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The Linguistic and Cultural Interpretation of Dissonant Heritage: the ATRIUM Cultural Route

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ABSTRACT

The European Cultural Route ATRIUM (Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes in Europe's Urban Memory) deals with dissonant heritage, referring to a contrast of meaning and value systems between the past and the present. The route will be examined within the framework of a set of communication strategies for cultural routes. This short paper will look at some linguistic aspects related to the ATRIUM route and its 'dissonant heritage'. By analysing some examples of existing promotional approaches related to this particular heritage, it will outline some considerations for a communicative strategy appropriate to the overall narrative structure of the ATRIUM cultural route, with special regard to a bottom-up constructivist approach.

Keywords: Dissonant heritage; ATRIUM cultural route; Architecture of totalitarian regimes; Communication strategies; Constructivist approach

La Rotta Culturale Europea ATRIUM (Architettura dei Regimi Totalitari del Ventesimo secolo nella Gestione Urbana) si occupa del patrimonio scomodo, implicando cioè un contrasto di significati e di sistemi di valori tra passato e presente. L'articolo intende esaminare alcuni aspetti linguistici relativi alla rotta ATRIUM e il suo patrimonio 'dissonante'. Analizzando alcuni materiali promozionali di questo particolare patrimonio, verranno proposte alcune considerazioni per una strategia comunicativa appropriata alla struttura narrativa globale della rotta culturale ATRIUM, con particolare attenzione ad un approccio costruttivista dal basso.

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Keywords: Patrimonio scomodo; Rotta culturale ATRIUM, Architettura dei regimi totalitari; Strategie comunicative; Approccio costruttivista

Introduction

Origins of the ATRIUM cultural route

The origins of the European Cultural Route ATRIUM (Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th century in Europe's Urban Memory) are to be found in the town of Forlì, today lead partner of the route. The medium-sized town features notable traces of architecture built under the Fascist regime. In fact, in the 1920s and 1930s, Mussolini projected the "*città del Duce*", celebrating both Fascism and his own origins in the Forlì area. The ATRIUM project grew out of a contrasting attitude by the local population towards this architectural heritage: the rejection of the Fascist regime and the parallel desire to come to terms with and valorise some elements of this heritage (Leech 2013:150). Against this background, the City Council of Forlì created a partnership network of 18 institutions of 11 different countries (Italy, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Rumania, Slovenia, Serbia and the Slovak Republic), formulating the ATRIUM project, which was funded under the South East Europe Programme from 2011 to 2013. The main objective of the project was the valorisation of this "dissonant" cultural heritage and to create cultural tourism as a motor for economic growth. The principal output of the project was the candidature as a European Cultural Route, which was accepted in 2014. Today, ATRIUM is one of the 32 cultural routes certified by the Council of Europe. Objective is to promote the knowledge and preservation of the European heritage associated with the architecture and history of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, while promoting the principles and values of the Council of Europe. Currently, the route comprises 13 towns and cities in four countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy and Rumania), displaying diverse examples of architecture originating from either communist regimes of Eastern Europe or the Fascist regime in Italy.

The promotion of a material heritage involving such politically sensitive issues requires a careful analysis of how to interpret and present it. There is a constant risk of being misunderstood or accused of historical revisionism with regard to the regimes that built that legacy. For this reason, ATRIUM's political and ethical position is indicated very clearly in its statute, article 2:

"The Association's activity is inspired by the principle of the promotion of the values of democracy and cooperation between peoples as the foundation for peaceful and civil coexistence. In no case and in no way does the Association accept expressions and forms of historical revisionism, exculpation for authoritarian, dictatorial or totalitarian governments."

Celebrative heritage vs. dissonant heritage

According to the British historian David Lowenthal, heritage is very often the celebration of material legacies in order to shape an identity. In reference to the concept of preservation, he states that “buildings are the chief catalyst of collective historical identity. [...] Relics saved [...] link us with our own and other people’s past, and shed glory on nations, neighbourhoods, and individuals” (1985:389). In contrast to such celebrative heritage stand the concepts of dissonant heritage and dark tourism.

‘Dissonant heritage’, according to Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) refers to a contrast of meaning and value systems between past and present. Consequently, it also suggests a discordance of different narratives that co-exist and inconsistencies regarding the representation of a certain history. This raises questions about who, how and in what conditions, should interpret this heritage. Tunbridge and Ashworth assume that all heritage is intrinsically dissonant, involving always some kind of “discordance or lack of agreement and consistency” (1996:20). Within a perspective of marketing theory, they classify four different types of dissonance. First, dissonance is implicit in commodification, i.e. in the development of tourism heritage products. Tensions regard the choice between a homogeneous product reducing the variety of interpretations and aspects of a certain heritage, and a heterogeneous product stressing diversification (ibid.:21-23). Second, dissonance is implicit in place-products as the same location can be simultaneously interpreted in different ways for different audiences (ibid.:24-26). Third, dissonance can also be implicit in content of messages, created by the co-existence of contradictory messages, or by messages of a “history that hurts” (ibid.:27-29). Finally, an extreme example of dissonance is that associated with atrocity. The interpretation of such a highly charged controversy with respect to the identity of both victims and perpetrators creates heritage dissonance as well as unsettling political consequences.

The last example connects directly to the concept of dark tourism. Lennon and Foley define dark tourism as “[...] the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (1996:198). The authors see the current interest in dark tourism as a “fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled [...] as tourism products” (2000:3). They argue that global communication technologies and an increasing industrialization of death have contributed in an important way to this interest in dark tourism/heritage (2000:11).

ATRIUM: dissonant heritage

Against this background, it is clear that ATRIUM cannot be celebratory. Dealing with the architecture and history of totalitarian regimes, the route is inevitably faced with a dissonance of 'history that hurts'. ATRIUM does not fall directly under the category of dark tourism, as it is not primarily dealing with sites of death or atrocity, differently from the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau for instance, which deals exclusively with the 'dark' objects of heritage. Furthermore, ATRIUM faces dissonance in terms of at least four different groups interpreting this heritage from diverse perspectives. The first group, is emphatically NOT a target for this route: those nostalgic for a totalitarian regime. The others include: architectural historians and those interested in formal or aesthetic qualities of the heritage of architectures or urban design; schools and young people, who are a privileged target for European cultural routes; and finally, cultural tourists interested in history. These different target groups need a carefully constructed and accurate historical context. Thus, only a heterogeneous heritage tourism product will be able to respond to these different needs by leaving room to cultural variety, local differences and diverse interpretations. After a short outline of the risks in the communication of dissonant heritage (section 2), sections 3 and 4 will deal with the question of how to present and promote the 'ATRIUM heritage', on a textual level as well as within a constructivist bottom-up approach.

1. Risks in the communication of dissonant heritage

Against the background outlined in the introduction, the dissonance in the heritage ATRIUM deals with needs to be taken into account when promoting the cultural route, including also a careful use of language. Since the 'ATRIUM heritage', even though aesthetically appealing in many cases, does not evoke merely positive associations, but also a critical reflection on the respective regimes, the conventional strategies applied in texts of tourism promotion are not necessarily appropriate in the context of ATRIUM.

A typical element of tourism promotion texts, for instance, is the use of evaluative adjectives (*wonderful, magnificent, etc.*) in order to celebrate the quality and beauty of a place or product (cf. Agorni 2012). In the promotional material on the ATRIUM cultural route, the use of evaluative adjectives is less frequent, avoiding the celebration of the heritage in question. An illustrative example is the comparison of the promotion of two sculptures, both representing figures from Greek mythology (Fig. 1+2) On the one hand, a neoclassical sculpture from the 17th century and on the other hand a sculpture created during the Fascist period: "Ebe, the magnificent sculpture of Canova" vs. "a monumental Icaro". The evaluative adjective 'magnificent' could not be used in

the context of ATRIUM, as it would constitute an unacceptable celebration of the Fascist regime under which the sculpture of Icaro had been created.

This aspect becomes evident also when comparing ATRIUM with an example of another cultural route focusing on a theme that evokes strong positive associations, as in the case of the European Route of Historical and Thermal Towns: wellness, water (elixir of life), health, relax, tradition. A photographic exhibition organised by the towns of the Massif Central in France was entitled: *Les trésors architecturaux des villes d'eaux du Massif Central* [Architectural treasures of thermal towns of the Massif Central] (Fig.3). As there is no dissonance, controversy or discordance regarding the theme, the use of the word 'treasure' is perfectly acceptable. Analogously, a phrase like 'Architectural treasures of totalitarian regimes of Europe's 20th century' would without doubt provoke a major scandal. An evaluative term like 'treasure' constitutes an unacceptable association in the context of totalitarian architecture (Fig. 4), even if the high quality of the respective built heritage may be recognized.

In the following two sections, a few examples of the risks of celebration when communicating dissonant heritage will be presented.

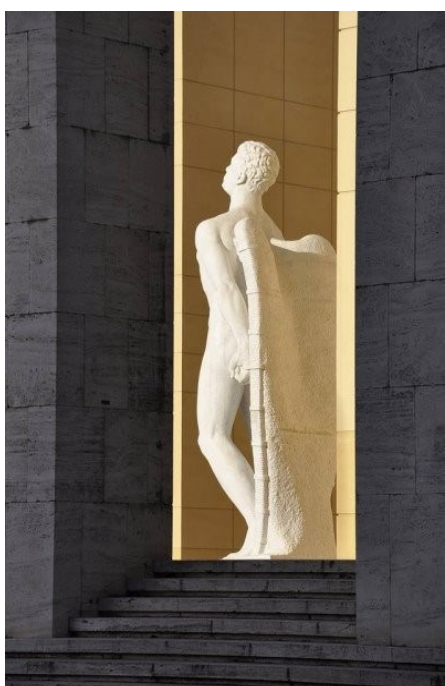


Figure 1: Statue of Icaro in Forlì (Francesco Saverio Palozzi, 1940)



Figure 2: Statue of Ebe in Forlì (Antonio Canova, 1817)



Figure 3: promotion within the network of the European Route of Historical and Thermal Towns

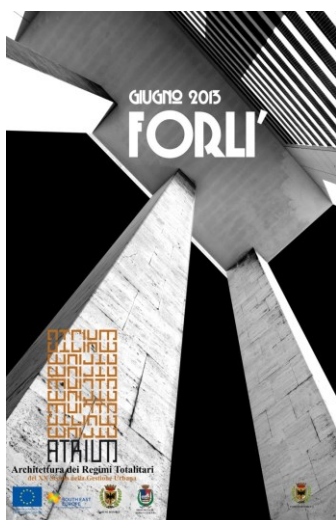


Figure 4: promotional poster of the cultural route ATRIUM

1.1 *The exhibition on Cesare Valle in Forlì*

On the occasion of the exhibition *Cesare Valle – Un’Altra Modernità: Architettura in Romagna* [Cesare Valle – Another modernity: Architecture in Romagna], organised by the Municipality of Forlì and the ATRIUM Association, which took place from September to November 2016 in Forlì, a lack of attention in the use of language for the exposition panels led to criticism from some members of the public. In fact, the English version of the introductory text of the exhibition approached the content exclusively from an architectural point of view, without making explicit the approach of ATRIUM:

“The restoration and reuse of the former ONB building, which had been neglected and left to degradation for many years, offers a perfect opportunity to celebrate its creator, Cesare Valle from Rome, an engineer but an architect by vocation.”

The verb ‘celebrate’ used in this way, explicitly refers to the architect and his professional qualities. Implicitly, however, it might be understood to refer to the celebration of the regime, under which Cesare Valle realised his works. In response to this misunderstanding, ATRIUM created a roll-up, which was positioned at the entrance of the exhibition, clarifying its political position and cultural intentions:

“While maintaining a strong repudiation of antidemocratic regimes, ATRIUM intends to evaluate this material heritage by means of cultural activities able to tell important, though tragic, stories of European cities and Europe’s twentieth century. [...] The restoration and the reuse of the ex-GIL building represents a perfect opportunity to reflect on this architecture and its creator.”

This anecdote shows how easily misunderstandings can arise and how important it is to present this heritage with great attention to an appropriate and careful use of language.

1.2 *The case of Predappio*

The Municipality of Predappio faces considerable challenges with regard to the interpretation of its material and immaterial heritage. As the birthplace of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, it had been chosen by the regime to be an example of a new town built with the aim of propagating the myth of Mussolini and the greatness of the regime and thus displays significant examples of rationalist architecture from the period. The case of Predappio is complicated also because the town has become a sort of pilgrimage site for neo-fascist groups several times a year. The question of how to deal with this dissonant historical heritage is still unresolved.

Besides its active membership in the ATRIUM cultural route, the Municipality of Predappio is promoting a project for a museum or documentation centre on the history of Italy during the Fascist period, to be housed in the abandoned *ex Casa del Fascio* (former Fascist party building). The project has evoked some debate at a national level (*‘Il Foglio’* 2015, *‘La Stampa’* 2016). On the one hand, some welcome the idea as a process of critical reflection and in-depth analysis on this unsettling history. On the other hand, there are considerable anxieties regarding the risk of ambiguity and the fear that a museum space could become a space of celebration.

Marcello Flores, professor of contemporary history at the University of Siena, is the coordinator of the scientific committee in charge of the project to transform the

former *Casa del Fascio* into a museum space, as well as being a member of the ATRIUM scientific committee. In response to these anxieties, Flores (2016) states that a modern history museum is never the celebration of a single “point of view” on history (neither of the winners nor of the “just”), but an instrument to enable people to understand and interact with history on the basis of critical knowledge, values and problems of our present days. He points out that the project envisages a critical historical reflection, combining scientific knowledge of Italy’s history during the Fascist period, and the possibility to actively experience aspects of that period by means of the new technologies (Flores 2014).

The challenge of communicating the dissonant heritage of Predappio needs to be dealt with also with regard to the use of language, both within the future museum space and concerning the name of the cultural institution. The notion of a ‘museum’ may imply a somewhat sacralising role, in the sense of David Lowenthal who states, as we have seen, that relics often glorify a nation and its past (1985:389). A linguistic choice favouring the term ‘documentation centre’ rather than ‘museum’ could alleviate these anxieties, invoking a content-based historical gaze rather than an object-based heritage gaze (Macdonald 2006:22; Urry 1990: 135). One way to mitigate the danger of being celebrative may be to position Predappio in a wider European dimension and perspective, something that can be provided also through the framework of the cultural route ATRIUM.

2. Dissonant heritage communication strategies

Given the risks described above, what are the communication strategies which can be adopted in order to avoid them? The following section proposes three communication strategies which can be used to avoid the risk of celebrating such dissonant heritage: firstly by making dissonance explicit, secondly by emphasizing reuse in the present, and thirdly by conveying dissonance through contrast.

2.1 Making dissonance explicit

The heritage of the town of Dimitrovgrad, a Bulgarian partner of the ATRIUM cultural route refers to a quite recent experience. It is an example of a completely new industrial town, enthusiastically built by the brigade movement between 1947 and 1950, a symbol of the victory of socialism and the communist regime. The proximity of the history associated with Dimitrovgrad’s dissonant heritage resulted in the choice of a very emotional approach, which is sensitive towards the feelings of a generation that has lived through communism. At the same time however, it expresses the necessity of a nostalgia-free and historically responsible look at the totalitarian heritage, recognising the failures of the regime.

A look at the promotional booklet (Fig.5) published by the History Museum of Dimitrovgrad shows the pre-ATRIUM approach: the history of the town of Dimitrovgrad is approached in a nostalgic way, using terms such as “enthusiasts”, “dreamers”, “the town of dreams”, etc.

“Members of brigades, builders, enthusiasts, dreamers, adventurers – it hardly exists another town that has gathered so many different people in one place [...] ‘The town of dreams’, ‘The first socialist town of Bulgaria’ – definitions that will remain in its history, as they most precisely describe its spirit at that time, during the first years of construction.” (booklet “Dimitrovgrad: History under a sign: The first socialist town!”, History Museum of Dimitrovgrad, 2010)

Comparing this booklet with a promotional brochure (Fig.6) produced by the local ATRIUM office in Dimitrovgrad, a clear change of approach from nostalgic to critical can be noted:

“The past is a part of us, it is our genetic memory [...]. To revive the past doesn’t mean to restore it, to flood it with a wave of nostalgia [...]. Living the past is an attempt for a historically responsible and critical [...] look over the events back in time, with a certain dose of sentiment. This look probably will cause ‘laughter through tears’, but as a result the past [...] will look more comprehensible, more endurable [...]” (brochure “Europe in the footsteps of ATRIUM”, (Municipality of Dimitrovgrad, 2013)

The brochure from which the text is extracted promoted a series of events within the framework of a pilot experience of the ATRIUM project in September 2013. It is an example of how dissonance was made explicit by emphasising the need for a historically responsible and critical look. Not only the use of language, but also the visual design suggests this change of approach from nostalgic to critical. The use of red colour as well as of Communist symbols in the museum booklet is substituted by a neutral, non-nostalgic design of the ATRIUM brochure.

In the words of the mayor of Dimitrovgrad, Ivo Dimov, the framework of the ATRIUM cultural route offers the city “the chance to fit into the cultural landscape of a united Europe” and approach its material and immaterial heritage in a less nostalgic and more democratic way:

“For the first time by means of the ATRIUM project, an open and historically responsible conversation has started about the architecture of totalitarian regimes as a chance to transform the uncomfortable heritage into a resource of future development.”

“Today, Dimitrovgrad without nostalgia and historical responsibility is trying to preserve the material evidence [...]” (Municipality of Dimitrovgrad 2013a:5).

The European framework of the ATRIUM cultural route thus offers Dimitrovgrad a means to approach its dissonant built heritage in a critical way. Given the recent nature of the history, the choice has been that of making the dissonance explicit by emphasising the need for a historically responsible and critical look at this material and immaterial heritage.



Figure 5: booklet
“Dimitrovgrad: History under a sign:
The first socialist town!”
(History Museum of Dimitrovgrad,
2010)

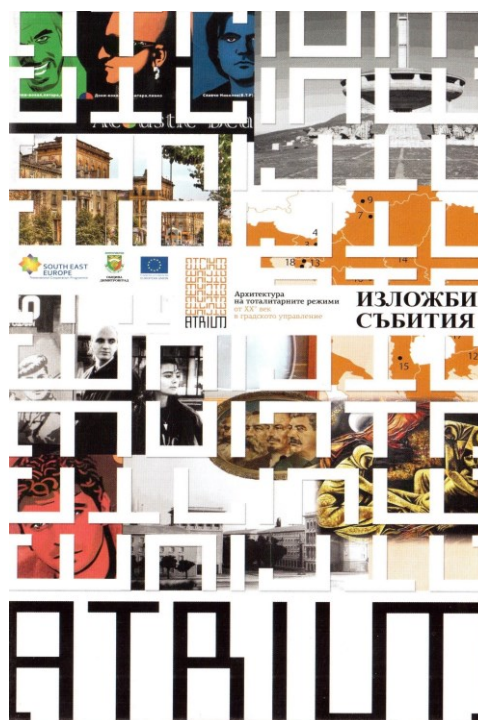


Figure 6: brochure
“Europe in the footsteps of
ATRIUM”
(Municipality of Dimitrovgrad, 2013)

2.2 Emphasising reuse in the present

Another strategy to promote dissonant heritage consists in emphasising a new meaning or a new use of a material heritage in the present. “The Mine of Culture - The Public Library of Labin” is the promotional slogan for the recently installed library in the former mining buildings of Labin. The official website of the tourist board of the city of Labin (Croatia) explains the relationship of this built industrial heritage with the Italian Fascist rule in Labin after WW1, when new mining towns were constructed in the style of Italian rationalism. A part of this industrial complex, which is associated with suffering and oppression, has been valorised and given a new meaning by assuming the new function of a cultural centre:

“The monumental marble hall of the building, which once housed the Direction of the coal mining company, where the miners received their salaries and where strikes took place, has been transformed into a mine of contemporary culture.” (Labin Tourist Board 2015, official website)

The suffering and oppression induced by the Fascist regime is expressed by the reference to the strikes, thus celebrating the resistance movement of the past. It might be said, that the dissonance has been negotiated by a resignification of the built material, transforming a site of oppression into a democratic place of knowledge for the wider public.

2.3 Conveying dissonance through contrast

According to Tunbridge’s and Ashworth’s definition, dissonance in heritage refers to a contrast of meaning and value systems between past and present. Moreover, in the case of ATRIUM, we are dealing with a “history that hurts”. Conveying dissonance through contrast may thus be a means to dissolve this discordance by expressing the denial of the (past) values represented by the regimes who built that heritage, while re-evaluating some qualities and aspects of those architectures.

As argued before, evaluative language celebrating the object in question is not acceptable when referring to dissonant heritage. Positive qualities are acceptable only if contrasted with a negative term making clear the rejection of it. “Terrible, yet wonderful. Reminders of architectures and ideologies whose past can still scare us.” (Fig.7) can be read in the introductory text of the photographic exhibition “Totally Lost” on abandoned architectural heritage of European totalitarian regimes of the 20th century (Spazi Indecisi, catalogue of the 2013 exhibition “Totally Lost”). This approach is also used in the context of Nazi dissonant heritage: “*Trügerische Idylle*” [Deceptive Idyll] (Fig. 9) is the title of an exhibition of the documentation centre in Obersalzberg, Bavaria/Germany, a place renowned as Hitler’s mountain residence (Dokumentationszentrum Obersalzberg, official website). “*Faszination und Gewalt*” [Fascination and Terror] (Fig. 8) is the title of the permanent exhibition in the documentation centre of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, Germany (Täubrich 2006). Accordingly, the documentation centre’s narrative is based on the deconstruction of the myth of the *Führer* by contrasting the myth (fascination through propaganda) with reality (terror).

However, the documentation centre in Nuremberg has been criticised for its top-down approach and authoritative narrative. Sharon Macdonald (2009:137), a British anthropologist, refers to the site as telling a strong narrative, leaving little room for individual interpretations. The heavy use of conventional media (text panels) and the arrangement of the exhibition into a semi-chronological account does not suggest the multiple routes for active visitors as suggested by the constructivist approach. The

approach used, considered appropriate given the highly delicate nature of the subject, is seen by Sharon Macdonald as having the disadvantage of not involving the local population in the discussion regarding the ways in which this heritage could be interpreted. However, recently, various novelties have been introduced to the exhibition, approaching a more constructivist, multiperspective and participative approach, which will be enlarged by the so-called approach *ErfahrungsRaum Reichsparteitagsgelände* (experiential space Nazi Party Rally Grounds).

The following section deals with the issue of how the ATRIUM cultural route applies a constructivist bottom-up approach when dealing with its dissonant heritage, i.e. proposing an active role to citizens in the process of heritage-making.



Figure 7: exhibition panel *TOTALLY LOST*:
"Terrible yet wonderful"

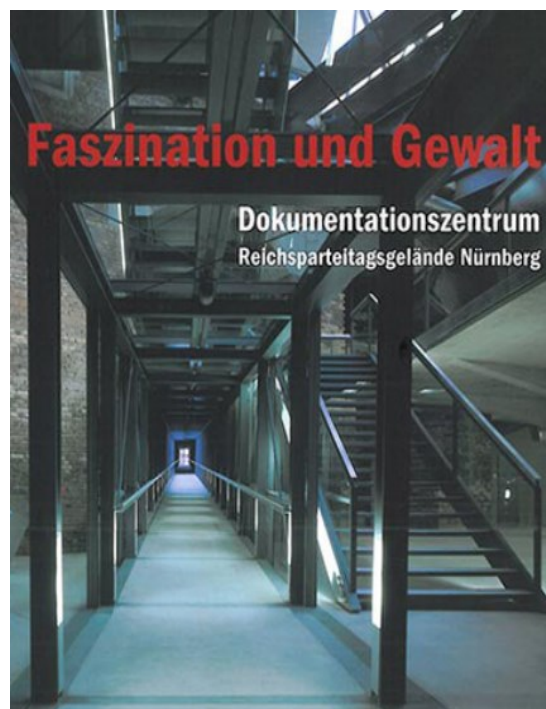


Figure 8: book title "Fascination and Terror" of the documentation centre of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, Germany.



Figure 9: promotion for the documentation centre in Obersalzberg, Germany: “Deceptive idyll”

3. Dissonant heritage within the constructivist approach

The points raised by Sharon Macdonald with regard to the documentation centre of Nuremberg fit closely with notions of a constructivist approach to meanings in museum and heritage sites, which may be relevant to the case of dissonant heritage. Both Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1999:70) and John Urry (1990:126, 130-31) acknowledge the active role of citizens within a shared cultural process of meaning-making, allowing for diverse interpretations rather than a single authoritative narrative.

Within a museum context, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1999) approaches the concepts of communication, education and interpretation against the background of this cultural move towards a constructivist paradigm. In recent years, museum visitors have been conceptualized as active rather than passive in the construction of their own knowledge. The emphasis has thus moved from a predominantly behaviourist view of learning to a constructivist learning theory. Whereas the former assumes that learning consists in the simple acquisition of facts, the latter postulates that mental schemata are actively built by visitors, while the educator is a facilitator, providing an appropriate learning environment and offering multiple paths and learning modalities. Such a critical museum pedagogy can enable the democratization of museum practices by allowing multiple perspectives shaped by a constructive audience, thus giving voice to different communities and interpretations. Rather than the curator interpreting for the audience, within the framework of a constructivist learning theory, visitors use their own interpretation strategies to make sense of their experience. These reorientations also rely on a cultural approach to museum communication (based on the constructivist paradigm), which has recently gained ground, and sees communication as a cultural process of sharing, in which all parties of society co-construct a meaningful

world. Works in the fields of tourism studies (John Urry) and heritage studies (Raphael Samuel) similarly stress the importance of constructivist approaches, which prioritize a “bottom-up” rather than “top down” framework.

As mentioned before, ATRIUM has worked within a constructivist bottom-up approach, favouring the co-construction of meaning. It has thus focused in particular on an inclusive process, involving the community, i.e. various stakeholders (mainly local associations approaching the ATRIUM theme in diverse ways, such as guided tours, theatre, photography, music etc.) and allowing for a certain liberty of interpretation, a highly democratic value. After all, the co-construction of meaning of this material heritage is probably the only way people can find their way to identify themselves with this heritage, and transmit their experience as promoters and ambassadors of their city. Such a position is obviously not compatible with the desire of controlling narratives on the part of architectures of totalitarian regimes, which means that the mentioned risks cannot be entirely controlled. However, “the refusal to exert complete control, after all, is an explicitly anti-totalitarian stance”. (Leech, forthcoming).

The following three examples of an active participation of local associations will show how ATRIUM and the city of Forlì foster a constructivist bottom-up approach, which took all place inside the buildings or on the streets of architecture from the Fascist period.

3.1 *An interactive guided tour*

On the occasion of the award ceremony for the certification by the Council of Europe of the ATRIUM Cultural Route in December 2014, the local association Casa del Cuculo conducted a guided tour through the rationalist quarter of Forlì which ended in the hall in which the award ceremony took place. It can be said that from the very beginning, the ATRIUM route fostered the active participation of the community within a perspective of co-construction of meaning. A quite unusual interactive guided tour involved 50 participants in a profound reflection on the built heritage left by the Fascist regime. As the title *Piccola storia di controllo dell'uomo sull'uomo* [Brief history of the man's control over man] reveals, the reflection focused on the relationship between architecture and power. The participants were stimulated in this reflection in a unique way: the audio guide presented itself as a kind of totalitarian Big Brother; inside a huge hall of the Aeronautical School, perceptions of this imposing building were read aloud and commented on; the participants were asked to construct a building with little wood bricks creating various effects. Another element was telling the history of these architectures through micro-histories by Forlì's citizens who are still living in these buildings today. The participants actually entered the private homes of these people and listened to the memories and stories they had to tell. The guided tour ended with the request to write down expectations of how ATRIUM should tell Forlì's history. Quite different from conventional guided tours transmitting content, this guided tour was thought as an interactive experience as well as an occasion for collective reflection

on the theme of ATRIUM and represented a perfect example of the idea of citizens as the best interpreters and “ambassadors” of their heritage.

3.2 *A theatre play*

A second example of Forlì’s bottom-up approach was a theatre play entitled “*Speer: Architettura e/è potere*” [Speer: Architecture and/is power] by the local theatre company Teatro. The play on Albert Speer, Hitler’s architect, focuses on the relationship between architecture and power, theme treated also in the well-known book by Deyan Sudjic (2005). The play was one of the events within the festival *Forlì, Città del 900*, including various exhibitions, workshops, conferences, guided tours and artistic performances, and organised by the ATRIUM Association and the Municipality of Forlì in the ex-GIL building in Forlì in autumn 2015. The awarded play has recently been performed in Paris at the Theatre de l’Opprime. A monologue of the architect, based on Speer’s *mémoires* written during his 20 years of imprisonment, stimulated the reflection on the mindshaping power of architecture, transporting the issue also into the present:

“Il carattere delle città è il nostro carattere. [...] Le forme impongono il pensiero, è l’architettura che decide i gesti del quotidiano ed i riti della domenica, è l’architettura che abita gli uomini, decidiamo noi dove dormite, dove lavorate, dove vi accoppiate, quanto grande deve essere la vostra finestra sul mondo. [...] Ma non vi siete liberati di quelli come me. Avete solo scelto qualcuno d’altro per costruire vostre volontà. Che poi sono proprio le vostre volontà?” (Fabbri 2016)

[The character of our cities is our character. [...] Forms impose our way of thinking. It is architecture that decides on our daily actions and on Sunday rituals. It is architecture that inhabits mankind. We decide where you sleep, where you work, where you make love. And we decide the size of your window onto the world. [...] You haven’t got rid of people like me. You just chose someone else to construct your will. But is it really your will?”]

So, the reflection on architecture and power had been produced by an artistic performance of a local association, offering yet another perspective on this built heritage and representing a further example of how the ATRIUM fosters a constructivist bottom-up approach.

3.3 *A European photographic competition, exhibition and mapping*

A third local association Spazi Indecisi has collaborated in various occasions with the cultural route ATRIUM. Its most important activity was a photographic competition called "Totally Lost" (first edition 2013, second edition 2015). The focus of the competition and the exhibition was the visual interpretation of abandoned architectural heritage of European totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, by exploring the relationship that these architectures and their memories have with the present in order to find new meanings and potentials for its regeneration, thus the reuse and re-signification of abandoned spaces. The association stimulates the reflection on whether or not a re-signification of these spaces is possible. Some of their questions include: "Do totalitarian architectures remain ever totalitarian in democratic systems? / Will they ever set free of the ideology they represented and were tool of? / Will they ever be treated as simple containers for new democratic contents? / What's left?" (www.totallylost.eu). In the two editions, almost 400 photographers from 25 nations contributed more than 5.000 photographs of circa 500 different sites, which subsequently have been mapped.

The work of the association Spazi Indecisi leads us to mention the geographical meanings that this activity helped to construct. Maps, as Benedict Anderson has argued, are not only representations of what is 'there'; they can "anticipate" a spatial reality (1983:175). In the case of ATRIUM, the photographic exhibitions (2013 and 2016) arranged by Spazi Indecisi constituted a local mapping of a diffused museum as well as a European-wide mapping of these abandoned sites, offering two visions, or even two narratives, of these abandoned architectures: a local and a European one. The European mapping (Fig. 10) of the tangible and intangible heritage of totalitarian regimes may initiate a reconfiguration of the European map, tracing differences and analogies in a comparative framework, offering a new European perspective of architectural heritage of totalitarian regimes. Such an approach gives each partner of the route the possibility to discover such differences and analogies, and eventually "re-collocate" its heritage in a European dimension.

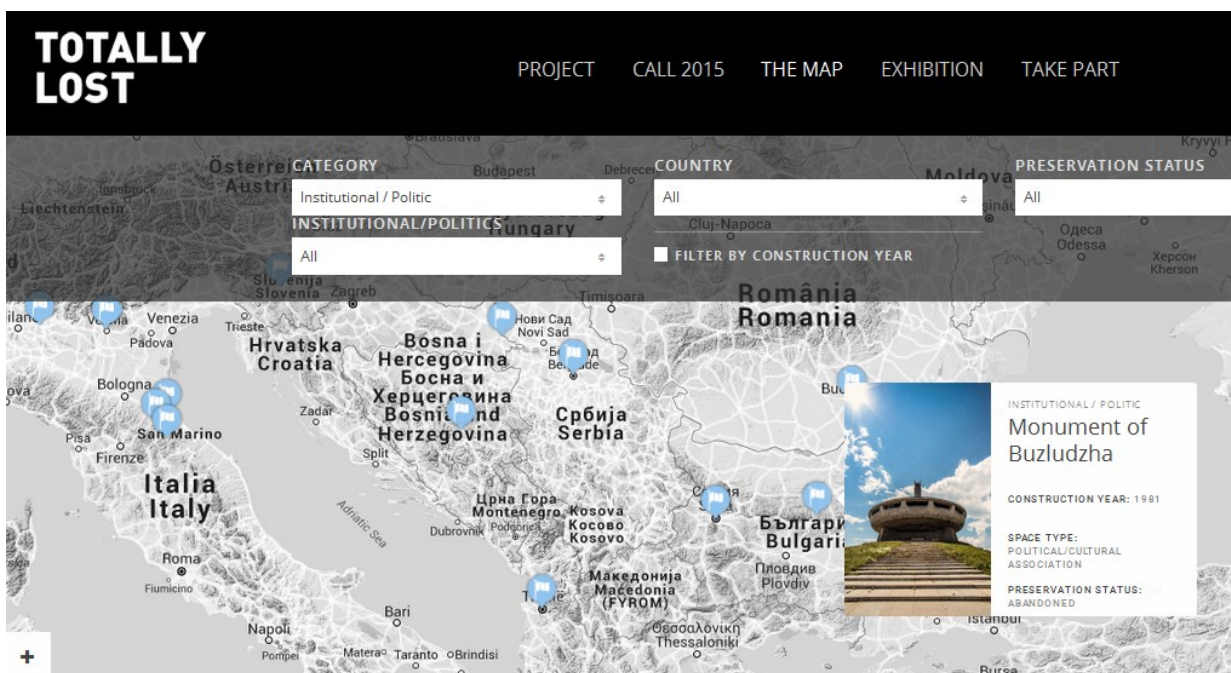


Figure 10: website of the project Totally Lost (by Spazi Indecisi): European mapping of abandoned totalitarian architectures.

One of ATRIUM's major scientific outputs, The Transnational Survey (Kaleva, Abbott, Clifford 2013) similarly has laid a basis for a European mapping (Fig. 11), suggesting the development of themes by categorizing the ATRIUM sites/architectures according to their message and modern interpretation (Transnational Survey, pp. 433-446):

Residential complexes and service architecture theme

- Residential complex
- Social Building
- Service Building

Residential complexes and service architecture theme

- Residential complex
- Social Building
- Service Building

Culture and education theme

- Culture Building
- Educational Building

Again, in reference to Anderson's concept of maps being able to shape reality by penetrating into people's imagination, such a thematic mapping may offer a way of re-interpreting the architectural heritage from 20th-century totalitarian regime within a European framework.

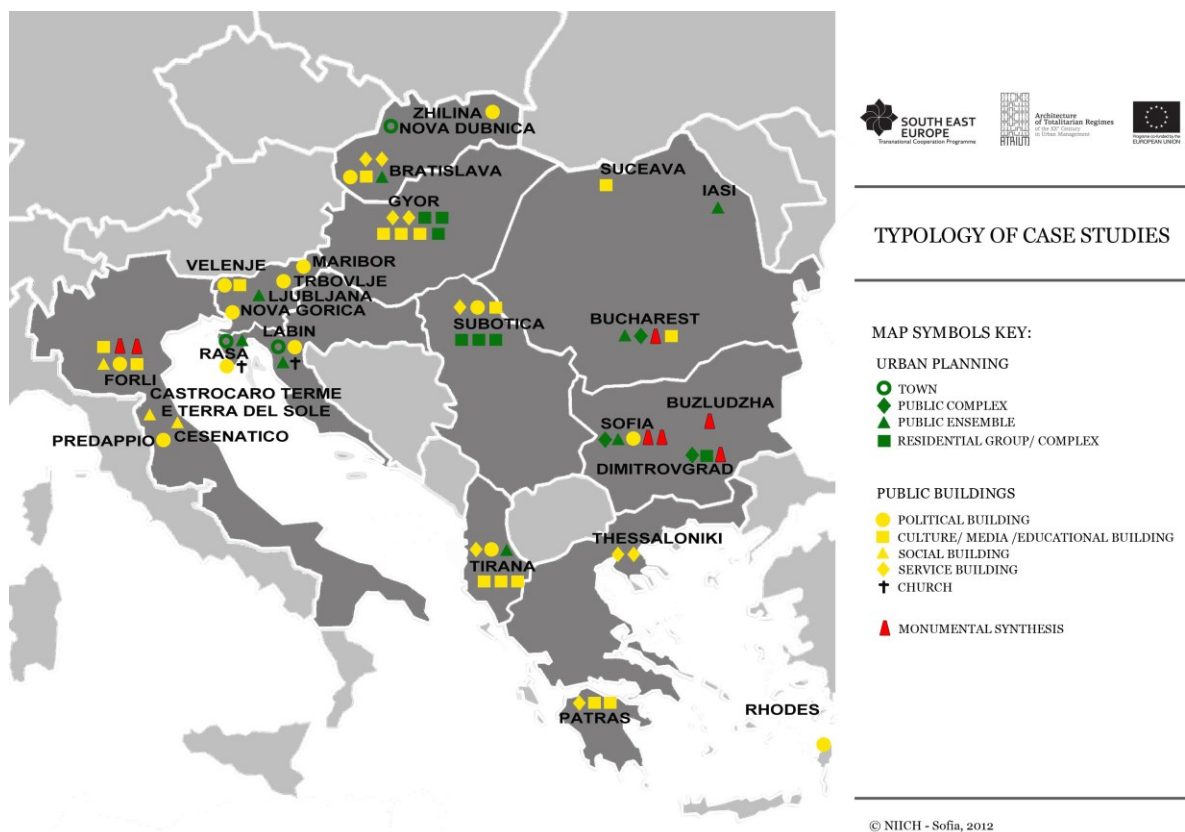


Figure 11: European mapping of totalitarian case studies (Transnational Survey, 2013:435)

Some conclusive remarks

In this article, various communication strategies for the promotion of a dissonant heritage connected to a “history that hurts”, i.e. the architectural heritage of totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, have been put forward. They all aim at avoiding the risks of being misunderstood as a celebration or revisionism of the regimes that built that heritage. The town of Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria opted to make the dissonance explicit by emphasising the need for a historically responsible and critical look at the built heritage left by the Communist regime. Emphasising reuse in the present was the choice of the town of Labin in Croatia, transforming the former coal mine, associated with suffering during the Fascist occupation in Istria, into a cultural center. Another strategy consists in conveying dissonance through contrast, offering a way to dissolve the dissonance by expressing the denial of the values represented by the totalitarian regimes, while re-evaluating some architectural qualities: “terrible, yet wonderful”.

ATRIUM faces dissonance also in terms of different groups interpreting this heritage from diverse perspectives. The concept of multiple interpretations suggested by the

constructivist approach allows for the integration of diverse narratives. Furthermore, the use of multiple channels of familiar forms of mediation and aesthetic expression, such as photography, film, theatre, painting etc. may specifically engage younger generations. The theme of 'architecture and power' was focused on in a theatre play. There are various possible themes, which could be developed around the ATRIUM cultural route, such as architecture and propaganda, architecture building consensus, architecture and ideology, architecture and education, architecture and state planning. In the context of tourism studies, John Urry puts forward the idea of the different perspectives of a place when constructing the image of a tourist site, and does not feel that this is in opposition to a consistent image of a tourist site. Against this background and within a bottom-up approach, a fixed overall narrative structure for the ATRIUM cultural route is therefore not desirable. A common strategy is rather defined by the framework of a democratic and shared communication process with the active participation of the community fostering the co-construction of meaning on a local and European level, where local micro-histories are put into a wider European context. Multiple perspectives, micro-histories and narrations, even diverse historical interpretations may be integrated into a coherent whole within a common ethical framework based on the dedication to democratic values and the respect of victims of the totalitarian regimes. The cultural route as a whole may thus be promoted by highlighting the multifaceted look at a complex heritage, where architecture becomes a window on history, where cities become open-air museums or spaces to be discovered. Such an approach may help shaping a shared European memory and perception of the history connected to the architectures of totalitarian regimes.

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