

SUSTAINABILITY OF VERNACULAR CONCEPTS IN CONTEMPORARY CREATION

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Abstract:

The vernacular concept finds its actuality under multiple valences and metamorphoses in not only design or architecture and the modelling of the interior space, but also in the daily way of life. Vernacular not only embraces a space, it becomes a way of thinking and relating to the dynamic, urban and technological environment in which we live. This responsible and sustainable reporting towards the built environment and the way of life has become the foundation of the creative strategy approached since 2012.

The present research aims to offer a visual and descriptive perspective on vernacular architecture in the European and national context, research on neo-vernacular models in order to capitalize on them, and the implementation of a methodology for interpreting and integrating this specificity in the current creation in this field.

Key words: *European and Romanian neo-vernacular architecture and furniture; vernacular concepts; interior space; on-site investigation.*

INTRODUCTION

The reintegration and reinterpretation of vernacular elements in the flow of contemporary design began in 2010 with the first isolated projects belonging to the neo-vernacular current. Subsequently, in 2011, under the guidance of architect Șerban Sturdza, the concept of the first solar house in Romania was sketched, a house with a vernacular concept and a strong cultural identity tinge. At that moment, the validity and versatility of this concept became clear, so it has been integrated multiple times in various projects, in numerous forms, in the last 12 years.

The research starts from the actuality of vernacular concepts and the sustainability of contemporary creation, integrating this type of approach in the design process. This attitude inspired by the vernacular way of thinking appeals to social, cultural, architectural mechanisms and concepts and can easily become support elements in the contemporary design process. The research and projects that are the main topic of this investigation, have appealed to this type of holistic thinking with a focus on local identity, rural community, local architecture, sustainability, participatory architecture, sustainable development and contemporary design.

The nucleus of the paper presents the main original scientific results in the proposal, development and application of the methodology of valorization of vernacular concepts in the current creation in this field by devising tools and methods of analysis and evaluation specially developed for rural typologies in order to obtain the proposed results. These analysis sheets provide useful information also in visual form about traditional structural typologies and specificities in architecture and furniture. These diagrams were also applied to the analysis and integration of vernacular concepts at the level of the European and national context, resulting in deepening in identifying some series of concepts and characteristics that can be interpreted and capitalized in the contemporary design process. These are the following: the form of the plan, the major functions; architectural typologies; dimensions, proportions at the level of the plans and the façade; the local structural principle; the use of materials from local natural resources; orientation of the dwelling; texture and chromatics of the façade; the window-wall ratio specific to the façade. The applicability of this thinking was also verified by research and on-site investigation in Romania in a field of wood tradition and culture, a less approached but landmark area for our built environment.

OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

The aim of the project is to create architecture and furniture with value and meaning which increases with time and with the use of local communities. This type of interior design achieves meaning as a part of the variety of cultures of the local European communities and as a symbolic reflection of the context. The first step of the experimental investigations was to determine specific local characteristics of vernacular architecture and furniture in Romania and specific European countries. The results and conclusions of this investigation would set the foundation for the critical analysis of the manifestations of the contemporary effects on the wooden built heritage, continuing with neo-vernacular architecture in national and European context and set the basis for the understanding of main value-adding methods utilized by contemporary architects and designers.

The objective of this research is to address in a critical and synthetic manner forms and structural typologies of neo-vernacular construction and furniture of European countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Cyprus, Greece and Romania. The aim was to obtain results that will set the basis of the understanding process of an improvement or concept transfer methodology regarding traditional cultural and architectural values in the contemporary context.

The term "vernacular" has its origins from latin ("vernaculus") meaning enclosure for slaves, behind the master's garden. This terminology began to be used only at the end of the twentieth century in response to the context of the era. In architecture, the word "vernacular" designates popular constructions, which have as author a person who has no experience in the field of architecture, instead it is based on an empirical and experimental knowledge (acquired over time) of materials. This knowledge has been passed on between generations orally.

The idea of a construction method inspired by the local space, resources, technological possibilities and specific conditions characteristic of the place; creating a strong bond between the community and the architect, can be considered two attitudes inspired by the vernacular way of thinking (Caminada 2009). Through the participatory, sustainable architecture and through the elaboration of holistically thought out strategies (on several levels - social, architectural, cultural, identity, ecological, economic, etc.) this type of approach can be capitalized. The goal is to diminish the effect of globalization and to direct the creative process towards a deep area of inspiration with local identity valences. „The design is based on an artificial identity increasingly forced and exactly this constraint leads to the uniformity of faceless living spaces” (Caminada 2009).

This type of approach appeals to social, cultural, architectural mechanisms and concepts that are related to vernacular thinking and can easily become support elements in the contemporary design process (Gronegger et al. 2013). The research has turned to this type of holistic thinking with a focus on local identity, rural community, local architecture, sustainability, participatory architecture, sustainable development and contemporary design. Each individual concept becomes an axiom of the design method and is detailed further below.

The concept of identity became a major theme in the social sciences between the '70s and '80s. In sociology the theme of identity is presented especially through the prism of race and ethnicity, but the village primarily represents a community with a specific tradition. The concept of local identity in this way is also reflected at the cultural, social or occupational level (agriculture or animal husbandry, at present we can see a diversification of this component).

The necessity of the existence of a constant or of a landmark specific to the place, an architectural-identity-cultural expression of it are one of the key elements that inspire the vernacular. This constant is not seen as a fixed element, but rather retaining the latin meaning *constare*, meaning harmony, composition.

These constants, in architecture, can be: climate, topography, relief, local resources, tradition, culture and customs of the place. If these aspects are seen as qualities of the place, they can form a solid basis for an architectural concept with an identity value.

It is hard to imagine at present, for a community to establish a series of regulations, which will result in the limitation of choices and personal expression. "After all, we should build on the most unfavorable area of the plot. The best place of it, being left free to function as an outdoor space. Ideally, in this way we have added new qualities to the built space." (Caminada 2009) These regulations must be understood by the community, and in the ideal case, the community should establish them according to their needs, traditions and way of life. The specialist can also participate in this process, but with a role of mentor or adviser, not as a project manager.

If modernity can be associated with the role of tradition, in the process of modernization and globalization has generated a series of debates in the circle of specialists, architects, and designers in recent decades. Tradition represents the mass of cultural, religious, ethnographic values, and modernity can be associated with the transformation of culture, mobility, the stratification of social classes, a society oriented towards consumption. Nowadays, tradition and modernity are no longer seen as two opposing concepts, but as ones that coexist, intertwine and influence each other.

However, it has taken decades for authorities and specialists to become aware of and perceive tradition as a primary resource in restoring local cultural identity and that it has a major influence on the built landscape. This environment, in Rapaport's¹ view, is made up of fixed elements (infrastructure, buildings, walls), semi-fixed (indoor and outdoor furniture, trees, gardens, fences, signals, lighting fixtures etc.) and mobile elements (people and their activities).

In conclusion, we can see that in the middle of the XXth century, the concerns regarding the forms of manifestation of the vernacular architecture, respectively the concept of vernacular, have increased and gradually become part of the areas of interest in the field of theoretical research in architecture. The different perceptions of the specialists presented above contribute to an enrichment of the meaning of this concept almost non-existent in theoretical researches until the 1960s.

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CONTEMPORARY CREATION IN THE VERNACULAR SPIRIT

To reinterpret vernacular concepts does not imply the creation of a new style of architecture, because a style in its usual notion represents the totality of constructive or aesthetic elements, which come from a collective tendency of an epoch, and in the contemporary context, the last 50 years cannot be associated with a single current, but with a multitude of architectural directions and attitudes.

Vernacular architecture, in addition to its conscious approach to energy and the environment, uses materials that can be considered sustainable: wood, wool, paper, clay, vermiculite, flax, hemp, cork, limestone and stone. A locally obtained building material can be considered sustainable. Vernacular architecture is local, sustainable, participatory (Jiaping 2011, Surapong 2011). It can represent the collective tendencies of an era or reflect the deep cultural and identity values of a community. This type of architecture cannot be copied, but it is possible to interpret it, to take over/filter the way of thinking or specific vernacular methods and concepts. In this sense, at the level of thought, on a theoretical level, vernacular can be considered feasible in the contemporary context. Instead, the limitations of this approach should not be ignored: the needs and requirements of today's society are guided by other fundamental values (economic, political, social etc.), the level of comfort and hygiene does not coincide with that of the beginning of the century, the evolution of technology and materials has also contributed to structural, aesthetic changes in terms of contemporary architecture (Orton 1998).

However, at the national level there is a tendency to open up to a new approach in the current creation: in addition to the established modern methods, architects feel the need to return to their roots.

The homogenous, international, globalized modern architecture has reached a critical point and is gradually balanced by the heterogeneous, local one, with specific identity valences, in the form of an anti-globalization current that reflects the beliefs, the way of thinking and the collective aesthetic sense of the community and of the architect. The respect for the natural or built context, the knowledge of the constants of some places where the future interventions will be (relief, climate, the spirit of the place, the community, etc.) represent the necessary stages of a profound project that will generate a positive impact at the level of the community and the place to which it is addressed.

Vernacular architecture can be a source of inspiration for specialists on several levels: conceptually (architecture on a human scale, with identity, cultural valence, architecture generating new spaces, traditions, customs); on the material level (use of local resources - sustainability, use of natural materials - ecological; respect for the natural environment etc.).

A contemporary concept may be grounded by a series of morphological, aesthetic or ergonomic features specific to vernacular architecture and furniture, but those aimed at expressive language as a primordial source of inspiration predominate in current creation. This visual repertoire can target many expressive-visual levels (Gheorghiu 1991) but also functional-ergonomic levels of the vernacular: the volumetry, the planimetric configuration, the functional zoning, the chromatics, the materials, textures, the construction techniques, the traditional joints in the case of walls (from beams or pillars and beams). For example, traditional combinations, they have had various forms, specific to different areas of the country.

This variety of forms was also influenced by the wood species existing in the areas where the house was built (for example, in Arges the beams were made of oak wood and had a massive section, and in Sibiu they had round sections smaller in terms of dimensional and were made of fir wood), the woody species influencing the section, the gauge and the way of joining and putting into operation of the wood material.

The role of tradition in the process of modernization and globalization has generated a series of debates in the circle of specialists, architects, designers in recent decades (Suzuki 1978). Tradition represents the mass of cultural, religious, ethnographic values, and modernity can be associated with the transformation of culture, mobility, the stratification of social classes, a society oriented towards consumption. Nowadays, tradition and modernity are no longer seen as two opposing concepts (Bonenberg 2009), but as ones that coexist, intertwine and influence each other.

Tradition is the prime resource for reintegrating, restoring and maintaining local, regional or national identity. Kenneth Frampton argued in the '80s, in his book on critical regionalism, that local tradition can be a tool for creating identity (Frampton 1983).

The building materials are local, from known sources, so the entire construction process becomes sustainable, durable and environmentally friendly. The foundation, built of river or mountain stone, the oak wood structure, the vertical closures made of resinous wood, the floor bridged with floorboards or clay, the beech furniture – all these elements formed a healthy microclimate in terms of thermal efficiency.

IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABLE NEO-VERNACULAR MODELS

The expansion of the area of analysis of the existing, vernacular background, offered the possibility to create a holistic image of the forms of manifestation specific to vernacular, but more than that, it became visible how urbanization and technological and industrial evolution had an influence on the built environment. If in Europe, the western countries have undergone a rapid metamorphosis against the background of technological-economic evolution and diversification of building materials, the countries of the East have kept their rural heritage largely intact, due to the lack of urbanization and development on an economic-social background. Probably some of the qualities of the rural context in Romania, Bulgaria or Hungary, remain the landscape and the traditional houses from the XIXth – XXth centuries, which address architectural image and function in an authentic way. Even if they have lagged behind in terms of ergonomics and comfort of living, at the base these are sustainable spaces, built by using natural, local materials and need an improvement strictly at the level of living conditions (modern bathroom, home appliances, internet) specific to the XXIth century. The countries of Central and Western Europe, such as Austria, Switzerland or even Greece, have been touched by a controlled urbanization or tourism strategies, the naturalness and authenticity of the countryside being subordinated to excessive control, altering the specific qualities, the determination of the inhabitants being guided by the economic evolution. As an example, when architect, Thomas Gronegger², visited Dealu Frumos between 2013 and 2016, was fascinated by the herd of cows that went in the morning to graze on the main dirt road that crossed the whole village and in the evening returned on the same road, without being disturbed by a very intense traffic activity. From his point of view, these are the elements of vernacular, those characteristics specific to vernacular living that have been lost in Western countries due to uncontrolled urban developments.

The fact that Romania had a much slower pace of development compared to the western countries, we can channel this gap in favor of the built rural fund, of our authentic heritage and of the specific living of the villages in Romania. It is still not too late for the formulation and implementation of sustainable, sustainable rural development policies on a national level. Specialists in the last 10 years have shown interest in this field, the architectural offices being open for collaborations with other specialists, outside their sphere: sociologists, geographers, art historians, archaeologists, engineers. The interdisciplinary approach offers an authentic closeness and empathizes with the values of the place beyond the built context. Participatory architecture has also yielded good results, the inhabitants of the villages being eager to intervene and shape together with the architect the future proposal, given that it will benefit the community. For example, the Swiss have already systematized their entire built fund, be it urban or rural, the overwhelming majority of rural natural landscapes and surroundings (forests, pastures, fields, paths, streams etc.) being maintained but their condition has been intervened upon, the rural landscape has lost its true, original, archaic state. The same model was followed by Austria, even if the phenomenon was involuntary, economic and industrial development had a greater influence in the decision-making factor at political level and urban strategies, to the detriment of the preservation and valorisation of the built and cultural heritage.

For countries outside Europe, a red thread can be outlined that indicates the same sequence of events and decisions at the level of the metamorphosis of the rural built fund. Just for a wider picture, if in China the urban development was excessively rapid and exhaustive, in South America there are still countries with regions untouched by industrialization, technology and metropolitan life. In India, the contrast between urban and rural-vernacular was most visible compared to the rest of the areas visited. Bombay (Mumbai) remains the supreme example of the "cannibalization" of the rural built fund, of housing belonging to people with a more modest living (farmers and craftsmen in particular), by the high-tech skyscrapers of IT centers and various technologies.

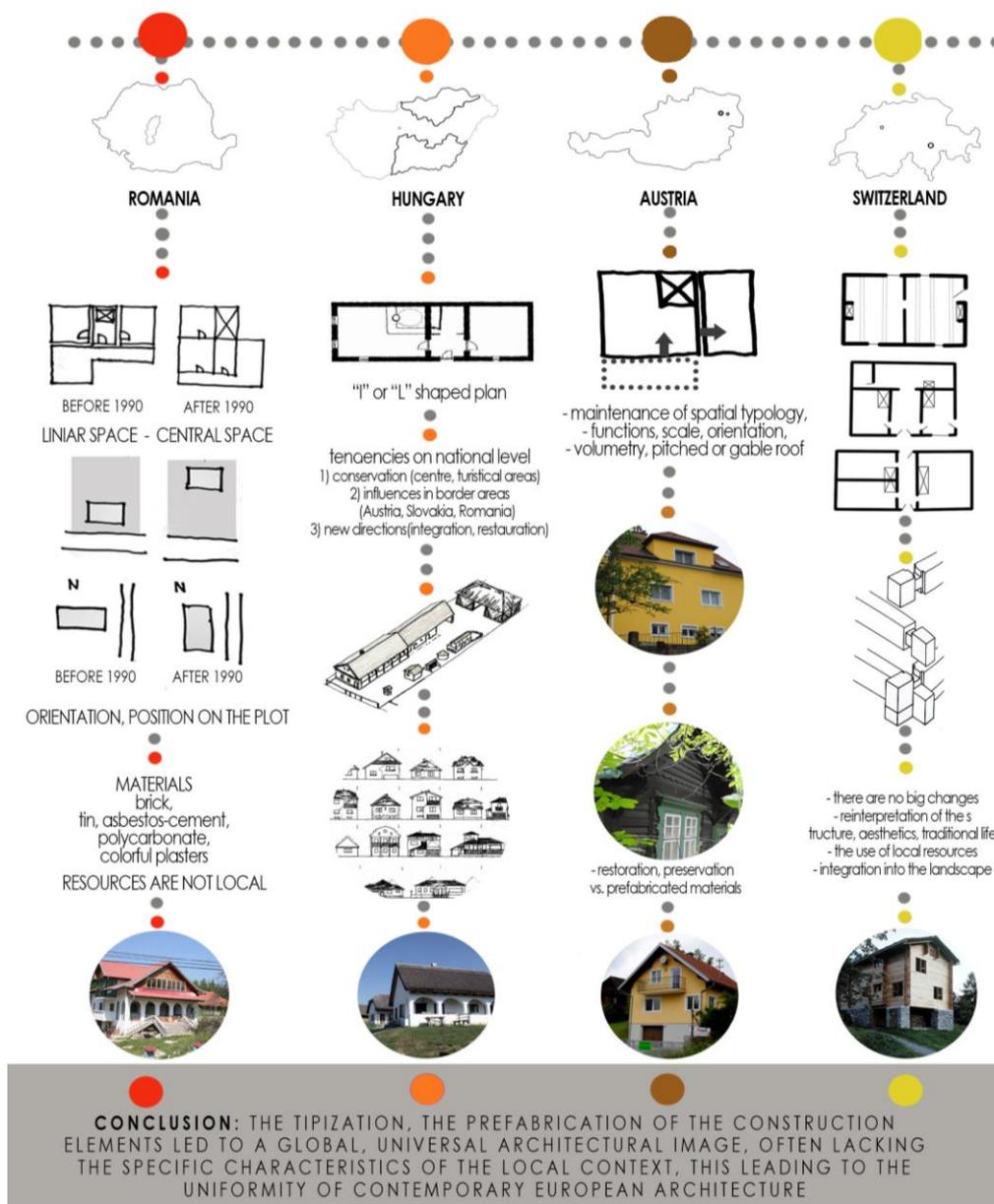


Fig. 3.

Impact of contemporary context upon vernacular architecture in European countries.

The contemporary interventions in the rural regions of Romania, especially the Transylvanian area, ignore the planimetric-spatial composition of the vernacular house, or the different ratios at the level of the faade/sides. New buildings no longer have a porch (this being frequently replaced by balcony or terrace), this change having an impact not only on the composition of the faade or the volumetry, but also on the tenant's way of life and his way of reporting to the community.

The transformations of the traditional architecture can also be observed on a smaller scale at the level of the component elements: walls, windows, doors. The walls of vernacular constructions are usually made of wooden beams (fir, oak) of sizes that vary in the case of width between 12-15 cm, and at a height between 20-30 cm and have special joints (for example, dovetail joints). The current trends at the level of the faade are: cladding the faade with a wood or plastic paneling, the use of materials that do not fit into the local context (light concrete blocks, high-performance brick), the painting in flashy colors of the wooden beams on the faade.

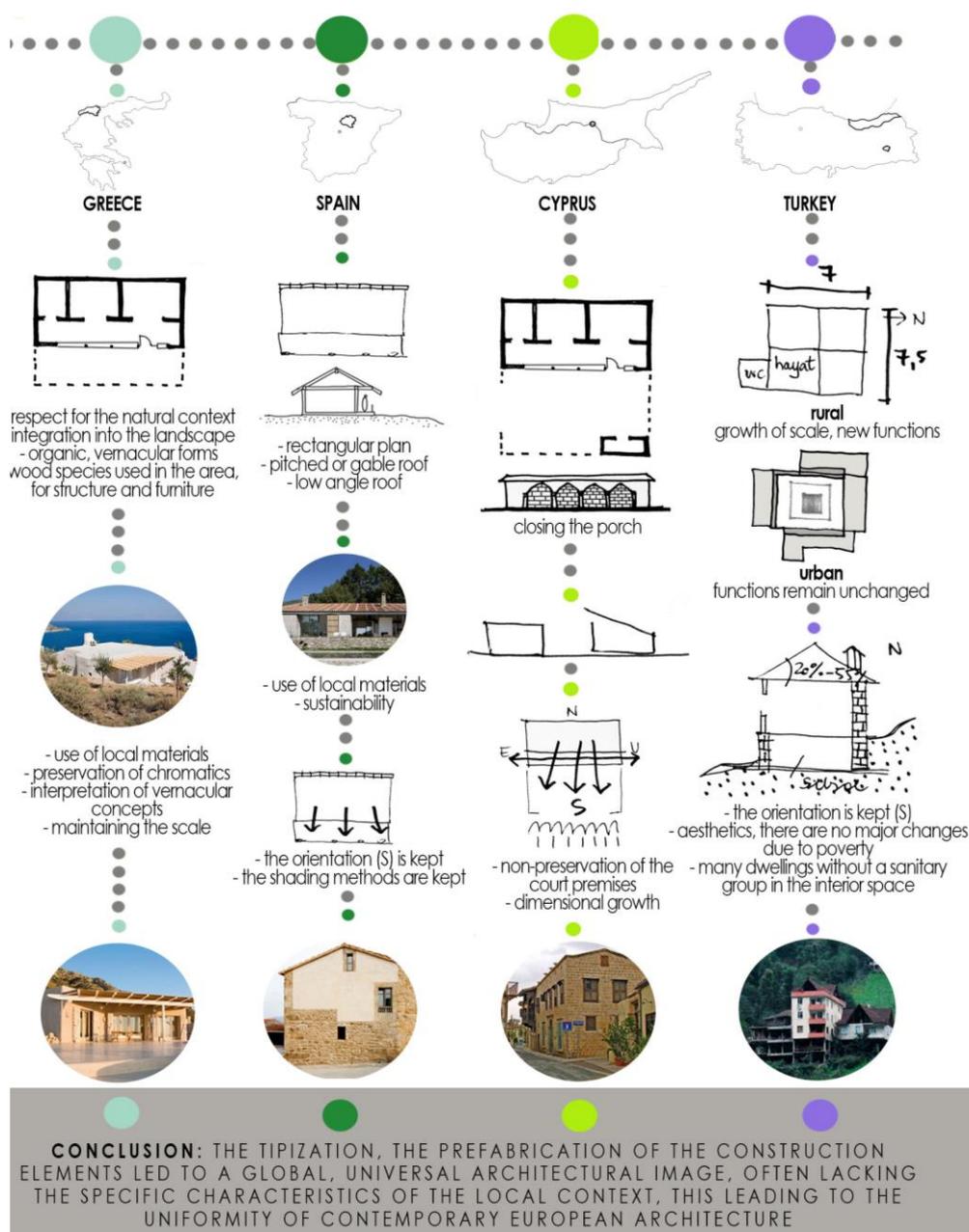


Fig. 4.

Impact of contemporary context upon vernacular architecture in European countries.

The solution in such situations would not be to completely exclude new materials, but to find a way of integrating them into the composition of traditional houses without affecting their aesthetics and compositional balance. Frequent trends in the case of contemporary interventions in the extracarpethian region consist in changing the slope of the roof; applying saturated colors on the facade; changing the wooden shingles of the roof (local material) with other materials that are not from the area and do not fit into the traditional architectural context: bituminated cardboard, tile, corrugated sheets made of composite materials, folded sheet or aluminum sheet; making improvised skylights.

In the case of windows and carpentry, the general tendency is to replace the initial wooden framing with a PVC or aluminum joinery, to add plastic blinds, to close the porch. The traditional double windows, with two subdivided sashes, with generous brightly colored frames, were gradually replaced by large horizontally developed windows.

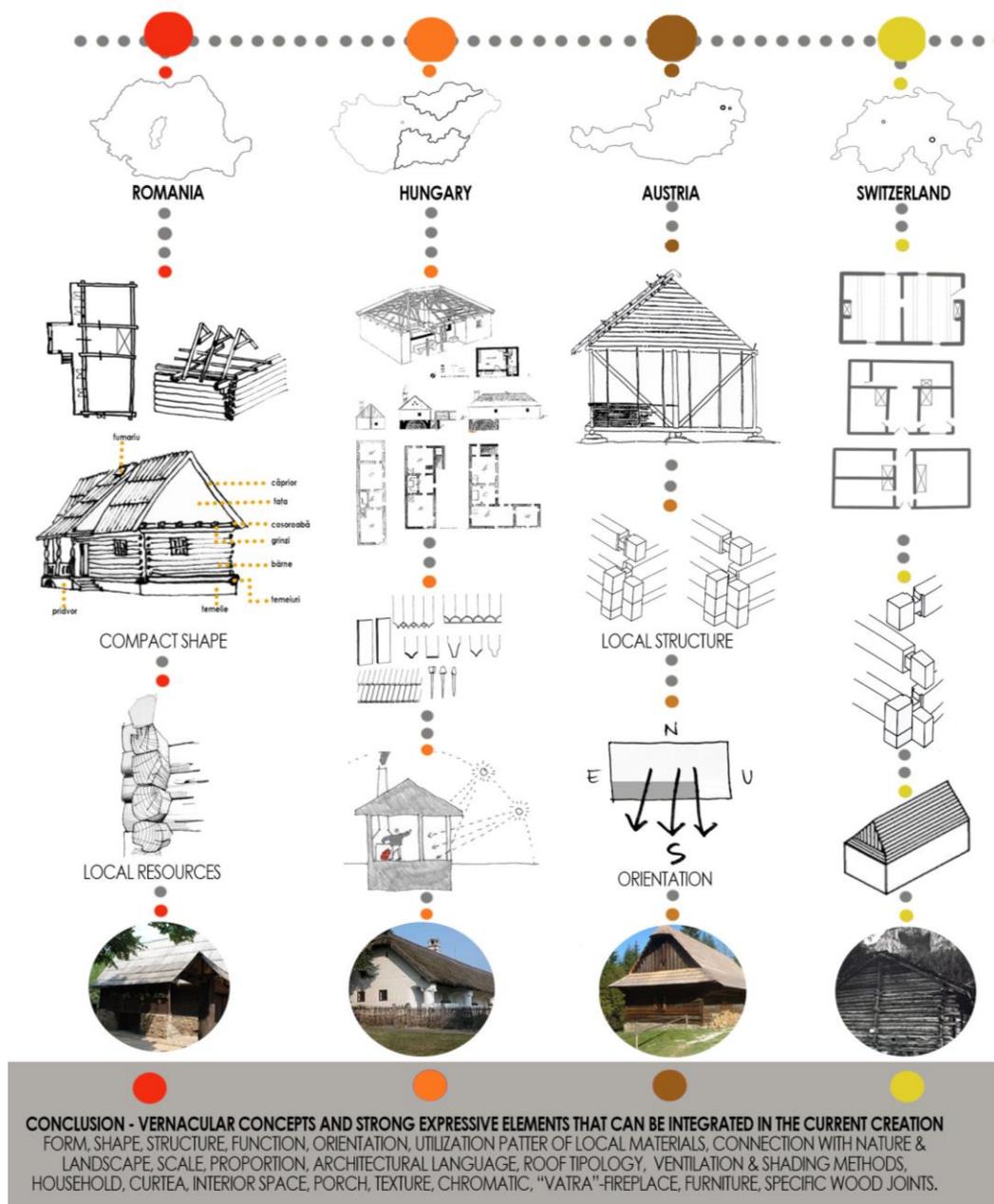


Fig. 5.
Sustainable integration of vernacular concepts in contemporary creation.

Another major change can be observed at the level of the building materials used: in the case of the wall structure, the horizontal beams made of resinous or oak wood have been replaced by stone or composite materials, concrete (over which a colored plaster is applied), the low wooden gates have been replaced by high ones that have concrete or stone frames and no longer allow a visual continuity at the level of households. The opening of the dwellings on the street is gradually replaced by this isolation behind the plot and the opaque and massive gates that give up in a significant proportion the use of wood.

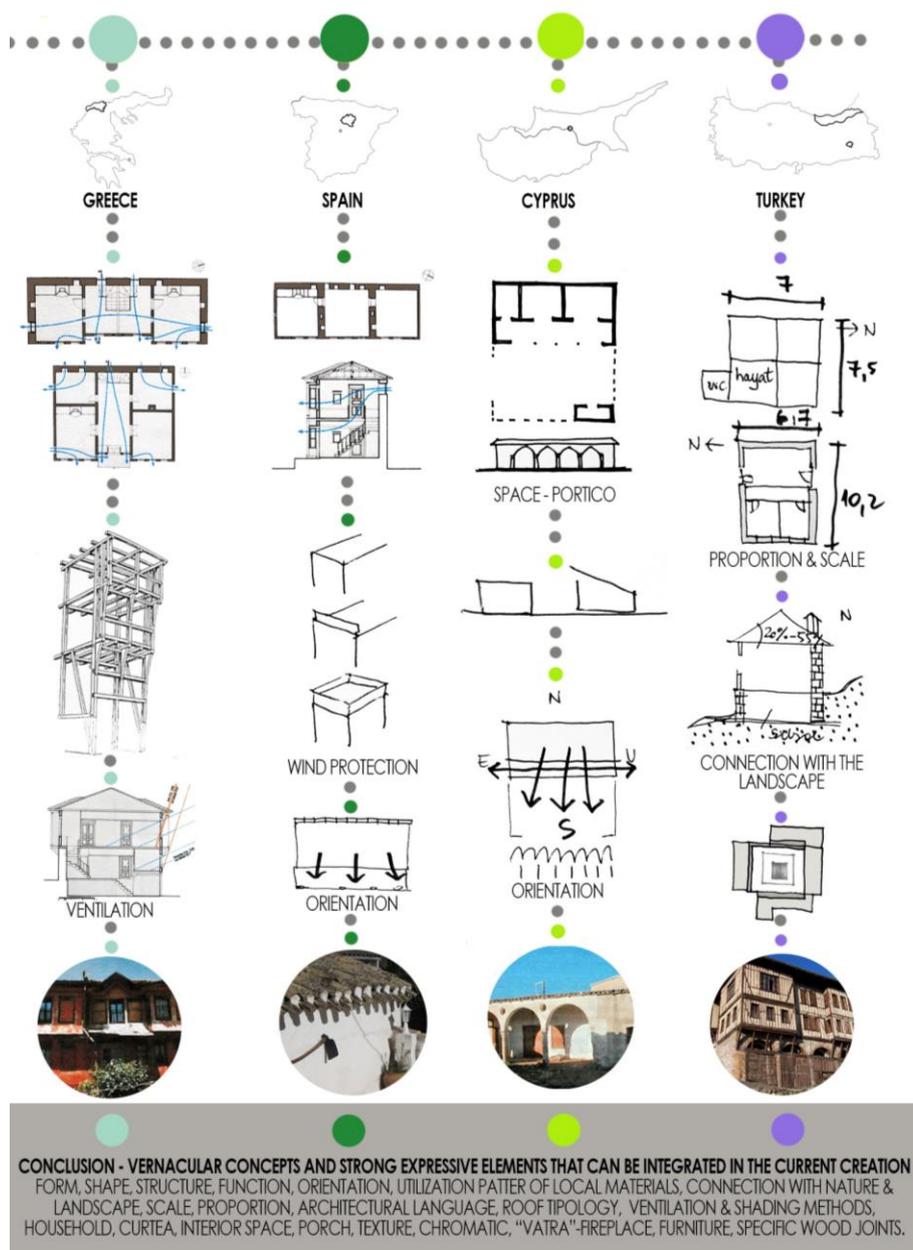


Fig. 6.

Sustainable integration of vernacular concepts in contemporary creation.

The conclusions regarding the transformation of the traditionally built Romanian fund must be analyzed holistically, taking into account all the factors of influence. The transformations can be observed regarding the general shape, the new dwellings being more compact, of larger size and oriented especially with the main façade towards the street. Also, changes can be observed on a functional level (due to the major retraining of rural inhabitants, animal husbandry and agriculture not being their main occupation at present), the old stables were converted into housing units for the younger generation, the porch was closed to increase the living space or become a storage place. Changes can also be observed on the level of the building materials used, wood as a primordial building material being replaced by composite materials and concrete. Regarding wooden furniture, elements dating back to 1900 are few, the most frequently preserved items are the carpentry chairs, low and rectangular round tables, crates and in some cases ceramic dishes.

The effects of the contemporary context on the built heritage fund, with local value or authenticity, were more visible and much faster in the case of other European countries better situated from a social, economic and administrative point of view. In the case of Switzerland, Austria and Hungary, urbanization and technological evolution have triggered a recalibration of intentions to develop projects on an urban scale. The development strategies of the localities were based on funds and infrastructure, which led to a rapid urbanization and modernization of the villages. However, examples remain that capitalize on local

specificities and take into account integration into the natural and locally constructed, genuine and traditional context. There is an ideology common to these countries regarding the neo-vernacular models, being possible to structure the configuration process on a conceptual level, incorporating the archaic, traditional values specific to the architecture of wood.

In order to integrate vernacular concepts into the flow of contemporary creation, it is necessary to perceive and assimilate them in the first stage (Fig. 3-6). The existence of clear similarities between regions regarding the shape of the vernacular dwelling in the plan can become an archetypal element for shaping the concept. The rectangular shape is specific to the regions of Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Romania and the researched regions of Cyprus. The analyzed areas of Greece and Turkey have a square shape in the plan of the vernacular dwelling, this form being directly influenced by the typology of the gable roof in four slopes.

In regions with a colder climate, the dwellings have a more compact volume, with few window voids in number and of small size, without a porch (Switzerland and Austria), with an intermediate eaves to protect the facades from weathering. Regions with a milder climate have vernacular dwellings with large and numerous voids, with generous porches (Hungary, Romania – in hilly and depression areas, Spain, Cyprus – in the form of a portico). The structure of horizontal wooden beams is left visible in the case of Switzerland, Austria and our country and is plastered in the investigated regions of Spain, Greece, Hungary, Turkey and Cyprus. The dwelling is built on a high stone pedestal in most of the analyzed regions, except for those in Hungary and Cyprus. In terms of orientation, the dwellings have the main facades directed to the south.

Regarding furniture and interior space, vernacular dwellings in Europe have a series of similarities such as: the presence of an access hall (in its specific form of porch in the case of our country or of hayot in the case of Turkey); the presence of the porch (*tornác* in the case of Hungary or *portico* in the case of Greece, Spain and Cyprus) as an area for carrying out various household activities; perimeter furnishing of the rooms, leaving free the central part of them; the main furniture elements are: the bed, the table, the chairs, the benches, the ceramic dishes and crates.

With regard to the influences of the contemporary context on European vernacular architecture and furniture, a number of conclusions can be drawn. For the most part, they overlap and validate with those found in the case of our country. The European vernacular built fund has undergone a gradual but major change due to the urbanisation of the countryside: in a few cases, such as Switzerland, Hungary and Spain, the vernacular fund has been protected, so the changes have not manifested themselves freely on an architectural level. The shape of the dwelling has not undergone major changes regarding its general shape, the most frequent ones targeting the porch or portico, these being closed or transformed into storage spaces.

The building materials used remained mainly natural ones such as wood, stone and earth in the case of Spain, Switzerland, Cyprus, Turkey. This is different in the case of Austria and Hungary where new composite materials (concrete gaining ground in front of wood) are mainly used. The contemporary interior space reproduces and is inspired by the vernacular one, its characteristic furnishing pattern being arranged (as in the case of vernacular dwellings) around the walls, the middle of the room remaining free.

Specific local vernacular structural systems have not undergone major metamorphosis, in the case of Spain, Turkey and Cyprus (wooden frame system with stone or brick filling), Switzerland (horizontal overlapping beams – *strickbau*), however, this cannot be mentioned in the case of Austria where the walls made of wooden beams have been replaced by ones formed of concrete frames with a high-performance brick filler, and in the case of Hungary the massive stone walls have been replaced using a frame-based concrete structural system. Changes also occur in the case of the building materials used, wood as a primordial building material being replaced by composites, concretes and prefabricated elements.

Wooden furniture, items or elements more than a century old are rarely found. The objects that are most commonly found in a good state of preservation, are high chairs, rectangular high tables, crates, in some cases even hangers).

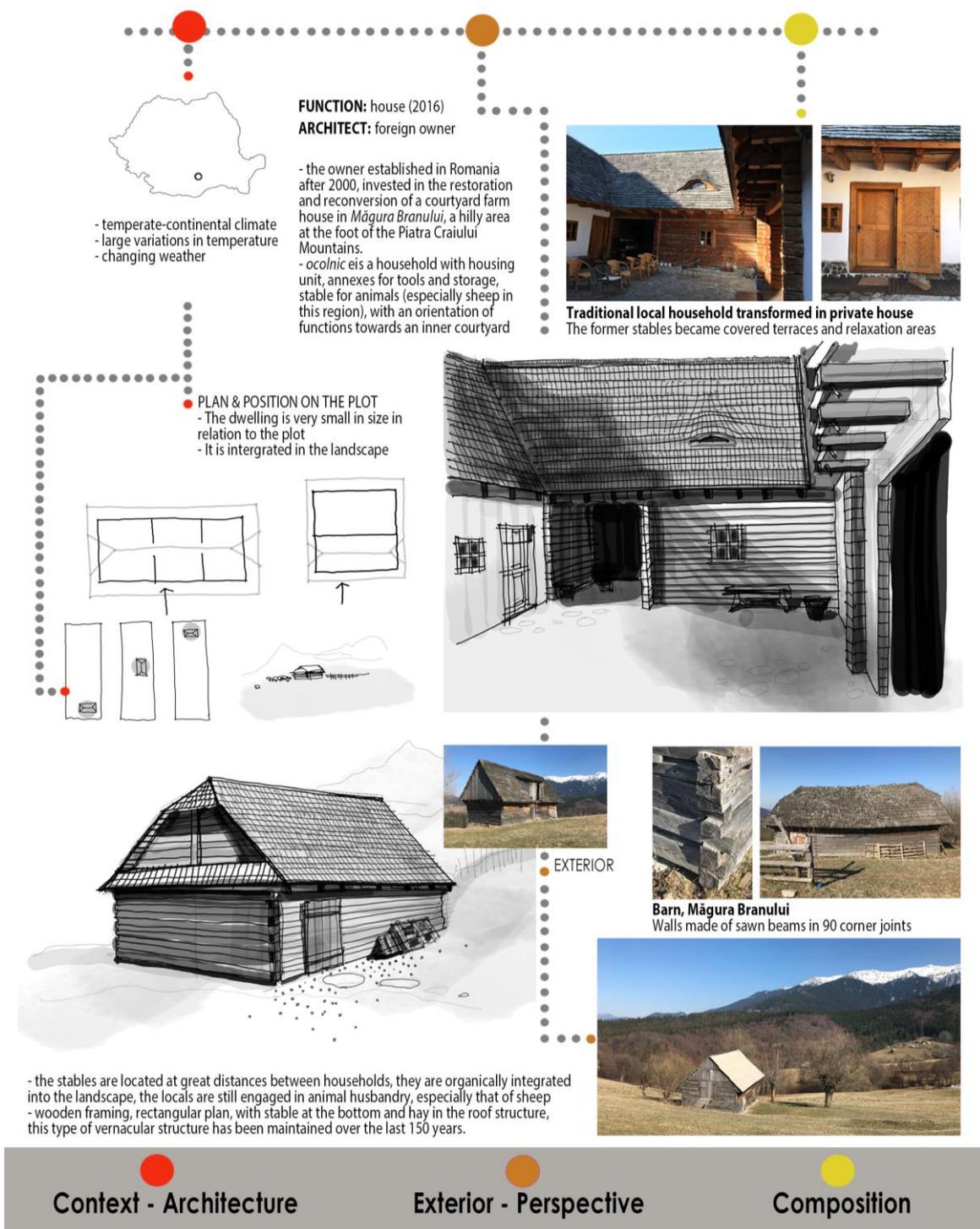


Fig. 7.

Example of local contemporary architecture in vernacular spirit – Bran, Măgura (Romania).

Even though vernacular has undergone a metamorphosis as a result of urbanization and technological evolution, there are a number of examples to follow, not only in the segment of chosen constructive solutions, but also in terms of the lifestyle promoted. Increasing interest from new generations of architects and engineers for environmental responsibility, sustainability, sustainable development and energy efficiency, are just some of the axioms that have set a clear direction on a niche area in contemporary design (Bartha & Olărescu 2017).

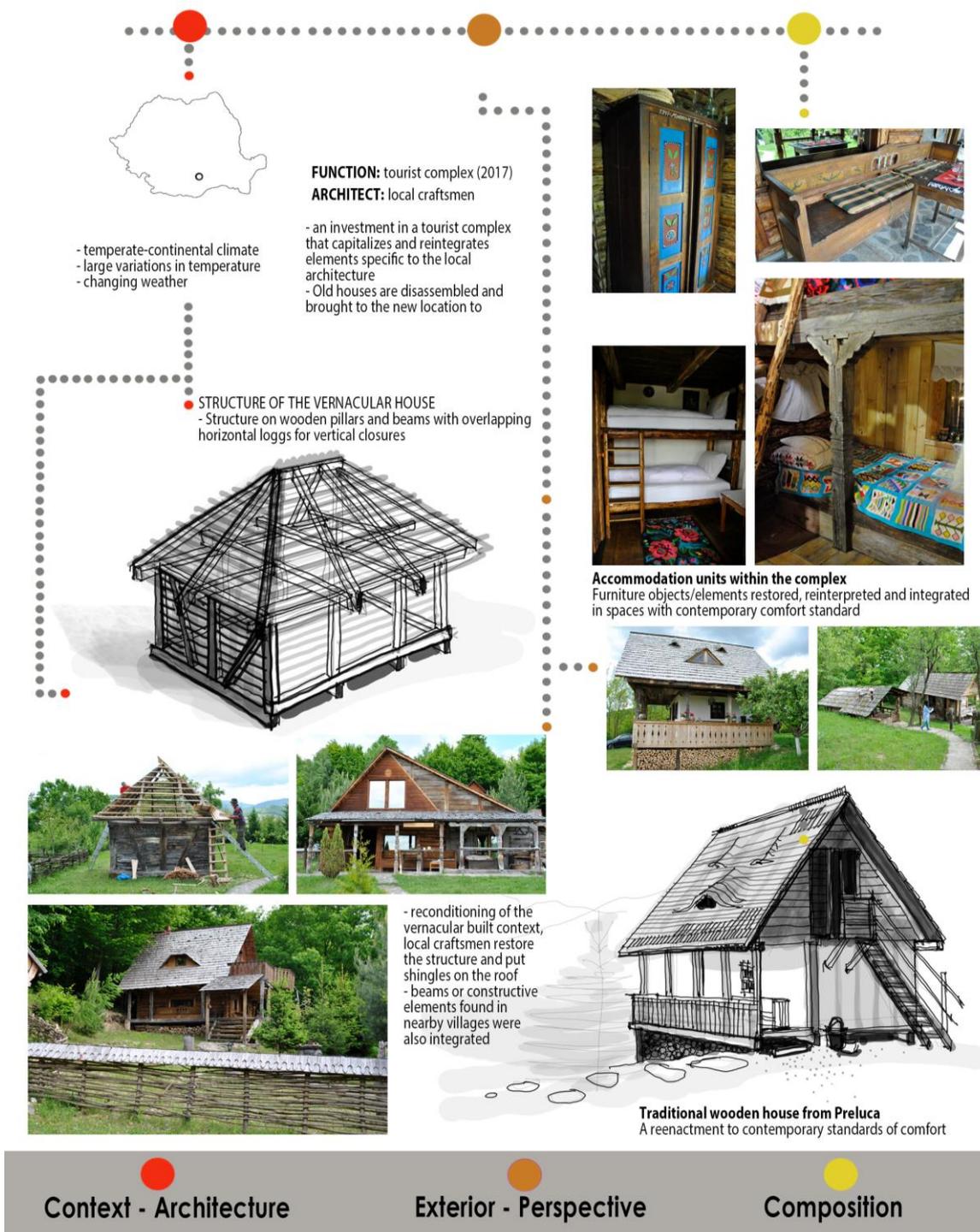


Fig. 8.

Example of local contemporary architecture in vernacular spirit – Preluca, Maramureş (Romania).

The examples presented in fig.7-9, fit into the neo-vernacular current with local identity valences or a high-tech variant that also incorporates energy efficiency components: nZEB, passive/active house, solar house etc. This way of constructing is not only about the expressive rendering of the visual elements characteristic of the traditional architecture specific to wood, but also to an integration of local natural materials into the construction, in a reinterpreted form (e.g. cellulose or straw can be used as a thermal-insulating material in the wall section).

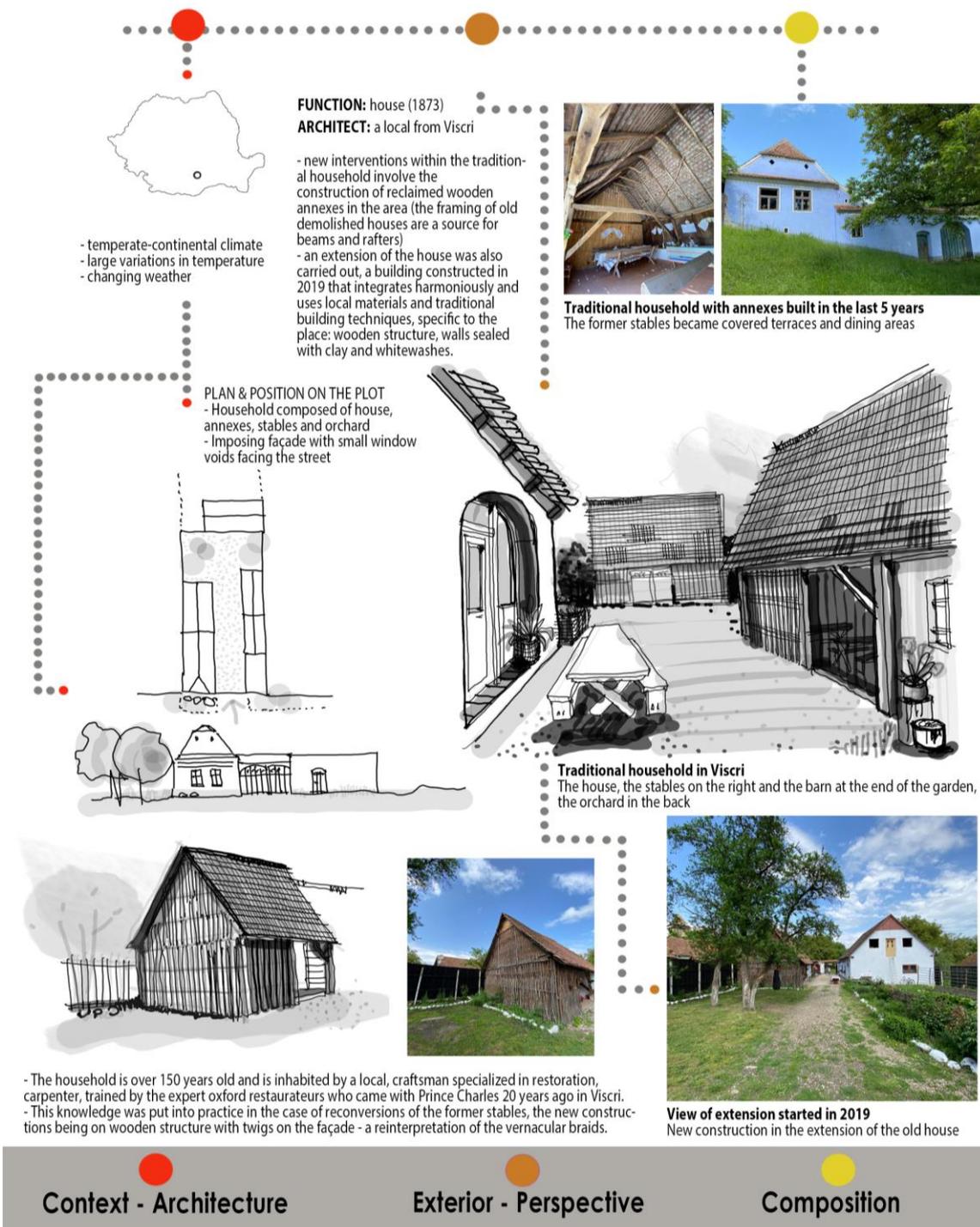


Fig. 9.

Example of local contemporary architecture in vernacular spirit – Viscri, Transylvania (Romania).

Neo-vernacular models exist on a national level, Fig. 7, 8 and 9 presenting such a case studies in a visual synthetic manner. The cases chosen for on-site research are from different regions, respectively from Transylvania or Maramures, the targeted function is that of housing, and the center of interest focuses around wood architecture and reinterpretation of local elements with identity specificity and their integration into the final concept. The strong and rooted connection of the local people with traditional wooden built environment is the one of the key factors when selecting the 3 analyzed areas (Bran, Preluca, Viscri). "This sense is held by the people who live in the middle of nature and our peasants possess it in such a strong degree, that it comes to form, in connection with the nature of the preservation of traditions, a general characteristic of the Romanian peasant" (Stănculescu 1987).

The examples from Romania are diversified, eclectic and approach the vernacular concept differently: the house from Măgura Bran (Fig. 7) relies on the ecological and energy efficient component, the observance of the archetype, the volumetry and the architectural authenticity, in the case of Preluca (Fig. 8) in Maramureș (Fig. 9), the local materials and the use of traditional construction methods and the craft being the landmarks of the contemporary intervention, and in Viscri, the restoration and recovery of the building elements specific to the traditional houses, with historical value, represented the axiom after which the builder was guided.

The project in Maramureș, a tourist complex that promotes local values, is located 10 km from Târgu Lăpuș, at Preluca, in a picturesque hilly area surrounded by forests.

The quiet and secluded location attracts tourists to the area, the complex consists of 5 cottages with individual accommodation units, a common space for dining and outdoor activities. The owner of this complex, being a local, emphasized the capitalization of the specific characteristics of the wood culture and tradition, all the accommodation units being built of wood claimed from the region, recovered from the construction sites where the old houses were demolished. Thus, old beams reached from 30-40 km away, even old pieces of furniture that required only easy restoration or repair had been integrated in the contemporary interior design.

Due to the authenticity of the sources and the use of natural, local materials, the concept of this complex becomes a sustainable one, implementable and worthy to be followed by the rest of the guesthouses that are developing at a fast pace and with prefabricated building materials without a visual integration into the built landscape specific to the place.

In Viscri, 52 km from Brasov, a Saxon village with a history and a cultural identity visible in the media due to King Charles' visit more than 20 years ago, in the spring of 1998. In addition to promoting sustainable tourism and local traditions, he also brought a number of specialists who passed on valuable knowledge to locals in wood restoration, traditional construction methods and concepts of sustainable development and the use of local materials for construction by setting up in 2015 *The Prince's Foundation*³ whose mission is to preserve and protect the architectural heritage of Romania, but also the sustainable rural development of the country.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

As seen in the selected Romanian case studies, contemporary architecture still knows how to rely on specific values such as local identity, spatial constants, tradition and culture. It is not a surprise that the neo-vernacular house embodies a set of valuable assets that can provide inspiration and coherent guideline also for the upcoming generations of architects and designers.

The conclusion is outlined in the form of diversified variants of manifestation and approach of neo-vernacular, the built fund being a versatile one, but at the same time responsible for the natural context, using not only an expressive language calibrated to local characteristics, but also renewable materials from local sources, thus enhancing a sustainable approach on multiple levels. Instead, it is to be appreciated that the tendency to build responsibly towards the environment and to incorporate local characteristics into the rural architectural language, becomes a practice of daily use among architects and local artisans. Even the beneficiaries have become more and more open to find out and get informed about the vernacular and ecological concepts, these concepts being perceived holistically and through the prism of the marketing campaigns that have been visible in the media in the last 10 years.

Even if these neo-vernacular interventions remain punctual and form a defined set of multiple elements that operate in an isolated regime, the beneficial effects can be seen and experienced (we can relate to the case studies presented above), and they can become a model for future directions in contemporary design.

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