

LASLEA

INTBAU Transylvanian Village Development Workshop

By Matthew Hardy and Susan Parham

The INTBAU Transylvanian Village Development Workshop was held in the medieval village of Laslea, administrative center of the municipality of Laslea, Transylvania, Romania, from August 30 to September 2, 2003. The workshop was organized by Stefan Bocu Forușel (the Norman Foundation for Architecture and Urbanism) and INTBAU, and undertaken in conjunction with the Norwegian Directorate of Cultural Heritage. The government agency is running a three-year conservation and sustainable development project in the district known as PREM (Preserving a Romanian Village for European Union Membership).

INTBAU is grateful to collaborators including the Directorate, the local municipality and the British Charity Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET), supported by BRIT The Prince of Wales who has visited the village on several occasions. MET in 2002 also published a report about the Sasoon villages, written by Kim Wilkie (Associate, with a foreword by the Royal Highness, His Wilkie's report provided a useful basis for much of the data collected. The masterplan is a handy companion with the text of Kim Wilkie's report.

Local partners in the workshop included the Municipality of Laslea, the mayor and councilors provided valuable assistance and information. The local community gave generously in terms of both time and resources, and their hospitality and enthusiasm was greatly appreciated by the participants.

The workshop program was facilitated by The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Norwegian Directorate for Heritage, Bocu Forușel and private sponsors.

Background

To most people outside Romania, Transylvania is a mythical land, a land of legends involving Draculas, vampires, bats and castles. In reality, Transylvania is the fertile elevated plateau bounded by the Carpathian mountains which form the center of the European continent in Romania. 22 million inhabitants have amongst the lowest per capita incomes in Europe. Poverty means that few chemicals are used, and the landscapes are rich in species – from butterflies and wildflowers to European birds, bees and wasps – which have scarcely vanished from much of Europe. Similarly, there are thousands of villages that the intensive farming of the 20th century has virtually erased.

Romans ruled the European Union in the next few years, and the landscape and villages will be subject to huge developments and social pressures. With this in mind, INTBAU went to Transylvania to work with other charitable organizations to help one village plan for the future. The intention is to carry the planning work forward over the next two years to create a series of pilot planning projects in advance of the arrival of the substantial agricultural, retail developments and social changes common elsewhere in the West.

The Sasoon Villages of Transylvania

So-called "Sasoon" (from the Rhaeto-Moed region, near present-day Lunenburg) were introduced to settle in Transylvania from the 12th century and initially established seven towns that contained key routes and transport links. In mining countries, the growth developed hundreds of villages based on a medieval system of land division comprising a series of long narrow plots fronting onto a single, wide main street.

Each plot belonged to an individual village, and houses were built in a distinct pattern (similar to the side yard typology) abutting the northern boundary with a series of rooms in an outfall. This opened a walled courtyard on the south, entered from the street through an arched opening. Behind the house, stables and barns closed the courtyard, beyond which the villagers established vegetable gardens, orchards and crops.

Prospectors for stripplote improvements to one of the many well needed things are the original layout for many of the plots. A proper water supply was high on the list of proposals made at the public meetings and has been the subject of a number of studies. Drawing: Luke Nye-Hughes.

The Flight of the Saxons

During World War II, Romania was occupied by the Axis powers. The remaining German Army in 1944 took some Saxons with it, beginning an exodus that accelerated during the ensuing 45 years of Communist rule. Deported Romanian "Soviet" emigrants to West Berlin joined a Romanian Village for European Union Membership. After the collapse of the Ceausescu regime in 1989, some returning Saxons took advantage of these laws and returned to Germany. Today only 10 percent of a post-war population of 80,000 remains. Those moving to the area now include Romanians moving from the cities after the collapse of state industries, holiday-home buyers and Roma people.

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to assist the long-term sustainable development of the Sasoon villages, with emphasis on ecological systems and organic farming. The participants analyzed the village and produced a preliminary new urbanism masterplan for future development of the village, including the integration of heritage protection and sustainable development.

The final masterplan will include design guidance for new traditional buildings inside the village and for those that future sustainable urban extensions. The masterplan is not only intended as a final plan for development, but also as a guide for the future of the village.

The Churches

The workshop included a seven-day charrette involving the local community, in which an international team of 17 practitioners and students from Western Europe, Scandinavia, the U.S.A., Australia and India worked with 13 Romanian architects, conservationists and engineers, and with local councilors and citizens. Participants brought skills including architecture, civil engineering, urban design, plant planning, regeneration, and property development, as well as research into heritage and local social science. INTBAU secretary and architect Dr. Matthew Hardy, U.S.A., a Belgian architecture designer Joanna Alimannastaru, and a Romanian architect-landscapeur Anne Sadal led the charrette.

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Project Name: INTBAU Transylvanian Village Development Workshop

Location: Laslea, Romania

Classification: Infill and urban extension

Designer: INTBAU workshop participants

Consultants: Susan Parham (CAG Consultants, London), Forușel Courtan (Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs), Jessica Douglas-Horne (Mihai Eminescu Trust), Neil Page and Sarah French (ADEPT Program), Dorin Bocu, Senator Hermann Fabian

Architects: Anne Sadal, Joanna Alimannastaru, Matthew Hardy (team leaders)

Developer: Council of Laslea

Design Date: 2003

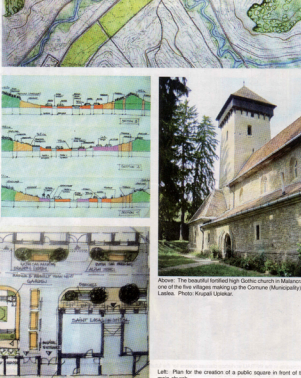
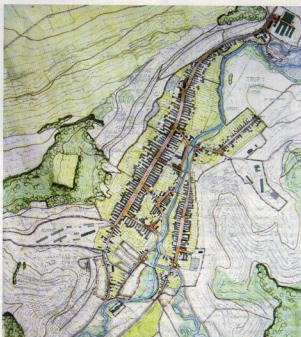
Status: Masterplan design

Site Area: N/A

Residential: 92 units
Houses: 40
Rearhouses: 40 (side yard typology to match existing)
Apartments: 12 (renovation of existing building)
Live/Work Units: 60 (all houses new and existing in Laslea are live-work)

Commercial: 300 square meters of office and retail

Public & Civic Program: New public market, youth center, building information and training center and public baths. Improvements to water supply and drainage. Renovations to public parks and streets. Flood mitigation work and environmental improvement of streams.



Left: Plan for the creation of a public square in front of the main church.

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Workshop Components

The workshop comprised a series of elements intended to inform the participants about key aspects of the region, its history, people and architecture. These included:

- Tours of the region's architecture of Sasoon houses and fortified churches with expert commentary from Romanian specialists.
- Visits to fortified churches and to Sasoon houses initiated by the MET with William Blackie, Caroline Ferrel and Mihai Cusan, and to a model farm demonstrating sustainable "micro-farming" techniques managed by Wilfrid Rucker as facilitated by Dorin Courtan of the PREM project.

A range of lectures and briefings included:

- The theory of new urbanism in a European context, by Matthew Hardy and Joanna Alimannastaru.
- Planning in the region by architect Dorin Bocu.
- The history of Transylvania by Francisc Courtan of the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs.
- The ADEPT programme, by Neil Page and Sarah French.
- The proposal to establish a protected area by Jessica Douglas-Horne of the MET.
- The Sasoon churches of Transylvania by Senator Hermann Fabian.

Public Consultation

There was an extensive public consultation program as part of the workshop, which was based in the Central Cultural Cultural Center in the heart of the village, allowing citizens to drop in at any time. Most formal events included:

- An evening public meeting attended by the mayor, Councilors and 140 citizens, which took place in the community school local issues, problems and goals for the future.
- An informal presentation of "work in progress" conceived feedback from the community on draft proposals, attended by around 100 residents.

A public exhibition on the final evening of the workshop to present the proposed masterplan and supporting documentation and letters to community views.

During the workshop a questionnaire on attitudes to cultural heritage, commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage, was conducted by participants under the direction of London-based planner/urban designer Susan Parham, assisted by Terry Page of the Directorate. The results influenced the overall design masterplan.

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Data Collection

Participants collected a wealth of data about the community of Laslea, including:

- Landscape ecology and climate;
- Cultural heritage;
- Urban fabric: housing and other built form typologies;
- Services and facilities;
- Infrastructure (especially the key issue of water supply);
- Transport and access;
- Human activities including enterprises and employment, notably in traditional agriculture;
- Population profile and village typology issues; and
- Governance, planning and taxation matters.

Masterplan

The masterplan produced by the participants included the following key elements:

- Landmarks
- An existing proposal for a conservation area including the Sasoon buildings, should be extended to the edge of the woodland surrounding the village, encompassing the enterprises, houses, vine, vegetable gardens, and farm land comprising the cultural landscape.
- A biodiversity corridor and linear park should be developed along the river system.

The masterplan also proposed a network, including paths along the river system and on back alleys, should be widened and new paths built, all simply marked and mapped to promote walking tourism.

Houses and Shops

- There are a number of households with outbuildings or outfalling from their rear yards connected to gas, electricity and water should be connected as soon as possible.
- Assistance and training should be given to those in need of housing to meet their housing requirements.

The masterplan shows proposals for new housing areas in northern and southern areas of the village to accommodate current population growth.

Traditional housing typologies should be protected and maintained by use of traditional materials and restoration techniques.

- Traditional enterprises should be protected and enhanced through street paving and measures to slow traffic.

Services and Facilities

- Low-impact ecological drainage and sewage systems should be installed, with



Bob's eye view of the northern village entrance, preserving and incorporating an existing internal settlement. Drawing: Robert Patterson.

common service trenching used when installing improvements.

- Public halls should be developed close to the dispensary.
- A youth center should be developed at the old cinema next to the Cinema Cultural.

New pedestrian bridges should be developed at points shown on the master plan.

- Feral pumps should be located in a low key manner at the center of the village.

Nodes of Activity

- Existing nodes of activity within the village that are supported by walkable connections should be supported and reinforced by new activities as appropriate.
- A simple public market structure, proposed near the key intersection of the two main streets, close to the river, café and general store.

Urban Infill

- There are sites to the west, east and north within the village, found suitable for mixed-use developments, or down to the masterplan. The balance between housing and other uses will vary as appropriate.

The vacant sites on the main street should be developed as a civic building to maintain the traditional building line and to close the visual termination at the junction.

Urban Expansion

- Participants proposed developing new housing and other uses within the village before developing outside. These areas identified for sustainable urban extensions within walking distance of existing facilities are shown on the masterplan. Few citizens of Laslea own cars.

A center for building construction information and skills training should be developed in a central location within the village.

- An internet facility could simply be provided at the library, general store or café rather than relying on a public terminal.



Study drawing of residential buildings in the village. Very low owners own cars, and most daily driving is without walking distance. A network of paths leads from the village to the nearest agricultural lands beyond.