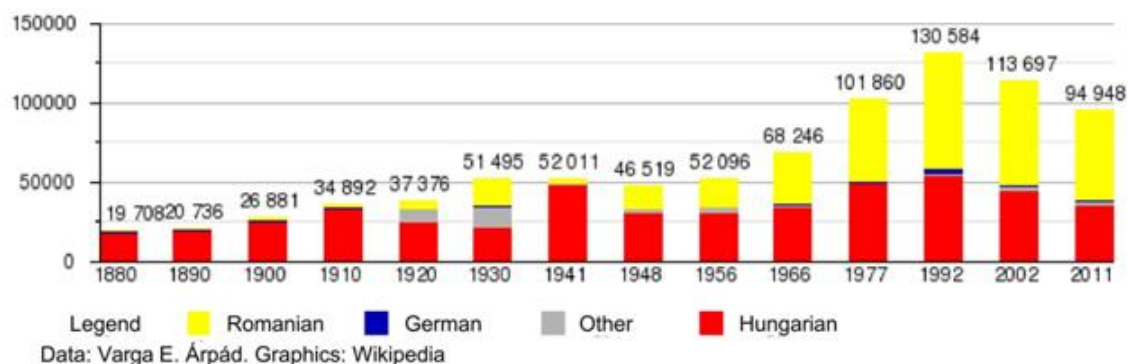


Figure 1. The ethnic composition of the population of Satu Mare (1880-2011)

The graph confirms a fluctuation which can be explained through the blossoming economy and later throughout the wars which have passed and then with the selling of Jews and Swabs by the Ceausescu communist party.

The houses, which in many cases are similar to those in different regions, are still unique in their own way. They carry in their appearance, interior and exterior alike, the lives of the generations of people who have lived there.

Since most of the buildings are unknown, as in not catalogued with the help of an adequate taxonomic method, they are not protected. Value is lost and destroyed, not appreciated or promoted. The buildings are not restored, looked after or visited because they are not known by most people.

There is no database which would reveal with precision (the blueprints, facades, sections, supporting structure, art history description, land book extract in-extenso, etc) how many houses, schools, hospitals, public buildings, cemeteries or historical churches are there, by whom are they built, in which period and in what style?

### **The importance of this problem**

These problems are important because any kind of built patrimony represents the collective memory, the glorious or not so glorious past of a community. Apart from the collective memory and past, another important factor is the fact that these buildings have historical, sentimental artistic and cultural value, value which can not be measured quantitatively or directly. Even though these values can not be measured, in some cases they are the most important ones, more precious than the object holding the value.

There is however, a different category of houses, which can be found in most of the settlements of Transylvania, and when we question the locals about these specific houses, which are bigger, more beautiful and mysterious, in most cases abandoned, and usually found in the central zones of the settlements, or in the more silent areas but still of high rank within the city, most of the time when we ask the locals about them, we get the answer: „Yes, that house, is a Jewish house.” The Jewish presence in the transylvanian area is proven starting from the 13th century, when the sources mention Jewish traders taking part in the commerce of salt on the Mureş river. (Gyémánt 2004)

A Jewish house... These two words are not just a piece of dry information. They hide within them a more profound reality, something of which we all know that is not „just a house...”, but a Jewish house, a big house, a good house, of quality, designed with care, and good taste, with a good attention to detail: thick walls, a voluminous roof, a representing and beautiful facade with a good composition of volumes, a mysterious garden in the back, which has been abandoned for some time, because the owners of these houses are no longer alive. Through their existence, these buildings represent a cultural diversity, they enrich the variety of the existing buildings of the area. We gaze upon this house, which stands solitarily and proud on the street and we feel sadness, now again we can imagine those who used to live here and we remember the events that have happened between the two world wars. We relive in a flash the tale of this family and we know why this house is alone, and slowly destroyed by all this grief and under the weight of all the things it had to endure throughout the years. It was made fun of, excommunicated, robbed, discriminated, abandoned and some even tried to take its life away. The only life it had. After so much unearned humiliation, it is still alive. Barely living, its eyes are closed, it is breathing but very slowly, like a sick man living out his last days on a death bed. Yet this creature still has it's dignity.

This study wishes to show the real estate, and also to save the memory of the buildings which „still live” and undoubtedly carry an intrinsic value through their inclusion in the settlement, the form of the parcel it was built on, the typology of the house, the volumetric concept, the way in which it completes the view of the street where it is found, and what captivates us as a first impression: their enchanting beauty, which enters our soul even

through the broken fillings, incomplete ornaments, destroyed roofs, abandoned entrances and the dusty facades.

From an architectural point of view the decoration styles of the facades of the buildings are the following: neoclassic, neobaroque, secession or eclectic. Each of the styles can be considered compositional and really like pleasant. The game of forms, symmetry, volumetry, the rythming in empty spaces, the relativity of spaces, the decorative forms, ornaments ( geometric, zoomorph, antropomorph and organic alike) and all of the compositional pieces in their way in which they are combined are really pleasant for the human eye. All of these are important because these buildings, through their presence, even without the motives explained above, make humanity to feel better. It is relaxing for a human being to look at something symmetric and successful from a compositional point of view. Something which calms the psyche and sends our thoughts towards harmony and something balanced. In conclusion, these buildings, through their presence have a positive impact on the lives of the people. If they disappear, these lives will no longer be enriched with important cultural value. The cultural diversity and variety which is represented in a place is the factor which define the genius loci, the distinctive atmosphere of the spirit of a place. Through the phenomenon of globalisation, the risk is really high for these values to be lost without a trace, and to result a sterile constructed space without personality.

### The proposed solution

The proposed solution is a revealing through a summary of the built Jewish patrimony in the city of Satu Mare from an architectural, historical, cadastral and art historical point of view, or in other words to create a monography which focuses on the real estate.

The approach used to solve this problem is similar with the study of (Riczu 1992) made in the city of Nyíregyháza (Hungary), but this would be more vast, and take into account more aspects and offering solutions at the same time.

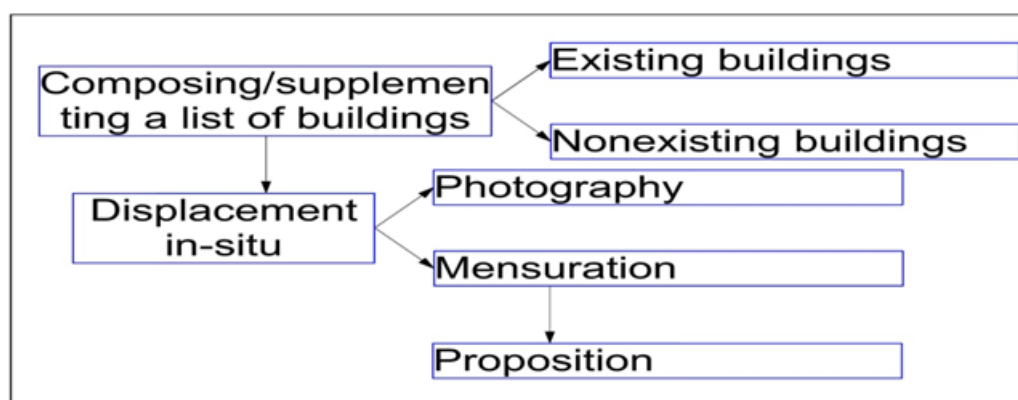
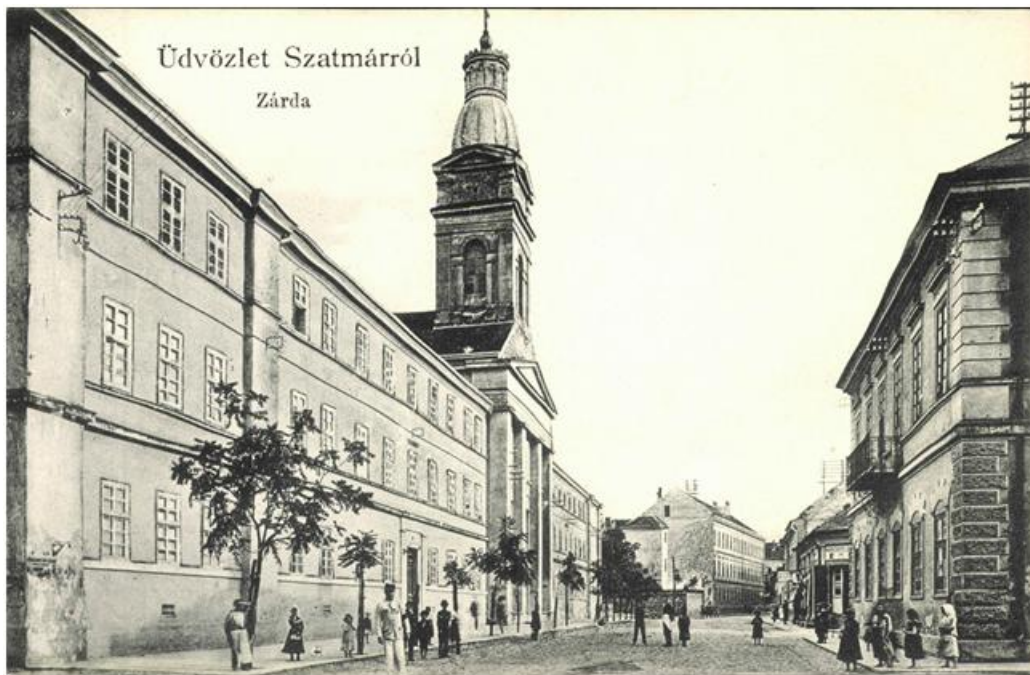


Figure 2. The proposed process of research

The study proposes to create a presentation of historical maps which show the contribution of the Jews in the mentioned city, together with a short presentation of their evolution regarding the areas to where they have spread and the periods in which they have built (including the eventual changes in legislation regarding the construction procedures and their effect on the urban image)(Moshe 1994), and also a map with the current situation, indicating where are the buildings which still exist or stand to this day. Together with the maps, the study proposes to create a complete list with exact address and land book extracts in-extenso (which represent a kind of Curriculum Vitae of the parcels on which the buildings are placed, together with the list of owners), the photographing and summary of at least the facades of the studied buildings.

A practical example for a case study would be the building of the Jewish girls school from Satu Mare which today is known by the name Rác house. The building is in a critical state. It is found in the historical center of the municipality of Satu Mare, on the Ștefan cel Mare street.



*Figure 3. Post Card- private collection. Zárdachurch (left) and the Rác house (right).*

The building is situated in the central zone of the city limited by the three streets: Ștefan cel Mare, Rândunelelor and Marsilia. The building was built in two stages, the older part (corpus A), was created in the year 1860, and in 1910 it was extended with corpus B which is on the side towards Marsilia Street. The height regime is basement, ground floor and one story. In the year 1960 there was a last intervention and capital reparations when the homes were created in their actual form. The building had a variety of functions: firstly elementary Jewish girl school, with various open spaces in corpus A towards the Ștefancel Mare Street, where its

last function was a tailor's shop. The ground floor towards the Ștefancel Mare Street is the property of the Romanian state.

All of the apartments are in private property, bought according to the Law 112/1996 through the COMCAS Satu Mare Company. In the basement there are storage spaces for the owners under the service providing area where the collapse of the median structural wall and the floor above the basement and ground floor had happened. In the A crop nobody lives since 20.11.2005, the residents were evacuated. Taking into account that even the stairs of access were deemed dangerous, a second set of provisional stairs were built to be able to enter the B corpus.

In this moment, from the outside the walls are held by wooden pillars. The façade is cracked in many places and on the inside two floors are partially collapsed. The central stairs are also collapsed and they were the only possibility of vertical access for the apartments of the whole building.



*Figure 4. Photo documentation 2014.02.20, the building in its current state – DohiTrepszkerLilla*

The exquisite architectural decorations with which the façade is made are the following: frames, profiles drawn with a template, girdles and a capital etc. These remind of classical architecture, but the building in its entirety can be classified of the eclectic style.

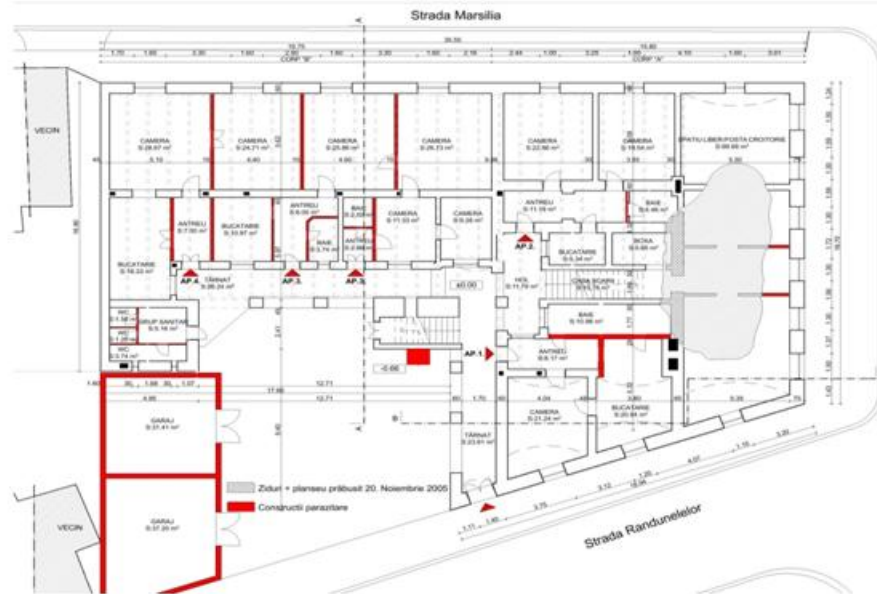


Figure 5. Ground floor blueprint – DohiTrepzskerLilla 2014. February

The building presents historical, architectural and urbanistical values which are more important for the historical city center of Satu Mare, than the value of the land on which it is built.



Figure 6. Facades – Deteriorated situation – DohiTrepzskerLilla 2014 february

Throughout the years the façade has suffered modifications, some windows were replaced by the modification of the holes, renouncing the arches and creating horizontal girders. The facades are in a critical deteriorated state: changed carpentry, cracked walls, the moisture has started to climb from the soil through capillarity into the pedestals, and at the level of the

gutters and drainpipes it is the rainwater which causes a great deal of damage, also the house is full of parasites in the form of gas lines, drainpipes, and aerial electric lines. The water is infiltrating inside the walls and they lose their resistance. In some places bricks and pieces of plaster fall from the cornice.

At the level of the floors there were new walls built to create smaller compartments. After an extensive review with taking into consideration all of the aspects, studies and existing facts, from an architectural point of view there is a proposition to change the function of the building and to reorganize it to provide a functional exploitation which is better than the current one.

Through the reorganization and creation of new compartments, the idea is to go back to the initial way the building was divided. The new proposed function of the building changed from residential spaces with commercial spaces on the ground floor would be a set of mixed functions corresponding to the needs of the central zone of the city: student housing, university library, literary coffee shop, book shop, summer garden and wine cellar.

The presence of these functions will populate the building with a public which comes from an intellectual social-level who can appreciate it's values.

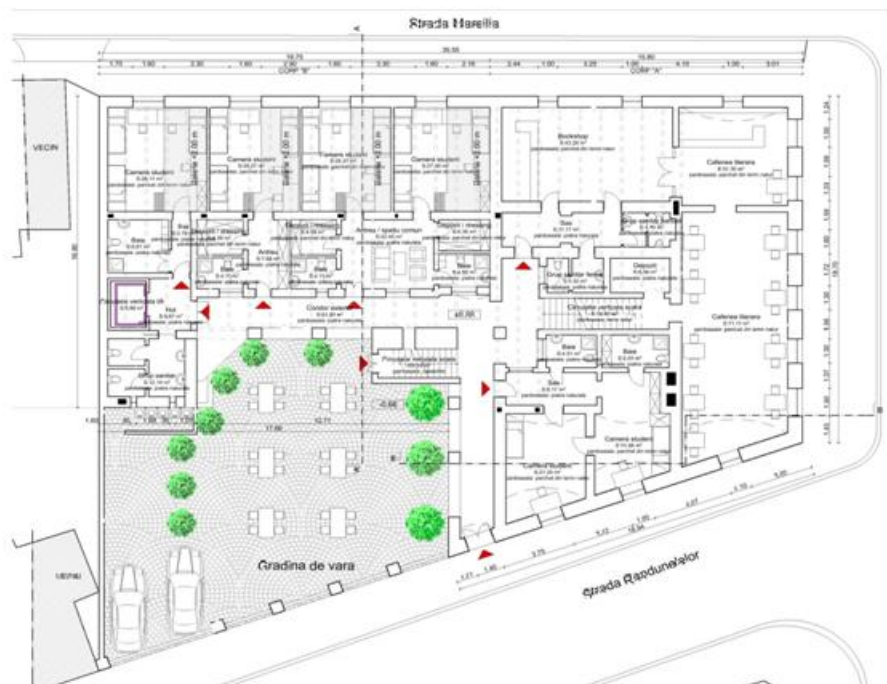


Figure 7. Ground floor blueprint – proposal for rehabilitation – DohiTrepszkerLilla 2014 march

In the General Urban Plan of the municipality of Satu Mare (P.U.G) the studied territory is treated as U.T.R (Territorial reference Unit) 01.01. CENTRAL ZONE of Satu Mare municipality “Old center” – historical protected zone.

Permitted use for buildings: Public institutions and services, except for polluting service providers, residences with functions of public interest at the ground floor with the maximum height regime of 4 stories.

All of the proposed functions are as such justified:

In the last years many of the faculties have opened their branches in the city, as such the number of students in the city have increased; however the housing for them has not been resolved. Also because of the increased number of students, there are not enough classrooms, amphitheatres, libraries or lecture halls. The situation of the county library is also uncertain, so there is need for a new university library. The representative hall from the first floor, with the antique wooden staircase which leads to it and the smaller rooms surrounding it with complementary functions are the most ideal to serve such functions.

For the students who are residents of this building and also for the people of the city a literary café has been proposed, to complement and also extend the services of the proposed library.



Figure 8. Façades – proposed for rehabilitation – DohiTrepșkerLilla 2014 march

The wine cellar, the same way enters the category of services to help spend free time, and also to be used by the makers of the Nachbil wine, with their main headquarters in the town of Beltiug, which is approximately 30 kilometers from Satu Mare, as space for exhibitions and wine tasting, which does not exist in the city.

Developed in the last years and creating an international name for themselves the makers of Nachbil Wine could either rent or buy this space in a beautiful historical building with a

particular atmosphere. This would also raise the ranking of the city by offering quality service in the central zone of the city.

To ease the circulation of the people with disabilities, the introduction of an elevator in the western wing of the building is proposed. Also to be able to easily participate at the events organized in this building, or the people to be able to get easily and fast home, two parking spots are proposed in the interior space of the parcel. The replacement of the existing fence with a new one is also proposed to enhance and not renounce the image of the building complex. The pillars of the fence will be placed similar to the pillars of the arches of the ground floor.

The interior and exterior rehabilitation of the building will happen with care, and adequate materials of high quality. Their usage will be supervised and done by experts in their respective domains.

Such an approach would be not only useful but also practical for each valuable real estate which still exists and is a part of the Jewish built patrimony. The study wishes to underline again the importance of these buildings regarding their uniqueness within the city, the neighborhood or zone. These buildings are parts which define the radiant atmosphere of a zone. The people of the society have the responsibility through conscious understanding and knowledge to protect these values for themselves and for generations to come.

### **Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations**

My solution would contribute in a different way to the research done thus far, since the summarizing of the existing situation up to this point has happened only partially and from other points of view. A list has been made of the real estates nationalized by the Romanian State (Csirák 2001). It is good, and useful but it is not sufficient. As a starting point, based on this list, buildings will be taken into account, however there are other Jewish real estates which are not mentioned on this list. Through the proposed study, the list will be completed with the missing information. Apart from the summary and taxonomic study of the buildings, a viable solution for rehabilitation will be proposed for each real estate.

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