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**Roxana Patraș
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(editors)

**Tools, Methods, and Solutions
for the Exploration of Romanian Corpora**

INSTITUTUL EUROPEAN

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Roxana Patraş, Loredana Cuzmici
(editors)

TOOLS, METHODS, AND SOLUTIONS FOR THE EXPLORATION OF ROMANIAN CORPORA

INSTITUTUL EUROPEAN
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Mapping Eastern European Political Discourse and Inequalities through Public Monuments: a digital cartography crowdsourcing project

Voica PUȘCAȘIU

Brief Introduction to Public Art Issues

This project combines a long-standing interest in art in public spaces, data-visualization tools in the Digital Humanities and, last but not least, an educational approach to addressing such matters. While art is never innocent, public art is particularly charged with political meaning and, when discussing it, one should be aware of its ideological discourses. Data-visualization may seem like a superficial mode to tackle these rather nuanced issues; what it manages to do, however, is to reveal several aspects at once. For instance, it establishes the frequency of certain kinds of representations and their distribution: Who is represented in public artworks, how often, and where are these representations found within the city? How important does local history appear to be, as compared to national history? Data-visualization also provides insights into inequalities: Who is left out? Where are the women and the other minorities? Who “owns” the city centre, and who is relegated to the peripheries? How does such representation compare across towns and regions in Romania, and between Romania and other Eastern European spaces? Considering that communities devoid of public memorials are extremely rare, I turned to crowdsourcing to try to answer some of these questions by creating an interactive digital map.

Before diving into the specifics of the project, we will clarify what constitutes public space, what the nature and function of public art are, and how these concepts are interconnected. Truly open public space is notoriously difficult to find (Dickenson 2021, 5), since there clearly are rules and regulations at play at all times; yet, for the purpose of this project, “public space” will be defined as a location that is in no way fenced off and that is free of charge and open to all members of the public at any time.

The decision to define the notion in this way risks further perpetuating the myth of the democratic public space, so in order to make a relevant point at a later stage in our discussion, we have included in the pilot map a location that falls outside the scope of this definition—a botanical garden that operates on a schedule and where entry is subject to an admission ticket.

As we will soon see, even in the public spaces that correspond more strictly to the definition above, all voices are not equally heard and not everyone is equally represented. This is problematic in itself since, if community is where most (collective) memory is acquired (Halbwachs as cited in Deegan 2018, 21), then representation within public spaces is a critical issue. This community-building narrative (Johnson 2002, 293) is also what drives most choices when it comes to art in public spaces, and it is here where the stakes are highest, since lack of representations in public art reinforces the overall lack of representation in the community which impacts minorities. As passers-by, we tend to take our surroundings for granted, as we do with most of our symbols, including maps, as we will see. Whether we realize it or not, however, there is a logic to what is presented in public spaces, and it can vary from overt propaganda to something much more subtle, though perhaps no less ideologically motivated. Art is never completely detached from the sociopolitical sphere and this is all the more true of public art (Levinson 2018, 32), since it essentially acts as a form of state speech (Valls 2019, 177). Moreover, the fact that it is commissioned for public consumption—and often paid for by taxes—does not necessarily mean that the artwork is intended to benefit the public (Hoffman 1991, 543).

One need only look at how the public responds to monuments to notice that the relationship between the viewers and the artworks is complicated and sometimes tense, although it can also be characterized by moments of tenderness. While these topics are for other studies to address in more detail, they are worth mentioning here because the public reception of statues lies at the heart of what initially motivated the present research.

Thus, we see how political realities, past and present, shape (art in) public spaces and are reflected in them. Yet who exactly is aware of these intricacies and is properly equipped to read and interpret public spaces in Romania? Surely someone who is to some degree a scholar of history could do it, but this seems less likely for most of the general public, and such analysis would definitely not be available to

visitors who are unfamiliar with Romanian history. Since Romanian history, like the Romanian language, occupies a more peripheral position on the world stage, what could a foreigner make of all the statues? Certain historical or literary figures who have been commemorated by public monuments need no introduction: for instance, many people worldwide know of Charles Dickens (1812-1870)—who, incidentally, has had surprisingly few memorials dedicated to him because he expressed a personal preference for such monuments to be limited in number—or Queen Victoria (1819-1901). The reasons why these figures are represented in public spaces are, much like the figures themselves, not in the least obscure. Yet such a claim cannot be made with the same level of conviction about Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1820-1873) or Ion Creangă (1837-1889), who are household names for Romanians but whose roles are largely unknown to people outside this culture. How could foreigners begin to understand the layers of power play and national discourse that are specific to a region when even the locals are often at a loss? Aside from the objects themselves and their placement, little to no explanation or context for the statues, monuments, plaques and memorials is provided, in Romanian or any other language; what's more, as we will see, much is lost in translation even when explanations are provided. Romania's case is by no means unique in its position or the complexities of its overtones, which is why we will also be comparing this case to that of other Eastern European countries which have certain historical backgrounds.

This brings us to the prime motivation of this entire initiative: the belief that public art is created not only to serve the lowest common denominator but rather to educate one and all. Our project of creating an interactive digital map of public monuments aims to do just that: to offer a broad overview of art in public spaces and to contextualize public art by using the ensuing database and visualization as a standing point for various types of analyses. The map can also be used as a popularization tool: while the monuments of one nation are arguably meant for its citizens, and the state should therefore not be concerned with what foreigners do or do not understand, the research of comparing and contrasting local and regional histories is not only legitimate but vital, since we all learn more about one culture when it is reflected in another, and we eventually gain a better understanding of the place that this culture occupies in broader terms, including continentally and internationally. Romania is still severely underrepresented (Patraş 2022, 133) in most

(Eastern) European research groups and international repositories (Patraş 2022, 140), and this research contributes to closing such gaps.

Methodology for mapping and crowdsourcing

This project originated during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as an impromptu solution for students specializing in Art History at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The project is therefore a direct consequence of how COVID-19 affected academia, not only with respect to education and research but also insofar as falls under the category of everyday research practices in the (post-)pandemic era, as observed by Patraş, and it is still novel (Patraş 2022, 129).

In short, under normal circumstances, first- and second-year students at the bachelor level complete a summer internship which is compulsory and reflected in their credits. Students usually opt to carry out the internship in museums, galleries, or archives in either Cluj-Napoca or their hometown; during the pandemic, however, most cultural institutions were either closed altogether or not admitting entry to those not already affiliated with the organization, which meant that the usual internship options were unavailable. Since, by this time, classes had already been conducted online for the better part of the university year, everyone was tired of Zoom meetings and other online activities, I believed that documenting public monuments—a project conducted in outdoor spaces—would be a welcome change. It is also useful to remember that most students were back in their hometowns during this period, so this documentary activity could double as an opportunity for them to (re)discover familiar spaces, from the perspective of art history students.

Although public art has been the main focus of my own research, the topic has been absent from the art history curriculum at “Babeş-Bolyai” University and therefore represented a novel theme for the students. Initially, our goal was to gather and build a database of public statues in Romania, as no such database—and certainly nothing as complex and exhaustive as the one we were proposing—existed yet.¹

¹ Since we began this project, an initiative of exhaustively documenting places of memory in Cluj-Napoca and the many forms they take has been published under the title of a database (Jakab). It is also possible that a digital version of this dataset will eventually be made available. Another project that documents and maps monuments in Romania and other nearby countries is *Monuments of Remembrance 1918–2018*, available at <http://monuments-remembrance.eu/ro/>.

Since one of the students' tasks was to record the locations of the monuments, the idea of developing an interactive digital map was soon born. The workflow of the data visualization itself was established at a later stage in the project, and it has continued to evolve as part of an ongoing process of introducing new generations of students to data visualisation notions and to methodologies related to not only to such visualization but also to the field of Digital Art History more generally.

Data collection

The initial task given to students was to identify three-dimensional monuments and statues that were independent structures (as opposed to being affixed to a building), to photograph the object, and to list several related pieces of information in a Google Sheet. While it was mandatory to fill in certain columns, completing others was optional and could be done at a later date. Choices about which data were most urgent were made in collaboration with the students, and it was intended to encourage them to focus on the medium of sculpture, rather than losing themselves the methodological task of distinguishing statues on buildings versus ornaments. Plaques were excluded from the project because transcription would be required and students felt that working with such quantities of text would involve a departure from the visual component of art history research. The mandatory columns were:

- the identifying number of the photograph (all photos were saved in a dedicated Google Drive folder);
- the title of the artwork;
- the name of the town or village where the artwork was located;
- the address associated with the statue (or the best approximation of the artwork's location);
- the medium of the artwork (e.g. stone, wood, cast metal);
- the theme of the artwork (e.g. historical, religious, allegorical);
- the artwork's type (e.g. equestrian, bust, full figure, non-representational);
- the number of figures featured in the artwork (if applicable);
- the gender of the figures featured in the artwork (if applicable).

Since this information was readily available simply just by observing the works, filling in the spreadsheet was not thought to represent a lot of additional work. The optional columns were:

- the artist's name;
- the year when the artwork was erected;
- a summary of the figure's biographical data (if applicable);
- the role the figure was their best-known role (if applicable).

Looking back, we appreciate that this spreadsheet is only an approximation of a proper monument chart, as it lacks emphasis on technical details; nonetheless, it was an appropriate tool for undergraduate students. The students carried out their tasks with various degrees of dedication. Some students took many photographs of the statues, from various angles; others took only one photo; in all cases, however, any inscriptions were legible. There was great variation in terms of how the medium category was defined, with students sometimes improvising names for the materials used. For example, cast metal was identified as “cast bronze,” “bronze,” “metal,” “forged metal,” “iron” and even “bronze?”; and stone was identified as any number of different types of stones, some of which were not plausible. These numerous and significant variations meant that in order for the database to be usable, considerable time and energy was needed to normalize the data.

The students worked on this data collection throughout summer 2020 and attended a final meeting—where they received their grades for the work—at the beginning of September of the same year. Each student was required to identify and collect data on a minimum of five monuments, but many students exceeded this quota and, especially when travelling to different towns, continued ad hoc to provide information on additional monuments even after the assignment had officially ended. Thus, to date, the database contains more than 250 monuments from 47 different towns in Romania. Although the distribution of the monuments is by no means uniform and many monument-rich towns are altogether missing from the survey, the database offers sufficient information to draw some preliminary conclusions and to start constructing a visualization.

Populating the map

Cartography and history have always been connected, as maps inform geographic and cultural identities (Thomas 2013, 336). However, since the digital turn and the widespread availability of Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies, digital maps have become objects of our time; we even navigate differently because of them (Wrisley 2014, 96). Digital cartography is a subdiscipline

concerned with the employment of information technology in the creation and use of maps (Visvalingam 1990, 115). The first Geographic Information System (GIS) was used as early as 1964 (Farman 2010, 870), and as software becomes more readily available, mapmaking is no longer the exclusive domain of geographers; indeed, digital humanists of all types have started wielding their metadata to create spatial visualizations. The user's status is also changing from mere readers towards a more active role as digital maps allow greater customization and interaction (Farman 2010, 869) in both populating and using the map.

What's more, since maps can be seen historically as tools of colonization (Thomas 2013, 336), there is an increased usage of the word "mapping" in the context of subversive activities. In such cases, there is sometimes no actual map involved, yet the word is used as a synonym for documenting, or rather pinpointing forgotten gestures and locations which are generally missing from official cartographies produced or approved by the establishment (Kelly and Vassell 2023) and the digital realm is an outlet for this new meaning of mapping.

Considering the tensions inherent in public spaces, and the role that public spaces play in maintaining national narratives, a spatial visualization of public monuments has the potential to reveal patterns that are otherwise difficult to observe. Eventually, one might see how trends fluctuate over time and which artistic styles are more or less dominant. Digital maps also allow for virtual visualization of monuments that have been destroyed or displaced, which adds another layer of understanding with respect to political preferences and regime as it tracks them over time. Believing that the students who had assembled the database deserved some kind of project closure and that such a coda would also serve as a teaching opportunity to address how to create a visualization based on a dataset, I set out to create a workflow that would be functional yet simple enough for students with limited prior experience in data visualization software to follow.

Thus was born the pilot map, which is available online.² In addition to representing an opportunity to work out methodological kinks, it acts as an incentive to continue mapping out monuments and to expand the database. For this pilot, I have limited the geographic range of the monuments to those located in the city of Cluj-Napoca. One factor underlying this decision is my own proximity to these

² Voica Pușcașiu. "Sculptură din spațiul public din Cluj-Napoca." Web Map available at <https://arcg.is/1eu8eP>.

monuments; another factor is that they had already been fairly thoroughly documented, especially in popularization publications (Ciorca 2022; Lukács 2005).

What ultimately enabled me to create this map was the course entitled Introduction to Digital Humanities, which I completed through the StarUBB Institute (Babeş-Bolyai University), and which was taught by Dr. Rada Varga in the DigiHUBB Centre. Without this experience, the path would have been infinitely more difficult. Using the methods taught in this course, I could appreciate the interconnectedness of different software programs, which offered me greater freedom to move strategically between them. While not necessarily the most straightforward method, the approach was advantageous because of its adaptability and the fact that it makes use of software versions that are free of charge. I feel compelled to highlight this last point, since I was determined to make the project as easy and low-cost as possible for future students to use, and since I did not want to use Google My Maps—a tool which is very useful but has limited customization options.

Starting off with just under 50 monuments, I created the pilot map using two programs: QGIS and the free browser version of ArcGIS. First, each point that represents the location of a monument was individually plotted in QGIS, with Google Roads used as a base layer for clarity of the representation and overall familiarity of people with the Google Maps visuals. While time-consuming and somewhat tedious, this activity is simple enough once a rhythm has been established. The initial spreadsheet was not used, instead the data in it were cleaned up prior to input, but otherwise, the new spreadsheet column headings for each point basically matched those in the students' database:

- ID
- Title
- Material (bronze or stone)
- Theme (e.g. historical, genre)
- Type (e.g. statue, bust, equestrian)
- Chrt. Nr. (number of characters)
- M/F (for the gender of the figures, or neutral for non-representational works)
- Inscript. (the inscription)
- Photo (dedicated to the URL of the photograph)

All of the fields were string type, except for “Chrt. Nr.” which was obviously an integer. The initial character limit was set at 200 for the inscriptions, and this proved sufficient for all but one of the 47 points.

The layer created in QGIS was then exported and uploaded to ArcGIS, this time with a more whimsical, doodle-like layer used as a basemap. At first, the legend took into account the type of monument, and a different color was therefore distributed to each category, resulting in a vibrantly colored map. Soon thereafter, however, I decided to feature the gender of the characters instead of the type of sculpture, and this led to fewer colors being used—red for women, blue for men, green for mixed, and gray for non-figurative works—but perhaps drove home a more important argument. The dots were also sized according to the number of the featured characters. This choice created a large gender-neutral green dot in the middle of the city belonging to the multicharactered relief on the Obelisk located in Cluj’s oldest square, but other than that, there’s hardly a noticeable difference between dot sizes. The columns corresponding with each pin in QGIS were used in ArcGIS to create the text for the Custom Attribute Display, meaning the pop-up box that appears when each pin is clicked or hovered over with a mouse. Since I was still working for and occasionally with the students, the decision was made to phrase the Custom Attribute Display in a way that was grammatically coherent in Romanian. Basically, the sentence provides a brief description of the statue by taking into account the previously established columns. Thus, for each pin, the following text is generated: The sculpture [*Title*] is a [Type: bust / an equestrian statue / etc.] made out of [Material: bronze / stone / etc.], with a [Theme: historical / religious / etc.] subject. The box also includes the transcript of any inscriptions found on the statue and a picture of the monument.

Call for contributions

Defined as small, straightforward tasks completed online, crowdsourcing is increasingly used in heritage and educational institutions (Bonacchi *et al.* 2019, 2) and is particularly useful for not only dealing with undocumented and undigitized material but also increasing citizens’ engagement with their national heritage (Ridge 2013, 435-436). Sometimes called “citizen science” (Terras 2015), these activities currently engage hundreds or even thousands of worldwide participants (Rotman *et al.* 2014, 110), who tend to choose tasks based on how the activities correspond to

their personal interests (Rotman *et al.* 2014, 114) or existing know-how (Bonacchi *et al.* 2019, 11). Sometimes, the involvement of these participants represent the only way for researchers to build or work with a database. For various reasons, including time, funding, and geographical distance or accessibility, one could choose to rely on contributions from the public, such was the case of this project from the very beginning since it was based directly on the student's participation in documenting the monuments.

A better term for the first part of the project might be “nichesourcing”: on the one hand, the work did not involve calling on the general public to send in photos; on the other hand, it not only engaged experts(-in-training) (de Boer *et al.* 2012) but also reflected a certain amount of coercion insofar as the students' grades depended on their participation in the project, which means that one cannot truly gauge the participants' interest, even when—as previously stated—certain students contributed much more than others and over longer periods of time.

Following the decision to expand the database to account for public art in other former Eastern Bloc countries, the project entered a proper crowdsourcing phase, which is still ongoing with varied results. Initially, participants are enthusiastic, but this attitude soon subsides (Rotman *et al.* 2014, 118). In other words, there is a significant gap between one's intention to participate and their actual participation (Rotman *et al.* 2014, 114), this shift is usually attributed to a lack of time or a perception that the tasks are too technologically complicated (Rotman *et al.* 2014, 118).

The call for *Crowdsourcing Eastern European Public Monuments*, usually accompanied by a short oral presentation, was issued on the occasion of three different Erasmus+ mobilities during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year. These oral presentations took place at the University of Novi Sad (Serbia), Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (Bulgaria), and the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (Macedonia). Another channel for the call was a social media collaboration with the Contested Histories initiative and EuroClio (European Association of History Educators). By far, the greatest number of responses came from Serbia, receiving data for approximately 70 monuments; otherwise, the response rate has been low to nonexistent.

Of course, not all crowdsourcing projects are a success, and participation is highly dependent on the design of the call (Nookelegref *et al.* 2014, 25) and on

project publicity, with most submissions being received within the first month of the call being issued (Nookelegref *et al.* 2014, 29). This reflects the fact that, despite their intentions, people typically forget about or skip work that is not on their immediate to-do list. Also, research suggests that a very small cohort of the total number of volunteers actually do the work: Nookelegref *et al.* noted that, in one case study, 75% of the work was done by 10 contributors, while the other 25% was carried out by the other 366 participants (Nookelegref *et al.* 2014, 30). This seems consistent with what we have observed with respect to our call. Thus far, there are few respondents, but those who have contributed data tend to have done so for a large number of monuments—often more than 10 of them—and their submissions were made in the first couple of weeks of learning about the call. Occasionally, participants submit additional contributions later on, if they have visited a different city. Contributors tend to ask if their submissions were suitable, but they do not seem concerned about whether the task was completed correctly. They also seem to appreciate receiving a thank-you note as well as feedback on the statues for which they have submitted data. Our intention is to identify participants who have contributed to the project, but they are not necessarily interested in having their name associated with it.

Preliminary results and analysis

From as early as the very first student contributions, some obvious conclusions could be drawn from the data. For instance, it was clear which figure was most commonly being featured in towns around Romania: Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889), the national poet. He was followed closely by poet George Coșbuc (1866–1918) and national hero Mihai Viteazul (1558–1601), with the canonical visual appearance of the latter being nearly identical in all representations. These results are consistent with the idea that local histories are especially prevalent in public art and that the diversity of figures represented across the country is therefore great. Historical figures such as those already mentioned and monuments that commemorate the December 1989 Anti-Communist Revolution are rare instances of representations that speak to the nation as a whole and therefore seem to belong in all of the former historical provinces, which underscores the idea of Romanian unity, both politically and—perhaps more importantly—linguistically.

This project was conceived not only to develop suitable assignments for an art history course but also to introduce students to the idea of working with data collection and analysis approaches that differed from those to which they may already have been accustomed and to draw their attention to the importance of gathering data which is open, connected, and smart (Oomen and Aroyo 2011, 138). Since the project ultimately centered around creating and interacting with a map, it has also represented a great opportunity to examine mapmaking itself from a critical perspective—especially in the light of the 1980s cultural turn of maps, which has enabled maps to be read in feminist, postcolonial and postmodernist ways (Cosgrove 2008, 162)—and to take advantage of maps’ storytelling properties (Killing 2018). Of all the different types of images, maps are perhaps most likely to be considered neutral and, therefore, true (Farman 2010, 874); as a result, one easily forgets that a map’s features largely reflect decisions made by the cartographer (Wrisley 2014, 102). It is for this reason that the visualisation was adjusted to highlight the representation of female figures among monuments. What better way to engage with feminist discourse and with the notion that maps will show us what we want to see?

Unsurprisingly, the pilot map featured very few women protagonists. Indeed, in terms of monuments located in true public spaces, only one statue features a female protagonist: the plague column,³ which is situated far from Cluj-Napoca’s city centre and features the Virgin Mary at its top. In addition to showing what cartographers want to highlight, maps—like all other data visualisations, including statistics—also serve to conceal. Reading the empty spaces between the map’s dots shows that public spaces reflect a clear underrepresentation of women. Here, we return to the methodological exception flagged earlier: one of the reasons the Botanical Garden was ultimately included in our study—despite the fact that it is not considered to be a true public space—is that the visualisation would reveal a unique

³ The plague column represents an interesting and unique case study. As a religious symbol, the statue is not common in Romanian Orthodox representations; also, because it was intended as a symbol of the Habsburg Catholic regime and was initially located in the vicinity of the main building of the “Babeş-Bolyai” University, it was removed by the communist authorities in the 1960s and salvaged by a parish located on the periphery of the city, which is where it is currently featured on the map. However, mere days before the writing of this text, the statue was moved back to its original location in a commendable gesture that completed the makeover of the streets surrounding the former Jesuit Baroque building complex. Even though it has been months since the announcement was made, I intentionally elected not to change the corresponding pin on the map in order to further emphasize that maps are products of their time and can therefore be biased and become obsolete if not updated.

cluster of statues of women (representing nymphs and allegories). Reading the map's empty spaces also shows that public spaces reflect a dire underrepresentation of minorities. This is particularly worrisome considering society's racist undertones and the troubled relationship that Romanians still cultivate with ethnic Roma groups whose histories are rarely discussed.

People are drawn to the ludic, which some generously and positively call gamification, but others rather maliciously call infantilisation (Lammes 2015, 200). However, we would do well to recognize mobile applications as meaningful tools for contemporary education (Jambeck and Johnsen 2015, 2), especially when it comes to GPS and interacting with a map, contributing to one, learning from one. The ArcGIS software allows mobile apps to be created based on a web map layer that draws on preset templates. These apps can be viewed on computer web browsers but are optimized for use on mobile devices. Thanks to a template called Nearby which creates a proximity-based app—all previously plotted information is available in app form,⁴ and the monuments and their various details can be viewed on an adjustable radius based on either the viewer's location or another address of their choosing. This is an illustration of how such a map can be used on the go and *in situ*, allowing users to familiarize themselves with the statues they encounter and to learn more about them.

Conclusions and further questions

Cultural nuances are notoriously difficult to explain to those outside the culture in question. In Cluj-Napoca, the monument dedicated to the Szekely Martyrs is situated in an out- of-the-way area that is difficult to access (it is basically found under the main road) and houses few other statues or memorials; yet, in other towns such as Târgu Mureș, the same monument is located more prominently and has a park associated with it. How might one explain the rationale for these differences? In contrast with the Roman Catholic artistic tradition, the Eastern Orthodox Church—through its interpretation of the Ten Commandments—believes that three-dimensional representations should not exist. As a result, religious figures are

⁴ Voica Pușcașiu. "Public Sculpture in Cluj-Napoca."

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/instant/nearby/index.html?appid=f0c86c7209ce49fd9759dea78cf57aad>.

featured in very few statues in Romania or Eastern European region. Yet, one day in 2018, three large bronze monuments were unveiled in Cluj-Napoca: while one of them was the long-awaited and much-debated statue of the Greek-Catholic Cardinal Iuliu Hossu (1885–1970), the other two statues—of the Orthodox bishops Bartolomeu Anania (1921–2011) and of Nicolae Ivan (1855–1936), respectively—had hardly been mentioned in the public arena prior to the unveiling, which made these statues rather surprising. How does one explain this uncharacteristic presence if not as a race for the upper hand in representation?

Perhaps one cannot or should not explain such things. Yet a case could be made for promoting greater transparency. It is clear that debates over statues are not a thing of the past or even just a brand belonging to totalitarian regimes; they are still taking place. What's more, older interventions are still left, and, when no explanations are provided in public spaces, confusion and division among audiences grows. The commemorative plaques on the House of Matthias Corvinus (1445–1490) offer another example in Cluj-Napoca that is particularly illustrative of this race. The historical building features two such plaques (*Figure 1*), which present two very different, even conflicting, ideologies. As it turns out, we can as viewers be wildly ignorant about narratives being told in parallel within a same shared public space. The first plaque, which is written in Hungarian and dated 1888, uses a convoluted 19th-century style to tell the story of the House and is as much a memorial to Franz Joseph I of Austria (1830–1916) as it is to Matthias Corvinus.⁵ The second plaque is bilingual (Romanian and English) and suspiciously undated, although a coat of arms and the inclusion of the English language of all things suggests that the plaque might only date back to 1996 (Lukács 2005, 53) during the administration of a mayor who was explicitly Romanian nationalist. As we can see here, apps and maps that offer *lingua franca* translations and additional information about interventions in public domain would openly showcase parallel ideologies; they could also contribute to demystifying ethnic struggles and demonstrating that—just like other items in public

⁵ The inscription on the plaque reads: “Matthias the Just, son of Hunyadi János and Szilágyi Erzsébet, was born in this house on the 27th of March 1445. The mighty king, out of grace, has released the house in which he was born from every obligation. George II Rákóczi, Prince of Transylvania, has reinforced this privilege. Our Apostolic King, Franz Joseph the 1st has honoured this house with his visit on the 23rd of September 1887, and with a gracious donation made possible that it (the house) would be marked for eternal memory. This plaque is a herald of grace and reverence, placed by the owner (of the house), the free royal city of Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca), onto the birthhouse of its greatest son. 1888.”

spaces—statues, plaques and memorials are products of their time and should be viewed as such.

Finally, one of the greatest challenges in this project, which is also its greatest strength, is its multidisciplinary. The work touches on interconnected domains such as art history, sociology of the arts, memory studies, and public policy and brings them all together in what is ultimately a product and resource typical for the digital humanities. Until recently, however, it has been difficult in Romania to secure funding; since scholars tend to prefer working alone (Patraş 2022, 136) and within their academic disciplines, it has also been challenging to gather a much-needed research group willing to collaborate. As information continues to be added to the database, following ongoing crowdsourcing calls, the tasks of organizing, mapping and analyzing the dataset therefore seem increasingly daunting. There is still hope, as citizen-based science projects are currently being encouraged through a platform that will soon be launched by “Babeş-Bolyai” University. However, it remains to be seen how heritage and cultural-based projects will fare in that space and whether there is an interest for this particular initiative.

Annex 1: Figures



Figure 1: Two samples of plaques in Cluj-Napoca

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