



**PROPOSAL OF PROJECT FOR JOINTLY SUPERVISED DOCTORAL THESIS**  
**UNITA**

**Cultural Heritage ;      Circular Economy ;      Renewable Energy ;**

**Interdisciplinary**

**Title of the project:**

***Urban regeneration through the cultural creative capitalization of industrial heritage. From abandonment and degradation, to solutions for socio-territorial reconstruction in the Mountain Banat***

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**Description of the PhD project**

**Keywords:** *deindustrialization, derelict spaces, reuse industrial heritage, cultural creative activities, creative brownfields, urban regeneration, social reconstruction, adaptive and sustainable development, mountain societies, Banat.*

**Conceptual framework**

The industrial heritage, today abandoned or very little used, represents the memory of one of the most significant changes in human history that the industrial revolution brought (Andrei, 2010), a change that helped society to progress and reach where it is today. With deindustrialization and new technologies, industrial sites, from economic engines, have become a real ecological problem, and the surrounding settlements face economic regression and massive depopulation, especially in the mountainous area (Jigoria-Oprea and Popa, 2017). The industrial heritage is also defined, and configured as a central element of the local territorial system of reference, when it is recognized, used, valued by the local networks as a set of outlets for the local development of the territorial system in which they operate (Dansero et al., 2003).

At the same time, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, objective 11 emphasizes the development of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements, and objective 12 emphasizes the aspects of sustainable consumption and production, with reduced environmental impact and increased social value. This perception was in the last decades the catalyst for the redevelopment and valorization of industrial sites (Merciu, 2014).

On the other hand, creative industries are gaining more and more scope, and the use of culture as a tool for the revitalization of abandoned industrial sites is a relatively recent trend in post-socialist Europe (Nedučín, 2022). In Romania, we are dealing with post-

socialist cities with little experience in this field, and the approach will have to be one that is aware of the social context and that requires the significant involvement, not just pro-forma, of non-institutional actors in the heritage valorization processes industrial.

Even more so, the presence of industrial sites in the mountain area presents unique challenges and opportunities for the valorization of the industrial heritage. On the one hand, their geographical positioning can make accessibility and use of these spaces difficult. On the other hand, the ecological diversity of the mountain space adds an attractive additional well-being for urban innovators, respectively a touristic value to the targeted revitalization projects.

Furthermore, the conversion and preservation of industrial areas is an important cultural objective and promotes sustainable development, as it encourages the reuse of obsolete buildings that are part of the industrial heritage (Loures, 2009).

Cultural creative activities play an important role in the valorization of industrial heritage (Cunningham, 2002). Practically, the present overlaps the past, preserving the memory of the place through the built space, but at the same time bringing elements of innovation. Creative industries represent solutions for the development, conservation and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage, contributing to urban regeneration processes (Chen, Judd and Hawken, 2016).

Industrial cultural heritage, in its new use, can function as a symbol of past greatness, but also as a local resource, material and symbolic, respectively as a constant source of inspiration for emerging entrepreneurs, creative professionals and the entire population (Byrne, 2002). Heritage is interpreted as a legacy of the past that builds up a relationship with the territory, is enhanced in the present and handed down to future generations (Dansero and Governa, manuscript).

Seen as "creative destruction", deindustrialization significantly altered the economic and social structure of cities: it led to the decline of some activities, favoring new ones (Koritz, 1991). Embracing new creative industries, new societal values and openness to culture and sustainable development (Burlina et al., 2023), the existing industrial heritage together with the need to commemorate the peak of industrial development and strong local identity, can represent opportunities to transform cities.

With the aim of preserving the identity and culture of the local community, systematic efforts are needed to preserve and revitalize the heritage, which can favor the development of historical memory and the sense of belonging that the communities in the area have towards the industrial spaces, but which they do not manifest (Cveni c, 2019).

An important aspect to consider is land use policies. The National Circular Economy Strategy of 2022 mentions that the circular design of urban development policies must be taken into account, focusing among others on reducing urban sprawl and prioritizing the use of disused industrial land (Romanian Government, SNEC 2022).

### **Materials and Methodes**

The research methods proposed in the present project are interdisciplinary, they belong not only to geography but also to sociology, anthropology, economics, urban planning and architecture, being both qualitative and quantitative.

The sources of information and data are also complex, with increased attention to the specialized literature, but also to the programmatic and legislative side. The data collected through interviews from the local community play a crucial role in choosing the types of activities and their implementation, identifying their needs.

In order to understand the perception of the local communities on the mountain industrial heritage, a historical analysis of the space and the local economy is needed. However, we

will not make this a goal in itself, but a basis for reflection on the possibilities of future creative development, with the involvement of local communities.

The main research methods will be the deductive and inductive reasoning method, the comparative, qualitative and diachronic multiscale analysis method (to study the process of changing space over time). The necessary data will be collected by accessing both physical and online bibliographic materials, through questionnaires, interviews, surveys, using digital tools such as google extensions (google forms, google maps), but also by observing the situation in the field, through focus groups, life stories, memoirs, etc. The media analysis method will also be used, mainly focused on representative case studies for the studied area, that of the mountainous Banat. A special role will be reserved for the evolutionary analysis of institutional documents for planning the processes of economic restructuring and reconversion, heritage conservation, reindustrialization and community reconstruction, including through the development of the creative cultural sector.

Data centralization will be achieved by creating a digital database that will represent the support for their spatial analysis with the help of GIS programs. A mapping of the spaces belonging to the industrial heritage but also of the creative cultural initiatives, with their scope and area of activity, will be carried out.

In order to verify the sustainability of the capitalization processes, it will be necessary to implement some pilot actions following the analysis of good practices already applied in similar spaces, centered on the creative industries. Following their realization, the impact on the economic as well as social and cultural dimension will be measured.

### **Case study**

The Banatul Montan (Mountain Banat) was selected as a research subject due to the fact that it constitutes the first classical industrial region on the current territory of Romania. The industrial heritage currently existing in this region is characterized by a significant stratification, the result of different stages of industrial evolution.

The origin of industrial activities in the mountainous Banat dates back to the 18th century, during the Austrian rule, when the first industrial centers were established, namely Oravița, Moldova Nouă, Bocșa, Dognecea and Reșița (CHEBUȚIU, 2010). During that period (1718 – 1918), Banatul Montan consolidated its multicultural character, which contributed to the effervescence of the local classical industry (Neumann, 1997). The colonization of the region with settlers brought from the traditional industrial regions of the Habsburg Empire (Tyrol, Styria, Silesia, Bohemia, Slovakia, etc.) to live with the majority Romanians, led to the formation of a multicultural community with a strong industrial identity, which deserves to be valued and reactivated.

A significant phase in the evolution of the Banatul Montan industry is represented by the interwar period, followed by the communist era, in which urbanization took place at a rapid pace, centered around the initial industrial cores. It is worth noting that, throughout these transformations, the industrial complex in the Mountain Banat has maintained an integrated structure, facilitating a unified perspective and strategy in addressing all economic, social and environmental aspects.

A determining factor in the selection of the mountain Banat as a subject of study is *the diversity of the existing industrial heritage* objectives in this region. The Mountain Banat range is home to a variety of industrial sites, including mining areas, ore processing plants, factories illustrating historical technologies, as well as hydroelectric plants, old transport infrastructure and artistic elements reflecting the social history of work (Jigoria-Oprea and Popa, 2017). All this represents a valuable potential that can be exploited.

At the same time, heavy industry has generated, within cities, extensive areas of contaminated land (brownfields) that require reconversion. Through sustainable

capitalization and the implementation of creative solutions, these brownfields can represent opportunities for the economic development of the Mountain Banat and for its reintegration into the sphere of influence of the Timișoara regional center (Durey, 2019).

By reintegrating into the functional circuit the diversity of heritage existing in the Mountain Banat, assigning it new meanings and uses, this industrial heritage has the potential to stimulate economic growth and urban development in a sustainable manner. In addition, it can become a point of attraction for emerging creative industries and young entrepreneurs who have left their hometowns (Sessa, Russo and Sica, 2022).

Also, the mountain Banat is an attractive tourist destination, with protected areas and biodiversity, as well as with numerous recognized tourist objectives. They can be harmoniously integrated into the industrial heritage valorization process.

### **Expected results**

Starting from the questions "Does industrial heritage represent a resource for creative industries?" and "Is the local community in the mountain areas open to creative industries?", and in the idea of a sustainable economic development of the local mountain communities, developed in the past on the basis of Fordist industries, the object of study of the research paper identified several main directions.

First of all, we propose to analyze the current situation with regard to the potential industrial heritage existing in the mountain area, in order to identify the possible typologies of industrial structures that lend themselves to an adaptive reuse, with a view to valorization.

In this sense, the evaluation of the existing legislative framework, which can favor or hinder the regeneration processes of the industrial heritage, is an indispensable step.

This paper aims to examine and to what extent some components of the industrial heritage of the mountain space can be characterized by the notion of "creative brownfields", these being defined by Pratt as abandoned industrial spaces, with a distinct aesthetic and flexibility in use, which they attract artistic communities and have a significant impact on youth (sub)culture and the development of so-called "cultural neighborhoods" (Pratt, 2009).

Last but not least, by exploring good practices already implemented, we will try to adapt them and propose the realization of pilot initiatives or possible solutions for these spaces, which respond to the social and economic needs of local communities, in order to understand their applicability on long term.

The analysis of the community's local identity, linked to the mountain industrial heritage, and its receptivity to the creative industries will also be considered, in order to identify possible strategies for the reuse of industrial spaces.

The analysis will identify the typologies of creative industries that lend themselves to the analyzed space and how they are perceived by the community to which they are intended.

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