

## **ALBA IULIA. Integrated revitalization of historical patrimony**

### **The Princely Palace Rehabilitation Project**

#### **Another step in the rehabilitation of the Alba Iulia Citadel**

ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE PROMOTION OF THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH NGO'S AND PRIVATE PARTNERS IS A GREAT TOOL TO VALORISE SITES AND TACKLE THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES THAT ARISES FROM MANAGING HUGE HERITAGE SITES.

Alba Iulia Municipality has an Integrated Urban Development Strategy for 2014 - 2023 which covers as well the cultural management of the city and the cultural development at short, medium and long term. Alba Iulia intends to become a city for tourists, a city for citizens and a city for investors in 2023.

The city centre of the city is an ancient citadel founded in Roman times full of historical buildings.

It is remarkable the high degree of concentration of monumental gems in a physical area dominating the city, inside the Alba Iulia Citadel. Here the visitor is driven through a collection of these evidences such as the Apulum Roman camp, the Transylvania Princely Palace, both the Catholic and Orthodox Cathedrals or

the Union Hall in which the Romanian Nation was declared, without forgetting other cultural sites such as the Batthyaneum Library or the Museikon & National Union Museums.



The city has made a remarkable job in its promotion (a strategy in part developed under the Urbact project "City Branding"). Initially they targeted residents that still had in mind the long period where the citadel was the headquarters of the army and civilians couldn't go inside. That time, citizens look at the monument as an opaque closed structure sitting right in city centre. So, there was no tradition of a public use. In 1994 the army was decommissioned and the municipality took over and started to manage the place. Since then, the city council has spent over 8 million euro to rehabilitate most of the fortification and the majority of buildings.

This is a lot of money for such a small city showing that there is a strong commitment of the decision-makers to bring back the citadel to its former glory, only made possible by the application to structural funds made available for the country from the EU. The public sector was one important support to revitalize the site as several services such as the Tourism Office were installed there reusing rehabilitated buildings and several monuments were open to public fruition such as the creation of the Museum Apulum showing and explaining the remains of the old roman military camp that once occupied the central square of the citadel. In fact, the site is fast becoming one the major highlights of tourism in Transylvania.

However, as the citadel becomes more and rehabilitated and more visitors are attracted to this astonishing patrimony, the municipality is facing a sustainability problem to keep up with the efforts to do more works in buildings and public spaces while at the same time have to manage an increasing number of structures that put stress on the city budget. To tackle this challenge the city developed a strategic plan to valorise the site with the help of the private sector.

Following this initiative, In November 2003 the first private investment in the citadel was implemented with the opening of café/bar/shop "PUB 13" after seven months of restoration of the space. In 2006 the ex-storehouse of the imperial army was rehabilitated and its exploration concession was leased for 49 years to a private company that installed a hotel there. This provided a stable income for the city of 800 euros / month and 15% from liquid profit of the hotel per year. Since many more cafés and other small businesses open at the site creating the necessary critical mass to turn the project more sustainable.

In this context, to promote the site among residents and also abroad, Alba Iulia Municipality organized the greatest human embrace in the world, in the ditches of the citadel. This event was organized in 29 of May 2009 and according to the officials from Guinness Book, 9.758 people participated in this "big hug". The event mobilised local students from the University, High Schools and many more volunteers, financed by sponsors. This was the starting point of well-structured campaign that is still going on to put the citadel in the bucket list of visitors to Transylvania.

### **The Princely Palace Project**

The INT-HERIT looked at the rehabilitation projects currently going on at the citadel and set focus in a particular building - the Princely Palace. This a building included in the national historical monument list. The



Princely Palace is an important architectural complex. The history of the palace includes many stages of construction across the centuries - Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, as well as from the 19th century and the 20th century - with rebuilding, reconstruction and restoration works. There's a good part here from the history of fortifications (Roman and Medieval) and the history of several institutions with major importance in the history of Transylvania.



Through the rehabilitation of the Palace another phase of the citadel project will be completed and with that a new area previously abandoned will become a lively area with the following equipment:

- A museum of the Principality of Transylvania;
- Setting up a cultural centre and a conference centre;
- Arrangement for temporary or permanent exhibitions and workshops for artists, bookstore and café;
- Setting up commercial spaces on the ground floor;
- Setting up a kitchen / baker in the former kitchen on the ground floor of the E Body and a dining room;
- Reconstitution of the gate from the entrance to the palace;



The project was initiated in 2017 by the municipality with the support of European funds. After a complex process the works started in December 2018 and when will last till August 2020. The decision to choose this building is mainly because of timing, i.e., the works were prepared and initiated during the project duration period which allow the city council to follow the process throughout its implementation to identify the problems and challenges found in order to help the city to devise the best solutions to keep the project moving and reach its goals.



This is a case where a strategy is in place, the necessary resources are available, namely funding, and experienced technicians are available to collaborate in the project implementation. However, even if

these pre-conditions are reunited, the city always faces many difficulties to pass from the strategic plan to the actual action plan has many hurdles and constraints are put in the way of the project. The city always had to struggle through a sea of bureaucracy in the public procurement process that hampers advances in the project. Moreover the legal framework in Romania is very averse to PPP's turning almost impossible to look for partners in the private sector as this would prevent the project to be supported by public funds.



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*"We can see already results that we can quantify as important. Through the restauration of the citadel and a well done promotion and marketing plan , our city become more visible as the number of tourists has increased every year. But it's also important for locals that can discover the greatness of a city with more than 2000 years of history. Increasing the number of tourists means increasing the cash flow for entrepreneurs and business will grow in this area"*  
*Carmen Preja, director of the National Centre for Information and Tourism Promotion*

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*"In order for us to link our past history with the future we want to restore all the buildings in the citadel. This is a very important thing because we now have a lot of restored monuments and buildings to show to visitors"*  
*Liviu Stanciu, ULG Member, Communication and PR Manager*



## **What's Next?**

As the site regains his long lost glory, the municipality is working on ways to increase the ROI of these investments by rebranding the city marketing and promote the organization of events that can increase the number of the visitors to the site and also the number of stays of foreign visitors.



In this context, in September of 2018 the Association of Cluj-Napoca, together with Alba Iulia City Council and Kaufland Romania, organized an exceptional festival – “Joy in Motion” - involving the community during the 2 days in games, contests and activities involving the movement

As the city celebrates 100 years of the reunification of Romania, the city decided to mark this historical event with a special event by organising another Guinness record break. The event gathered thousands of people from Alba Iulia and other communities from Romania to create the #CelMaiMare100 (#TheBiggest100). Guinness World Record has recently published the latest record shot down in Alba Iulia, "The largest



image of people in a country / continent", in which 4,807 people recreated Romania's map, having the number "100" in the middle.

The engagement of citizens in the protection and valorisation of city patrimony group people together around a cause and empower them for a true appropriateness of their cultural heritage. Together with a very well-structured campaign in external markets, the city is gaining momentum as figures of residents and tourists are steadily growing every year. This is a case where all the pieces are put to work together and the changes are already visible in the city. For a small city as Alba Iulia, cultural heritage is an engine to boost local economy and create a true lively and prosperous city in the upcoming years. The city of 2000 years of history is writing its next chapter.

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**By Pedro Soutinho, INT-HERIT LE**

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### **Videos**

Alba Iulia Vox pop video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80ajysmhsGU>

The Pincely Palace Video Case: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxaKjZp9HrA>

Alba Iulia Transnational Meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-jgYrw2Mhs>

### **About the INT-HERIT Project**

The INT-HERIT project is an Implementation Network under the Urbact Programme that identifies, collects and exchanges knowledge across nine small to medium-size cities sharing similar challenges



