

## "Ultima Frontiera" Comments to presentation on Nov. 15th, 2019

### In general:

Unless expressed otherwise, participants consider the "Association of former political prisoners from Romania (AFDPR)" as beneficiary for their planning and design concepts. The memory of the suffering and dying of prisoners in the Danube Delta should be remembered by locals and tourists alike. In Romania, the memory to the dark sides of the recent communist history was and still is a sensitive issue.

The core territory where the prisoner camp of Periprava was situated is privately owned and location of an advanced ecotourism. A close co-operation with the owners of the hotel "Ultima Frontiera" is required if interventions within the original camp area are targeted. The owners of "Ultima Frontiera" complex reacted recently to commemorate the political prisoners by building an orthodox church next to the camp area. It is not clear in how far they would be ready to finance other built objects. Commemorating political prisoners has to go in line with improving the tourism infrastructure of "Ultima Frontiera" complex to gain the support of owners. The communist heritage is in principle suited as another tourist asset. Another issue is that the camp area is not directly accessible for outsiders. People must either stay in "Ultima Frontiera" complex as tourists or they work within the closed territory of 1,000 ha to visit the place of the former prisoner camp.

The core area of the camp is a small rectangle of some 80 ha, 2km length in the north-south and 0.4km in the east-west direction. The part of the camp where the political prisoners were kept is situated in the South. The wooden barracks were widely abolished already in the 1970ies to erase their traces. The remaining ruins in the North are the left over from the village of guards and service personnel like doctors and teachers and do not represent prisoner life. After the camp was abandoned an agricultural co-operative took over and cement buildings were used as stables and agricultural facilities. It is not clear when exactly they were built and if they had a meaning during the camp times. The former intensive way to produce animal products disappeared after 1993, when the territory was declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve and today we find only marginal animal husbandry at the place in accordance with the requirements of the protected area. As wetlands became restored some 25 years ago, the buildings became inundated and the vegetation changed to reed land and many of the buildings are today difficult to access. Notwithstanding this more ruins or houses in the North are renovated and converted into touristic facilities and indicate that tourism is the most important economic income of "Ultima Frontiera" complex.

While the camp was located in Periprava, the prisoners were moving around in the Romanian Danube Delta - an area of some 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> to build channels or other infrastructure, to harvest reed or to exploit resources. Even in case there are many locations with incidents where prisoners were involved. E.g. during reed cutting usually undertaken in the coldest period of the year and in the month of January or February, many prisoners fell into the cold water and could not withstand the icy winds blowing in these times. Many of the prisoners died at the spot while others got sick in the simple barracks that were usually not or poorly heated. So one third of the students opted to plan in the area outside the political prisoner complex where they were working and sometimes dying. In fact they covered a small portion of this terrain that is in or close Periprava. This can insure the "memory" even in case the "Ultima Frontiera" complex is not accessible.



In particular:

Four students presented their design proposals for "Ultima Frontiera" complex while two students were planning their projects outside the core area.

1) Petra Ianu

Presents primarily a 25 pages introduction to history and the surrounding landscape, but not yet a distinct project. Key words are - TEMPORARY - TRANSITION - CHANGE - ADAPT - REMEMBER Cultural festival Film, Theatre play, Dance, Poetry circle. The presented ideas are all valuable, but you need to concentrate on your main idea which has the largest potential and not to lose track due to several possibilities, not necessarily in line with each other. There is already an annual film festival in St. Gheorghe in the Danube Delta.

If film is the main theme the differences to the other film festival in St. Gheorghe have to be elaborated and explained. Will this be complementary or in competition to the other film festival. In how far the political prisoners are in centre of such a film or cultural festival? Several buildings are proposed to be transformed into a (film) festival theatre. What is the best suited ruin or the preferred place for activity? What are the needed interventions at the place? What are the costs in relation to the transformation? Who shall/could sponsor this activity?

2) Masayuki Fukui

Presents an ambitious plan for the entire area for the southern part of the former political prisoner camp with an entrance, a museum and a memorial area. The area roughly covers half of the core area, some 80 ha in the south. On 32 pages he explains his concept of the place with elaborated details. He argues that the history cannot be felt at the place and proposes to introduce the memory via his design proposals. There is an attempted transfer of Japanese concepts to the Romanian situation of periphery and decline. Both lines are merged in his concept which is really innovative and even if the concept is perhaps not entirely applicable it provides many entries of discussion for good design and management practice. In particular if natural materials of the area are used such as reed and wood - which is the historically correct one in the case of the prisoner camp barracks - the concept of rebuilding periodically is a good and flexible one.

To become more feasible from an economic context following questions should be answered: what is the expected number of visitors? What are the visiting hours for tourists coming from outside "Ultima Frontiera" complex? What are the costs of establishing the interventions? Who shall pay for it and in how far the price is in relation to the benefit? (A division of costs between owners and funding agencies in relation to beneficiaries of the project)

3) Kenya Yoneichi

Describes his ideas on five pages. Actually there is the history of the place and not just nature. You observe that the buildings are exactly orientated on the main directions of a compass. This is quite a contrast and could be considered as "human" or "in-human (bearing in mind the use as a prisoner labor camp)" against nature. So you should connect your current impression of nature with the informations on the political prisoner camp. You develop a wooden structure at the camp site territory. The new structure is not linked to the reminders of the prisoner camp. Could you do so? What is the purpose of the current structure? [Such as a passage from here to there! Or "Spiritual passage" if you consider the concept of old Japanese gardens] In how far the structure is related to the history of political prisoners or to certain

individuals? Where exactly in the southern territory the building is located? For how many people it should serve? What kind of visitor frequency is expected? What is the expected cost? Who is supposed to pay for this?

#### 4) Oana Rotaru and 5) Toni Cherneva

Oana and Toni went to Periprava on their own and organized their own study tour. This was fruitful, as their design proposal goes beyond the site of "Ultima Frontiera" complex and considers the larger "Periprava" area (in the work even the Eastern part of C.A.Rostti municipality with Sfiștofca and Grindu is mentioned) as a target region to commemorate the political prisoners. You purposely want to consider the larger region for their designs avoiding to be dependent on the owner of "Ultima Frontiera" complex. You do not target a particular building but an ensemble of interesting objects along a political prisoner hiking pass that should shed light on the daily life of prisoners during the turn of the year. Particular points where prisoners died or were injured could be marked or emphasized with land art interventions to remember that something happened here. Do you intent to position information maps on certain incidents? How long is the entire trail? What is the required management to maintain the path? [Usually animals are running in the area and a lot of structures get broken if not permanently maintained] For what number of visitors are you planning? You propose a certain funding scheme which is great as it makes your project realistic and calculable! Do you have an NGO willing to support you? [Beside the AFDPR in Bucharest, I recommend artist Laura Ivanov, chairwoman from the Sfiștofca Art Association who already undertook art interventions in the area e-mail: <ivanov.laura@gmail.com>] As you did a separate field trip you missed our discussion with the mayor of C:A.Rosetti, who offered us his full support. [Mr. Aurel Giocel, tel. +407443825460, please contact him]. And finally you should consider a research institute. During our trip we visited the DDNI. There, Mr. Edvard Bratfanov, invited us to cooperate with them on our issue [<http://ddni.ro/wps/>]. So in principle you have the all partners to start a real project in the intention of our course. And certainly you will need a budget. How high do you consider the costs to establish this path?

#### 6) Michael Plankensteiner

The culture to remember is in focus of the design work. During the 1970ies and 1980ies, the main purpose was to forget the sad political past and to hide everything. Even during the following two decades there was no change in this attitude. Just recently and in particular through the activities of the AFDPR during the ongoing decade this is currently a reverse process. On one side you plan for in a ruin of the northern part of the prisoner complex in another attempt you propose collecting briques and put them in front of "Ultima Frontiera" hotel. Do you target primarily the guests of Ultima Frontiera? How to invite more people from Periprava or tourists not residing in the hotel complex? What is the expected cost? Who shall initiate the project?