Urbanity and Civil Society.
The Rise of a New Urban Generation in Bucharest during the 2000s

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Motto:

"The right to the city is […] far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the process of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is […] one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."[1]

(David Harvey, 2008)

Urbanity and Civility

We inherit the modern definition of civil society from G.W. Hegel, who discusses the question of association of individuals in the part dedicated to Ethical Life of his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821).[2] For Hegel, ethical life – *Sittlichkeit* – is marked by the intertwined relations between family life, civil society and the state. He defines civil society as

"[the] association of members as self-subsistent individuals in a universality which, because of their self-subsistence, is only abstract. Their association is brought about by their needs, be the legal system…and by an external organization for attaining their particular and common interests."[3]

The idea of common interest and participation, as well as the ethical dimension of the civil society are features that have been largely commented by social sciences scholarship – where especially the trait of associability has been understood to create trust and solidarity within groups.[4]

An important moment for the current understanding of the civil society has been the German debate upon the actuality of the term *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* versus the *Zivilgesellschaft*,[5] indicating a more involved, participatory dimension. Participation is an essential quality of civil society today. What interests me is to address this participatory dimension in looking at the urban

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1 David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23-40.

2 *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821). Translated to English in G.W. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3 Hegel, *Elements*, 157.

4 Robert Putnam (ed.). *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

5 Gerometta, Julia, Hartmut Häussermann, and Giulia Longo. "Social Innovation and Civil Society in Urban Governance: Strategies for an Inclusive City." *Urban Studies* 42, 11 (October 2005): 2007-2021; Enquete-Kommission, Zukunft der Buergershaftlichen Engagements (ed.), *Bürgergesellschaftliches Engagement und Zivilgessellschaft* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 2001).

question itself: the part of public life that directly addresses the common interests of the city and of the citizens. This might remind Jean-Jacques Rousseau's statement about the relations between the city (cité) and its citizens: "la plupart prennent une ville pour une cité et un bourgeois pour un citoyen. Ils ne savent pas que les maisons font la ville et les citoyens la cité."[6]

We may then say that there has always been a direct connection between civil society[7] and urbanity. The name itself has its origins in the Latin *civilitas* – civility, initially the quality of being a citizen – later with a broader sense, involved in the quality of *urbanity*. Whether it defined life in Rome, manners, politeness, elegance, the trajectory of the concept of urbanity describes, historically, "a moral quality of that which belongs to the city."[8]. American sociologist Louis Wirth even defined, in a famous text from 1938 "urbanity as a way of life."[9]

Participation in the public life and in the issues regarding the construction of the city itself is a question of utmost actuality, in reclaiming something that David Harvey named, following Lefebvre, "the right to the city: one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."

My paper intends to discuss the relations between civil society and the gradual construction of a new urban awareness in Bucharest. Timidly starting at the beginning of the 2000s, this conscience became more and more present especially after 2010, in the context of some radical urban changes but also linked to the appearance of a young, hip, educated, western-oriented middle-class, more and more concerned for the fate of the city and the new urbanity it describes.

Context

In order to discuss the growing implication and interest of the civil society in issues directly linked to urban problems and indirectly addressing urbanity, I will first draw the Bucharest context, in describing a few cases of buildings and demolitions that triggered public attention. These cases are representative of the new corporate architecture in Bucharest, and at the same time stand for both the corruption in the municipal offices (which issue illegal construction permits that affect the historical substance of the city) and the questionable decisions (in terms of collective profit and public good) of the city´s administration. The examples that I chose to discuss here are among the most visible ones, in terms of urban impact and economic or political agendas. But Bucharest during the last quarter of a century has been affected by a whole range of less spectacular situations (in scale or impact) that resulted directly in the destruction of urban heritage: abandonment, decay, evictions following the retrocession of confiscated property during communist times, combined with real-estate and land speculation involving the destruction of historical houses. This landscape could be described as a scene of diffuse yet constant violence against the city. This whole highly conflicted landscape has determined the development of actions and associations of the civil society engaged in urban development, heritage protection, social housing equity, etc.

A wave of new buildings appeared in Bucharest in the early 1990s, and, although architecture was timidly and rather unsuccessfully trying to mimic - using local materials and construction skills - occidental postmodernism, it respected more or less the existing building heights. Poorly built, they were, however, less flashy than the corporate architecture that began to appear towards the end of the 1990s, triggering less – or almost no – public attention until much later on.

The first case of a high-rise building in the city center was the construction in 1997 of a corporate large building in Bucharest, initially the headquarters of the Bancorex Bank[10] and later known as the Bucharest Financial Plaza (Fig.1,2). 83m high, the tower was erected just at the limit of the Historical Centre, on one of the most famous historical streets (Calea Victoriei) and next to a

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6   Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Le contrat social* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 57.

7   The term first appears with Cicero but enters the European world via Aristotle´s translations into Latin, in the form of *societas civilis*.

8   Pierre Merlin and Françoise Choay, *Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement* (Paris: PUF, 2000).

9   Louis Wirth "Urbanism as a way of life," *The American Journal of Sociology*. 44, 1 (1938): 1-24.

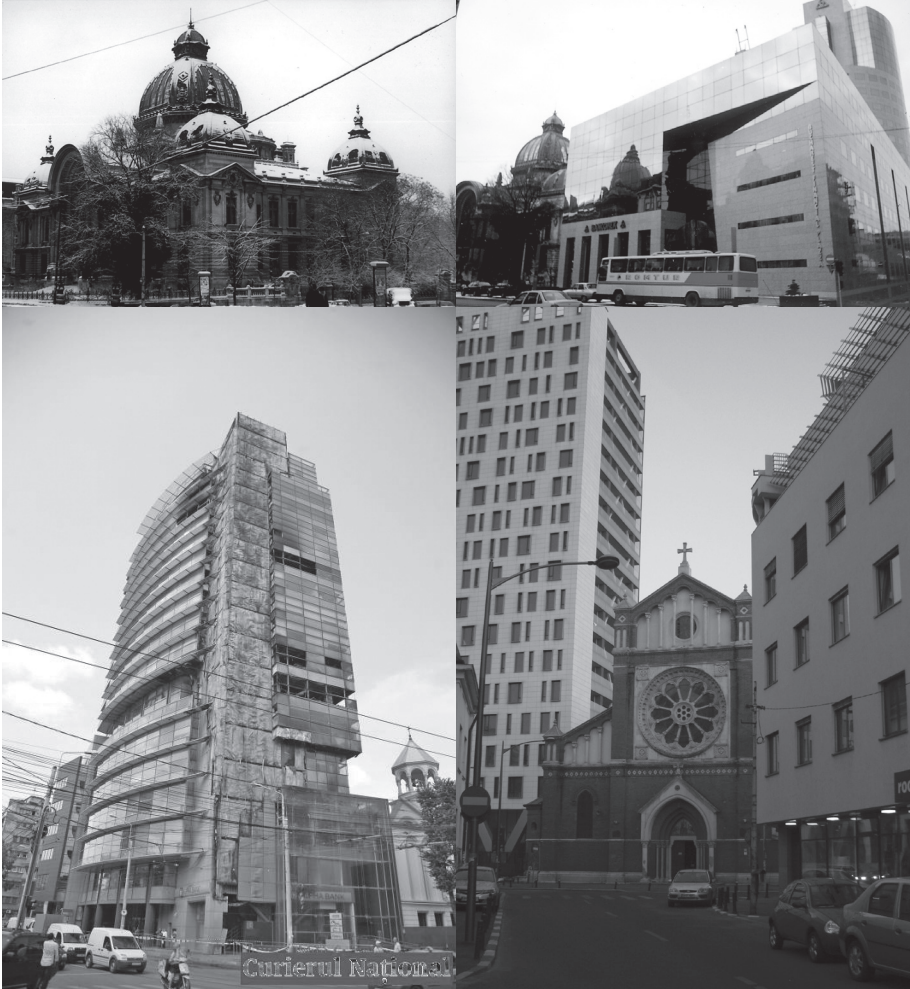10 That went into bankruptcy in 1999, after a media scandal linked to corruption and money laundering.

Fig.1: CEC Palace (the Savings Bank), image taken before the construction of the adjacent tower
Fig.2: The implant of the Bancorex (Bucharest Financial Plaza)
Fig.3: Armenească Millennium Tower, 2009
Fig.4: Cathedral Plaza, next to the Sf. Iosif Cathedral

series of historical monuments, visually affecting the entire historical area, but especially the turn of the 20th century CEC Palace[11] and the National Museum of History.[12] Situated in a protected area and surrounded by class A historical monuments, the building provoked some indignation, mostly among professionals (architects, urban planners, urban and architectural historians, etc.) but at the time failed to trigger a lot of attention from the general public.

Starting with the year 2000, the construction of high and large architecture intensified. This coincided with the increasing presence of large corporations on the Romanian market as well as the establishment, in Bucharest, of local or regional branches of multinational companies, also in need for architectural representation.

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11 The Savings Bank, an impressive eclectic construction built in 1900 upon the plans of French architect Paul Gottereau and supervised by Romanian architect Ion Socolescu.
12 Built by architect Paul Smărăndescu, 1894-1900, initially the Post Palace.

Many of these buildings were situated in central areas, in close proximity of historical buildings, and probably for the beginning of the decade the most famous case had been the construction, next to the Armenian Church, of a 72m high tower (18 floors above the ground and 4 technical grounds) – the Millennium Business Centre (Fig.3). Started in 2001, the construction was finished in 2006 and the very deep foundations seem to have seriously affected the structure of the church. Again, without much vigor, the professional milieu and the Armenian community protested, but the case came to the attention of the press only much later, in 2009, when a large fire destroyed a few floors of the newly inaugurated building and made it unusable for many years.

The building wave of the early 2000 continued with a few large investments, among which some had been received with protests coming mainly from the professional community, divided between the urge to modernize Bucharest and the need to protect what was left of the historical architecture and the urban structure of the city.

By far the most controversial project of the first decade of this century was the construction, started in 2006, of a 75 m and 19-storey high business tower in the immediate vicinity of the Sf. Iosif Catholic Cathedral in Bucharest: the Cathedral Plaza (Fig.4).[13] Not only has this project triggered more public attention than any of the previous ones, but it also opened a long series of legal disputes and highly publicized controversies, spanning almost a decade.[14]

Unlike the Armenian Church, representing a relatively small community, the Roman Catholic Church is the second most important religious cult in the country and Sf. Iosif is the Cathedral of the Archbishopric of Bucharest. The direct implication of the Church and the public statements and campaign of the Bishop of Bucharest have contributed to the media success of this real-estate story. Thus, the symbolic significance of the project, connected to religious values, added to the direct urban consequences of the high-rise tower, finally contributed to an apparent benefit of the city *in the name of urbanity.*

Promoted by the Millennium Building Development company, the project of the office tower was designed in the period 1999-2006 and received a construction permit in February 2006. The works started immediately, in March, and only weeks later, after having notified the Municipality about potential irregularities regarding the construction of the tower, the Roman Catholic archdiocese (ARCB) filed a complaint in the court of law, asking the authorities to stop the works and to investigate the legality of the building permit. A report of the Construction Inspectorate confirmed the illegal aspects of the permit, and was followed by a decision of the Romanian Senate to initiate a commission that would look into the legality and opportunity of the Cathedral Plaza project, as well as into other projects that could affect protected and historical areas in Bucharest. Following the conclusions of the commission, in November 2006 the Senate asked the Romanian Government and the Construction Inspectorate to stop the works of the tower. 2007 followed with more lawsuits, public complaints and open letters addressed to the Romanian President and even the European Parliament. The latter condemned the construction and asked the Romanian government to stop the works. Yet the construction continued. More lawsuits and appeals followed in different courts of the country (from Dâmbovița to Craiova, Constanța or Suceava) - each of them contesting the legality of the construction. 2009 was probably the most intense and visible moment - marked by a series of public protests[15] (which gathered the catholic community but also involved some of the civil society and heritage protection associations). The construction stopped in 2009, pending the court´s decisions, but the works resumed later on, and the tower was finished in 2013. In the meantime, in 2010, the Suceava Court of Law irrevocably sentenced the construction as being illegally built. In 2011 the

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13 It is however interesting to note the recurrence of the name "plaza" for these large corporate buildings - an ironic attempt to retrieve the lost qualities of a public space that would attest the richness of an urban public life that could unfold in these spaces.

14 Still continuing in 2015, at the time of writing of this article.

15 According to the ARCB (Bucharest Roman Catholic archdiocese), all Catholic churches in Romania closed on Sunday July 12th 2009, celebrating only one Liturgy, in the St Josef Cathedral. The same day, 6000 persons participated in a public demonstration in front of the Romanian Government building, asking for the construction to stop.

Municipality asked the owner to start the disassembling of the building, while the Cadaster Office erased the construction´s official record. Yet nothing happened, and the works continued until the final stages of the facade and of the interior works. Another public petition initiated by the ARCB and signed by 12,500 persons urged the General Mayor to proceed to the immediate dismantling of the illegal building. This action was reinforced by the court´s final sentence to demolition and the obligation of the owner to bring the land to the physical condition prior to the construction as well as the restoration of the natural environment of the protected area.[16]

The corporation contested the court´s decisions and initiated new procedures to re-authorize the building. Yet the final sentence of the Ploieşti court of law issued earlier this year compelled the Municipality to proceed to the dismantling of the building. At the time of this article, the situation is still unclear, and the building is still in place, with more legal actions to be followed by the new owner of the tower.

Although still unclear when it comes to the direct results, this example illustrates the attention and interest of the public opinion that gathered around the cause of the city. Certainly, the variable that played a decisive role in the campaign was the involvement of the Catholic Church as an actor in the play. People remembered the quite recent and painful destruction of churches during the communist 1980s, and in a way this augmented the intensity of the conflict: once again churches (seen in the 1980s as symbols of anti-communist resistance) were threatened by a "public enemy," this time embodied by the large international corporation.

The issues raised by the protests were the arrogance of the tower, the ways in which the new building affected the historical monument - the main Catholic Cathedral of the city, the illegality and irregularities in obtaining the construction permit (a recurrent situation in many historical areas, only to be exhibited publicly) and finally, the city as a threatened body.

We may speak here about a legal war but also one that could be seen as a war about public interest and urbanity. A conflict which ended with only an apparent gain of the city: the area is permanently damaged, opening the way for other large-scale projects, suffocating the traffic in the area for many years. Its demolition would also be highly problematic, gravely affecting the structure of the historical monument and the structure of the surrounding buildings.

As observed by socio-urban scholars, the late 2000s "brought about a different pattern"[17] in the dynamics of construction and re-construction: along with the refurbishment of old buildings, the period was marked by the progressive large-scale real-estate investments. Moreover, in looking at the construction permits issued especially during the second half of the decade, it seems that the number of new residential buildings was declining in favor of refurbishments and remodeling of the historical ones. Out of 100 general construction permits, 39% were remodeling and only 7% reconstructions; new buildings even less, around 4%.[18] Yet, in a field survey, most of this remodeling is either destruction of the original substance of the building or, worse, masked demolitions where the so-called "remodeling" actually means tearing the building down and reconstructing a completely new one.

There is another very peculiar element that became more and more present towards the end of the 2000s – the growing implication of the Municipality in large-scale regeneration or redevelopment projects that involved systematic and aggressive relocations of economically and socially deprived residents, who could not put up any resistance to these processes. This was happening on the background of a psychological distance, acquired 15 years after the change of the political regime – from the trauma installed by the previous demolitions and redevelopments that had taken place in the 1970s and 1980s, in most of Romanian cities. This violent history, occurring at a national scale, compromised any attempt that would have been made immediately after 1989 in terms of municipal and state interventions in the urban development of cities.

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16 Decision no. 2520/2012 of the Dâmbovița county Tribunal.

17 Liviu Chelcea et al., "Who are the Gentrifiers and How Do They Change Central City Neighborhoods?" *Geografie* 120, 2 (2015): 113-133.

18 Ibid.

On the other hand, a shift in local governance took place after 2008, when along with the new zoning regulations, the state was allowed to use the eminent domain for the construction of local roads, thus allowing and encouraging the Municipality to expropriate land for the construction and rehabilitation of the latter. These new zoning regulations, along with the post-EU adhesion processes (the pursuit of EU and public funding) facilitated the initiation of large infrastructure or urban projects developed by the Municipality. As shown by Elena Ion,[19] most of these projects were designed (everywhere in Romania) to rapidly access funding and only superficially met the criteria of the EU, without really relying on local development needs. Ion concludes that "far from delivering on the promised agenda of infrastructure modernization and boosting economic growth and job creation, these projects resulted in increased disparities, made worse by the redirection of funding that could be used for more pressing needs."[20]

One example of such urban projects is the recent and highly disputed Berzei-Uranus Boulevard, a large re-development project involving an important protected area, developed mainly at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Started in 2010, the operation supposed the construction of a multi-lane urban express-way and in the process it involved the clearing of 93 parcels, the expropriation of 83 buildings[21] (all of which were situated in the area of protection of a historical monument) and the demolition of 13 historical monuments, together with the almost entire clearing of the North front of the Buzeşti street, built in the period 1852-1911. It also implied the eviction of 1000 residents, some in very aggressive circumstances (at night, in winter). Many of the demolished buildings were already in an advanced state of physical decay and inhabited by a poor population, some of whom were squatting.

These actions of the Municipality were met with an unprecedented wave of protests organized by organizations of the civil society questioning the public benefit of the whole operation, the implication on the further development of the city, the destruction of architectural and urban heritage and finally the moral and human consequences of the evictions. More than 100 lawsuits intended by the NGO *Salvaţi Bucureştiul* (Save Bucharest) addressed the City Hall and were related to the legality of the evictions and of the demolition of historical buildings.

Mapping the Associations. The New Urban Generation

The continuous decay, during the last 25 years, of the urban architecture in Bucharest has been commented upon many times – either in the reports of the professional associations[22] or through the ever growing protests of the civil society, whose public initiatives have become more and more visible, especially during the last five years.

Urbanity, as well as civility and civil society are not anhistorical concepts. Furthermore, civil society is neither ahistorical nor is it a unified sphere, acting homogenously. In looking at the groups, associations and civil movements that have been active in Bucharest recently, I am fully aware that these do not represent the whole complexity and diversity of the civil society: the initiatives are as diverse as they are motivated by different agendas. My paper looks at those initiatives that are directly targeting urban issues, architectural and urban heritage, public space and city governance.

The growing number of associations dedicated to the protection of heritage and to sustainable urban development, the coalition of some of these associations into a platform (2008), as well as the more and more numerous initiatives meant to culturally activate historical houses or industrial architecture or just to educate the public about the city – all these show an important change of

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19 Elena Ion. "Public Funding and Urban Governance in Contemporary Romania: the Resurgence of State-led Urban Development in an Era of Crisis," *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* (2014) (accessed 22.01.2014).

20 Ibid., 17.

21 Adrian Bălteanu. "Dosar mut - Buzeşti Uranus" [Silent File - Buzeşti Uranus], *Arhitectura* 1 (2011): 16-23.

22 Such as *Raportul Comisiei prezidenţiale privind patrimoniul construit, siturile istorice şi naturale* [Report of the Presidential Commission regarding Built Heritage, Historical and Natural Sites], 2009, http://patr.presidency.ro (accessed 15.03.2015).

perspective of the new generations about urbanity. They attest a growing interest in assuming the city and its identity, by acknowledging its values, its history as well as the responsibility to preserve and enrich its cultural life. Moreover, these types of activities as well as the sometimes-conflicting situations they generated (public protests, legal lawsuits against the Municipality) lead to a new relationship towards governance, significant for the general evolution of Romanian civil society: the bottom-up initiatives.

As mentioned above, an important moment in the development of civil society around urban issues was the creation, in 2008, of the Platform Together for a Better City (Împreună pentru un oraş mai bun).[23] The Platform was a coalition of more than 40 associations interested in urban matters rising from heritage to social equity, education, sustainability, mobility, etc. One of the most visible outcomes of this coalition was the Declaration for Bucharest, a document that reclaimed the citizen´s right to participate in the city´s governance, but also the administration´s duty to act according to the real needs of the city – in terms of society and culture and not only infrastructure or economy. Some of the statements of the Declaration were further developed into a *Pact for Bucharest*, partially adopted in the electoral campaign by some of the candidates running for mayor in 2008.

The most prominent voice of the Platform was probably the Save Bucharest Association (Asociaţia Salvaţi Bucureştiul).[24] Recently (summer of 2015), the Association was transformed into a political party, Save Bucharest Union (Uniunea Salvaţi Bucureştiul), with its President, Nicuşor Dan preparing to run for the second time (first in 2012) for General Mayor of Bucharest in the future elections of 2016. It is interesting to observe how bottom-top urban initiatives have gradually been evolving into more institutionally-oriented structures. When addressing the international context, the combined initiatives (bottom-up, top-down) followed by concrete negotiation regarding governance have been described as "bottom-linked" strategies.[25] Still, for the Romanian context, such developments are quite recent and could difficultly be evaluated. What is interesting is the local profile of such "multilevel governance initiatives", as well as the evolution of the general public interest from purely political towards more subtle, political urban-related general issues.

The main actors traditionally acting in the field of heritage protection or conservation (the Commissions of the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality, the National Institute for Heritage) have been recently supplemented with a whole series of associations, foundations, private or collective initiatives (neighborhood associations), independent and alternative cultural centers or initiatives of the professional associations (the Chamber of Architects – OAR; the Union of Romanian Architects - UAR). Although still fragile, these initiatives depict a more complex and much more interesting scene of the heritage protection actors than it appeared at the end of the 2000. Mapping these initiatives is a difficult task – they are very different in size, intensity, life span, or types of actions. More interesting is to identify some general tendencies:

– Watchdog or heritage protection associations (Pro Patrimonio, ProDoMo, Asociaţia Salvaţi Bucureştiul, Case care plâng [Crying houses]…)
– NGOs that are not directly concerned with heritage, but whose activities target public space or the built environment (Active Watch, Kommunitas)
– NGOs and collective initiatives regarding the production and cultural activation of public space (Street Delivery, Manasia Hub)
– Alternative cultural centers – cultural squat, re-activation of industrial architecture (Carol 53, WASP, Postăvăria Română, Halele Carol)
– Alternative guided tours of areas outside the main touristic attractions (ARCEN, Zeppelin, Make a Point, etc.)

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23 A detailed account of the creation of the Platform, its history and outcomes, see Vera Marin, "Mărturie: un spaţiu public virtual pentru Bucureşti," in ACUM (vol.4), *Dosare bucureştene* (Bucharest: Editura Universitară "Ion Mincu"), 318-331.

24 http://www.salvatibucurestiul.ro (accessed 15.03.2015).

25 Eizaguirre et al. "Multilevel Governance and Social Cohesion: Bringing Back Conflict in Citizenship Practices," *Urban Studies* 49, 9 (July 2012).

– Neighborhood associations that have become surprisingly active in defending the public spaces of the districts (Grupul de inițiativă Salvați Cartierul Floreasca, Grupul de inițiativă civică Salvați Parcul Drumul Taberei, Luptă pentru strada ta[26]).

Contagion and the Space of Appearance

An excellent tool for investigating the interest in the urban questions is to observe the social and virtual media. The online medium appears to be the favorite and by far the main communication tool for the new generation. A variety of websites, blogs, Facebook, Tumblr or online magazines have exploded recently, especially after 2011. A research of these pages lists at least 30 such new entries for the last two or three years. Their content is extremely diverse: from old photographs of disappeared or remodeled urban places, memories about Bucharest, comments and critiques of the Municipality and the recent projects, or just descriptions of the interesting spots of the city. They all speak of a new type of archive, more volatile and fragmentary, but also about those issues that are triggering the interest in the city. If civil society´s protests against large corporate buildings became more present around the mid 2000s, towards the end of the mentioned period they intensified and multiplied, certainly related to the disappearance of a significant part of the traditional urban tissue through the development of the large infrastructure projects of the Municipality. Their multitude and diversity say something about the emergency to save a city whose partial disappearance starts to worry its own inhabitants, and to the salvation of which they are willing to participate.

We may say that "the online" is the mark of the new urban generation. This is a very important change in people´s attitude towards their city. If the protests and actions of the civil society regarding large corporate investments started towards the mid-2000s, they intensified and multiplied towards the end of the 2010. As mentioned earlier, an important moment of these actions coincides with the street protests against the Berzei-Buzeşti demolitions and aggressive evictions. These protests were stronger in the period 2011-2013, around the debated issue of the demolition of Hala Matache, an old market hall that had to be demolished in order to leave space for the new boulevard.

Yet, regardless of the protests of the civil society, the market was destroyed in March 2013. The disappearance of the market – that had become, during the last few years, a symbol of urban resistance – lead to a gradual decrease of intensity and interest for the project, as the harm has been irreversibly done. But the democratic exercise to reclaim the right to the city had not been lost, and other urban and heritage causes have been embraced: the same protesters (and many others) gathered in Fall 2013 - Spring 2014 in the civic movement for the salvation of the mining area Roșia Montană.[27]

Starting from the symbolic kilometer zero of Bucharest, Piața Universității, tens of thousands of people marched every Sunday afternoon, for almost six months, to protest against the planned destruction of the villages of the mining region by the actions of a large Canadian mining corporation.

Piața Universității is one of the most important urban spaces for the political and social life of post-communist Bucharest. As shown by political theorist Alexandru Gussi,[28] Piața Universității

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26 Just to illustrate the types of actions of these associations: the Association *Lupta pentru strada ta* started in 2014 as a reaction to the destruction of a small community park on Aleea Luncșoara, to leave space for the construction of a 10 storey-building in the very close proximity of the already dense area of collective housing units. Alarmed by the Association, the Prefect of Bucharest opened a lawsuit against the Municipality of the 2nd District for issuing an abusive construction permit and managed to stop the construction. The action is still pending the Court´s decision regarding the legality of the permit.

27 http://www.rosiamontana.org (accessed 01.05.2015).

28 Gussi uses the term as an extended definition of Pierre Nora's concept from his monumental work *Les lieux de mémoire*… . Nora initially refers to all the modern instances that replace the traditional institutions of memory, evoking their multiple dimensions: material, symbolical or functional. These may be figurate as well as physical places, participating in the construction of memory and identity. However, the physical

has been invested by the anti-communist political resistance of the early 1990s as a proper *lieu de mémoire*: a physical trace of the creation, in Romania, of a new political identity and subsequently the symbol of the post-1990 public space. Although the direct, anti-communist significance attached to the place has been altered during the last 25 years, it is precisely through the repeated use of the place in politically charged contexts that Piața Universității has become a veritable place of memory. Thus, it is not by chance that the Salvați Roșia Montană protests reconfirmed the place as a high place of democratic actions: unlike Piața Matache (situated in the centre of Bucharest), the physical space to be saved was remote, so the immediate and spontaneous reaction of the civil society was to return to Piața Universității. Still, it is interesting to observe that spatially the phenomenon defined a new landscape of protests in Bucharest: although initially concentrated around the center, the marches spread around other streets and districts of the city. Moreover, the movement became viral and involved other important cities: Timișoara, Cluj, Brașov, Sibiu. In mapping the trajectories of these protests, Ștefan Ghenciulescu[29] shows how these street movements have redesigned Bucharest, activating urban areas that have never been part of the usual manifestation routes. We may argue that the online media not only facilitates or creates a new public involvement model, based on the internet, but also implies a reconfiguration of the spatial model of the street movements.

It is perhaps not by chance that such actions took place in a historical moment globally marked by street movements such as Occupy or the Arab Spring, publicized all over the planet. Of course, the internal triggers as well as the type of movements are very different, yet we should ask ourselves if this particular historical moment – that became global precisely by being viral – had not participated in a certain way to reclaiming publicly the "right to the city."

In a recent book about the Occupy movement, art historian W.T. Mitchell was asking a similar question, in defining this historical moment a revolutionary one – in an extended contemporary understanding of the "revolution":

> Would it be better to think of revolutions not as specifically definable events, but instead as subtle shifts in language, imagery, and the limits of the thinkable?[30]

And he continues:

> And yet we know that something links these places and the events that transpired in them. In the nineteenth century we would have called it the spirit of revolution, and understood it as a kind of ghostly, uncanny return of familiar images of popular uprisings and mass movements. (…) In our time the preferred language is biological and bio-political, employing terms like "contagion" to describe images and words that have gone viral in the global media.[31]

If ten or twenty years ago the proliferation of the social media and the online medium could have been interpreted as a failure or retreat of the public space – away from the physical, actual space of the city – they have now become quite the opposite: instruments for resistance and tools to reactivate the social and the political. The invisible virtual space has turned into an agent of activating the space of action and the space of appearance – where one sees and is seen by others, in the sense of Hannah Arendt:

> the space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and

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characteristics of the commemorative places as places of memory have been most often highlighted. Although his initial account of the modern *lieux de mémoire* is rather ambivalent (they attest the disappearance of an entire traditional value system, where memory was naturally and directly transmitted through family, school, etc.). In the 1992 Preface to the book, Nora revisits the actual, physical importance of the place in the constructions of places of memory.

29 Ștefan Ghenciulescu,"Recucerind orașul. Prin Roșia Montană," http://e-zeppelin.ro/recucerind-orasul-prin-rosia-montana (accessed 15.08.2015).

30 W.T. Mitchell et al., *Occupy. Three Inquiries in Disobedience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Kindle Edition, 2013), 80.

31 Ibid., 92.

the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized.[32]

Interestingly, phenomena such as Piața Universității at the beginning of the 1990s were a form of *occupy* long before such movements would become a global, viral form of resistance.

What could then be the role of civil society when it comes to understanding today´s urbanity? I would argue that, besides contributing to the construction of a real social capital – the civil society´s role as a watchdog and alarm trigger – we assist at the growth of a new urban generation and of a new public conscience, more and more aware of the values of living together in the city and of the city itself. The force of this generation is important and cannot be neglected: it represents the history in the making.

Post-submission addenda

On October 30th 2015, an apparently benign and common Friday evening rock concert gathering a few hundred young people in a non-conventional former industrial space transformed in an underground club (the Colectiv Club) turned into a tragic, incredible event ending with the terrible death of dozens and the injury of many others in a fire that started during the concert. The late response of the emergency units, the series of the illegally obtained permits for functioning in a non-appropriate space resulting in a horrible tragedy – all these triggered an immediate and extraordinary public response. In the days following the event, tens of thousands of people marched along the streets of Bucharest (and other cities of Romania) – first silently, honoring and mourning the victims, and then protesting against the corruption in municipal offices but also, generally, against a long period of general political atmosphere of corruption and incompetence. The protests reached a size and intensity unseen in Romania since the fall of communism, 25 years ago. The same, young generation (the media estimated an average of 40 years) but in a much larger and more determined way protested against a corrupted political class and municipal administration – many of the participants were the same ones as those involved in the Matache and then Roșia Montana case. On Wednesday November 4th the Prime Minister resigned along with the entire government. Two weeks later a new a-political technocratic government was mandated to govern Romania.

The public response has been extraordinary in its solidarity and intensity. I would argue that many of the groups and individuals of the civil society described here are the ones that determined the political changes taking place in Romania.

In the Colectiv Club many of the victims were architects, urbanists or students in architecture. Some of them were our friends and colleagues. This issue is dedicated to their memory.

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Fig.1: CEC Palace (the Savings Bank), image taken before the construction of the adjacent tower (1996, photo Mihai Ghyka).

Fig.2: The implant of the Bancorex (Bucharest Financial Plaza), 1997 (photo Mihai Ghyka).

Fig.3: Armenească Millennium Tower, 2009 (source Curierul Național).

Fig.4: Cathedral Plaza, next to the Sf. Iosif Cathedral (2015, photo Călin Dan).