

## Building Urbanity in Bucharest

**Hanna Derer**

Dr. Habil., Professor, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest  
hanna\_derer@yahoo.com

Translation: Magda Teodorescu

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Too often has Bucharest been denied its urban character; it has been perceived (and still is, sometimes) as having less of a town and more of a village. Likely, one reason for this less flattering perception is the fact that it has always been compared to Central and Western European cities, in a biased manner.<sup>1</sup> For centuries forced to turn eastward, the Romanian capital longed for being part of the Western world. This state of mind makes the aforementioned comparison more understandable, while consolidating the automatic association with the common form of a central European city, able to confer a settlement its urbanity; the (past and present) nickname "little Paris" is only a proof in this respect.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, this point of view ignores the unavoidable irrelevance of any comparison between settlements differing with regard to their historic evolution up to modern times. In this specific case, it is meaningful to highlight the existence of two categories: on the one hand, settlements that have been defined for centuries by a surrounding defensive system, which has forced the tissue to increase its density and has required regulations able to control it; and, on the other hand, settlements without any rigid belt, which have had the opportunity to grow free of tangible limits, as well as of any other kind of regulatory restrictions regarding construction.<sup>3</sup> The frequent prejudice that occurs when these two categories are compared consists in considering the latter less urban because of the low density, as well as because its development is, or seems to be, completely random, spontaneous.<sup>4</sup> It is true that planned interventions are less visible within rarefied fabrics, because they are meant to shape larger and less homogenous spaces than in the case of denser settlements.

- 1 Some of the thoughts regarding the two types of settlements, as well as part of the case study concerning Mântuleasa Street are based on Hanna Derer "Modernizare, urbanizare occidentalizare? Cîte ceva despre devenirea oraşului Bucureşti" [Modernizing, Urbanizing, Westernizing? Some Remarks on the Growth of Bucharest], paper presented at the *Istorie, civilizație, cultură în spațiul românesc* [History, Civilisation, Culture within the Romanian Space] Summer School, Piteşti, July 5-7, 2013. Some of the historic data and information which form the background for Bucharest's evolution can also be found in Hanna Derer, "(Multi?) Cultural Bucharest: on Older and Newer Residential Areas in the capital of Romania," paper presented at the *Culture and Space in the Balkans. 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* international symposium, Thessaloniki, November 21-22, 2014 (the proceedings are expected to be published in winter 2016).
- 2 See "Bucureşti, micul 'ce'?" [Bucharest, the Little 'What?'] colloquium, organized by the board of the *Urbanismul – serie nouă* journal. The printed opinions, recorded by Maria Mănescu, "Bucureşti, micul 'ce'?" [Bucharest, the Little 'What?'], *Urbanismul – serie nouă* 3 (2009), suggest that even when Bucharest is no longer considered to be a kind of Paris, it should resemble cities in Central and Western Europe. Another interesting topic of the given panel consisted in viewpoint concerning the position of the inhabitants themselves with respect to the (new) identity of the capital.
- 3 Because Walachia has been controlled by the Ottoman Empire since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Bucharest has encountered difficulties in maintaining or, as the case might have been, in erecting a defensive system surrounding the whole settlement – see, for instance, Giuseppe Cinà, *Bucarest dal villaggio alla metropolis. Identità urbana e nuove tendenze* (Milano: Edizioni Unicopli, 2005), 32. As a consequence, lacking a tangible limit, the administrative border must also have been rather unstable – Joachim Vossen, *Bukarest. Die Entwicklung des Stadtraums* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag GmbH, 2004), 59.
- 4 On the existing, but less visible logic of such settlements see Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu, *Cetățile oraşelor. Apărarea urbană în centrul şi în estul Europei în Evul Mediu* [Fortified Towns. Urban Defense in Medieval Central and Eastern Europe] (Bucharest: Simetria, 2000).

It is precisely the case of Bucharest. The loose tissue, as it is represented in the main historic maps, even the ones dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the following one, is reasonably considered to be one of the most vital facets of the city's character ever since its birth.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the first building regulations in a proper sense appeared only in the 1830s; until around 1870 their role was mainly theoretical, as Romanian society came of age; their implementation became possible only after that time, and at a slow pace until the 1930s. As a consequence, the changes promoted by the regulatory instruments took built form, readable in the reality of Bucharest only afterwards and, even then, these can be noticed rather in the centre, an area that has always been denser than the rest of the city.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, there is no surprise that such settlements are denied their urban status, their urbanity, i.e. both their urban life and their capacity in possessing whatever belongs to a city.<sup>7</sup> At the time, this kind of denial was so natural that it underlaid even the writings of the most ardent admirers of Bucharest. An eloquent example in this respect is, among others, Ulysse de Marsillac, whose quill pen wrote, around 1860: "Bucharest is nothing else than the result of over-layered villages," stating that it was a huge entity, with irregular streets and contrasting edifices drowned in vegetation but, simultaneously able to charm in a peculiar way the stranger coming from profoundly different homelands.<sup>8</sup> Without losing anything of this attitude, one century and a half later, contemporaneity proves often more direct and concise, by the keyboard of a Romanian architect: "Today, when it celebrates 550 years of written records, Bucharest keeps the surprising unusual magic consisting in the refusal of urbanity."<sup>9</sup>

As charming, as surprising and as "less of a city", Bucharest seems to have resisted all attempts to change and is, therefore, the same as that of Ulysse de Marsillac. Apparently, this condition was maintained until World War I, at least in the vision of Felix Sima, the character used by his creator, the writer G. Călinescu, to describe a real street (the old Antim Street) as follows: "All courtyards, of the church in particular, were indeed filled with old trees, just as all courtyards used to be in the large village the capital was by then."<sup>10</sup> According to Călinescu, the shift from "the village" to the "the capital" took place by way of the ideal town conceived by another of his heroes, the architect Ioanide, who starts to imagine this other Bucharest in the Interbellum, when, generally speaking, flesh and blood architects did take the responsibility for this transformation.<sup>11</sup>

What would be, in their opinion, the suitable reason of this process? Stagnation in a non-urban shape and life. "We believe that, today, we are still arrested in the same phase," stated the architect Octav Doicescu, pinpointing the urban family house that, in his opinion, was nothing else than

5 Vossen, *Bukarest*, 97.

6 Nicolae Lascu, "Legislație și dezvoltare urbană. București 1831 – 1952" [Legislation and Urban Development. Bucharest 1831 – 1952] (PhD diss., "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, 1997), 351-366.

7 urbanity / noun ... 2 Urban life ... Origin / Mid 16<sup>th</sup> century: from French *urbanité* or Latin *urbanitas*, from *urbanus* 'belonging to the city' ...: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/urbanity>, accessed June 17, 2015.

8 Ulysse de Marsillac, "Ghidul călătorului la București" [The Travellers Guide to Bucharest], in *Bucureștiul în veacul al XIX-lea* [Bucharest During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century], edited by Adrian-Silvan Ionescu (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1999), 108 (quote), 110 (the paraphrased description) (first published in 1877).

9 Mihai Pupăzan, "De la 'Orașul lui Bucur' la metropolă" [From 'Bucur's Town' to the Metropolis], *Urbanismul – serie nouă* 3 (2009): 66.

10 G. Călinescu, *Enigma Otiliei* [*Otilia's Enigma*] (Chișinău: Litera Internațional, 2001), 11 (first published as such in Bucharest, 1938).

11 According to Mariana Celac, "B. Ioanide (1887-1968). L'homme et l'oeuvre; Dossier de travaux de B. Ioanide 1914-1946. De la villa aux candélabre à la ville cardinale; Dossier de travaux de B. Ioanide 1946-1968. Réalisations architecturales dans le style socialiste," *Secolul 21. Spécial Bucarest – Paris* special issue (2013) (sidenotes of the quoted article), the first stage of the ideal town conceived by the architect Ioanide could have started in 1932 (Ibid., 168). The same source suggests parallels between this character (of the novels "Scrinul negru" [The Black Cabinet] and "Bietul Ioanide" [Poor Ioanide], published, respectively, in 1953 and in 1965) and certain leading architects of the interwar and postwar times in Romania, such as G. M. Cantacuzino, Horia Creangă, Duiliu Marcu and Octav Doicescu; the latter is mentioned even more often. For the more or less virtual creation of G. Călinescu's hero see also Ana Maria Zahariade, "Cine e B. Ioanide?" [Who Is B. Ioanide?], *Secolul 21. Spécial Bucarest – Paris* special issue (2013).

the prototype of the rural house in a different shape<sup>12</sup> and thus suggesting that Bucharest is not a genuine city. From the point of view of the architect Horia Creangă, this situation is also due to “the anarchy of the so-called styles that one can see in the streets of Bucharest.”<sup>13</sup> The solution? Planning, firm regulations and strict (geometric) control! Marcel Iancu, the other well-known modernist of the period, wrote: “Only barbarian eras, – those of the dark Middle Ages and the architecturally unfortunate 19<sup>th</sup> century have not acted by means of geometry. The therefore randomly grown cities mean a reduced human consciousness and art [...] We now live days of authentic formation: times of directives. [...] It’s the decisive hour for the skeleton, for the geometrical foundation [...] of Bucharest. Where is the iron fist, the visionary mind and the daring power that we imperiously require [...]?”<sup>14</sup>

Many other examples attest that the active architects in the interwar period (and with them the public opinion as well) proclaimed the absolute superiority of the severe geometric order against the irregularity born out of natural growth and, as a consequence, the superiority of the city with a strictly regulated evolution and planned to the utmost over the one with a rather spontaneous development or subjected to minimal planned corrections. Planning was called in to solve the “randomness” of Bucharest through geometry and stylistic control. In fact, this view was shallow and certainly biased by an image which did not correspond to planners’ “ideal” of a city; what they blamed, i.e. the absence of urban rationale of these spontaneous developments, had no real support. An attentive study of the evolution of many streets in Bucharest could testify in this regard.

The following pages will try to identify the discreet rationale that substantiates the more or less spontaneous developments of two streets in Bucharest. Unfortunately, this aspect can no longer be studied in the case of Antim Street, since it was destroyed (as were many other old streets) by the 1980s demolitions meant to turn Bucharest into a communist city.<sup>15</sup> To remain in the realm of literature, Mântuleasa Street, another old street made famous by Mircea Eliade’s fiction,<sup>16</sup> proves to be, even at a first glance, an eloquent case study for those qualities Bucharest had defined and cultivated starting with the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The urban importance of Mântuleasa Street has increased along with the growth of the whole settlement; consequently, the meaning of the images it (still) offers cannot be understood unless interpreted against the background of this process.<sup>18</sup>

12 Octav Doicescu, “Spiritul arhitecturii bucureștene” [The Spirit of Bucharest’s Architecture], in *Către o arhitectură a Bucureștilor* [Toward an Architecture of Bucharest], edited by Asociația pentru urbanistica Bucureștiului (no place: Editura ziarului Tribuna Edilitară, 1935), 35.

13 Horia Creangă, “Anarhia stilurilor și arta viitorului” [Anarchy of Styles and Art of the Future], in *Către o arhitectură a Bucureștilor* [Toward an Architecture of Bucharest], edited by Asociația pentru urbanistica Bucureștiului (no place: Editura ziarului Tribuna Edilitară, 1935), 23.

14 Marcel Iancu, “Utopia Bucureștilor” [Bucharest’s Utopia], in *Către o arhitectură a Bucureștilor* [Toward an Architecture of Bucharest], edited by Asociația pentru urbanistica Bucureștiului (no place: Editura ziarului Tribuna Edilitară, 1935).

15 On Mitropolit Antim Ivireanul Street before the brutal interventions from the ninth decade of the last century, as related to the destroyed urban space in order to make room for the communist symbols consisting in the House of the People (today the Palace of Parliament) and the Victory of Socialism Boulevard (nowadays, the Unirii Boulevard) see Șerban Bonciocat, Hanna Derer, and Corina Popa, *București demolat. Arhive neoficiale de imagine* [Demolished Bucharest. Unofficial Archive Images] (Bucharest, Fundația Ines, 2013), 204-205.

16 Mircea Eliade, “Pe strada Mântuleasa” [Along Mântuleasa Street], in Mircea Eliade, *În curte la Dionis* [In Dionysus’ Courtyard] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1981). Unfortunately (but understandably) the translations in English and in French (“The Old Man and the Bureaucrats,” respectively “Le vieil homme et l’officier”) didn’t use the streets name as part of the titles.

17 Mântuleasa Street has been chosen as a case study for several reasons. It belongs to the same type as the Antim Street, both having developed as locally significant traffic ways through residential areas, while linking commercial main routes of the whole settlement; the street has become a powerful landmark as it has been the subject of literary fiction.

18 The following remarks on the historic evolution of Mântuleasa Street, as well as on its cultural significance are based upon Hanna Derer, Radu Nicolae, and Simina Stan, “Imobilul din strada Mântuleasa numărul 17, București. Identificarea resursei culturale prin prisma aspectelor esențiale din evoluția istorică. Studiu de fundamentare pentru intervenții viitoare” [The Property in 17 Mântuleasa Street, Bucharest. Identification

Its recorded beginnings coincide with the end of the long period when Bucharest has developed without restraints.<sup>19</sup> In spite of this lack of planning, the trajectory of the street has not been established randomly. According to a 1852 map,<sup>20</sup> the street is part of a street pattern closely connected with the commercial (and once political) core, known as Piața Mare (the main marketplace). From this place, two structural axes (Moșilor Road and Călărași Road) form a “wishbone” shape while heading respectively to the northeast and to the east.<sup>21</sup> (Fig.1) They are parts of the radial-concentric street-system of the city.

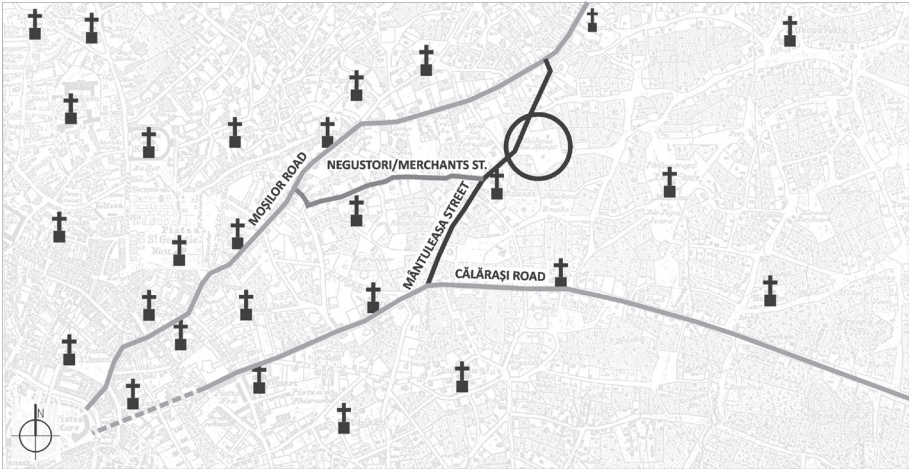


Fig. 1: Bucharest in 1852 – from the settlement's core to the eastern limit. The “trident” consisting in Moșilor Road, Călărași Road and, in between, Negustori Street, while the first two are linked by Mântuleasa Street, which is also serving the Maidan of Murat; the density difference between the tissue west of Mântuleasa Street and that on its eastern side is clearly indicated by the number of parish churches

As the distance between the two roads increases while moving away from the centre, “at the right time and in the proper place,” a third street (Negustori Street) branches out and turns the “wishbone” into a “trident”, thus contributing to a better “irrigation” of the fabric. In those times, the street sprung in the vicinity of the trade heart of Bucharest, inhabited by members of the community significant enough to be mentioned on the map. Towards its eastern end, Negustori Street got lost among modest plots and buildings, precisely in the area it crossed Mântuleasa Street. This is not a simple coincidence; most probably, Mântuleasa Street played the quite important role of linking and thus reinforcing the basic “wishbone” pattern. Simultaneously, it had to act as a kind of border between what was considered the “inner” part of the settlement and its outskirts. This second role is clearly shown in the 1852 map that represents a western area vigorously drained by traffic ways and served by numerous churches, and an eastern area by far less intensely packed. Therefore, it is possible to say that Mântuleasa Street, though further from the central area than Negustori Street, had the position of a locally structural axis. This is strongly suggested by the land division and the buildings, obviously more representative (plot and/or edifice size) and also by the presence of a cynosure, the *maidan*,<sup>22</sup> an important landmark for the local public life, able to enrich considerably the functional profile of the street.

of the Cultural Resource through the Lens of the Historic Evolution. Substantiation Study for Future Interventions] (Bucharest, 2012).

19 Nicolae Lascu, *Bulevardele bucureștene până la primul război mondial* [Bucharest's Boulevards until WWI] (Bucharest: Simetria, 2011), 12.

20 Rudolf Arthur von Borroczin, Map of Bucharest, 1852.

21 This paper only uses the current street names, regardless of any possible former denominations.

22 Maidan ... *n. Anglo-Indian* an open area or space in or near a town, often used as a market place or parade ground - (Webster's Dictionary, 1994), 864.



As a proof to its importance (be it only local), in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mântuleasa Street was subject to an early alignment plan, dating from 1868,<sup>23</sup> which most likely remained only on paper. But it was soon followed by the second one (approved between 1889 until 1896 by Royal Decree), which was implemented.<sup>24</sup> The two regulations mirror the transition from the first regulatory stage of the city to the second, which means the transition from ideas to implementation.

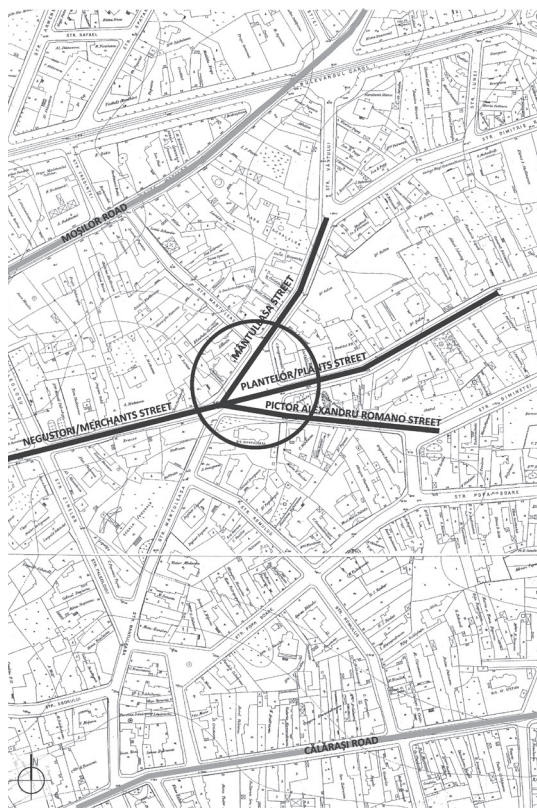


Fig.2: Bucharest in 1911 – along Mântuleasa Street. The former Maidan of Murat was turned into a square and became the origin of a second "trident" consisting in Mântuleasa Street, Plantelor Street and Pictor Alexandru Romano Street

areas of the town, as these areas are divided by Mântuleasa Street. This smoother flow was even more necessary because, in the meantime, due to growth ensuing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the built density on the two sides of the street had been evened; the street was no longer the border it used to be. This is clearly shown not only by the prolongation of Negustori Street

It is important to emphasize that the new document did not foresee brutal interventions, meant to radically change the tissue, but quite the opposite. In line with the practice of the time, the alignment regulation contains strictly the elements required to ease traffic, by then probably busier and faster. Hence, the plan provides adjustments of the excessive sinuosity of the street layout, and alignments on both sides of the street in order to maintain its constant width; at the same time it manages to intrude on private properties as little as possible. In fact, the 1896 regulation stipulates neither the position of the buildings with respect to the sidewalks nor their heights, as it does not specify other elements that usually define the "building regime",<sup>25</sup> or the style of edifices; it rather represents a minimal set of corrections.

In any case, the given stipulations were applied and, therefore, one can partially see them in the historic plan drawn between 1895 and 1899.<sup>26</sup> The results of the changes are summarized in the 1911 historic map of Bucharest.<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 2) By that time, the former *maidan* was already modernized into a square (in the Western sense of the word), ensuring a fluent transit from the western to the eastern

23 National Archives of Romania, Bucharest section. "Bucharest City Hall – Alignments" document stock, file 27/1868, The Alignment of Mântuleasa Street.

24 National Archives of Romania, Bucharest section. "Bucharest City Hall – Alignments" document stock, file 240/1883-1896, The Alignment of Mântuleasa Street.

25 Some of these elements, including building height, were comprised within the so-called "Regulation for buildings and alignments", a legal document adopted for Bucharest in 1878, 1890, 1928 and 1939, its provisions being progressively refined from one edition to the next (Lascu, "Legislație", 79-91, 93-100, respectively, 123-144, 154-180).

26 The Geographical Institute of the Army. Map of Bucharest, 1895-1899.

27 \*\*\*, The map of Bucharest 1911.



Fig.3: The north-western side of Mântuleasa Street, between number 17 and 23, a discontinuous, low front and therefore one of a rather rural nature

Fig.4: The south-eastern side of Mântuleasa Street, namely 2 Romulus Street, 18 and 16 Mântuleasa Street, a continuous, high(er) front than the opposite one

to the east (Plantelor Street), but also by the transformation of the new square into a node and of the “wishbone” crossroad into a “trident”. One can say that the planners had considered the “traditional” formula of the spontaneous development good enough and thus worth repeating. The correctly planned irrigation of the developing tissue was consequently achieved by means of



minimal interventions, using the experience of centuries of spontaneous growth. To this purpose, two old roads and one new have been employed (respectively, Mântuleasa Street, Negustori Street, and prolongation to east of the latter, Plantelor Street).

It is interesting to notice the simultaneous development of the built fronts of the street, which accompanied the transformation of the street network. This development presents paradoxical aspects, but very meaningful in this context. The first visible aspect is the difference between the two street fronts. The northwestern front (Fig. 3) is mainly discontinuous, low-rise and, according to the prevalent opinion of the time, quite of a “rural nature”. Still, it presents a coherent, ordered continuity in the way houses are positioned in relation to the public domain, even if most house-imprints date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to the first decade of the following one. Concurrently, the southeastern front (Fig. 4), which is rather semi-continuous and decidedly higher, displays the buildings far less orderly, even though most of them are erected later, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Fig. 5) This particular condition contradicts the theoretical hypothesis according to which the urban image resulted from planning is more coherent than the image of a spontaneous development. In the case of Mântuleasa Street, the old front is definitely more ordered than the newer one, though the latter took shape in a more regulated Bucharest. (Fig. 3 and 4). Paradoxically, the unconstrained, “random Bucharest” proves at least as logic as the regulated

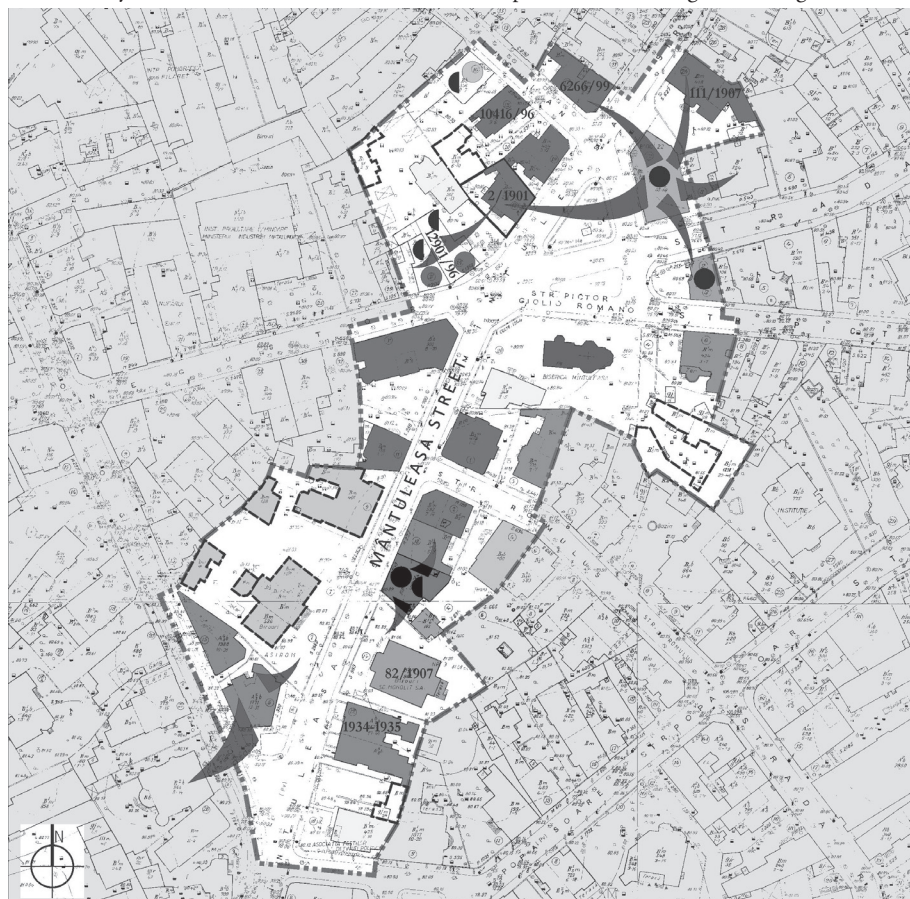


Fig.5: Along Mântuleasa Street – styles and heights. As the church shows byzantine like influences and components specific to the Brâncoveanu Style from the turn of the 17th to the 18th century, the dwellings are much younger (neoclassical, neobaroque, eclectic, neoromanian, inter-war houses with Art Deco elements, late post-war ones). The disturbing height differences are shown by means of the black curved arrows, with the base drawn on the higher building.

one, which means that it is as urban as the regulated Bucharest – if attributes as order, geometry, stylistic unity characterize a “real” city.

Apart from this immediately visible aspect, the “random Bucharest” was also blamed for another non-urban feature: the “sin” of low building density, consisting in ground floor family homes, built as isolated or adjoined buildings with gardens (rowhouses are very rare). This particular feature, frequently and ambiguously remarked by the travelers, conferred the city the character of a “village”, though granting it a specific charm. Under such circumstances, and according to their urban ideal, the Interbellum planners set to correct the “rural” character by creating on a segment of Mântuleasa Street a continuous front with much higher buildings (six stories in 1935, compared to mostly ground floor until WW I). By doing so, the designers of that time also accepted, happily or carelessly, the risk of producing violent fractures in the skyline and in the perception of the fronts (Fig. 4 and 5). As far as density was part of their vision regarding a “(Western) European capital-city” (i.e. modern, uniform, regulated), there was much to be done. Thus, during that period the building height surpassed by far the maximum height of the older houses. Yet, in many cases, this dramatic change managed not to be too aggressive with regard to the old setting. This is the case of the tenement house at 12 Mântuleasa Street (Fig. 6), which despite its obviousness (volume, height, and mass) is not intruding too violently into the public space, due to its recess from both the neighboring buildings and the sidewalk. The success of the number 12 property (Fig. 5) was specifically possible on the expense of the use of the whole plot. This kind of “sacrifice” also means discouraging any intention of building another segment of continuous street front, which is more sensitive to height variations, as testified by the northern neighboring plots.

However, the key of the intervention also resides in the qualities of the spontaneously emerged and developed fabric, which proves fairly flexible, ready to integrate a way of building different from its original typology and simultaneously robust enough to set an example. Essentially, one can say that the planned intervention adopted a feature specific to the spontaneous development, contributing thus to an optimum cooperation between the two, which eventually resulted in an original identity expressed by the images any passer-by can perceive. Interestingly enough, in this same segment of the front random geometry of the alignment – which is another outcome of the



Fig.6: Along Mântuleasa Street – non disturbing height differences. 14 and 12 Mântuleasa Street





Fig.7: Along Mântuleasa Street – disturbing height differences. 18, 16 14 Mântuleasa Street unrestricted distribution of isolated architectural objects – has as little impact on the streetscape as the height variations. (Fig. 5)

In brief, here in Mântuleasa Street, “rural” Bucharest is the one that has provided the necessary means to triple the building density without ruining its initial charm, visual comfort and character, as they are defined by the rarefied fabric and the plenty of green of the so-called “village”. (Fig. 7) Due to the flexibility of both spontaneous and planned development, Bucharest managed to avoid violent collisions between the densifying models specific to Western cities and the particular, old character of its own. In this example (as in many other parts of the city), the “blamed Bucharest” succeeded in preserving and, concurrently, in enhancing its identity. Being challenged by such examples one may inevitably ask: why should things have been otherwise?

This question becomes all the more relevant that other qualities of the spontaneous evolution seem to have been recognized as such and used by the planned development. This can also be demonstrated in the cases of more important streets than Mântuleasa. The analysis of an area around a segment of Dorobanți Road (the southern part) is an eloquent example in this respect.<sup>28</sup> As to its urban importance, Dorobanți Road belongs to another category than Mântuleasa Street. While the latter is a locally significant structural axis of a residential area, the first is a main thoroughfare for the whole northeastern quadrant of Bucharest, therefore it is important for the entire city. Thus, the urban fabric has known a particular dynamic through which the whole area has profoundly changed its profile, also by means of a densification. Since its spontaneous beginnings and up to the later stages, when it was partially regulated through planning instruments, the area testifies to a continuous increase in density and height, corresponding to its growing importance in the city.

<sup>28</sup> This case study is based on Hanna Derer, Radu Nicolae, and Simina Stan, “Imobilul din Calea Dorobanți numărul 32, București. Identificarea resursei culturale prin prisma aspectelor esențiale din evoluția istorică. Studiu de fundamentare pentru intervenții viitoare” [The Property in 32 Dorobanți Road, Bucharest. Identification of the Cultural Resource through the Lens of the Historic Evolution. Substantiation Study for Future Interventions] (Bucharest, 2015).

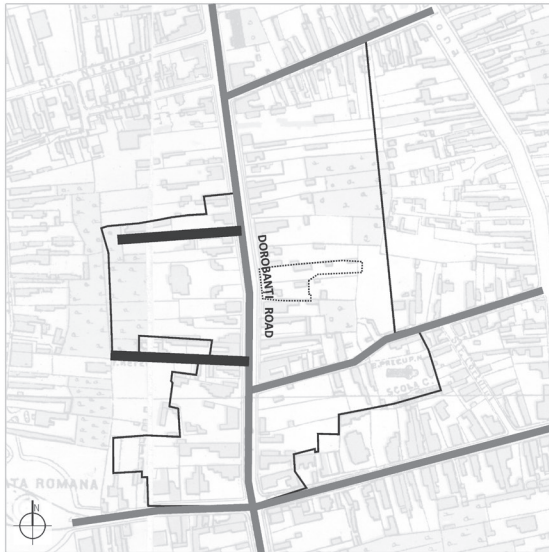
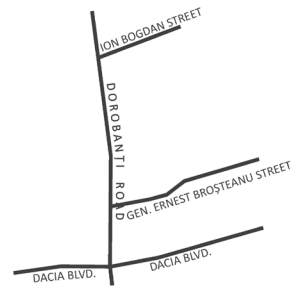


Fig.8: Bucharest in 1852 – along Dorobanți Road

Fig.9: Bucharest in 1895 – 1899 – along Dorobanți Road

As attested by the 1846 map of Bucharest updated in 1852<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 8), until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the area was situated in a marginal position (close to an old custom barrier of the city), was used for agricultural purposes and was crossed by only four streets, developed spontaneously. During the second half of the same century (Fig. 9) the importance of the area grew due to the proximity of the newly cut North-South axis of the city (situated west of Dorobanți Road). As a consequence, the street network developed by means of two dead ends, while the built density

<sup>29</sup> Rudolf Arthur von Borroczin, Map of Bucharest, 1846 and Rudolf Arthur von Borroczin, Map of Bucharest, 1852.



Fig. 10: Bucharest in 1911 – along Dorobanți Road

Fig. 11: Along Dorobanți Road – the historic evolution of the street net and of the plots. The traffic routes have evolved in five different stages i.e. before the mid-19th century (dark green), between the mid-19th century and its end, between the end of the 19th century and 1911, between 1911 and 1933 and between 1933 and 1938. The plots date back to the second half of the 19th century and the period after 1911 but with regard to their side limits the area is by far more assorted: there are side limits older than the mid-19th century, such that have been first established in its second half, others dating back to the period between the end of the 19th century and 1911 as well as several defined as such after 1911.

augmented considerably. In less than five decades, the western front of Dorobanți Road, initially very loosely built, reached the same density as the opposite side.<sup>30</sup> The densifying process must have been so intense that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the originally huge urban block

<sup>30</sup> The Geographical Institute of the Army. Map of Bucharest, 1895-1899.



in the east of the road was divided by a street, cut in 1903<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 10). As the archive documents testify, the operation was carefully planned: a perfectly rectilinear route that closely follows the rear sides of the older plots. It is obvious that the planners recognized the sustainability of the spontaneous fabric and used its potential. The second newest street in the neighborhood, west of Dorobanți Road, cut between 1911 and 1933,<sup>32</sup> took form in a similar way, as did the regular route of the newest street shown for the first time only in the 1938 map of Bucharest.<sup>33</sup> They conclude the growth of the street network, which also established a hierarchy.

According to that hierarchy, alignment plans were conceived, yet not all were put into effect. Their chronology shows that Dorobanți Road was gradually granted a higher status, as the first alignment plans for it date back to 1866 and the latest to 1889. For the two other streets existing at the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the planning concepts were issued in 1869, while the third had to wait until 1888. At the same time, one of the dead ends was not taken into consideration before 1925.<sup>34</sup>

The hierarchy of the streets is also confirmed by the historical evolution of the plots, which acquires a particular significance. In this respect, it is not the “absolute” age of the plots, as defined by the date of the overall perimeter, which is meaningful, but the chronology established by the dynamics of their side borders, since this division induces the rhythm of the street fronts and finally their image. As resulted from the analyses of these aspects, it becomes clear that Dorobanți Road is the dominant thoroughfare, and its representativeness increases over time. The chronology of the plot division mirrors this process developed in two distinct phases. (Fig. 11)

The first phase took place in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and consisted in numerous divisions of the large farming plots, so that instead of vineyards and orchards, buildings were erected. The second phase occurred at the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, once the limits of the city grew further away<sup>35</sup> and the area became more central. In this context, Dorobanți Road was ready to assume a representative role within its new street network, albeit at a local level. As a consequence, the plot density is reduced by means of unifying certain plots in order to allow the erection of new, representative building types. Throughout this process, many of the former lateral limits, dating back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were reinstated; this fact leads to an enhancement of the cultural identity value of the fabric.

The new status of Dorobanți Road is also readable in the varied geometry of alignments in a particular way. This geometry visibly contrasts the regularity of frontages, which testifies for an early and decisive stability of the borders between the private and public domains, thus confirming Dorobanți Road dominant position. Quite the opposite, the “turmoil” of the alignments seems to suggest a secondary, subordinate position, which is very likely, since buildings’ withdrawal from the public domain is a phenomenon that started in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when that area began to change its profile.<sup>36</sup> It is highly possible for the irregularity of the alignments to be caused precisely by the representation function Dorobanți Road was assigned during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the two first decades of the following one. This role has been expressed in the beginning by residences, a type of dwelling that involved a *cour d’honneur* and/or a representation

31 National Archives of Romania, Bucharest section. “Bucharest City Hall – Alignments” document stock, file 503/1903, The Alignment of Vodă Caragea Street.

32 \*\*\*, The map of Bucharest 1911, and, respectively, Constantin Teodorescu, The map of Bucharest, 1933.

33 Ulisse Simboreanu, The map of Bucharest 1938.

34 National Archives of Romania, Bucharest section. “Bucharest City Hall – Alignments” document stock, files: 213/1866, The Alignment of Dorobanți, respectively 159/1889, The Alignment of Dorobanți, 358/1869, The Alignment of Precupeți, 194/1869, The Alignment of Fetei, and respectively 175/1888, The Alignment of Romană.

35 Through an act called *Lege pentru mărginirea Bucureștilor* [Law for Bordering the City of Bucharest], published on May 14, 1895.

36 Likewise, one may assume that buildings were recessed from the street line due to their height, a fact also sustained by all building and alignment regulations drawn for Bucharest until WWII, regulations that stipulated that one could surpass the height regime, provided the building withdrew from its alignment (Lascu, “Legislație”, 289-293).



Fig. 12: Along Dorobanți Road – historic stages. 34, 32, 30 and 20-28 Dorobanți Road

Fig. 13: Along Dorobanți Road – disturbing height differences. 36-42 Dorobanți Road, known as the “Zodiac Block” and 34 Dorobanți Road

garden, both requiring a vacant space between the sidewalk and the edifice. This stage is clearly reflected by the successive images of the site (Fig. 12), where the information communicated by the position of the buildings with respect to the street is coherent with the front discontinuity, deriving from the fact that the residences of the epoch were isolated edifices, with ground floor, first floor and attic, reaching around 12 meters at the cornice and around 15 meters at the ridge. Certainly, this building regime leads to the low density that was highly disregarded in the interwar period, when planning strategies aimed at densification.

This is probably the reason for placing the tenement building known as “Zodiac Building” (Fig. 13) directly on the border between the public domain and the private property, occupying the whole width of the plot. As a manifesto for an efficient exploitation of the land, the building rises up to 23 meters with its first cornice and up to 35 meters with its recessed levels. The statement of change is expressed first by the function of the “Zodiac”, since it symbolized the new type of dwelling – the comfortable, fully equipped apartment in a tenement. And, according to the planning of the interwar period, the apartment building was supposed to replace the family home to a great extent. In brief, the “Zodiac” stands for a new dwelling type of high standard (that includes the representative function), which was meant to confer Dorobanți Road, by that time an already eight decades old major landmark in Bucharest, the representativeness that the residences had granted it previously.



Fig. 14: Along Dorobanți Road – non disturbing height differences. 32, 30 and 20-28 Dorobanți Road

At least theoretically, it can be said that the gesture that gave birth to the “Zodiac Building” is both natural and logical. Still, it is equally true that the kind of tissue it created collides with the older one. The specific fabric produced during the historical evolution of the area consisted in a system defined by the broken street front, recessed low-rise buildings and green spaces. The new one was expected to create a continuous front. Thus, the contiguity of the two types of fabric is rather abrupt, lacking a larger lateral buffer space. (Fig. 14) As a consequence, the indifferent and high blind wall becomes significant and also very obvious. There is no space between the “Zodiac Building” and the low residence in the vicinity, as there is no articulation of the high lateral wall, meant to optically attenuate the typological differences, as it happened for instance in the case of 12 Mântuleasa Street. (Fig. 13)

Most probably, such cases are culturally valuable in themselves, no matter if they are interpretable. But they are also important for defining, as precisely as possible, any settlement's capacity to absorb change without losing its genuine identity; and this knowledge should be used as such for future developments.

In the case of Bucharest, as it was illustrated by the two examples, a significant side of its uniqueness consists in the transition from a spontaneous development to planning in the context of its rapid modernization. Here, this process did not materialize in sharp layers, in which the retrospective glance can clearly distinguish each historic horizon, unmistakably separated from



the others. In Bucharest the initially loose, relaxed fabric has allowed for a real merging of the different stages, which might represent a form of plurivocal identity that has been always present and always asserted, even if unpleasant for some or fascinating for others.

"The city of Bucharest looks like a large village; here and there, the houses are separated from another by endless gardens. If you take it as model, you can define the limit between the Eastern and the Western cities; since Bucharest has something from both of these." wrote, in 1841, the abbot Domenico Zanelli, writer and journalist.<sup>37</sup> Fifteen years later, the newsman Ferdinand Lasalle confessed: "I have probably seen no other city of such an unusual nature, belonging to a strange species and that astonishing."<sup>38</sup>

But none of those who described Bucharest as a village has really denied its status as a city, thus accepting implicitly that the quality of a city can exist in its a loose fabric, resulted from a mainly spontaneous historic evolution. Urbanity, Bucharest seems to show, can take more shapes than one can ever imagine. And this leaves us with the question: Why do we want Bucharest to be denser and higher by all means?

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