

Irina Leca

**FROM HERITAGE SITES TO HEALING SPACES: A
THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPE APPROACH TO HERITAGE
MANAGEMENT IN BĂILE GOVORA, ROMANIA**

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Vienna

November 2024

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by

Irina Leca

(Romania)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy,
Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Irina Leca**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis began in response to the deteriorating condition of the historic built environment in Romania, which has been my professional focus since 2009. The thesis tackles historic spa resorts, with a particular focus on Băile Govora, a site I have been working on since 2020. The research aims to reposition heritage within a broader therapeutic landscape and explore ways to connect their preservation with contemporary health and well-being practices, as spa resorts are primarily places of healing.

The first chapter examines the concept of therapeutic landscapes and related values and attributes, with particular attention to Western examples such as the Great Spa Towns of Europe transnational serial UNESCO World Heritage property. The second chapter delves into the development of Băile Govora's therapeutic landscape, tracing historical events and policies that have shaped the evolution and management of the resort through three political regimes in the last 150 years. It also discusses the town's current challenges, arising from changes in mass tourism and shifting economic and social contexts after 1989. The third chapter further provides an overview of national policies influencing heritage conservation and spa resort development, emphasizing both limitations and opportunities that are now relevant to Băile Govora and its therapeutic landscape. The final chapter establishes connections between heritage, health, and wellbeing, positing that despite the risks Govora's heritage assets are facing, these attributes represent valuable opportunities for community revitalization and the innovation of health and wellness practices associated with spa tourism. By presenting the Govora Heritage Lab program, implemented by Studiogovora, a local NGO dedicated to heritage preservation in Băile Govora which I am part of, the thesis offers a practical case study that illustrates how heritage can be integrated with health and wellbeing initiatives.

Acknowledgements

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Alice Choyke, my thesis supervisor, for her encouragement and expertise, which provided clarity and guidance throughout the process of completing this thesis. I am equally grateful to Dr. Dóra Mérai, whose thought-provoking questions were instrumental in shaping the early stages of this work.

I am deeply grateful to my family and friends, especially Eugen, Cristina, Anca, Ale, and Brîndușa, for their steadfast support, tireless proofreading, and for pushing me to think outside the heritage bubble. I would also like to thank my colleagues at Studiogovora, Ștefania, Catinca, Radu, Roxana, and Bianca, whose dedication and perseverance in grassroots heritage work have been a constant source of motivation.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues and professors at CEU for what has been a lasting and enriching learning experience.

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List of Abbreviations

1. AHD – Authorized Heritage Discourse
2. EU – European Union
3. GHL – Govora Heritage Lab
4. ICCROM – International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
5. ICOMOS – International Council on Monuments and Sites
6. INP – *Institutul Național al Patrimoniului*, National Heritage Institute
7. NGO – Nongovernmental Organization
8. OAR – Ordinul Arhitecților din România, The Romanian Order of Architects
9. PUG – *Plan Urbanistic General*, General Urban Plan
10. PUZ – *Plan Urbanistic Zonal*, Zonal Urban Plan
11. UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

Growing up in the 1990s, I was immersed in a world of spa resorts and vacation rituals, traveling with my grandparents to Romanian spa resorts such as Slănic Moldova, Olănești or Tușnad. At that time, I was unaware that I was witnessing the last years of what could be called a "golden age" of Romanian spa tourism, a long-standing health practice in Eastern European culture marked by distinctive places, communal spaces, and restorative rituals that was then on the cusp of profound change. My fascination with these environments was quiet but enduring, an interest which would later develop into a deeper recognition of their historical and social significance.

Recent years have brought me closer to these old spa resorts, allowing me to actively contribute to sustaining spa heritage sites as spaces of healing and cultural identity. A pivotal step in this path was joining Studiogovora, a group committed to preserving and revitalizing heritage in Băile Govora, one of the many historic spa resorts in Romania. I became involved with Studiogovora just a few months before beginning my studies at CEU, and the connection between my academic path and my fieldwork has since been interdependent. Not only has my graduate coursework expanded my critical approach to heritage conservation but it has also directly influenced the direction and impact of our work in Băile Govora. With each new insight gained in the classroom, our projects became more refined and tailored to the needs of the site and its users. This integration of academic and practical experience reached a new level on November 6th, 2023, when I purchased a former thermal plant dating from 1968, located in the heart of Băile Govora, with the aim of gradually transforming it, together with Studiogovora, into a space where heritage revitalization ideas can be tested in cooperation with a wide network of local and regional actors.

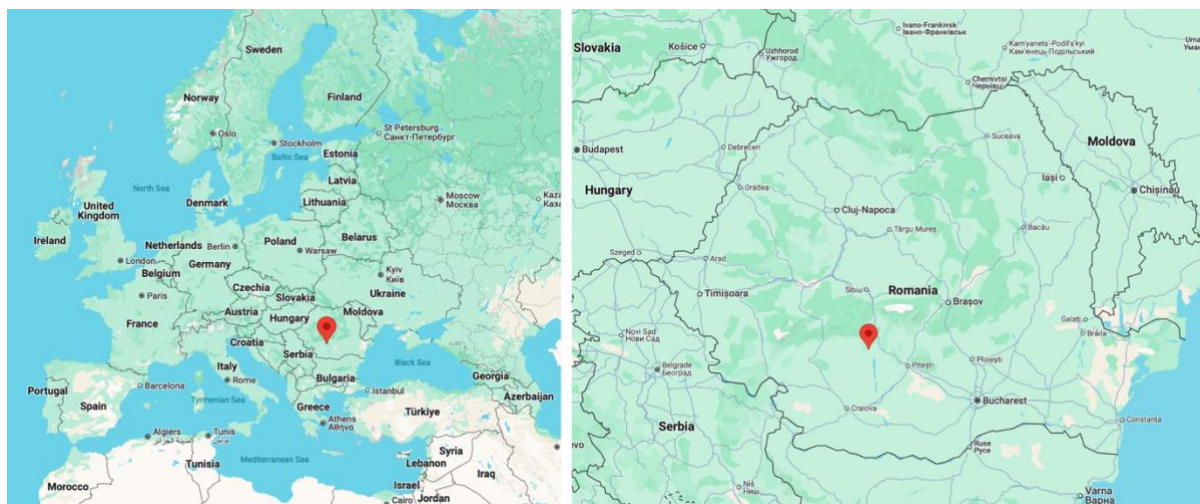


Figure 1: Location of Govora in Europe and Romania

Băile Govora, a charming resort town with just over 2,000 residents, is situated in southwestern Romania, approximately 20 km from Râmnicu Vâlcea, the county seat of Vâlcea. As part of the region's network of spa resorts—including Olănești, Călimănești, Căciulata, and Ocnele Mari—Govora's development has historically been tied to its mineral waters and its role in the health and tourism sectors. However, like many small resort towns significantly affected by shifts in mass tourism after the fall of the communist regime, Govora faces persistent economic and social challenges. Since the late 1990s, the town has faced a demographic drop, lack of employment opportunities, low economic income, and fewer tourists.

Băile Govora was developed from the ground up in the forested landscape following the discovery of its healing waters. Beginning in the late 1880s with a single bathing facility, the town transformed into a modern (for that time) spa resort within three decades, inspired by the "ideal/garden city" model and Western European spa traditions. Remarkably, Govora retains much of its original historic architecture and urban layout, as it was spared significant alterations during the communist years when many other resorts underwent urban systematization.

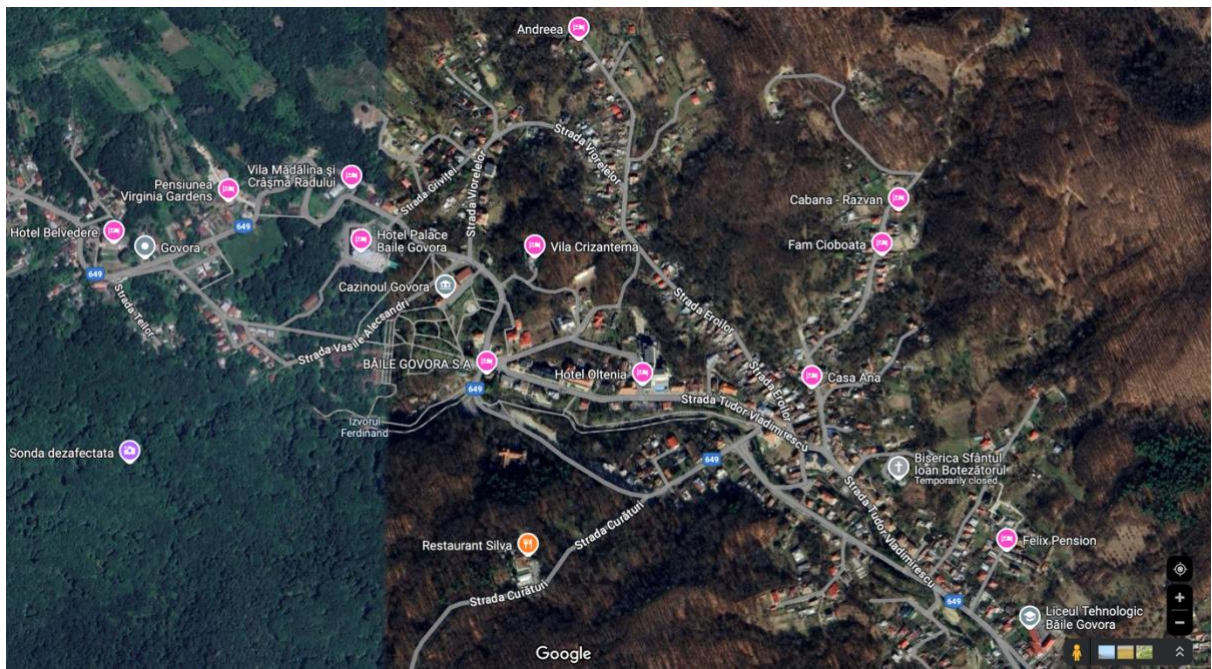


Figure 3: Satellite image of Băile Govora. Source: Google Maps



Figure 2: The central area of Băile Govora with the park and thermal area and the main street along the Hința River. Source: Studiogovora

The townscape features a harmonious blend of grand spa buildings and vernacular architecture, all set within a vast natural environment. At its heart lies the historic thermal park, home to key spa buildings and the Casino, surrounded by the town's historic villas, shops, and

houses. This combination of cultural and natural elements establishes Govora as a distinctive landscape centered on health and wellbeing. Moreover, its fusion of local and international architectural influences positions it as an important example of a spa resort at the crossroads of Eastern and Western traditions.

Civic engagement and community participation in public life in Băile Govora have significantly declined in recent years, influenced by generational changes, youth migration, and economic challenges. A notable divide exists between the active workforce, many of whom commute outside the town and exert pressure on local decision-makers, and those reliant on this group for their livelihoods, who often avoid voicing criticism. Addressing local heritage issues demands a proactive administration equipped to monitor historic buildings, design projects, secure funding, and co-finance and coordinate large-scale strategic initiatives. However, the municipality faces critical challenges, including insufficient staff with the necessary expertise, limited hiring capacity, and a small annual budget that restricts access to external specialists.

Băile Govora does not currently have a heritage management plan, as such frameworks remain uncommon in Romania and are typically developed in the context of World Heritage nominations. However, efforts to create a management framework for local heritage are being led by Studiogovora, the sole local organization actively working to unite local, regional, and national stakeholders in a shared effort to understand and preserve Govora's heritage values. Studiogovora's primary initiative, the Govora Heritage Lab, focuses on creating scenarios for revitalizing the neglected spa heritage and reconnecting it with health and wellbeing practices. The Lab undertakes experimental projects aimed at fostering urban, social, and economic renewal by restoring and enhancing the historic environment. These activities and their impact will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

With many historic buildings in a state of disrepair, both residents and visitors tend to associate the resort with a bygone "golden age." Due to the resort's specific medical profile, numerous repeat visitors have been coming to Govora for decades, witnessing its gradual decline firsthand. Together with the residents, these long-term visitors often express nostalgia for the past while providing valuable insights into how the resort operated before privatization. While both tourists and residents generally appreciate the modernization of accommodation facilities, they are notably critical of the deteriorated state of the historic buildings and the limited availability of leisure activities, particularly those that could highlight and celebrate the town's heritage. Furthermore, they express powerful emotional connections to the town's heritage, but also manifest a lack of agency and knowledge about possible ways in which they could contribute to improving the state of local heritage.

Health and well-being are integral to the daily life and heritage of Băile Govora, serving as the foundation of the town's origins and identity. These themes are key to understanding and tackling the challenges the town faces today. The concept of the therapeutic landscape provides a compelling framework for addressing these issues, offering a perspective that connects health, heritage, and community in a meaningful and cohesive way. This thesis will serve to further this discourse by answering the following research questions.

Research questions:

1. What are the key heritage values and attributes that define the therapeutic landscape of historic spa resorts, with a specific focus on Băile Govora?
2. What existing heritage management policies influence the preservation and utilization of spa heritage and how can they be improved to enhance health and well-being?
3. How can civil society initiatives raise awareness about the connections between heritage and well-being while fostering community engagement and stewardship in Băile Govora?

Methodology

In order to understand how Băile Govora functions as a therapeutic landscape and identify possible heritage management approaches that support well-being, the thesis employs the following methodology.

Literature and Policy Review: The academic literature on therapeutic landscapes, cultural heritage management, and spa town heritage will be briefly reviewed. This includes topics such as the therapeutic landscape concept, heritage management and strategies for spa development in Romania, and links between culture, heritage and health and well-being.

Case Study: Băile Govora and the Govora Heritage Lab

This study employs an in-depth analysis of Băile Govora as a heritage site, focusing on its therapeutic landscape values and attributes. The research draws on a variety of data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the town's historical, social, and cultural context. Historical archives and planning documents related to the development of Băile Govora offer insights into the town's origins and evolution.

Central to this case study is the Govora Heritage Lab program, which links heritage, community, and the therapeutic landscape through a range of initiatives. These include interdisciplinary research, cultural events, heritage interpretation activities, on-site restoration projects, and efforts to develop and enforce local policy tools such as best practice guidelines for restoring historic buildings.

Field research carried out during on site activities for the past five years plays a critical role, incorporating detailed documentation of heritage buildings and interviews with residents, tourists, and tourism operators to capture diverse perspectives. Furthermore, field research was carried out methodically during the Govora Heritage Lab summer school in September 2024.

At this time university anthropology students investigated how residents and tourists perceive Băile Govora's therapeutic landscape, starting with the question, "Where, why, and how are people taking the waters?". The study examined the relationship between natural resources, spa traditions, and community identity, highlighting how Govora's therapeutic landscape supports place-making through collective memory and local spa identity. Methods included shadowing, interviews, participatory and non-participatory observation, photo elicitation, and stakeholder mapping. Participants ranged from residents and artisans to medical professionals, returning tourists, and retired spa workers, providing diverse insights into the resort's cultural and therapeutic significance.

Given the length of the text and the time allocated for research, this thesis does not provide an in-depth analysis of medical spa practices, or the heritage challenges faced by all Romanian historic spa resorts. Additionally, it does not fully address the complexities involved in managing the natural resources, both surface and subterranean, that constitute Băile Govora's natural heritage: mineral waters, woods, air and so on. These issues are of extreme relevance to mapping all attributes of the therapeutic landscape and will be hopefully further researched in the future by Studiogovora's interdisciplinary team and professional network.

Thesis Outline:

The first chapter examines the concept of therapeutic landscapes and its relevance to historic spa resorts, with particular attention to Western examples such as those included in the Great Spa Towns of Europe UNESCO transnational serial property. The second chapter delves into the development of Băile Govora's therapeutic landscape, tracing key historical events and policies that have shaped its evolution. The town's current challenges, arising from shifting economic and social contexts after 1989 and evolving tourism practices, are also discussed. The third chapter provides an overview of national policies influencing heritage conservation

and spa resort development, emphasizing both the limitations and opportunities relevant to Băile Govora.

The final chapter establishes connections between heritage, health, and wellbeing, positing that despite the risks facing Govora's natural and cultural heritage, these assets represent valuable opportunities for community revitalization and the innovation of health and wellness practices associated with spa tourism.

By presenting the Govora Heritage Lab program (GHL), implemented by Studiogovora, the local NGO dedicated to heritage preservation in Băile Govora where I am one of the founding members, the thesis offers a practical case study that illustrates how heritage can be integrated with health and well-being practices in historic spa resorts. GHL has been developed based on the resources provided by the Open Heritage Project and by ICCROM's Heritage Place Lab approach. GHL was first presented in 2022 at the People-Nature-Culture Forum organized by ICCROM in 2022 in Suwon, South Korea. This subchapter builds on that presentation and on the article that was further developed for the PANORAMA: Solutions for a healthy planet platform.¹

¹ Irina Leca, "Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort," PANORAMA: solutions for a healthy planet, accessed November 18, 2024, <https://panorama.solutions/en/solution/govora-heritage-lab-linking-nature-culture-and-health-historic-resort>.

Chapter 1 – Historic Spa Towns as Therapeutic Landscapes

Therapeutic landscapes, which encompass physical, emotional, social, and even spiritual dimensions, have evolved as an interdisciplinary framework used to explore the relationship between place and well-being. With its “multi-dimensional and multi-scalar focus”, the concept “engages with complexity and flux”, but these characteristics have also “limited its uptake and application across disciplines and within policy circles.”² There is a pressing need for strong and innovative empirical research that is easily understood both within and outside of academia to support the process of integrating data on therapeutic landscapes into health policies.³ By grounding the concept within the historical context of spa towns, often seen as the first conceptual therapeutic landscapes, the chapter illustrates how these sites can advance recognition and policy integration for therapeutic landscapes today in the field of heritage management.

Historic spa towns are uniquely positioned to deepen the understanding and utility of the therapeutic landscape concept in heritage management. Policy tools such as the management plan of the Great Spa Towns of Europe UNESCO World Heritage site provide useful and accessible information for heritage managers on how values and attributes linked to the therapeutic landscape can be identified and protected. Although there are similarities with the great spas, each historic spa town possesses unique characteristics shaped by its size, cultural context, and natural environment, which must be carefully identified and preserved. For Băile Govora and the broader network of Romanian historic spa towns, such management

² Sarah L. Bell et al., “From Therapeutic Landscapes to Healthy Spaces, Places and Practices: A Scoping Review,” *Social Science & Medicine* 196 (January 2018): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.11.035>.

³ Bell et al., 129.

tools offer a flexible and replicable framework to assist in identifying, prioritizing, and safeguarding their distinct values and attributes.

Tributary to heritage legislation, the focus of such policy tools is primarily on preserving the Outstanding Universal Value and the physical attributes of the site, with limited attention to intangible, social, and emotional values that also contribute to well-being. In heritage-rich settings such as historic spa resorts, this expanded understanding of heritage values, acknowledging healing, social, and emotional dimensions, not only underscores the importance of heritage to well-being but also positions the therapeutic landscape concept as a vital tool for managing existing site attributes in close relation to evolving community needs and perceptions.

1.1 Therapeutic landscapes

The metaphoric concept of ‘therapeutic landscape’ combines the idea of landscape with holistic health principles, building on theories from cultural, structural and humanistic geography.⁴ First introduced by geographer Wilbert M. Gesler in the early 1990s, the concept is “a geographic metaphor for aiding in understanding of how the healing process works in places (or in situations, locales, settings, milieus)”.⁵ In Gesler’s interpretation, the therapeutic landscape concept offers a sociocultural lens to examine how ‘**place and space**’ influence health. It provides an analytical tool for understanding how environmental, social, and individual factors interact in natural or built environments to foster health and well-being, shaped by specific experiences, perceptions, ideologies, attitudes, and emotions associated with those places.

⁴ Karolina Doughty, “Therapeutic Landscapes,” in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard et al., 2nd ed. (Second edition. | Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2018.: Routledge, 2018), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315195063-27>.

⁵ Wilbert M. Gesler, “Therapeutic Landscapes: Medical Issues in Light of the New Cultural Geography,” *Social Science & Medicine* 34, no. 7 (April 1992): 743, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(92\)90360-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(92)90360-3).

Gesler's initial case studies examined locations historically linked to therapeutic properties, such as Epidauros in Greece, Lourdes in France, and Bath in England. Looking into the components of the therapeutic landscape, Gesler divided them into three main categories: natural environment, social environment, and spiritual environment. The natural environment includes elements such as territory, scenic nature, water, and a location away from daily stress. The social environment refers to the site's reputation for healing, its identity, the enacted social relations, shared routines, historical background, and relative social equality. "The spiritual environment "incorporates symbolism, the healing power of faith, supernatural healing forces, the origin of spiritual nature, spiritual transformation, and related beliefs, philosophies, expectations, and perceptions."⁶

While in this first period of research the therapeutic landscape concept was mainly applied to places that already had a recognized reputation for healing, the theme subsequently opened up to include places that promoted well-being and contributed to maintaining the health of visitors.⁷ Further research focused on people's interaction with the landscape, arguing that places are not intrinsically therapeutic, and that positive experiences are linked to certain types of engagement. Thus, the therapeutic landscape experience arises from a complex interaction between an individual and their surrounding social and environmental context(s).⁸

Drawing on Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory, the enabling character of therapeutic places has been linked to a series of resources - encounters, networks, and associations.⁹ These can be grouped into three types: social, affective, and material. Social

⁶ Marcin Salamaga and Diana Dryglas, "Therapeutic Landscape as Value Added in the Structure of the Destination-Specific Therapeutic Tourism Product: The Case Study of Polish Spa Resorts," *Tourism* 71, no. 4 (November 2, 2023): 785, <https://doi.org/10.37741/t.71.4.9>.

⁷ W. Gesler, "Therapeutic Landscapes: An Evolving Theme," *Health & Place* 11, no. 4 (December 2005): 295, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2005.02.003>.

⁸ David Conradson, "Landscape, Care and the Relational Self: Therapeutic Encounters in Rural England," *Health & Place* 11, no. 4 (December 2005): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2005.02.004>.

⁹ Cameron Duff, "Networks, Resources and Agencies: On the Character and Production of Enabling Places," *Health & Place* 17, no. 1 (January 2011): 152–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2010.09.012>.

resources are tied to the place itself, as they both arise from and support everyday experiences through relationships formed within the therapeutic setting. Affective resources involve the individual or collective emotional responses that shape or limit actions and perspectives. Material resources refer to the way relationships are built through the physical characteristics of a place, influencing people's access to goods, services, and information. Various processes are employed to support social responsiveness in therapeutic environments, combining relational, emotional, and cognitive abilities to form social networks and create meaningful experiences.

Therapeutic landscapes evoke social and cultural responses, and individuals may experience therapeutic landscapes in varying ways at different times. Thus, the potential healing outcome of landscapes can be understood as a relationship dependent process.¹⁰ This broadens the concept of therapeutic landscapes to include both tangible and intangible human values, reinforcing the idea that health, wellbeing, and place are deeply interconnected. These values are woven both into the narrative of individual and communal histories of people seeking wellbeing, and various material and architectural layers.

The idea of therapeutic landscapes has developed alongside research and theory to align with contemporary societal values. Successful therapeutic landscapes are those which consider the social and cultural background of their surroundings and respond to the environmental, mental, and physical needs of their users.¹¹ Recent years have seen therapeutic landscapes linked to placemaking practices and building healthier, more resilient communities.¹² A deeper connection to place is seen as vital to fostering stronger communities and enhancing overall

¹⁰ Bruno Marques, Jacqueline McIntosh, and Hayley Webber, "Therapeutic Landscapes: A Natural Weaving of Culture, Health and Land," in *Landscape Architecture Framed from an Ecological Perspective* (IntechOpen, 2021), 31, <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.99272>.

¹¹ Marques, McIntosh, and Webber, 13.

¹² Marques, McIntosh, and Webber, 14.

health and well-being. The prosperity of a community is inherently linked to the vitality of its environment, encompassing natural landscapes, local culture, and the broader surroundings.

Therapeutic landscapes can enhance the well-being of individuals, communities, or even entire populations. The most effective healing environments are those that create a welcoming atmosphere and cultivate a strong sense of place, often achieved when users feel emotionally or historically connected to the space.¹³ A “sense of place” is shaped by the inclusivity of a space’s design and its intended use, as well as by historical connections that enrich the “place identity”. Placemaking activates the restorative qualities of these landscapes, fostering social inclusion and a sense of comfort or attachment through communal activities.

Therapeutic landscapes are deeply connected with both tangible and intangible heritage. In an ongoing effort to link culture with health and wellbeing, research has highlighted how engaging with heritage sites can enhance physical and mental wellbeing. Studies underscore “the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, the pressing need for more thoroughly evaluated studies, and the potential to further theorize the relationship between heritage and well-being.”¹⁴ This theoretical development can lead to innovative and thoughtful strategies for managing heritage sites in ways that are “sensitive, imaginative, and meaningfully engaging.”¹⁵ These topics will be further explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

¹³ Marques, McIntosh, and Webber, 16.

¹⁴ Timothy Darvill, Vanessa Heaslip, and Kerry Barrass, “Heritage and Well-Being: Therapeutic Places, Past and Present,” in *Routledge Handbook of Well-Being* (Routledge, 2018), 10, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315724966-12/heritage-well-being-timothy-darvill-vanessa-heaslip-kerry-barrass>.

¹⁵ Darvill, Heaslip, and Barrass, 10.

1.2 Historic spas as therapeutic landscapes: values and attributes

Historic spa towns are among the first generation of conceptual therapeutic landscapes, where the interplay of natural mineral springs, architecture, and social life created an environment that fostered healing. Beyond their built heritage, the intangible aspects of these towns, such as their historical significance, communal routines, and symbolic associations with health, contribute to a broader understanding of well-being that extends beyond purely physical dimensions. These towns, with their rich heritage of wellness and social interaction, highlight the potential of integrating the concept of therapeutic landscapes into contemporary heritage management policies.

1.2.1 Taking the waters

The Greeks were among the first Europeans to recognize the therapeutic benefits of mineral waters, a practice later expanded by the Romans, who built complex bathhouses known as *thermae*. However, water was only one aspect of treatment in ancient times. Pilgrims seeking healing at shrines dedicated to Asclepius combined prayer, fasting, and ceremonies, precursors to modern spa practices like meditation, relaxation, diet, and the ritual use of water.¹⁶ While the use of thermal springs dates back to antiquity at least, the modern practice of "taking the waters" originated in eighteenth Great Britain and spread throughout Europe. By the nineteenth century, 'thermalism', defined as the use of waters at various temperatures for medical use¹⁷,

¹⁶ Marina Soroka, *The Summer Capitals of Europe, 1814–1919*, 1st ed. (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017). | Series: Routledge studies in modern European history; 41: Routledge, 2017), 13, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315211701>.

¹⁷ Fleur Stevens, Iríde Azara, and Eleni (Elina) Michopoulou, "Local Community Attitudes and Perceptions towards Thermalism," *International Journal of Spa and Wellness* 1, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24721735.2018.1432451>.

had evolved into a medicalized approach, distinguishing itself as more than just a cure through water, but one based on a medical approach grounded in scientific research.¹⁸

Health has long been seen as a balance between humans and nature, while disease was viewed as the result of an imbalance brought on by industrialization within artificial environments such as cities, factories, and slums. Balneology, considered a continuation of humoral medicine, was regarded by doctors as a prestigious and scientific practice.¹⁹ Its core principle was that mineral waters have measurable effects on the human body, which can be harnessed to restore health. This approach was complemented by the period's notions of climatology, which were concerned with the way elements such as sun, wind, temperature, humidity, and atmospheric pressure impact the human body.

The success of spas was not only due to the promotional efforts of their physicians but also to the enduring belief in the healing properties of their waters, which was deeply rooted in the historical role of water sources in folk medicine and popular religious traditions.²⁰ Mineral springs had and have a deep cultural significance in Central Europe, and in pre-modern times, their use was largely unrestricted, often accompanied by outdated medical practices like bleeding and the use of leeches. As the effects of the waters became better understood, these latter practices faded, and the focus shifted more toward drinking the waters rather than bathing. Over time, spa medicine became more professional due to improvements in medical education, increased state regulation, and better facilities, which in turn attracted more visitors. Claims about the healing properties of specific waters led to specialization at different resorts, encouraging people to visit multiple locations for various treatments.²¹ A network of diverse

¹⁸ Ada Ștefănuț, "Living at the Waters," *New Europe College Europa Program Yearbook 2007-2008*, n.d., 327.

¹⁹ Ștefănuț, 330.

²⁰ Jill R. Steward, "Moral Economies and Commercial Imperatives: Food, Diets and Spas in Central Europe: 1800–1914," *Journal of Tourism History* 4, no. 2 (August 2012): 183–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2012.697487>.

²¹ Steward, 186.

sites and institutions offering recreational, therapeutic, and medical services, closely tied to the expansion of railway networks, developed into a complex "health trade" operating at local, national, and transnational levels by the mid nineteenth century.²²

In Western Europe, historic spas were considered "hospitals in a beautiful setting"²³, pioneering places built for the purpose of healing and the promotion of well-being. The idea that the natural environment could restore the emotional and physical balance lost by urban dwellers, contrasting with the chaos and pollution of industrial cities, gained traction in the nineteenth century. Influenced by the Romantic movement, which celebrated nature, doctors recognized the calming and healing effects of natural surroundings on their patients.²⁴ Physicians believed that the therapeutic benefits of mineral waters were enhanced by beautiful natural surroundings, as scenic landscapes encouraged patients to take long, restorative walks.²⁵

"Taking the waters", thus, involved traveling away from the crowded industrial cities and the daily work routine to places with healing waters, clean air, and scenic surroundings, where patients followed strict medical recommendations.²⁶ Spa visits typically lasted three weeks, with treatments tailored to individual illnesses. The spa physician determined which spring waters the patient should use, how much water to drink, the timing of water consumption, the diet to follow, and the physical exercises to be performed alongside the water intake. After drinking each prescribed glass of water, patients were required to walk, which is why springs were typically located in parks, often with covered galleries nearby to allow for walking in any weather. Once they had consumed the requisite number of glasses of water,

²² Steward, 184.

²³ Soroka, *The Summer Capitals of Europe, 1814–1919*, 39.

²⁴ Soroka, 32.

²⁵ Soroka, 28.

²⁶ Ștefănuț, "Living at the Waters," 330–32.

patients were expected to engage in other doctor-recommended activities. These activities included walking on specific terrains, such as paths in the surrounding woods, sunbathing, and listening to military music played in kiosks, which were common at the time. Leisure activities, such as music and dancing, were part of the treatment, though they gradually became more central to the spa experience as medical justifications for taking the waters alone weakened once the medical paradigm shifted. Additional therapies, such as inhalations and massages, complemented the water cure. Doctors prescribed these cures in the belief that they lead to better health, and visitors were expected to balance enjoyment with moderation and repeat the cure annually for lasting benefits.

Spa doctors were frequently criticized as quacks by their academic peers. In response, they sought to establish their professional credibility by adopting new treatments and showcasing their specialized knowledge. Techniques from alternative medicine, such as massage, douches, mud and vapor baths, gas inhalation, gymnastics, and electrotherapy, gradually became standard offerings in conventional spas, enhancing both their reputation and services.²⁷

The concept of ritual plays a significant role in the daily life of a spa, encompassing both therapeutic practices and entertainment activities. Unlike routine or custom, ritual carries deeper meaning and emotional resonance, shaping conduct and belief by determining what can be expressed and eliminating alternative perspectives.²⁸ A delicate balance exists between those who sponsor the ritual—such as doctors—and the audience, whose acceptance or rejection ultimately determines the ritual's success. Spa rituals imposed constraints on both space and time, dictating specific routines for activities like drinking water, walking, and bathing, all aimed at renewing the body, refreshing the blood, and stimulating digestion.

²⁷ Steward, “Moral Economies and Commercial Imperatives,” 194.

²⁸ Ștefănuț, “Living at the Waters,” 328.

Doctors encouraged patients to fully commit to the treatment, free from distractions, and the schedule left little time for personal worries.

Social life also played an important role during ones stay in the resort. Spa life was structured to ensure patients were rarely alone, providing constant company if desired. With everyone following the same daily routine, they often met at the bathing establishments and walked together to the drinking halls. Cure activities created a rather monotonous routine, and doctors recommended that spa patients should keep themselves occupied to prevent fatigue, anxiety, depression, or other psychological symptoms then associated with “neurasthenia”.²⁹ While the natural surroundings offered options for healthy outdoor activities, facilities like ballrooms, concert venues, casinos (originally used for social gatherings), coffeehouses, and theaters were built near the main promenade to encourage social interaction among visitors.³⁰ Large balls at casinos and smaller ones at hotels provided opportunities for guests to meet. Hosting or attending such events became one way to enter high society.³¹ Also, while initially *Kurhauses* or bathhouses were simply places for bathing and drinking water, they gradually became the focal points for social interaction.

The rise of European railways transformed spas, bringing in large numbers of visitors. This led to the development of grand hotels, which offered cutting-edge technological innovations while serving as a stage for the grand display of bourgeois ambitions.³² These establishments needed to operate year-round, promoting the idea of year-round spa cures. Grand hotels offered the facilities of modern urban life, housing shops, cafés, and post offices on the ground floor. They featured opulent interiors, and their architecture also catered to the

²⁹ Soroka, *The Summer Capitals of Europe, 1814–1919*, 51.

³⁰ Soroka, 91.

³¹ Soroka, 77.

³² Soroka, 49.

social nature of guests, positioning entrances and public spaces to allow people-watching, while also providing a balance between privacy and connection to the outside world.³³

Mealtimes were central social events in spa life, much like the rituals of the pump room and promenade, reflecting issues of social class, gender, and cultural identity.³⁴ Communal meals provided opportunities for socializing, observation, and even therapeutic benefits, especially for nervous or hypochondriac individuals. Despite bringing together people from various backgrounds, social distinctions often persisted, as seen in the different meal placements, with more prestigious places where more expensive lunches of higher quality were served. The quality and nature of spa food, while mundane compared to the mineral waters, were important for the comfort of guests and reflected local customs and broader cultural practices around dining.³⁵ Spa restaurants served two main purposes: catering to customers on specific diets and offering guests an indulgent experience with luxurious settings, fine wines, rare delicacies, and sophisticated culinary experiences.³⁶

The urban planning and architecture of spa resorts was deeply intertwined with the belief that physical surroundings influenced the healing process. Spas often featured an array of urban institutions replicated for the comfort and entertainment of the guests - hotels, theaters, coffee houses, restaurants, parks and gardens.³⁷ Resorts were built with a careful integration of natural features, creating a harmonious balance between buildings and the wider landscape. Public promenades, gardens, and pavilions, designed to promote leisurely walks and social interaction, connected the architecture to the natural environment.

³³ Soroka, 47.

³⁴ Steward, "Moral Economies and Commercial Imperatives," 184.

³⁵ Steward, 187.

³⁶ Soroka, *The Summer Capitals of Europe, 1814–1919*, 27–28.

³⁷ Steward, "Moral Economies and Commercial Imperatives," 182.

The architectural structures that housed the baths and mineral springs were typically located at the heart of the social and physical spaces within the spa, playing a key role in shaping how these spaces were experienced. Spa architecture was frequently large scale and rich in detail, reflecting both the prestigious status of spas and the significance placed on the healing process. The architectural styles mixed grandeur and function, with buildings intended to express health, luxury, and serenity, while also being practical spaces for relaxation and medical treatment.

1.2.2. Heritage values and attributes of spas as therapeutic landscapes

The therapeutic qualities of certain places arise from a unique blend of resources, which vary significantly across locations, thus, studying the relationship between place and well-being is complex, as different sites affect individuals in varied ways. A common thread is the interaction between tangible and intangible qualities. In the case of spa resorts, the sensory environment and the meanings people derive from it enrich their experiences, while rituals and social interactions can improve both the efficacy of the spa treatments and transform the way health is perceived. Such interactions often evoke spiritual or mythological connections to place, which could be better supported socially and architecturally if they were more fully recognized as part of the therapeutic landscape.³⁸

Spas have been interpreted in many ways, including as spaces for the performance of health, heterotopias,³⁹ sites of pilgrimage, representations of paradise gardens, or marriage

³⁸ Jacqueline McIntosh, Bruno Marques, and Kezia Fairbrother, “Architecture of Geothermal Places: Socially and Culturally Responsive Therapeutic Landscapes,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 38, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2020.1820682>.

³⁹ The concept of *heterotopia*, introduced by philosopher Michel Foucault, describes physical spaces existing outside regular societal norms, allowing for alternative social behaviors.

markets.⁴⁰ These varied roles highlight the multi-dimensional nature of spas as both social and cultural institutions, reflecting the complexity of the functions they served alongside their healing purpose.

Spa practices created an outstanding dimension of heritage that continues to this day, comprising both tangible and intangible features. The healing landscape values are promoted by organizations such as the European Historic Thermal Towns Association⁴¹, and the most valuable historic spas have been recognized by UNESCO in 2022 with the inscription of the Great Spa Towns of Europe on the World Heritage List. In these resorts, the therapeutic landscape is protected as part of the Outstanding Universal Values of property that can be harnessed for sustainable health and tourism as part of a broad management process described in the Management Plan of the serial property. The site's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value states:

“This transnational serial property comprises eleven spa towns, located in seven European countries: Baden bei Wien (Austria); Spa (Belgium); Františkovy Lázně; Karlovy Vary; Mariánské Lázně (Czechia); Vichy (France); Bad Ems; Baden-Baden; Bad Kissingen (Germany); Montecatini Terme (Italy); and City of Bath (United Kingdom). All of these towns developed around natural mineral water springs. They bear witness to the international European spa culture that developed from the early 18th century to the 1930s, leading to the emergence of grand international resorts that impacted urban typology around ensembles of spa buildings such as baths, Kurhaus and Kursaal (buildings and rooms dedicated to therapy), pump rooms, drinking halls, colonnades and galleries designed to harness the natural mineral water resources and to allow their practical use for bathing and drinking. Related facilities include gardens, assembly rooms, casinos, theaters, hotels and villas, as well as spa-specific support infrastructure. These ensembles are all integrated into an overall urban context that includes a carefully managed recreational and therapeutic environment in a picturesque landscape. Together, these sites embody the significant interchange of human values and developments in medicine, science and balneology.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Steward, “Moral Economies and Commercial Imperatives,” 183.

⁴¹ “Therapeutic Landscapes: Historic Spa Towns – Designed for Wellbeing” (European Historic Thermal Towns Association, n.d.), <https://historicthermaltowns.eu/downloads/Therapeutic-Landscapes-Historic-spa-towns-designed-for-wellbeing-english.pdf>.

⁴² “The Great Spa Towns of Europe - UNESCO World Heritage Centre,” October 20, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1613/>.

World Heritage management tools distinguish values from attributes.⁴³ Values are the foundation for determining why a heritage site deserves preservation for future generations and are rooted in a spectrum of social and cultural experiences. Heritage sites encompass various values, such as aesthetic, historical, ecological, scientific, social, and spiritual, among others. The unique blend of these values and their layering over time shapes the significance of each heritage site. Values are often organized hierarchically, spanning international, national, and local levels; for instance, a World Heritage site focuses on Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) but also holds important national and local values that contribute to its overall meaning. The specific elements that express a site's values are known as its attributes, which allow these values to be understood. Attributes may include tangible features, like physical structures and materials, or intangible elements, such as social practices, cultural associations, and community relationships, all of which convey the heritage values central to the site's significance. The Management Plan for the Great Spa Towns of Europe offers the following list of attributes that convey the Outstanding Universal Value:

Attribute	Description	What to protect
1. Mineral springs	Natural geothermal, and cold water, mineral springs and their water management	Springs; Faucets; Cover structures; Water distribution; Fountains
2. Spa spatial ensemble	Progressive design and spatial planning of spa towns that reflects a new urban typology that has no earlier parallel	Distinctive urban plan of the spa town that gives it a specific form and function (buildings and spaces related to “taking the cure”, including taking the waters, exercise, leisure and pleasure, parks and gardens, accommodation, and religious activity)
3. Spa architecture	Building designs and structures developed for medicinal and curative purposes; Building designs and structures developed for leisure, meeting and communicating; Accommodation for spa clientele	Spa prototypes and spa buildings of great diversity and quality, including pump rooms, drinking halls, baths and pools, fountains, hospitals, treatment rooms, colonnades, promenades and bridges, casinos, assembly rooms, reading rooms, concert halls, music pavilions, theaters, opera houses, galleries and museums, grand hotels, lodgings, palatial and diverse styles of grand villas

⁴³ “Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit 2.0: Assessing Management Effectiveness of World Heritage Properties and Other Heritage Places” (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IUCN, 2023), 19–20, <https://doi.org/10.58337/HBZY1376>.

4. Therapeutic spa landscape	Designed setting for spa towns, and management of the wider landscape to create therapeutic walks, opportunities for exercise and leisure	Recreational parkland pathways; Designed woodland walks, rides and drives; Funicular railways; Hillside trails; Watchtowers and viewpoints; Restaurants, cafes and bars in the spa landscape; Sports facilities (golf courses, tennis courts, horse racecourses); Designed picturesque setting; Vistas
5. Spa infrastructure	Early and technically advanced, and distinctive spa-specific, support infrastructure	Spa headquarters, bottling and salt extraction, pastille-making; railway stations, railways and funiculars; administrative buildings
6. Continuing spa function	The regime of ‘taking the cure’ represents a continued sustainable function, and continued living tradition	Traditional spa features that remain in use; New developments that sustain the spa tradition but that are sympathetic to potential WH values
7. Internationalism, scientific, artistic and literary values, events and cultural tradition	i) Achievements in spa science and other scientific, social and cultural fields; ii) Fashionable places that are associated with works of “high-art” in music, literature and painting; iii) Centers of political gravity; iv) Religious and spiritual tolerance	i) Places and specific buildings where significant progress in developing scientific principles of balneology, hydrotherapy, crenotherapy and other medical diagnostics were made (and other scientific, social and cultural achievements). Places which helped to transform society, and which created transferable modes of sociability; ii) Places where “high art” was originated or performed for the first time; iii) Places of major political events and/or where many important decisions were made; iv) Churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious buildings related to spa clientele

Table showing the values and attributes of the Great Spas of Europe Nomination.⁴⁴

The management plan highlights additional values and attributes beyond those tied to the OUV, offering a comprehensive perspective on why these sites serve as effective models for managing other spa towns.⁴⁵ The selected spa towns maintain a strong connection to cultural heritage, hosting artistic and scientific institutions such as museums, galleries, and libraries which provide a wide and attractive cultural offer. The resorts continue to support vibrant cultural traditions through numerous festivals and events, showcasing living heritage through contemporary music, literature, and arts. Their legacy in medical and wellness innovations places these towns at the forefront of health care advancements, where tourism, wellness, and

⁴⁴ “Nomination of the Great Spas of Europe for Inclusion in the World Heritage List. Volume III: Property Management Plan,” 2021, 30–31, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1613/documents/>.

⁴⁵ “Nomination of the Great Spas of Europe for Inclusion in the World Heritage List. Volume III: Property Management Plan,” 31–32.

the desire for improved health converge. This evolving approach reinforces the relevance of spa towns in modern health tourism.

Architecturally, these towns illustrate both historic innovation and ongoing commitment to high-quality design, with modern thermal facilities built by renowned architects. The natural landscape surrounding each spa town is integral to their therapeutic appeal; carefully managed forests and parklands offer spaces for prescribed health activities like walking and riding. These environments, crafted in collaboration between town authorities, landowners, and doctors, provide therapeutic benefits and continue to inspire visitors, making the landscape a valued asset for both the community and its guests.

Drawing on Gesler's components of therapeutic landscapes and various studies in the therapeutic tourism field, researchers studying Polish Spa Resorts argued that the therapeutic landscape includes a much broader range of features: the natural environment, including forests, hot springs, medicinal water, healing gasses, curative muds, and a healing climate as well as silence and quiet; the built environment, including the therapeutic infrastructure consisting of spa hospitals, sanatoriums, promenades, parks, walking halls, bathhouses, pump rooms, and landscape features such as band shells, amphitheaters, caves, baths, and graduation towers⁴⁶; the spiritual environment, which comprises shrines and images of saints in a natural setting, narrative and legends about healing in spa resorts, as well as health events, traditions, rituals and ceremonies; and the social environment which consists of the organized cultural life, the healing reputation, atmosphere and history of the spa resorts.⁴⁷ This definition partially echoes the attributes of the Great Spas of Europe, but offers a broader and more comprehensive

⁴⁶ Graduation towers are structures specific to the Austrian, German and Polish spa landscapes. These towers, often built with pine or fir wood frames filled-in with blackthorn brushwood, evaporate saline solutions to produce salt. The brine flowing over the brushwood creates a health-enhancing aerosol with effects similar to sea air, offering therapeutic benefits to visitors.

⁴⁷ Salamaga and Dryglas, "Therapeutic Landscape as Value Added in the Structure of the Destination-Specific Therapeutic Tourism Product: The Case Study of Polish Spa Resorts," 785.

understanding of the therapeutic landscape. In short, mostly all tangible and intangible feature of a historic spa can be interpreted as part of the therapeutic landscape.

Understanding the effects of the therapeutic landscape on Swoszowice spa visitors offers key insights for spa managers and marketers in Poland. It underscores the need to recognize the therapeutic landscape's importance to tourists, identify specific landscape features, integrate therapeutic design into planning, focus on revitalization that enhances the landscape's therapeutic quality, and design health-promoting landscape architecture. Expanding the framework to include assessments from local government and management perspectives could reveal important correlations. Exploring therapeutic landscape components beyond the social, spiritual, and natural aspects would offer an additional, more holistic approach.⁴⁸

Considering the legal framework related to spa resorts, and consequently their therapeutic landscape, such places are shaped by various laws and regulations, such as regulation on spa resorts and health, laws on underground resources, heritage laws, urban planning regulations, environmental law, regulations related to tourism etc. Their enactment “allows for merely a selective, instead of a holistic and coherent view”⁴⁹ on therapeutic landscapes. For the purpose of this thesis, and given the complexity of the topic, I shall focus further on aspects that can support using the therapeutic landscapes concept to improve heritage management.

Building on the distinction between a therapeutic landscape and a therapeutic landscape experience, research underscores the importance of culture in shaping healing environments. Cultural practices contribute significantly to creating and sustaining architectural spaces,

⁴⁸ Salamaga and Dryglas, 794.

⁴⁹ Salamaga and Dryglas, 783.

influencing how individuals and communities interact with these places through various social encounters, personal experiences, narratives, and emotional beliefs. These interactions merge with the material aspects of architecture, embedding spaces with rich, culturally shaped meanings.⁵⁰ The therapeutic experience in these environments can either be enhanced or diminished depending on the cultural values and social norms enacted within the space.⁵¹ While current medical analyses of spas often focus solely on the physical qualities of hot spring waters, the cultural practices surrounding wellness and “taking the waters” should be acknowledged as an essential part of the therapeutic landscape experience.

The therapeutic landscape concept can serve as a valuable tool in heritage management, especially for historic spa towns, where change must be carefully managed to preserve the heritage essence of the town while accommodating contemporary needs related to health practices and living. This approach promotes a more comprehensive and flexible range of heritage values, moving beyond the simple preservation of material fabric or natural sites to include social, emotional, and healing values created through people’s interaction with the sites. However, current management frameworks, such as the one developed for the Great Spas of Europe, still focus predominantly on the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage, as they conform to existing heritage legislation. There is often little consideration or guidance for the integration of intangible features, sometime place specific, that contribute to the therapeutic character of these landscapes, revealing a key limitation in current approaches to managing heritage values in these historically significant spaces.

Spas offer an ideal setting for studying the effects of cultural and heritage participation on health and well-being due to their established medical and therapeutic infrastructures. Traditionally, spa environments are designed not only for physical healing but also for

⁵⁰ McIntosh, Marques, and Fairbrother, “Architecture of Geothermal Places,” 28.

⁵¹ McIntosh, Marques, and Fairbrother, 43.

relaxation and mental rejuvenation, making them natural sites for observing the holistic impacts of cultural engagement. Many spas are equipped with facilities for tracking patient health metrics, such as respiratory, cardiovascular, and stress-related indicators, allowing researchers to gather empirical data on how cultural and heritage activities contribute to both physical and mental health.

Băile Govora, as a spa town situated conceptually between Eastern and Western European influences, represents a therapeutic cultural landscape of both national and European significance, yet one that remains underrecognized and at considerable risk of further neglect. Initially designed as a public health destination under modern urban regulations, Govora stands out as an intentionally planned therapeutic landscape, aimed at promoting healing and attracting both national and international visitors. The following chapter will provide an overview of the resort's history, showcasing how its development has closely mirrored the health policies and social priorities of various historical periods and political regimes.

Chapter 2 - Băile Govora: a therapeutic landscape at risk

Starting in the late nineteenth century, the Romanian state founded state resorts and supported private investors, establishing a wide balneary network, guided by the desire to create resorts that would rival Western destinations and attract and promote the health of the Romanian population. In this chapter, I examine the way Romania took various steps towards creating its network of balneary resorts, creating spaces of curing that were planned and used in particular ways. This historical overview serves to provide context and a better understanding of the problems these therapeutic landscapes face today, and Băile Govora in particular.

2.1 The history of Băile Govora in the context of Romanian spa development: changing values and emotional tropes

In the nineteenth century, Romanian elites frequently traveled to Western thermal resorts located far afield from France, to Belgium, and even the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Empire, as such places were nonexistent or rudimentary in their home country. Located closer to the Romanian borders and far from big towns in the empire, resorts in Transylvania and Banat attracted many Romanian visitors which the Austro-Hungarian authorities were happy to accommodate.⁵² Aside from medical reasons, elites visited Western resorts to enhance their social status, by becoming acquainted with or even part of international social circles, and in a quest for knowledge, looking to bring important lessons back to their developing country.⁵³

⁵² Tudor Dinu, *Băi, Hammamuri, Desfătări [Baths, Hammams, Delights]* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2024), 144.

⁵³ Ada Hajdu, “Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă [Villégiature architecture in modern Romania]” (PhD, București, Universitatea de Arte București, 2012), 19–30.

Meanwhile, Romania was undergoing rapid development, after gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. With the government looking to strengthen the national economy, attention was directed towards discovering new natural resources, especially oil. The state also looked to modernize its medical system, under the guidance of the French doctor, Carol Davila. Taking great interest in local springs and believing that the creation of Romanian resorts could provide medical benefits for all social classes, Davila carried out field campaigns and founded the Society for Hydrology in 1869.⁵⁴ Soon, many scientists and doctors throughout the country began testing local waters in the Society's laboratory or abroad and studying their benefits to patients, especially war veterans.

2.1.1. The state's pilot projects

The practice of visiting local spas provides insight into Romania's modernization process, reflecting a new perspective on the pace of urban life and leisure. Frequenting spas signified that life in Romania could match the rhythm and lifestyle seen in Western Europe.⁵⁵ The main promoters of Romanian resorts were the Royal family, leading politicians, and the medical community.⁵⁶ King Carol I traveled extensively to oversee the development of resorts and sparked the development of Sinaia by building Peleş Castle, the summer residence of the royal family. Leading magnates and politicians followed his example, investing their political and economic capital, and soon many spa destinations started developing throughout the country. Doctors published reports stating that Romania possessed almost one third of European mineral waters, some of them superior to famous waters found abroad, making traveling abroad was thus unnecessary. This was the time when political debates on how to attract more visitors and how to create destinations matching Western standards intensified. Choosing foreign holiday

⁵⁴ Hajdu, 50.

⁵⁵ Ștefănuț, "Living at the Waters," 338–39.

⁵⁶ Hajdu, "Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă [Villégiature architecture in modern Romania]," 37.

destinations began to be publicly questioned. Soon, traveling within the country was considered as prestigious as going abroad, especially because people could manifest their patriotism and contribute to the development of these resorts, either through visiting, promoting or investing in them.⁵⁷

The discovery and evolution of Băile Govora is linked to the oil prospecting. Local natural springs were investigated by Ioan Klaus, the Vâlcea county chief engineer and later entrepreneur, while searching the area for oil reserves. Klaus was first shown the water springs in 1878 by locals and conducted further research in 1881 to analyze the quality of the oil in the area.

Shortly after, local authorities began analyzing the quality of the waters and took preliminary measures to protect them since they were located mostly on private property. These discoveries also attracted the attention of the Romanian Prime Minister, Ion C. Brătianu, who owned an estate in the neighboring village of Mihăiești, and of an army doctor, Nicolae Popescu Zorileanu. Interested in studying the effects of local waters in improving the health of war veterans, Zorileanu set up a temporary military hospital in Govora. Observing that local waters ameliorated common diseases such as gout, syphilis, and pellagra, Zorileanu pleaded for the creation of a permanent bathing establishment open to a wider public.⁵⁸ The Prime Minister, himself suffering from gout, was a staunch supporter of the idea.

As new springs were discovered throughout the country and research on their utility blossomed, several bathing establishments were built by both state and private investors. Soon discussions on how to actually bring the facilities at state resorts up to Western standards began to appear in both public and political spheres. In 1886, the state took the first set of measures

⁵⁷ Hajdu, 30.

⁵⁸ Ionela Nițu, “Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort]” (PhD, Târgoviște, Universitatea Valahia din Târgoviște, 2015), 15.

by creating the Service for Mineral Water Capture within the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Domains, issuing legislation for resort development,⁵⁹ and subsidizing travel to state resorts.⁶⁰ In the years that followed, the state took further steps towards regulating the development of thermal resorts. It allocated funds, oversaw medical activities, issued construction guidelines and created management regulations for its state resorts. These infrastructure developments were commissioned by authorities related to industry and economy, and doctors and the wider health community were scarcely involved. Investments in thermal facilities were often overseen by international professionals who had experience in western resorts, although their experience often clashed with local realities. While the public discourse revolved around creating destinations that followed Western models to subsequently rival them and keep Romanians from spending money abroad, further research might shed light into whether there were actual efforts to incorporate distinct local elements as well. Local practices related to using the waters had existed for a few centuries, linked to the Ottoman cultural influence on the Romanian Principalities.⁶¹

In 1887, the government offered Băile Govora official spa resort status, allocated a considerable budget,⁶² and allowed the state to purchase land from the locals and start the development of the resort. The state commissioned two French engineers: Papon de Lemaigné to design a bathing establishment and Henri E. J. Bochet,⁶³ famous for his work in Aix-les-Bains, to modernize and expand the installations built by Klaus & Co. for extracting mineral

⁵⁹ “Legea Pentru Încurajarea Și Dezvoltarea Exploatării Apelor Minerale Din Țară Și a Produselor Lor [Law for Encouraging and Developing National Mineral Waters and Their Products],” *Monitorul Oficial al României*, July 7, 1886.

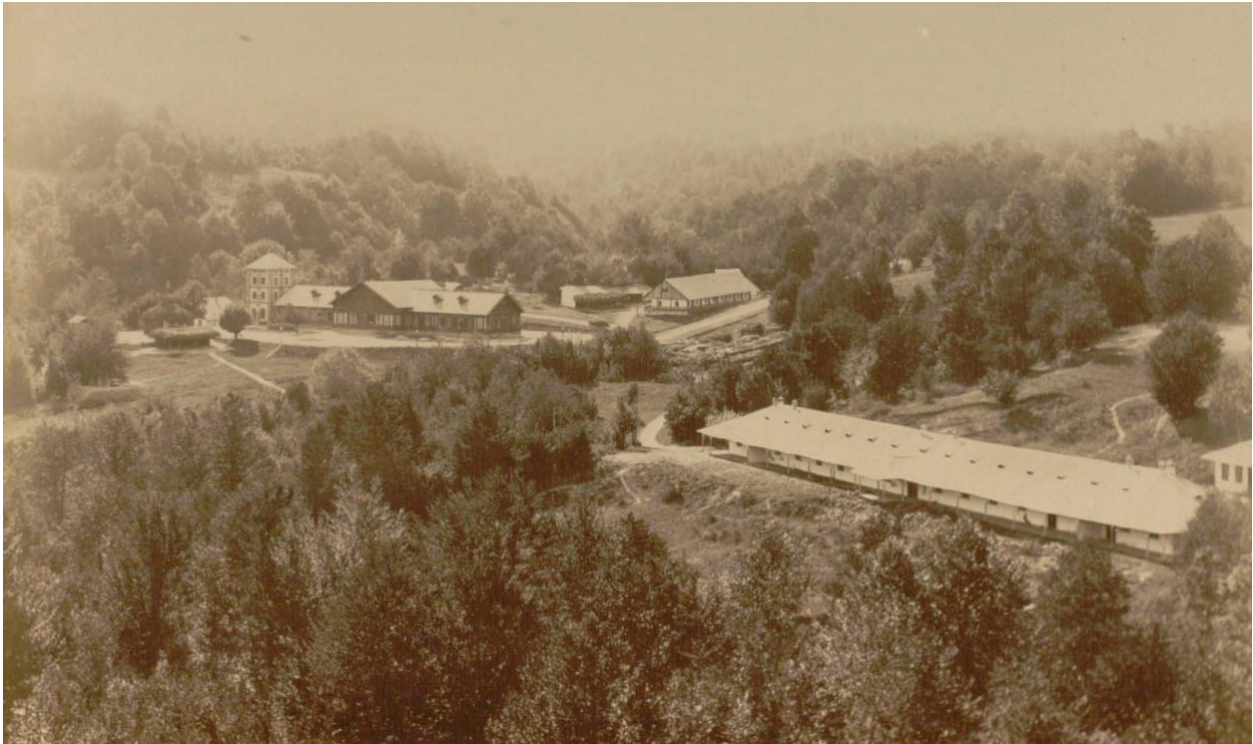
⁶⁰ “Regulamentul Pentru Călătoria Cu Preț Scăzut a Vizitatorilor Băilor Din Țară [Rules for Reduced Travel Fares for Visitors to Resorts in the Country],” *Monitorul Oficial al României*, April 7, 1886.

⁶¹ Dinu, *Băi, Hammamuri, Desfătări* [Baths, Hammams, Delights].

⁶² “Legea Pentru Alocarea Unui Credit de 1 Milion Lei Pentru Stațiunile Călimănești, Căciulata, Bivolari, Govora, Lacul Sărat [Law for Granting a 1 Million Lei Credit for the Resorts of Călimănești, Căciulata, Bivolari, Govora, Lacul Sărat],” *Monitorul Oficial al României*, March 5, 1887.

⁶³ Hajdu, “Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă [Villégiature architecture in modern Romania],” 41.

waters.⁶⁴ In 1890, the Service for Mineral Waters issued the first regulations for managing the resort, creating and dividing responsibilities at both a national and a local level.⁶⁵ With the first bathing establishment finished⁶⁶ and several functional springs, the resort began to attract to attract more patients, but lacked the necessary accommodation and leisure facilities.



*Figure 4: Govora, cca. 1889-1892. From left to right: the first bathing establishment (1888-1910), a building approximately on the site where the first Hotel of the State will be built in 1895 and Zorileanu's barracks.
Source: Albumul General al României, Județul R. Vâlcea, 1893*

In theory, Băile Govora was supposed to fit the concept of a “hospital in a beautiful setting”, echoing western models, but local realities rarely matched visitor expectations and its therapeutic landscape lacked many features. While the complex had the great advantage of

⁶⁴ Mihai Mecu, Valentin Dolfi, and Radu Geiculescu, “Băile Govora - Date Și Imagini În Timp (Schită Monografică) [Băile Govora - Dates and Images in Time (Monography Sketch)]” (Primăria Băile Govora, 2008), 8–9, <https://www.primaria-baile-govora.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Schita-monografica-Baile-Govora-2008.pdf>.

⁶⁵ “Regulament Pentru Administrarea Și Exploatarea Stațiunii Balneare Băile Govora [Rules for the Management and Exploitation of the Băile Govora Spa Resort],” *Monitorul Oficial al României*, January 6, 1890.

⁶⁶ Alexandru Antoniu, *Albumul General al României [The General Album of Romania]*, vol. Județul R. Vâlcea [R. Vâlcea County] (Bucharest: Atelierele Gobl și Fii [Gobl and Sons Workshop], 1893), 48, <https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/?pub=2291-albumul-general-al-romaniei>.

being built in the forest, thus surrounded by nature, there were no previous infrastructure or facilities located there. The state decided to support private entrepreneurs in building accommodation and leisure facilities through selling plots for houses and offering tax exemptions.⁶⁷ To ensure these developments were respectful to the concept of the resort, it provided construction guidelines for how these buildings should be designed to create a harmonious building environment.⁶⁸

In Govora, the state also wished to build its own hotels and leisure facilities, and in 1893 launched a tender for three hotels, a restaurant and a casino.⁶⁹ The contract was won by Dimitrie Maimarolu, architect and Anton Ștefănescu, entrepreneur. With the contract dictating that the entrepreneur had to reside in Govora for the duration of the project, Ștefănescu seized the opportunity to buy land and build his own hotel. So did many others, and until 1907, the state sold more than 50 plots.⁷⁰ All buildings had to follow the construction guidelines set in 1891 and be approved by the public authorities. Constructions mostly followed existing regulations and displayed a picturesque blend of Western styles combined with local vernacular building techniques, building on the experience of local craftsmen. Thus, many buildings were examples of Regionalism, a style which aimed to create architecture incorporated the spirit and architectural tradition of an area, reinterpreted it, and built in a manner respectful towards the landscape, architectural typologies, techniques and materials. Many of the buildings possessed intricate wooden details and porches, from where tourists could enjoy the clean air and rich nature, as well as watch other visitors from the comfort and privacy of their accommodation, practices that were part of the therapeutic landscape experience.

⁶⁷ Nițu, “Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort],” 42–44.

⁶⁸ “Regulament Privitor La Modul de Construcție al Clădirilor Particulare La Stațiunile de Băi Ale Statului [Rules on the Construction of Private Buildings in State Spa Resorts],” *Monitorul Oficial al României*, January 15, 1892.

⁶⁹ Nițu, “Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort],” 35.

⁷⁰ Nițu, 43–44.

The state wished to offer medical services to all social classes. Medical treatment was subsidized, bathing establishments offered different categories of cabins, and visitors who could not afford to stay in hotels or eat in restaurants had other options, such as lodging with locals or eating in cafeterias. Although these destinations aimed at attracting elites through their architecture and spatial planning, they actually served visitors from all social classes, who mingled and interacted with each other more than was customary in Western resorts.⁷¹ Romanian balneologists were pioneers in advocating for the democratization of spa treatments and promoting mass tourism. They viewed spa-going as a vital method for enhancing public health and developed initiatives aimed at encouraging rural populations to use nearby mineral springs as an affordable means to treat illnesses.⁷²

Throughout the country, the state conducted its own projects to develop bathing facilities, accommodations and infrastructure, while also enforcing policies to create a national thermal network of private and state-owned resorts. The settlements around - with their markets, houses, villas and services - developed organically and often chaotically, bringing together the urban and rural in ways which were far from the Western ideal. Doctors working in spa resorts often complained or, in a more constructive approach, wrote to the government advocating for modernization of spa infrastructure. Such is the example of Dr. Macovei, Govora's head doctor, who wrote to the government in 1893 asking for improvements to be made to bathing infrastructure and for services to be diversified to include massages, electric therapy, inhalations and hydrotherapy. Dr. Macovei also advocated for better management of

⁷¹ Hajdu, "Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă [Villégiature architecture in modern Romania]," 30–36.

⁷² Ștefănuț, "Living at the Waters," 347.

the resort, more accommodation and leisure facilities, as well as for the creation of a therapeutic park and greenhouses to support this landscape development.⁷³

For the state, attracting high paying clients, while also offering social services, creating infrastructure and ensuring urban development became challenging. Thus, it was decided to attract more private funding and divest hands on management of its resources to private individuals or companies. In 1894, it passed the *Law for the lease on the exploitation of state baths*, which authorized the Ministry for Agriculture, Industry, Commerce and Domains to allow, through public tenders, the exploitation by private individuals or companies of mineral resources and existing buildings.⁷⁴ For a fixed period, these entities were entrusted with managing and further developing resorts and ensuring that all needed facilities - pavilions for baths, hotels, casinos, parks and infrastructure - were created and maintained. At the end of the contract, all buildings would return to the state.

Overall, this first period in the development of Băile Govora was characterized by state efforts to create an autonomous and independently functioning resort. This option had its advantages, as the state could easily develop a thermal area in a rich natural environment, following Western models, which also attracted numerous investors and doctors who built their own private residences, villas, hotels, and restaurants. But there were also disadvantages, as this new settlement lacked several key facilities such as train access, roads, potable water or electricity. Early on, in 1890, private owners of villas and hotels aimed to contribute to the development of the resort and created the Govora Society.⁷⁵ This society, presided over by

⁷³ “Cele 62 de puncte ale doctorului Macovei sau despre ameliorările absolut necesare stabilimentului de băi Govora și organizațiunei în general a stațiunilor balneare ale Statului [The 62 points of Dr. Macovei or On the absolutely necessary improvements of the Govora bathing establishment and the overall management of State Spa Resorts],” *Voința Națională* [National Will], July 10, 1894, <https://bailegovoradealtadata.wordpress.com/2017/10/12/cele-62-de-puncte-ale-doctorului-macovei-sau-despre-ameliorarile-absolut-necesare-stabilimentului-de-bai-govora-si-organizațiunei-in-general-a-stațiunilor-balneare-ale-statului/>.

⁷⁴ Nițu, “Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort],” 40.

⁷⁵ Nițu, 57.

Vintilă Brătianu, brother of the Prime Minister, aimed to raise funds for basic services (a local school, a dispensary, ensuring public order), as well as for the beautification of the resort.

2.1.2 The Govora-Călimănești Company

In 1902, Doctor Gheorghe Marinescu gave a talk at the Geographic Society, attended by His Majesty, where he discussed several Romanian and foreign spas, framing the topic as a “national, economic, industrial, and patriotic issue.”⁷⁶ Dr. Marinescu argued that Romanians preferred foreign spas due to poor management at home, including difficult access, outdated bath facilities, and accommodation that often lacked both comfort and basic hygiene. Marinescu observed that most Romanian spas had no hydrotherapy facilities, or, when present, they were inadequate. He attributed the success of German spas to their comprehensive treatments, which combined water therapy with various complementary therapies—an approach that, as some economic research supports, was effective. Romanian spas lacked organized paths for terrain therapy, and restaurants did not offer dietary options, undermining the efficacy of water cures. Moreover, water analysis was infrequent, and spa doctors were often unqualified or politically appointed, leading to frequent staff turnover and preventing the establishment of consistent medical practices. Additionally, he criticized the social scene at Romanian spas, noting that due to limited therapeutic options, guests spent much of their time at casinos, balls, and theater events rather than focusing on health treatments. These observations highlight the fact that the prescribed patterns of behavior were not yet well established or enforced, and as such the aspects related to spa rituals and beliefs could not develop.

At the beginning of the century, Băile Govora faced the same challenges as many other state resorts, including a need for better management and coherent investments. The medical

⁷⁶ Ștefănuț, “Living at the Waters,” 337.

community offered reports comparing Romanian and international resorts and waters, asking for more efficient management and development of state resorts, arguing that better management would be ensured if such resorts were taken over by private entities. Responding to the medical community, the state passed the *Law for the exploitation of thermal resorts* in 1909, which influenced spa resort development in the following decades.⁷⁷

The law offered a framework for private companies to be created for managing state resorts (Govora, Călimănești-Căciulata, Lacul Sărat and Techirghiol) through public subscription. The state contributed the mineral springs, the existing buildings, parks, installations, and several plots of land, and kept building its own sanatoriums or hospitals for civilians and the military. The new companies ensured the maintenance and enhancement of state thermal facilities and hotels, and built any additional infrastructure needed. The law provided further detailed information on how these companies would be organized and what their responsibilities would be with respect to providing clean water, electricity, transportation, or a police service for the community.⁷⁸

The Govora-Călimănești Company (*Societatea Govora-Călimănești*) was founded in 1910, based on this law, taking over existing state assets. With buildings and thermal facilities in poor shape, the Company began a wide redesign process, wishing to modernize and expand existing facilities and bring Băile Govora up to Western standards. Between 1911 and 1916, the initial thermal ensemble - the baths pavilion, hotels and park - underwent significant transformations following French models, through the involvement of architect Ernest Doneaud and a landscape artist, Ernest Pinard. Doneaud, who was a French - Romanian architect trained in Paris, was commissioned to modernize existing buildings and design new

⁷⁷ Nițu, "Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort]," 88–89.

⁷⁸ "Legea Pentru Exploatarea Stațiunilor Balneare [Law for the Exploitation of Spa Resorts]," *Monitorul Oficial al României*, April 18, 1909.

facilities. Pinard, an apprentice of French landscape architect Eduard Redon, was commissioned to redesign the thermal park. This period marks the creation of the thermal area as it can be seen today - the Baths Pavilion and the Palace Hotel, together with the surrounding Thermal Park. The new facilities were often praised by both doctors and the press for their modernity and European standards.

For the ensemble to function and to meet the needs of the community, the Company built an electric plant, modernized the existing water treatment plant, built greenhouses that supplied plants for the park, and invested in new springs and infrastructure while also looking into connecting Băile Govora to the national train network. All these investments enhanced the values of the therapeutic landscape, while offering health and quality of life benefits to the local community and contributing to local development.

World War I halted development in Băile Govora. The resort was requisitioned by the German army who used it for the recovery of its soldiers. Although the resort and town did not suffer any damage during the war, many of the buildings and warehouses were emptied and most of the thermal installations broke down due to local workers' lack of skills.⁷⁹ After the war, both private owners and the Company faced challenges in their recovery efforts, the latter having to fund significant investments in new equipment. Nonetheless, both the resort and the town continued to flourish in the years following the Great War, as did the practice of taking the waters in Romanian resorts.

The contrast between the cosmopolitan nature of thermal spa practices and their national significance became even more pronounced after 1918, as spa vacationing began to be incorporated into the wider nationalistic rhetoric following the Great Unification, when Transylvania and Banat became part of Romania. Famous resorts from the Austro-Hungarian

⁷⁹ Nițu, "Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort]," 115.

Empire which had been frequently visited by Romanian elites before the war, such as Băile Herculane (*DE: Herkulesbad, HU: Herkulesfürdő*), Buziaș (*DE: Busiasch, HU: Buziásfürdő*) or Borsec (*DE: Bad Borseck, HU: Borszék*), were now part of the national spa network, along with numerous other smaller destinations. In 1928, doctor Aurel Weiss argued that balneology had a national and social side, as it contributed to the cohesion between provinces:

“Health resorts are always a very important factor in bringing closer the provinces of a country, because arising the interest of the inhabitants from one province for the inhabitants from another province levels differences and misunderstandings and contributes largely to strengthen relationships of all kinds.”⁸⁰

The 1920s brought new developments to Romanian medicine and thermal resorts through the creation of new medical institutions and societies which contributed to both research and policies and cemented the influence of the medical community.⁸¹ In 1922, the Institute of Balneology and the Romanian Society for Balneology, Climatology, and Mineral Waters were established, which were instrumental in advocating for updated rules, regulations, and legislation. Their first notable achievement came in 1924, when they successfully secured the transfer of health resort administration to the Ministry of Health, and the second in 1926, with the Sanitary Law. The law included a series of articles dedicated to balneary resorts, assigning significant management responsibilities and control to doctors.⁸²

The law outlines the requirements for a settlement to be designated as a spa, including receiving at least 500 visitors annually, having a systematization plan, and a plan of the cure establishment. In 1928, additional construction regulations were introduced: all building plans needed approval from the General Balneo-climatic Inspectorate, construction within protected zones surrounding the mineral sources was prohibited, and all buildings were required to have

⁸⁰ Ștefănuț, “Living at the Waters,” 348.

⁸¹ Hajdu, “Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă [Villégiature architecture in modern Romania],” 50.

⁸² Hajdu, 47–51.

electricity and a sewage system. Specific guidelines were also set regarding the permitted height, foundations, roofs, and annex structures of these buildings.⁸³

All resorts had to have at least one doctor specialized in balneology, and no cure could be carried out without medical prescription. Thus, the number of practicing doctors grew. The law also stated that the tax paid by visitors could only be used for the further development of the resorts and thermal facilities. Local authorities had to follow the recommendations and requests of the local medical community. Consequently, arguments between public authorities, private owners and doctors over how the money should be spent became frequent.⁸⁴

Another innovation of the Law was the creation of the National Office for Tourism (ONT) within the Ministry of Health, to coordinate activities in spa resorts. In the following years, ONT evolved into an official body which would coordinate, advise, and organize touristic activities in the country. Its local branches played an important part on the ground, gathering data, offering advice to local stakeholders, controlling the quality of services, and further developing touristic infrastructure. The membership of this official body included: architects, engineers, doctors, forestry engineers, representatives of private owners, mayors, and representatives of thermal establishments.

Policy developments in the 1920s also affected Băile Govora, creating the need for updated infrastructure and facilities for the resort to comply with legal requirements. The most stringent were the systematization plan, a sewage management system, and more alimentation facilities. Local authorities often argued with the Company on who should be responsible for funding and overseeing these improvements. This period saw a new wave of development, one in which the Company continued to play an important role, alongside local authorities, the

⁸³ Ștefănuț, “Living at the Waters,” 342.

⁸⁴ Hajdu, “Arhitectura de vilegiatură în România modernă [Villégiature architecture in modern Romania],” 50–51.

military (which built several sanatoriums), as well as other private and public entities who chose Govora as the place they built their own leisure or recovery facilities.

During this period, many relevant Romanian architects enriched the resort and town with buildings and public spaces that can still be seen today. The Company commissioned Virginia Andreescu-Haret to design the Casino (1928) and the *Cucurigu* terrace, and Arta Cerchez to design the Balneara Hotel (1935), now Hotel Park. Local architects, active in neighboring towns such as Râmnicu Vâlcea or Sibiu, were also commissioned by local elites, especially doctors, to design their private residences. The resort prospered and the number of doctors involved in the life of the community increased significantly. In some summers, up to ten doctors were active, attracted not only by the specialization in rheumatic diseases but also by the research opportunities available here. Doctors from Govora carried out studies, participated in international congresses on physiotherapy, rheumatology and the role of water in the treatment of various diseases.⁸⁵

The medical discourse regarding the appearance of spa resorts became an important part in their urban planning regulations. Cincinat Sfințescu, the founder of the discipline of urban planning in Romania, highlights the importance of the overall appearance of spa resorts, underlining the importance of architectural quality and attention to the surrounding natural landscape:

"Cleanliness, simplicity, comfort, open space and plantations are the elements that should characterize the development and good management of such resorts. The inhabitants will have to transform their dwellings, dress and manners according to the same principles, and the administration will have to severely repress any deviations for the good reputation of the resort."

⁸⁵ L. Budin, "Doctorii Care Au Propășit Stațiunea Govora [The Doctors Who Developed the Govora Resort]," *Viața Medicală (Medical Life)*, October 28, 2022, <https://www.viata-medicala.ro/doctorii-care-au-propasit-statiunea-govora-29446>.

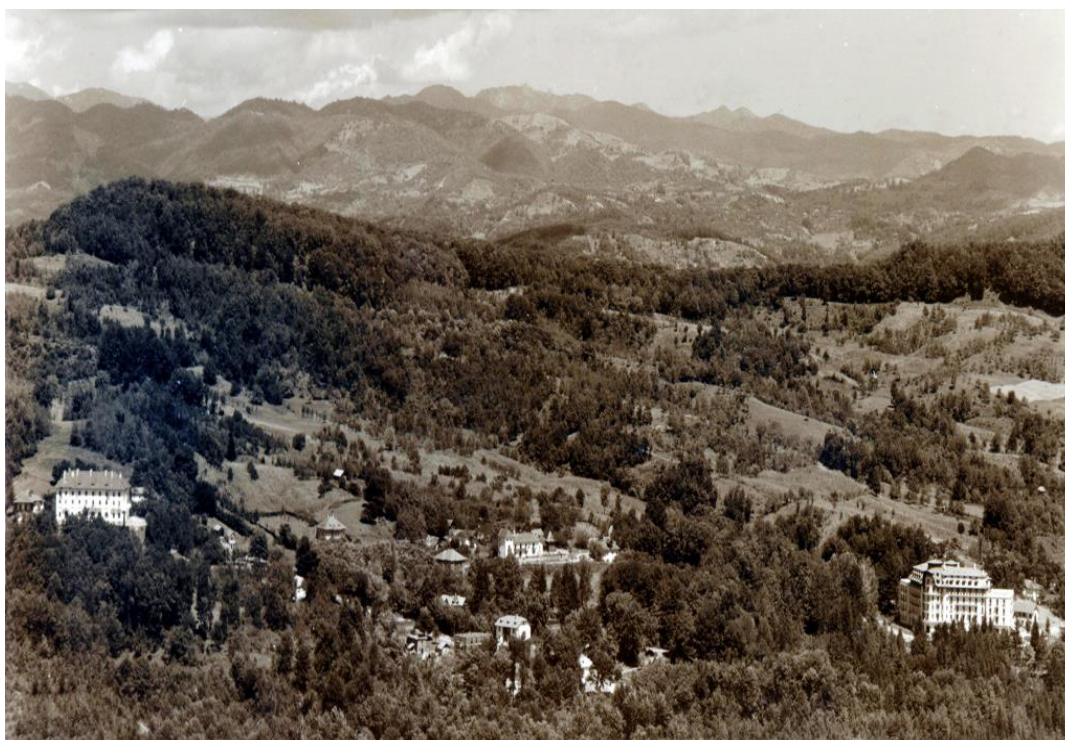


Figure 5: Aerial photo of Băile Govora in the 1930s. The image shows the relationship between the overall natural landscape and the main buildings of the resort. Source: Băile Govora Municipality website: <https://www.primaria-govora.ro/galleries/istoria-baile-govora-in-imagini-perioada-1919-1947/>

Băile Govora serves as a prime example of therapeutic landscape, a fact highlighted even by Sfințescu, demonstrating that medical recovery can be enriched within a carefully maintained town that offers a unique architectural character and a harmonious natural environment. Brochures and magazine articles praised the healing qualities of the resort, always mentioning the rich natural environment and leisure opportunities alongside the healing waters. The following description from 1932 offers insight into how the therapeutic landscape was perceived:

"The greenness that surround you, on which the most often serene blue vault rests, constitutes the new environment into which you arrive, after the imprisonment of the city. [...] the utter tranquility, whether at midday, which is not torpid, or especially towards the evening, everything transforms the bearish mood brought from the city or as a companion of illness into a deep contentment with life. Nature is exerting its healing powers. Such natural conditions are not to be neglected when it is a question of recovery, which is gained not only from taking the waters, but also from the conditions in which they are taken."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ I. Simionescu, *Govora Și Călimănești [Govora and Călimănești]* (Cartea Românească, 1936), 7–9.

2.1.3. Creating a new destination for mass tourism

Following the World War II, Romania initially embraced the Soviet model of structured, collective outdoor recreation, promoting domestic tourism as a way to improve workers' health and instill pride in socialist achievements. Trips to the countryside, mountains aimed to enhance the physical well-being and productivity of the workforce, with medical tourism to spas and coastal resorts sharing similar objectives.⁸⁷ This "proletarian tourism" model was purposeful and collectivist, focusing on intellectual and physical self-improvement to align with the state's broader socialist ideals.⁸⁸ Before World War II, tourism had been largely reserved for Romania's social elite. However, under socialism, tourism was "democratized" to make it accessible to all working people, particularly through active leisure in natural environments. This form of recreation was viewed as essential for revitalizing workers' physical strength and health, thereby increasing productivity and supporting the construction of a socialist society.⁸⁹

Medical tourism and spa resorts were of great interest for the new regime, which made massive investments in both spa infrastructure and accommodation facilities. Through these efforts, the socialist state sought to transform spa tourism from an elite activity to a mass movement aimed at enhancing public health and supporting the socialist state's goals. The therapeutic landscape and medical experience were restructured in line with political ideology to cater to larger, more active audiences, primarily drawn from the working class. The

⁸⁷ Duncan Light, "'A Medium of Revolutionary Propaganda': The State and Tourism Policy in the Romanian People's Republic, 1947–1965," *Journal of Tourism History* 5, no. 2 (August 2013): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2013.828780>.

⁸⁸ Light, 187.

⁸⁹ Light, 190–91.

following transcription from a short newsreel dating from 1957⁹⁰ offers insight on the regime's discourse regarding spa resorts:

“In the places where once industrialists and landowners used to laze around, today, thanks to the people's democratic regime, working people are coming to take care of their health. (...) Workers from all over the country come to these resorts: miners, factory workers, peasants from collective farms, intellectuals. The resort has the most modern equipment: hydro-electric baths, inhalations for chronic bronchitis and asthma sufferers, light baths to relieve rheumatic pains, iodine baths, medical massages to activate blood circulation. After treatment, a substantial meal awaits the patients. In their free time, the comrades meet at the club, where they spend pleasant hours. They read and comment on the articles in *Scântea*. Comrade Irimie Ladislau, a worker at the August 23 factory in Bucharest, reads a short biography of Comrade Stalin. Comrade Coschai Stoica, from the collective farm "New Life", who has visited the Soviet Union, tells her comrades about the wonderful life of the Soviet collective farm workers. With increased strength, the working people will return to work, carrying on the struggle for the plan!

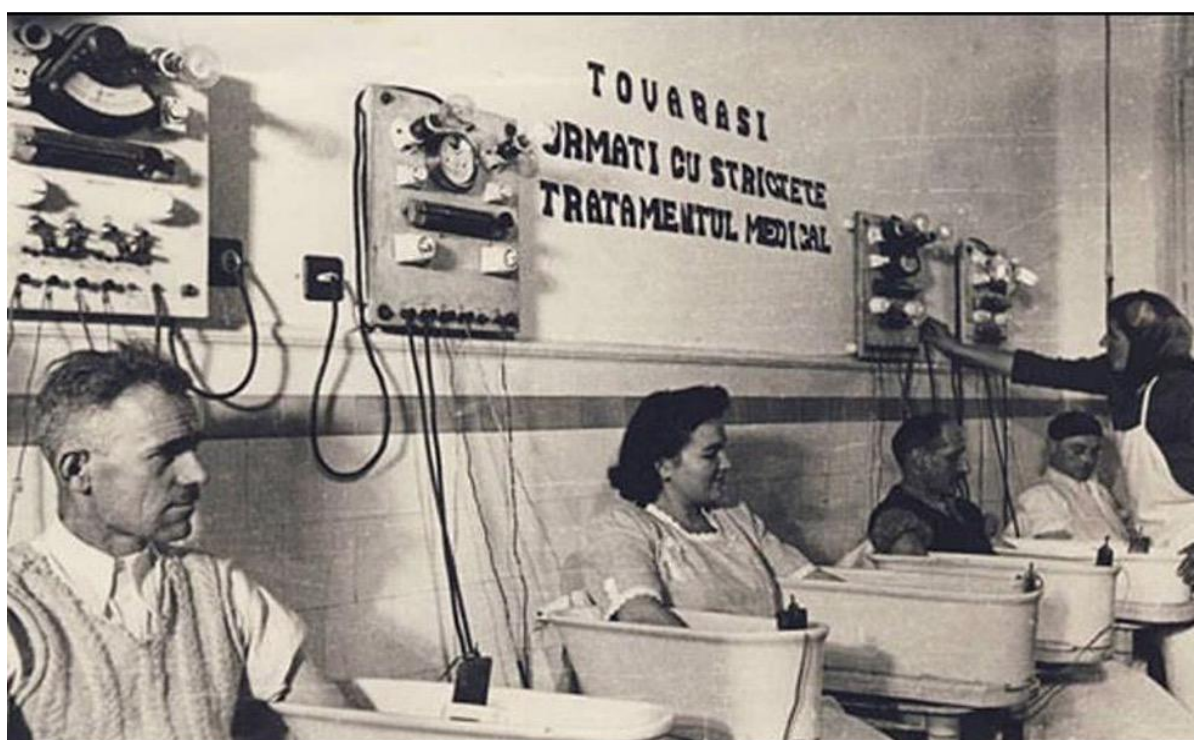


Figure 6 - Caption from a 1957 news reel showing workers taking the waters. The sign above reads “Comrades, follow the medical treatment strictly!” Source: Studioul de Filme Documentare și Jurnale de Actualități „Alexandru Sahia” (“Alexandru Sahia” Studio of Documentary Film and News Journals)

⁹⁰ “Stațiuni Balneare de Iarnă [Winter Spa Resorts],” *Actualitatea În Imagini [News in Images]* (Bucharest: Studioul de Filme Documentare și Jurnale de Actualități „Alexandru Sahia” [“Alexandru Sahia” Studio of Documentary Film and News Journals], 1957), Culturalia, <https://bit.ly/3VlkSo7>.

The new Socialist regime reorganized both property ownership and the management of thermal resorts, aiming to make them more widely accessible for the working class. In 1948, the regime ruled that the Ministry of Health would take over operations at Călimănești, Căciulata and Govora, thus, all the assets of the companies running the resorts returned to the state.⁹¹ Extending the nationalization process, the state soon took over other privately owned buildings, such as villas, hotels or restaurants, and in 1951, created the State Balneary Companies to manage this patrimony in the interest of the state and the working class.⁹²

The authorities of the new political regime aimed to transform Băile Govora into a thriving resort that tended to the rest and recovery of the working class throughout the year. Thus, a new chapter in its development began, one in which historic buildings - especially former villas or private homes – were often given new functions: dispensaries, cafeterias, schools, offices for the resort’s administration, social housing etc. Changes in the overall character of the resort became visible during the first season. With the new legal framework in place, buildings and thermal assets were nationalized, and most of the assets of the Company were taken over by the Ministry of Health (Palace Hotel, the Baths Pavillion, Hotels 1, 3 and Balneara), while more than 50 other buildings passed into the ownership of other state bodies and trade unions. In the same year, the General Confederation of Work (*Confederația Generală a Muncii*) published instructions for the creation of “houses of rest”, guiding the transformation of former privately owned villas into lodgings for workers.⁹³ Changes in the nature of the visitors came rapidly, with more than 80% of visitors in 1948 being trade union workers. Just one year later, Băile Govora was declared a “thermal resort of national interest”, achieved permanent status, and began to operate throughout the year.

⁹¹ Elena Bărbulescu, ed., *Documente privind politica sanitară în România (1948-1964)* [Documents regarding the sanitary policy in Romania (1948-1964)] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2009), 159.

⁹² Bărbulescu, 308–10.

⁹³ Nițu, “Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort],” 331–32.

In the mid 1950s, the long-awaited systematization plan was designed by the Central Institute for the Design and Systematization of Towns and Regions in Bucharest.⁹⁴ This plan outlined imperative investments that would modernize the resort, such as updating potable water and sewage networks, expanding the street network, creating new thermal facilities, housing and leisure facilities etc. In practice, this plan created the basis for the urban development of the 1960s and 1970s in Băile Govora. During this period, a series of apartment buildings were constructed to accommodate the increasing population, as the flourishing resort needed a significant number of workers. Many of the historic buildings that had been used for housing were becoming unsuitable for habitation due to lack of maintenance.

In the late 1970s, the state looked once more at expanding tourist and community facilities in Băile Govora and created a new systematization plan (1980) that outlined a large urban redesign process. For this, many historic villas - especially the ones that had become structurally vulnerable - were demolished to make room for necessary urban facilities: a post office, shops, medical facilities, schools etc. This plan, which also included several large hotels and smaller villas designed in a socialist style, was never fully realized. Although some new buildings appeared – the most significant being the new Post Office and the Hotel of the Trade Unions (nowadays Hotel Oltenia) inaugurated in 1985⁹⁵ – developments advanced slowly, as they lacked state funding. In 1989, they stopped altogether. Although it lost a significant number of historic villas, Govora retained much of its historic layout and large thermal buildings and acquired a series of socialist modernist buildings which are a relevant addition to the urban landscape, providing housing, public services and commercial spaces and still in use today.

⁹⁴ Nițu, 320.

⁹⁵ Mecu, Dolfi, and Geiculescu, “Băile Govora - Date Și Imagini În Timp (Schiță Monografică) [Băile Govora - Dates and Images in Time (Monography Sketch)],” 12.

During the socialist period, Govora experienced significant growth and prosperity, marking what many consider the “golden age” of the resort. The expansion of facilities and services led to the development of a comprehensive tourism and wellness infrastructure within the Govora Balneary Complex, which became a major employer in the region. By the 1970s, the complex employed over 700 staff members, working in hotels, restaurants, and bathing facilities under the administration of the Vâlcea County Office for Tourism.⁹⁶ Under the socialist government’s emphasis on public health and accessible treatment, spa therapies at Govora were extended to year-round services, with longer treatment durations fully subsidized by the state. This accessibility transformed Govora into a leading destination not only for therapeutic treatments but also for medical research, attracting both patients and professionals nationwide. This era saw the rise of Govora as a center for rheumatology and respiratory treatments, and the presence of a specialized workforce facilitated ongoing research in balneology.

2.1.4 The impact of the transition period and present-day issues

The major political, social, and economic transformations in Romania following its shift from a centralized, state-owned economy to a market economy had significant repercussions on spa tourism. All over the country, previously state-owned, the large spa complexes and medical villas underwent a prolonged and complex privatization process, leaving many with ambiguous ownership statuses, leading to a lack of investment and, eventually, their degradation or closure. Without clear ownership or support from temporary administrators, many of these facilities, which once provided accessible social services, suffered extensive neglect. Consequently, privatization reduced the number of available

⁹⁶ Nițu, “Istoria stațiunii Băile Govora [The history of the Băile Govora resort],” 339.

accommodations and the overall capacity of these once-bustling spa resorts, exacerbating the sector's difficulties.

Romanian spa destinations, though rich in natural resources and notable for their historical architecture, lacked the comfort and modern amenities that visitors increasingly sought. Data from the National Institute of Statistics reveals that between 1989 and 2005, demand for spa tourism declined by over 60%, primarily due to reduced purchasing power and limited travel budgets for most Romanians.⁹⁷

As economic recession and shifting socio-economic conditions decreased government support, both public and private stakeholders became less inclined to invest in spa tourism, focusing instead on more profitable ventures. Limited government support and insufficient promotional efforts steered tourists toward more modern spa destinations abroad, impacting Romania's long-term competitiveness and leading to an increased reliance on the state-subsidized social holiday system.

Social support programs have become vital in sustaining Romanian spa resorts, especially through subsidized or free spa treatment vouchers distributed by the National Pension and Social Insurance Funds to retired or disabled individuals.⁹⁸ This tradition of providing spa holidays at minimal cost has cemented Romania's spa tourism as an affordable option for retirees. As a result, the profile of spa tourists in Romania is predominantly older individuals who utilize these vouchers for subsidized, 18-day spa stays that include meals and daily treatments. This demographic is explained by Romania's aging population, limited incomes, and the lack of affordable alternative tourism options.

⁹⁷ George Erdeli et al., "Romanian Spa Tourism: A Communist Paradigm in a Post Communist Era," *HUMAN GEOGRAPHIES – Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography* 5, no. 2 (November 30, 2011): 53, <https://doi.org/10.5719/hgeo.2011.52.41>.

⁹⁸ Erdeli et al., 50–52.

Spa tourism remains among the most accessible holiday types in Romania, meeting the needs of older visitors seeking relaxation in natural settings with access to professional care. While it is an enduring and socially essential form of tourism, the sector faces challenges in attracting diverse age groups and competing with modern spa facilities abroad due to its limited modernization.

The changes described above can be easily observed in Băile Govora, from privatization and the effects of long restitution trials to the impact of the recession. During the privatization process, the “Băile Govora” Company (*Băile Govora SA*) was created in 1999 and bought the assets of the former County Office for Tourism from the state: the thermal buildings and a series of villas, many of them run down and in need of investments.⁹⁹ In the early 2000s, as families of the former owners of historic villas began filing for restitution, a long period of uncertainty and lack of accountability began. When the trials ended, Băile Govora SA had lost 14 buildings and almost half of its accommodation capacity.

The gradual decay and abandonment of historic buildings had a drastic effect on the therapeutic landscape experience, as many public spaces were closed off, impacting social ties and emotional connections with the built environment. All around, visitors and residents could feel the effects of privatization and observe how the spa experience was beginning to be reimagined. Treatments became shorter and patients fewer and in time the Baths Pavilion closed down, as the building required significant financial investments to meet health regulations. Many accommodation facilities, including the Palace Hotel, developed their own treatment centers, making the central baths obsolete. Many owners did not have the resources needed for renovations on the historic buildings that changed ownership after restitution, and

⁹⁹ Viorel Ilișoi, “Govora - Distrusă de Comunism Și de Tranzitie [Govora - Destroyed by Communism and Tranzition],” *Jurnalul.ro*, October 8, 2004, <https://jurnalul.ro/vechiul-site/old-site/suplimente/jurnalul-old/govora-distrusa-de-comunism-si-de-tranzitie-63394.html>.

which had become derelict and structurally vulnerable during the trials. Lacking its former capacity to accommodate and treat many visitors, Govora began to decline. The absence of balneary practices and the fading of the resort from collective public memory in Romania at large had consequences for its social and economic life that can still be seen today: young residents left in search of work, most of the buildings fell out of use, and economic activity was reduced to just four hotels and a few small businesses.

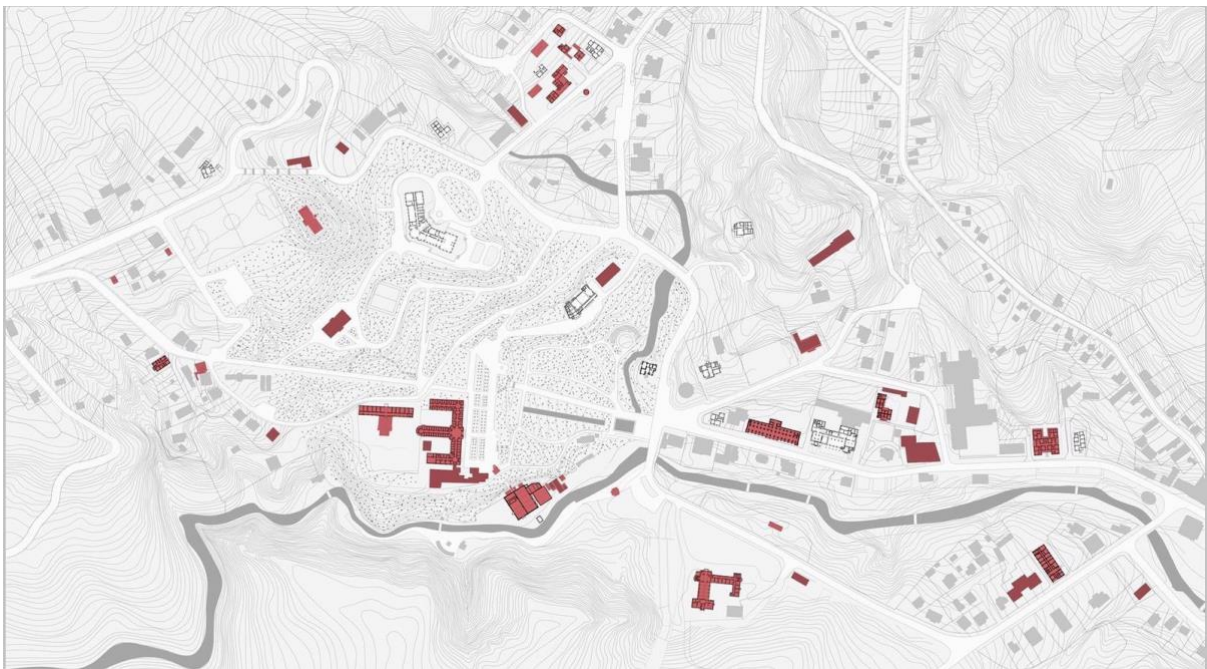


Figure 7: Abandoned buildings (in red) in the historic center of Băile Govora. Source: Studiogovora

Field research in Băile Govora highlights the resilience of small local entrepreneurs who work hard to keep their businesses afloat despite low tourist numbers.¹⁰⁰ Medical and tourism personnel, though highly committed, commute from nearby towns, underscoring a local workforce shortage. Previously, many locals established their careers within the resort, yet today, even long-term residents must seek employment elsewhere. This shift in workforce

¹⁰⁰ Andrei Leca et al., “Explorarea Peisajului Cultural Terapeutic al Băilor Govora: Patrimoniu, Resurse, Identitate [Exploring the Therapeutic Cultural Landscape of Băile Govora: Heritage, Resources, Identity],” Research Report (Bucharest, 2024), 20.

dynamics points to a significant transformation in Govora's economic structure, with locals identifying the labor shortage as a critical issue impacting various social facets of the community.

The resort remains an active medical destination and attracts visitors that choose to come here for therapeutic reasons, especially those related to pulmonary issues and allergies. The Thermal Park and three historic buildings (the Palace Hotel, the Casino, and the Iliescu Villa) have been restored through European projects and governmental grants. This restoration work has had an overall positive impact, and Băile Govora is starting to be regarded as an emerging destination for cultural tourism as well, due to efforts by civil society organizations.

Nonetheless, the overall poor condition of the historic built environment and the lack of services have a negative impact on incoming tourists. The decline of Govora's historic built environment reflects a shift in investment priorities which impacts the therapeutic landscape. Originally, the design and maintenance of Govora's facilities were rooted in the belief that a therapeutic environment must seamlessly integrate high-quality medical facilities with well-maintained, aesthetically pleasing surroundings. The combination of restorative architecture, clean public spaces, and tranquil landscapes was intended to enhance the curative experience for patients and create a holistic atmosphere of health and relaxation. In contrast, today's deteriorating structures and lack of services present a fragmented, poorly maintained environment that detracts from this vision of healing and tranquility. The once-cohesive therapeutic landscape is now characterized by disrepair, which diminishes its appeal to both visitors and residents, undermining the intended psychological and physical benefits of the original spa setting.

2.2 Contemporary perceptions of the therapeutic landscape in Băile Govora

During the Govora Heritage Lab summer school organized by Studiogovora in September 2024, a team of anthropology students went out to investigate how the therapeutic landscape is perceived and valued by both residents and tourists. Starting from the initial exploratory question “*Where, why and how are people taking the waters?*”, the research revealed different aspects of spa culture and highlighted the belief that “spa practices represent a state of mind, a way of living with its own rules, time, and space, practices which extend beyond the classic urban identity by referring constantly to the therapeutic landscape and places’ healing potential.”¹⁰¹

The research examines the relationship between the resort's natural resources, local therapeutic practices and community identity that revolves around these essential elements. Through a multidisciplinary analysis of natural resources, heritage spa architecture and local discourses of identity and revitalization, the study has revealed the multiple dimensions of Govora's therapeutic landscape and how it contributes to place-making processes through collective memory and local spa identity. Anthropological methods used include shadowing to document social rhythms, semi-structured interviews and movement interviews to explore interactions in specific contexts, as well as participatory and non-participatory observation, photo elicitation for image-based discussions, and stakeholder mapping to identify significant social actors and behaviors. Study participants included a diverse range of community members and visitors: civil servants, business owners, artisans, young people, retirees who have witnessed Govora’s historical changes, medical professionals with over five years of experience in the treatment centers, returning treatment tourists, vacationers, day-trippers, as

¹⁰¹ Leca et al., 21.

well as retired tourism workers, such as nurses, masseuses, and hotel staff. The research offers valuable insight into how people interact and connect with the surrounding landscape, showing values and affective connections that mirror historic descriptions and build on collective memory.

The historic spaces still in use in Băile Govora, such as the Palace, Parc, and Belvedere hotels, the Casino or former Cinema, as well as the public spaces - the park, promenades and mineral springs, remain essential features of the place identity and social and economic dynamic of the resort. As any other Grand Hotel, Palace was, in its heyday, a symbol of modernity and luxury, attracting visitors eager for spa treatments and an exclusive atmosphere. It regained this reputation after being restored but is now perceived as less accessible by many of the resort's visitors. Many of the tourists who arrive in Govora using state subsidized spa treatment vouchers stay in the other hotels in the resort: the Belvedere, the Oltenia and the Parc. These hotels are known for their affordable prices and a more pragmatic approach to spa tourism and attract many recurring visitors. This special relationship between visitors and the places they frequent over the years underlines the deep emotional connection and personal identity that is built around spa tourism experiences.¹⁰²

Băile Govora is appreciated by visitors as a therapeutic oasis where forests, mineral springs and clean air create a complex cultural and natural landscape with health benefits. Public spaces play a key role in this process. The air quality is considered a key attribute of the resort, described by locals and tourists as "inexplicably pure" and "nourishing", giving a unique sense of well-being.¹⁰³ Many visitors have been returning for decades to treat respiratory

¹⁰² Leca et al., 11.

¹⁰³ Leca et al., 17.

ailments and to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the park, where rare species of trees and biodiversity create a unique space to relax and reconnect with nature.

Often overlooked by both tourists and locals, the local greenhouses are an omnipresent feature of the town. The greenhouses, once essential to maintaining Govora's therapeutic landscape by nurturing flowers and greenery for the town's parks, remain active but face an uncertain future. Located at the park's edge, these greenhouses and their dedicated staff are emblematic of the town's heritage, yet their roles are gradually diminishing, and the complex itself is threatened with demolition. These greenhouses are part of the therapeutic landscape integral to Govora's identity as a spa town, with potential for revitalization to benefit both residents and visitors.

The Casino or former Cinema has lost some of its social and cultural relevance, being described by locals as a "beautiful but empty shop window", with events rarely organized there. Both locals and tourists alike lament the absence of the cinema, nostalgically recalling the times when it was active. The gazebo in the park is also evoked as a place to meet and listen to the brass band after Sunday service, where people came dressed elegantly, with purses and gloves. This place of socializing and entertainment was a cultural and social platform for the community to come together, strengthening social and cultural relations. Even if nowadays the gazebo is used more for casual socializing, there is a strong desire to revitalize it through cultural and musical events, to bring back some of the original charm and function of the place.

The mineral springs of the resort are perceived as symbols of healing, a sacred element of nature that contributes to the identity of the place and to the personal experiences of visitors.¹⁰⁴ These resources are part of the collective memory and local mythology, seen not only as therapeutic elements, but also as points of spiritual recharging and self-discovery. It is

¹⁰⁴ Leca et al., 16–19.

worth mentioning though that locals are reluctant to drink the waters, with many of them mentioning they are worried that they have lost their therapeutic characteristics or, worse, that the waters might even cause harm. One reason is that although the waters are frequently tested by the Băile Govora Company, the results are not communicated to the public.

The Baths Pavilion, once a symbol of health and vitality, is today in a state of deep decay, causing sadness among both the community and tourists. In the past, the pavilion was the central treatment and socializing place, where visitors and locals met in an atmosphere of elegance and respect.¹⁰⁵ Outdoor bowling alleys and cafeterias played an essential role in social cohesion at the resort as places to relax and interact after treatments. They were lively places, where locals and tourists met and formed a community closely linked by their shared experiences. The disappearance of these spaces is a loss not only for the built heritage but also for social cohesion, contributing to the overall atmosphere of stagnation. Visitors and locals now acutely feel the absence of entertainment options, and young people no longer have dedicated spaces for socializing, exacerbating the general sense of decline and social isolation.¹⁰⁶

Apart from the natural and built environment, respondents also referred to residents' qualities, whom they described as "welcoming" and "good", emphasizing the idea that the resort is more than a mere treatment place, it is a space where interactions between people create a network of support and healing for everyone.¹⁰⁷

Through the historical overview, this chapter has shown how the varying management models adopted over time significantly shaped the urban development of Băile Govora and the creation and understanding of its surrounding therapeutic landscape. Issues connected to

¹⁰⁵ Leca et al., 14.

¹⁰⁶ Leca et al., 14–15.

¹⁰⁷ Leca et al., 19.

participatory management and effective division of responsibilities between public authorities and the management bodies of the spa resort have persistently hindered progress. Efforts to achieve financial viability have historically been challenging for the resort, with relative stability only seen during the socialist era when state subsidies and centralized control briefly alleviated economic difficulties.

The visible state of neglect and disrepair of the resort is frequently lamented by both locals and visitors. Over 30% of the central buildings are currently abandoned, with few new investments or revitalization efforts. Once an important touristic and medical destination, the town is struggling to attract new visitors and investors. This deterioration impacts not only the town's attractiveness but also the efficacy of the spa's treatment potential, as the environment no longer supports a holistic approach to health and wellness. Furthermore, the run-down state of the town discourages investment and limits the community's ability to preserve or repurpose these structures, which in turn impacts economic sustainability and the resort's future.

Chapter 3 - Heritage policies and perspectives for spa tourism

In the years preceding EU integration, the European perspective on culture as a generator of economic sustainable development and social cohesion also appeared in the Romanian public discourse.¹⁰⁸ These ideas were included in strategies, funding guidelines, and policy documents, as well as heritage legislation starting in the early 2000s. The new heritage protection framework, created by Law 422/2001 and methodologies that followed, was designed to accommodate a broader understanding of heritage values and improve heritage protection, by integrating community values and dividing conservation responsibilities between a broader range of actors. While the new law succeeded in integrating contemporary principles promoted by international conventions, it also has several shortcomings that hinder its full implementation, as it still relies on a highly bureaucratized and centralized protection system. Ongoing attempts to update legislation and create a comprehensive Heritage Code began several years ago but are currently on hold.

Historic buildings are not perceived as assets but as burdens, largely due to limited heritage protection efforts and significant gaps in the documentation intended to support preservation. In Govora, despite some completed preservation projects, the town lacks a comprehensive strategy that would integrate culture and heritage into development, as well as the local capacity to sustain it. This situation reflects an ongoing need to strengthen connections between the community and its heritage, fostering a sense of ownership and pride that could support long-term revitalization. This chapter further explores these themes, examining how

¹⁰⁸ Dan-Eugen Ratiu, "Cultural Policy in Romania: Justifications, Values and Constraints. A Philosophical Approach," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 4, no. 12 (December 2005): 106.

existing heritage and spa policies create opportunities to reconnect both residents and tourists with spa heritage and the wider therapeutic landscape. The following chapter exemplifies the steps taken locally for a more integrated approach to preservation, investment, and community engagement that could redefine Băile Govora as a model of sustainable tourism that builds on the values and attributes of the therapeutic landscape.

3.1 The Romanian heritage protection framework

The Romanian protection system recognizes built heritage in connection with the national List of Historical Monuments, a legally binding document published once every five years by the Ministry of Culture. Monuments are divided into four categories, three types, and two grades of importance (see Appendix, Tables 1 and 2). Through these sometimes arbitrary separations and the limited amount of information provided, the List fails to cover and, thus protect, the diversity of values inherent to historic monuments.

An attribute of the previous approaches is that the listing system remains focused on “intrinsic value”. In assessing sites, the methodology uses four criteria: the most important is age, followed by architectural, artistic, and urbanistic value, then rarity, and lastly memorial and symbolic value. “Religious, social, scientific and technical values are not taken into consideration in the listing methodology,” and ethnographic value is only used in relation to rarity, hence the small representation of vernacular heritage.¹⁰⁹ “Social values or convergence with the values of the natural or intangible heritage are also only rarely and marginally taken into consideration.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Sergiu Nistor, “The Importance for Romania of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society,” *Transsylvania Nostra*, 2013, 10.

¹¹⁰ Nistor, 8.

The division of historic monuments into items of universal and national as well as regional and local importance, has an impact on heritage management. Distinctions between monuments were guided by administrative requirements needed to decentralize the protection system and facilitate the administrative and financial involvement of local authorities in funding and managing historic sites. Unfortunately, this aim is yet to be fully achieved in practice due to legislative contradictions which prohibit the allocation of public funds to private properties, a shortage of specialized staff at a local level, and a lack of coordination and cooperation between the central, regional and local administrative levels.¹¹¹

These problems stem from the listing methodology because historic structures graded below the limit necessary for being of national and universal importance are listed in group B. This approach contains two fundamental errors: first, “the confusion between the intrinsic merit of the historic building and its representativeness related to the territory on which it was built”, and second, “the idea that historic buildings with inferior grades in terms of age or architectural value or rarity are only locally representative.”¹¹² This assessment only applies to buildings listed after the adoption of the methodology in 2003, document which was updated in 2008. Monuments which appear in the previous lists were not reassessed following the adoption of the methodology. Many other inconsistencies remain in the way updating the List has been approached throughout the country, both historically, and geographically.

The protection instruments developed through Law 422/2001 are complemented by urban planning policy tools, mainly regulations and plans. While the List is supposed to protect individual items of remarkable value, the latter protect values that are diffused through the larger urban fabric, by designating protected areas or setting up specific regulations. Although these instruments should work together to create a more interoperable heritage protection

¹¹¹ Nistor, 13.

¹¹² Nistor, 10–11.

framework, they overlap and create an over-bureaucratized image of heritage protection, with numerous loopholes that can be navigated and exploited by both owners and architects, especially for real estate purposes. For example, sites which are proposed for listing in urban plans, following careful analysis and interinstitutional approval processes, are not given special status and must undergo the same procedure as regular proposals. If these steps are not taken, sites have no legal protection and can be easily demolished. Another issue comes from how the listing procedure can be initiated. For public properties, the County Offices for Culture can start the procedure themselves, but for private properties they need to be requested to do so by NGOs, other heritage authorities or the Municipality. Because private owners can contest heritage listing decisions in court, this puts pressure on heritage authorities, who often neglect to start the procedure, arguing lack of capacity or agency. Without the official recognition provided through listing, these items remain both unprotected and vulnerable, as well as ineligible for conservation funding. Băile Govora is a good example of how all these limitations and redundancies create complex heritage management issues at a local level, which will be further discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

The early 2000s also saw the beginning of restitution trials, during which time unclear land ownership issues led to lack of accountability associated with the destruction of heritage. Although the Law on Historical Monuments provides that in such cases local authorities take on the protection of historic monuments until the trial came to an end, other laws prohibit allocating any public funds for protection or emergency interventions on built heritage that is not public property. Also, without clear ownership, authorities cannot leverage fines or prosecute if the historic monument suffers damage. In time, these long ownership disputes led to irreversible damage to many buildings, while others were eventually returned in bad condition and without any financial compensation that might support their conservation.

Given the topic of the thesis, the issue of protecting cultural landscapes is also worth mentioning. Although Romania has ratified several international conventions which require the state to recognize, identify, and implement protective and management measures for cultural landscapes, national legislation still lacks clear definitions and specific regulations for cultural landscape protection.¹¹³ The analysis of the existing legal framework shows that the only concrete methods of protecting cultural landscapes are their inclusion in urban planning documents or their classification as sites on the List of Historic Monuments. However, new legislation currently under development, such as the Spatial Planning, Town Planning and Construction Code (*Codul Amenajării Teritoriului, Urbanismului și Construcțiilor*) or the Cultural Heritage Code (*Codul Patrimoniului Cultural*) are expected to contain proposals for adequate protection instruments.

3.2 Participatory approaches to heritage protection in Romania

In preparing for European integration, Romania adopted a series of measures meant to support the development of a more open, democratic society, and the nongovernmental sector. Supported by international funding mechanisms, as well as by newly created national ones, civil society initiatives dedicated to heritage grew significantly in the following years. Over 2500 NGOs dedicated to different cultural aspects came into being after 2000.¹¹⁴

Recent and detailed research into Romanian civil society dedicated to heritage has indicated several primary ideas driving this field.¹¹⁵ Firstly, civil society reacts to the way state authorities manage heritage, as well as against modernization trends, especially in rural areas,

¹¹³ Alexandru Mexi, “Evoluția La Nivel Internațional Și Național a Domeniului Prezervării Grădinilor Istorice Și Peisajelor Culturale. Congrese, Dezbateri, Convenții, Charte, Ghiduri Și Legi [The International and National Development on Preserving Historic Gardens and Cultural Landscapes. Congresses, Debates, Conventions, Charters, Guides and Laws],” *Caietele Restaurării XII* (2023): 165.

¹¹⁴ Raluca Rusu, “Practici Patrimoniale Actuale. O Etnografie a Grupurilor Socioprofesionale Din România [Current Heritage Practices. An Ethnography of Socioprofessional Groups in Romania]” (PhD, Timișoara, Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara, 2018), 323–24.

¹¹⁵ Rusu, 79.

where traditional houses are being adapted to modern requirements with little regard for their architectural assets. Also, there is a growing interest in other types of heritage that have been previously overlooked, such as industrial or vernacular heritage. Then, there is a growing affinity for certain values sought for in the past. Lastly, there is the creation of official and informal heritage networks. Overall, heritage NGOs have developed a variety of projects using complex and creative approaches, creating a “medley of heritage practices” aimed at contributing to the development of contemporary society.¹¹⁶

In building its arguments, civil society often turns to the principles of the Faro Convention, promoting the key role heritage plays in society. Romania is yet to ratify the convention and heritage professionals have diverging opinions on it. Arguments vary from advocating for the need to enhance the roles and responsibilities of communities, to arguing that the ratification of previous conventions is already sufficient, to the fact that implementing the ideas of the Faro convention would create even more vulnerabilities and lead to loss of heritage. Indeed, through ratifying the Granada and La Valetta Conventions, Romania integrated cultural heritage into policies and undertook to support partnerships between local authorities and civil society, a principle which can also be found in the Faro Convention. However, the partnerships promoted by these conventions are meant to increase the efficiency of public authorities to which civil society is subordinated, while the Faro Convention *promotes equal partnership* in all heritage processes.¹¹⁷ The debates around the Faro Convention provide insight into the rigidity of the existing heritage framework in Romania and how it hinders a wider understanding of heritage as a process, echoing international discussions on the topic of authorized heritage discourse.

¹¹⁶ Rusu, 79.

¹¹⁷ Nistor, “The Importance for Romania of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society,” 14.

Critical heritage studies have redefined heritage as a dynamic cultural process involving acts of remembering that shape our understanding and interaction with the present.¹¹⁸ From a governmental perspective, heritage can be viewed as a tool or variable in power struggles at both local and supralocal levels of governance.¹¹⁹ In examining different types of heritage discourse, Laurajane Smith introduced the concept of authorized heritage discourse (AHD), analyzing how it is constructed and disseminated across various levels—ranging from international heritage organizations to governments and NGOs. AHD influences all aspects of the heritage field, from policy development and listing practices to the technical processes of management and conservation, which are framed by AHD, as well as cultural processes that generate value and meaning. Smith further argues that by emphasizing the inherent aesthetic, scientific value, and physicality of heritage, AHD obscures the deeper cultural and political functions of heritage, such as reinforcing narratives of nation, national identity, and the historical identities of elites.¹²⁰ As demonstrated in this chapter, authorized heritage discourse has shaped Romanian heritage protection and remains prominent within the country's heritage policy framework.

Once Romania had access to European funds, projects aimed at restoring heritage sites for the purpose of cultural tourism and sustainable development found their way into strategies and policies. Without a comprehensive official understanding of heritage, priority was and still is given to historical monuments of national importance owned by public bodies. Projects focused on the restoration of the buildings and the creation of spaces for cultural activities (mainly museums) in the hope that the investments would attract visitors. Lately, after policy reports began to contain critical assessments of completed projects, funding programs started

¹¹⁸ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 11.

¹¹⁹ Regina Bendix, "Heritage between Economy and Politics: An Assessment from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology," in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2008), 263, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203884973-20>.

¹²⁰ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 87.

to encourage partnerships between authorities and NGOs to ensure citizen participation and “sustainability” of conservation projects.

The Open Heritage Project, a research project funded under the Horizon 2020 program to study sustainable adaptive heritage reuse initiatives, offers a detailed overview of Romanian heritage policy. The experts observe that although strategies suggest that an integrated approach to cultural heritage is a key aspect of sustainable development, there is no clear implementation framework for this idea.¹²¹ EU funds channeled into specific development projects and programs (e.g. tourism strategy, sustainable development) often capitalize on heritage. Still, several crucial areas of heritage, such as rural heritage and minority heritage remain unfinanced.¹²² Such is also the case for heritage related to thermal practices, which have not yet benefited from a more nuanced approach to values and types of functions. The reports indicate that private investment and sponsorship in cultural heritage receive little support, public-private partnerships are infrequent, tax incentives are ineffective, and there is a shortage of financial and human resources needed to implement and enforce heritage legislation. Although the heritage system is highly centralized and relies heavily on experts, there is a notable gap in the expertise needed to address heritage policy and management. NGOs play a crucial role in counteracting the effects of this centralized system and the lack of specialists. Engaging in heritage projects remains challenging; while some grassroots participatory processes exist, they rely heavily on local initiatives, NGO involvement, and the willingness of local authorities to participate.

¹²¹ Loes Veldpaus, Federica Fava, and Dominika Brodowicz, “Mapping of Current Heritage Re-Use Policies and Regulations in Europe Complex Policy Overview of Adaptive Heritage Re-Use,” September 2020, 160, https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/d_1.2_mapping_of_current_heritage_re-use_policies_and_regulations_in_europe.pdf.

¹²² Dóra Mérai et al., “Typology of Current Adaptive Reuse Policies,” May 2020, 38, <https://openheritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Typology-of-current-adaptive-resue-policies.pdf>.

3.3 Local Governance: heritage protection in Băile Govora

Băile Govora can be interpreted as both a cultural and therapeutic landscape, with heritage values and attributes rooted in its historical development. Established as a health-focused town planned according to the health and urban planning regulations of the period, it serves as a notable example of a spa town that bridges eastern and western influences. The town's unique qualities, such as its architecture, natural setting, landscape, and urban design, combined with its therapeutic resources and practices, as well as the intangible values they embody, set Băile Govora apart from other resorts in Romania. Nonetheless, due to shortcomings regarding the existing heritage framework and its application in Govora, these values are yet to be comprehensively recognized and protected. The following subchapters summarize how local heritage protection evolved at a local level and presents its effects.

3.3.1. Listed heritage in Băile Govora

In Băile Govora, the first assets were nominated for heritage status in 1980,¹²³ as can be seen from the 1980 tentative list. The Palace Pavilion (today the Palace Hotel), the former building of the Govora Archaeology Museum (the Pănciulescu Villa, a modernist private house that had been nationalized), and the two busts of Dr. Zorileanu and Dr. Bottescu in the park figure as “goods of particular artistic value”, under consideration because of their artistic and documentary value. These assessments came from the central administrative level, following proposals from county museums, and can be seen as steps taken by the regime to promote the artistic features of the resort for touristic reasons, as well to allocate funds for conservation or maintenance, if needed. To some extent, listing the hotel and the museum, each of them lying within a protected area, could have been a means to ensure protection over a larger area, but

¹²³ “Lista Bunurilor Din Patrimoniul Cultural National al Republicii Socialiste România (Monumente Istorice) [List of Goods Inscribed in the National Cultural Heritage of the Socialist Republic of Romania],” 1980, National Institute of Heritage, <https://bit.ly/40VPyzH>.

more archival research is needed to demonstrate this hypothesis. Listing the museum as an architectural monument may have been proposed in connection to Art. 13.d) of the 1974 Law,¹²⁴ as a means to protect its collection of archaeological and religious artifacts donated by Gheorghe Petre-Govora.¹²⁵ As the 1980 listing has remained on an undisclosed tentative list¹²⁶ more research is needed to assess the extent to which the listing had any impact at the local level, especially if it had an influence on the upcoming systematization project mentioned in Chapter 2.



Figure 8: Systematization plan for Băile Govora, 1977. Source: Central Historic Archives [Arhivele Istorice Centrale, Fond Comitetul pentru Problemele Consiliului Popular – Direcția Sistemalizare, Litera V, dosar 14/1976-1977]

The systematization plan above reveals the ambitions the regime held for the resort.

Within the central area of the town, the Vâlcea County Design Center (*Centrul Județean de*

¹²⁴ “If the goods of national cultural patrimony are part of collections or immovable ensembles which also have artistic, historic, or documentary value, they will be preserved and valorized within these collections or ensembles, ensuring special conditions for their maintenance and conservation.”

¹²⁵ Gheorghe Petre, who adopted "Govora" as a second surname to honor his connection to the area, was the parish priest of the nearby village of Govora. Passionate about archaeology, he explored the region, amassing a collection of over 4,000 items through discoveries, acquisitions, and donations. Initially displayed in the church and later in his home, the collection includes pre-glacial fossils, artifacts from the Upper Paleolithic to the Second Iron Age, and materials from the Roman and Medieval periods. It also features religious art, such as wood and glass icons, and nearly 100 old religious books printed in Wallachia between the 17th and 19th centuries.

¹²⁶ Laura Demeter, “Regime Change and Cultural Heritage Protection, a Matter of State Security,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25, no. 5 (May 4, 2019): 530, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1468349>.

Proiectare Vâlcea) planned for several accommodation facilities offering almost 3000 beds. The plan shows where large scale socialist hotels were to be built, and the extent to which the historic center was to be made densely built-in. While this plan shows consideration for the historic thermal features, leaving the historic spa ensemble untouched, and, to some extent, respects the vernacular features of the settlement since it targets few streets outside the center, the systematization plan brought radical changes to the landscape and overall atmosphere of the resort. Given that during the 1980s, the state did not direct much money to investments in Govora, little of this plan was put into practice. Only one large socialist hotel was built, luckily leaving the historic center of the town mostly untouched by large scale socialist structures, unlike many other historic resorts in the country.

Code	Name	Address	Dating	Details on conservation
VL-II-s-B-09643	Urban Ensemble	between the Town Hall and the Park	late 19th - early 20th c.	most of the historic buildings are unused and in disrepair
VL-II-m-B-09644	The Palace Hotel	1 Park St.	1914	restored, used
VL-II-m-B-09645	The Casino	3 Park St.	early 20th c.	restored, unused
VL-II-m-B-09646	The Gheorghe Petre collection of archaeology and religious art	109B Vladimirescu Tudor St.	mid. 20th c.	The building has been restituted and is now a private residence; the collection was moved to another historic villa owned by the municipality
VL-II-m-B-20968	Ivanovici Villa	10 Sfatului St.	-	not restored. emergency conservation carried out in 2020
VL-III-m-B-09991	Bust of Gen. Dr. N. Zorilescu (sic!)	Central Park	early 20th c.	In good condition

Table 1. Listed architecture and public forum monuments in Băile Govora.

The table above shows existing heritage items and their conservation state. The List of Historical Monuments features only monuments of local importance in Băile Govora (see Table X): one archaeological site (with three monuments), four architectural monuments (one site and three buildings), and one public forum monument. A detailed list containing all items

included on all Lists of Historical Monuments can be found in the Appendix. By analyzing changes in heritage status between the 1980s List and today, it can be seen that little attention was given to reassessing local heritage values and attributes between 1991 and 2004. The 2004 List shows that the Palace Pavilion and the Museum of Archaeology (now the Gheorghe Petre collection of archaeology and religious art) regained their heritage status, as did the busts of the two doctors who shaped Govora's development, Dr. Zorileanu and Dr. Bottescu, the latter being included on the List of Lost Historical Monuments after it was stolen. The only two additions that were new were initiated by the municipality, as a prerequisite to accessing funds: the Casino, listed in 2004, and the Ivanovici Villa (fig. 9), listed in 2009.



Figure 9: The Ivanovici Villa after the emergency conservation works. Photo: Studiogovora / Marius Vasile

Owned by the municipality, the Ivanovici Villa was used for social housing and declared a danger to the public in 2005. It was listed after the municipality saw an opportunity to access funding for its conservation through a cooperation program between Romanian and French authorities. The plan was to transform it into a center for local crafts, under the management of the National Institute of Heritage, but the project never came to fruition and the villa was completely abandoned in 2012. As the only individually listed historical monument in town that has not yet been restored, the building restoration work is eligible for public funding. In 2020, Studiogovora, an independent group of heritage activists, helped the municipality access funds for the emergency conservation works needed to stop the building from decaying further. Efforts are currently being made to draw up possible scenarios for its future use.

Urban development in Băile Govora is regulated by the General Urban Plan (PUG) which came into force in 2010.

“The General Urban Plans must be developed based on the regional or county plans, following the regulations in the regional plans and contain programmes of short, medium and long-term measures addressing issues and inequalities in that area. They regulate land-use, the functional zoning, the traffic, infrastructure, protected zones and historical areas. It determines the future development of the area including the maximum built-up area and designates protected and regeneration areas.”¹²⁷

For Băile Govora, the main issues mentioned in the PUG that are relevant in the context of this thesis are: the need to protect heritage values, the lack of maintenance of houses and green spaces, the outdated medical and accommodation facilities, and the lack of diversity of leisure activities. Without mentioning it directly, the PUG also highlights the need to protect or enhance features of the therapeutic landscape. For urban planning to ensure proper protection of heritage values, each PUG is based on a historical study, which assesses the urban

¹²⁷ Veldpaus, Fava, and Brodowicz, “Mapping of Current Heritage Re-Use Policies and Regulations in Europe Complex Policy Overview of Adaptive Heritage Re-Use,” 155.

fabric in close connection with existing criteria and make recommendations, and on landscape research concerned with evaluating values in the surrounding environment.

Values		Details
Urban design	cultural landscape created by the Central Park and the promenade leading to it (Tudor Vladimirescu St.)	
	organic insertion of unbuilt spaces in the urban fabric	
	blend between typical rural and urban landscape elements	
Architectural	Values of traditional resort architecture	Buildings that show their balneary utility, from their initial concept to their architectural details, found on the main street, in the park, and on its nearby streets. Some are proposed for listing.
	Neo-Romanian architecture values (including religious architecture)	Not specific to resort architecture, but characteristic for the urban development period of the town, highlighting and serving as background for the values listed above.
	Values of vernacular architecture	Showcase traditional building techniques and influences from “polite architecture”. ¹²⁸
	Interwar architectural values	Few buildings highlighting the final creative period of organic urban development, before commissioned urban planning.
Memorial	The Monument of Heroes and the Museum of architecture and religious art	
	The statues and monuments in the Central Park	
Industrial	The Electric Plant	Proposed for listing
Natural	The ‘natural’ environment	
	The Park with landscape design and rare plant species	Proposed for listing

Table 2 - Heritage values outlined in the historic study of the General Urban Plan

The historical study¹²⁹ developed to aid the 2010 PUG details local heritage values and their attributes (Table 2) and offers a more comprehensive view than the List of Historical

¹²⁸ Polite architecture is a term used in architecture theory to refer to buildings designed by a trained professional, whether an architect, surveyor, or master mason, following national or international styles and conventions.

¹²⁹ Sergiu Nistor and Vlad Cristinel, “Studiu istoric de fundamentare și delimitare a obiectivelor și ariilor urbane protejate din orașul Băile Govora, jud. Vâlcea [Historic Study for the Substantiation and Delimitation of Objectives and Protected Areas in Baile Govora, Valcea County]” (Bucharest, May 2010), 10–11, <http://bit.ly/40Q5P9q>.

Monuments. Most importantly, it advances the idea of the historic main street and thermal park forming part of a cultural landscape together with its buildings, urban fabric and natural environment. The study outlines several measures to ensure heritage values are protected. It proposes that the main buildings and areas that formed the historic resort - the Baths Pavilion (fig. 10), the Electric Plant and the Park - should be given official heritage recognition and be listed as an ensemble, together with the Palace Hotel, Casino, and bust of Dr. Zorileanu, which are already listed. The authors also propose the delisting of the main street ensemble (Tudor Vladimirescu St.), arguing that existing designation causes confusion, as the street is listed as a site, but named an ensemble. They further mention that this historical group has lost its historical coherence and homogeneity of values through recent insertions.¹³⁰ They propose that three buildings on the street (Hotel Ștefănescu, Vila Constanța Marieta and the house at no. 158) be listed individually, arguing that their protection areas would offer a sufficient means of conserving the heritage values of the historic town. Contrasting the coverage of study with the existing situation, one can see that some areas containing heritage values remained unassessed, mainly adjacent streets where there are several buildings relevant to the architecture values mentioned in the study.

Following the conclusions of the historical study, the General Urban Plan marked the protected areas, proposed changes to the List of Historical Monuments, outlined how buildings in protected areas could be used and modified. The plan underlined that heritage values needed to be protected through further studies but failed to recognize the complex and multi-faceted values and attributes linked to the therapeutic landscape. Nonetheless, the General Urban Plan advocated for closer cooperation between authorities, private owners and responsible authorities, mainly the County Office for Culture (*Direcția Județeană pentru Cultură Vâlcea* -

¹³⁰ Nistor and Cristinel, 30.

DJC) which were expected to offer advice and support local heritage preservation efforts. No responsibility or possibility of involvement was offered to the local medical community in assessing and harnessing the benefits of heritage.

3.3.2 Current issues in heritage preservation in Băile Govora

In recent years, once several funding options became available for developing the touristic and cultural infrastructure, both the municipality and Băile Govora SA accessed grants to restore the heritage buildings in their possession. The Palace Hotel, owned by Băile Govora SA, was restored with European funds and became a 4-star hotel. The municipality restored the Casino and the Park, and though the quality of the execution was criticized by professionals, these investments had a positive impact in reconnecting the area to residents and tourists. The municipality also implemented a project to promote local attractions, such as the local church, the public pool, and the well-known religious attractions in the area, such as the Horezu Monastery (a World Heritage Site) or the Bistrița, Arnota, and “Dintr-un lemn” monasteries. The selection and interpretation of chosen sites in Băile Govora fails to present a comprehensive and engaging story of the local heritage. The privately owned spa buildings and their stories have been completely left out of the presentation narrative offered to tourists.

Despite these projects aiming at revitalizing tourism and restoring listed monuments, the town still has a large number of unused buildings standing in the central area, some in critically poor condition. Since the PUG was approved in 2010, its heritage recommendations have had little impact, as local authorities were both unwilling and had little capacity to put them into practice. Inside the protected areas, owners continued to make improper alterations to their houses, having little knowledge about existing regulations or access to professional advice. The listing proposals outlined in the historical study never went through, as none of the responsible authorities filed for the procedures to start.

After Romania joined the EU, heritage designation was seen by local decision makers and owners as an administrative prerequisite to access funds to attract tourists and raise the attractiveness of the town. Without these funds, heritage status is considered a burden, because of its economic and bureaucratic implications. Heritage professionals saw listing as a means to protect the historic health-related facilities after they closed down, especially the Baths and the historic villas and hotels, and to offer them some sort of priority in case opportunities appeared. The owners objected, thinking that heritage status would hinder further projects or transactions. Since then, little attention has been given to a more strategic approach that would connect historic buildings (either listed or not) to a wider array of needs coming from all stakeholders in the community and to health practices.



Figure 10: The Baths Pavilion in Băile Govora. Photo: Studiogovora | Marius Vasile

Lacking legal protection that would coerce owners and authorities to take appropriate measures to restore the abandoned buildings, as well as adequate policy tools for their revitalization, the historic spa buildings in Băile Govora continue to decay. Among them, the Baths Pavilion (Fig. 10), stands out as the landmark building in the resort, located at the heart of its design. Both residents and visitors often express disapproval and resentment when talking about the building, as well as the state of local heritage in general. The Pavilion's condition also attracts journalists, who regularly report on the run-down appearance of the resort, cementing its reputation as a destination which only attracts elderly patients who come here for health reasons, making it rather unattractive to the wider public.

Băile Govora has the potential to be interpreted as both a cultural and a therapeutic landscape. Its values lie in their history and initial planning: a new town created as a public health objective on the basis of regulations that were up-to-date for the period, a relevant example of a spa town conceived on the intellectual and conceptual border between East and West. and. The architectural, natural, landscape and urbanistic values, together with the therapeutic resources and practices and their inherent intangible values, differentiate the town from other Romanian resorts, many of which have been impacted by urban systematization during communism.

The history of the resort can be read throughout its urban landscape. It shows both how the resort evolved in close connection to existing resources and the health policies of the day, and how its heritage situation was greatly influenced by policy decisions made after 1989, mainly privatization and policies targeting the Romanian balneary sector, and only to a smaller extent, by heritage policies. Thus, the following subchapter offers a brief overview of the spa sector, based on existing research and strategies, showing what opportunities exist for harnessing the potential of natural and cultural heritage.

3.2 Spa tourism and heritage experiences

In the early 2000s, Romania's accession to the European Union was seen as an opportunity to revitalize the spa tourism sector and to connect local spas to the wider continental network. Prior to and shortly after joining the EU, the state commissioned several studies and strategies to support this process.¹³¹ Nevertheless, to this day, many of the challenges presented by the studies are yet to be resolved, and EU accession is yet to have the desired impact in increasing the number of foreign tourists and reducing the system's dependency on state subsidies. Spa experts and the Romanian government estimate that over one billion euros in investment would be needed for Romanian spa resorts to compete with similar facilities elsewhere in the European Union.¹³²

Increased competition from well-established European spa destinations has highlighted the need for modernization, as many Romanian resorts rely on outdated infrastructure from the socialist era, which does not meet the EU standards. Although EU structural funds offer some financial support, limited access by private investors has slowed progress in upgrading facilities and services. Regulatory issues also pose challenges, for while EU standards emphasize wellness and sustainability, Romanian legislation remains largely focused on medical treatments, lacking a framework that could foster a shift toward holistic wellness services. Additionally, many spa towns possess rich cultural and architectural heritage but lack structured policies and resources for effective preservation, often creating conflicts between conservation needs and the modernizations necessary for competitiveness.

¹³¹ Jamil Benabdallah, "Calypso Study on Social Tourism in Romania" (Detente Consultants, 2010), <https://www.scribd.com/document/185089674/Romania-En>.

¹³² Camelia Surugiu, Marius-Razvan Surugiu, and Raluca Mazilescu, "Social Insurance System Influence on Spa Tourism: Evidence for Romania," *Anatolia* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2020.1850483>.

The sector also faces workforce shortages, as demand rises for skilled spa, wellness, and hospitality professionals and retaining talent is challenging, with many seeking opportunities abroad due to better prospects. Furthermore, shifting tourist expectations across Europe now favor holistic experiences that blend relaxation with activities like nature walks, cultural engagement, and a range of wellness treatments. These are still areas where Romanian spas, traditionally rooted in state-supported medical treatments, must adapt to appeal to the modern market. Together, these challenges point to a pressing need for diversified strategies that prioritize investment, workforce development, and regulatory alignment with European wellness tourism trends.

The Strategy for Spa Tourism Development (*Strategia pentru dezvoltarea turismului balnear*) and its Master Plan are the most comprehensive documents detailing the overarching management framework of the Romanian spa network to this date. The documents examine the evolution of tourism in Romania's spa sector, contextualized alongside relevant legislative developments, and outlines recommended actions for implementing this development plan. The strategy also considers two external elements shaping the sector's future potential: available funding from the European Structural Funds (2014-2020) and the strategic framework for health tourism established by EU Directive 2011/24, which sets out patients' rights regarding access to cross-border healthcare in the European Union. The directive applies to patients who choose to seek healthcare in another EU country and aims to facilitate access to safe and high-quality healthcare in other Member States as well as encourages health cooperation between them.¹³³ It is yet to be implemented, unfortunately, but is seen as a source of salvation for Romanian spas.

¹³³ "Strategia Pentru Dezvoltarea Turismului Balnear [The Strategy for Spa Tourism Development]," 2019, 97, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/217931>.

The current legal framework treats the spa sector from a strictly medical perspective, in which economic and tourism objectives are integrated only through the formal involvement of tourism authorities in the attribution of spa resort status.¹³⁴ Spas are regulated by Government Ordinance no. 109/2000, which establishes the necessary criteria for granting spa designation, as well as the regime of use and protection of natural therapeutic factors. The law gives the Ministry of Health and the National Institute for Recovery, Physical Medicine and Balneoclimatology (*Institutul Național de Recuperare, Medicină Fizică și Balneoclimatologie*) exclusive responsibility for the technical operating criteria, placing the public treatment and recovery system financed by treatment vouchers at the heart of the economic functioning of the sector. This approach puts an emphasis on the proven medical efficacy of natural curative factors, in contrast to the less medicalized wellness approach dominant in other European countries and globally.

The strategy further identifies other main actors in the spa sector and their responsibilities reflect the key roles in the coordination and development of the sector.¹³⁵ The Ministry of Health regulates and supervises medical activities in the resorts, while the National Health Insurance Fund (CNAS) finances spa medical services for insured patients, supporting access to rehabilitation and rehabilitation treatments. The Ministry of Labor and Social Justice ensures access to spa services for vulnerable groups, while the National House of Public Pensions provides treatment vouchers for pensioners and people with disabilities. The Ministry of Tourism promotes and supports the modernization of spas as tourist destinations, and the National Agency for Mineral Resources monitors the exploitation of mineral and thermal water resources for their sustainable use for therapeutic purposes. The Romanian Spa Tourism Employers' Organization supports the interests of spa tourism operators and promotes

¹³⁴ “Strategia Pentru Dezvoltarea Turismului Balnear [The Strategy for Spa Tourism Development],” 95.

¹³⁵ “Strategia Pentru Dezvoltarea Turismului Balnear [The Strategy for Spa Tourism Development],” 83–91.

collaboration in the sector. These actors are working together to increase access to health services and develop the attractiveness of spa tourism in Romania.

The strategy is to continue to analyze tourism trends and possible synergies with other policy documents, such as Romania's marketing strategy, underlining the necessity of linking spa tourism with ecotourism.¹³⁶ Despite current limitations in infrastructure, tourism products centered on Romania's natural and untamed landscapes are highly competitive given the country's exceptionally preserved wild environments, among the most impressive in Europe. In addition to upgrading spa infrastructure and treatments, the spa sector needs to capitalize on the natural landscape and local authenticity, while remaining competitively priced at European levels. Since the spa and wellness sector is inherently connected to natural surroundings and pure natural resources, a partnership with nature-based ecotourism is straightforward and holds significant potential for creating positive synergies. Given that ecotourism already has a functional framework for certification and development, the strategy concludes that:

“The development of the spa sector should be “designed” together with ecotourism, by creating joint products that use the natural element for health and relaxation, and the curative elements and associated therapies to boost the eco-tourism offer. This positioning of the spa sector can be summarized by the formula “green spa tourism”, which emphasizes the use of pure nature and its resources (plants, air, climate, waters, landscapes, tranquility, etc.) to provide wellbeing and health.”¹³⁷

The shift towards “green spa tourism” proposed by the strategy seeks to enhance well-being by embedding elements of pure nature, tranquility, native plants, and scenic landscapes into the tourism experience, promoting a balance between the health experience, authenticity and sustainability. This approach aligns closely with the concept of *therapeutic landscapes*, although it is not mentioned literally in the strategy. By fostering an environment that blends natural resources with a serene atmosphere and authentic experiences, “green spa tourism”

¹³⁶ “Strategia Pentru Dezvoltarea Turismului Balnear [The Strategy for Spa Tourism Development],” 149–50.

¹³⁷ “Strategia Pentru Dezvoltarea Turismului Balnear [The Strategy for Spa Tourism Development],” 154.

underscores the value of understanding spa resorts as therapeutic landscapes that support both physical and mental health, drawing on Romania's unique environmental assets to create holistic, health-oriented destinations.

This chapter has highlighted the discrepancies between official built heritage assessments and existing protection at the local level in Băile Govora, and how this failure is linked to the wider heritage context. In the next chapter, I will argue for better inclusion of the town's tangible and intangible heritage into its wider therapeutic landscape experience by presenting research linking heritage projects with health and wellbeing. I will further outline the work of Studiogovora, an NGO which has been actively involved in preserving local heritage in Govora for the last five years. Through the Govora Heritage Lag project, the NGO advocates to decision makers for a more integrated approach to preserving and using local heritage in Băile Govora.

Chapter 4 - The Govora Heritage Lab

“Places look after people as much as people look after places. Health and wellbeing are at the very top of public policy concerns right now, and the heritage sector has a huge amount to contribute given the significant levels of personal satisfaction that working in and with the past brings. By refocusing on personal health and wellbeing, heritage sites can explore new operational models that will help to make them more sustainable in the longer term.”¹³⁸
Ben Cowell, Director General, Historic Houses

This last chapter examines the ongoing activities of Studiogovora, an interdisciplinary collective of architects and heritage managers, who manage the Govora Heritage Lab project. Inspired by the heritage labs from the Open Heritage project¹³⁹ and the ICCROM Heritage Place Lab¹⁴⁰ approach, this umbrella initiative is dedicated to revitalizing the neglected thermal heritage of Băile Govora, as part of the wider therapeutic landscape of the resort. Through collaboration with a network of professionals and partners, Studiogovora seeks to integrate the town's cultural and natural heritage into a wider vision for future sustainable development. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first section highlights recent research on links between heritage and wellbeing, while the second examines the Govora Heritage Lab program developed by Studiogovora. Through the Lab, a set of concrete steps aimed at preserving and enhancing the therapeutic landscape of the resort are proposed, shifting towards a holistic approach that empowers residents and tourists to actively participate in different aspects of heritage protection in Govora: conservation and adaptive reuse, policy tools, advocacy, funding, and heritage interpretation.

¹³⁸ “Heritage, Health and Wellbeing. A Heritage Alliance Report” (Heritage Alliance, 2020), 8, https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport_2020_Online.pdf.

¹³⁹ “OpenHeritage Project,” accessed November 20, 2022, <https://openheritage.eu/oh-project/>.

¹⁴⁰ Maya Escudero Ishizawa et al., “Heritage Place Lab: A Model for Research-Practice Collaboration in the Context of World Heritage. Report of the Pilot Phase 2021-2022,” n.d.

4.1 Culture and heritage contributions to wellbeing

While the concept of well-being has been long established and frequently appears in social and economic research, there is no universally accepted definition. Though commonly linked to human health, well-being is a much broader concept, with differing values and priorities across communities. It includes essential physical needs like quality housing, nutrition, healthcare, and freedom from violence and oppression, as well as the conditions necessary for individuals to achieve their potential and participate fully in society.¹⁴¹ Significant progress has been made to analyze the factors that influence well-being, and culture's role in enhancing well-being is somewhat acknowledged, but this perspective is still underdeveloped in policy. Compared to sectors like education and health, whose contributions to sustainable development and well-being are well-established, the cultural sector lags behind considerably in terms of recognized importance and integration into policy frameworks, as evidence for its role is often anecdotal.¹⁴² Nevertheless, in the last twenty years, research has expanded significantly, accompanied by advancements in practices and policy initiatives.

The 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage saw the emergence of significant case studies and projects, offering substantial research material on heritage benefits, including in the field of health and well-being. By year's end, the European Commission introduced the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, emphasizing the need for evidence-based decision-making within cultural heritage and listing several upcoming projects aimed at assessing the impact of culture and heritage.¹⁴³ These advances were followed shortly after by

¹⁴¹ Alison Heritage, Ambre Tissot, and Bashobi Banerjee, "Heritage and Wellbeing: What Constitutes a Good Life?," ICCROM, October 21, 2019, <https://www.iccrom.org/news/heritage-and-wellbeing-what-constitutes-good-life>.

¹⁴² Manuela Samek Lodovici et al., "HERIWELL – Cultural Heritage as a Source of Societal Well-Being in European Regions - Synthesis Report" (ESPON, June 2022), 7, https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/HERIWELL_Synthesis%20report.pdf.

¹⁴³ European Commission. Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture., *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*. (LU: Publications Office, 2019), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/949707>.

the COVID pandemic, which put even more emphasis on the interlinkages between health, wellbeing and cultural participation.

Several reports published in the last years have established a growing body of evidence linking cultural engagement, arts and, heritage with health and well-being benefits. The 2019 World Health Organization's report "What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?"¹⁴⁴ provides a comprehensive synthesis of over 3,000 studies across the WHO European Region, demonstrating that the arts significantly contribute to preventing illness, promoting health, and managing medical treatment across all life stages. The report encourages recognizing and building upon the substantial evidence of the arts' positive impact on health, advocating for arts engagement at individual, local, and national levels, and promoting greater public awareness of these benefits. Key recommendations include: acknowledging the health benefits of arts engagement by integrating health and well-being into arts organizations' strategic goals, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration through co-financed arts-health programs, and embedding arts and humanities within healthcare professional training.¹⁴⁵ The WHO report was followed by the adoption of the 2021 WHO Geneva Charter on Health Promotion for Well-being for All¹⁴⁶, further promoting the significance of culture in fostering health and well-being.

Similarly, the "Heritage and Wellbeing Technical Report"¹⁴⁷ examines community well-being impacts associated with historic places, revealing that heritage can enhance physical, mental, and social well-being, although gaps remain in understanding how impacts

¹⁴⁴ Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn, *What Is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being?: A Scoping Review* (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2019).

¹⁴⁵ Fancourt and Finn, 2019, p. viii-ix.

¹⁴⁶ "The Geneva Charter for Well-Being" (World Health Organization, 2021), <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/the-geneva-charter-for-well-being>.

¹⁴⁷ A. Pennington et al., "The Impact of Historic Places and Assets on Community Wellbeing - a Scoping Review" (London: What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2018), <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Heritage-scoping-review-March-2019-1.pdf>.

vary across population groups and settings. The 2020 UK Heritage Alliance Annual Report¹⁴⁸ emphasizes the intersection of heritage and well-being through case studies and offers recommendations for heritage, health, and government sectors to embrace heritage as a tool for public health. ESPON's 2022 study, "Cultural Heritage as a Source of Societal Well-being in European Regions," builds on the need for better evidence-based policies by developing a pan-European methodology to assess heritage impacts on well-being, social inclusion, and community cohesion. Similarly, the 2022 CultureForHealth Report responded to EU-level policy needs by consolidating evidence of culture's role in health and well-being. The report indicated that participating in art-related cultural activities is linked to several positive health outcomes, such as enhanced quality of life, improved general and psychological well-being, greater social engagement, reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, better health-related quality of life for individuals with chronic illnesses, prevention of cognitive decline in older adults, and the strengthening of cognitive, emotional, and social skills.¹⁴⁹ The rich body of evidence also shows how cultural heritage contributes transversally to quality of life, societal cohesion and material conditions.¹⁵⁰

While at an individual level, research has shown that visiting cultural heritage sites has a significant effect on physical and mental health, particularly by reducing stress¹⁵¹, on a community level, engaging with diverse forms of heritage can positively influence individual and community well-being, offering meaningful encounters that enrich lives.¹⁵² The

¹⁴⁸ "Heritage, Health and Wellbeing. A Heritage Alliance Report."

¹⁴⁹ R. Zbranca et al., "CultureForHealth Report. Culture's Contribution to Health and Well-Being. A Report on Evidence and Policy Recommendations for Europe. CultureForHealth." (Culture Action Europe, 2022), 11, https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/02/Final_C4H_FullReport_small.pdf.

¹⁵⁰ Samek Lodovici et al., "HERIWELL – Cultural Heritage as a Source of Societal Well-Being in European Regions - Synthesis Report."

¹⁵¹ Enzo Grossi, Giorgio Tavano Blessi, and Pier Luigi Sacco, "Magic Moments: Determinants of Stress Relief and Subjective Wellbeing from Visiting a Cultural Heritage Site," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 43, no. 1 (2019): 4–24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-018-9593-8>.

¹⁵² Paul S.C. Taçon and Sarah Baker, "New and Emerging Challenges to Heritage and Well-Being: A Critical Review," *Heritage* 2, no. 2 (May 4, 2019): 1300–1303, <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage2020084>.

opportunity to access and engage with local heritage enhances a sense of community identity, reinforcing civic pride and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, community-based heritage conservation has been shown to have therapeutic effects, while damage to heritage sites can have a dampening impact, leading to a decrease in community well-being.¹⁵³

The effects of heritage on health and wellbeing depend on context and many enabling factors, such as valorization, accessibility and co-creation, co-production and co-evaluation.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the impact of cultural heritage on well-being is driven by internal processes like a sense of accomplishment, purpose, and learning.¹⁵⁵ To foster these effects, heritage activities need to actively engage individuals, encouraging their participation in decision-making and implementation. This involvement empowers citizens, strengthens their sense of community and belonging, and enhances their confidence and responsibility toward communal heritage. Greater participation not only boosts individual and community well-being but also benefits heritage preservation by fostering a heightened commitment to its care and protection.

A community's sense of ownership and connection to cultural heritage is closely tied to recognizing the value of heritage, and participation in heritage activities tends to increase when there is heightened awareness of heritage's significance. Community recognition can also be strengthened through official certifications, such as listing on national or international heritage protection registers, as the public trusts such seals of approval from centers of power and the authorized heritage discourse. As these societal values evolve, perceptions of heritage value shift over time, creating space for renegotiating meaning and relevance, and communities should be empowered to define and protect what they recognize as their heritage.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Taçon and Baker, 1300–1303.

¹⁵⁴ Samek Lodovici et al., “HERIWELL – Cultural Heritage as a Source of Societal Well-Being in European Regions - Synthesis Report,” 22.

¹⁵⁵ Samek Lodovici et al., 11.

¹⁵⁶ Samek Lodovici et al., 12–13.

Effective governance requires that participatory practices be both community-driven and embedded in public institutions' daily operations, ensuring inclusivity and integrating community input into final decisions.¹⁵⁷ Success in heritage management also depends on the various sectors and levels of governance, recognizing that heritage impacts various policy areas, such as welfare, education, environmental sustainability, and tourism. Strong intergovernmental coordination is crucial for identifying heritage investment priorities. Political support is vital to sustain heritage initiatives, especially in funding and strategic coherence. Adequate resources, both financial and human, are essential, with special attention to ensuring public funding access for smaller organizations that act at a local level and that lack the means to tap into larger funding sources.¹⁵⁸

The recent reports highlight the importance of integrating arts and heritage within public health and social well-being frameworks, driving forward a more holistic approach to long term development. However, there is a notable gap between extensive research showing culture's positive impact on health and well-being, and the limited evidence that this is incorporated into policymaking.¹⁵⁹ Thus, there is a need for better data collection, monitoring and evaluation. A significant challenge lies in assessing the impact of culture and heritage beyond monetary terms, as existing frameworks typically focus on financial metrics like tourism revenue.¹⁶⁰ This emphasis often leads to a policy bias, where practices prioritize economic outcomes over potentially more significant social benefits, such as fostering social cohesion. However, there is growing interest in developing tools that measure nonmarket impacts, which opens new opportunities to understand the broader societal value of cultural heritage. This shift in policy objectives could ultimately lead to a more balanced recognition

¹⁵⁷ Samek Lodovici et al., 22.

¹⁵⁸ Samek Lodovici et al., 22.

¹⁵⁹ Zbranca et al., "CultureForHealth Report. Culture's Contribution to Health and Well-Being. A Report on Evidence and Policy Recommendations for Europe. CultureForHealth.," 146.

¹⁶⁰ Heritage, Tissot, and Banerjee, "Heritage and Wellbeing."

of culture as a strategic asset for development, beyond its economic contributions. So far in Europe, practitioners and researchers working to bridge culture and health have developed this sector with minimal support from political and administrative authorities.¹⁶¹ The sector of culture for health and well-being can only reach its full potential if authorities actively enable grassroots experimentation and network development, while the EU also provides strategic guidance and support from the top down.¹⁶²

To effectively explore the intersections between heritage and well-being, it's essential to prioritize perspectives within local communities. Moving beyond the authorized heritage discourse and the official designation that drives conservation efforts, the value of heritage remains deeply personal and context-driven, rooted in individual and community attachments. This attachment can be challenging to predict, as communities often act unexpectedly when heritage sites are at risk. This unpredictability underscores a common misconception: that both residents and visitors primarily view heritage through high-cultural lenses, such as historical or architectural value, when, in fact, the connections are often more personal.¹⁶³

4.2 Govora Heritage Lab

The Govora Heritage Lab¹⁶⁴ encompasses “a series of experimental projects exploring urban, social, and economic dimensions rooted in heritage.”¹⁶⁵ These projects involve a diverse array of stakeholders and are implemented through a range of activities, including “research

¹⁶¹ Zbranca et al., “CultureForHealth Report. Culture’s Contribution to Health and Well-Being. A Report on Evidence and Policy Recommendations for Europe. CultureForHealth.” 137.

¹⁶² Zbranca et al., 130.

¹⁶³ Taçon and Baker, “New and Emerging Challenges to Heritage and Well-Being,” 1306.

¹⁶⁴ Govora Heritage Lab is a collaborative initiative. It was first presented at the People-Nature-Culture Forum organized by ICCROM in 2022 in Suwon, South Korea. This subchapter is based on the conference presentation given by the author and on the article that was further developed for the PANORAMA: Solutions for a healthy planet platform, cited below. The article is also based on the research carried out for this thesis and on the collaborative work of the Studiogovora team presented on the association’s website and during several public events.

¹⁶⁵ Leca, “Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort.”

and dissemination, policy development, on-site interventions, and community engagement”¹⁶⁶ initiatives.

Chapter 1 explored the therapeutic landscape as a multifaceted concept rooted in community involvement, civic engagement, and activism. These relational characteristics are fundamental in Govora’s case, where community activities have emerged as essential to preserving and revitalizing local heritage, motivated by decades characterized by lack of responsibility and neglect. Reviving spa heritage for health and wellbeing purposes in Govora involves harnessing the cultural, and natural attributes, as well as the rich intangible spa heritage of the therapeutic landscape. This model of engagement fosters a community identity closely tied to the town’s heritage, where the act of preservation itself represents a form of civic health, encouraging a culture of care, historical awareness, and resilience that directly contributes to both individual and communal wellness.

The Lab aims to raise awareness about thermal heritage, offering a platform for the conservation and restoration of historic buildings, through advice, research, advocacy, and awareness raising as well as community building.¹⁶⁷ Through these efforts, it contributes to the revitalization of local tourism in Govora and provides valuable on-site learning opportunities for emerging heritage practitioners. To gradually rebuild the resort’s positive image and move beyond nostalgia, the team focuses on communicating the spa town’s multifaceted values through thorough heritage interpretation, which builds on extensive research and community engagement and does not shy away from presenting the causes behind the resort’s decay. The projects developed within the lab target various communities and target groups, such as local

¹⁶⁶ Leca.

¹⁶⁷ Studiogovora, “Govora Heritage Lab,” *Anuala de Arhitectură București* [Bucharest Architecture Annual], 2022, <https://www.anuala.ro/proiecte/2022/246/>.

decision makers, residents, tourists, professionals working in heritage conservation, students, artists, and many others who feel connected to the place.

Through interdisciplinary research on heritage values and attributes, as well as the ways in which they have been created, managed and defined throughout the history of the resort, the Lab provides a foundation for investigating contemporary management challenges. As discussed in Chapter 2, public-private partnerships have played a crucial role in the development of the resort, though they present difficulties in the present context due to the lack of cooperation between decision makers and the local business sector. To address problems, the team facilitates opportunities for stakeholder collaboration and trust-building, in both formal and informal settings, through professional events such as conferences and round tables, or community events such as the Spa Architecture Days in Govora festival.

Additionally, in support of preserving the built environment, Studiogovora runs several projects to offer guidance to property owners, including the dissemination of best practice guidelines, the implementation of a structural survey program, and planning intervention advice. These efforts are complemented by partnerships with local stakeholders and a national network of professionals aimed at developing policy tools and enhancing capacity to strengthen local heritage management practices. Currently, the team is contributing to the future General Urban Plan, through historical and landscape studies, two documents that form the basis of the plan, as they help define the values and attributes of the resort and their protection areas. It is worth mentioning that this has been achieved after consistent efforts of advocating for these documents to be done properly and following a thorough site analysis.

4.1. Interdisciplinary research

The team “conducts extensive research on the heritage values of thermal heritage”¹⁶⁸ within the Govora Heritage Lab, engaging in continuous dialogue with researchers from a variety of disciplines. Beyond mapping, the ongoing research seeks to identify opportunities for revitalizing the urban space and its surroundings to enhance their appeal for both visitors and residents.

The Lab’s research progresses across multiple dimensions, including topographical updates and surveys of existing historic buildings, discussions with private property owners to develop strategies for new functions, historical studies, surveys, and archival research.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, it encompasses analyses of the political, social, and economic contexts across different historical periods, alongside mapping and strategic planning. This work is complemented by continuous dialogue, negotiation and collaboration with local stakeholders.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the current condition of the heritage in Govora reflects broader challenges faced by the Romanian heritage system, including limited awareness of the diverse values associated with historic resorts, and insufficient legal and institutional capacity to protect the tangible and intangible heritage. Although Romania continues to grapple with updating its legislation to encompass cultural landscapes and strengthen heritage protection, the connection between heritage, communities, and sustainability has grown more prominent in public discourse.

This shift is also evident in academia, where increasing numbers of students, particularly from architecture and related disciplines, are choosing to engage with heritage projects through research, volunteer work, and practical involvement. Universities are

¹⁶⁸ Leca, “Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort.”

¹⁶⁹ Studiogovora, “Govora Heritage Lab.”

increasingly partnering with civil society to provide students with hands-on experience. For example, since 2021, Studiogovora has been collaborating with the “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning in Bucharest, supporting students who select sites in Govora for their coursework or theses. The outcomes of these projects are regularly shared with the local community and decision-makers through debates, roundtables, and exhibitions.

The ideas and solutions generated through the research process are shaping a forward-looking vision for the future of Govora, integrating nature, culture, and health practices. Presenting these findings to decision-makers, property owners, and the local community fosters dialogue and strengthens the collective commitment to realizing this vision. The involvement of professionals in the process signals active interest in the resort and affirms the significance of preserving its values. The proposed projects offer a hopeful perspective on the heritage site, viewing the current condition of its buildings not merely as evidence of prolonged neglect, but as an opportunity for development and revitalization. However, as the projects remain theoretical at this stage, the community has expressed its expectations for more tangible outcomes, and there is a potential risk of disappointment should ideas regarding the future of historic buildings fail to materialize.

4.1.1 Govora Heritage Lab summer school

The idea for the summer school emerged from a need to research the values and unique attributes of Govora's therapeutic landscape, fostering a network of partners and researchers to gather evidence that could inform future policies connecting heritage and health both locally and nationally.¹⁷⁰ The first edition of the summer school took place in September 2024. Govora's therapeutic landscape was investigated, its current challenges assessed, and scenarios

¹⁷⁰ Studiogovora, “Govora Heritage Lab Summer School,” govora.studio, 2024, <https://govora.studio/heritage-lab/govora-heritage-lab/>.

were proposed for its abandoned or underused buildings and public spaces. The research activities included whether it is feasible for Govora to re-emerge as a fully functional resort, aligned with contemporary societal needs, envisioning a transformation of the area's potential into actionable initiatives to re-establish the city's historic link with health.

Over a period of seven days, students from various fields, including architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, geography, anthropology, history, and tourism, collaborated under the guidance of a group of lecturers to propose ideas for the revitalization, interpretation, and protection of the cultural and natural heritage of the spa area, with a particular emphasis on abandoned buildings.¹⁷¹ Activities involved:

- mapping latent spaces and spaces of heritage value: cataloging underutilized or abandoned spaces by type, whether buildings or public areas, to identify their potential uses, identifying architectural, historical, and landscape-rich spaces that require preservation.
- documenting sites of shared community significance and assessing the practical needs and preferences of residents and visitors to inform future developments.
- selecting three public spaces for minimal yet strategic interventions aimed at revitalizing spatial qualities and enhancing quality of life, accompanied by illustrated proposals.
- developing new ideas for local heritage interpretation following community discussions.

The results from the summer school are soon to be presented to local policymakers, tour operators, the community, and balneologists with the goal of supporting the development and adoption of an Action Plan for Culture and Health, which is currently being drafted in

¹⁷¹ Studiogovora.

collaboration with the Cluj Cultural Centre (*Centrul Cultural Clujean*), one of the partners of the Culture for Health consortium.

4.2. Strengthening public-private-people partnerships for local heritage

Historically, the resort's successful operation has depended on public-private cooperation, a model that remains essential today. Most funding programs for the rehabilitation of heritage buildings now require such partnerships, mostly between local authorities and the local community, represented through NGOs. In Govora, while several heritage buildings and public spaces have been rehabilitated, they remain underutilized, as is the case of the former Casino. Property owners require support from civil society to organize events and attract wider audiences, ensuring these spaces are actively engaged with and appreciated. The lack of collective heritage stewardship in Băile Govora can be linked to frequent changes in ownership over the last decades, as well as the current authorized heritage discourse and the highly centralized official heritage protection system, which does little to support citizen participation in heritage protection, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The Govora Heritage Lab emphasizes the importance of collective responsibility in addressing the challenges of protecting and repurposing abandoned or underused historic buildings.¹⁷² Through its activities, the Lab demonstrates how initiatives taken by citizens and stakeholders alike can contribute to the preservation of local heritage, all the while also generating new opportunities for both the community and heritage assets. The Lab fosters a collaborative framework that integrates public, private, and community engagement. Key activities include volunteer participation in restoration efforts, ongoing collaboration with public and private sector stakeholders, providing guidance on funding opportunities and

¹⁷² Leca, "Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort."

necessary interventions, and organizing cultural events within heritage buildings. These actions serve as practical examples of how cooperative efforts can positively impact heritage conservation and sustainable reuse.

Funding opportunities frequently require public-private partnerships; however, these partnerships are often imbalanced, characterized by top-down structures where NGOs play a marginal role, and individual citizens are primarily viewed as passive end users.¹⁷³ The success of such partnerships is largely dependent on the capacity of local authorities to implement them effectively and of the public to make use of their results. Projects that have already been implemented in Govora have shown how this lack of capacity influences the long-term management and sustainability of heritage investments.

Public-private-people partnerships are generally more successful in societies with strong trust between the state, private stakeholders, and the public. However, in Romania, such initiatives encounter significant obstacles due to the deep erosion of trust caused by the communist regime. The absence of a clear legal framework regulating public-private partnerships contributes to the prevailing distrust among both authorities and citizens. Consequently, fostering community participation in heritage-related activities is essential for building trust at both the individual and community levels. Though not yet fully operational, the implementation of public-private partnerships in Govora, alongside initiatives aimed at supporting local property owners, has fostered an increasing level of citizen engagement in heritage-related activities.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Leca.

¹⁷⁴ Leca.

4.3 Developing a program for interventions on historical spa buildings

With over a third of historic structures in Băile Govora in a state of decay and disrepair, there is an urgent need for conservation efforts.¹⁷⁵ Not all decaying buildings in Govora can or should be saved, and interventions must consider the extent of physical damage, the materials used and the quality of the original construction, as well as ownership status, funding availability, investment potential, and future uses and users.¹⁷⁶ These activities need ongoing coordination and sustained collaboration with property owners, authorities, contractors, as well as donors and funding bodies. Approaches and concepts from critical heritage studies, such as “curated decay”¹⁷⁷, can open a wide range of discussions related to how decaying buildings can still be beneficial for people and the natural environment.

While EU grants are often mentioned as a feasible funding option for local heritage, such grants remain predominantly accessible to public entities, with limited availability for private owners, who face more restrictive conditions, especially regarding the co-financing budget. As mentioned in Chapter 3, such funds are directly conditioned by the heritage status of the building, provided by the somewhat arbitrary inclusion on the List of Historical Monuments, which is often seen as a burden by private owners. As a result, structures located within protected areas or those deemed significant at the local level are often still ineligible for financial support. Furthermore, preparing and competing for such grants is an arduous process with unpredictable chances of success, also influenced by changes in guidelines, legislation

¹⁷⁵ Ștefania Hirleață, Radu Tîrcă, and Irina Leca, *Ghid de Bune Practici: Băile Govora. Recomandări Pentru Păstrarea Specificului Local Valoros [Best Practice Guidelines: Băile Govora. Recommendations for Preserving Valuable Local Characteristics]* (București: Studiogovora, 2022), 15, https://govora.studio/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Gav_B_web_pages.pdf.

¹⁷⁶ Leca, “Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort.”

¹⁷⁷ Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

and long bureaucratic delays. Grass roots initiatives need funding that is both flexible and continuous, thus, relying mostly on private donors and sponsorships.

Several key factors enable successful interventions in heritage restoration in Govora.¹⁷⁸ Although funding is poorly financed, access to it, whether through governmental or private sources, plays a crucial role in supporting these efforts. Equally important is collaboration among stakeholders, whose capacity to contribute to and sustain interventions is essential for long-term success. A robust professional network is also necessary, to provide the team with specialized expertise. Additionally, the involvement of contractors who are open to using traditional restoration techniques is vital in preserving the authenticity of heritage sites. Lastly, the willingness of residents to seek assistance in restoring their properties further facilitates the process of heritage conservation and revitalization.



Figure 11: Stages in the restoration of the historical gazebo. Photo: Studiogovora

Studiogovora is currently developing a “program to assess and prioritize interventions on historic buildings.”¹⁷⁹ Thus far, the organization has completed a series of projects, including securing the Ivanovici Villa, offering advice and assistance to several residents

¹⁷⁸ Leca, “Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort.”

¹⁷⁹ Leca.

making small-scale repairs, and restoring a 1930s-era gazebo. Several additional restoration projects are in the planning stages, with their implementations contingent upon decisions made by property owners. Additionally, the team has begun recovering and storing valuable architectural elements, such as doors and furniture, for future restoration work.

4.3.1 Govora Heritage Lab - adaptive reuse project

The most recent project of the team is the creation of a library and bank of historic materials, a physical heritage lab which builds on the organization's ongoing efforts to revitalize local heritage. The project aims at the gradual adaptive reuse a thermal plant dating from 1968 (fig. 12). The objective is to transform the site into a heritage interpretation center, featuring a library of historical materials and a restoration workshop.

The need for a facility with such functions has become increasingly evident through the association's work and is further amplified by the local authorities' limited capacity to effectively communicate planning regulations and support residents in preserving the distinctive character of their buildings through fiscal incentives or advisory services. This initiative is expected to directly contribute to several key outcomes such as reducing waste from building renovations by recovering and reusing materials and objects, raising awareness about the value of these materials as resources and the environmental impact of construction practices, enhancing local capacity in restoration techniques through demonstration workshops with craftspeople, volunteers, and the local community, thus, improving the quality of restoration interventions on historic buildings both locally, and in the broader area.

In its initial phase, the center will support conservation projects implemented by the organization, with the building itself serving as one of these projects. The project is envisioned as sustainable over the long term, as the demand for services related to the restoration of old buildings, such as advice on craftsmanship, legal provisions, and funding, continues to grow,

alongside the organization's work. Currently, there are no local craftspeople or workshops capable of meeting the demand for specialized restoration, such as in historic carpentry work or furniture renewal. In the long term, Studiogovora aims to attract a resident craftsperson for the workshop and to establish a residency space where craftspeople from other regions can participate in temporary exchanges.



*Figure 12: The future headquarters of the Govora Heritage Lab, a thermal plant from 1968.
Photo by the author, 2023*

4.4 Policy tools to improve local heritage management

There is a recognized need to strengthen the capacity of local administrations to more effectively manage renovations and new construction projects. Collaboration with the Town

Hall on architectural matters, combined with an existing network of heritage practitioners with diverse expertise, provides a solid foundation for addressing these challenges.

The large number of buildings requiring repair or conservation highlights the need for clear guidelines.¹⁸⁰ Funding opportunities, such as those offered by the National Order of Architects, support the development of best practice guidelines to guide these efforts. Local authorities often lack the capacity to effectively advise property owners or translate urban regulations into accessible terms. The town's historic character is increasingly at risk due to new constructions, extensions, and restorations that are incompatible with its distinctive architectural identity and the natural landscape.

In response to increasing requests for professional guidance, Studiogovora published a best practice guide focused on preserving the town's valuable local features.¹⁸¹ The guide is based on "a comprehensive analysis of the town's buildings, historic spa complex, and public spaces"¹⁸² as complementary parts of the therapeutic landscape of the resort. It details various architectural elements, such as facades, ornamentation, balconies, terraces, and roofing, while also addressing the relationship between courtyards and the surrounding landscape. The guide establishes a set of rules, identifies key architectural features, and situates them within a broader socio-cultural context, offering solutions for both restoration work and contemporary interventions. Developed in collaboration with heritage professionals, the guide has recently been adopted by local authorities as a set of official recommendations. Its implementation is supported and monitored by a newly established local planning commission.

¹⁸⁰ Leca.

¹⁸¹ Hîrleață, Tîrcă, and Leca, *Ghid de Bune Practici: Băile Govora. Recomandări Pentru Păstrarea Specificului Local Valoros* [Best Practice Guidelines: Băile Govora. Recommendations for Preserving Valuable Local Characteristics].

¹⁸² Leca, "Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort."

Best practice guidelines dedicated to preserving local architecture remain uncommon in Romania, where “administrative and professional practices focus primarily on official documents, such as laws and regulations, while often neglecting political, civic, and administrative accountability for local policies and instruments.”¹⁸³ Getting local decision-makers to accept advice from civil society and implementing it requires both time and the establishment of trust.

For civil society recommendations to be effective, they must be supported by institutional measures, such as “financial incentives and stronger enforcement of construction regulations.”¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, there is a significant shortage of craftspeople and contractors skilled in working on historic buildings, both locally and nationally, due in part to the migration of construction workers abroad. Addressing this issue requires long-term national strategies for training a new generation of skilled professionals and possibly luring experienced craftspeople back to Romania.

4.5 Interpretation of the therapeutic cultural landscape

There is a growing focus on integrating natural and cultural heritage into the experiences of spa tourists, creating activities that combine leisure with therapeutic programs, complementing the existing medical treatments. This approach reflects the original nineteenth-century vision of spas as “hospitals in a beautiful setting,” where the built and natural environments played a key role in promoting health and well-being. As reflected in Chapter 1, the therapeutic landscape is an asset which brings added value to health destinations.¹⁸⁵ Govora

¹⁸³ Leca.

¹⁸⁴ Leca.

¹⁸⁵ Salamaga and Dryglas, “Therapeutic Landscape as Value Added in the Structure of the Destination-Specific Therapeutic Tourism Product: The Case Study of Polish Spa Resorts.”

has the potential to become a pioneering place where heritage contributes tangibly to the health and well-being of both tourists and residents.¹⁸⁶

The current condition of local heritage significantly influences the narrative of the place. It is difficult to discuss the resort's historical functioning and envision an optimistic and feasible future when many buildings remain in disrepair. There is a notable lack of heritage interpretation at the local level, which also mainly remains largely tied to the formal heritage discourse which emphasizes official designation and recognition. Creating a participatory and inclusive approach to heritage interpretation continues to be a challenge, as the community often expects and respects top-down methodologies.

As part of the Govora Heritage Lab, Studiogovora has developed an interpretation plan that addresses the complexity of Govora's heritage, building on continuous research and experiences within the community. Fragments of the plan - the main interpretive themes, the services and their evaluation have been included in the Appendix. The goal of the plan is to raise awareness among the local community, tourists, and decision-makers about the area's thermal heritage and its broader therapeutic landscape as valuable resources that can be used for future development, shifting the negative narrative focusing on decay towards opportunities, responsibility, and active participation. The goal is to preserve these values and attributes while influencing future development plans and encouraging community stewardship of local heritage.¹⁸⁷

To address this, the team regularly conducts interviews to collect personal stories from both residents and visitors, especially from people who worked in the now abandoned spa facilities. Their stories complement historical information and shed light on the personal side

¹⁸⁶ Leca, "Govora Heritage Lab - Linking Nature, Culture, and Health in a Historic Resort."

¹⁸⁷ Leca.

of spa practices, on personal connections, emotions and experiences. People are generally eager to share their experiences, and their enthusiasm grows when their stories are incorporated into Studiogovora's guided tours. This process of gathering stories has led to an increase in local participation in these tours, as many residents regained their interest for local heritage. To further these efforts, the team organizes guided tours and exhibitions, while actively promoting the spa town through social media and press coverage.

4.5.1 Spa Architecture Days in Govora festival

Since 2020, Studiogovora organizes the "Govora Spa Architecture Days" (*Zilele Arhitecturii Balneare la Govora*), an event dedicated to revitalizing local heritage through art and civic engagement. This grassroots interdisciplinary festival temporarily brings life to historical buildings and public spaces in the resort, offering locals and tourists an opportunity to better understand the area. The event includes a variety of activities, such as guided tours of the historic spa area, exhibitions about local architecture and heritage, thematic workshops, jazz concerts, film screenings in the historic cinema, and light projections on Govora's most iconic buildings, all aimed at raising awareness of the value of spa heritage for a variety of audiences.

The curatorial concept of the festival is annually updated to create meaningful connections between spaces and their users, by accommodating suggestions from both tourists and locals and creating a program tailored on existing needs. With community building as one of its main objectives, all activities within the festival aim to foster social connection and stewardship for local heritage. The last two editions of the festival included a community dinner and a local garden competition, which have been well received by the community.

Recent field research has shown that the numerous abandoned buildings provide good habitats for a large, ecologically important, bat population. Govora is home to 11 species! This

year's festival also included tours that offered information on the benefits bats can bring to the habitat and the need to carefully protect these non-human inhabitants of the buildings (Fig. 13).



Figure 13: Guided tour dedicated to Govora's bats. People are using tracking equipment to observe various species flying around the abandoned Baths. Photo: Studiogovora / Marius Vasile 2024

The activities of the festival have contributed to a raised awareness of the existing heritage values and the interconnectedness of nature, culture, and health. Community awareness regarding the protection of heritage as a collective responsibility has also significantly increased, with active debates emerging around future uses of the heritage sites. The project has further encouraged greater community involvement in heritage preservation while improving communication between stakeholders and strengthening the connection between people and the local cultural landscape.

As a small, grassroots festival, the “Govora Spa Architecture Days” primarily attracts locals and visitors already familiar with the area. However, media attention has grown significantly, amplifying its reach and appeal. This exposure has brought new recognition to Govora, highlighting its rich architectural and cultural heritage alongside the traditional health-focused tourism. This shift towards cultural tourism has sparked interest among potential partners, cultural organizations, and preservationists, opening the door to future collaborations aimed at conserving and promoting Govora’s therapeutic landscape and its diverse attributes.

The therapeutic landscape is the main asset of Băile Govora, bringing an added value to both tourism and the lives of its residents. The work of preserving the characteristics of this landscape can be developed into a management framework that activates the town’s natural, cultural, and architectural heritage to support both the healing practices related to spa tourism and community building. This approach emphasizes not only the intrinsic healing properties of the natural environment, such as mineral springs and clean air, but also the unique historical and social dimensions that contribute to a sense of place and well-being. By leveraging these resources, Govora has the potential to cultivate a holistic environment that enhances quality of life for residents and provides a meaningful experience for visitors. However, for such efforts, to be truly impactful, active engagement and support from decision-makers, particularly local public authorities, is essential.

Conclusion

Health and wellbeing, as universally recognized concepts, are deeply embedded in the heritage of Băile Govora. They comprise the foundation for the town's very existence and link Băile Govora to the larger network of historic European spas. These themes are central to understanding and addressing the challenges this resort faces today. In seeking a unifying framework to address these issues, the concept of therapeutic landscape emerged as particularly relevant, offering a lens through which the interplay between health, heritage, and community can be explored.

Romania is currently updating its heritage policies to include cultural landscapes and the link between heritage, communities and sustainability is being streamlined into the public discourse. National policies on heritage conservation and spa development are both limiting and enabling forces, with particular implications for Govora's future. Despite challenges such as the lack of official heritage recognition, community stewardship, and a divide between users and the spa heritage itself, caused by decades of abandonment, Băile Govora is a case study example of how heritage participation can have local impact.

The Govora Heritage Lab sees the current run-down appearance of the town as representing a competitive advantage and invites visitors and residents to play an active role in “curing” the layer of neglect of the last three decades. By tapping into the rich intangible heritage related to “taking the waters”, the Lab creates experiences that contribute to preserving the heritage values of the site, guide decisions towards heritage revitalization, and foster community's stewardship. The experiences promote active citizenship and contribute to the growth of a heritage community, promoting action, solidarity, empathy and compassion. The link with health and well-being opens the discussion to future place-making

and transformation, which is facilitated by the interpretive plan developed within the Lab, culminating with the interpretation center that will be housed in the thermal plant.

Although in its early stages, the Govora Heritage Lab exemplifies how community-driven approaches can reconnect residents and visitors with the therapeutic landscape, fostering a renewed appreciation for heritage while addressing contemporary needs. The historic buildings act as a medium through which topics like construction waste reduction and reuse of resources, traditional techniques, and environmental impact can be discussed. The abandoned buildings offer opportunities to explore scenarios for community driven inclusive adaptive reuse projects, which are still rare in Romanian context.

Debating and interpreting the continuous capacity of heritage buildings to foster changing uses not only enhances emotional attachment, but the impulse to replicate such programs elsewhere, but with an awareness of the required financial efforts, technical needs and professional services. Thus, Govora has become a laboratory for heritage as living environment. Nevertheless, for such efforts to achieve a meaningful impact, active involvement and support from decision-makers, especially local public authorities, remains crucial.

The therapeutic landscape speaks of the use of natural assets, the mineral waters, the flora and the fauna as well as the need to ensure that they are preserved for future generations. The history of spa practices provides examples of how these resources have been carefully used, shared and managed since 1880. As Govora was and still is a place for all social classes, not just elites, the history of resort underlines the need to provide universal access to the healing environment. The thesis identifies opportunities for leveraging Govora's natural and cultural assets to innovate spa-related health practices, aligning Govora's past with its future potential. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the health benefits of heritage, offering

insights that are relevant not only locally but also within the broader European context of spa tourism and heritage preservation.

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Appendices

1980 List of Historic Monuments				1991-1992 List of Historic Monuments		
Category		Name	Address	Category	Code	Address
				E. Rural and urban historical areas	39 E 106	The area between the neighbourhood of flats and the Postal Office
Goods of particular artistic value [Monuments of architecture & monuments of art]	arch. m.	The "Palace" Pavillion	No. 1 Baths' Park			
	arch. m.	The Building of the Govora Archaeology Museum	No. 102 Tudor Vladimirescu St.			
	public art monument	The Bust of General-Doctor M. Zorileanu, sculptor Spiridon Georgescu	Central Park			
	public art monument	The Bust of Dr. H. Botescu, sculpt. D. Măţoanu	Central Park			
2004 List of Historic Monuments						
Category	Code	Name	Address	Dating		
Archaeological Monuments (I)	VL-I-s-B-09563	The Prajila Archeological Site				
	VL-I-m-B-09563.01	Settlement	Prajila, Băile Govora	Latene		
	VL-I-m-B-09563.02	Settlement		Hallstatt		
	VL-I-m-B-09563.03	Settlement		Bronze Age		
Architectural Monuments (II)	VL-II-s-B-09643	Urban Ensemble	between the Town Hall and the Park, on both sides of the street	late 19th - early 20th c.		
	VL-II-m-B-09644	The Palace Pavillion	1 Park St.	1914		
	VL-II-m-B-09645	The Casino	3 Park St.	early 20th c.		
	VL-II-m-B-09646	The Gheorghe Petre collection of archaeology and religious art	102 Vladimirescu Tudor St.	mid. 20th c.		
Public Forum Monuments (III)	VL-III-m-B-09991	Bust of General Doctor N. Zorileanu (sic!)	Central Park	early 20th c.		
	39D0014 (disappeared)	Bust of Dr. H. Botescu	Central Park	early 20th c.		

Figure 14: Overview of listed heritage items in Govora between 1980 and 2010

2010 List of Historic Monuments				2015			
Code	Name	Address	Dating	LHM Code	Name	Address	Dating
VL-I-s-B-09563	The Prajilia Archeological Site			VL-I-s-B-09563	The Prajilia Archeological Site		
VL-I-m-B-09563.01	Settlement	Prajilia, Băile Govora	Latene	VL-I-m-B-09563.01	Settlement	Prajilia, Băile Govora	Latene
VL-I-m-B-09563.02	Settlement		Hallstatt	VL-I-m-B-09563.02	Settlement		Hallstatt
VL-I-m-B-09563.03	Settlement		Bronze Age	VL-I-m-B-09563.03	Settlement		Bronze Age
VL-II-s-B-09643	Urban Ensemble	between the Town Hall and the Park, on both sides of the street	late 19th - early 20th c.	VL-II-s-B-09643	Urban Ensemble	between the Town Hall and the Park, on both sides of the street	late 19th - early 20th c.
VL-II-m-B-09644	The Palace Hotel	1 Park St.	1914	VL-II-m-B-09644	The Palace Hotel	1 Park St.	1914
VL-II-m-B-09645	The Casino	3 Park St.	early 20th c.	VL-II-m-B-09645	The Casino	3 Park St.	early 20th c.
VL-II-m-B-09646	The Gheorghe Petre collection of archaeology and religious art	109B Vladimirescu Tudor St.	mid. 20th c.	VL-II-m-B-09646	The Gheorghe Petre collection of archaeology and religious art	109B Vladimirescu Tudor St.	mid. 20th c.
VL-II-m-B-20968	Ivanovici Villa	10 Statului St.	-	VL-II-m-B-20968	Ivanovici Villa	10 Statului St.	-
PUG 2010 - Listing proposals	Baths Pavillion, arch. E. Doneaud	3 V. Alecsandri St.	1914				
	Ștefănescu Hotel	170 T. Vladimirescu St.	1900				
	Panseluța (Constante-Marieta) Villa	160 T. Vladimirescu St.	-				
	Multiple family house	158 T. Vladimirescu St.	-				
	Central Park, Picard (sicl)	-	1914				
PUG 2010 - Proposals for change in designation - delisting	Urban Ensemble	combined with listing the proposals above					
Public Forum Monuments (III)	Bust of General Doctor N. Zorilescu (sicl)	Central Park	early 20th c.	VL-III-m-B-09991	Bust of General Doctor N. Zorilescu (sicl)	Central Park	early 20th c.
	Bust of Dr. H. Botescu	Central Park	early 20th c.	39D0014 (disappeared)	Bust of Dr. H. Botescu	Central Park	early 20th c.

Figure 15: Overview of listed heritage in Băile Govora between 2010 and present day

Classification and assessment criteria for built heritage

Table 1. Classification of Historical Monuments

Classification of historical monuments according to Law 422/2001	
Category	I - archaeological monuments
	II - architectural monuments
	III - public forum monuments
	IV - memorial and funerary monuments
Level of importance	A - historical monuments of national and universal value
	B - historical monuments representative of local cultural heritage
Type	Monument
	A building or part of building, together with its installations, artistic components, interior or exterior furniture elements, that are an integral part, as well as commemorative, funerary, public works of art, together with the related land delimited topographically, which constitute cultural testimonies of historical significance from an architectural, archaeological, historical, artistic, ethnographic, religious, social, scientific or technical point of view;
	Ensemble
	A coherent cultural, historical, architectural, urban, or museal group of urban or rural constructions that, together with their land, form a topographically delimited unit that constitutes significant cultural-historical evidence from an architectural, urbanistic, archeological, historical, artistic, ethnographic, religious, social, scientific or technical point of view;
	Site
	A topographically delimited area of land comprising human creations in a natural setting that are significant cultural-historical evidence from the architectural, urbanistic, archaeological, historical, artistic, ethnographic, religious, social, scientific, technical or cultural landscape point of view.

Table 2. Assessment criteria for built heritage

Criterion	Aim of assessment	Grading	Aspects to be considered
Age		<p><1777 - exceptional</p> <p>1775-1830 - very high</p> <p>1830-1870 - high</p> <p>1870-1920 - medium</p> <p>1920-1960 - low</p> <p>> 1960 - null</p>	<p>Assessment is weighted by the design's authenticity, construction materials and processes, and the location, inversely proportional to the age of the asset. The following shall be considered:</p> <p>a) the initial age of the building and subsequent interventions.</p> <p>b) the age of building components.</p> <p>c) attested archeological remains, belonging to buildings older than the one being assessed.</p> <p>d) the proportion of composing elements coming from subsequent interventions.</p>
Architectural, artistic, urbanistic value	To establish the value of the asset from an esthetic, functional and technical point of view	exceptional, very high, high, medium, low	<p>a) coherence of the plan and structure, as well as technical concept.</p> <p>b) degree of representation within a historic area, designer or style.</p> <p>c) significance for a particular historical-geographical area.</p> <p>d) architectural decoration on the facades and interiors.</p> <p>e) valuable artistic components.</p> <p>f) value of the different components and the share of the ones that give the asset a certain character.</p> <p>g) relation with the urban and natural contexts, being part of an ensemble or built or natural site which is partly or totally preserved.</p> <p>h) representative of a program, urban policies, or typologies</p>
Frequency (rarity and uniqueness)	To establish the value considering the frequency and rarity of the asset, its components and ensemble	exceptional, very high, high, medium, low	<p>a) uniqueness of the immovable asset, its components, or ensemble.</p> <p>b) if it represents a first example of a series in a historical-geographical or ethnographical area or historical period.</p> <p>c) rarity or part of a limited series in a historical-geographical or ethnographical area, or historical period.</p> <p>d) typical for a historical-geographical or ethnographic area, for a style or an era.</p> <p>e) frequency of valuable assets in a built historical ensemble.</p>
Memorial-symbolic value	To establish the value of the immovable asset in terms of its use of symbols	-	<p>a) immovable assets related to certain historical, cultural, political or social moments and places, as well as to particular personalities.</p> <p>b) previous buildings that no longer exist, of recognized historic importance, mentioned in any documentary or archaeological sources.</p> <p>c) presence in community memory, on a European, national, or local level.</p> <p>d) connection to certain local traditions.</p>
	A (national)	<p>a) at least one exceptional grade, except for assets included on the World Heritage List and Tentative World Heritage List.</p> <p>b) at least "high value" for all criteria except memorial-symbolic value</p> <p>c) at least one "very high", one "high" and one "medium" grade.</p>	
	B (local)	At least three "medium" grades, except for cases in which, considering the historic-geographical area, the age value is graded as "low".	

Studiogovora projects within the Govora Heritage Lab program

architecture: diploma projects

1. The Baths Ensemble
2. Vila Sylva

interventions on existing buildings

3. Restauration of the Interwar Gazebo
4. Emergency intervention for safety of Villa Ivanovici
5. Exterior pool and terrace at Palace Hotel
6. Assistance for rehabilitation of Villa Popovici
7. **projects for space reactivation**
8. Public toilet in the Thermal Park
9. The Chestnut Alley
10. The Old Bar in the Thermal Park
11. Ferdinand Spring Buvette
12. The Electrical Plant
13. The Former State Hotel no. 2

latent spaces and buildings - potential urban and social catalysts – to be explored

- I. Commercial building
- J. Villa Constanța-Marieta
- K. Former Villa Paulinescu
- L. The old kindergarten
- M. Villa Topîrceanu
- N. Former State Hotel no. 2
- O. Villa General dr. Iliescu
- P. Villa Diaconu Marin
- Q. Villa Zinica
- R. Villa Georgescu
- S. The Electric Plant
- T. Villa Paulina
- U. CC ensemble
- V. The river promenade
- X. The old school
- Y. The Casino
- Z. Ștefănescu Hotel



Excerpt from the Interpretation Plan: Themes and Services

Interpretive themes

Heritage phenomena are grouped in series of topics support the main theme. Themes have also been proposed for each topic and most of the phenomena.

Site	Main theme	
Băile Govora cultural landscape	Explore a healing cultural landscape at the border between Eastern and Western Europe	
Topics & Phenomena	Theme	Interpretive services
Thermal Area	The heart of the resort housed, cured and amused all social classes.	Personal: interpretive walks Non-personal: Questo app, interpretive trail, audio trail
The Park	Strolling through a beautiful environment plays a key part in the therapeutic cure and adds to our wellbeing.	Panels Interpretive walk
Baths Pavillion	Once state of the art in Romanian balneology, this is the only surviving historical baths in the region and one of the few in Romania.	Panel Interpretive talk
State hotel #1 (oldest building)	This abandoned building has seen all the resort's history.	Panel Interpretive talk
Casino	Designed by the first female architect in Romania, and built incompletely, in a hurry to showcase the Oscars	Panel Interpretive talk
Palace Hotel	Built with state-of-the-art 1900s engineering after the Hotel Royal in Evian, the Palace still is the most luxurious accommodation in town.	Panel exhibit (inside) - history & conservation project carried out by Băile Govora SA Interpretive talk
The Ferdinand Spring	Drinking mineral water immersed in nature is the essence of thermalism.	Panel, active element Interpretive talk
The Power Plant	The engine of the resort, the plant produced electricity to pump water to the Baths and light up the town.	Panel Interpretive talk
The historic town	Explore the evolution of daily life, where residents, workers, merchants,	Interpretive trail, walk & talks, panels, panel

	farmers and tourists mingle since 1880.	with map, leaflets, Questo app
The Main Street	Residential and commercial buildings in all architectural styles.	Interpretive trail, walk & talks, panels, panel with map, leaflets, Questo app
Hotel Stefanescu	The mall of the 1900s, this hotel's ground floor housed jewelers, the local newspaper, and other shops.	Panel, talk
Villa Ivanovici	Theme to be developed	Panel, talk
The doctor's residences	The doctors in the resort needed proper residences, built by famous architects.	Panel, talks
The local museum	Theme to be developed	Panel, talk
Hinta river	From stinky sewer to romantic promenade, explore the evolution of the river.	Panel, talk
Socialist Govora	Explore traces of the socialist resort that was never built.	Interpretive trail, walk, audio trail
Ceausescu's villa	This villa was built for the famous dictator, who never visited it.	Interpretive talk, panel
Oltenia Hotel	The largest hotel in town, this is the only one built before the state ran out of funds.	Interpretive talk, panel
Spring II	Theme to be developed	Interpretive talk, panel
Central Committee's headquarters	Theme to be developed	Interpretive talk, panel
The new Post Office	Theme to be developed	Interpretive talk
Rural Govora	Wander away from the main street to discover the peaceful village life.	Interpretive walk, panel
Architecture and design	The buildings in town tell the story of Romanian architecture and architects in the 19th and 20th century.	Interpretive walk, audio trail, panel
Buildings designed by famous architects: Virginia Andreescu-Haret, Gh. Simotta, E. Doneaud, Atra Cerchez, Grigre Cerchez etc.	Themes to be developed based on each building/architect.	Interpretive walk, audio trail

Interpretive services

Given that the municipality will not allocate public funds for interpretation at the moment, the responsibility for developing the interpretive services will be taken on by Studiogovora. The NGO plans to partner with the business sector and the municipality, in order to raise the financial resources necessary to develop the services. This can be done either through sponsorships, donations or cultural projects. The interpretive services are proposed in close connection with the available human resources, capacity and funding opportunities.

The main objective of the plan is to facilitate meaningful experiences for both visitors and residents throughout the year and to enhance stewardship and participation in preserving local heritage. The interpretive themes and services work together to challenge the current status quo - the dilapidated look of the resort - and take a step further in understanding the complex causes behind and the many opportunities available. The interpretation plan starts from facilitating first-hand experiences around built heritage and evolves towards participation in restoration and protecting the wider surrounding natural environment.

The interpretive services focus on phenomena that include heritage buildings, public spaces, thermal practices, building techniques and vernacular architecture. This is due to the profile of the team, our research and the need to conserve local heritage. With little interpretation available on site permanently to offer first-hand experiences, the plan first starts with a series of interpretive trails, evolving towards more personal and non-personal services. As the services develop and interpretation becomes more complex, so does visitor experience.

The cultural landscape is interpreted as a place for health and wellbeing, where natural and cultural heritage offers opportunities for lifelong learning and participation. Interpretation builds on four years of academic research and direct on-site experience with both residents and tourists. The themes facilitate meaning making by linking heritage phenomena to universals

such as the connection to nature and clean air, personal health, and the quest for knowledge. The plan gives preference to built heritage attributes but plans to develop interpretive services that target natural heritage also. The personal interpretive services encourage people to develop their own meaning, through active dialogue. The services aim to provide learning opportunities and contribute to the personal growth.

Băile Govora is a case study example of how heritage participation can have both local and national impact. The interpretive services contribute to community growth and solidarity, aiming to create an active local heritage community. The plan underlines the importance of shared responsibility for preserving heritage and creates opportunities for active involvement, themes that are relevant and needed on a broader level. The plan aims to raise awareness on the international relevance of the site, its connection with the larger network of European spas, and explore the values of historic spa towns in the wider context of linking heritage and wellbeing.

Panels for signaling historic monuments	non-personal, cca. 1500 euro
Description: Panels with brief information: date of construction, relevant people involved, brief information on the architecture and history of the asset. Panels will be written following the guidelines for interpretive writing and the theme of each phenomenon.	Rationale: These small panels are mandatory through the Law of Historical Monuments for each individual monument or ensemble and are the only interpretive services visitors are used to throughout the country. There is enough information available to easily design and set them up. They need to be approved by the Zonal Commission for Historic Monuments & the Vâlcea Directorate for Culture (DJC VL).
Interpretive Trail 1: The Thermal Area + walk & audio trail	Personal & non-personal. 10.000 euro panels & recording 1000 euro/month staff costs for walks and talks
Description: The trail covers the entire thermal ensemble with both natural and cultural heritage attributes. The trail will consist of a series of panels developed by an interdisciplinary team of architects, historians, biologists, landscapers, anthropologists, with as much involvement of the community as possible. Given that the Thermal Area is the main attraction of the resort, and most buildings are in bad shape, the trail also aims to foster stewardship, by presenting the causes of the given situation and offering opportunities for involvement, by promoting	Rationale: There is enough information available to begin working on the panels. The research on architecture & history has been carried out, more work is needed on natural heritage (will be covered by Kogayon Association) and engaging the community (Studiogovora). The Thermal Area is a protected area, thus the panels need to be approved by the Zonal Commission for Historic Monuments & the Vâlcea Directorate for Culture (DJC VL) and by the municipality. The walk and talks have already been developed by

active citizenship through interpretive panels, audio trail, walks, and talks.	Studiogovora during the Spa Architecture Days. The audio trail builds on these services. The town has a relevant tradition in gardening practices, the interpretive services will also cover this aspect and foster participation.
Interpretive Trail 2: The Historic Town + walk & audio trail	personal & non-personal 6000 euro panels & recording 1000/month staff costs
Description: The trail covers the historic town - the main street and other relevant nearby areas (str. Pietii, str. Grivitei). The trail interprets the evolution of the town, starting from the first villas built in the late 1800s, covering topics such as building techniques, conservation practices, daily life during three regimes (monarchy, socialism, democracy). Many historic buildings are abandoned and in bad shape. The trail also aims to foster stewardship, by presenting the causes and offering opportunities for involvement. It promotes active citizenship through meaningful experiences.	Rationale: There is enough information available to begin working on the panels. The research on architecture & history has been carried out, more work needs to be done on engaging the community (Studiogovora). Given that the main street is a historical monument, the panels need to be approved by the Zonal Commission for Historic Monuments & the Vâlcea Directorate for Culture (DJC VL) and by the municipality. The walk and talks have already been developed by Studiogovora during the Spa Architecture Days. The audio trail builds on these services.
Interpretive walk 3: Socialist Govora + audio trail	personal & non personal 1000 euro staff costs + 1000 euro recording
Description: The walk and audio trail link memories and buildings to offer an in-depth experience of the resort's golden age. The audio trail will include recorded accounts from residents and visitors wishing to share their memories.	Rationale: The walk & audio trail build on ongoing research on daily life and resort management during socialism, a period which was experienced by many residents and visitors alike. This service also aims to bridge the gap between generations, attracting the young audience born long after 1989.
Live interpretation - Re-enactment	personal, cca. 3000 euro
Description: An interactive, open air tableau vivant populated with military and civilian characters interpreted by historical re-enactors, portraying the usual social classes of visitors that Govora enjoyed in its early stages as a spa town. Populating the old streets with people in historic clothing would articulate well with the preserved architectural landscape, creating a historically coherent visual experience in a manner often employed by open air museums.	Rationale: Băile Govora was founded by Dr. Zorileanu, a general in the Romanian army, with the aim to cure war veterans. In the first decades of the resort, plots were mainly bought by former military, who built villas to be used either as private residences or to be rented out. This link can be explored through live interpretation organized in partnership with associations. One such association - IR33 - has already visited the resort and expressed interest.
Model of the resort & historic town	non personal. cca. 15.000 euro
Description: A 3D model that can be placed at the entrance of the Thermal Park. The model shows the layout of the resort and the historic town, together with the geographic characteristics, offering visitors a better understanding of how the thermal and residential areas relate to the surrounding natural landscape.	Rationale: A preliminary model already exists; it was developed in 2019 by Studiogovora. Due to its fabric, it can only be used indoors. It can be replicated and cast in metal to be displayed outdoors. Given that the Thermal Area is a protected area, the model needs to be approved by the Zonal Commission for Historic Monuments & the Vâlcea Directorate for Culture (DJC VL) and by the municipality.

Questo tour	Non-personal, 1500 euro
Description: Questo is a mobile app that guides visitors through the city on a story line, solving puzzles to discover new places and their history. People call it many things: urban role-playing exploration, outdoor escape game, or simply a walking guide. Based on the Questo concept, Studiogovora developed a mystery story around the most important local landmarks. The story is currently in testing mode on the app and will be launched soon.	Rationale: The interpretive walks offered by Studiogovora include stories about life in the resort over time and how it has influenced the architecture of the resort. One of the objectives of the team is to do more tours and engage a younger audience. Questo gives the opportunity to develop a tour that can be done anytime without the direct involvement of the team. Plus, the tours are available for purchase and 75% of the funds go directly to the creators, providing revenue that can be redirected to conservation projects.
The Balneary Museum	personal & non-personal, cca. 200.000 euro
Description: The Balneary museum presents the evolution of thermal practices in Govora and Romania, linking them to the history of European thermal practices. The existing collection consists of artifacts recovered from the Baths pavilion and several historic postcards. This is sufficient to develop a comprehensive exhibition and can also be enhanced through donations.	Rationale: The museum currently does not function, artefacts are deposited in a locked room, due to lack of space. The collection needs a suitable space and interpretation. It is currently housed by a building owned by the municipality, which also houses the local library and a branch of the county museum managing the Gh. Petre-Govora collection. The interior spaces can be redesigned in order to better accommodate all functions.
Publication	Non-personal, cca. 15.000 euro
Description: The book presents the heritage values of the cultural landscape to a wide audience. It includes the history of the resort, plans of historic buildings, archive material, personal accounts of the locals etc.	Rationale: The book continues the research and publishing efforts done by Studiogovora (the Mazzocchi edition dedicated to Govora, the best practice guide for restorations) and builds on previous publications on the history of the resort.
Presentation film	Non-personal, cca. 10.000 euro
Description: The film presents the heritage values of the cultural landscape to a wide audience. It includes scenic imagery, information on the history of the resort, archive material, personal accounts of the locals etc. Medium length - cca. 30'	Rationale: The film will serve to document and promote the resort as a destination for cultural tourism and showcase the efforts being made by Studiogovora and other stakeholders to restore the buildings and revitalize the resort through art and activism.
Action element: The Ferdinand Spring	Non-personal, cca. 2000 euro
Description: The Ferdinand Spring is the only functioning spring in the resort and has the same 20th century original design. It is managed by Băile Govora SA as part of their lease of the mineral waters. Drinking the pungent water in nature offers a multisensory experience.	Rationale: Current visitor experience needs to be improved, through small architecture interventions around the spring and interpretation. As visitors often come to drink the water, this is a suitable place to create an action element that interprets thermal practices.
Interpretation centre	personal & non-personal, cca. 750.000 euro

Description: A dedicated space created by Studiogovora where the cultural landscape can be interpreted and researched. The center will include a bank of materials, with elements recovered from buildings and will be part of an adaptive reuse project.	Rationale: The existing museum is too small and cannot be extended. The site needs a dedicated independent space that showcases the multiple cultural and natural values and provides space for dialogue between various stakeholders. The center can house events, demonstrations, exhibits etc.
Demonstrations: crafts	Personal, cca. 500 euro/event
Description: Once conservation projects start, this will offer the chance to organize demonstrations on traditional techniques - carpentry, plaster, mortars, masonry etc. Demonstrations on gardening practices can be organized in the thermal park and other green areas.	Rationale: These events showcase interesting processes and offer immersive experiences. This is an excellent opportunity to involve volunteers and foster stewardship for local heritage. Events can also be accessible through a fee, providing revenue for conservation projects. Given that the town has a relevant tradition in gardening practices, the demonstrations can also cover this aspect and foster participation of locals and employees of the municipality.
Demonstrations: gastronomy	Personal, min 50 euro/participant
Description: Gastronomic events can be organized around heritage sites to raise awareness, raise funds, showcase local producers and attract a wider public. They can be combined with interpretive walks around the resort.	Rationale: The region is rich in gastronomic heritage. Hotels are yet to tap into this resource, but Studiogovora has been organizing wine tastings and brunches, showcasing local producers. Events can be accessible through a fee, providing revenue that can be redirected to conservation projects.