

The Shift in Paradigm of the (Post)Mining Landscapes, Between Risks and Recognitions

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Abstract

The 1972 Convention Text mentioned the need to pursue collective assistance for the safeguard of cultural and natural heritage considered of Outstanding Universal Value. As of 2021, 52 properties are inscribed as World Heritage in Danger. The most recent such nomination in Europe is the cultural site of Roşia Montană Mining Landscape (Romania), listed as World Heritage in July 2021. The paper will pose a reflection over the simultaneous status of Roşia Montană as World Heritage mining cultural landscape and as a productive system still in use, tackling the social and environmental issues that derive from the analyzed context. Furthermore, it will be investigated the conceptual transformation of the cultural landscape in relation to the mining legacies and their methodological approach within the patrimonial acknowledgement, stressing the role that the UNESCO label can play while negotiating at local and regional level such aspects of the multi-scale territorial legacies.

Keywords

World Heritage in Danger, Cultural Landscapes, Mining Industrial Heritage.

The Progressive Acknowledgements of (World Heritage) Mining Cultural Landscapes

While introducing the List of World Heritage in Danger, article 11.4 of the 1972 Convention Text mentioned a broad range of threats that might affect nominated Properties¹. Fifty years later, such a statement is still urgent: the monitoring process encompasses newer risks, comprising natural resources extraction and exploitation, industrialization/deindustrialization, armed conflicts, pollution, abandonment, territorial, economic, and socio-cultural marginalization, to mention a few². Although extraction activities are considered an endangering factor, the World Heritage Centre has inscribed five sites directly linked to mining activities in the last 15 years, labelled as "cultural landscapes". All the latter are in Europe Region, distributed in six countries³. The listing of such properties well represents the widening discussion and debate concerning the industrial landscape concept concerning the "cultural landscape" theme, especially when dealing with the heterogenous acknowledgement processes ongoing in transitioning mining sites.

Each UNESCO nomination of mining territories brought a new perception and approach of what a "cultural landscape" means and is actively used within the post-mining revitalization process. For example, the Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin's listing as a World Heritage site in 2012 brought a shift in scale, underlining the role of «living and evolving»⁴ changing landscapes. This concept was pushed furthermore by the nomination in 2019

of Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region property⁵, which overcame the national administrative limits. Thus, the impact of the mining activity passes from the individual site recognition (es., Røros Mining Town and the Circumference, Norway (1980); Humberstone and Santa Laura Saltpeter Works, Chile (2005); Major mining sites of Wallonia, Belgium (2012)) to the broader millenary territorial, social, and cultural legacies as in the case of Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region, Germany/Czechia (2019) or Roşia Montană Mining Landscape, Romania (2021). In the case Roşia Montană Mining Landscape, such long-term processes are still ongoing⁶. While all the properties mentioned above might be considered "organically evolved cultural landscapes", Roşia Montană Mining Landscape is an example of a "continuing cultural landscape"⁷, in which mining activities have been constant from Roman times until the present (with peaks and lows) and overlapping a specific pastoral way of living of the Carpathian Mountains⁸.

Between Risks and Recognitions: A Brief Analysis

Nevertheless, beyond the international acknowledgement of the (post)mining areas as heritage, natural resource exploitation activities are perceived to risk the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of listed Properties. In the 2021 State of Conservation (SOC) reports, among the 14 primary factors, "Physical resources extraction" (which includes the secondary factors of mining, oil and gas, quarrying, and water extraction) is stated as a threat in 106 properties⁹, having cultural landscapes representing 11 sites¹⁰. Of those, only one is listed as World Heritage in Danger, the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria¹¹. More specifically, the "mining" menace affects 62 properties, of which natural sites represent the vast majority; only ¼ of properties set at risk by mining activities are labelled as "cultural"¹² of which five are "cultural landscapes"¹³. Concerning the listed European mining cultural landscapes, the "mining" threat emerges in the Krzemionki Prehistoric Striped Flint Mining Region site (Poland) and Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape properties (UK)¹⁴. While Roşia Montană Mining Landscape is not among the sites reportedly under threat due to the SOC¹⁵, the most recent gold extraction plans and proposals are considered a threat to the site's authenticity if not adequately regulated. However, the recognition of possible damages to the environmental, social, and cultural system of Roşia Montană caused by extensive open cast mining exploitation started on the local level at least two decades before the UNESCO nomination. The site exposition to risks related to gold extraction was at the center of a process of community-driven initiatives aimed at its preservation, intensely politicized in the Romanian setting¹⁶. Furthermore, the risks related to physical resource exploitation have led to the simultaneous nomination of the site as World Heritage "In Danger"¹⁷. Thus, the conferral of World Heritage Status might be assumed as a pivotal point in the site's protection, which started with civic mobilization.

Towards a Shift in Paradigm: The Case of Roşia Montană Mining Landscape

Roşia Montană Mining Landscape represents a complex and unique World Heritage case among the cited ones. Like in other production landscapes, the site reflects not only the progress of mining activities in terms of technology from Roman times to the present; it also encompasses a heterogeneous system of social, environmental, and cultural dynamics developed at different stages. The ceasing of statal mining operations in the site started in the '90s, followed by a controversial privatization process to a foreign company to enlarge the gold extraction

process (spatially and temporally) with drastic long-term effects on the territorial system in a matter of both cultural and environmental aspect.¹⁸ The expansion plans of open cast mining convinced a vast part of the local population to relocate, signing for the transfer of the properties to be lost in view of further industrial extraction and exploitation; at the same time, a small part of the local community decided to stay and advocate for safeguarding the territorial system generating an international bottom-up movement "Save Rosia Montana"¹⁹. Thus, the (long) candidacy of Roşia Montană as a World Heritage Property initiated in a moment of induced abandonment of the site by its inhabitants with the coexistence of two perceived time stages. On the one hand, most of the population pursued a structure based on the past, recognizing industrial efficiency and income as the only economical way of living. On the other, the civic movement put the basis for the possible future of Roşia Montană upon and beyond its industrial legacy by setting on the same negotiation table both the cultural heritage and environmental values of the territorial system, pushing towards a shift in the paradigm of the post-mining landscape.

First Conclusions: The Complex Aspects of the "In Danger" Listing

The State of Conservation Report submitted by the State Party in January 2022 seems to consider not only the mitigation of the risks related to extraction activities plans that are endangering the Property. It comprises also the conservation of the relatively more recent built elements related to mining activities: such initiative is justified not only by the national acknowledgement of these elements as heritage, and therefore as testimony that must be protected and transmitted. The conservation of XVIII and XIX century-built systems related to extraction activities is seen as a trigger to promote local economy, by creating opportunities which might be beneficial for «residents and others»²⁰. However, it should be noted that the indications regarding heritage-based opportunities remain vague, with reference mainly to "visitor experience" and therefore, implicitly, to possible openings in tourism industry. The "In Danger" status of the Property is not linked only with the open-cast mining threat but also with the overall lack of *top-down* management strategy stressed by the lack of approved legal planning tools at regional and local level (es., Roşia Montană PUG and PUZ) that could govern the world-wide patrimonial acknowledgement. Furthermore, the "In Danger" listing makes reference, even though in an indirect manner, to the induced depopulation process initiated from the early 2000s due to the gold mining plans and strategies raising further issues in a matter of local embracing of the patrimonial values on the long-run.

The status of Roşia Montană Mining Landscape as World Heritage and, simultaneously, as a productive (mining) system still in use is unique. Although the World Heritage nomination is too recent to formulate which is the future direction of the Property, it might be argued that the role of UNESCO label became crucial while negotiating at different multi-scalar territorial levels (es., regional, national, and international) the complexity of its legacies in a matter of community environmental wellbeing²¹. However, with a disappearing local community, and thus memory, it is to understand if the same territorial system of production will become a safety net in Rosia Montana's further sustainable development and enhancement. Furthermore, in lack of the top-down management plan will be to understand if and for how long the on-going bottom-up activities (es., Save Rosia Montana movement, Alburnus Maior NGO, ARA, Pro Patrimonio Foundation etc.), will have the same effectiveness in maintaining active the public interest on the Property as well as its further preservation.

- ¹ Cfr. UNESCO, Basic Texts of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Edition December 2021, Paris, UNESCO, 2021, pp. 108-113.
- ² UNESCO, List of factors affecting the properties, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/factors/>, last access July 2022.
- ³ The nomination of mining cultural landscape sites covers the time span from 2006 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) to 2021 (Romania). The Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region site is a transboundary property shared between Germany and Czechia.
- ⁴ UNESCO, Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1360/>, last access July 2022.
- ⁵ Cfr. UNESCO, Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1478/>, last access July 2022.
- ⁶ For a detailed analysis of three of the mentioned World Heritage mining landscapes set in Europe and inscribed as of 2020 cfr. MICHAEL TOST et alii, *Mining and Europe's World Heritage Cultural Landscapes*. «Resources», s. X, vol. XVII, 2021.
- ⁷ Cfr. UNESCO, Cultural landscapes, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/#2>, last access July 2022.
- ⁸ The long mining history activities in the site, which dates to the Roman occupation of Dacia (106-271 CE), is in fact among the criteria that justify the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property and listed as one of the main features that shaped its context. Cfr. UNESCO, Roşia Montană Mining Landscape, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1552>, last access July 2022.
- ⁹ Cfr. UNESCO, State of Conservation, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&pattern=&soc_start=&soc_end=&groupby=threats&id_threats=100%2C102%2C101%2C103&fullsearch=&otherthreats=, last access July 2022.
- ¹⁰ Cfr. UNESCO, State of Conservation, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&pattern=&themes=4&soc_start=&soc_end=&id_threats=100%2C102%2C101%2C103&fullsearch=&otherthreats=, last access July 2022.
- ¹¹ Cfr. UNESCO, State of Conservation, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&pattern=&themes=4&danger=1&soc_start=&soc_end=&id_threats=100%2C102%2C101%2C103&fullsearch=&otherthreats=, last access July 2022.
- ¹² The Natural sites reporting "mining" as threat in SOC are 47; Cultural sites are 12; Mixed sites are 3. Cfr. UNESCO, State of Conservation, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&id_threats=100&, last access July 2022.
- ¹³ Cfr. UNESCO, State of Conservation, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&pattern=&themes=4&soc_start=&soc_end=&id_threats=100&fullsearch=&, last access July 2022.
- ¹⁴ It must be noted that both the Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin and the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region Properties do not report any State of Conservation since the year of listing (respectively 2012 and 2019).
- ¹⁵ The State of Conservation Report by the State Party concerning Roşia Montană Mining Landscape has been submitted in January 2022, due to the site very recent nomination as World Heritage.
- ¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the events linked to the community-based initiatives conducted in Rosia Montana, cfr. OANA CRISTINA TIGANEA, FRANCESCA VIGOTTI, *Community-Driven Initiatives for Heritage Acknowledgement, Preservation and Enhancement in European Marginal Areas. The case of Roşia Montană (Romania)*, in «New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022», vol. 482, Cham, Springer, 2022, pp. 37-46.
- ¹⁷ Cfr. UNESCO, WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE, Decision 44 COM 8C.1 Update of the List of World Heritage in Danger (Inscribed Properties), 2021.
- ¹⁸ Cfr. SERGIU MUSTEATA, ELENA COZMA, *Community Heritage: Case of the Rosia Montana Mining Landscape in Romania*, in «Archeological Heritage and Education. An International Perspective on History Education», Ljubljana, Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO, 2020, pp. 379-401.
- ¹⁹ Ibidem; Cfr. VIRGIL APOSTOL, ŞTEFAN BALICI, *Roşia Montană: An Assessment of the Cultural Heritage*, in «Roşia Montană in Universal History», Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 2012, pp. 30-34.
- ²⁰ INSTITUTUL NATIONAL AL PATRIMONIULUI, *State of Conservation Report by the State Party - Roşia Montană Mining Landscape*, p.1, January 2022.
- ²¹ IRINA VELICU, *Demonizing the Sensible and the 'Revolution of Our Generation' in Rosia Montana*, «Globalizations», XII, VI, pp. 846-858, 2015.