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Ekistic Heritage and Enhancement: The Case of Sulina

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Abstract

In the eastern part of Romania, in the region of Dobrogea, lies the small town of Sulina. The establishment of the European Commission of the Danube there in 1856, transformed Sulina from a small fishing village to a cosmopolitan city. Not only was the centre of commercial activity but also a location that attracted people of different nationalities. The dominant population group was that of the Greeks who were active in commerce and navigation, and many of them worked at the Commission. Over the years and after the devastating wars, the city experienced decline. Today it stands nearly deserted. The glorious past of the city is demonstrated by the ekistic heritage. The cemetery, as well as the buildings are distinguished for their architecture and testify the city's history. Many of them are now labelled as historic monuments and they are protected by a specific institutional framework. A good example of bilateral cooperation between Romania and Greece is the "Beautiful Romania" project; its aim was the rehabilitation and restoration of the historic monument of the former Paleologos and Apesos House which is nowadays the Municipal Library of the city of Sulina.

Keywords: Sulina, European Commission of the Danube, Greeks, Ekistic Heritage.

Introduction

Sulina, one of the branches of the Danube Delta, is the main output of the so called "king of the rivers", in the Black Sea. It was known as the dangerous and unique passage of ships directed from and towards Romania.

The city of Sulina, built on the banks of this homonymous arm, situated not far from the sea, was and still is the first port for ships entering the Danube towards the interior of the country, but also the last stop for them to the Black Sea (Cantili, 1901). The city since its establishment and over the years has been an important trading port and a meeting point for different cultures. Despite the fact that throughout the years the region was claimed by various conquerors, the commercial-shipping activity did not stop.

The History of Sulina

The name of the city was first mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in 950 AD as Selina (Koromila, 2000). Other names appeared during centuries, such as Solin,

Kalostomon, Salina, Sollina. However, until today the origin of the name has not been adequately established. It is supported that either it is originated from the ancient greek word that means pipe, either from the Turkish word "su" that means water, or that it's originated from the latinoslav word "sol", which means salt (Comnène, 1918; Curelaru, 2008; Markopoulou, 1967). In the 13th century, after the victory of the Byzantine Empire, the Venetians and Genoese appeared in the region. In 1417 it was conquered by Sultan Mehmet A, while from the 18th century the presence of the Russians and the Austrians is noticeable (Curelaru, 2008). From 1826 by the Treaty of Ackerman, Sulina was Russian territory. The Treaty of Adrianople, that was signed a few years later, in 1829, was important for the country's economy since it brought economic independence in the Romanian Principalities and liberated the trade of grain. This treaty was also significant for the town of Sulina, because Russia, that was the dominant in the region, was

obliged to start drilling works at the branch in order to make the navigation for commercial or not ships, safer. Despite this obligation as well as the signing of a new agreement (Russo-Turkish agreement St. Petersburg 1840), the improvement works did not start (Cantili, 1901; Engelhardt, 1862). The Crimean War broke out in 1853 and had a major impact in the area. Not only the grain trade stopped but also the city of Sulina was utterly destroyed in 1854 by the British (Cilincea, 2009).

The Creation of the European Commission of the Danube

A turning point in the history of Sulina and of the broader region was the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1856, which marked the end of the Crimean War and the resurgence of the winner Turkey. This historical context was the starting point for the development of Sulina and its transformation from a small fishing village into a cosmopolitan center of commerce, affecting also essentially the socio-economic profile of the broader region. Note that an important term of the Treaty of Paris, except from the freedom of navigation along the Danube (from the source to its estuary), was the creation of the European Commission of the Danube, which would not only control the navigation of the lower Danube River (from the estuary to Galați) but it would also undertake construction works of the branch, in order to make the ships' navigation safer. The Commission was originally formed by: France, England, Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, Russia and Turkey; was established in Sulina and since 1878 Romania has also been a member (Gâlcă, 1930; Baicoianu, 1915; La commission, 1931).

The Commission's works in Sulina as well as its proclamation in 1870 as a free port (porto franco), contributed to the economic development of the city. It was the main export gate for the most important product that Romania manufactured this of the grains, which was destined to Western Europe. Also, it was the gate for imported products such as citrus fruit, olive oil, coal etc. (Kardasis & Harlafti, 2006). The establishment of the Commission led to the creation of many jobs and business opportunities which had as a result the rapid growth of Sulina. A huge migration wave to the city was created by people who were willing to profit from these advantages. People of various nationalities created the multicultural mosaic of Sulina and this had as a result the appearance for the first time, in this region of Romania, the notion of a Euro-community/Europolis.

The Greek Presence in Sulina

The dominant group in the area of Sulina, at least until the beginning of the 20th century, was the Greek one. The Greeks appeared for the first time, in the wider region of the

mouth of the Danube, in the 7th century BC when traders from Miletus founded their first colony of Istria, which was followed by the establishment of other cities like Aegisus and Tomis (Koromila, 2001). During the centuries the wider Delta region was characterized by the presence and the activity of the Greeks, while in the beginning of the 19th century, their presence became more numerous and more dynamic.

For example, in 1879, there were 2.875 people of whom 1.653 were Greeks, 175 Armenians, 155 Russians, 150 Romanians, 9 French, 24 Italians, 15 Lipovens, 45 Germans, 85 British, 3 Poles, 150 from Montenegro, 250 Turks, 15 Bulgarians, 140 Jews, 6 Albanians (Sturdza, 1880). The Greeks, who lived in Sulina before the establishment of the European Commission of the Danube, had arrived in the region in their greatest majority after the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829 (Covacef, 2003). Besides, according to a source it is stated that "En 1853, Sulina ne comptait tout au plus 1.000 à 1.200 habitants tous, Ioniens, Maltais ou Grecs [...]" (Engelhardt, 1862).

The majority of the Greeks had undertaken to guide with safety the ships from the Black Sea to the interior of Romania- via the Sulina branch- and vice versa, the so called pilots. But as the depth of waters was low, the transshipment of the cargo from large ships into smaller ones was a necessity. Thus, the weight was reduced and it was easier for the workers to tow the ship either by small boats or with their hands by land. These works were undertaken by the Greek inhabitants of Sulina. When the European Commission was established in Sulina, an even bigger wave of Greeks arrived, mostly originated from Cephalonia, Ithaca and from other places such as Mykonos, Kasos etc. As soon as the amelioration works of the branch began, those who were responsible for the transshipment of ship, were incorporated in the Commission's services and worked as pilots, officers, sailors, captains (Fokas, 1975). Besides, since 1857, Antonio Grimaldi Fossi, the first Italian vice-consul at Sulina stated that "[...] the Greeks are already the backbone of the city and the support of the Commission [...]". Also, many were those who were occupied with trade and opened businesses in the city (cafes, grocery stores, shipping agencies), basically dominating the economic life of the city and other aspects as well (Dracodaidis, 2000). The various ethnic groups that existed in Sulina were organized during the years and created their own churches, schools and clubs. Most of them had their own consulates, necessary for upgrading and supporting the merchants' and other citizens' rights.

The Greeks, constituting the largest population group and the most economically active, acquired their own consulate in 1866 and the first Greek vice-consul was Sampen Spyridon. In the same year the Greek Church was founded, built in the place that was once the first Russian- Romanian Church of Sulina. Around 1870 the Greek school for boys was founded, while an all girls' school was also active. All the above could not have been achieved without the financial assistance of the Greek habitants and the Greek merchants and ship owners who were passing through the area and gave donations to the community (Peristeropoulou, 2012). Also important assistance and funding was given by the European Commission of the Danube, which supported financially different actions not only of the Greek community but other communities as well. For example, the Commission gave funds for the construction of the Catholic Church in 1865, the Russian in 1866, the Anglican and Greek in 1869, as well as the construction of the mosque in 1870 and 1926 and the Cathedral of Sulina. It also helped in the development of the city and funded several projects, such as the construction of the city's hospital; a second one specialized in infectious diseases, the construction of lighthouses, and an important project for the safe passage of ships. Significant assistance was given for the construction of a hydrotherapy spa, as well as for the casino. The

Commission also funded the formation of the beach and the city streets and also created in 1864 the city's cemetery. Note also, that in Sulina a water plant was functioning, telephone and telegraph lines, while the lighting of the city by oil was completed in 1903 (La commission, 1931).

The City's Ekistic Heritage

"Sulina, the capital of the province lies on the mouth of the Danube to the Black Sea, it contains 300 Turkish art houses on parallel lines and 1880 residents 1800[...]" (Peristeropoulou, 2012).

Sulina, besides its history, also demonstrates an extensive cultural and ekistic heritage that reveals the history of the city. The architectural features of Sulina show peculiarities in comparison to those that dominate in the region of Dobrogea. There are different architectural elements (e.g sachniși), while the reed is the main building material in the local architecture. During the 19th and 20th century, the intense commercial activity of the city was gathered in the first two streets, parallel to the bank of the river, since it was essential to practice economy on the land because of the swampy soil of the area. This resulted in the maximum benefit of the narrow riparian zone and led to the creation of an architectural peculiarity. The set-storied building with narrow facades, structured in series for reasons of ground economy and of structure's static reinforcement, is the special architectural heritage that Sulina preserves until today.

The typical dominant house at Sulina, especially on the first street, is made of brick and stone. It is a two-storey architectural structure that constitutes the transition between rural and urban type. The upper floor was exclusively for residential use while the lower was used as a store and sometimes as a house. The walls were made of brick and they were covered with wooden boards in order to protect them. The salty water, combined with the winds that were blowing in the area, was frizzing over the brick thereby causing irreparable damage. What characterizes Sulina's home is sachniși, situated in the middle of the facade, made of wood and glass all around it. The toilet was upstairs as an additional construction on the back outer side of the house, while the wooden staircase had a steep incline and drove straight upstairs (Comisia științifică a muzeelor, monumentelor istorice și artistice, 1958; Atelier Franco-Roumain, 2008-2009).

Besides these typical houses, there are different typologies of buildings (in rather western standards), constructed under modern techniques in relation with the previous ones, in which resided the Commission's officials. Also there are buildings with prominent features of classicism and profound effects of eclectic architecture. Apart from the usual residential buildings, there were luxurious and splendid ones, which were usually owned either by consular offices or merchants who were settled in Sulina (Romproiect, 1991).

Over the years, the city expanded linearly along the bank of the river, having as its limit, the water plant. Initially, the city had only huts made by reed and at 1833 there were found only three houses, one of which was owned by Arsenis, at that time the only Greek merchant (Peristeropoulou, 2012). In 1838 prince Waranzoff, the governor of New Russia, gave permission to build the first shops in the city, while with the establishment of the European Commission and the massive influx of immigrants, the unregulated construction began in Sulina (Tudose, 2011). In 1880 there were 300 homes spanning in two series, later in 1896 there were three series that intersected with twelve vertical streets. In 1900 the town had expanded and the fourth street was the marking the city's – swamp limit

(Peristeropoulou, 2012; Dănescu, 1896). Over the years the city continued to expand and now stands with its sixth street as the town's limit.

In the first street, which was and still is the main trading route, paved nowadays with stones, there were houses, lined up one next to the other, with their enclosed balconies, small businesses, as well as various services. The first street is filled with architectural elements specific to the 19th architecture, when the Greek community was flourishing, with buildings like Ianis Barbatis House, Lizer House, Chiriachidi House, Papadopol Hristu House and Paleologos - Apesos House (Figure 1).

In this street, it was-and still exists-the building of the European Commission of the Danube, also buildings that were used by public authorities such as the city hall, the prefecture, the police, customs and consulates, commercial agents' offices, the latest of which are unfortunately not saved nowadays.

The second road was the main artery of the city and was paved with gravel, while the sidewalk was covered with square blocks. The northern side of this street was the exit of the houses situated in the first street since they had two sides. In the above streets the houses were described as of contemporary Turkish technique. It is worth noting that since the area was swampy, it was necessary to drain a large area in order to enable the city to expand. The sand and the pumice that ships were carrying in order to help them keep balance during their journey, was exploited. These waste materials was converted into a "treasure" for the residents and thus were able to backfill the swamp, create-in some way-the necessary land in order to build more and bigger buildings. The land on which the palace of the Commission was built was quite swampy since until then the drainage projects had not been completed yet. To avoid future settling, the building was built with lightweight materials such as limestone. This technique was not applied afterwards, having as a result nowadays, huge blocks of flats that were built in the 1960 period to have serious problems of settling (Comisia stiintifica a muzeelor, monumentelor istorice și artistice, 1958).

The Commission's palace, built under neoclassical standards, plan to form Π, was constructed in 1864. After being damaged in the two world wars, today it stands imposing at the first waterfront street, housing the departments of the Administration of the Riverian Division of Lower Danube. Note that the building of the Danube Commission is classified as a historical monument, just like the old lighthouse, which is located behind this building and is now the museum of Sulina. Nowadays, the historic center of Sulina is part of the law M.O. 152/2000 as a cultural heritage of national interest (valori de patrimoniu cultural de interes național), while monuments such as the Greek church, the former cathedral, the palace of the Commission, the 'new' lighthouse and the old one, as well as the catholic church, are individually included in a framework of protection [for the improvement of a national area-part III protected zone, M.O. 84/24.02.2000] (Direcția Județeană pentru cultură, culte și patrimoniul cultural național Tulcea). Among the buildings that today are institutionally protected is the hotel of Camberi, one of the most impressive extant buildings. Property of the Greek 'Beri' Parparia, the three-story building now stands on the coastal street with visible signs of aging and abandonment on it (Peristeropoulou, 2012). Another distinctive building is the one that until recently housed the public library. This building was built in 1890 and owned by the families of Paleologos and Apesos. It was enlisted in the Official Heritage Register by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs and relatively recently (2007-08) it has been included in a program of restoration and re-use, with financing of both the Greek Government and the UNDP. Important monuments also are the churches that have survived until today. The old Russian-Romanian church, built between 1866-1868, was constructed on a site that

was once the first Russian church of Sulina. During the years, there were performed maintenance works on it while during the Second World War it was partially destroyed. After the church was rebuilt, it was abandoned to its fate and now is a historical monument (Filip, 2009).

The Catholic Church, built in 1863 by Italian sailors and merchants, type of basilica, was a meeting point for all Catholics who were active in one way or another in Sulina. As nowadays, the Catholic community no longer exists, the church remains closed and deserted. Despite the fact that it no longer officiates, repair works are made since it's part of the historical monuments list coded TL II m B 06032 (Filip, 2009).

The Greek church of St. Nicholas, was founded in 1866 and the construction works were completed in 1867, with the financial support of the Greek habitants of the city. The architectural features of the church refer to churches in areas of the Ionian Sea, where the Greeks of Sulina came from. It was hagiographed by Greeks and Romanians, and nowadays it is a historical monument (Curelaru, 2008).

The traces of those who lived in the place are nowadays detected also from the cemetery's monuments of Sulina. Created in 1864 by the European Commission of the Danube, in the beginning it was common while during the years it was divided into Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish and Russian (Covacef, 2003). The cemetery is located outside the city and is registered in the list of historical monuments with the following codes: the European Commission's officials cemetery (code: TL-IV-sA-06044), the orthodox (code: TL-IV-sA-06045), the Muslim (code: TL-IV-sA-06046), the catholic (code: TL-IV-sA-06047) and the Jewish (code: TL-IV-sA-06048). In this cemetery lay graves with inscriptions in various languages, Greek, Italian, French and Hebrew, some crafted by famous sculptors while others are distinguished only by a simple wooden cross. The dominance and wealth of the past-history Greeks, characterizes also their tombs, which stand out for their size and luxury (Figure 2). There are Greek tombs of known families, merchants, sailors who have large marble plaques written in the Greek language. Today the cemetery, even though it is apparently abandoned by the local authorities, is a place of attraction for tourists who are searching there the pirates, the princess, loving couples and the famous pilots of the European Commission of the Danube. To date, in this way maybe an aspect of the historical memory of the once cosmopolitan Sulina is maintained (Covacef, 2003).

Eco-museum and exhibition in a restored landmark: The Municipal Library – Paleologos and Apesos House

The restoration of the public library building - a former Greek family, Apesos and Paleologos house, was initiated as a support for new functionalities, but also to bring local community history into light- a shared identity by the inhabitants to be proud of and the regeneration of functional and social mix in a larger area. The project aims at a long term sustainable development and social integration of vulnerable groups by vocational training in heritage skills, reconsidering tradition, habits, local crafts and skills not only for cultural tourism development but also for enhancing economy based on local resources.

"Beautiful Romania" is a UNDP project having as Executing Agency the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, implemented with the support of the Local Authorities. The project is divided into a number of small-scale high priority sub-projects that will have a visible impact both at local and national level.

Project's Framework

The Danube esplanade includes a built landscape made of private and public buildings, one of the most emblematic for Sulina being the former Paleologos and Apesos House, now the Municipal Library.

As a final goal, the restored building will be upgraded by new inserted functions, such as an exhibition on the past of the local Greek community and by an eco-museum area, in order to make tourists familiar with the historical, natural and built treasures of Sulina and the Danube Delta. The Project will be developed in two directions: the design of a project for the urban and architectural restoration of a building (Municipal Library) and the social training of the unemployed / post-institutionalised young adults, in construction works.

Sulina is one of the most suitable options for developing such a project, taking into consideration the social problems the city faces as well as the potential for sustainable development through built heritage revitalization. The impact of a good practice example, that is a successful restoration, will enable Local Authorities to implement the master plan, realised in 2001, within the Project Sulina Rescue 2000. The project of the Municipal Library (Paleologos and Apesos House) can be implemented as a pilot-project for the attempt of revitalisation. The proper restoration of a building and the introduction of new functions with economic and cultural impact (eco-museum, exhibition on the history of the local Greek community), all contribute to enhance the local culture and determine a point for economic growth.

The main objective of the project-cities where the Greek community is representative for Romanian history and architecture- is to develop a cultural infrastructure through preservation, rehabilitation and enhancement of the built local heritage. Also, to integrate into the market economic mechanisms of the new public space and to promote the idea of a new type of tourism, that of the cultural tourism. Moreover, it is important to raise awareness of the contribution of the Greek community in forging the image and development of a multicultural city in the middle of spectacular natural elements, like the Danube and the Black Sea. The coordinator of the project is the UNDP "Beautiful Romania" Project Team while co-financing partner is the Greek Embassy in Romania. The Municipality of Sulina, Tulcea County Council and the University of Western Macedonia, Greece are listed as partners (UNDP Romania, 2006).

In this framework previously, UNDP also cooperated with the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing (UrbanProiect Institute, Bucharest), focusing on the rehabilitation - revitalization and enhancement of a central area in Sulina and linked to an on going project. This rehabilitation effort is referred to especially on the "Street 1" public space; an area surrounding the future restored Municipal Library building. As we were informed, this renewal is absolutely necessary to ensure a sustainable development of the area and provide an adapted environment for the future restored building, Apesos house – Municipal Library.

Perspectives and Proposals of Further Down Planning

To the same direction, we consider that more renovation/rehabilitation works would attend to enhance the historic commercial character of the city, obeying as well to an integrate study and planning. It should be pointed out that the updating of previous respective studies, which have been realized for the region and especially for the city of Sulina by Romanian authorities with the support of European funding frameworks, could constitute the basis of a corresponding attempt.

The collaboration with authorities as the UNDP or Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, can assure the presupposition of guaranteed effective cooperation and outcome of the works. The financial participation and consulting support by the Greek side, given the historical interest for Sulina, are considered to be self-evident (Gavra, 2007).

In such a case, the renewal can concern central areas of the urban tissue (in zones), where interventions in buildings related to the everlasting Greek presence in Sulina will be pointed out (specific interventions).

In the realization of an integrated pilot project for the renewal and development of the city, we consider the role of the Greek Community of Sulina important as well. The Greek Community of the city can support the effort not only during the research/ documentation phase but also can achieve the mobilization of the local authorities and the local population during the realization. Mainly, the Greek Community, in collaboration with local authorities and other organizations could support further promotion of the results of such a respective application (horizontal actions) in Sulina and further away -in Romania and abroad (Gavra, 2008). The experience from other respective examples of integrated renewals in urban areas with similar characteristics (historic and commercial character) is useful; in each case the consulting support of special experts is considered to be necessary during the realization (Gavra, 2005).

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Appendix



Figure1. Greek ekistic heritage of Sulina. Greek houses, the Greek Church and the Greek school. Gavra (2007)



Figure 2. Part of the orthodox cemetery and some of the Greek tombs. Gavra (2007)