

## THE JEWISH PAST OF EASTERN EUROPE

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**Abstract:** *In Transylvania, buildings with a high quality architecture have been constructed along the centuries. 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 article is the continuation of the article about the Jewish architecture in Transylvania, with a case study about the Jewish girls' school in Satu Mare. The research domain is interdisciplinary because it links History, Architecture, Art history and the problem of Globalization as well. 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. Most of the other precious buildings have been left aside. 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.*

**Keywords:** Jewish building; heritage of Transylvania; transnational dialogue; identity; globalisation problems

**JEL Classifications:** O18; O34; R14; R21

### Introduction

Globalisation, one of the issues of today's world also affects architecture, as well as all the other domains of life (Liane Lefaivre, 2012). Globalisation functions, it is not a failed project, because it is a wanted trend, it is human, natural, and humanity benefits from it (Wolf, 2004). Although considering all of its positive effects, some areas suffer because of it (Liane Lefaivre, 2012). One of its effects is the fact that in the image of the European area everything becomes uniform. In the last decades, many multinational companies have appeared and most of the products are sold everywhere worldwide and as such the image of a country cannot be displayed so vividly, whether we talk about its unique lifestyle, food or architecture. This diagnosis is becoming more and more clear.

### 1. Jews – those who have defined the image of East European cities

A speck of colour which enriched the identity of Romania and especially that of Transylvania was the mosaic community. The presence of Jewish population in Europe and especially in Eastern Europe meant more than just a simple existence. It was a transnational system which, through its entangling nature and form, created links which cover this area, regardless of the boundaries created by national borders. Jews are in contact with each other, they cooperate, communicate and thus create their own invisible network. The Jewish population created by the diaspora has reached various

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countries since they were forced to begin a new life in a new country and in a new community, where there were new rules and customs than those to which they were used to which have put their own mark and thus enriching unforeseeably the life of the community to which they would come to belong (Csirák, 2001).

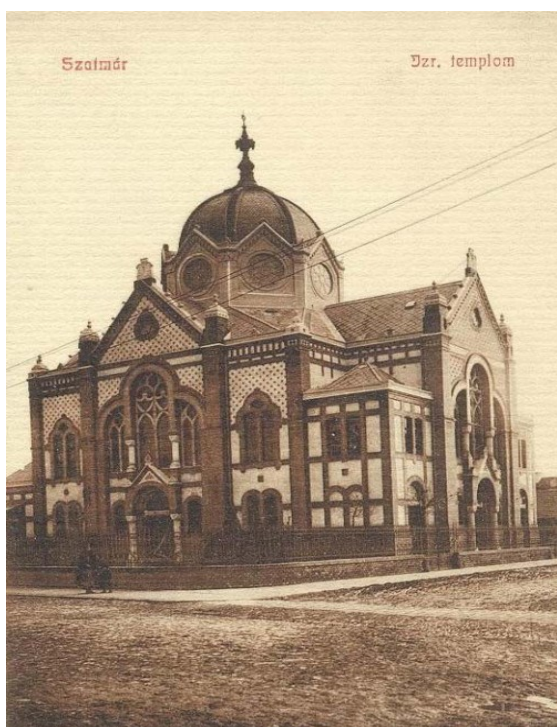
Traveling around, in most of the cities, a synagogue, a Heider, a ritual bath, a prayer house or a house where the Schlachter lived and worked can be found. All these are traditional, easily recognisable buildings. But research also involves other buildings with a Jewish background which are worth talking 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 recognised by people.

The challenge of integration and cohabitation with other citizens however does not represent such a big problem for them. It is true that they have brought a different culture, characteristic customs and an unusual lifestyle, but they were qualified people who have also brought with them the trades which they have learned, the wisdom and the will to work and thus they have succeeded in a very short time span to be tolerated and accepted (Csirák, 2001; Csirák Csaba, 2012), by the citizens of the communities where they have arrived. The majority of them have contributed with something valuable to raise the standard of living and culture of the community where they have come, their presence being beneficial and valuable (Csirák, 2001). The laws introduced by the government at those times were mostly anti-Semitic (Gyémánt, 2004), and made life and the adaptation of the Jews much harder into the integration of the European region. There are various examples of government ordinances in Romania as well (Gyémánt, 2004). Against all odds however, the Jews managed to survive and throughout the years slow and steady to gain rights, and became more and more accepted. The period before the First World War is considered to be the apogee of Jewish contribution to the cultural life of Eastern Europe (Aristide Streja, 2012; Csirák, 2001; Klein, 2014; Lugosi Lugo László, 2002; Perczel, 2008). A lot of literature, music and architecture managed to see daylight in this period thanks to Jewish contributions (Mayo, 1940). The majority of buildings from the built Jewish patrimony is from this period (Aristide Streja, 2012; Riczu, 1992). There are buildings from this period which still stand today and radiate the beauty of that era and talk about the unique character of the zone in which they were built. Through their presence, these buildings enrich the parcells, areas and cities with beauty, history and compositional harmony. Sadly, some of them do not exist anymore (Riczu, 1992). There are a series of causes: they were left to be destroyed by time (Csirák, 2001);

they were not restored (Csirák, 2001); they were demolished intentionally because they were in the historical centre (Peltz, fara an), where the land was expensive and for the purpose of building something new but maybe something less valuable, they were demolished; they were demolished by time or by the will of others simply because they were not known (Csirák, 2001), in the sense not being catalogued, taken into account, photographed or included on the list of Architectural Monuments and thus as a case of not being known they remained unprotected. These problems and other similar ones represent challenges in all countries, for example Hungary (Perczel, 2008).

The built space is sterilized more and more and the values are not dealt with accordingly. Because of globalization, the risk of losing the enchanting image of the old Jewish buildings, which are extremely representative of the cities of Transylvania, or in other words, the *genius loci*\* is slowly annihilated (Csirák, 2001).

**Figure 1 - Status-quo Synagogue**



Source: Private collection

**Figure 2 - Building of the Police in the place of Satu Mare**



Source: [www.jurnaluldenordvest.ro](http://www.jurnaluldenordvest.ro)

On the two images above the same parcel of land can be seen. The first image is of the Status-quo synagogue built in 1905 and demolished in 1965 while the second, the existing building, the main

\* The distinctive atmosphere or pervading spirit of a place.

headquarters of the County Police built in its place. This way the city had lost a masterwork of Architecture.

## **2. Intrinsic importance of the problem**

Identity is the key word for it opens the lock of the problem and it underlines its importance, the identity of a nation, the specificity and uniqueness of a community even if it lives on in a faraway country. The identity is the primordial dilemma of a country or a nation, because this is where their source is, and if its foundations are not correctly placed, they are unclear or unrecognized, everything else built on an unstable foundation can't be stable. The discussion leads to the collective memory of a community, which are personal, unique and unrepeatable. It is important for a community to know well its own history, values tangible and intangible alike, and these values to be correctly remembered and used by the leaders of a nation.

The importance of the problem is relevant economically, politically and socially as well. Economically: if these buildings would be restored and put in function in the right way once again, it would be a lot more attractive for tourists and they would become a source of considerable income for a country. Not only that but as a whole they would raise the quality of the cities of Transylvania (most of these buildings being situated in the historical centre of the cities of Transylvania). Politically it is important for each government to constantly keep in mind, protect and defend the buildings which have the value of historical monuments, since these have representative national and international value as well.

Socially a return to the idea of identity can be accomplished. The specificity of historical Transylvania is defined by multiculturalism and a large ethnic diversity – long before the European community – being able to be perceived as a predecessor of it, not just as an integrated part. From this cultural diversity an important part is the built Jewish patrimony. If this problem is not taken seriously, these buildings day by day will be destroyed and will vanish, together with the past of the community.

**Figure 3 - House on Petőfi street**



Source: Foto: Dohi Trepszker Lilla

**Figure 4 - Place of demolished house on Petőfi street**



Source: Foto: Dohi Trepszker Lilla

On the images above the same parcel of land can be observed, on the address of 9 of Petőfi Street. The house with the number 3, in 2012 (the year when the photo was taken) still stands. This is a Jewish house, information taken from the list of nationalized houses (Csirák, 2001). Today in 2015, it looks like Figure 4. A clear evidence, what the fate of these buildings is, which could be classified and protected by their new status of historical monuments.

### **3. Proposals and case studies**

The goal of this study is to raise awareness and make these buildings known, it is important, for these buildings to be seen and known, that the issue at hand to be on the daily agenda, to be current, discussed, and acquainted. The proposed solution would consist from a taxonomic summarization and revelation of these buildings. 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. This would mean, more precisely, the completion of the existing evidence lists, with those buildings, that are not included on these lists yet. Another important step would be the marking of the buildings on a map, with a legend, in which the following are represented:

1. All of the Jewish buildings that existed



2. Buildings which still exist today, and the categorization of their status
3. Rebuilt buildings
4. Demolished buildings

For the existing-ones a revelation from the architectural, structural, and art historical point of view is necessary, and a Land Book Extract in-extenso (this shows clearly who the owners of the land, on which the building stood over the years, were). 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 allow 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. The proposed city for the case study, is Satu Mare. The buildings can be categorized according to functions, such as: hospitals, schools, churches, prayer houses, ritual baths, ritual slaughterhouses, factories and residential houses. From all the categories, the largest is the one of residential houses. Among these, many examples can be found, which are extraordinary. The residential hoses can be divided in subcategories: ground floor houses, one-story houses, undecorated/elementary houses, adorned houses, houses with only residential function, houses with residential and commercial function, etc.

For a short case-study a parallel presentation of two types of houses is desired, both of them valuable, one being from the historical and compositional point of view, and the other mostly from a historical point of view. Residential houses are the most common Jewish buildings, which have been built in the city of Satu Mare, this is why it is a lot easier for a parallel to be drawn between different types of buildings from this category.

**Figure 5 - House on Hasdeu street**



Source: Foto: Dohi Trepszker Lilla

**Figure 6 - House on Brancoveanu street**



Source: Foto: Dohi Trepszker Lilla

The pictures from above represent two residential houses: first on Hasdeu Street, and the second one on Brancoveanu Street, both of them being located in the city of Satu Mare. The volumetric and height regime is similar: ground floor building, with an open gable roof, and the entrance is from the same zone in the case of both houses. The one thing that differs though is the architectural way of approaching the façade. The rhythming of the windows is similar: in a symmetric way, on five axes. In the case of the first building it can be observed, that the decorations are vaster and realized in a late-secession style. The forms of decoration are concentrated in the zone of the window framings and in the zone of the cornice. In the case of the building from Brancoveanu Street, a more simplistic approach can be observed, a simpler treatment of the adorning elements of the façade: here the façade is an eclectic-one, much more simplified. The forms are geometric-eclectic-ones.

Proposal for changing of destination: in the case of both buildings it is recommended to return to the original compartmentalisation, in order to get an authentic picture about the past of these buildings. In the case of the first building, since it is located in a residential zone, and used as a residential one-family house, as it was in the past, the proposal is that in the future for it to be used in the same way, respecting the above conditions, which refer to the compartmentalization, and with the condition that the small, periodical repair works to be done on the downspout and gutter system, which collects the rainwater. The case of the building on the Brancoveanu street is different: it is located in the historical city centre, and back then it was used as a residential house, however today the residential houses disappeared from the surroundings and the zone had transformed into a commercial and services zone. The building is uninhabited. The proposal consists of the change of function of the building, by changing the destination from residential house to a commercial building in which commercial activity or services take place, in compliance with the ideas mentioned above for the compartmentalization and periodical reparations. For both buildings the rehabilitation of the façade is recommended, preserving the existing decorative elements and using a range of colours (maximum two colours) which can represent more vividly the beauty and the value of the architectural details.

#### **4. Analysis, interpretation, conclusions and proposals**

The proposed solution would bring an addition to the prior studies made in this domain (Aristide Streja, 2012) (Riczu, 1992) (Perczel, 2008) (Lugosi Lugo László, 2002). The additions would be similar to the ones described above. These aim to enter more profoundly in the research of the mentioned buildings, for better and more detailed knowledge. The solution, in conclusion, would

consist in a proposal of rehabilitation, change of function, and reintegration of the buildings in the urban tissue, and into the life of the community. The proposal would be created in such a way, for the final solution to be a viable and sustainable one, which serves and answers the needs of the community, raises the quality of the services in the zone in which it stands, and within the range of possibilities, respects the original compartmentalization. The beauty of the rehabilitated, buildings with their changed functions will also raise the quality of tourist attractions in the country.

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