

## **CONSERVATING THE TRADITIONAL CELLARS OF SALACEA, BIHOR COUNTY, ROMANIA**

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**Abstract:** This paper argues for the enhanced utilization of the built heritage in the case of the unique cellars of Salacea, Bihor Country which is called „the village of 1000 cellars„. The research analysis of the cellars includes field investigations, study of existing bibliography, air-photo interpretation. For examining the

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architectural plans, facades and volumes use was made of software such as: Archicad 22 R1 INT version 22.0.0.3006, Artlantis (2017) 6.5 version 6.5.2.14, Adobe Illustrator CC (2017) version 21.1.0 and Adobe Photoshop CC (2015) version 16.1, and for processing the photos Adobe Lightroom version 6.12. Cartographic materials have been processed in 3D Studio Max, Corel Draw and Corel Photopaint. The use of spatial data allowed identification and analysis of important aspect for understanding the territorial reality. The study identifies two authentic models of cellars that could be exploited for their heritage potential for tourism development and a source of income for the local area.

**Key words:** cellars, cultural landscape, heritage monuments, Salacea, Romania

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## INTRODUCTION

Sălăcea commune is located in the north-western part of Romania in the northern extremity of Bihor County, between the Ierului Plain and Sălăcei Hills (Figure 1). The altitude of the landscape varies between 100 and 160 m. The areas landscape evolution is the result of climatic-tectonic oscillations and the uninterrupted action of the Ier River and its tributaries (Posea, 1997). The climate is moderate temperate-continental plain, with Panonic tones, western and northern influences. This, in turn, is reflected directly in the soil types and crops that are suitable for agricultural purposes. Viticulture has been a long established tradition in this area and the traces of this occupation are manifest in the cultural landscape in the physical form of the cellars.

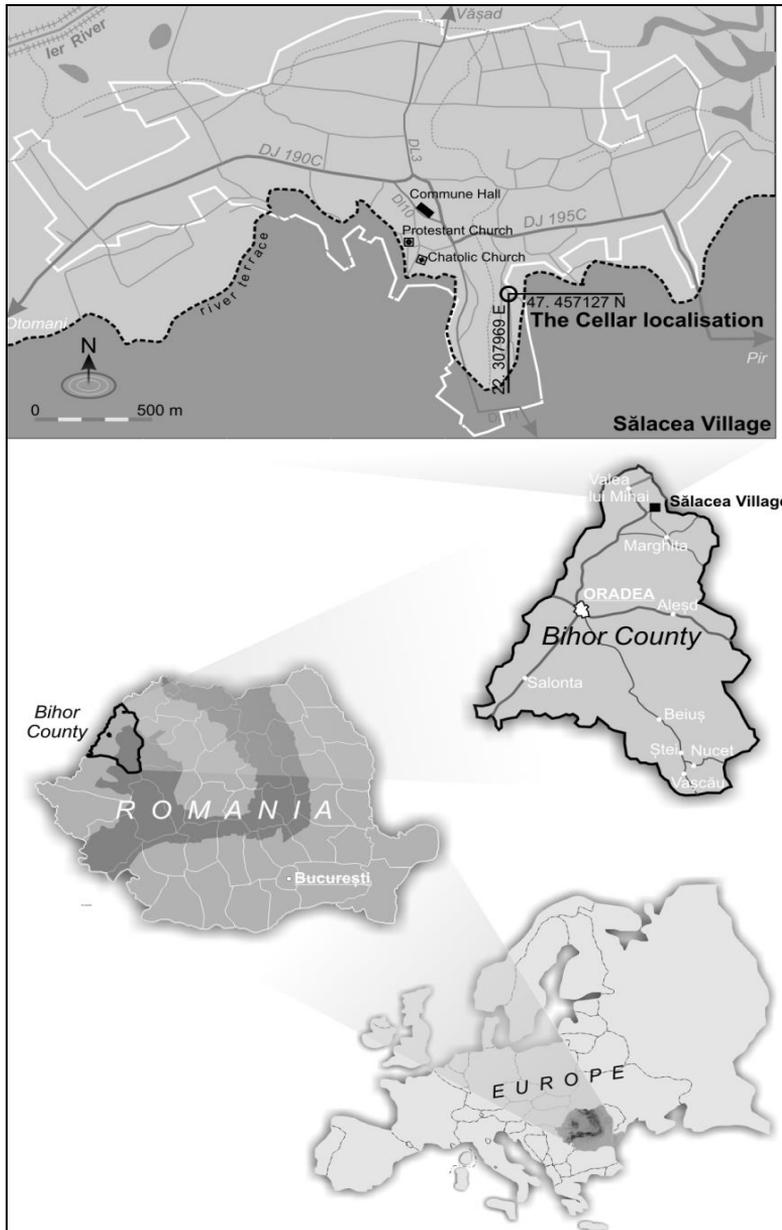
Several previous works refer generally to the cultural landscapes (VÁTI KHT - Budapest Compilation, 2000; Ilieș et al., 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Gozner, 2010), with special regard to the landscape in Transylvania (Benedek, 1996); photographic work (Sofalvi, 2004) and monographic works (Kéri & Kántor, 2009; Iren, 2003); Other research address opportunities for touristic capitalization of the oenological and gastronomic tradition (Hava, 2015; Gozner et al., 2016, Gozner & Avram, 2010). Of note also is a biodiversity study in Salacea wetland (Interreg project, pre-feasibility study, 2017), albeit with no emphasis on Salacea cellars. General works exist referring to the cellars on the hills of Oradea (Dincă et al., 2012; Linc et al., 2017; Tatar et al., 2017). It is the aim in this paper to analyse the architecture and traditional cellars of Salacea and argue that they potentially represent an opportunity for the enhanced utilization of built heritage in this part of Romania. The following discussion is presented as a description of the Salacea cellars as cultural heritage, the methodology results and discussion of different models of cellars, and conclusions.

## THE SALACEA CELLARS

The origins of the Salacea cellars relate to the long tradition of viticulture which has been practiced for hundreds of years in this area. For the inhabitants of Ierului Valley wine production was not only a source of income but also provided status in the local society. The historical evidence suggests that all quality farmers have a patch of vineyard (Benedek, 1996, 101; Hava, 2015). Most of the cellars are concentrated in Sălăcea commune, which is known as the “village of the 1000 cellars”. Kéri G. and Kántor A. (2009, 104) in their study stated that they found evidence of a total of 956 cellars.

Local residents say, however, that this total is an underestimate as each household would have at least one cellar. As is shown on Figure 2 most of the cellars

are concentrated in groups or rows, in the urban part of the locality (7 rows). It has been observed that the cellars are “an extension of the household at the border of the villages, the expression of a way of life as a result of their adaptation to the environment and also as an argument in favor of a profession that provided people with a chance to make money” (Chiriac, quoted in Sofalvi, 2004). Figure 3 shows the oldest cellar in the village of Sălăcea which dates back to 1807 (Iren, 2003) this is evidenced by the inscriptions on the facades of the cellars.



**Figure 1.** Geographical outline of Sălăcea, Bihor County, Romania



**Figure 2.** Village street with the row of cellars, Salacea village



**Figure 3.** The cellar from 1807, considered to be the oldest on the territory of Salacea village, Bihor county



**Figure 4.** Specific lock to a cellar form Salacea

Despite their distinctive architecture and important contribution to the cultural landscape the cellars are not yet listed in the national cultural heritage list (albeit there have been some failed attempts). Figure 4 shows the distinctive architecture of the facades which can be admired, in terms of iron or oak doors, with the specific locks. The importance of the cellars has been described as follows: “they have the role of structuring the space to which they belong, the villagers consider them objects that delineate a space and implicitly its isolation or the preservation of a threshold from the exterior-interior and vice versa, with the meaning that marks a property in the intimacy of which the joys and the difficulties of generations succeed naturally; they are real objects of art, made and promoted by the craftsmen of the past, but also by the passage of time; they are distinguished by sobriety resulting from the use of wood and iron and classical assembly techniques” (Chiriac, quoted in Sofalvi, 2004). Besides the historical and aesthetic values of the monuments, they are important also because they “transmit the knowledge and feelings, develop tastes, educate and learn to appreciate our culture” (Kéri & Kántor, 2009, 8 and 116).

Overall it has been argued that the cellars play an important role in defining the cultural landscape in this area (Ilieș, 2007). The location and configuration of cellars are the result human adaption to the particularities of the natural environment. As already observed the area is suitable for vineyard growing from a topo-climatic point of view, but it is located on route between Transylvania and Pannonia, contributing to the development of both the production capacities of the wine and that of storage. These cellars are dug into a layer of clay starting from the upper part of the Ier River Terrace. The amount of sand in the clayey layer has determined and limited the dimensions of the excavated galleries. The most common is between 1.25 m wide and 1.80 m high with arched ceiling in the shape of a circular arch. Cellar chambers were long due to width and height limitations. The existence of the impermeable clay layer is the proof of resistance to water infiltration and contributes to the inner microclimate. Obtaining a suitable shelter for keeping the wine was also based on the predominantly northern orientation of the river's terrace, and on the fact that the line marking the edge of the terrace has a very sinuous route with a ratio of 1 to 3. On the thalweg of some perpendicular valleys on the edge of the terrace a few concavities developed, greatly increasing the working area.

The configuration resulted in similar arrangements to inner courtyards, with cellars close to or around or in front of each other. The cellars are dug in the upper part of the river's terrace, between the altitudes of 130-140m, in direct harmony with the horizon corresponding to the clayey layer. In some sectors, the thickness of the clayey horizon and the altitude difference between the valley talweg and the terrace floor allowed a number of cellar rows to be excavated on several levels on altitude. Practically, the cellar dimensions are tailored to the natural features of the area, being probably the result of longer-lived local practices. They have strongly influenced the structure of households, even villages (besides the social life of local people) (Ilieș, 2007). The cultural landscape of Salacea (Gavra, 2013) graphically demonstrates the long tradition of wine production in this region of low hills and river valleys. The intricate pattern of vineyards, farms, villages, with their historic networks of deep wine cellars, illustrates every facet of the production of the wines (VÁTI KHT – Budapest Compilation, 2000).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In terms of methodology a range of approaches were used. A study of existing bibliography, field investigations, and air-photo interpretation was performed. For the understanding of plans, facades and volumes we used software such as: Archicad 22 R1 INT

version 22.0.0.3006, Artlantis (2017) 6.5 version 6.5.2.14, Adobe Illustrator CC (2017) version 21.1.0 and Adobe Photoshop CC (2015) version 16.1. For the processing of photos we used Adobe Lightroom version 6.12. The particularities of the territory were analyzed by the spatial correlation of data stored on the layers, information from topographic and geological maps, orthophotoplans, PUGs (General Urbanistic Plann), publications and field surveys.



**Figure 5.** Wooden oak doors reinforced with wrought iron, Salacea cellars, Bihor

Being a low-altitude, slightly waved area, all land details have been used: abandoned meanders, recent river basins, river terraces, land elevations, toponyms, current roads and old roads, and hydrotechnical facilities. Cartographic materials have been processed in 3D Studio Max, Corel Draw and Corel Photopaint. Spatial data interference has allowed for the identification and analysis of important aspects for understanding this territorial reality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figures 5 to 7 provide an illustration and evidence of the different forms of cellars which occur at Salacea. Using the methodologies as described above Figures 8 to 13 present our analysis of the architectural design of the cellars. It is evident that most of the cellars are made of burnt brick, but there are also other types which are made of wood or mud brick with a reed roof. Because the area consists of low-lying fluvial-lake deposits, there are no hard rocks, which is why they do not appear in the cellar construction. All the other materials are found in the local horizon, being more than a differentiation depending on the level of processing, that is, the mud brick or brick, both made of clay. As shown according to Figures 8 to 11 their layout comprises: a hall in which, if the surface permits, the grapes are pressed and the wine is produced. This is followed by the room called by the locals as the “neck”, which is the passage to the cellar room where the various goods are stored. Here the most valuable possessions of the family were stored, namely: food and wine. The mayor of the Salacea commune stated as follows: “The size of cellars represented the measuring unit of family wealth. The bigger the cellar, the more wealthy the family” (B. Horváth, Mayor of Sălăcea commune 2018).



**Figure 6.** Brick cellar Salacea

Our analysis shows the existence of two distinct cellar models in the area. The first authentic cellar model found in Sălăcea commune is built of burnt brick, completely covered with earth, leaving only the façade visible. The brick is apparent, not plastered.

The façade can be crowned with a gable of different shapes and decorated with different patterns of the brick (Figures 6, 8, 9, 10). The second authentic model of the cellar identified is made of wood, mud brick and reed, and it is also covered entirely with earth.



Figure 7. Wooden cellar and reed Salacea

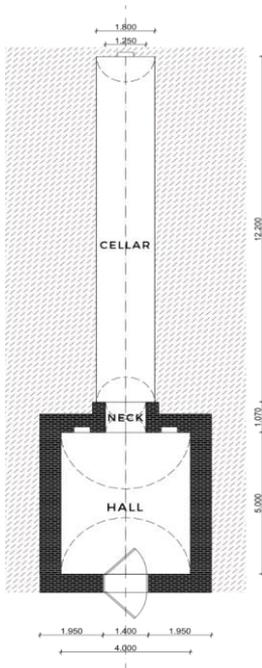


Figure 8. Brick cellar plan, Salacea

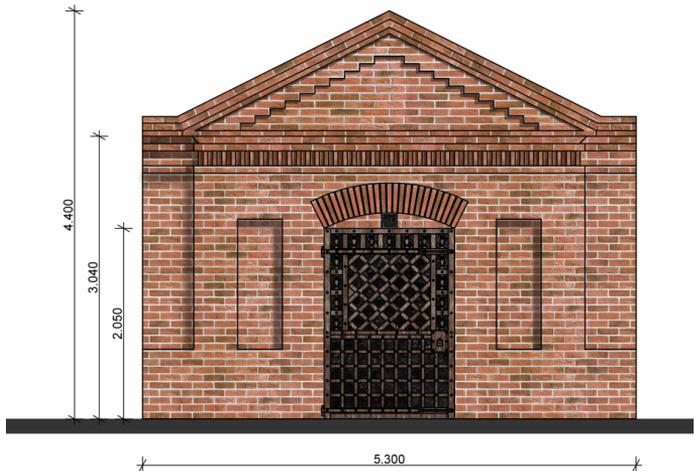
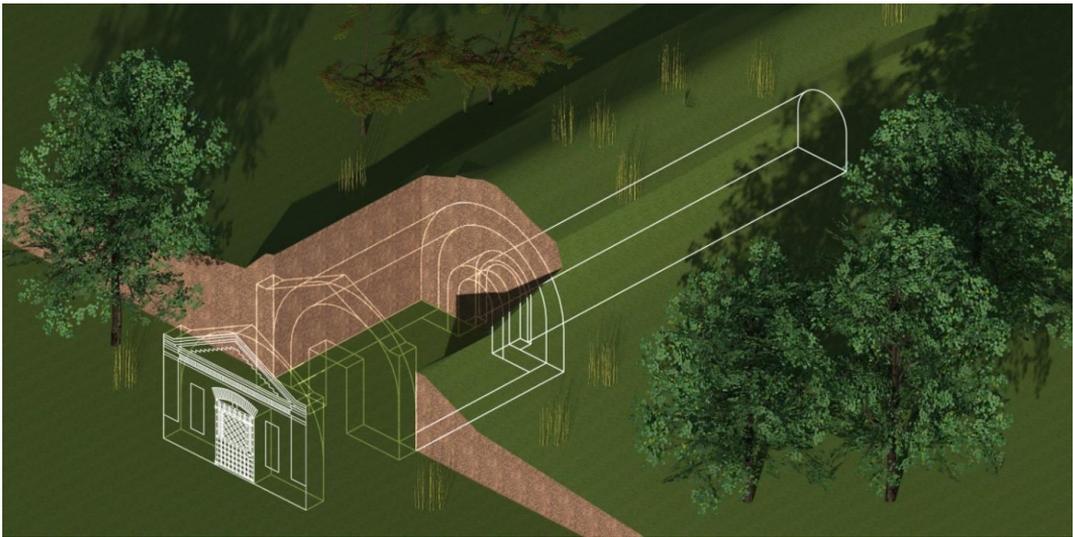
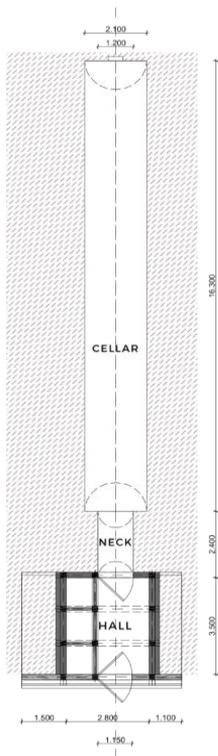


Figure 9. Brick cellar facade, Salacea



**Figure 10.** Brick cellar volume, Salacea



**Figure 11.** Plan of wooden, mud brick and reed cellar, Salacea



**Figure 12.** Façade of wooden, mud brick and reed cellar, Salacea

The façade is entirely made of oak wood and is not decorated (Figure 7, 11, 12, 13). In both cases the cellars are dug at a depth of about 2-3 m deep. Both façades have as

their main central point the door which is made of oak and wrought iron (Figure 5). They play an important role in creating a unitary set. They are specific to these types of cellars and, together with the special locks, they create an identity. The locks open through various secret combinations by means of oversized keys.



**Figure 13.** Volumetric analysis of wooden, mud brick cellar, Salacea

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis which is undertaken here of traditional wine cellars of Celcea Romania, highlights their importance in the traditional cultural landscape and their potential as heritage resources which might be maximized for the benefit of the local community. It has been argued that these cellar ensembles are living testimonies of traditions and habits about historical viticulture. They have a specific character and are remarkable as heritage values. It is noted that the cellars are not included in the List of Historical Monuments of Romania. From our analysis we consider that the cellars have historical-architectural value, and that their great density, the special personality justifies their recognition as important local monuments which can be of interest for local tourism as well as regional and international visitors. In terms of territorial planners the identification of different types of authentic cellars identified can support local authorities planning in particular in terms of restoring and rebuilding some of the cellars which are at risk of falling into disrepair.

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