

SAFEGUARDING THE CULTURAL PATRIMONY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA — THE INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE*

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Introduction and methodology

More than 30 years after gaining independence, the Republic of Moldova continues to grapple with political instability, corruption, and economic crisis, all consequences of its former communist regime. Civil society has played an instrumental role in the process of rebuilding the Republic of Moldova's identity, with a particular focus on cultural heritage. As with other areas such as the democratization process, citizen participation in political life, and advocacy for people's social rights, the role of civil society in safeguarding cultural heritage is crucial. The field of cultural heritage is not financially supported by the state, with budget cuts affecting areas considered 'non-priorities' such as culture (Dobrea 2012: 393–396), thus forcing civil society organizations to find alternative solutions through which they can contribute to the process of heritage protection. Throughout this paper, we aim to analyze the legislative levers available to CSOs, as well as the activities they undertake in practice to protect heritage.

Our research is grounded in the hypothesis that protecting cultural heritage is an intricate and widespread effort taken by civil organizations and, whilst they may have considerable influence in shaping and implementing legislative and strategic frameworks, their impact on the tangible act of safeguarding cultural heritage remains limited unless there is robust collaboration with national and local authorities. In order to prove or disprove our premise, we have conducted a double research strategy. First, we have analyzed the legal context and the involvement of civil society in the configuration of the normative architecture in the matter of cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova.



Based on the observations of this endeavor we have analyzed in the second part of the paper the concrete actions conducted by three of the most relevant civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, whose actions, concerning the safeguarding of cultural heritage, have made a difference. To perform an objective selection of these civil society representatives, we considered the recommendations of the Institute for Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Moldova, which presented us with the most relevant approaches of civil society members and suggested that we consider SAVE Chişinău, ANTRIM, and Monumentum as our case studies.

The main research questions are as follows: Q1. Is the contribution of civil society to shaping the protection architecture of the Moldovan cultural heritage superficial or, on the contrary, with deep reverberations? Q2. How broad is the concrete range of civil society intervention in the field of cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova?

From a methodological perspective, the research adopts a multifaceted approach, using the following tools: literature review, document analysis, legal research, and an overview of concrete actions undertaken by civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova to protect and promote cultural heritage. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted, focusing on academic articles, books, and reports related to cultural heritage protection and the role of civil society. Selection criteria included relevance to Moldova, publication date (last 10 years), and peer-reviewed status. Databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories were used as well as policy documents, NGO reports, and legal texts. The analysis was guided by a framework that considered policy effectiveness, implementation challenges, and the role of non-state actors.

The legal research focused on the legislative framework for cultural heritage in Moldova. This included a comparative analysis of national laws with international conventions such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The historical context and recent amendments were also considered. An in-depth review of the activities of civil society organizations was undertaken. This analysis focuses on the actions of three NGOs: SAVE Chişinău, ANTRIM, and Monumentum Basarabia, in the context of cultural heritage protection and promotion in the Republic of Moldova, with a particular emphasis on community involvement. This resulted in an original perspective on the role of civil society in cultural heritage protection, following three areas of action of cultural civil society organizations: advocacy and policy-making, education and awareness-raising, and research and development.



Conceptual framework and literature review

In order to validate or refute the underlying assumption upon which our hypothesis is built, our research analyzed the extensive body of literature relevant to our field of study. The literature review was complemented by a meticulous examination of legislative documents from various jurisdictions, including the Republic of Moldova, the European Union, and the broader international legal framework. Some authors (Pasat 2018: 219–229; Brânză–Stati 2016) approach the subject of lawmaking in the sphere of cultural heritage protection in the Republic of Moldova, concluding that there needs to be a revision of amendments in the legal-criminal protection thereof. The papers showcase the complexity of cultural heritage protection from a legislative standpoint while mentioning the risks that cultural heritage protection can encounter, such as long-term abandonment, destruction, eviction, theft, and extortion. Others (Putină–Brie 2023: 79–104; Brie – Putină 2023: 167–187) analyze the role of civil society organization in the process of democratization and in the context of the Eastern Partnership, connecting civil society with politics and demonstrating the capacities of such organizations to contribute to modernization and democratization in the decision-making process.

The subject of cultural heritage is fragmented in the specialized analyses with authors like Sergiu Musteață (2007: 311–325; 2012: 535–541) providing an incentive in the archaeological heritage of the Republic of Moldova. While extremely relevant for the connection between cultural heritage, legislation, and state involvement, the articles mentioned only target a specific area of cultural heritage. i.e. archaeological heritage. Others (De Cesari 2020), examine the growing influence of NGOs in cultural heritage policies, highlighting how they could increasingly take over roles and responsibilities traditionally held by the state. Although the case studies for this article include locations like Italy and the West Bank, our paper uses the principles presented by De Cesari, such as transnational policy circulation and neoliberal globalization, to prove that the protection of cultural heritage could be conducted by NGOs even outside or beyond the boundaries imposed by the state (both economically and socially).

Within this literature analysis, we carefully reviewed works focusing particularly on elucidating the intricate legal nuances of the protection and legal framework for cultural heritage conservation in the context of the Republic of Moldova. By engaging with the literature, we sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted legal landscape that shapes cultural heritage conservation efforts in the region. While reviewing the literature, we discovered no research that comprehensively addresses the issue of cultural heritage legislation, while analyzing its impact on the activities of civil society in this field, although some ideas relevant to the study were identified in the works presented at the International Conference on UNESCO World Heritage and the Role of Civil Society, in Bonn, 2015 (Conti 2016; Badman 2016; Ackerman 2016; Quaedvlieg-Mihailović 2016). Despite being a conference dedicated to the international community's interest in safeguarding and



protecting cultural heritage, the articles mentioned make a strong contribution to the idea that NGOs can complement governmental efforts in heritage conservation, by providing expertise, funding, and advocacy. The authors stress the importance of involving local communities in heritage conservation. They argue that sustainable heritage management requires the active participation and support of the communities that live around these sites.

Through this study, we will attempt to overcome the fragmented approach to the issue analyzed and offer an overall perspective on the mission of civil society not only in the institutional and normative configuration of the Republic of Moldova in the matter of cultural heritage, but also in the effective protection of authentic cultural values.

Legal context and the involvement of civil society in the configuration of the normative architecture germane to cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova

The legal framework that ensures the protection of the cultural heritage of any European state is built vertically on three levels of regulation: international-grafted on international treaties/conventions; European, with its source in the Community acquis; and national, based on domestic legislative instruments.

We do not propose an exhaustive presentation of the legal architecture in the matter of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova, since this would exceed the scope of our research, which is why in this section we will highlight only those sources that denote the current legislative status in the field under analysis and the role of the civil society in its configuration.

The starting point in revealing the current legislative configuration in the field of cultural heritage is the very appearance on the international field, as an independent state, of the Republic of Moldova in the 1990s. In essence, the statehood of the Republic of Moldova finds its source in a broad movement of national renaissance that places identity symbols in the foreground, such as "language, Latin script, cultural heritage, traditions and cultural values" (Postică 2016: 47). The transition to independent government, however, brought about series of hurdles, especially of a political, economic, and social nature, which somewhat overshadowed the concern for the development and protection of cultural heritage. The lack of financial means, the rigor of solving internal crises and conflicts, political instability, administrative incapacity, and the lack of professionalization in the state technical apparatus impact how state policy is designed in a certain area.

Undeniably, however, the acquisition by the Republic of Moldova of the status of a member of the Council of Europe in 1995 represented a turning point in the articulation of the state's approach to the issue of cultural heritage protection. By reviewing the conventions issued under the auspices of the Council of Europe, it can be seen that the Republic of Moldova has made relevant international commitments, such as the European Cultural Convention (Paris, 1954, ratified on May, 24th,



1994), the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985, ratified on October, 11th, 2001), the Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe (Valetta, 1992, ratified on October, 11th, 2001), the Council of Europe Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000, ratified on March, 14th, 2002), the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005, ratified on December 1st, 2008), and the Protocol amending the European Landscape Convention (Strasbourg, 2016, ratified on July, 1st, 2021). To all these, other international treaties ratified by the Republic of Moldova are added, for example, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage (Paris, 2003, ratified by Law no. 12/2006); the Convention on the Protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (Paris, 2005, ratified by Law no. 258/2006); the Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage (Paris, 1972, ratified by Law no. 1113/2002), etc.

The European Cultural Convention of 1954 states with the rank of principle in Art. 1 the fact that the contracting states must take all the necessary measures in order to protect the "contribution to the common cultural heritage of Europe", but the real cornerstone in the matter of protecting the cultural heritage on the European continent is the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, which in paragraph 5 of the Preamble instrumentalizes the concept of the need to know and use heritage, transposing it into the content of the citizen's right "to participate in cultural life, enshrined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (1948) and guaranteed by the International Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights (1966)". Art. 1 letter a) of the Convention expressly states that "the right to cultural heritage is inherent in the right to participate in cultural life".

In addition, this Convention is relevant because it provides a legal framework of reference for the heritage policies of the contracting states: we note the existence of a definition of cultural heritage seen as "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions" (art. 2 letter a). Then, we find the duality right-obligation and individual or collective right to benefit from the cultural heritage corresponding to the duty to respect the owned cultural heritage of another person and the common European one (art. 2 letter b). Under this aspect, we appreciate that the definition of the object of legal protection and the recognition of the fundamental right to culture constitutes the inherent premises for the effective protection and preservation of cultural heritage (Lazăr 2020).

Finally, the Convention departs from the declarative language and imposes on the ratifying states some concrete obligations regarding the regulation at the national level of a genuine policy in the matter of cultural heritage protection. Thus, the contracting states have not only the obligation to recognize the connection between the "public interest" and the "elements of cultural heritage" (art. 5 letter a), but also the task of ensuring the necessary legal framework by adopting legislative,



administrative, technical and financial measures so as to facilitate the exercise of the right to cultural heritage. We then find provisions that give the concept of cultural heritage various values: a resource for "facilitating peaceful coexistence and dialogue" (art. 7), for "fortifying social cohesion" (art. 8); a component of an economic development model based on the principles of sustainable use of resources (art. 10) etc.

Having at its core the desire of the Committee of Ministers to provide the widest possible frame of reference regarding heritage policy, with reference to the rights and duties of the natural and legal persons involved, the Convention could not omit the civil society, seen both as an "intervention partner " and as a "factor of constructive criticism of cultural heritage policies" (art. 12 letter c).

A key moment regarding the involvement of the Moldovan civil society in the legislative process, in general, was the adoption of the *Concept of cooperation between the Parliament and the civil society* (adopted by Parliament Decision no. 373/2005, currently repealed), it being obvious that the existence and consolidation of the role of non-governmental organizations are imperative for a pluralistic and transparent democratic regime. Thus, innovatively, civil society organizations acquired a consultative role in the drafting of normative acts, and so determining an intensification of the public-private partnership in the legislative decision-making process (Putină–Brie 2023). The European Commission's report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the measures proposed by the European Commission regarding the application for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU (European Commission 2023) highlighted, however, that most arrears were recorded in the chapter on the involvement of civil society in the public deliberative process. For example, the named Report highlighted the lack of information regarding "the number of civil society organizations involved in the public consultation process and in working groups at the level of public authorities", in the context of the non-existence of a permanent consultative platform (the omission was partially remedied in the meantime, with the adoption of Decision no. 149/2023 on the approval of the Platform for dialogue and civic participation in the Parliament's decision-making process). With certainty, for the Republic of Moldova obtaining of the status of a candidate state for EU accession in 2022, respectively the opening of accession negotiations (December 2023), required more consistency in the involvement of the civil society in decision-making processes at all levels.

Related to the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova, the reference document for its strategic policies up to the present moment has been the EU-Moldova Association Agreement (within the Neighbourhood Policy), ratified by the Republic of Moldova in July 2016. Recommendation no 1/2017 of the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Council on the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Agenda establishes the following objectives for the parties involved: "to promote the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; to promote the participation of cultural and audio-visual operators from the Republic of Moldova in EU programs, in par-



ticalar Creative Europe; to cooperate on developing an inclusive cultural policy in the Republic of Moldova and on preserving and promoting cultural and natural heritage; to strengthen capacities for developing cultural entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative sectors (including cultural heritage) and for providing cultural services”.

Thus, the implementation of the international and European legal framework undoubtedly involves efforts, on the one hand, by the state authorities, called upon to draft the national normative system, the institutional architecture, the cooperation mechanisms between the state agencies and civil society, and not lastly, to make available the necessary financial resources. On the other hand, efforts are required from non-governmental organizations, whose role is extremely important in terms of the development and evaluation of strategies and policies, financing/co-financing of activities and projects in the field of cultural heritage preservation, involvement in partnerships with the public sector, etc.

The analysis of the current national legal framework in the matter of cultural heritage reveals the existence of a broad normative set in this field, as well as the lateness of legislative intervention in certain cases, respectively the fragmented approach to the issue, finding no less than seven primary normative acts, such as Law no. 1530/1993 regarding the protection of monuments, Culture Law no. 413/1999, Law no. 218/2010 regarding the protection of archaeological heritage, Law no. 192/2011 regarding public monuments, Law no. 280/2011 regarding the protection of movable national cultural heritage, Law no. 58/2012 regarding the protection of intangible cultural heritage, Museum Law no. 262/2017, and special legislation in the field of urban planning, all with multiple and detailed rules of application in secondary (government decisions) and tertiary (orders, regulations, instructions etc.) legislation.

It can be observed that only after 2010 did the legislative effort in the field become a major one, an aspect that had a negative impact on the very object of protection. The lack of an adequate legal framework, including in the aspect of incurring legal liability for possible unlawful conduct, created the circumstances that allowed the radical modification of some protected edifices, so that their heritage value was affected (Council of Europe 2012), or the neglect of some objects of heritage, effectively left in disrepair, unutilized or lost.

Moreover, it is indisputable that certain legislative interventions or the identification of some aspects that had to be regulated, were in fact the result of campaigns/projects/actions carried out by civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, for example:

- A transfer of results, from a project idea with non-reimbursable funding to a legislative initiative was realized by the adoption of Law No. 218/2010 on the protection of archaeological heritage (which ensures the implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe-Valetta, ratified by the Republic of Moldova in 2001). In the period 2009-2010, the National Association of Young Historians from Moldova, with the support of the

Soros-Moldova Foundation, implemented the project "Policy for the Protection of archaeological heritage in the Republic of Moldova: reality and Necessity", which had among the results the draft of the Law on the protection of archaeological heritage (Musteață 2016).

- Law no. 1530/1993 regarding the protection of monuments and Parliament Decision no. 1531 of 22.06.1993 for the implementation of the aforementioned law provided for the establishment of a Register of Monuments of the Republic of Moldova, which was not published in the Official Gazette with the decision, but 17 years later, on February 2, 2020. This omission, which rendered Law no. 1530/1993 largely ineffective since it was not known what the material object that needed to be protected was, was also corrected under the pressure of civil organizations and professionals in the archaeological field from the Republic of Moldova (Musteață 2023: 126). However, a deficiency of the Register was the fact that it did not consider all the archaeological sites, with over 2,000 of them remaining outside the protection area (Ghilaș 2019: 8). As a result, although it took 17 years to create a relatively effective framework, it is not flawless, because according to the legal provisions in force, only architectural objects and archaeological sites that are registered in the Register of Monuments fall under the protection of the state (Jitari 2021). On the other hand, the provision according to which the proposals for updating the Register of Monuments protected by the state can be formulated not only by state or private organizations but also by NGOs or even natural persons, is auspicious, an aspect materialized otherwise through the 2023 proposal to update the Register (Proposal 2023).
- Given the pressure of some civil society organizations, whose proposals were later taken over by two parliamentary initiators (deputies Vasile Grădinaru and Virgil Pâslariuc), Law no. 1530/1993 on the protection of monuments was amended by including some provisions regarding the introduction of protection zones for each monument; the inclusion of protection zones in the urban planning documents; the prohibition of interventions through new constructions, if they are not related to the monuments and there is no historical-architectural argumentation; establishing the conditions under which interventions can be made on monuments etc. (Save Chisinau, 2021).
- Some proposals were formulated regarding the change of the provisions of the construction authorization Law in order to make it impossible to issue construction authorizations by local public authorities, for interventions on monuments, without the mandatory prior approval of the National Council of Historical Monuments attached to the Ministry of Culture (Budianschi–Stafii–Șonțu–Reabcinsch 2013).
- As it follows from the Informative Note to the draft law (from 15.10.2020) regarding the amendment of Law no. 58/2012 on the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the amendments were proposed not only by local public administration authorities but also by civil society organizations. Among other aspects, in its basic form, Law no. 58/2012 only refers to the National Register of Intangible



Cultural Heritage, which would create the conditions for the elements specific to smaller local communities to remain uninventorized, and, consequently, without any kind of legal protection. As a result, by Art. 18 of the Law, after the amendment, the obligation to create and update local registers of intangible cultural heritage rests with local authorities.

- Civil society organizations are also campaigning for the adoption of a national strategy to protect, preserve, and enhance intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and to cover legislative gaps regarding sanctions and the hierarchical establishment of responsibilities regarding the identification of ICH elements at the national, regional, and local levels (Budianschi–Stafii–Șonțu–Reabcinsch 2013).
- Equally, it cannot go unnoticed that in the past years, public pressure exerted by civil society has remedied some faulty administrative practices (National Anti-corruption Centre 2021) or led to the vehement denunciation of some cases of the violation of legislation in the field of cultural heritage, especially in terms of urban desolation (Crăciunescu 2016: 95). Therefore, the civil society has played a fundamental role in identifying deficiencies in the actions of public authorities and in monitoring reported irregularities.

Civil organizations' actions towards the protection of cultural heritage

If the role of civil society in the actual creation of the normative and institutional framework is important, the way in which the legislation favors the involvement of civil society in the safeguarding of cultural heritage is equally relevant. Although we cannot say that the current legal framework restricts the involvement of civil society in safeguarding cultural heritage, it is not a stimulating one either if it is not accompanied by encouraging fiscal measures for the involvement of civil society organizations (beneficiaries or donors/ sponsors). One noticeable aspect resulting from our research endeavor is the lack of strategies to raise the awareness of public opinion about the economic importance of cultural heritage, which can be a source not only of creativity but also of productivity, thus ensuring the path to sustainable development.

The foundational assertion posited in the introductory section of this paper is that civil society organizations encounter constraints in their efforts to preserve cultural heritage from a legislative standpoint, in the absence of adequate financial resources. The efficacy of civil society's efforts is inherently circumscribed in the absence of relevant support from both national and local authorities. This contention finds validation through an examination of the activities undertaken by three prominent civil society entities in the Republic of Moldova, namely SAVE Chișinău, ANTRIM, and Monumentum Basarabia, as they engage in endeavors aimed at the safeguarding, reconstruction, protection, and promotion of the Republic of Moldova's cultural patrimony.



SAVE Chişinău stands as a prominent civil society organization committed to raising awareness of issues surrounding cultural heritage while actively participating in initiatives aimed at reforming the legal framework pertaining to the safeguarding of cultural heritage sites. In the realm of advocacy and policy-making, according to their website, the organization monitors municipal decisions and provides consultancy to citizens and public authorities on urban development and heritage protection. The organization's initiatives have yielded notable success, particularly evident in the aftermath of their issuance of the Manifesto for Cultural Heritage to the Government in 2019. Besides it is a strong move in education and raising awareness, subsequently, their efforts culminated in a pivotal development: the revision of the Law on the Protection of Monuments in December 2023 (The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2023).

In addition to their involvement in legal advocacy concerning the protection of heritage, members of this organization actively contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage through the development and implementation of initiatives such as The Visual Code. This comprehensive framework focuses on regulating the placement of businesses and outdoor advertising within areas of cultural significance. The fruition of The Visual Code represents a significant milestone in heritage conservation efforts, underscored by its official endorsement by the Ministry of Culture.

Initiated by SAVE Chişinău, this endeavor reflects a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon the expertise of designers, urban planners, and heritage specialists. Through volunteering and collective dedication, these professionals have come together to craft a comprehensive guideline aimed at harmonizing commercial activities with the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage sites. The resulting document stands as a testament to the proactive role of civil society in shaping policies that not only safeguard cultural heritage but also foster sustainable development and cultural appreciation within local communities. (The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova 2023).

In the contemporary era, the metamorphosis of art and technology has become increasingly pronounced, prompting cultural civil organizations to recognize and capitalize on this transformative phenomenon for the promotion and protection of cultural heritage sites and architectural landmarks (Joldescu-Stan 2023). This symbiosis is exemplified by the collaborative endeavors of SAVE Chişinău and ARCOR (The Centre for Creative Industries in Moldova), who have joined forces to craft nine immersive digital narratives showcasing various national cultural heritage sites.

Utilizing an innovative online app, this digital initiative seamlessly integrates advanced three-dimensional visualizations with captivating storytelling techniques, effectively transcending conventional temporal constraints. Through this cutting-edge approach, visitors are transported beyond traditional historical frameworks, „defying the temporal axes and transcending into the future” (The Untold Stories of the City 2023).



Cultural heritage cannot be analyzed independently of its economic performance. The concept of cultural capital (Throsby 1999; Krol 2021) defines any good that embodies or gives cultural value, besides the economic value or in addition to it. Cultural heritage has far more cultural capital than economic capital, but by means of tourism, civil society, and private organizations strive to make the cultural valuation of heritage more efficient from an economic point of view. In this regard, a relevant NGO in the Republic of Moldova is considered to be ANTRIM (National Inbound and Domestic Tourism Association of Moldova). The focus is on promoting Moldova as a tourist destination, with significant emphasis on its cultural heritage, while also identifying measures to ensure cultural heritage protection. ANTRIM works with government bodies to develop policies that support cultural tourism and heritage sustainability. Because they view tourism as a promoting factor for cultural heritage, the NGO invests in projects like BSB831/HERIPRENEURSHIP “Establishing long-lasting partnerships to upgrade heritage-based offers and create new investment opportunities in tourism and the cultural and creative industries”. Although an ICT-focused project, based on creative industries, HERIPRENEURSHIP allocated resources toward the promotion of cultural heritage, like rustic art and carpentry. Statistical data shows that cultural heritage tourism has grown exponentially in most European countries (Cukanova – Krnacova 2018) and countries like the Republic of Moldova must align themselves with the new norms, to integrate and develop both culturally and economically.

But before bringing up topics such as sustainable development, digitization of cultural heritage, immersive reality, and the like, it is important to note an underlying problem facing Moldovan cultural heritage: degradation and lack of resources from the state budget for reconstruction, renovation, or refurbishment (as stated by the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Moldova, in an interview for the purpose of this research). In this context, a visible non-governmental organization in Moldova is Monumentum. They represent an NGO the Republic of Moldova whose aim is to restore the Romanian historic monuments from the interwar period, destroyed during the Bolshevik and communist era. Monumentum Basarabia conducts fieldwork to document and restore endangered heritage sites, often involving volunteers and experts. Their projects have successfully preserved numerous heritage sites and increased community engagement in heritage protection. At the same time, the organization seeks to make an inventory of the Romanian cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova. The result of this inventorying process is the book written by Iulian Rusanovschi (2018), the founder of the Monumentum Association, who also explains the process of financing projects for the restoration of monuments. According to Rusanovschi, sponsorships are the main way for cultural heritage sites and monuments to be protected and restored, in the absence of an allocated budget from the Government. Before 2018, the year in which Monumentum was created, the process of obtaining funds and restoring monuments was under the responsibility of ASCOR Moldova (The Association of Romanian Orthodox Christian Students from the Republic of Moldova).



From 2010 to 2024 over sixty monuments were restored or built by ASCOR and Monumentum (Monumentum 2024) But the process of restoring cultural monuments is far from being a light and easy task. The deficient integration of the issue of cultural heritage in other state policies, such as education, environment, or tourism, and the lack of tradition in cooperation between the public and private environment have a negative impact on the role of civil society in safeguarding national cultural heritage (Report Twinning Project 2019).

All three organizations emphasize community involvement, education, and advocacy in their efforts and day-to-day activities. Although one is more focused on urban heritage and sustainable development (SAVE Chişinău), the other integrates heritage and tourism, providing an economic perspective to culture (ATRIUM) and the third specializes in the restoration and protection of immovable heritage (Monumentum Basarabia), all three have the same mission: that of engaging the community and collaborating with the authorities and other control bodies in order to make substantial contribution preserving Moldova's rich cultural heritage.

The previously stated considerations reveal the fact that the role of civil society in the matter of cultural heritage protection is a diversified one, and the concrete activity of the NGOs involved is challenging, given the heterogeneity of the object of protection.

Notably, the role of civil society in the realm of cultural heritage is discernible through two distinct perspectives. The first, known as the top-down approach, involves the influence flowing from state authorities to NGOs and civil society. In this scenario, the state takes a leading role in shaping policies and providing directives, and civil society organizations play a part in implementing and adhering to these guidelines. This approach often includes formal mechanisms for participation, such as advisory committees and public consultations, ensuring that civil society's role is structured and aligned with governmental objectives.

Conversely, the second perspective, referred to as the bottom-up approach, highlights the initiative and pressure exerted by civil society on public authorities. In this dynamic, civil society organizations act as catalysts for change, advocating for the preservation and protection of cultural heritage. They initiate grassroots movements, lobby for policy changes, and actively engage with the public to create awareness and garner support for the cause. This bottom-up influence emphasizes the proactive role of civil society in shaping the cultural heritage landscape and exerting pressure on authorities to adopt measures that align with community values and interests.

Conclusions

Having carefully analyzed the legal framework in force in the Republic of Moldova and having examined the work of important civil society organizations in the country, in the field of cultural heritage protection, we can confidently affirm the validity of the paper's underlying premise.



Thus, the slow steps taken by the Republic of Moldova reveal that there was not a high degree of openness on the part of the state authorities regarding the involvement of civil society in shaping public policies, respectively, in the present case, the policy regarding cultural heritage. Illustrative under this aspect is the very fact that only starting from 2023 have civil society organizations gained access to the electronic platform that ensures the possibility of their involvement in the deliberative public process. Beyond the delay in ensuring the functionality of the dialogue platform, the fact that, from a technical point of view, the deliberative process allows access to civil society organizations to discussions on draft normative acts, in due time, represents a huge step in order to replace the formal, apparent dialogue with a real and effective one.

On the other hand, the current Moldovan legislative architecture in the field of cultural heritage is also the fruit of the initiatives and pressures of the civil society, whose role was consistent and profound, not only in terms of adjusting the normative framework but also in its implementation. Thus, the Moldovan civil society has the merit of notifying the deficiencies in the application of the legislation in the field, monitoring the deviations from regularity, and constantly exerting pressure on the public authorities to remedy the deficiencies.

Regarding the last question proposed in the introductory part, research shows that civil society intervention, although limited by legislation or inadequate financial resources, has managed to leave its mark on advocacy and policy-making, education, and raising awareness. While the premise also included research and development, according to the Institute of Cultural Heritage of Moldova, the respective process cannot be completed by civil society organizations, due to the lack of support from national authorities.

Despite the significant steps taken by the non-governmental organizations described in this paper, it is undeniable that there is a lack of systematic action on the part of the public authorities to protect and safeguard cultural heritage. Such steps would not only bring stability to an area that is becoming increasingly important in the diplomatic and international context but would also legitimize heritage protection and reconstruction activities and encourage citizens to take action to protect culture and monuments.

As the following steps for the research, we propose a qualitative analysis, composed of interviews with civil society representatives in the Republic of Moldova, to better understand their needs and the hurdles they face in the process of safeguarding cultural heritage. As we are interested in a legitimate perspective of the state authorities on the given subject, such an approach is to be conducted, in part, with representatives of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova, and other officials from the national and local level.

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