



14 January 2014

Concern: Ultima Frontiera Course

Dear all,

thank you for the contribution so far. My general observations and specific comments to designs or project proposals are written down on the next five pages. With most of you I could additionally discuss and I extended the deadline to deliver the very final versions to January 21st, in one week. There are no restrictions on the form of presentation.. In addition I ask you to prepare an A1 poster and a joint booklet summary. All materials received by then will be put on the webpage (www.breiling.org/lect/uf-web).

On April 22nd 2020, we will present the results of our course at a special session at the 27th Conference of the Working Community of the Danube Countries (ARGE Donauländer) in Tulln with several actors from Danube Region Strategy. We will get in total 45 min presentation time. Beside a TU Wien Landscape student presentation there will also be the presentation of UAUIM students by Marius Voica. So expect the possibility of a 3 to 5 min oral presentation time.

Each project/student should prepare and summarize her/his design/concept in a poster in A1 format. The oral presentation should refer to the content of the poster. Kindly use also the logo of the TU Landscape Unit (<https://landscape.tuwien.ac.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/landscape.png>) in the letter head above, the UAUIM logo (<https://www.uauim.ro/media/img/uauim-ro.svg>) and also the logo of the "Danube Region Strategy" (f.e. https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/themes/dfd-native/assets/images/no_image_resized_675-450.jpg).

We plan to send all posters by the end of January to the conference organizer.

Booklets summarizing all student projects in the format as prepared by Oana and Toni will be printed by conference organizers. Please prepare your project summary or short version and send it to Oana (e-mail: [oanarotariu6591@gmail.com](mailto: oanarotariu6591@gmail.com)). Oana will send the final output to me. We plan to send the booklet by the end of January to the conference organizer.

All students who plan to publish their work in the Academic Journal of Vernacular Architecture (<http://csav.ro/>) are invited to try and I will discuss with Dr. Marius Voica and editor Dr. Christina Vultur on the possibility of a special issue. Further information will follow in February.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Meinhard Breiling". The signature is fluid and cursive.

"Ultima Frontiera" Comments to presentation on Dec. 13th, 2019

In general:

The Danube Delta, the municipality of C.A.Rosetti with the village Periprava and the labor camp Ultima Frontiera experienced several paradigm changes over the last period of 70 years. During the 1950ies and 1960ies there was the time of cruelty and believe that the Delta can become one of the most productive areas. During the 1970ies and 1980ies, the main purpose was to forget the sad fate of political prisoners and to deny their presence and to hide the physical remains. The 1990s brought the ecological ideas back and a reverse of great development ideas that were pursued during communist time to the idea of restructuring the Danube Delta in an ecological way. Only recently, during the last decade, the fate of thousands of political prisoners, dying or suffering in the Danube Delta became an issue.

The collapse of communism did not only bring ecological restoration, but a serious economic decline to the Danube Delta. Many inhabitants, in particular the well educated ones left the area to more economically prosperous ones. In addition many areas of the now protected Danube Delta - often in the property of the municipalities or the county - were exempted for economical reasons. Reed harvesting, fishing or aquaculture or touristic facilities were commissioned to the highest bidder to guarantee at least a minimal income to public institutions widely lacking tax income for maintaining public administration. As the economically best pieces were privatized the locals suffered additionally from restrictions to their long lasting informal rights like fishing at certain spots or harvesting reed for personal use. Many of the areas commissioned out to private businesses collapsed just after a few years when profitability for private businesses could not be maintained and were simply given up.

The local population in C.A.Rosetti municipality is lacking income opportunities and experiences a severe outmigration and deterioration of local services. Positively regarded is the border to Ukraine and the jobs created by national and EU border police and the obligations for frontier protection. Without this guaranteed income the situation would be even worse. In general the tourism sector is not full filling the many expectations put into it. Ultima Frontiera complex is the most advanced tourism company in C.A.Rosetti and eventually brings the highest tax income to the municipality. Bringing additional attractions directly to this company or to the wider region will definitely help to strengthen the economic viability of the municipality. On the other side the projects commemorating the political prisoners can also be situated outside the core area. By this, even other locations where prisoners were doing forced work could be commemorated. Funds coming into the region and municipality are urgently needed.

If not expressed differently, participants consider the "Association of former political prisoners from Romania (AFDPR)" as recipient for their planning and design concepts. The memory of the suffering and dying of prisoners in the Danube Delta should be altered by targeted building interventions. Locals and tourists should become more informed on the sad happenings in Periprava and Ultima Frontiera in particular in post war communist Romania.

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. An income increase due to augmented visitor streams has to be seen in relation to the planned interventions and their potential to commercialize the place additionally. Some of the student projects require high investments and additional investors from outside.

The core territory where the prisoner camp of Periprava was situated is today privately owned and became the 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.

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 in the early 1970ies 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 already 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 the former 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 km² 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. There was a subsidiary camps in Sfiștofca and many temporal camps. Putting emphasize on the wider area in and around Periprava can help to generate a "memory" even in case the "Ultima Frontiera" complex is not accessible or closed for outside visitor streams.

Funding projects in the Danube Delta is perhaps the most difficult issue. Different strategies can apply here: i) to limit the scale and size of projects to the means and resources available at the place and in the local region or ii) to lobby for partnership and a consortium to go for a larger solution. The resources from the owners of Ultima Frontiera complex to initiate such a venture might be already limited at current state. We learned that a "memorial construction"

was initiated by the owners of Ultima Frontiera on their initiative. They built a new Romanian Orthodox Church on the territory in 2018/19 devoted to all prisoners that lost their lives during this period. According to participating students this intervention does not fully meet the memory of all political prisoners as many of them were not members of this church. Mayor Mr. Giocel additionally informed that we find seven more churches in the municipality of C.A.Rosetti with currently some 700 inhabitants and that more and different initiatives are required. Our students contribute in this character.

In particular:

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

Design concepts for the core area of Ultima Frontiera Complex:

1) Petra Ianu

Condensed her initial concept of 25 pages with broader ideas to a more elaborated 12 pages design concept with seven elaborated details. Please check English! Key words for the seven elaborated details are i) recycling, ii) partnership investment, iii) sponsorship, iv) local workers. Recycling refers to the use of materials such as concrete, transported from far away during times of central planning. Partnership investment and what kind of national and international partners should be involved is not mentioned. Being specific in this allows a better comment/judgement. The same applies for sponsorship and fundraising! The creation of working opportunities for locals is a very good idea. However, the municipality is not too large and a lot of skilled labor force is perhaps not in place. Maybe you can split different kinds of works and judge in how far you can manage with locals.

The seven design elements in the proposal: 1) ticket and information counters in broken building. How many elements will be needed? All six or just a few? Maybe the food store or your 2) food store could be combined and you choose what building is better suited for a multipurpose information and shop area. Also what is your visitor expectation for high and low season days. This consideration may define the need for capacity. 3) The cinema (or multipurpose cultural) hall and the idea of complementary events to St. Gheorghe is nice. However, what is the expected use? How often will it be used? How many people shall visit the hall during the festival(s) and ordinary times? What is the estimated cost to renovate the building? 4) The exhibition hall is a good idea if you have a special exhibition in mind and you propose a cheap solution for the roof. But what should be exhibited here? Will there come enough people that justify the effort of an exhibition? 5) The renovation of buildings in the guards area for tourist rental is already taking place and this idea is straight forward. Eventually one could make an assessment of priority from location, easy access and degree of decline to list the feasibility for tourist adaptation. 6) Camping place is a nice idea as it is cheap and flexible. The availability of water has to be considered in particular and is more difficult to reach than just a good site for camping. 7) The sanitary facilities are certainly important. There is a great tradition of building compost toilets in the Danube Delta. Why do you think you will need ToiToi toilets instead of simple reed based toilets? How many toilets will you need or for what number are you planning? For all seven design proposals: what are the costs in relation to the transformation? Who shall/could sponsor this activity?

2) Masayuki Fukui

Presents an ambitious, modern plan for the entire area for the southern part of the former political prisoner camp with three design elements: an entrance, a museum and a memorial area. The area roughly covers half of the core area in the south. On 39 pages he explains his concept of the place with some elaborated details. He argues that the history cannot be felt at the place as he cannot feel the terror of the past in a beautiful landscape. He proposes to introduce the memory via his design proposals.

His first design is the entrance area. The planned building for the entrance area recombines half broken elements with new contrasting materials that reshape to a cube building. But is the roof of the building open or closed. In case of openness the function as coffee house would not be possible.

The second design is the memorial area under the motto architecture like a ghost. Several buildings remain untouched while some of the ruins are reshaped to stricter geometric forms with help of contrasting materials. Some ideas are provided like engraving the names of victims into the remaining walls. If more ideas in support of the memorial could be found it would be even more supportive.

The third design element proposal is a museum built into the ground. This is a really contrasting element connecting the entrance area with the memorial area. The material used is concrete and walls increase from two meters to ten meters. While the design might be appealing one can question the functionality of this design element. In particular the cost of 10 million Euro have to be better justified by the use of the museum. How many people are expected to justify this expenditure?

There is no longer an attempted to transfer Japanese concepts - like rebuilding shrines made of natural materials every 20 years (described on page 12 of the old concept) - to the Romanian situation of periphery - where the barracks of prisoners could be rebuilt in a similar time interval. I regret this as it would be really innovative to try this in a European context and according my opinion also feasible. 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.

Cost calculations are very valuable. However I do not understand the meaning of construction costs. Or can you specify what you mean by this as compared to material and labor cost. Is it the cost to transport materials and to rent construction machines? Who shall pay for different elements 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 nine pages. The ideas behind the design are not described and more explanations have to follow. What is the purpose of the current structure? In how far the structure is related to the history of political prisoners or to certain individuals? 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?

According to our personal discussion from 10th January we agreed on a redesign of the current proposal. Instead of a physical museum a virtual museum should explain the building structures of the period when political prisoners lived here. The virtual museum should be represented by an app for computers and mobile devices.

4) Michael Plankensteiner



Presents one realistic but efficient idea by constructing a small memorial building directly in front of the central building of Ultima Frontiera complex. The culture to remember is in focus of the design work. In addition there is the idea of recycle materials. During the communist time a lot of building materials were brought into the Danube Delta and into the prisoner camp in Periprava. Afterwards the materials were partly used in the agricultural co-operative. Latest since the closing of the co-operative in the 1990ies the materials are no longer used. The basic idea is to use minimal intervention to construct a new building with recycled materials that carry the memory of the past. There is the knowledge that prisoners touched and used these materials during the period they suffered in or before they died in the Danube Delta.

Locating the memorial building just in front of Ultima Frontiera complex is a good idea. All tourists staying there are confronted with the former presence of political prisoners at their location. It is also an invitation to better explore the past by entering the building. The construction itself can be cheap if volunteers can be found to undertake the construction work. This can be in co-operation with universities and/or NGOs like AFDPR in Bucharest or local organizations. The project is realistic and needs moderate funding. The issue is to find interested key persons and to promote the project.

Design concepts for the wider area and side camps in the Danube Delta:

5) Oana Rotaru and 6) Toni Cherneva

You describe your proposal in 30 pages. The 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. In the update you even include other political prisoner camps that were concentrated near Braila and Constanta. As mentioned, I would consider at the beginning only the camps near Periprava, your (3) and would afterwards aim to produce a larger work with Braila and Constanta regions. 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. Eventually you can produce sight maps with QR Codes explaining the history of the area or particular persons. 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! But what is the needed budget? You further describe the four aspects of an architectural project! You give yourself several questions (p.25) but you also need to answer them. How to take history out of a private property assumingly refers to the construction of observation towers or structures (p.26). You need to describe what you mean! The drawings of p. 28, p.29 and p.30 are unfortunately not self explaining and need additional description from your side.

Update on Jan. 13th, 2020 in booklet form. The strong introduction is contrasted by an abrupt end. Can you produce a map with the nine intended stops for Periprava? Did you walk along the proposed path? I did it some years ago, but there were barriers and I doubt that they disappeared. Is it useful to reproduce the "shelter" nine times? The strong point from last time with information on the funding organization disappeared. What is the approximate cost of this project?