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ИКС-ОКС С БУКУРЕШТАНСКИМ ГРАДИТЕЉСКИМ НАСЛЕЂЕМ

Апстракт

Булевар Уранус, познат и као Северозападна осовина, најоспораванији је урбанистички пројекат града Букурешта. Идеју за изградњу овог булевара дао је још 1936. краљ Карол II, да би 1986. Николај Чаушеску прихватио и потписао *Просторни план* који предвиђа исту трансформацију датог подручја. Предлог је усвојен и радови су отпочели у новембру 2010, под патронатом тадашњег градоначелника Букурешта. Од почетка пројекта до његовог завршетка 2011, срушено је 80 зграда, од којих је седам имало статус историјских споменика, а 1.000 људи исељено је из својих домова.

Одлуке локалних власти у складу с тадашњим законодавством оспорене су у румунским судовима много пута. Скупштина града Букурешта изгубила је већину тих спорова, док су остали још у току.

У нашем раду нећемо се бавити техничким детаљима или просуђивањем начина на који се све одиграло, већ ћемо изнети историјске податке и стварну ситуацију о једном од најважнијих подручја у том пројекту.

Циљ рада је да анализира утицај рушења области Бутешти–Берзеј–Уранус на град Букурешт с урбанистичке тачке гледишта (последике на промене градског ткива), из социјалне преспективе (колективно сећање и свест) и из архитектонског угла (промена опште атмосфере).

Намера нам је, дакле, да истакнемо важну улогу наслеђа у историји града и историјском памћењу заједнице.

Кључне речи: културно наслеђе, историјски споменици, градско ткиво, грађевинска регулатива, Букурешт

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PLAYING NOUGHTS AND CROSSES WITH THE BUCHAREST ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Abstract

The most disputed urban project in Bucharest is Uranus Boulevard, also known as the North-South axis. King Carol II first came up with this idea in 1936. In 1986, Nicolae Ceausescu approved and signed a Zonal Urban Plan for the same transformation in the area. The proposal was accepted and the works started in November 2010, under the auspices of the then Mayor of Bucharest. From the start of the project till the end in 2011, almost 80 buildings were demolished, out of which seven were historical monuments, and 1,000 people were resettled from their homes.

The decisions taken by local authorities in line with the legislation of that time were contested in Romanian courts in numerous trials, most of which were lost by the Bucharest Town Hall, while some litigations are still ongoing.

In our presentation, we are not going to give technical data or judge the way it all happened, but we are going to elaborate on the history and the actual situation of one of the most important and affected areas of the project.

The paper aims to analyze the impact of the demolition of Buzești–Berzei–Uranus area on the city of Bucharest from an urban point of view (consequences for the urban tissue), from a social perspective (collective memory and conscience), and from an architectural point of view (change of general atmosphere).

Therefore, we intend to highlight the important role of heritage in town history and historical memory of the community.

Keywords: cultural heritage, historic monuments, urban fabric, building regulations, Bucharest.

Introduction

The area in focus of this paper was created and developed with the spontaneous expansion of the city towards north. The demolished urban area was an important part of the early twentieth century history of Bucharest and had an atmosphere that directly reflected the general image of the city, which even today bears lingering traces of its organic development, unaided by clear legislation which could have protected its most valuable elements.

The study begins by pointing out the elements which influenced the evolution and development of the existent plots, continues by analyzing the buildings and identifying valuable elements, and ends by stating the reported conclusions of the performed urbanistic intervention.

The methodology used follows the definitions and identification of values which could have been protected – construction elements, spaces, architectural aesthetics, decorations and, by exclusion, those areas in which necessary interventions were possible both from an urbanistic point of view and by functionally emphasizing the existent built environment of the time and, by comparison, the existent situation.

In order to obtain this, the chosen substantiation sources were based on the existent and prior urban planning documents and relations thereof; cartographic plans/documents – the historic cartographic information was derived from varied sources, such as expert studies elaborated in different contexts, historic plans from different periods, administrative plans etc.; iconographic documents – historic photos mainly originating from the existing archives, books or the internet, as well as photos taken by the authors; written documents – a number of publications dealing with the area in question; and field research – field work was conducted to verify the existent relations between various components of the urban fabric.

The paper is based on a series of investigations started in 2010 by the Bucharest local self-government in order to broaden in the north-south direction the existent road system.

Historic analysis of the studied area

Identification on referential historic plans

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Bucharest developed in a spontaneous rather than planned way, using the tools of modern urbanism – a conglomerate of houses organized around parishes with representative churches as nuclei. This image evokes the legendary Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), as Dana Harhoiu, a renowned researcher of the urban history of the city, observed¹.

A traditional urban unit was called “mahala” – an array of houses located along more or less narrow streets, all grouped around a monastery, a nobleman’s residence, a parish house, a church, or a craftsmen guild, the members of which lived in the area. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Bucharest was divided into five color-coded areas or neighbourhoods: red, yellow, black, blue and green (the city center was in the red area)².



Figure 1. The studied area on Bucharest historic plans – The Boroczyn Plan 1847-1852, the Plan of the Military Geographic Institute 1895–1899, the Plan of the City of Bucharest, 1911. (Source: the library of Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism – electronic format)

The first half of the nineteenth century brought about a great change in the architectural design of the city, as a result of the increase in the number of engineers and architects successfully completing their studies, mostly in Paris. The nineteenth century was marked by the city's inclination towards occidental culture, in opposition to the eastern influence (mainly represented at the time by the Ottoman Empire), and by the penetration of European values in the city³. Some urban planning measures of those time proves this: dilapidated inns were demolished to make way for modern buildings, the street network was regulated, the Cismigiu garden was designed and partially built. Prof. Nicolae Lascu⁴ estimated that in 1846–1911 the central area of the city acquired its modern configuration and functionality; the current historical center has kept much of the urban planning interventions generated after the fire of 1847.

By analyzing relevant historic plans for the studied area, we can observe the historic evolution of the existent circulation routes, street network, urban tissue, and the architectural features which would define the outer boundary of the neighbourhood outside Bucharest's historic center, right until the beginning of the twentieth century. Until about mid-nineteenth century, the area was mainly a green one, with crops and orchards (the Borroczyn plan), with large lots and isolated buildings. On the next plans, the main street appears fully formed and, with small exceptions, it would keep the shape until the interventions in 2010–2011⁵.

We could see that the main roads in the area were built towards the end of the nineteenth century. The early appearance of street network is also illustrated by the ensuing efforts and regulation plans. The first approach to the north-south axis is presented in the Orăscu Plan (1893), which would be used in the interwar period for the extension and urban development of the city based on Haussmann's principles. Then we could observe the city as the subject of coherent development plans, with attempts to regulate the entire territory.

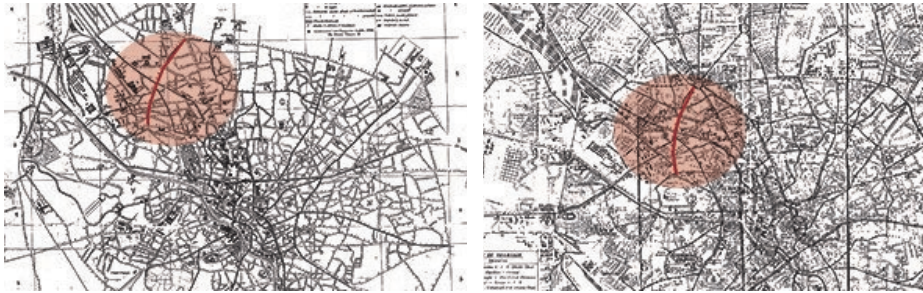


Figure 2. The studied area on Bucharest historic plans. Left: The Orășcu Plan (1893). Right: the General Urban Plan of the City of Bucharest, 1935 (Source: the library of Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism – electronic format)

Alexandru Orășcu deemed that the boulevard had a particular character of “administrative, speculative, and entertainment housing”.

The General Urban Plan (Planul General de Sistemizare) from 1921 was actually the last phase of a long process which started with the provisions of the City Housing Works Law (Legea Casei Lucrărilor Orașului) from 1894, and continued with the competition held in 1906 for the development of a Bucharest urban plan. We can say that his competition was an important moment in the urban planning of the city. For the first time the emphasis was on the search for innovative solutions for the entire city, instead on local interventions dictated by local issues.

Later, in 1919, the “father” of Romanian urban planning, engineer Cincinat Sfințescu, published „A study of the general urban plan of the capital, followed by a draft law on the establishment, construction, development and planning of communes”⁶, aiming at resolving the issues of the city boundaries and neighborhood delineation, which served as a basis for future urban plans.

In 1928 the Bucharest Urban Planning Committee was established, and talks and endeavors started on the necessity of specialty studies for the preparation of the new Bucharest urban plan.

These endeavors did not end with the General Urban Plan of 1935, which was not very clear, and only presented urbanistic concerns in a whole different ideology, in a different political regime, and different era of modern history.

Although created over 40 years apart, the two plans do not show great differences in planning the circulation routes in the analyzed area. The coherent drawing of the North-South circulation axis can be noticed, as well as new boulevards and streets and the extension and substantial growth of the built environment. The latter plan would be used and modified in the communist era and would become the basis for restructuring and demolishing in the focus of this paper.

Post WWII period was marked by restoration and reconstruction of the city after war damages and bombing. Damaged buildings were replaced and the new built in historic neighborhoods. The new communist authorities were interested in the extension of the city

and the construction of new residential neighborhoods for workers. The issue of comprehensive plan of the city was addressed once Nicolae Ceaușescu became the leader of the country in 1974, and established the Urban Planning, Housing and Communal Household Institute (Institutul de sistematizare, Locuințe și Gospodărie Comunală, based on an older institution which dealt with the planning of construction works and developing landscaping plans), specializing in national, regional and local urban planning projects and planning large public works. This institute would be in charge of many of the transformations suffered by Bucharest in those years.

The issue of the urban planning intervention in the studied area was also addressed, given the necessity to double the width of the already existing north-south road and demolish heritage buildings. This project was implemented 20 years later, when one of Bucharest mayors applied this plan.

Identification of cultural assets at the time of the urbanistic intervention

Historic monuments, local spirit, mixture of styles – historic and architectural landmarks – Berzei–Buzești section

Berzei Street was clearly outlined around 1800, when the construction of its defining buildings started, those that would give the particular character to the area and create its urban personality.

Back in 1911 plan we can identify the area as being completely changed and closer to a coherent urban image. Large lots disappeared, big boulevards were connected by streets, alignment and construction regulations start being applied. The area also developed due to the nearby Târgoviștei Railway Station (1872), later becoming the Northern Railway Station (1888), the main railway junction connecting Bucharest to the rest of the country.

Among the landmark constructions which shaped the aesthetic character of the area, there were some famous houses there in the pre-WWI period: C. Dumitrescu's house, D. Constantin's house, and painter Stoicescu's workshop (1885). A little later, in 1893, the well-known historian Constantin C. Giurescu also built a house there, at numbers 47–49, which was demolished in 1987. In a brief description of the street, he mentions that, from his point of view, the most valuable part of the street is between Știrbei Vodă and Calea Plevnei, the sector which could be considered to belong to the „traditional architectural heritage of the city.”

One of the remarkable constructions on the left front of the street was Rădulescu House, built in 1878 at the junction of Buzești Street and Griviței Road (the former Târgoviștei Road), in an eclectic style with neoclassical elements and rich ornamentation. The building was used as a theatre, which after WWII became Marna cinema, and was nationalized after 1948. In the 1950s, the building was named Feroviarul. It had a troubled history, and after being damaged by a fire in 1990, it fell into neglect, having only its original façades at the time it was demolished in 2010.

Perhaps the most controversial intervention was the Matache Hall, which not only had historic and architectural values, but was also memorial, social and cultural landmark of the community. Almost 150 years before, at the junction of Griviței Road and Buzești

Street, a butcher named Loloescu Matache opened up a shop which grew to become the center of the area, and over the years set the spirit of a typical community in a historic neighborhood, with family-owned workshops and shops in the spirit of the old Bucharest. Matache the Butcher started his business right after the Independence War (1877), when the entire area, situated at that time at the outskirts of the city, had a rapid urban development. In 1898, approximately ten years after it was opened, the butcher's was incorporated in a structure built by the municipal authorities of that time – Grivița Hall. For over 100 years, the reputation of merchants and the diversity of craftsmen who had their shops and workshops in this area turned Matache Hall in the strongest social nucleus of the neighborhood⁷.

Another building from the early twentieth century was the Marna Hotel, which had obvious art deco elements and added to the variety of styles and decorative elements in the area. Some of the buildings constructed in the interwar period had architectural value as well, and added to the area's eclectic image, such as the Bossel block of flats, built by engineer Prager and the Czechoslovakian textile factory, famous in the interwar period.

In the bombing on the April 4th, 1944, the area suffered major destruction but kept its character, and the ensuing interventions did not ruin or modify its urban image.

Even though the following period saw ever more aggressive urban planning interventions in the built environment (without any consideration of its value), the area was not significantly affected, with very few local exceptions (the inexplicable demolition of private houses). The area was included in the urban plans made after 1970, but wasn't modified until 1987, when the first big intervention was made in order to finalize the general image of Victoriei Square⁸.

If we examine the Historic Monuments' List from 2004,⁹ we can identify 14 historic monuments (at positions 408 to 413 and also 542 to 549) in Buzești and Berzei streets, mostly residential buildings with shops on the ground floor, but also Marna Hotel, Nicolae Iorga House, the house in which the most famous Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu lived, or Saint Nicolae Buzești Church, all from the second half of the nineteenth century or beginning of the twentieth century, an important period for building the character of the area. Out of these historic buildings, seven disappeared in the 2011 demolitions, together with another 80 buildings of ambience value, all situated along the right front of Uranus Boulevard.

In 5/2000 Law on the approval of the National Territory Design Plan, section III – protected areas, these are defined as "natural or built areas, geographically and/or topographically defined, which include natural and/or cultural heritage values and are declared as such in order to achieve the specific objectives towards the preservation of heritage values".

In 2006, the first delineation of the culturally valuable city parts was made, which preceded the operational definition of the protected built areas. The area in the focus of this study was a part of a territory fragment defined as valuable and in need of protection, from the street formation to the character of the area. So in this area the only permitted interventions were those which would preserve the street formation and enhance the existent character by increasing the quality of the built environment and urban image.¹⁰



Figure 3. The new proposed boulevard (Source: Map archive of the Library of Ion Mincu Bucharest University of Architecture and Urbanism, electronic format)

Moreover, the front building process and the spatial distribution of individual front façades as compared to the continuous fronts led to a coherent result reflecting the status of the area and its functional profile.¹¹

Comparative study of urbanistic plans for the North Railway Station –Matache–Berzei area

The 1935 urban plan, accessible online on several websites, gives a first big picture of Bucharest's development intentions that continued in the same direction for the next 80 or so years. It is interesting that at that time Berzei Street was meant to be widened and, most importantly, a new central ring was planned, as the city mostly ended on the present Ștefan Cel Mare – Mihai Bravu ring.

By comparing urban plans of the area (starting from the one from 1935 to the one from 1974 and further to the Zonal Urban Plan of 2010), we can say that the intervention was planned and studied in several instances, without consideration for the heritage values of the area.

Parts of the Bucharest General Urban Plan (P.U.G.) emphasize and show the solution proposed at the time of its creation (2000), disregarding legal provisions but merely indicating the development directions of this boulevard, with the intention to later develop detailed plans and proposals for its every section.

The Zonal Urban Plan ensued, envisaging demolition of the Berzei–Buzești section, for which the demolition permit was issued and even the government's decision passed, with all the properties to be affected by the construction of the new boulevard, which were expropriated. The approved Zonal Urban Plan (2006–2010) elaborates the proposal for the enlargement of the section and does not offer any alternatives to the demolition of the existing buildings on the right side of the boulevard section.¹² In conclusion, the



Figure 4. Current situation (Source: authors' archive, March 2021)

legislation concerning historic monuments and their preservation was not actually applied, and further demolitions were approved without discussion.

Conclusions: The cultural heritage of the area and its present transformations

As a result of research and the performed analysis of the obtained results, it is clear that the cultural potential of the area has been diminished with the elimination of irreplaceable historic buildings.

We can say that the interventions in the area has emphasized the broken image of the city and that the urbanistic intervention has improved the traffic flow and widened the streets, but has not added value to the urban tissue or the existing historic lots.

The part of the traffic artery which was outlined back in 1984 (when the block fronts facing the Victoriei Square were built) reflects a contrast between a traditional area with its charming two- to four-storied residential houses, and the newly added administrative and financial buildings, a rupture that generates a discrepancy between a traditional residential area with commercially used ground floors, and the newly proposed sky-scrapers.

The memory of the locals was affected by the destruction of a social hub concentrated around the well-known Grivița / Botescu / Ilie Pintilie Square (the latest during the communist regime), and later known as Botescu Square (following the 1989 revolution).

Notes

- 1 Harhoiu, D. *Bucharest – A City Between Orient and Occident*, Simetria, Bucharest, 1997, p. 34.
- 2 After 1840, the population of Bucharest greatly increased as a result of the great labor demand and multiple possibilities offered to the inhabitants of the impoverished countryside, who wanted to escape their feudal obligations.
- 3 Dușoiu, C, Lazăr, M. *Fires and the Transfiguration of Bucharest. Some Changes Brought by Fires in the Urban History of the City. Orthodox Churches and their Protection against Fire*, in the volume *Cultural Landscape, Architecture trends – 120 years of higher education in architecture* (original title "Peisaj Cultural, Arhitectură, Tendențe – 120 de ani de învățământ superior de arhitectură"), Ed. Universitară "Ion Mincu", Bucharest, pp 131–148.
- 4 Lascu, N, *Zonal Urban Plan – Area of Bucharest Historic Centre Phase I, 2002 – Implementation, Analysis, Diagnosis* (Romanian P.U.Z. Zona Centrului Istoric al Municipiului București, Etapa I, 2002, Actualizare, Analiză, Diagnoză).
- 5 As for the lots and built environment, the shrinking of lots and densification of construction resulted in the creation of almost continuous street fronts (1911 plan).
- 6 Sfințescu, C. *A study of the general urban plan of the capital, followed by a draft law on the establishment, construction, development and urban planning of communes* (original title *Studiu asupra planului general de sistematizare a capitalei, urmat de un anteproiect de lege asupra stabilirii, construirii, desvoltării și sistematizării comunelor*), Bucharest Municipality, Technical General Directorate, Bucharest, 1919, p. 35.
- 7 <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/istoria-incotro-a-disparut-si-hala-matache>
- 8 It was at that time that the part between Victoriei Square and Dr Felix and Sevastopol streets junction was demolished, as a starting point of an art project interesting to the authorities even as early as then. It is then that the houses with front and back yards and a rural appearance, as well as modest interwar buildings, were replaced with P+10 block of flats which bordered the southern front of Victoriei Square.
- 9 <https://patrimoniu.ro/images/lmi-2004/disparute.pdf>
- 10 *Zonal Urban Plan – P.U.Z. Protected Built Areas in Bucharest, Bucharest*, phase I, 1997 and Hanna D., *The cultural dimension of the metropolis. Delimitation of protected area study – PUG Bucharest-Phase I-1997* (original title *Dimensiunea culturală a metropolei. Studiul "Delimitarea zonelor protejate – PUG București – Etapa I – 1997*), in *Arhitext Design* no. 1/2000, pp 28–30.
- 11 Therefore, in addition to the old age of the fronts along the same roads and junctions which combine the territory arrangement with the cultural identity value, continuous fronts are notably concentrated around Haralambie Botescu Market and obviously around the junction between Berzei Street and Gri-vița Road, fitting into the general image of what is considered the original historic center of the city.
- 12 This demolition implicated downgrading – existent buildings in the area were stripped off their historic monument designation.