

Bucharest in the Industrial Age: Two Jewish Trade Schools

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Around the mid-1880s, Romania experienced rapid industrialization especially across five major sectors: extractive, agricultural, commercial, transport, and manufacturing.¹ At the same time, Bucharest and its society were in full process of modernization. Within this evolving landscape, the establishment of the two schools emerged as a necessity. The 1930 census indicates that Bucharest had a population of 768,725, of which 69,972 were Jews, representing approximately 9.1% of the total. Societal adaptation to the industrial revolution on the one hand, and the legal provisions discriminating against Jews — most notably Article 37 of the 1893 Education Law, which barred their access to state education — urged the establishment of modern Jewish schools. In this context, prominent leaders of the local Jewish community founded independent educational institutions to meet the community’s immediate needs and to provide Jewish youth with opportunities for professional and social advancement that were otherwise inaccessible within the state system.

This article examines the establishment of two prestigious Jewish educational institutions in Bucharest — the Ciocanul Industrial Training School and the Filip and Rașela Focșăneanu Foundation’s Girls’ Gymnasium and Trade School² — within the broader context of the city’s industrialization. It argues that these two institutions provided an efficient answer to the economic and societal challenges of that time, thereby actively contributing to the integration of young Jews in the promising, though discriminatory, industrial society.

Within this social and legislative context, both the Ciocanul School³ and the Focșăneanu School⁴ were established in 1899 (although another source mentions 1897 as the founding year for Ciocanul School),⁵ as a direct necessity. Both institutions emerged as key Jewish educational establishments in Bucharest, backed by leading members of the Jewish community⁶ dedicated to developing a well-structured and effective educational system, as will be explained below. Their location in the city is also significant. Both are situated in the proximity of the area mostly inhabited by Jewish families, generally known as “Jewish neighborhood,” because Bucharest did not have an enclosed ghetto-type area, but rather a residential zone with a Jewish majority and a concentration of places of worship.⁷

1 N.P. Arcadian, *Industrializarea României* [The Industrialization of Romania] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1963), 9.

2 For clarity, this essay will refer to the Ciocanul Industrial Training School as Ciocanul School and the Filip and Rașela Focșăneanu Foundation’s Girls’ Gymnasium and Trade School as Focșăneanu School.

3 Felicia Waldman, Anca Ciuci, *Istории și imagini din Bucureștiul evreiesc* [Histories and Images from Jewish Bucharest] (Bucharest: Noi Media Print, 2011), 106. However, Dr. Ilie Rădulescu, “De la IUDA cetire” [As JUDAS Said], *Porunca Vremii* IX, no. 1667 (June 11, 1940), 1-2, mentions 1897 as founding year.

4 Elena B. Kanner, *Monografia Școlii Profesionale și a Gimnaziului de Fete Fundațiunea Filip și Rașela Focșăneanu* [The Monograph of the Filip and Rașela Focșăneanu Foundation’s Girls’ Gymnasium and Trade School] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Cartea de Aur” A. Grossmann, 1924), 10.

5 Rădulescu, “De la IUDA cetire,” 1-2.

6 Liviu Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română* [The Israeli-Romanian School] (Bucharest: Ed. Hasefer, 1999), 170.

7 The “Jewish neighborhood” in Bucharest clearly differs from the classical forms of Jewish settlements

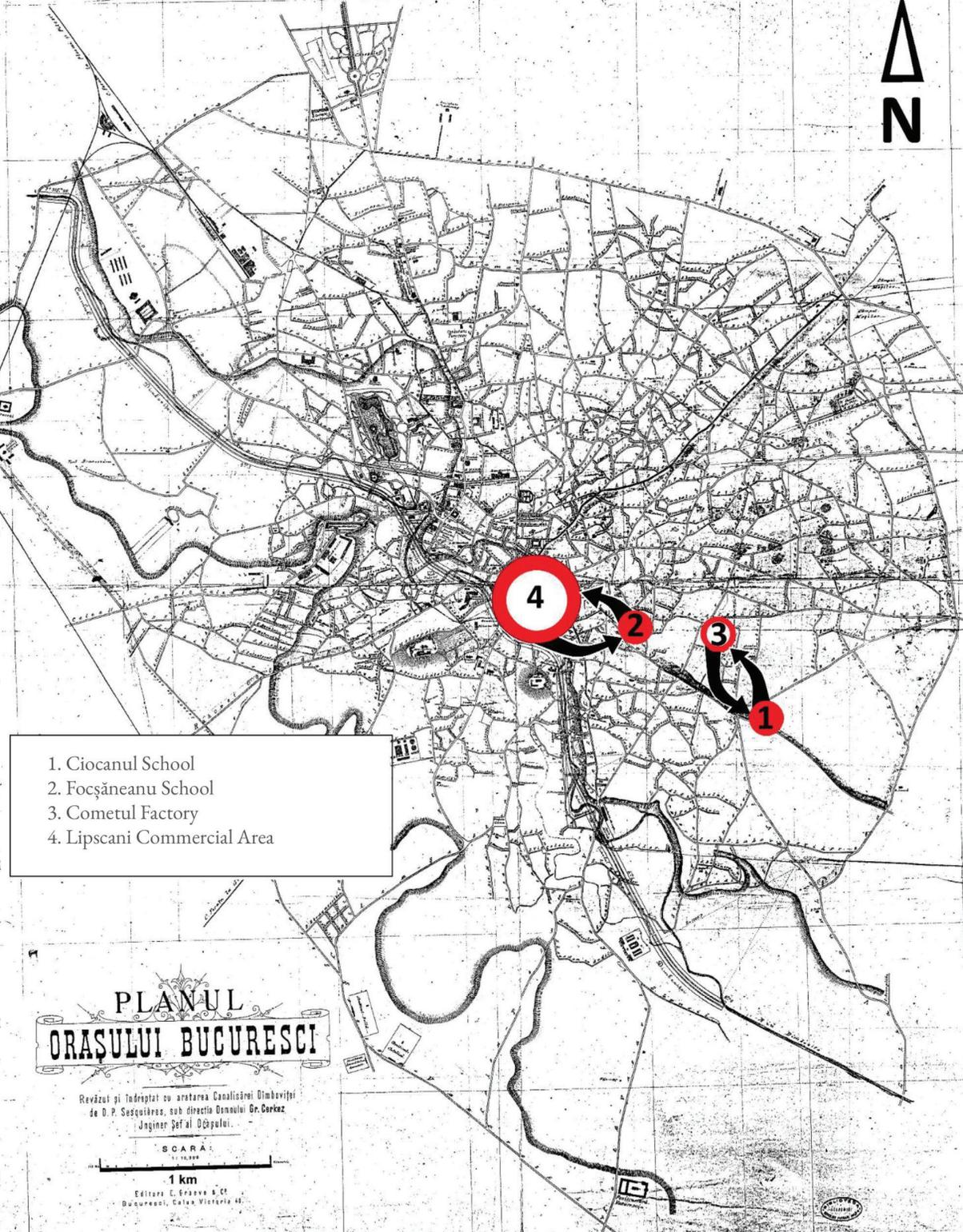


Fig. 1: Locations of Focșăneanu and Ciocanul Schools, the Cometul Factory, and the Lipscaeni Commercial Center in 1881

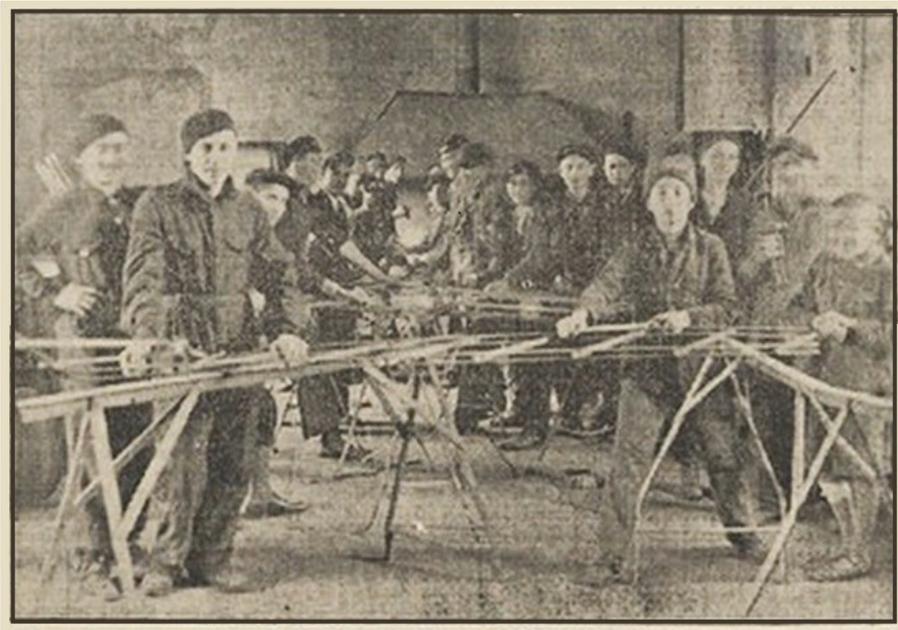


Fig. 2: A workshop at Ciocanul School

The Ciocanul School was established in a marginal area that would later develop, but located in close proximity to the Cometul Factory, a metal furniture and ironworks factory, with which the school operated in an interdependent relationship. In contrast, the Focșăneanu School was situated in a central district with a higher building density, near the traditional commercial area of Lipsčani. (Fig. 1) It was founded by industrialist Adolf Salomon, owner of the Cometul factory, on a 16,000 square meter plot,⁸ and is considered the first Jewish trade school⁹ in Bucharest. The school's committee included prominent Jewish figures such as S. Orenstein, Oscar Sadecker, Ch. E. Rosen, the Imanueli brothers (iron processing factory owners), and E. Prager (furniture factory owner).¹⁰ The school building, designed by architect A.G. Davidescu, a Paris School of Architecture graduate,¹¹ was conceived as an institution for the industrial era. Its volumes follow the typology of an industrial nave, with a rhythmic structure visible on the façade. (Fig. 3, above, left) The school had departments in mechanics, locksmithing, tinsmithing, electrotechnics, and heating installations (introduced in 1915), functioning in close connection to the Cometul Factory.¹² (Fig. 2)

found elsewhere in Europe — whether the Western-style ghetto or the Eastern European *shtetl*, the traditional “small town” in which Jews lived in compact rural communities, often under hostile conditions. In the Romanian capital, however, the spatial organization of the Jewish neighborhood was primarily functional rather than segregative: certain areas, such as Calea Văcărești and Dudești, were predominantly residential, while others, including Calea Moșilor, were characterized by intensive commercial activity. The present article draws upon research for my doctoral thesis, currently in progress, *The Jewish Neighborhood in Bucharest, 1965–1989*.

8 Anca Tudorancea (Ciuciu), “Școala Ciocanul. Prima școală evreiască de meserii din București” [The Ciocanul School. The First Jewish Trade School in Romania], *Revista de Istorie a Evreilor din România* 1, no. 16–17 (2016): 124–41.

9 Waldman, Ciuciu, *Istorie și imagini*, 106.

10 Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română*, 169.

11 *Ibid.*, 12.

12 Waldman, Ciuciu, *Istorie și imagini*, 106.

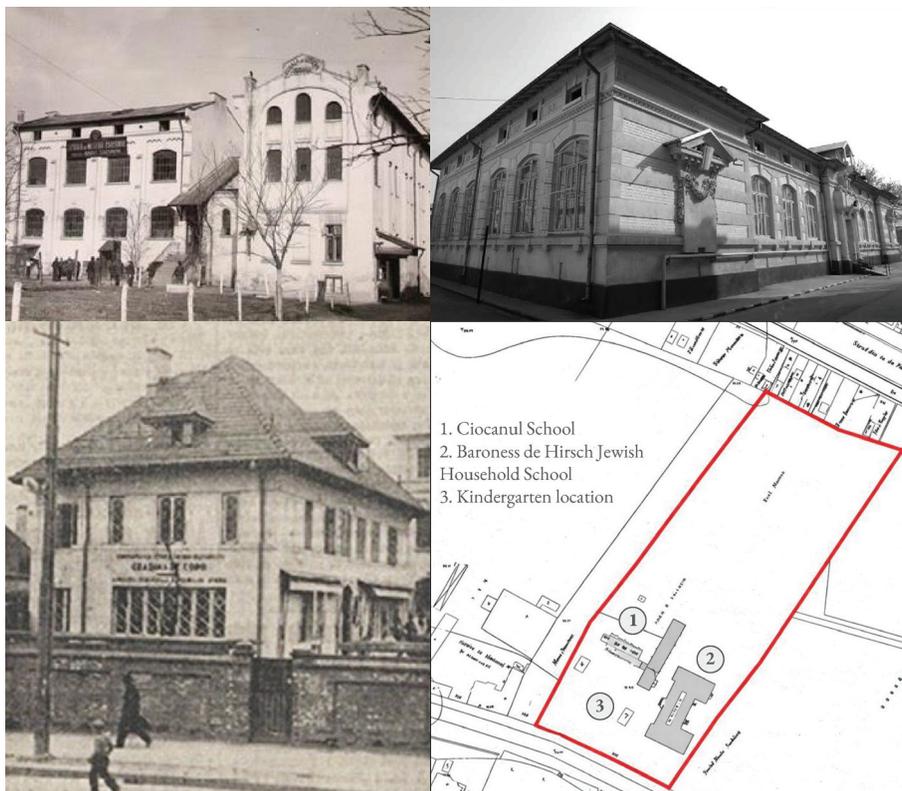


Fig. 3: Ciocanul School (above, left); Timpuri Noi School (formerly the Jewish Household School, formerly Ciocanul School) (above, right); Children's Kindergarten from 1934 (below, left); location of the buildings on an excerpt from a 1911 plan (below, right)

Fig. 4: Focșăneanu School, 1924



According to newspaper accounts from the time, in 1902, 120 students were studying in the school's workshops, most of them children aged between 10 and 15.¹³ By 1940, their number had reached approximately 400 students per year.¹⁴ It can thus be estimated that, between 1902 and 1940, over 7,000 young apprentices had passed through the school's benches.

For decades, Ciocanul School facilitated its graduates' integration into the labor market, either by assisting their relocation to America,¹⁵ Vienna, or Munich, thus illustrating the characteristic mobility of the industrial era, or by employing them in the Cometul Factory¹⁶ and other factories in need of skilled labor.¹⁷

The Ciocanul School became the nucleus of a larger educational complex, incorporating in time other educational buildings as shown on the 1911 Army Geographic Institute map (Fig. 3). The most important is the Jewish Girls' School, officially named the Baroness de Hirsch Jewish Household School, which was initially part of a network with branches in Brăila,¹⁸ Galați,¹⁹ and Birlad.²⁰ As part of the complex, the Baroness de Hirsch Jewish Household School (Fig. 3, above, right) was designed by the same architect as the Ciocanul School (A.G. Davidescu). It is a single-story building with a residential appearance, also featuring facilities such as an apartment for the headmistress, a meeting hall, and a library.²¹ This reflected its role as an institution dedicated to women's education with a focus on domestic training. In 1910, it ceased to function as a girl's school and became part of the Ciocanul School complex. In 1934, according to *Curentul* newspaper,²² a kindergarten was already in operation, also offering extended hours to accommodate factory workers' shifts.²³ Although built at different times, the three buildings (the first Ciocanu School, Baroness de Hirsch Jewish Household School and the Kindergarten) operated both independently and together, forming an educational ensemble.

The Focșăneanu School, centrally located in the city, began operations on September 16, 1899, with an initial enrolment of 36 girls. Its leadership was entrusted to Mrs. Emmy Wandelmann,²⁴ who was recruited from Germany for the position. Between 1899 and 1924, a total of 3,752²⁵ female students were reported as having been enrolled over time, which allows us to estimate that by 1940, approximately 6,000 girls had attended the school.

The founder of the school, Filip A. Focșăneanu, a visionary philanthropist, freemason,²⁶ industrialist, and social activist, was also the president of the Bucharest Jewish community²⁷ and received

13 Rep., "Bernard Lazare în Capitală" [Bernard Lazare in the Capital], *Adevărul* 4587 (May 8, 1902), 2.

14 Rădulescu, "De la IUDA cetire," 1-2.

15 Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română*, 301.

16 *Ibid.*, 304.

17 *Ibid.*, 300.

18 Camelia Hristian, Ghena Pricop, and Evdochia Smaznov, eds. *Greci, Evrei, Ruși, Lipoveni, Turci... Brăila* [Greeks, Jews, Russians, Lipovans, Turks... Brăila] (Brăila: Ed. Istros, 2012), 228.

19 Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română*, 362.

20 "Balul școalei 'Baroneasa de Hirsch'" [The Ball of the "Baroness de Hirsch" School], *Adevărul* XVI, Nos. 5152-5179 (December 1903).

21 Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română*, 364.

22 C. Micu, "În Dudești, la școala 'Ciocanul': O școală care importă elevi și exportă absolvenți" [In Dudești, at the Ciocanul School: A School Importing Pupils and Exporting Graduates], *Curentul* 2454 (December 1, 1934).

23 After World War II it was renamed Kindergarten No. 19 and it and continued operating as such after nationalization. "Grădinițele din Sectorul 3 al Capitalei" [Kindergartens in Sector 3 of the Capital], *România Liberă* 1955 (August 30, 1996), 10.

24 Kanner, *Monografia Școlii*, 10.

25 *Ibid.*, 55-62.

26 Sorin Mihai Rădulescu, "Loji masonice bucureștene din perioada domniei lui Carol I. Documente pariziene inedite" [Masonic Lodges in Bucharest During the Reign of Carol I. Unpublished Parisian Documents], *București. Materiale de Istorie și Muzeografie* XIII (1999), 134.

27 "Agiția evreilor" [The Agitation of Jews], *Adevărul* (May 27, 1900), 3.

	CIOCANUL EDUCATIONAL COMPLEX			VOCATIONAL SCHOOL AND GIRLS' GYMNASIUM FILIP AND RAȘELA FOCȘĂNEANU FOUNDATION	
School name	Ciocanul School	Baroness de Hirsch Israelite School of Home Economics	Ciocanul Kindergarten / Kindergarten No. 19	Trade School	Girls' Gymnasium
Educational function	Trade School for Boys	Housekeeping School for Girls	Kindergarten	Trade School for Girls	Girls' Commercial Secondary School
Opening year	1897	1902	Before 1934	1899 (opening) / 1903 (official inauguration)	1919
Educational Curriculum	Sheet metal work, locksmithing, carpentry, technical drawing, and design (according to <i>Ziarul Adevărul</i> , Wednesday, May 8, 1902); locksmithing, turning, and sheet metal work (according to <i>Ziarul Adevărul</i> , December 1, 1934). Engineer O. Steinhart gives lectures on industrial economics and progress in industry (<i>Școala Israelito-Română</i> , p. 303). The theoretical curriculum included physics, mechanical technology, as well as machinery and equipment components.	Drawing, gardening, natural sciences, sewing, repairs (mending), and embroidery—these form the foundation of the curriculum. (<i>Școala Israelito-Română</i> , Liviu Rotman, p. 307)	Preparatory activities for schooling	Linen manufacturing, sewing, fashion and flower making, drawing, stenography and typing, calligraphy, drawing, Hebrew, mathematics, French, German, gymnastics, accounting, physics, natural sciences, music, religion, and household management. (according to <i>Monografia Școlii</i>)	A secondary school later emerged for continuing studies (according to <i>Monografia Școlii</i>). The Commercial School (according to <i>Dimineața</i> , September 1930, p. 2).
Architecture	Architect A.G. Davidescu. An architectural project dedicated to a vocational school with workshops, a small technology museum (according to <i>Școala Israelito-Română</i> – Liviu Rotman, p. 302), and a dormitory.	Architect A.G. Davidescu (according to <i>Ziarul Adevărul</i> , Wednesday, May 8, 1902). An architectural project with residential façades design and volume. It includes six classrooms, a staff room, a dining hall, a library, a conference hall, and the director's apartment.	Architecture with residential functionality. Architect unidentified, possibly the same Architect A.G. Davidescu.	Initial architecture with residential functional characteristics. Subsequent change of function. Unidentified architect.	In the same building as the trade school.
Closing year	After 1989	1910 – the year in which the school building was repurposed for the function of Școala Ciocanul.	After 1989	After 1989	After 1989

Table 1. Comparative table with the two schools' curricula, over the course of their functioning

the “Order of The Crown of Romania”²⁸ from King Carol I in 1910. He chaired the school’s Committee, which included other prominent figures such as Leon Schönfeld (director of Techer & Co. Commercial Society), banker and lawyer Max Gaster, D. Adolphe Schwartz (delegate of the Sacre Society), and Dr. Adolphe Stern²⁹ (president of the Coral Temple³⁰), etc. (Fig. 4)

In 1898, Mr. Focșăneanu completed the construction of an imposing house initially intended as the family residence. However, after discussions with Chief Rabbi Dr. Meir Beck³¹, he decided to transform the building into a trade school for girls. Thus, the Focșăneanu family residence was remodeled to serve its new purpose. The transformation from residence to school was not a radical shift, as home education was common among wealthy families. Instead, this conversion enhanced the institution’s prestige, with its elegant architecture reinforcing its image as a center for fine education, while its closeness to the Lipscani commercial hub of fashion industry, where both raw materials, such as thread and fabrics, and finished clothing items were traded, provided a significant advantage for the trade school’s activities.

With regard to their educational profile, the table in Table 1 summarizes their key educational characteristics, showing that their curricula reflected an educational model specifically tailored to the challenges of the industrial era.

In July 1942, both Ciocanul and Focșăneanu Schools³² were transferred to the National Center for Romanianization, an institution established in 1941 with a pronounced anti-Jewish orientation. Subsequently, in 1948, the two schools were nationalized through Decree no. 176 on August 30.³³ Nevertheless, both schools continued to operate successfully for several decades, demonstrating the adaptability of their curricula to the changing needs of industrial society. The Ciocanul School was later transformed into the Timpuri Noi Industrial High School, while the Focșăneanu School became General School No. 72. The institutions remained operational until after the 1989 Revolution, when they were closed as a result of the property restitution process, implemented within a complex and evolving legal framework.

Conclusions

It may be observed that the establishment of these two schools constituted a natural and timely response to the general demand for a specialized workforce, essential to the development of the emerging small-scale industry through educational programs tailored to the economic realities of the time. At the same time, as those realities were discriminatory, both played a defining social role, contributing significantly to the training of a new generation of Jewish skilled workers whose education was denied by the state. An indirect yet notable outcome is that these buildings have continuously accommodated change, demonstrating a remarkable capacity to evolve in response to new and, as it happened after World War II, unexpected circumstances. These emblematic structures not only shaped generations of skilled workers, contributing to Bucharest’s small-scale industry, but also reflect the Jewish community’s enduring investment in education as a means of social progress and integration. (Fig. 5)

Preserving these buildings would mean more than safeguarding structures of brick and mortar; it would protect a cultural identity integral to a European capital that still retains a distinctive

28 Kanner, *Monografia Școlii*, 15.

29 Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română*, 169.

30 “Templul Coral din București” [Coral Temple in Bucharest], *Wikipedia*, last modified January 10, 2025, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Templul_Coral_din_București.

31 Kanner, *Monografia Școlii*, 10.

32 *Monitorul Oficial*, Part I, no. 170 (July 24, 1942), 26.

33 “Decree no. 176 (August 2, 1948) for the nationalization of the assets of churches, communities and private citizens serving to the functioning and maintenance of institutions of general, technical or professional education,” *Monitorul Oficial*, Part I, no. 177 (August 3, 1948).



architectural layer from the early 20th century. In a city continually striving to reconcile its past with its future, conserving these schools constitutes an act of collective responsibility. Moreover, it is essential to develop a strategic plan to ensure the preservation and integration of these two historic buildings into the evolving urban fabric, allowing them to continue contributing to the city's educational, cultural, and social landscape.

Today, Foçașăneanu School stands in a now-protected, highly central neighborhood of the city, known as the Labirint area. Once an educational landmark, the building now faces an uncertain future: in February 2025, it appeared on the Bucharest City Hall's website with an active Partial Demolition Permit. The Timpuri Noi Industrial High School is currently listed as a historic monument, yet it faces an alarming state of deterioration.³⁴ The entire complex has suffered repeated fires,³⁵ the most recent occurring in January 2025.³⁶

34 Locuri abandonate, sau nu, din România, "La pas pe Calea Dudești, cu umbra a ceea ce a fost prima școală de arte și meserii – partea I" [Walking the Calea Dudești, in the shadows of what used to be the first trade school – part I], YouTube video, 9:29, accessed February 25, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwJILXZxTis>.

35 Realitatea pe NET, "Incendiu devastator la liceul Timpuri Noi din București" [Devastating fire at the Timpuri Noi High School in Bucharest], YouTube video, 3:25, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwJILXZxTis>.

36 Ordinul Arhitecților din România – Filiala București, "Școala 'Ciocanul' din București, Calea Dudești nr. 127: Un ansamblu de patrimoniu și un incendiu la început de an 2025" [The Ciocanul School in Bucharest, Calea Dudești no. 127: A Heritage Ensemble and a Fire at the Beginning of 2025], accessed January 10, 2025, <https://www.oar-bucuresti.ro/anunturi/2025/01/06/a/>.



Fig. 5: Left: Ciocanul Educational Complex; right: Focșăneanu School (2025)

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

Fig. 1: Bucharest, The "Cerkez Plan" (1881): *Planul Orașului București. Revăzut și îndreptat cu arătarea Canalisării Dîmboviței de D.P. Sesquieres, sub direcția Domnului Gr. Cerkez, Inginer Șef al Orașului*.

Fig. 2: Photo by unknown author, ziarul *Curentul*, December 1, 1934, p. 5.

Fig. 3: Above, left: Image of Ciocanul School, courtesy of the Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal, Bucharest Jewish Community Collection;

Above, right: "Liceul Timpuri Noi București" Facebook page (color faded), accessed March 30, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/212569202151260/photos/a.1722965341111631/1722965197778312/?type=3>.

Below, left: Photograph from the newspaper *Curentul* (December 1, 1934), 5, author unknown;

Below, right: excerpt from the 1911 Bucharest map of the Army Geographic Institute, grid series XVI, column C'.

Fig. 4: Elena B. Kanner, *Monografia Școlii Profesionale și a Gimnaziului de Fete Fundațiunea Filip și Rașela Foșăneanu*. Bucharest: Tipografia „Cartea de Aur” A. Grossmann, 1924.

Fig. 5: Photos by arch. Yvonne Toader (January 15, 2025).

Table 1: Author: arch. Yvonne Toader.