



European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2024)

625-Conservation and Adaptive Reuse 1. Conservation & Adaptive Reuse



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Conservation and Adaptive Reuse of the St. Michael Roman Catholic Gothic Church from Cluj-Napoca

Entry details

General information

Main country of application Romania

In case there are other official partners involved in the project, please list the country(ies) they come from

Architectural survey, team of Department for History of Architecture and of Monuments Budapest University of Technology and Economics from Hungary, lead by: prof. dr. MEZŐS Tamás

Name of the building, site or work of art St. Michael Roman Catholic Church from Cluj-Napoca

Address of the building, site or work of art

Piața Unirii nr. 0, 400133 Cluj-Napoca, Cluj County, Romania

Type (select one type only, as applicable): Building

Brief description of the project

Experience the revival of Cluj-Napoca's iconic Church of Saint Michael. From 2015 to 2022, a monumental restoration effort brought this Gothic masterpiece back to life. With a total investment of 30,741,134.23 lei, including significant EU funding, the project reinforced its structure, restored facades, and modernized installations. Unearthing historical treasures, the Neogothic tower now offers a breathtaking exhibition space with panoramic city views. This meticulous restoration preserves the church's cultural legacy, integrating it into the tourist circuit, and enriching Cluj's heritage landscape for generations to come.

Start date of the project	2016-08-31
Completion date of the project	2022-08-01
Website(s) of the project/nominee	https://szentmihalytemplom.ro
Does the site or heritage in question have national/regional/local cultural heritage designation or protection status in its country?	Yes
If yes, please specify:	
The St. Michael Roman Catholic Church from Cluj-Napoca has National cultural heritage designation with the following registration number CJ-II-m-A-07469	

Is the site or heritage in question included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, either as a single World Heritage Site or as part of one larger site?	No
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If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to the public?	Yes
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If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to people with disabilities?

| The restored Church of Saint Michael in Cluj-Napoca is partially equipped with facilities and features to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

Contact details

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Entrant's position	Project Coordinator
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Owner's position	Dean Parish Priest
Organisation of the owner	Saint Michael Roman Catholic Parish – Cluj-Napoca
Email address of the owner	aszlar@yahoo.com
Name of the project leader	Adam MAKSAJ
Project leader's position	Project Coordinator
Organisation of the project leader	General designer M&M DESIGN LTD
Email of the project leader	maksaj.adam@gmail.com
Telephone of the project leader	+40744263185

Concise summary

Concise summary

The Roman Catholic Church of St. Michael in Cluj-Napoca, an unparalleled European architectural gem, embarked on an extensive restoration journey from August 2016 to 2022. Nestled in the city's vibrant center, this church epitomizes faith, history, and artistic prowess. Over the years, the wear of time and natural disasters took a toll on its grandeur. To arrest this decline and reintroduce it as a pivotal destination in European tourism, a project was initiated.

The mission was clear: to revive and enhance this link between the past and contemporary Europe. The task, however, wasn't without its challenges. The COVID lockdown imposed unexpected difficulties, ranging from logistical disruptions to labor shortages, which tested the resilience and adaptability of the entire restoration team.

Despite these challenges, the results were remarkable. Beyond mere structural reinforcements and façade revivals, the project's depth was evident in the interior refurbishments and modern enhancements it brought. Moreover, archaeological explorations during this period unveiled treasures like original architectural fragments and invaluable medieval art, enriching the church's narrative.

A significant milestone was the opening of the tower to the public. This new feature showcased an exhibition area, providing visitors with insights into the church's rich history and the restoration journey. But the true highlight awaited visitors at the tower's zenith. Here, they could behold breathtaking panoramic views of Cluj-Napoca, making it a vantage point that connected the church's past with the living, breathing city below.

From a financial perspective, the restoration's total expenditure amounted to 30,741,134.23 lei (6,148,000 Euro). Funding was majorly supported by the European Union (ERDF) with a contribution of 15,626,223.96 lei (3,125,000 Euro). The national exchequer further pitched in with 2,389,893.08 lei (478,000 Euro).

This revitalized Church of St. Michael stands not only as a beacon of Cluj-Napoca's rich heritage but also as a testament to Europe's commitment to preserving its illustrious history, even in the face of modern-day challenges like the COVID pandemic.

Historical background

Historical background with dates

The Church boasts a rich historical background dating back to the 14th century. Its construction commenced after the indulgence letter of 1349 in Avignon, referencing the earlier church building. Over almost 150 years, with unwavering support from Hungarian kings, including Sigismund of Luxembourg and King Matthias, and contributions from figures like priest Benedict, the church evolved through various stages. Architectural elements like the spiral staircase in the sanctuary and biblical depictions on the main pilasters were added, imbuing the space with religious and human touch. The 16th century marked the final phase, with the raising of the western towers, though work ceased at this stage. The church underwent significant transformations during the Reformation and under Habsburg rule. Its significance extends beyond religious function, playing pivotal roles in political events. This church stands as an emblematic Gothic structure as cultural and spiritual heritage.

Value and significance in its local/regional/national context

The Church of Saint Michael, situated prominently in the main square of the city, is an architectural marvel that holds immense significance on local, regional, and national scales. Recognized as a national landmark under the code CJ-II-m-A-07469, this Gothic structure serves as a beacon of Transylvania's rich heritage. Its deep-rooted connections to royalty and pivotal historical figures underscore Cluj's evolution over the centuries. Beyond its grandeur and exquisite architecture, which cements its position as the second-largest church in Transylvania, embodies regional pride and historical reverence. Renowned art historian Lajos Kelemen eloquently encapsulates its value, stating, "Of the oldest architectural monuments in Cluj Napoca, it is the first in terms of size, age, historical and art historical significance." As it stands tall amidst the backdrop of a modernizing Europe, the church's restoration underscores the paramount importance of preserving historical edifices that bear witness to the region's rich history and culture.

Former and new use of the building/site, if applicable

The Church of Saint Michael, originally a place of Catholic worship, retained its religious function through the centuries. Today, it continues as a functioning Catholic church, while also serving as a major cultural and historical landmark in Cluj-Napoca. Additionally, with the completion of the project, the Neogothic tower will house an exhibition space. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore exhibits while enjoying panoramic views of the city, providing an immersive experience that bridges history with the vibrant present of Cluj-Napoca. This innovative use of the tower further enriches the cultural and educational offerings of the Church.

State of conservation of the building/site/work of art before the project commenced

Before the restoration, the church showed alarming signs of degradation – from cracked facades to weakened foundational structures, posing risks and diminishing its original grandeur. Prior to the project, the church exhibited signs of aging and degradation, necessitating comprehensive restoration. Elements like the stone masonry, vaults, and interior components required attention to ensure the long-term preservation of this significant heritage site.

Conservation work undertaken

Aims and objectives of the project.

The restoration initiative was envisioned to achieve three primary goals: structural conservation, enhanced accessibility for the differently-abled, and the promotion of cultural tourism. Recognizing the church's potential to elevate European tourism, there was an expectation to see a 6% annual visitor increase, bridging the gap between historical relevance and contemporary interest. The project's primary aim was the meticulous restoration of the Church of Saint Michael, focusing on structural reinforcement, façade restoration, and interior refurbishment. This effort sought to conserve its historical and

cultural significance for future generations. Additionally, the project aimed to integrate the church into the tourist circuit, fostering cultural and educational value.

Historical and technical research undertaken for the project.

Before embarking on the restoration journey, extensive research using technological tools like 3D scanning, archival studies, and consultations with conservation experts formed the project's backbone. These provided invaluable insights, allowing precise planning to ensure the church's authentic essence remained intact.

Thorough historical and technical research informed the restoration process. Archaeological explorations revealed original architectural elements, providing invaluable insights into the church's evolution. Additionally, in-depth studies of architectural styles, materials, and construction techniques guided the restoration efforts, ensuring authenticity and historical accuracy.

The conservation principles during the research, study, design and execution:

The main governing principles can be synthesized, as follows:

1. Conserve as it found,
2. Conserve fabric, structure and material with the minimum intervention possible;
3. Use of compatible materials and technologies;
4. Assure a sustainable use and maintenance for the building

Researches and studies prior the design and execution:

Art historian research and study

Building biology survey

Geotechnical study

Physic-chemical and microclimatic study

Archeological research

Stone restorer study

Mural painting restorers study

Wood, painted wood restorer study

Dendrochronological study

Architectural survey

Design and conservation work carried out and the stages of implementation of the project.

The project unfolded in multiple stages, encompassing extensive restoration efforts. This included structural reinforcement, façade restoration, carpentry, finishes, and modernization of installations. The Neogothic tower's opening was secured for tourist access. The old floors and wooden staircases were replaced with metal structures, enhancing safety and accessibility. Artistic components made from stone and murals underwent meticulous restoration, preserving their original splendor. The northern apse and Schleyinig chapel saw reconfiguration to restore the historical treading level. Architectural interventions were conservative, prioritizing the conservation of the original textures and colors of stone materials.

The structural interventions were presented on the drawings recording the structural deteriorations. The survey of damages continued during the execution, for e.g. the degree of damage caused by the 18th century earthquake to the former north-west towers supporting arches became visible only after the removal of the 300 year old completions.

The historic Baroque roof structure, due to the correctness of the structural concept, only the biologically damaged elements and not functioning joints needed to be restored. The most important structural intervention was the placement of the steel 3D trass-girder, above the vaults, in the axis of the buttresses, which increase the safety of the walls above the arches, between the naves, in case of an earthquake.

The original Gothic cross and star vaults of stone masonry have been partially or totally rebuilt several times in their history, using brickwork and occasionally doubling arches on the extrados. Cracks have been wedged, grouted and the surface repointed, and in places treated with geosteel and NHL render reinforced with fibreglass mesh on the extrados of the vaults. In places, the joints were reinforced with inox spiral bars. The state of the intrados of the vaults was documented after the removal of the plasters by orthophotography.

Problems encountered and justification for the decisions taken to overcome these problems, both before and during the project.

Challenges included structural degradation and biological decay, particularly in the roof truss. The insertion of a steel structure above the vaults addressed earthquake safety. Additionally, the restoration required delicate handling of original elements, ensuring their preservation.

During restoration, hidden damages, especially from 18th-century earthquakes, came to light. These challenges were addressed head-on with expert consultations, ensuring the monument's longevity.

Building and conservation techniques and materials employed and any traditional crafts and skills that were used.

The meticulous restoration of the Church of Saint Michael was a harmonious blend of preserving historical authenticity and introducing modern innovation. By employing locally-made elements, the restoration stayed true to the church's historical essence. Techniques spanned from traditional crack-fixing, injection, and re-jointing to advanced reinforcements using GeoSteel or fiberglass mesh. Stainless steel spiral bars, an innovative touch, were deftly inserted into joints. The craft involved was a testament to the rich tradition, especially evident in the intricate restoration of the roof structure, stone components, and precious murals.

This seamless marriage of age-old craftsmanship and cutting-edge methodologies was further emphasized with the integration of intelligent lighting, enhancing the church's architectural magnificence. A new sound system was embedded to enrich the visitor's experience. The organ, a centerpiece of its musical heritage, was restored to its former glory. Additionally, to meet evolving liturgical needs, the interior underwent thoughtful remodeling for contemporary worship practices.

Results and impact

Summary of the main results achieved and knowledge that has been gained. List the ways that the project/initiative contributes to the preservation and/or enhancement of the historical, cultural, environmental, educational and/or social values of the heritage in question. Mention the project's impact on conservation policy and practice, if any.

The project resulted in the meticulous preservation of the Church of Saint Michael, safeguarding its historical and cultural significance. Notable achievements include the restoration of architectural elements, murals, and stone components. The integration of the church into the tourist circuit enhances cultural and educational value. This project has contributed to the conservation policy and practice, setting a benchmark for future restoration endeavors. The safety enhancements, particularly in earthquake-prone areas, ensure the longevity of this architectural gem. The project has resurrected St. Michael's Church to its former glory. Apart from its restored architectural brilliance, the church, once again, has become a focal point for cultural rendezvous, drawing visitors from across Europe. Its success is a beacon for other heritage sites, emphasizing conservation's importance in a fast-paced world.

Our common Heritage, the built environment is the key to our knowledge of the past, our understanding of the present and confidence in the future. This legacy inspires us not only to care for the artefacts of previous generations, but also to make the right decisions for future generations. This learning process is active and dynamic.

This project can be a good illustration of the positive values of networking in favor of cultural heritage, built and natural environment. The future of our rich Transylvanian cultural heritage will be best assured and sustained by partnerships between the public and private sectors. Such synergies, at all levels and between all sizes of organization and the public, will be a positive feature of the future cultural environment and its sustainable development.

The highest priority is to retain the historic character and appearance of the Church. Through the rigorous application of the highest international standards of conservation throughout all phases of the work, the project will serve as a demonstration of excellence throughout Romania and the region.

Aspects of the project that can be considered innovative within its area or field.

The project showcased innovation in its structural reinforcement methods, utilizing a steel structure with lattice girders to enhance earthquake safety. Conservation interventions prioritized minimal additions, preserving original textures and colors. The use of locally-made new elements and the insertion of stainless steel reinforcements demonstrated a balance of

tradition and modernity.

The project's true innovation lay in seamlessly integrating cutting-edge technology, like 3D imaging, with age-old restoration practices, setting a precedent for future conservation endeavors.

Measures to ensure the sustainability/future viability of the project (in terms of future plans and funding).

The sustainability of the Church of Saint Michael's restoration project is rooted in a multifaceted approach that intertwines preservation with forward-thinking strategies. By employing meticulous restoration techniques, the project has paved the way for the monument's continued resilience and relevance for future generations. This dedication is bolstered by ongoing maintenance agendas and consistent inspections, further ensuring its architectural longevity.

Beyond structural preservation, financial sustainability is addressed through educational programs and tourism initiatives. Notably, the beautifully restored organ, a centerpiece of the church's rich musical heritage, is set to be a focal point for organ concerts. These musical events, aimed at both the local community and tourists, promise to generate revenue while enriching the cultural milieu of the region.

The primary essence of the church remains undisturbed: serving the spiritual and religious needs of its congregation. This balanced approach guarantees the church's viability in both spiritual nourishment and sustainable preservation.

Environmental sustainability of the project and contribution to climate action (in terms of results, techniques, materials employed, methodologies etc.), if relevant.

The project's emphasis on conservation aligns with environmental sustainability. The use of locally-made materials minimizes environmental impact. Additionally, the restoration efforts contribute to the conservation of natural resources by preserving the existing structure rather than resorting to extensive replacements.

Eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient lighting, and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices ensured the project's alignment with global environmental standards.

Project's interaction with the surrounding community and landscape.

The Church of Saint Michael serves as a focal point in Cluj-Napoca's cultural landscape. It engages with the community through cultural and religious events. Its presence in the main square enhances the city's aesthetic appeal and cultural identity.

The church's restoration revitalized Cluj-Napoca's spirit, reinforcing community pride, and creating an inclusive space for gatherings, events, and education.

Dissemination of the project's results and knowledge gained and any outreach or educational activities.

The project's results have been disseminated through educational programs, guided tours, and outreach initiatives. This includes exhibitions and educational materials that provide insights into the restoration process and the historical significance of the church.

The church's successful restoration has been shared across various platforms, seminars, and workshops, inspiring other European cities to undertake similar heritage projects.

During the four years of construction, we have tried to ensure the greatest possible openness on the site. The works were visited by professors and students at the Technical University of Cluj (Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Civil Engineering), Babeş-Bolyai University, University of Arts and Design in Cluj-Napoca, participants of several international conferences, professional groups, ecclesiastical and public personalities, students from elementary and high schools and numerous individuals.

Involvement of youth, community and/or non-traditional audiences.

The project engaged local youth and community members through educational programs and guided tours. Workshops and events provided opportunities for hands-on learning about restoration techniques and the church's historical significance.

Interactive sessions have been organized, igniting a passion for heritage conservation among the youth and community.

Transferability of the initiative to other contexts and its scalability potential.

The meticulous restoration methods and conservation techniques employed in this project serve as a valuable blueprint for similar endeavors worldwide. The balance of tradition and innovation showcased here can be adapted to various cultural and historical contexts.

The project's methodologies, blending tradition with innovation, can inspire and guide similar European heritage projects, emphasizing scalability and adaptability.

Any related work that still needs to be completed, if applicable.

The restoration project has achieved its primary objectives, with no significant pending work. Ongoing maintenance and periodic inspections will ensure the continued preservation of the Church of Saint Michael.

Continuous monitoring and periodic maintenance remain on the owners agenda, ensuring the preservation of this European gem.

European and international dimension

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

The Church of Saint Michael stands as a beacon of European heritage, reflecting the intersection of architectural styles and historical influences. Its ties to Hungarian kings and key historical figures underscore its European significance. The meticulous restoration effort sets a standard for heritage preservation across Europe.

St. Michael's Church stands as a symbol of European unity, representing a shared history and culture, and reinforcing the collective European identity.

Costs of the project/initiative

Costs of the project (in euro), financial and management arrangements, funding partners and/or the type of funding.

The project's total cost was 30,741,134.23 lei (6,148,000 Euro) with funding from the European Union (ERDF) contributing 15,626,223.96 lei (3,125,000 Euro), along with a national contribution of 2,389,893.08 lei (478,000 Euro).

These financial arrangements were facilitated by a collaborative effort between various stakeholders, including project management companies, designers, and technical support teams.

The funding was provided by:

The Government of Romania Minister for development, public works and administration thru Regional Operative Program 2014–2020, Priority Axis 5.1 (EU funds)

The Government of Hungary

Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd, Hungary

State Secretariat for Cults, Romania

City Hall of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Treasured Cluj Association, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Generous persons and private companies

With a budget of 30,741,134.23 lei, the project saw substantial financial support from the EU, reinforcing the significance of preserving shared European heritage.

Funding provided by the European Union or the EEA/Norway Grants (including programme, year and amount of the Grant), if any.

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Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

Winning the European Heritage Award/Europa Nostra Award would provide invaluable recognition for the meticulous restoration effort. It would spotlight the project's significance and serve as a testament to the dedication of all involved stakeholders. This recognition would not only honor the heritage of the Church, but also set a benchmark for future restoration endeavors.

Winning would amplify our message on heritage importance, boost tourism, and solidify our commitment to preserving Europe's cultural legacy.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

In the event of winning the Grand Prix, the monetary award would be dedicated to further initiatives focused on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage within Cluj-Napoca and the wider Transylvanian region. The award will fund a permanent exhibition about the project and educational programs, promoting European cultural conservation.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

The recipient of the Grand Prix award would be the Parohia Romano Catolica Sf. Mihail, the Catholic Parish responsible for the Church's stewardship and the driving force behind the successful restoration project. So the beneficiary, Parohia Romano Catolica Sf. Mihail, dedicated to heritage conservation, would receive the award.

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards? Europa Nostra website

Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards? Yes

On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form? 10

Do you have any comments on the application form or suggestions that you would like to share with us?

No

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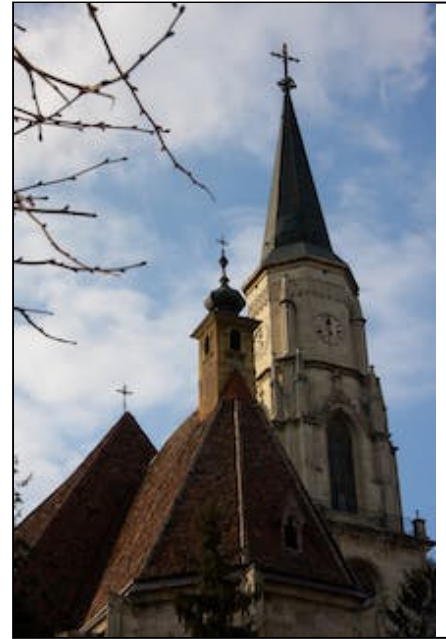
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062-ext-after.jpg 2.9 MiB



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[151-int-before.jpg](#) 3.1 MiB



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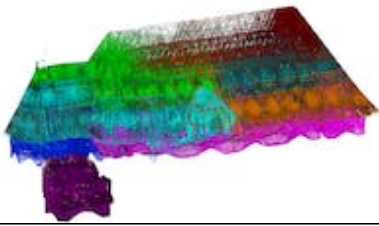
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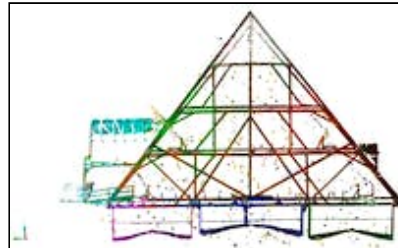
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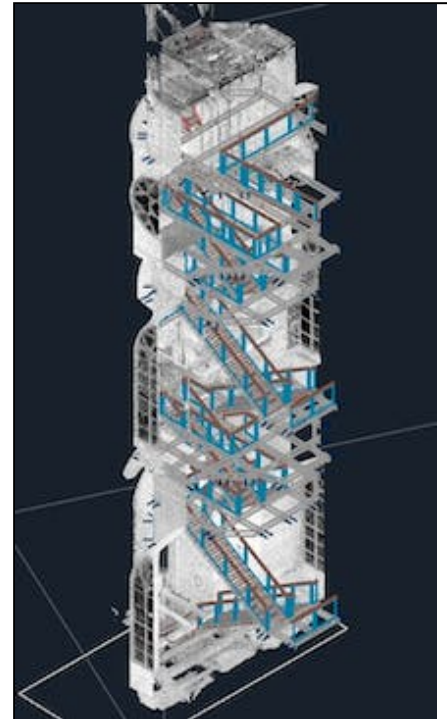
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The story of the time cap...

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Attachment name
Our Saint Michael's Chur...

<https://www.youtube.co...>

Attachment name
Saint Michael hymn

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