

USING CONTINGENT VALUATION AS A PLANNING TOOL FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE RESTORATION IN MUNICIPALITY OF REȘIȚA (ROMANIA)

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Abstract: Applying the contingent method for the evaluation of heritage buildings is a useful tool that requires a complex analysis based on the preferences expressed by the community members regarding cultural goods, especially those that are publicly owned. The purpose of this paper is to assess the non-use value of historical monuments in Reșița, a city where industry has shaped the local culture. The results of the study reflect the community's identification with the local cultural heritage, including industrial monuments, and a concern of community for restoration of cultural goods. The heritage buildings selected by the community are representative of the local culture and play a significant role in creating the tourist image of Reșița, a city that has registered changes in its functional profile. The findings are particularly important in the territorial planning process for developing cultural policy focused on the preservation and sustainable valorization of cultural heritage. The contingent method is useful in the political and economic context of Romania in the post-socialist period where a large part of cultural heritage has been neglected and is characterized by degradation. Furthermore, few public funds have been allocated for restoration and adaptive reuse of cultural heritage assets.

Keywords: industrial culture, urban heritage, value analysis, cultural economics, steam locomotive museum

1. Introduction

The evaluation of cultural heritage involves a complex analysis associated with the multiple valences (historical, architectural, cultural, social, scientific, including economic) and the particular characteristics such as authenticity, irreversibility, and uniqueness [1, 2, 3, 4].

In addition, cultural heritage assets are considered public goods that offer a series of intangible values related to their aesthetic content or symbolic function [1, 2, 5]. This fact reflects that the economic valuation of

historic buildings is a difficult task, which is often carried out through revealed preference methods [1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8]. Through the contingent method, the degree of appreciation of community members reflected in the desire to restore cultural heritage assets can be assessed [1]. This evaluation is relevant because it highlights the appreciation of the heritage values of historical buildings by community members (the intention to pay for the conservation of historical buildings reflects the residents' desire to (re)use them in the future) [8].

Cultural heritage conservation programs can be reviewed through the contingent method with the involvement of residents. Including community members' opinions in heritage policy development reflects the importance of participatory planning, which becomes essential in heritage management decision-making processes [5].

In the current context, marked by globalization [9] and an accelerated rate of urbanization [2], it is necessary to integrate cultural heritage into urban planning in order to manage a series of challenges related to divergent values and interests between different categories of stakeholders, limited financial resources allocated to conservation and low administrative capacity in managing cultural heritage. These challenges are more commonly encountered in developing countries where studies focused on evaluating the social benefits derived from cultural heritage are limited [1]. At the same time, these studies can be justified by the need to provide sources of funding for the restoration of heritage buildings [1]. Moreover, the application of appropriate tools in the field of territorial planning and the development of studies dedicated to the evaluation of cultural heritage can reveal data on community preferences regarding abandoned or partially used cultural assets, as well as a series of benchmarks necessary for the development of cultural policy [1] and implementation of conservation and adaptive reuse projects of local cultural heritage [2].

A challenge even for developed countries is for professionals and public administration representatives to include local culture and regional identity elements to design urban policies and programs that support the business environment with the aim of generating positive effects both economically and culturally [9]. The differences in the approach and implementation of various territorial planning practices are explained by the influences exerted by societal, institutional

and professional contexts (the views and behaviors of the actors involved in the planning process) [10].

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the non-use value of historical buildings and open spaces in the municipality of Reșița using the contingent method. This paper will answer the following research questions: What are the iconic buildings identified by residents? Are residents aware of the importance of local heritage? Do community members identify with local cultural heritage? Is there a concern of the local community to preserve cultural heritage? How do we increase the relevance of the results obtained to contribute to the identification of territorial planning solutions regarding the management of cultural heritage?

2. Case Study Description

The municipality of Reșița, the county seat of Caraș-Severin County, is located in the Southwestern part of Romania, in the historical province of Banat. The location of Reșița in a depressional area, bordered by mountainous space, with rich solic and subsolic resources and the favorability of other natural factors (the presence of rivers and their exploitation for energy production) have contributed to the development of industrial activity from the 18th century to the present.

Reșița was established as a small rural settlement before the construction of the metallurgical plants, being known as Romanian Reșița [11]. Later, the second locality, Reșița Montană (Mountain Reșița), located near the first rural nucleus, is also mentioned in the Austrian census [11].

Reșița Montană was founded by ethnic Germans who were colonized in Banat during the Habsburg occupation to provide the necessary labor force for the industry. In this context, the decision was made to develop the steel industry in Reșița after the economic decline of the town of Bocșa. This situation stimulated the development of Reșița and the joining of the two rural

localities that had evolved separately.

The metallurgical plants were built in 1771 and determined the expansion of the built space in the adjacent area, contributing to the shaping of Reșița Montană as a working-class neighborhood [11].

Industry diversification represented a strategic measure for the development of the municipality of Reșița even during the communist period, when new industrial units were built.

The city of Reșița experienced a reduction in industrial activity after 1990, but unlike other areas in Romania, heavy industry (steel and machine building) is still a presence in the local economic picture. Industry has played an important role in the development of the municipality of Reșița, being one of the largest industrial centers at national level.

At the same time, industry has shaped the local culture. Industrial architecture in Reșița is recognizable through a varied typology: factories, plants, industrial infrastructure elements (metal bridges), workers' housing, some of which also have a special aesthetic value (e.g. Grebla hydroelectric power plant). The specificity of the cultural heritage of the city of Reșița is conferred by the existence of a significant number of industrial heritage assets that have been included on the list of national cultural heritage. The diversity of industrial monuments on the territory of Reșița represents a strong argument to support the initiation of a program for the valorization of industrial heritage.

3. Methodology

The contingent method is increasingly applied to directly assess the non-use values of material and intangible cultural heritage [1, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16]. The assessment of the non-use value of heritage buildings,

historic urban ensembles, public spaces or cultural events is not easy to quantify because it is not traded on markets [1,2]. Through the contingent method, the non-use value of historical buildings and public spaces is assessed by the willingness of the resident population to pay (to restore or enjoy cultural heritage assets). The evaluation is based on the community's appreciation of the specific attributes and values of both public and private heritage assets (people would like to be able to use them in the future through restoration) [1, 7, 8]. This measure also ensures the transmission of cultural heritage assets to future generations [1, 2].

The authors assessed the non-use value of heritage buildings and open public spaces by asking 348 respondents questions about the selection of historical buildings in need of conservation and how much they would be willing to pay to contribute to their restoration.

The authors applied a questionnaire between May 1 and 20, 2024 in various locations within the municipality of Reșița: the civic center, the historical center, the Tricolor Park, the Steelworker Park etc.

The analysis of the sample structure reflects a relatively proportionate share of respondents between the two genders (49% men and 51% women) (table 1).

People aged between 18 and over 50 were surveyed (table 1). The authors aimed for a relatively balanced proportion of young people, adults and the elderly, due to the fact that Reșița is an industrial city and has a relatively high proportion of retirees. The distribution of the respondents is as follows: young people (31%), adults (30-45 years) (33%) and elderly people (over 50 years: 36%) (table 1).

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents	Number	% of the sample
Gender	170 men 178 women	49 51
Age	18-29 years: 108 persons 30-45 years: 115 persons Over 50 years old: 125 persons	31 33 36
Occupation	Student: 83 persons Employs: 167 persons Housewife: 9 persons Retired: 89	24 48 2 26
Education	Secondary education: 146 persons University studies: 202 persons	42 58
Marital status	Single: 57 persons Married: 291 persons	36 64

4. Results

In line with the application of the contingent method in other studies [1,8], residents were asked to indicate at least three historical buildings, cultural sites or open public spaces for which they would be willing to pay a modest amount to their restoration.

The residents' responses were marked with circles of different sizes on the city map depending on the number of options they expressed.

92,5% of respondents (322 people) selected the steam locomotive museum (Figures 1, 2, 3).



Figure 1: First steam locomotive constructed at Reșița

Source: Merciu G.

The museum marks an important moment in the history of industrial culture in Romania. The cultural importance of the technical museum lies in the value of the exhibits, namely the 16 steam locomotives from different construction periods, one of the most important being the RESICZA locomotive, one of the first three steam locomotives built in the southeastern European space, in Reșița, between 1872-1873 (Figure 1) [11].

Another element that justifies the importance of the museum is represented by the fact that the locomotives were made in the steam locomotive factory in Reșița. The open-air technical museum is both an industrial and tourist landmark that outlines the character of the local culture shaped by industrial activity. The large number of residents that selected the steam locomotive museum justified their option as a result of its symbolic values that mark the continuity of industries that contributed to the prosperity of the city and its inhabitants.



Figure 2: Steam locomotive in open-air museum from Reșița
Source: Merciu G.

Community members identify with the open-air technical museum because they believe that Reșița was an important industrial center where steam locomotives built were exported in other countries. At the same time, respondents mentioned that some steam locomotives require restoration or minimal maintenance to preserve their characteristics on the basis of which they are considered technological “jewels”. The steam locomotive museum is classified as a historical monument.

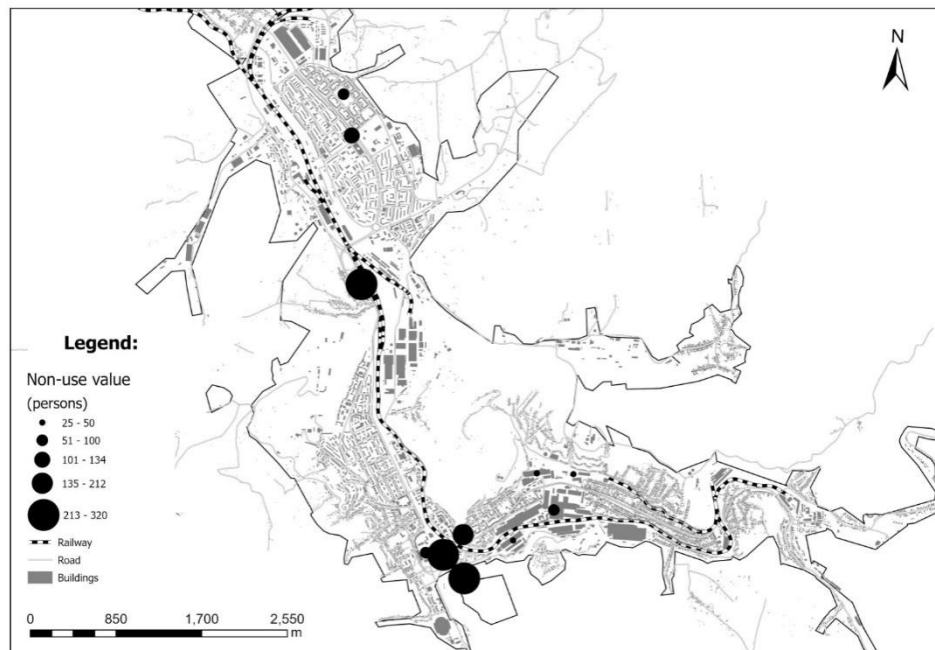


Figure 3: Assessing the non-use value for the historical buildings and open spaces in municipality of Reșița
Source: authors' own research contribution

The city coat of arms was the second most mentioned objective by 298 people (Figures 3, 4). The coat of arms was erected on Golu Hill in 1971 to celebrate 200 years of continuous industrial production of the Machine Building Factory (founded in 1771).



Figure 4: Coat of arms of the city of Reșița with the acronym of the Car Manufacturing Factory located on Golu Hill, Source: Suditu B.

Since industry was the pillar of local development, the community is strongly attached to the industrial past and to the symbols related to industry. Thus, the coat of arms has the name of the most important industrial unit in Reșița, the name of the city and the year of construction inscribed (Figure 4).

Even if industrial activity was not completely closed, the local population shows an intense nostalgia as a result of the effects generated by the deindustrialization process, namely an uncertainty of the present as a result of the fact that some industrial units are partially functional.

The community members who selected the city's coat of arms, located on Golu Hill, justify the need to relate to this symbol of the city, which highlights the continuity of industrial activity for 254 years.

In 2021, 250 years of industrial activity were celebrated (under the name “250 years of unquenchable fire in Reșița”) by organizing various cultural activities (e.g. sculpture exhibition “ReMetal2021” arranged in the Minda industrial hall).

Industrial heritage narratives can be socially meaningful for former workers, helping to fill the identification gap that has resulted from the deindustrialization process [17]. Respondents mention that they prefer to take walks on the Golu Hill and admire the city's coat of arms on their free days.

Moreover, respondents over 50 also selected some factories in which they worked, which indicates their strong attachment to industrial monuments. This is also related to the perspective on the human dimension of what the industrialization process meant, the figures of the workers and the impact of the industrial units on the urban landscape. Thus, a specific urbanscape was formed, to which is added a multitude of relationships built around the figure of the workers and the factory [18]. The old theater building (called the West Theater / the Cultural Palace) is notable for its historical and architectural value (Figure 5).

This important cultural institution was selected by 274 people.



Figure 5: Western Theater / Cultural Palace in Reșița, Source: Merciu C.

The building was built out of the desire of the Romanian population of Reșița to have their own cultural institution, just as the Germans in Reșița Montană had. On the cultural front, choirs first appeared in Reșița, then brass bands (closely related to industrial culture), operetta and, later, theater, with amateur teams and its own team of professional actors [19].

The 'Trade Unions' Culture House was indicated by 212 respondents (Figures 3, 6). This cultural institution was built in 1956 and is notable for its bas-relief decorations on the exterior facades [11]. Respondents justified the selection of the two cultural institutions due to the quality of the buildings as cultural landmarks and the importance they play in the dynamics of cultural life today.



Figure 6: Trade Union Cultural House in Reșița, Source: Merciu G.

Another industrial monument representative of local history and culture selected by residents is the Reșița South railway station (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Reșița South Railway Station
Source: Merciu G.

The building is part of the railway architecture pattern and has a historical and architectural value [11]. Respondents associate the old station building with the importance of the industrial activity of building steam locomotives.

It can be appreciated that the local population has expressed its willingness to pay for the conservation of the selected buildings. The community members have selected a series of cultural objects and industrial monuments that shape the image of Reșița as a cultural and tourist city.

The association of the idea of tourist attractiveness with an industrial city may seem contrasting at first glance, but the municipality of Reșița has a large number of historical monuments (47) [20]. Cultural objectives play an important role in shaping tourist attractiveness of cities [21, 22]. The presence of industrial monuments due to their multiple heritage values (historical, architectural, technological, and social) justifies their cultural and touristic valorization in order to contribute to the sustainable development of industrial cities [15, 23, 24].

6. Conclusions

This paper focuses on evaluating the non-use value of symbolic buildings and public spaces of the city of Reșița with which community members identify. The emblematic buildings and a public space (Golu Hill where the city's industrial coat of arms is located) selected by the residents are linked to the local history and culture that have been shaped by industrial activity for over 250 years.

The scientific and practical importance of this paper results from the relevance of the findings obtained based on consulting a representative sample of the resident population regarding the degree of appreciation of the local cultural heritage. The willingness of the community members to pay for the conservation of heritage buildings in the municipality of Reșița is noted.

These findings reflect the importance of participatory governance in decision-making at the local public administration level, which corresponds to current trends in the field of territorial planning.

The results obtained from the consultation of community members can be included in the project for the valorization of cultural objectives, including industrial monuments, that representatives of the Reșița City Hall are currently carrying out.

A limitation of this study is related to the analysis of the perception of the community members using only the contingent method. Future research will aim to consult the local population regarding their preferences for the redevelopment of industrial monuments through semi-structured interviews.

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