

THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS: THE HERITAGE PHOBIA AND THE NEED OF AN OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS*

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Abstract: The paper emphasises on the need of proper documentation and information when intending to elaborate heritage and development strategies. With respect to recent allegations on the over-representation of buildings in the National Register of Historic Buildings, the author demonstrates not only that the number of historic monuments in Romania is not exaggerated, but also that with respect to other countries within the EU Romania is less “endowed” with monuments. In order to assess the relationship between the heritage constraints and the need for development the author analyses several connections between the heritage stock and the local budgets, and uses comparisons between the GDP per capita in EU countries and each country’s heritage. The increasing number of historic monuments in the national register in the last decades may lead to misunderstandings or even to subjective interpretations in favour of speculative pressures upon the built heritage. The paper emphasizes upon the objective processes that lead to an important increase in the built heritage stock after the 1989 Romanian anti-communist uprising (but not only in the case of Romania), calling for a scientific analysis of the cultural heritage geography and economic impact.

Rezumat: Articolul subliniază necesitatea unei documentări și informări științifice adecvate atunci când sunt enunțate ori elaborate strategii de dezvoltare. Urmare a unor afirmații recente asupra supra-reprezentării clădirilor în Lista Monumentelor Istorice, autorul demonstrează nu doar că România nu este supradotată în monumente, dar și că este în urma multor țări europene în această privință. În a respinge acuzația că numărul mare al monumentelor determină o rămânere în urmă din punct de vedere economic a României în raport cu alte state ale UE, articolul face comparații prin care pune alături statistica patrimoniului și cea economică și bugetară, inclusiv prin compararea PIB-ului României și al altor țări europene cu patrimoniu construit mai consistent decât cel al țării noastre. Evoluțiile Listei Monumentelor Istorice din ultimele două decenii pot însă stârni nedumerire sau chiar fi folosite, prin interpretări subiective, pentru servirea unor interese speculative. Articolul arată fenomenele obiective de creștere numerică a Listei Monumentelor Istorice, în diversele sale formule și aprobări, îndemnând către o analiză științifică și în profunzime a stocului patrimonial construit din România și a repartizării sale teritoriale.

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Some people say that the National Register of Historic Monuments is much too comprehensive, and that especially in Bucharest we have too many historic monuments. They say that it will be reasonable to delist some of these historic monuments to make room for the much more profitable urban redevelopment. It seems to us that after 24 years of rather modest achievements in improving our quality of life, finally we realize what has kept us lagging behind other countries which, exiting the “socialist compound” simultaneously with us, are far ahead of us in terms of well being. The explanation would be the over-representation of the built heritage, and especially the urban heritage, in the National Register, standing in the way of urbanistic and infrastructure projects. It seems for the preachers of this “development first” theory that the reviewing of the National Register and the change of the procedures for the issuing of the historic monument permit will be the solution for rebooting the economy. What they do not say is that Romania committed itself to several international conventions obliging us to reconcile development with the heritage preservation and, on the other hand, they do not explain how that all other countries in EU apply an exactly opposite trend in overcoming the setbacks of the economic recession.

Assessing from a scientific point of view the issue of the historic monuments stock we have first to underline that we lack a lot of information about the cultural heritage in Romania, and especially on built cultural heritage. Except the National Register of Historic Monuments which has been published in the Official Gazette, or the list of built heritage objectives of national importance approved as annex to the Law on Protected Areas of National Importance or the National Register of Archaeological Sites there is not much information, data or statistics with respect to the geography, the economy or the state of conservation of the historic building stock. Only partial and narrow analyses were performed, not providing relevant data for a comprehensive overlook upon the built heritage of Romania. An analysis of the built cultural heritage of the Dâmbovița County¹ provided us information that in that particular county the ratio between the public and private ownership in the domain of historic monuments is about 1 to 3 in favour of the private ownership, but there is no such data for the whole country. Except the number of historic monuments allocated to educational (605, of which 298 schools;² Table 1) or to

¹ Nistor 2011.

² Based on a statistical analysis drawn by ICOMOS Romania on the occasion of the 2013 International Day on Monuments and Sites, dedicated to the Heritage of Education.