

Introduction

1.1. Preamble

More than a century ago there was a Great War, a war that crashed the great empires, freed nations, reshaped borders, but first and foremost a war that changed the face of the earth forever. Such war changed the concept of war itself, upgrading it to *total war* and acquainting history with the phenomenon of mass dying. In the whirlpool of the war the nations mingled and collided, and the confusion of Babylon descended upon the war fields. Some fought for freedom, some fought for power, but the great majority fought because they had no other choice; dead or alive, the exit was through fire and there was simply no other way out. So, the earth trembled and for four years darkness descended upon the nations, but when the sun rose again new countries arose on the Eastern Front.

In the aftermath of the war, for a long time, historians narrated a dissociated story, a story about two separate fronts. Still, there is only one all-inclusive tale, a tale told by the earth itself, a tale about the significance of WWI sites as places of remembrance and heritage. That is because the Great War not only reshaped balances of power, redefined borders and wrote fundamental pages of national history for several states, but also shaped the identity of the land, redefining landscape. The Great War inaugurated a procedure of environmental incisions that branded the places of war with the world war mark, a hallmark that rooted conflict in the earth, not only as ground strategy but also in anticipation of threats from the air. Bunkers, trench systems, mine craters, common graves were all carved wounds in the landscape, wounds that in time turned into scars giving the natural environment pride and personality, converting space into place.

Nature itself played a part in this plot by growing poppies to remind the world of its sons lost in battle, and ever since the red poppy became a symbol of warfare remembrance for every war that followed. So, these places of war became soul keepers of a war long gone, but whose avatars reach us to this day. For decades the land wore its scars with pride, honouring the memory of the fallen and listening to their silent voice in hope that one day it would arise to be heard. This poses a question: more than a century after the end of the Great War, if you could give voice to those who lost theirs, would you do it? If the earth itself reached to you and urged you to listen to its story, would you do it? Would you?

I did, and that is why my research explores the significance of WWI sites. The aim of this research is to understand the relevance of Romanian WWI sites as places of remembrance and heritage. The centenary of the end of the

Great War emphasised the necessity of approaching WWI remains, and hence their adjacent war sites, as potential heritage objects. The work, which was conceived as a pilot project for the heritage management of the WWI remains on the Eastern Front (on account of historic peculiarities and the contemporary political similarities between the countries of the region), is designed to contribute to the work of the authorities that have legal responsibility to decide the preservation or allow obliteration of these places of war. Furthermore, the work holds capacity to inform decision-makers, private and public agencies, and the general public about the heritage extent of war sites, thus providing them with a scientific basis for dealing with and deliberating upon the heritage status of these war remains and, inductively, on the management of the material culture of war.

The sites of conflict reveal stories of international relations, societies, cultures, mentalities, traditions, institutions and people against the background of the land, all of which come together, intersect and inhabit the same space. The various dimensions of the considered landscapes mingle together in a tacit narration about the Edge of Europe.

1.2. Research context and broader themes

At a symbolic level, the war sites preserve an evocative power that transcends the common boundaries of materiality. With the passing of time WWI earthworks and buildings have become architectural features representative of the symbology and phenomenology of the Great War. War architecture can be approached as a cultural artefact filled with the untold stories of the past. Although it is widely accepted that architecture mirrors its source of emanation, the study of WWI architecture as footprint of the generative society was never approached scientifically, leaving an entire archive of meanings unexplored and constituting a gap in our knowledge that is still to be filled.

The international dissemination of President Woodrow Wilson's *Fourteen Points* not only anticipated the age of human rights but also seeded a new international mentality that later spread worldwide. In this way the Great War can be approached as world war, as its implications reached actors and had major consequences on people not directly involved in the conflict at the time it occurred. By instigating the dissolution of the great empires, the Great War created circumstances that allowed completion of a historical process, which culminated in the emancipation of the Eastern Front nations and the freedom of East European peoples, thus setting the scene for a new world order. In such an optic, WWI can be viewed as the collision

of two worlds; a war between a declining world and a potential world, each fighting for the prevalence of what they believed to be idealistically just.

Work conducted so far on the Eastern Front fails to cover the heritage and remembrance dimension of the war sites. The historical circumstances of the Galician Front nations impacted negatively on the research capacities of the East European states. Until recent times international researchers were unable to conduct research within the region due to restrictive regulations and inaccessible archives, and there was little contact with the West. Scientifically speaking, Eastern Europe was internationally invisible for a long time. Nationally, the communist propagandistic strategy (Denize, 2009) heavily abused the patriotic repertoire triggering a process of vulgarisation of national discourse, which was the main factor leading to the overall neglect of late modern war sites. Achieving the aim of understanding the relevance of Romanian WWI sites as places of remembrance and heritage constitutes a step towards filling a gap in our knowledge of the war and its consequences, as well as raising an awareness that could result in improving East European heritage practices. The present research provides a methodological model for other countries of the region that face similar difficulties in managing their war heritage and remembrance (Gheyle, *et al.*, 2014).

At international level there seems to be a significant difference between the low visibility of the Eastern Front in opposition to the prominence of the Western Front. While large-scale works have been conducted for the Western Front, in terms of memory and memorialisation, we have little similar knowledge of the Eastern Front. The WWI Eastern Front also remains largely unexamined, both in terms of archaeological works and heritage studies, so that its capacity to inform us about the conflict remains unexplored.

By examining the relevance of Romanian World War I sites as places of remembrance and heritage, the present research will provide a representative case study of the Eastern Front situation concerning the heritage management of war remains, as well as clarifying their significance as places of remembrance at a national level. The war and its consequences had major impacts on countries such as Romania, so understanding more about its conduct and remembrance (Misztal, 2003) will be significant to policy makers and heritage agencies in Romania and elsewhere in Europe.

In 2018 Romania celebrated a hundred years of National Unity, alongside celebrating the end of the First World War. This created a need to question the significance of any remaining war traces. The fate of the material remains of war, in terms of preservation and legal protection, depends on the elucidation of their heritage status. Until now, no East European World War I site has been granted official heritage status, despite the fact that for several nations of the region this war meant national unity and liberation

from foreign domination. Consequently, there is a strong case for conducting research on the Galician Front from a heritage perspective.

In Romanian national history, the Great War represents a cultural landmark that stands for having achieved the aspirations of national unity, independence and self-determination, thus qualifying the places of war as “lieux de memoire”. Beyond this strong national significance, the Romanian case is emblematic of a larger phenomenon concerning the socio-political background and historical circumstances that impacted upon, and fuelled, the participation of several East European nations in WWI (Jukes, 2002). Like other nations of the region, Romania was literally forged in the industrial war, 1st of December 1918 marking the Great Union of all Romanians.

The research area of this study holds the potential to highlight all these aspects. Maramureş was among the last territories freed from foreign domination and united to “the Mother country” *de facto* in 1919 (Batin, 2014) in the aftermath of heavy fights conducted, physically, against the Hungarians and, diplomatically, against the Great Powers (Ardelean, 2016). The Mountains of Maramureş are part of the county of Maramureş, situated in North Romania near the present border with Ukraine and marking the last frontier of the European Union. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these mountains were surrounded by three empires: the Czarist Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the German Empire. Before the war, on the mountains’ northern crest, stood an imperial boundary stone in the shape of a triple-faced obelisk of white marble, each facet adorned with a metal plaque pointing in the direction of one of the great empires.

Maramureş is, notably, a Romanian historical province where the war did not begin in 1916 as in the rest of the Romanian Kingdom, nor did it factually end in 1918. The continuation of physical and diplomatic fights after the Great War constitutes additional reasons for selecting this region for the present study alongside the central criterion of providing a representative case study illustrating the condition of such multi-ethnic imperial provinces during the war. The difficult position of the local population in Romanian historical provinces during WWI, their divergent histories, the peculiar conditions of Romanian soldiers in the multi-ethnic imperial army, loyalty dilemmas, persecutions, the exclusion from memorialisation of the overall population, along with the resulting alterity of the borderline places of war, recommend Romania as a suitable case study and Maramureş as an adequate study area for the understanding of the legacy of the Eastern Front in its extreme complexity, diversity and alterity. The need to conduct this research is further advocated by the fact that the Mountains of Maramureş present a rich variety of examples of material culture of war, which builds up a rare case of conflictual landscape that is still visible to the naked eye. The concept of conflictual landscape denotes a land that has been influenced throughout time by conflict, and visibly shaped by it; a land that has been historically

disputed and contested due to its position or geography and which, as a result of that historical conflictual state, was mutilated during the world wars giving birth to a reinvented landscape. The world wars' projection of violence onto the land, whose traces over time became the marks of those wars (trench systems, bomb craters, bunkers, etc.), has created a conflictual landscape that not only preserves the traces of a very particular kind of war, in a unique spatial context, but also highlights that the land itself was the agent of conflict and the object of rivalry that fuelled the war.

From a remembrance perspective (Connerton, 1989; Moriarty, 1999; Winter, 1999; Bushaway, 2001; Misztal, 2003), war remains became potential, genuine and inclusive war monuments, able to hold not only national and local significance but also to gather fragmented memories (Traverso, 2012) becoming representative in a frame larger than that of the national state. Unlike classic war monuments that were built to commemorate a precise and often restricting category (Nelson and Olin, 2003), WWI remains are evocative of all the war's participants, regardless of the role they played. This work aims to test the concept of monumental landscape of the places of war in order to fill a gap artificially constructed in WWI standard rhetoric, bypassing the classical commemoration of historically representative characters, fallen soldiers or local heroes. The Great War was a complex phenomenon whose call to arms echoed among both the masses and individuals, soldiers and civilians, a summons that gathered and collided empires, nations, armies, weaponry, humans, animals and, above all, land. Hence, the landscape dimension allows the reconciliation of WWI memories by providing space for the mutual completion of common consciousness and individual memories and congregating a myriad of layers that were authentically built in time and by time. From the perspective of sites of memory/heritage, the places of war gather together a wide range of collective symbols/meanings and warfare knowledge/testimonials that can shed new light on the war itself, highlighting its peculiarities and contradictions.

The present work has the capacity to inform us about a dimension of the Great War that, until now, has remained unexplored. In countries like Romania there is an urgency to elucidate the heritage status of these war remains before development irremediably alters the traces of war. Understanding whether they are worthy of being legally protected, regionally, nationally and/or internationally, and implicitly preserved for further study, is of great relevance and stands as a precondition of our understanding of the war from a still poorly explored perspective, which might remain the case if the sites are permanently altered or destroyed.

1.3. Research outline

The overall aim of the research presented in this book was to explore the significance and relevance of Romanian WWI sites as places of remembrance and heritage. The

slant of the research implies dealing with the material culture of war and thus with cultural memory, which, on the one hand, calls into question WWI memory and remembrance and, on the other, relies on archaeology as a means of investigating the past and heritage as barometer of official value recognition/assignment. In order to address the aim of examining Romanian material culture of war in a heritage perspective, the methodology was designed to address three subsidiary objectives. The first objective regards the investigation and recording of WWI material evidence of war in Maramureş. The second objective regards the investigation of the heritage legal framework in Romania and examines the premises for granting heritage status at national level in order to allow the assessment of the places of war as heritage. The third objective regards investigation of the international legal framework and examines the premises for granting World Heritage status, allowing assessment of the international significance of WWI sites and contextualisation of the Romanian case in the wider heritage debate.

The research design is incremental, with the results of each stage affecting the next one. Hence, the literature review allows construction of the methodology, the methodology allows construction of the research method; the research method prescribes the need to develop historical contextualisation, the historical context allows the identification and characterisation of the research area upon which the field work is conducted; the field work identifies and records the material culture of war which provides the basis for the assessment of the war sites as heritage at national/international level, while the exploration of the national heritage legal framework ends up conjoined with international heritage, which is interdependent with national laws. Structurally, the work that begins with the identification and analysis of the Maramureş war sites will follow the path of national and international heritage legislation and debate to finally re-conduct the results to the case study in a concentric manner and hence contextualising the investigated material culture of war within wider heritage/memory phenomena.

The structure of the research informs the achievement of the main objectives, each chapter responding to specific needs meant to elucidate the research question. Each sub-question covers relevant thematic areas at different levels of analysis, which work together in building up the different layers of the research focus. The work is organised in a logical progression with the findings of each chapter constituting the raw materials to inform the subsequent.

The work constructs the first gazetteer of Romanian WWI sites and provides the first scientific investigation of the material culture of war adjacent to the Eastern Front. It emphasises the necessity of approaching war sites at landscape scale and highlights the monumental value of the conflictual landscape dimension, advocating the preservation of the landscape itself as heritage. Wider significance of the research is offered by the fact that it has

constructed a methodology for the assessment of heritage that goes beyond war sites, extending to and having implications for other categories of yet unrecognised heritage. The work constitutes a new approach to the material culture of war, which combines heritage knowledge with conflict archaeology and landscape, both enlarging overall understanding of the war and opening new windows on the study of the war/material culture in an interdisciplinary perspective.