

Heritage Spaces and Local Engagement: The role of heritage buildings protection in strengthening communities

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A low level of trust, solidarity, and community values is well documented in post-totalitarian Romania. This low level of social capital affects many areas of public life, including protecting heritage buildings. Recognizing this, the Ambulance for Monuments (AfM) has engaged since 2016 in interventions to safeguard heritage buildings from collapse or decay. They use an intervention model to safeguard the monuments from destruction, raising awareness about their value and promoting communities' heritage stewardship. Their interventions enlist various stakeholders, among them community members, who contribute by offering financial or in-kind support (e.g., meals, accommodation, tools, work on-site, etc.).

In this presentation we discuss how these interventions contribute to strengthening communities.

We used a mixed-method research design. We collected data in phone surveys and semi-structured interviews with members of the communities where the interventions took place, who volunteered by offering financial or in-kind support.

The results suggest that once a well-organized intervention to safeguard local heritage takes place, a small number of local community members participate and contribute in various ways. Some continue to contribute to protecting cultural heritage once they learn how to do it. However, they feel mostly helpless regarding the prospects of continuing the restoration projects.

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