

REHABILITATION OF A SPACE THAT INCLUDES SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE NEOROMANIAN STYLE

REABILITAREA UNUI SPATIU CE INCLUDE ELEMENTE SPECIFICE STILULUI NEOROMÂNESC

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Abstract.

This study explores the principles and methodologies for the rehabilitation of natural spaces surrounding buildings that incorporate elements of the Neoromanian style. Originating in the late 19th century, the Neoromanian style represents a synthesis of traditional Romanian folk architecture, Brâncovenesc influences, and Byzantine aesthetics. This architectural and artistic movement aimed to define a national identity and is characterized by specific elements such as semicircular arches, loggias, columns with basket capitals, and the use of natural materials like brick and stone. The research focuses on the landscape rehabilitation of the associated garden, arguing that the outdoor space is an integral part of the Neoromanian design philosophy. The approach centers on the use of traditional horticultural species, particularly native trees and shrubs, to recreate a rustic, yet elegant, atmosphere. The study proposes a framework for designing and implementing these green spaces, emphasizing the importance of respecting the historical context. The paper concludes with a case study that applies these principles to a specific project that is located in Cotnari, Iași. The findings offer a comprehensive guide for landscape designers, and cultural heritage specialists seeking to preserve and revitalize spaces that embody the rich aesthetic and historical values of the Neoromanian style.

Key words: rehabilitation, garden, Neoromanian style, landscape, rustic.

Rezumat.

Acest studiu explorează principiile și metodologiile pentru reabilitarea spațiilor naturale aferente unor construcții ce încorporează elemente ale stilului neoromânesc. Originar de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, stilul neoromânesc reprezintă o sinteză a arhitecturii populare tradiționale românești, a influențelor brâncovenești și a esteticii bizantine. Această mișcare arhitecturală și artistică a avut ca scop definirea unei identități naționale și se caracterizează prin elemente specifice precum arcade semicirculare, loggii, coloane cu capiteluri în formă de coș și utilizarea materialelor naturale precum cărămida și piatra. Cercetarea se

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concentrează pe reabilitarea peisagistică a grădinii asociate, argumentând că spațiul exterior este o parte integrantă a filosofiei de design neoromânesc. Abordarea se concentrează pe utilizarea speciilor horticole tradiționale, în special a arborilor și arbuștilor nativi, pentru a recrea o atmosferă rustică, dar elegantă. Studiul propune un cadru pentru proiectarea și implementarea acestor spații verzi, subliniind importanța respectării contextului istoric. Lucrarea se încheie cu un studiu de caz care aplică aceste principii, și detaliaza amenajarea unei grădini din comuna Cotnari, județul Iași. Rezultatele oferă un ghid cuprinzător pentru designerii peisagiști și specialiștii în patrimoniu cultural care doresc să conserve și să revitalizeze spațiile care întrușchipează bogatele valori estetice și istorice ale stilului neoromânesc.

Cuvinte cheie: reabilitare, gradina, stilul neoromânesc, peisaj, rustic.

INTRODUCTION

The neo-Romanian architectural style embodies a self-awareness of the romanian people and is manifested through components based on traditional values that reinterpret vernacular, brâncovenești and byzantine elements to create a harmonious national style [Dinulescu, 2009]. Constructive parts such as semicircular arches, columns and carved capitals, geometric and floral ornaments, as well as natural materials - stone, wood and brick - have been consistently recognized as defining features of the style [Hoinărescu, 2023; Lowe, 2001]. All these specific elements constitute the national cultural heritage, which is why their proper conservation within rehabilitation projects is of major importance. Therefore, due to the cultural value it encompasses, a space containing neo-Romanian elements and structures requires a rehabilitation process based on a methodology that offers conservation approaches applicable to the style [Baera *et al.*, 2023].

Despite the historical importance of neo-Romanian architectural elements, the deterioration of many of these structures is currently occurring at an increasingly rapid pace. This trend can be attributed to two major causes, namely - the lack of proper maintenance and natural functional ageing of buildings, respectively to inappropriate technical modifications that affect the initial stylistic authenticity [Nistor, 2000]. Similar to this phenomenon, there is an increased vulnerability of the plant environment, which once formed the indispensable entourage characteristic of neo-Romanian villas and buildings, the garden representing an indispensable extension of the house. The mentioned vulnerabilities clearly indicate the need to develop rehabilitation strategies that would provide not only rigid conservation of form and vegetation, but also adapt the spaces to contemporary functional standards through a sensitive reinterpretation of the landscape [Nestoriuc *et al.*, 2025].

The aim of the paper is to investigate the methods through which a space with neo-Romanian elements can be rehabilitated, while preserving its stylistic and cultural value. In this sense, the research proposes the analysis of an applied case

study that details the design of a garden integrated into the grounds of a rehabilitated neo-Romanian style house in Cotnari commune, Iasi county.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodology used combines architectural and landscape analysis of neo-Romanian heritage. It is based on the study of specialized literature and images retrieved from the Ziarele Arcanum and the Biblioteca Digitală archives showing the historical gardens associated with neo-Romanian architectural complexes, in order to catalog the plant species used, the compositional distribution of the alleys, the inventory of specific materials and traditional elements that can be reinterpreted in the proposed case study.

The initial analysis of the case-study site shows the advanced deterioration of architectural features such as masonry and wooden elements due to exposure to adverse weather conditions and the lack of necessary care. The study of the existing vegetation shows the loss of traditional species, the appearance of areas with unkempt vegetation, associated with soil compaction and deterioration of the alleys (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. The initial analysis of the site

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first stage of the process was the restoration of the building. Wood was used as the main element, intervening both on the exterior and in the interior design with wooden elements inspired by traditional, vernacular elements of romanian architecture (Figure 2).



Fig. 2. The proposed wood elements in exterior (1,2,3) and interior design (4,5,6)

The second stage consisted of the realization of the garden design concept. It aims at the reinterpretation of the spatial organization characteristic of a neo-Romanian style garden. To this end, the main interventions proposed were the restoration of the visual relationship between the reconfigured space of the loggia and the garden space, the reintroduction of characteristic traditional plants and the restoration of the alleys by using materials compatible with the original design (Figure 3).



Fig. 3. The proposed garden design concept

Relaxation Area Inspired by the Loggia

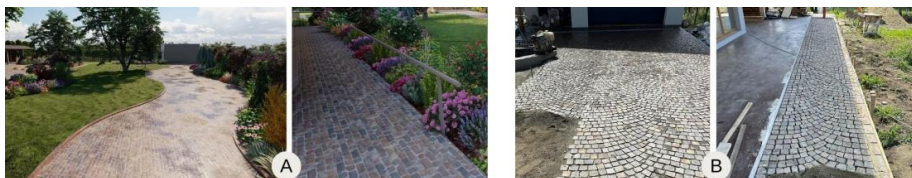
The design of the relaxation area is inspired by the architectural element of the loggia, a structure that harmoniously integrates traditional aesthetics into a contemporary space. It offers a functional area of rest and shade, while also creating an intermediate space that ensures a harmonious connection between the house and the garden. As in the built ensemble of the building, the exterior elements are also made of wood - as the main material, reflecting the traditional craftsmanship of neo-Romanian architecture (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. The relaxation area inspired by the Loggia

Restoration of pathways and natural stone elements

It was proposed to integrate alleys made of cubic stone, in order to preserve the historical aspect of the site and to highlight the continuity of the tradition in landscape design. These alleys will contribute to maintaining the harmonious connection between the general concept of the garden and the neo-Romanian architectural style of the building, while ensuring functionality and accessibility in the outdoor space (Figure 5).



a. The concept design presentation

b. The implementation stage

Fig. 5. The restoration of pathways

Creating plant compositions using traditional species

To recreate the authentic spirit of neo-Romanian gardens, it is proposed to use a traditional plant palette, which includes species frequently found in historical gardens around romanian houses.

The proposed species are listed in the table below.

Table 1.

List of proposed species

<i>Platanus acerifolia</i>	<i>Rosa sp.</i>
<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>
<i>Forsythia intermedia</i>	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>
<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
<i>Cedrus deodara</i>	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>
<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>

The selected species contribute to the rendering of the historical atmosphere by using plant textures specific to romanian landscapes from the beginning of the 20th century. Their use in the plant design contributes to the shaping of the stylistic identity of the garden, creating a continuity between architecture and landscape [Bernardis *et al.*, 2022].

Trees and shrubs such as *Platanus acerifolia*, *Cedrus deodara*, *Viburnum opulus* and *Prunus laurocerasus*, provide a structural framework for the composition, creating volume and areas of shade. These species recall the mature vegetation in the gardens of old romanian villas. Research into the historical archives of these villas demonstrates that the species of *Syringa vulgaris*, *Rosa* sp. or *Forsythia x intermedia*, are indispensable in the traditional landscape, bringing with them a special seasonal chromatic variation through abundant flowering, deeply integrated in the popular memory and associated with the historical heritage (Figure 6).



Fig. 6. The representation of planting compositions

The species of *Buxus sempervirens* and *Berberis thunbergii* contribute to the ordering of the compositions through their formal appearance, and decorative perennials such as *Lavandula angustifolia*, *Rudbeckia fulgida* or *Buddleja davidii* complete the composition with color accents, thanks to the beloved flowers used in both formal historical spaces and in the contemporary landscape (Figure 7).



Fig. 7. The representation of planting compositions

The stage of placing plants in the field is an essential one in the rehabilitation process (Figure 8). A rigorously executed implementation contributes to the recreation of the historical environment, while ensuring a harmonious coexistence of species, implicitly a sustainability of the landscape composition. Scientific studies confirm that the use of native species, organized according to ecological principles, increases their ecological resistance [McKinney, 2002; Căpraru and Zlati, 2009; Istrate *et al.*, 2025; Zlati and Gradinariu, 2010]. In this way, a

functional balance between the plant components is ensured, highlighting the need to integrate traditional species in the restoration process [Zlati *et al.*, 2024]



Fig. 8. The on-site arrangement of plants

CONCLUSIONS

The rehabilitation process of a space with neo-Romanian features requires a strategy that treats the site as a coherent ensemble, combining the conservation of built elements with landscape heritage. The restoration with attention to detail of the decorative elements and the traditional plant community ensures an authentic reconstruction of the house-garden ensemble, thus maintaining a balance between the cultural and ecological sides of the process.

Respect for heritage is not a rigid reconstruction of the past but a sensitive reinterpretation of traditional architectural and landscape elements. This process allows the preservation of the historical character, while adapting the site to the challenges and pressures of the present.

Looking beyond the direct interventions of rehabilitation of a degraded space, the process can be considered an example of cultural and ecological education. By bringing traditional species back to the forefront, the project significantly contributes to highlighting the value of cultural heritage, demonstrating its importance in the resilience of a cultural landscape.

The integration of traditional elements into the rehabilitation process contributes to the reactivation of national identity and the connection with our heritage. Moreover, the methods applied within it can serve as examples of good practice, which can be replicated in other sites with neo-Romanian specificity to achieve balanced projects in terms of authenticity, functionality and sustainability.

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