

Research paper

THE AESTHETICS OF RURAL CULTURAL CENTRES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY: TWO CASE STUDIES FROM THE NIŠAVA DISTRICT

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Abstract

The expansion of cultural centre construction in underdeveloped areas was an integral part of the cultural policy pursued by the new political and social order in Yugoslavia following the end of the Second World War. The conceptual aim was to foster the cultural life of rural populations while simultaneously promoting the principles of collectivism and socialist ideology. These buildings were erected according to predefined schemes developed by professionals specifically engaged for this purpose. However, the actual construction process, including the final selection of materials and decoration, was largely entrusted to the local inhabitants, who actively participated in building their own cultural centres. Today, due to the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the country's entry into a transitional period, these buildings are often abandoned and in a state of disrepair, while the local communities, formerly their users, have no legal rights to continue using them. This paper analyses two case studies of rural cultural centres in the Nišava District – the cultural centre in Kamenica and the cultural centre in Gornji Matejevac. The focus of the analysis is on the aesthetic components of these buildings and the effects they generated during their active use, as well as their current aesthetic value and the impact they produce as abandoned structures. The aim of the paper is to examine the extent to which the aesthetics of these cultural centres and the symbols they embody as the only institutions of their kind in rural areas influence the local population. The expected outcomes are intended to provide a response to the hypothesis that an aesthetic imbued with specific ideological symbols, incorporated within the eclectic architectural style of cultural centres, and their subsequent devastation, affects community development and alters the identity of place.

Key words: Rural Cultural Centres, Post-socialist Transition, Architectural Aesthetics, Community, Socialist Heritage

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural centres in the territory of Serbia are closely linked to the period following the Second World War, the formation of Yugoslavia, and the introduction of the socialist political system. In accordance with the political strategies of that time, the construction of a large number of cultural centres was planned, with particular focus on the building of these facilities in less developed settlements. The reason lay in the perceived need for the existence of a central point for the development of the cultural aspect of the inhabitants' lives. Although the planned objective was not fully achieved, the construction of cultural centres with the aim of affirming the local community in both cultural and political terms represents an ambitious project of that period. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, due to the transition and other political developments, cultural centres failed to survive as institutions because of unresolved legal issues and were gradually left to deteriorate. The subject of this research is the identification of the aesthetic characteristics of rural cultural centres as certain architectural and social phenomena of socialist Yugoslavia, as well as the analysis of the contribution of this architectural aesthetic to the formation of the identity of place and inhabitants through two selected case studies of cultural centres from the Nišava District. The methods applied in this research are analysis, synthesis, interview, descriptive and analytical research. The aim of the paper is to establish the relation between the aesthetics of socialist cultural centres and the society for which these facilities were intended, as well as to perceive the aesthetic properties of cultural centres today as abandoned institutions and their current relationship with society. By stratifying the phenomenon of the cultural centre through its aesthetic perception, the level of its significance will be observed primarily from a sociological aspect. The results should suggest that the importance of the existence of cultural centres was once considerable, even though the aesthetics and formality of the cultural centres cannot be characterised as highly valued architectural approaches. Also, today, with their closure, abandonment, and thus gradual deterioration, they form a new volume which acquires different aesthetic characteristics, and the effects of such a condition of the cultural centre on the inhabitants are entirely different compared to the active period.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methods applied in aesthetics cannot be clearly defined, because the relationship between subject and method is causal. Therefore, the inclusion of methodological procedures from other scientific disciplines is required [1]. In this research, analysis, synthesis, case study, descriptive and analytical research will be applied, as well as interview as a method for a clearer insight into the relationship and connection between people and the cultural centres in their locality.

The selection criteria for the case studies in this research include their location in the Region of South-East Serbia, which is the least developed region; their proximity to the City of Niš, which serves as the regional hub and the centre of the Nišava District; and their inclusion in the Municipality of Panteleј, which encompasses a large rural area. Additionally, the selected villages Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac represent two different types of villages according to the Spatial Plan of the administrative territory of the City of Niš, which is important due to the size of their gravity area.

The paper will analyse the aesthetics of rural cultural centres as utilitarian architecture, their design and symbolism during the period of their construction and active operation, and subsequently the aesthetics of abandoned rural cultural centres which, through gradual devastation, form a new structure. Thus, the same buildings in different periods are interpreted as different phenomena, and their effect on society is examined. The social effects of both phenomena of cultural centres and their aesthetics are analysed theoretically and empirically, i.e., based on theoretical foundations as well as through interviews with local residents. The methodological approach can be defined as integrative-synthetic.



Aesthetics, in a general sense, can be defined as a philosophical discipline and the science of sensory perception of the world and phenomena. Contemporary tendencies in aesthetics primarily emphasise "the cultural context" [1]. In this paper, the focus will be on the aesthetics of context (environment), the aesthetics of architecture, and everyday aesthetics. The aesthetics of architecture represents an aesthetic sub-discipline. The field of everyday aesthetics is a relatively new area and is closely related to the aesthetics of architecture and the aesthetics of applied arts, whereby the observation and analysis of architecture is not conducted from the standpoint of art and technological skills, but from the standpoint of everyday life, that is, from people's everyday experiences and their aesthetic perception of architectural space. Everyday aesthetics in architecture uses coherent aesthetic analysis as the dominant method, taking into account two aspects: the everyday (routine and habitual) and the creative (different, specific) [1].

3. CASE STUDIES

Two cultural centres in the Nišava District have been selected to be used as case studies for aesthetic analysis. The cultural centres are located in the villages of Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac. The villages share a border and are located approximately 7.5 km from Niš. Basic data on these cultural centres are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on cultural centres (source: author)

	Cultural Centre in Kamenica	Cultural Centre in Gornji Matejevac
Construction period	First phase of cultural centre construction (1945–1950) – unofficial data	First phase of cultural centre construction (1945–1950) – unofficial data
Legal holders of the property and land parcel	Socially-owned enterprise Agricultural and Industrial Combine "Niš"	Republic of Serbia (City of Niš), ex. Socially-owned enterprise Agricultural and Industrial Combine "Niš",
Type of rights, form of ownership and share	Ownership; social property; 1/1	Ownership; state and public property; 1/1 ex. Ownership; user rights; 1/1

Spatial position of the cultural centre within the village		
Land parcel area of the cultural centre	3368 m ²	2414 m ²
Building footprint	919 m ²	1004 m ²
Number of storeys	Basement + Ground floor + First floor	Basement + Ground floor + First floor
Subsequent interventions on the building	Sanitary facilities were added during the later socialist period	Certain ground floor rooms were adapted during the post-socialist period
Accent material	Stone	Stone
Current condition	Poor: the timber floor structure is significantly weakened, and part of the roof above the hall has collapsed	Poor: the building sustained fire damage, the consequences of which have not been remedied

3.1. Cultural Centre in Kamenica

3.1.1. Active period

Aesthetics of Context: The village of Kamenica is of unplanned origin and morphologically compact. In relation to its number of inhabitants, it belongs to the group of medium-sized villages. Due to the unplanned organisation of the settlement, there is no clearly defined centre. However, this was not achieved even with the construction of the cultural centre. The initial location for the cultural centre, which had the potential to develop into the "village centre", was at one of the main intersections, but this site was abandoned due to a tragic event involving young members of the People's Liberation Movement. The new location was established at the very entrance to the village. Although the cultural centre did not form the centre of the village, it successfully emphasises its beginning. Due to its dominant scale and the small square formed by the T-shaped base, it allows visitors to observe the most representative building of the village and, in doing so, signals their current condition and offerings in terms of cooperative products and cultural-entertainment events, thereby inviting further exploration of the village.

Aesthetics of Architecture: In terms of the functional aesthetics of the plan, the spatial units are clearly defined. The T-shaped base is divided into three parts. The frontal wing, parallel to the road, contains a decentralised entrance section accentuated by arches and columns, leading into a small hall with a bar, from which access is provided to the large hall where events were held. The hall and bar area enabled villagers to socialise before and after the events. The wing perpendicular to the road, in its ground floor volume, houses the cooperative section, positioned closest to the access road. It contained a shop also highlighted by columns and a balcony above, which belonged to the library. There was also a separate side entrance for the storage areas. The upper floor of this section comprised the administrative block and a library with a reading room. The basement level included an

additional inventory of storage and auxiliary rooms. Therefore, the clearly defined paths and movement schemes enabled villagers to comfortably use the cultural centre as a new architectural structure in the village. From the aspect of form, the volume of the building does not give the impression of massiveness, but rather of "modest grandiosity". The finish of most of the facade is in a neutral beige colour, highlighting the stone geometric articulation of the entrances to the communal and retail areas. Their form evokes a sense of approachability and seriousness. The repetition of larger windows and the accentuated geometric elements above them were not standard elements in rural environments. A further highlighted part of the building is the balcony near the road, which, together with the columns, forms the entrance to the cooperative shop. (Figure 1)

Everyday Aesthetics: The cultural centre hosted film screenings, performances, village gatherings, and associations such as folklore and marksmanship. The centre possessed a film projector, television, radio, and gramophone. Villagers emphasise that having a television was of great significance to them, as it allowed communal viewing and shared commentary on events and news. Some villagers hold very emotional memories of the cultural centre, such as seeing a film on the big screen for the first time. A particular sense of pride was associated with the activities of their centre – they highlight the recording of the first episode of the television show "Knowledge and Possession" (sr. *Znanje imanje*), and the marking of the 180th anniversary of the Battle of Čegar. Such events are remembered and often retold in the village, and the existence of the cultural centre contributed to the improvement of the cultural and social life of the residents. Through the operation of the institution and the presence of a dedicated space, new daily activities were developed or existing ones were transformed, thereby altering the aesthetics of everyday life.



Figure 1. (a) Main entrance and roof damage above the main hall; (b) Entrance to the shop and the balcony (source: author, 2024)

3.1.2. Current period

Aesthetics of Context: The cultural centre is currently abandoned. The longest-lasting function was the village shop, which also had to be closed in the late 1990s due to unresolved legal and ownership issues. Last year, the building began to physically deteriorate. Just as its once dominant structure at the entrance to the village invited visits and signified development and activity, it now, in its devastated state, gives the impression that the village itself is in decline.

Aesthetics of Architecture: The new form of the cultural centre, shaped by partial collapse, presents a different kind of aesthetic. The previously coherent form, externally defined by minimalist architectural decoration, has been transformed with the emergence of numerous small elements — interruptions in the roof covering, protrusions of broken wooden structures behind the frontal walls, and shattered windows. In the interior, even more detailed aesthetic

traces of decay can be observed. The hall, once the central space for social interaction among villagers, has been transformed into a horizontal composition of broken roof tiles and spontaneously grown plants, which, during sunny periods, reach upwards and form a unique arrangement with diagonally positioned structural fragments. In the administrative block and library, a hint of the former "homely, cosy" atmosphere still lingers, indicated by the chandelier and crocheted curtains, while the deteriorating walls create non-repetitive patterns that speak to the centre's prolonged disuse. (Figure 2) Thus, the building does not evoke the impression of an entirely alien, menacing structure but rather, as described by residents, a sorrowful disintegration of something once cherished.

Everyday Aesthetics: Near the abandoned cultural centre stands one of the village's main shops, so residents frequently pass by the site. The small square in front of the centre is still occasionally used as a gathering place, as it contains benches, a table, and a playground added at a later stage. Inside the last-operating shop, numerous promotional posters remain, visual markers of the gradual transformation of the socio-cultural system and aesthetics of daily life during the 1990s. Since the building is not secured, certain movable furnishings have been removed. What remains includes the film projector, television, a few shelves, chairs and tables, and part of the library's book collection, which is continuously diminishing. There are currently no signs of restoration efforts, a fact well understood by the locals. The older generations, in particular, express feelings of nostalgia and disappointment, as they are confronted daily with the deterioration of the most important public building in their community, a building they are not legally permitted to restore.



Figure 2. (a) Cultural centre library; (b) One of the standard office rooms (source: author, 2024)

3.2. Cultural Centre in Gornji Milanovac

3.2.1. Active period

Aesthetics of Context: The village of Gornji Matejevac is categorised as a large rural settlement. Genetically, it is of an unplanned typology, while morphologically, it belongs to the clustered village type. The cultural centre was positioned at a busy intersection, and its T-shaped layout enabled the formation of a gathering space, allowing social life not only to take place within the interior but also to extend into the building's courtyard. The primary school and the local community office were built nearby, forming a central core within the otherwise unstructured settlement. Located at a crossroads, the cultural centre functioned as an architectural landmark of the village's central zone.

Aesthetics of Architecture: The building's plan form is shaped like the letter T. The frontal wing, containing the main entrance and hall, runs parallel to the main road. The hall, with a relatively large capacity, includes a balcony supported by columns with modestly decorated capitals and bases. The wing perpendicular to the main road accommodates a shop on the

ground floor, with its entrance facade highlighted by columns and the library's balcony above. This tract also contains storage rooms. The first floor houses administrative spaces and the library with a reading room. The building's position at the corner of the intersection provides a dominant visual presence. To further emphasise its verticality, the design of the balcony railing is echoed in the attic's decorative elements. The entrance portico of the cultural and entertainment wing is articulated with three arches supported by four circular columns with restrained decorative detailing. Above these arches, three regularly spaced windows repeat the rhythm established on the ground floor. (Figure 3) The ground floor facade is accentuated with stone finishing, while the upper storey and much of the remaining facade are rendered in ochre tones. A different type of stone defines the basement level, situated on a gently sloping terrain. As the hall extends parallel to the road, the facade features large window portals accentuated by a continuous decorative horizontal band. With its greater surface area and eclectic facade combining arched and geometric motifs, the cultural centre was readily identified as the focal point for cultural events in the village.

Everyday Aesthetics: The centre hosted film screenings, theatrical performances, village gatherings, children's shows, and other community events. All activities enjoyed high attendance. The ability to independently organise such events fostered a culture of community involvement and the improvement of village life. The main agricultural cooperative was located here, and communal gatherings in the afternoons and evenings contributed significantly to the quality of daily life.



Figure 3. (a) Main entrance to the cultural centre; (b) Entrance to the shop and the library balcony (source: author, 2024)

3.2.2. Current period

Aesthetics of Context: The cultural centre was closed following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Today, the building is still positioned centrally within the village, and its immediate surroundings are actively used by residents for recreational purposes. On an adjacent plot, a football pitch was constructed, while the cultural centre's small square was converted into a basketball court. Various matches occasionally take place. Earlier this year, local residents organised several actions to clean up and maintain these courts. Information about these activities is often shared through the village's social media profile, which serves as a platform for updates about community initiatives. A fire that occurred several years ago severely damaged the building. Considering that, due to its volume and position, the cultural centre has retained its role as a landmark within the village, its devastated condition does not reflect the villagers' continuous efforts to maintain and adapt their settlement in line with contemporary rural development strategies. In 2022, the ownership of the cultural centre changed when it was sold at a public auction of the Socially-owned enterprise Agricultural and Industrial Combine "Niš" (PIK Niš). The City of Niš acquired the property, as well as the

neighbouring cultural centre in the adjacent village. Despite significant promises of renovation, this change in ownership has not brought any visible improvements.

Aesthetics of Architecture: The fire particularly devastated the interior of the centre, while externally, the damage is most visible in the missing window portals of the main hall. There have been attempts to repurpose parts of the building for new sports activities. This spontaneous functional adaptation led to a visually chaotic exterior, with the use of inappropriate materials, mismatched joinery, and partial repainting of sections taken back into use. One of the more absurd changes occurred inside, where the stage area behind the hall was bricked off to serve the local sports club's needs. The hall, which retains the blackened forms left by the fire, now ends in a bare, unplastered brick wall, creating a new visual identity – that of a ruin. (Figure 4) Additionally, the interior is covered in graffiti. This type of "vandalism" is uncommon in rural settings. In certain areas, such as the library, the intermediate floor is unstable, rendering entry unsafe. Nevertheless, traces of human presence suggest that people still enter the building. Despite its dilapidated condition, the original architecture remains partially legible.

Everyday Aesthetics: In the immediate vicinity of the cultural centre, a primary school and several general stores are still active, indicating that the village centre remains vibrant. Since the cultural centre is no longer in use, residents gather in these alternative locations (younger individuals in the schoolyard and older residents on benches in front of the shops). Their view often falls upon the abandoned centre. Although city authorities have announced its potential renovation, no actual plan for reactivation has materialised. In the meantime, as already noted, residents organise clean-up actions themselves, showing their own initiative to maintain the space. No original furnishings remain within the centre. The library space contains only broken shelves, now forming an unintentional geometric composition of wooden panels. Residents express disappointment that this central space has remained inactive for years. They feel the lack of a dedicated communal venue, which they believe is essential for a settlement of their size. Gatherings on benches are perceived as inadequate, contributing to a sense of monotony and prompting a growing tendency to seek cultural and entertainment opportunities in the city, which are no longer available locally.



Figure 4. (a) View of the walled-up stage in the main hall; (b) Balcony and entrance to the hall (source: author, 2024)

4. DISCUSSION – EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

The cultural centre, as a phenomenological entity, reflects a specific period, a segment of history, a moment of directed rural development and an attempt to reshape the perception of cultural life among rural populations. Cultural centres represented cultural spaces in villages that developed in accordance with the needs of the local residents, yet not according to the

predetermined plan and programme, thus not fully meeting the criteria nor fitting into the context of the "ideological-theoretical matrix" [2].

Cultural centres were the result of collective labour, which was both intended to be and indeed represented a hallmark of socialism: the emphasis on community intended to stimulate "general social discourse" and highlight the importance of social benefit as a key impression and criterion by which the significance of a work is determined. The intended typicality of the cultural centre, i.e. a certain alignment of functionality, may be observed as a "sum of dominant phenomena and relations at a given time, thus representing an important characteristic of art that should reflect objective reality" (according to Georg Lukács' theory of reflection) [3]. Examples of typicality and uniformity may be noted in the cultural centres in Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac, where the same plan type was used, though the facade treatment differs in certain details. Although Kamenica was a medium-sized village at the time, it showed tendencies toward development, and thus a larger cultural centre was planned.

Ideological and political meanings are evidently present and embedded in cultural centres, as symbols of the former system can still be discerned (five-pointed stars prominently displayed on the facades). However, the residents do not consider removing these symbols, even though they no longer identify with the former system and, with historical distance, now recognise the broader context of political propaganda. Nevertheless, they believe the cultural centre brought certain benefits and significantly influenced how leisure time was spent. Architecture develops in response to specific social demands and is determined by socio-cultural conditions; it adapts to these conditions in formal, aesthetic, and ideological terms [4]. In that context, cultural centres, as a new type of building located in the village centre or, in the case of Kamenica, at the very entrance to the village, represented an ideological aspiration towards progress, even though there was later insufficient investment in their further development. The cultural centres in Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac reflect the needs of the village at the time through their massing. The layout shape defines a usable open space, and thus the T-shape offers greater possibilities for forming gathering spaces.

From the perspective of form and architectural aesthetics, there was a direction suggesting that cultural centres should possess certain visual characteristics to distinguish them and indicate their significance. However, these visual characteristics were neither predetermined nor explicitly defined [5]. Arches and columns at the main entrances stylistically reflect traits of socialist realism, as well as the traditional architecture of the region, albeit with changed materialisation. These arches and columns were intended to suggest a function different from residential use. Neutral colours dominate the facades of both cultural centres, and stone appears as a secondary dominant material. The rhythmic arrangement of large windows on elongated facades is a leading motif in both buildings. Architectural details on the cultural centres in Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac are also very similar.

The economic position of the village and social perception of the yet-to-be-formed space must also be considered. Introducing these aspects clarifies the approach to creating a rational architecture and aesthetic directed toward achieving social significance. Although seemingly simple and unimpressive in terms of the architectural innovations of the time, they fulfilled the anticipated social needs. While these buildings may not stand out for their architectural value or significance, their "symbolic charge" is more pronounced and supports the assertion that the symbolic nature of a building is not necessarily proportional to its aesthetic value. The emphasis was therefore primarily on functionality, to which residents

had to become accustomed and familiar during the construction process. The architecture of cultural centres was meant to be close and accessible to the people, that is, "socialist in content and national in form" [6].

The analysed cultural centres also exhibit programme similarity. This can be attributed to the comparable level of cultural development in the villages. The notion of everyday life encompasses routines, familiar elements, a certain continuity of action and activity, and habits [1]. According to the residents, cultural centres were quickly accepted, thereby enhancing the aesthetic of daily life. Inhabitants felt a desire and need to spend time there. The ritual of visiting the cultural centre after agricultural work or labour in the city contributed to the aesthetic dimension of daily routine, as a nearly everyday act in support of their social and cultural lives. Residents state that the atmosphere offered by the centre in terms of space, light, and the vibrancy of visitors had a direct impact on improving the quality of leisure time. The most attended events were film screenings, dances, and village gatherings. In the summer, people gathered outside the centre, although main events were held in the large hall. Among the available activities, the library was the least visited. The reason for this was that people primarily came to the cultural centre for the aesthetic atmosphere it offered. Community interaction, including passive presence (e.g., collective television watching), were favoured activities, and these experiences reveal the residents' perception and aestheticisation of using the cultural centre during its active period. It should be noted that in terms of entertainment content, these sometimes bordered on kitsch, as popular commercial music performers occasionally held events there. From a cultural perspective, such content is not entirely appropriate to the function of a cultural centre. Nonetheless, residents agree that even such content was necessary from time to time. It is evident that the cultural development process required transitional content of this kind. The period when cultural centres in Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac were active was marked by significant influence on the local community (contributing to social cohesion, development of collective identity, and the formation of personal development). Moreover, one of the intended goals was achieved: the development of political awareness among rural inhabitants, fostering a sense of "personal participation in the construction of socialism".

The dissolution of Yugoslavia led to a transition from a socialist to a capitalist social system, accompanied by a period of societal transformation. The negation of the previous system, the strengthening of nationalism, as well as the confrontation with economic crises accompanied by deindustrialisation and privatisation, directed political tendencies and strategies towards attempts to address these issues. As a result, rural development was once again sidelined and often omitted from detailed considerations [3]. Cultural centres thus remained symbols of socialist tradition and planning even after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Today, even in a state of devastation, they represent the clear end of that ideology and the abandonment of its developmental aspirations. This highlights the problem of contemporary socio-cultural values, where the village is once again marginalised, without consistent investment or planning for cultural events. What is predominantly mentioned regarding rural areas is the opportunity for rural tourism, which primarily brings economic profit and tends to commercialise rural potentials if developed rapidly and without planning. However, very little investment is made in the cultural and social aspects of village inhabitants' lives. And even when certain initiatives for renewal exist, they do not belong to a long-term strategy for rural development. In the case of these two centres, there is no plan for renovation or reactivation. They are thus left to decay over time, creating new structures and aesthetic compositions of

ruin that cannot be precisely predicted. The collapse of a prominent and frequently visited village site demotivates the residents, causing frustration, sadness, and fear of being neglected and alienated from the nearby urban city structure.

While architecture was once a direct medium for expressing socialist ideas, it is now characterised by a certain intrigue created by crumbling walls shaped primarily by the passage of time. The aesthetics of ruin may be seen as an invitation to discuss society, lifestyle, politics, and architecture itself, along with its remnants. Damage to the structure may be defined as any change that has occurred during or after its use. Depending on the type, such damage does not necessarily impact the building's functionality, but as it progresses, it may render the space unsafe and unfit for its original purpose [7]. Simultaneously, damage alters aesthetic value. Aesthetic value is still present, but in a different form and interpretation. This is evident in the cultural centres in Kamenica and Gornji Matejevac, which have undergone various forms of devastation. The initial stage involved the disappearance of inventory and furniture, which occurred more gradually in the cultural centre in Kamenica. The cultural centre in Kamenica experiences a "natural" form of devastation due to abandonment, structural weakening, weather conditions, and the passage of time. The cultural centre in Gornji Matejevac suffered a fire, followed by vandalism from unknown visitors who further damaged the interior by creating often inappropriate graffiti. These modern ruins are depictions of ephemerality; they are not permanent and will continue to transform unless such processes are halted through planned intervention. Despite symbolising transience, the ruined cultural centres now possess a new ambient and narrative value, creating a different dialogue with the community. To emphasise the aesthetic qualities of a structure, the surrounding environment also plays a key role. The deterioration of a structure once crucial to the community's cultural life may also be interpreted as a metaphor for life itself.

With the abandonment and decay of the centre, residents are deprived of their only existing platform for cultural events, forcing them to spend their leisure time in the city or adapt activities to current limitations. In Kamenica, for example, people still gather in the courtyard of the cultural centre or in front of the local shop. However, these spaces are inadequate for accommodating larger groups, indirectly forcing residents to confine their social activities to private yards, which themselves are often too small to host community-scale events. This reduction in community interaction decreases the level of socialisation, and people become more oriented towards close acquaintances, which negatively impacts inclusivity in villages that, compared to cities, have significantly smaller and simpler urban structures. To realign the cultural aspect of rural life with contemporary tendencies, it is necessary to define development goals and formulate a strategic plan. It should be noted that most village residents support the idea of renovating the existing cultural centre. They also support constructing new buildings at different locations, but due to the established emotional and spatial connection with the current cultural centre and its location, they would not support its demolition, but rather its renovation in accordance with expert recommendations.

5. CONCLUSION

Today, cultural centres predominantly serve the function of remembrance of a previous period of social organisation. The aesthetic quality of the architecture of cultural centres should primarily be interpreted as a project of a political system that aspired to economical and primarily utilitarian buildings, without, at that time, a developed and clearly defined

stylistic direction, while the aesthetic understanding of the abandoned cultural centre is in fact a sensory analysis of a dynamic structure caused by the parameter of time, as well as by other complex factors. The effects on society caused by this discontinuity in the development of cultural centres are particularly significant, and through communication with the villagers, the necessity of a cultural space is perceived, a context of a central gathering place that would communicate with its users.

Considering the aesthetics of architecture and everyday aesthetics in both the active and current period of the two case studies, which are relatively close to each other, it is observed that cultural centres, although architecturally simple structures, are in fact highly complex compositions containing aesthetic and symbolic details, utilitarian aspects, social, political and cultural nodes. Although cultural centres may be described as symbols and materialised elements of the strategic cultural policy of the socialist government, it is undeniable that they had an affirmative impact on the local community, as such a space was necessary for the village as a turning point in its development. The closure and deterioration of cultural centres in representative locations can be interpreted as a depiction of the current relationship between rural areas and state development strategies, whereby this has an impact on the degradation of the identity of place and community. Although in poor condition, the residents do not feel the need to distance themselves from the building, in which some of their ancestors participated in construction or with which they are emotionally connected through memories associated with the cultural centre. Thus, among the locals, emotions of melancholy and nostalgia prevail, as well as frustration due to their inability to help or influence restoration, and subsequently the development of new potentials that the cultural centres would likely gain through revitalisation.

Future directions of research should examine what approaches to the process of revitalisation would be appropriate for this architectural typology, in order to ensure the quality of the aesthetic atmosphere, bearing in mind that certain cultural and social patterns of the inhabitants' leisure time have changed over time.

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