

# **Urban Politics and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Post-Socialist Bucharest**

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the concern of a boundary between the state, the market and the civil society the present paper tries to understand a fine section within the broader debate of an urbanization process in post-socialist Romania, to gain a deeper perception on the renovation and selling process of old nationalized buildings declared representative for the cultural local heritage. This focus implies an understanding of the social space as incorporating social actions, as a means through which the social actors (architects, state officials and journalists) develop a general discourse or engage in a representational space by attaching meaning and regarding the nationalized houses as statements of esthetical perception, means of increasing the cultural heritage or excuses found by the political class in the process of establishing their positions in the field of power. In addition, the paper addresses the construction and negotiation process of cultural heritage within a general framework of urban renewal, not as a way of reclaiming the city history but rather as a means in the reinterpretation of the politics of accumulation.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Bucharest is a creation of our own nation, it expresses our originality, it is what were able to do (...) By its own vitality, Bucharest has managed to impose itself as a unique Capital, that had received all the attentive care of some great personalities we have not fully understood, to show then the gratitude they deserved"*

(Nicolae Iorga<sup>1</sup>, "The History of Bucharest", 1939)

After the overthrow of the communist regime in 1989, Bucharest, as most of the Romanian cities, started a process of urban transformation; the socialist rationalization of the urban space and life has been replaced by a neoliberal rescaling of urban economics leading to the loss in identity of the city known in the inter-war era as "Little Paris". The urban renewal, at first glance, has had positive effects: an enhanced property value and an image improvement that made Bucharest attractive for external investors; however, the economic and social changes have been triggered at the expense of Bucharest's cultural heritage as numerous buildings representative for the Romanian patrimony have been demolished. The highly debated housing landmarks have become creators and definers of the urban space transforming the cultural heritage into a prolongation of the civil and political spheres. Their discourses have shaped the perception of cultural heritage as a tool of urban renewal; in a neoliberal era where competition is translated into the unique character of a city, the cultural heritage has become a financial tool, an investment strategy of the urban governance (Harvey, 2005). In light of this, one can argue that the distinctive character of a city is converted, nowadays, into an ability to exploit socially and economically its cultural heritage<sup>2</sup>. Whether we are talking about an attempt of the city to compete within a globalized world for heritage tourism or a city undergoing physical change as

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolae Iorga, (1871-1940), a scholar and statesman, is regarded as Romania's greatest national historian. He established a historical reputation as a result of work materialized into 25,000 articles and 1,000 books among which a two-volume *Geschichte des rumänischen Volkes* (1905; "History of the Romanian People"), a five-volume *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches* (1908–12; "History of the Ottoman Empire") and a ten-volume national history (*Istoria Românilor*, 1936–39) (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293151/Nicolae-Iorga>)

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the paper, cultural heritage, heritage values and cultural significance will be used as intertwining concepts.

part of a multivalent redefinition of heritage, we constantly find ourselves in a position of addressing the question *what is cultural heritage?* The corpus of literature offers two possible answers; the first one can be found in the discourse of evaluation and conservation of values as no longer being restricted to the few, to the experts, but rather as having been embraced by a stronger public participation. The political and social civil voice<sup>3</sup> articulates and defines cultural heritage in distinct ways, and implicitly, it reinterprets history, memory and cultural identities. Based on this, the cultural landscape<sup>4</sup> becomes much more than one of power and resistance - in a Marxist-oriented interpretation - it is a construction and a means in an identity formation process (O'Keeffe, 2007). A second interpretation of the meaning of heritage lies on a new approach to urban governance that re-imagines the city, constructs a new present by reinterpreting the past and manufactures a landscape within a general framework of global economic change. The newly developed framework of action relies on the local governance competence to plan, manage and conserve the patrimony as a main vehicle of urban regeneration.

Informed by these new dimensions, the present thesis, which focuses on how heritage politics have been constructed and interpreted in contemporary Bucharest, is written from a standpoint that regards the cities' cultural heritage as assuming a much wider process than one of sustainability and continuity; it refers to the negotiation process of the heritage notion, in general, and to the built environment as a means of creating cultural heritage through the politics of accumulation in particular. Before proceeding to the research questions, it is important to mention at this point that the built environment is represented, in the present paper, by the nationalized houses who were subjected to property disposition during the communist period,

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<sup>3</sup> Gramsci's (1971) distinction between *political society* (state bureaucracy, army, police, legal system) and *civil society* (family, workers unions, voluntary associations) is a useful tool in defining the NGOs as active actors in society

<sup>4</sup> Landscape, in a more abstract way, is synonymous with "space" and "place"; all three concepts employ the same basic features: they define an area, are subjective to individual's perceptions and meanings attached to them are a result of social interactions. It is why, they are used in the present paper in interchangeable ways

right after the lose of World War II, in 1947<sup>5</sup>. Keeping in mind that these residential houses represents only a small fragment of a communist insight into the urban restructuring, a comparison will be drawn between them and the housing usually found at the outskirts of the city. The purpose is a better grasp of the communist systematization process and of the built environment as a background against which the process of cultural heritage is shaped. The first research aim of the present paper is, therefore, to demonstrate *how do the policies of demolition, part of an urban regeneration process of Bucharest, impact the preservation of the cultural heritage* and it traces two main fields of action: a culturalist approach to the state (Steinmetz, 1999)<sup>6</sup> which leads us to a research question on *how the Romanian state through its process of selection and construction of heritage discourse reasserts its power* and to a neoliberal policy that targets *how is cultural heritage shaped as a result of the production of an accumulation space?* The integration of a free-market policy has been re-written and exemplified in distinct manners by conservationists, historians, architects, political figures and governmental authorities; these opposing points of view are translated into different plans of actions. The implications of political, social and economic initiatives of these social actors represent the second goal of my analysis. Based on this, I argue first of all, that the urban space of Bucharest is one in which the social actors struggle for the right to the city understood in Lefebvre's terms (1991:158) as "demand...[for] a transformed and renewed access to urban life"; cultural heritage becomes, hence, the means through which the civil society reclaims the cultural space of the city, and even the national identity. In addition, I argue that the urban neoliberalism as an extension of Lefebvre's theory on urban space (Kipfer, 2002) leads to the production of space as a re-articulation of the institutional restructuring.

Architects, urban planners and NGOs have defined Bucharest's last 10 years of urban regeneration and revitalization as a cultural and architectural abuse; the statement refers to a

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<sup>5</sup> Further details on the nationalization process and the idea of built environment as a means of capital accumulation, will be provided in the chapter "Bucharest- The 'Little Paris' of the East"

<sup>6</sup> Drawing from Kowalski's insight into the governmental practice of cultural heritage, the culturalist approach to state refers to the "embeddedness of governmental action (...) that define its role in ideological and dependent ways and that legitimate it" (2006:1)

chaotic urban development, to attempts of building in open green or protected areas and to aggression over the Romanian patrimony by demolishing houses representative for the cultural heritage and were part of the nationalization process of the 50's. Even though in the mass media, the general discourse presents the nationalized houses as being in decay and vice versa (each house left in decay is, by consequence, a nationalized house), distinctions have to be made: not every nationalized house is in decay and not every house that is not part of the cultural heritage is a "success story"; rather each one of them is by itself a unique case. The NGOs or more precisely, the Platform for Bucharest (and the architects)<sup>7</sup> have translated their discontent either in legal programs (reports, trials) or civic actions (community based programs, local movement of people or organizations that share a similar profile and a strong mass-media campaign). At the same time, the state officials promote through formal and legal acts such as the heritage tourism and the Urban Plan of Bucharest, a respect for the cultural character and the features of each of the built segment, for the diversity and cultural prestige of the central historic area. Nevertheless, at the practical level, numerous examples have shown that segments of the local authorities (the City hall of district number 3 of Bucharest) try to find gaps in the Romanian legislation or construct history by omission (the campaign started by the Ministry of Tourism and Territorial Development with the purpose of promoting the landmarks of Bucharest). Solutions can be found; other major European capitals that have been part of the Iron Curtain have proved it. Examples of countries who have a respect for cultural value but most of all, a desire to preserve their cultural and historical patrimony countries are Hungary (Budapest), Czech Republic (Prague<sup>8</sup>), Lithuania (Vilnius<sup>9</sup>) and Poland (Warsaw<sup>10</sup>). Romania, and in this particular case,

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<sup>7</sup> During the fieldwork, I have been noticed that there is no strict category of architects; rather they are divided into two main fields of action: those who are employed by the state and are responsible for the Urban Plan of Bucharest and those who have joined NGOs, sharing the same ultimate goals. This is why, since I see no distinction between the NGOs and the architects as volunteers, I am going to address them as a single group: the civil society or, as it will be noticed later on, as the Platform for Bucharest

<sup>8</sup> The Strategic Plan for Prague was formulated in 2001, providing a vision of what Prague plans to achieve in spatial planning in the next 10 years. Although Prague has a master plan which guides the development of Prague, it does not determine what will be built, but rather what can be built.

<sup>9</sup> *The Vilnius Revitalization Strategy* drawn In 1995 under the name "An integrated approach to conservation-

Bucharest fails to become part of the list as it refuses to reach an architectural coherence by favouring the private sector through its Local Urban Plan (Plan Urbanistic Zonal) – this issue in Europe will be explained in more depth in the chapter devoted to the urban politics of neoliberal rescaling<sup>11</sup>.

With these concerns in mind, I undertook an empirical research project on the effects of global capitalism in post-socialist Romania on the nationalized<sup>12</sup> housing process as part of an urban regeneration. This process implies two intertwining plans: the first one refers to Romanian architects, journalists, NGOs and local officials as producers of space, their perception of themselves as professional practitioners in the nationalization process and their role within the public debates (Lynch, 1960:310). The second one is an understanding of the nationalization process, its implications on the urban renewal plan of Bucharest as a means of re-articulating the hierarchy of the state power. Taken together, the two points refer to the political decision process and the conflict that arises within the wider context of urban space management. It is with this dual character in mind that I have systematized my paper and divided the present research into four chapters. The first is a review of the related literature; it starts with a short comparison of urban regeneration and urban revitalization as strongly correlated to the process of urban renewal; also, global capitalism and urban neoliberalism are framed in a discourse of national space. Following this, under a theoretical umbrella divided around two main questions: *to whom does the cultural heritage belong? or what and how should it be conserved?*, particular attention will be given

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led urban regeneration ”aims at “safeguarding historic urban architecture and revitalize the inner-city district”

<sup>10</sup> During the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, more than 85% of Warsaw's historic centre was destroyed by Nazi troops. After the war, a five-year reconstruction campaign by its citizens resulted in today's meticulous restoration of the Old Town, with its churches, palaces and market-place. It is an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century.

<sup>11</sup> A similar situation can be noticed in Riga, Latvia where historical buildings are demolished, motivating that it is easier and cheaper to build a new one than to restore the historical buildings, attempts to build up public open space, green zones have been made and original elements of the buildings have been changed leading to the loss of the buildings' authenticity.

<sup>12</sup> *Nationalization* should be distinguished from *privatization* or *property redistribution*. To put it briefly, nationalization refers to the process during which private assets (in this case, houses) have been taken into public ownership with the purpose of being operated or owned by the state.



to values as main triggers in the social construction of cultural heritage; the description of the process will be done against a conceptual background of the cultural heritage as analyzed within a general framework of memory, forgetting and identity-formation. The second chapter is devoted to a short contextualization of the Romanian urban development process within the limits of architectural heritage with a particular emphasis on the social and capitalist mechanisms of urban development. With a particular focus on the built environment, the paper makes an analytical transition from a state-centred mode of production to a capitalist space of accumulation. The following two chapters refer to structural and organizational questions have been outlined in semi-structured interviews taking into account the duality outlined above (the nationalization process analysed through the understanding of the Romanian architects as professional practitioners and hierarchy of the state power). Hence, in the third chapter, I have addressed the manner in which the state understands the cultural heritage and how, via different practices, they create a system of promotion and ultimately production of identity, which differs from the ideological climate and working conditions of the communist era. The fourth chapter is devoted to the mapping of the civil structure by identifying organizational actors and researching their histories and leadership structures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A large theoretical body of literature outlines as the main symbolic feature of a heritage value, its ability to generate multiple meanings for different groups of people; its multivalence becomes an outcome of interaction in a context be it social, historical or spatial (Avrami, E., R. Mason, and M. de la Torre, 2000). “A guiding idea in the heritage conservation” (Mason, 1999:7), value refers either to a singular point of view or as it is going to be used in the present paper, an anthropological perspective that aims at a more integrative insight; this is why the first part will be reserved for a brief analysis of the concept of values, conservation and to how the process of forgetting shapes heritage. The distinct discourses tackled in the present paper become various layers of cultural heritage distinct through their meanings and their relation to an urban revitalization or regeneration of Bucharest. The different points of view are analyzed within a general theoretical framework of cognitive mapping, memory and forgetting as a main tool in the creation of an identity formation, but most importantly in the creation of the urban space and the preservation of heritage. The beginning of the literature review is devoted to a short parallel comparison between the urban regeneration and revitalization as part of an urban strategy, the core aim of most of the Romanian ruling political parties. So urban revitalization refers to a manner of “putting new life into cities” and bettering areas from a social and economic point of view (Beauregard and Holcomb, 1981). It is defined by the purpose of rebuilding a portion of the urban environment with the purposes of enhancing the consumption habits and opportunities (ibid). Two distinct approaches according to Zienlebach (2000) can be noticed: an individual based one (an improvement of living conditions in neighborhoods) and a place-based one (local economic development and increase in real estate values). To put it briefly, urban revitalization focuses on activities and functions. In a slight contrast, urban regeneration is characterized by physical growth and environmental progressions; it is lead by new class of highly skilled and highly paid gentrifiers and results in creation of wealthy neighborhoods (Beauregard and Holcomb, 1981). Based on these, one can observe that in theory, a correlation between urban

regeneration and sustainable development can be observed as it can be enforced through the recycling of buildings, for example; but in practice, the discourse is much more difficult to be enforced. First of all, the physical renovation and the economic revitalization even though it leads to an urban renewal, it does this at the expense of exclusion of individuals and even communities, spatial inequality and ultimately, as in the present case, to the cultural heritage. The conflict that might arise between a desire for urban renewal as part of a wider process of consumption, exchange and production, and the preservation of cultural heritage might find its core in a duality that has been the centre of literature debates and has been formulated in terms of: to whom does the cultural heritage belong? or what and how should it be conserved? Based on this, the following two sub-chapters will be devoted first to the idea of the value as an outcome of ideas and actions (Mason, 2000) with a particular emphasis on value as material, tradable and value as a quality constantly dependent on an allocation of resources; and secondly, to the social construction of the cultural heritage focusing on the state control over the space supply.

### HERITAGE VALUES – BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

On November 16<sup>th</sup> 1972, the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage:” adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was the first one to formally define the cultural heritage; the first article acknowledges that cultural heritage refers to “**monuments**: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements of structure of an archaeological nature (...); **groups of buildings**: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape (...); **sites**: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological and anthropological point of view”<sup>13</sup> (my emphasis). Nevertheless, while the Convention, and in particular, the definition is useful for a classification process and serves as a starting point in the evaluation of cultural

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<sup>13</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf>

heritage, it does little for an understanding of the central role active conservation and cultural participation have in the national policy-making. For a better understanding of cultural heritage as an embedded actor in the social and cultural lives of the communities, additional references are needed. Cultural anthropologists refer to heritage as a product of the users or lifestyles transferred from generation to another (Gunay, 2008; Bucher, 1996) and accentuate the role of the conservation community in the ascription of values (Ashworth, Graham, Tunbridge, 2000, 2007; Avrami, Mason, 2000). However, whether we are talking in terms of agency or structure, one thing is clear: these integrated perspective face difficulties when analyzed in a globalized neoliberal context. Within a competitive framework, the cultural heritage is much more than an outcome of ideas and actions (Mason, 2000), it has become an “economic development tool” (Gunay, 2008) in heritage tourism or urban regeneration programs. Based on this, one can conclude that the corpus of literature on cultural values either addresses the heritage from a financial standpoint (resource management) or as a good within the society, a public outcome of a decision-making process. A common ground is reached however, when it comes to the conservation as a social construct, a subjective notion depending on the values of individuals: “heritage is never merely conserved or protected; it is modified — both enhanced and degraded — by each new generation.” (Lowenthal, 1985). Starting from the assumption that all answers are meaningful and legitimate, the heritage value of an object cannot be framed in terms of wrong and right but rather it addresses from various angles the same problem; it is a matter of different perspectives of various groups and individuals defined and articulated through values (Avrami & Mason, 2000). These cultural values held by different players confer meaning to the object transforming it into heritage (Avrami, Mason & de la Torre, 2000). This process of shape-significance implies that the contested place becomes a metaphor for an individual or collective identity, that “place is somebody’s heritage” (O’Keeffe, 2007:10). The tendency towards the democratization of opinions (“everyone knows, possesses and partakes in ‘landscape’” (ibid:3), a multivalent characteristic of cultural heritage (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Kearns and Philo,

1993; Bianchini, 1993; Zukin, 1995; de la Torre, & Avrami, 2000; Mason, 2000; Rypkema, 2005) transforms the patrimony conservation into “a highly politicized social process” (Avrami & Mason, 2000) as the question of to whom does the heritage belong to is raised.

### **The Social Construction of Cultural Heritage**

Avrami and Mason (2000) by analyzing the process of heritage creation, production and preservation, outline the main steps of the “conservation as a complex, diverse and even divergent social practice” (ibid:3). They follow: for an object to become part of the cultural heritage, interest (be it academic, archaeological, civic, political or religious) has to be generated; the acknowledgement of cultural values is dependent on a community driven or community-based concern. This local or national mobilization of forces entails a starting procedure of evaluation; curators, heritage commissioners or other types of experts evaluate the importance of the object and make suggestions, which may or not be formulated into a program of intervention. The owners or the persons who are responsible for the object make the final decision of renovating, conserving or abandoning the urban fabric. It can be easily observed from Avrami and Mason’s (2000) synthesis that, first of all, conservation policies are a nexus between the stakeholders (communities, politicians, investors) and the professionals. Secondly, in light with Torre’s statement (2000), the roles accomplished by the cultural heritage, be them instrumental (the functions and the purposes it accomplishes within the wider society), symbolic (the meanings people attach to them) depend on the cultural contexts, social aspects, political forces and economic factors. This is why conservation is an evolving process correlated to an interpretation of the past, reconstruction of the history and an active cultural participation.

During the process of heritage conservation, cultural identities are shaped and history is re-written; history cannot be analyzed without making reference to memory, or as O’Keffee puts it “history (...) is always about memory” (2000:5). History is a narrated, reconstructed past of idealized collective (Halbwachs, 1960) or collected memories (Young, 1993). Collective

memory is an outside construction, an outcome of external development; it represents what we are reminded and it develops a model based on which the past is structured (O’Keefee, 2007). Memory shapes our reactions to history influencing the outcomes and the positions individuals adopt towards a place; it is the main factor in a process of place contestation between different social, economic or even political interests (Lowenthal, 1985): ‘Memory transforms the experienced past into what we later think it should have been, eliminating undesired scenes and making favored ones suitable’ (ibid: 206). But most importantly, collective memory is an end product of a reshaped personal memory through cultural heritage (White, 1999; Shackel, 2001)<sup>14</sup>. Place and personal memory processes and identity formation influence values, which are strongly the preservation and development of cultural heritage (Giddens, 2002). ‘Memory transforms the experienced past into what we later think it should have been, eliminating undesired scenes and making favored ones suitable’ (Lowenthal, 1985, 206). Interestingly, it is during this process of selection, that implies omission and forgetting, that place becomes a “product of mindscape” (Zerubavel, 1997) and as a consequence space the means of remembering “visual-factual” and the “sensual-emotional”. Hence, the spatial image developed in the mind of the individual is a result, on the one hand, of what is visible at the present moment, the outcome of our senses and, on the other, of the memory of past experiences that guide him into acknowledging and providing meaning to our surroundings. Within the space created and absorbed by the individual, perception and cognition are the key players. A proper starting point would be Lefebvre’s understanding of the social space as defined by a lived spatial practice, conceived representations of space and perceived representational spaces, a unitarian concept between the space and its users. The proper relational concept, a “toolkit” – as used by Archer (1982) is Lynch’s mutual determination between space and the individual which come to be seen as “the nodes and intersections between culture and nature, abstraction and reality, past and future, form and

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<sup>14</sup> For further details, see the work of Nora (1997, 1998, 2001) on *lieux of memoire*, Hough’s (1990) on the tendency of collective identity to be reinforced at the regional rather than at the national level, Zukin’s (1991) on market forces and technology as the main factors in the homogenization process of landscape (for full citations, see the Resources).

inform, the abstract and the real” (Lynch, 1960:38). A similarity between Lynch and Lefebvre cannot be denied: this concept of nodes and networks as observed above in Lynch’s work resembles Lefebvre’s intertwinement of social spaces, which achieve real existence “by virtue of networks and pathways, by virtue of bunches or clusters of relationships”. (Lefebvre, 1991: 86). Despite the fact that the two perspectives, when considering space in isolation, are mere abstractions, but through the continuity of time and cultures (Lefebvre’s case<sup>15</sup>) or through the construction of a “cognitive space” (Lynch’s case), space becomes the main activist of a law, an interconnected link between the planners and the social space users. Also, the space as a link between memory, history, the immediate observation of space, and collective or personal identity is an *aide de memoire*.

## METHODS AND RESEARCH STRATEGIES

A field analysis, the present paper is constructed as a case study of the nationalized houses from Bucharest, Romania. The last ten years have transformed the nationalized built environment of Bucharest in highly debated housing landmarks; creators and definers of the urban space, they have reshaped the cultural heritage as a matter of civil and political rights. The social actors engaged in a space of conflict and at the same time, of exchange, have configured the perception of cultural heritage as much more than a tool of urban renewal; the built environment is the means of creating national identity through the politics of accumulation. To find responses to the research questions outlined in the introduction chapter, I have based my spatial and political economic analysis on open-ended semi-structured interviews. The data gathered is a result of qualitative, primary data gathering and interviews taking place in natural social contexts.

Although this method can pose numerous problems as it can be difficult to find good interviewers and the personal opinion of interviewer may creep into the interview or the

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<sup>15</sup> We are confronted not by one social space but by many – indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as “social space” (Lefebvre, 1991: 86)

information might be restricted due to the social position or formal situation, I find it very useful as it allows observation of non-verbal expressions of my respondents while the personal contact with him or her enhances a good probing and it facilitates a higher degree of flexibility so higher chances of asking questions in accordance to the evolution of the discussion (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In addition, it has allowed me to speak with one participant at a time and was an excellent way of exploring issues in more detailed manner (the legislation), of finding out from the interviewers information I could not have otherwise directly observed (the bureaucratic process of listing, de-listing a built environment from the list of national monuments) or were not anticipated when the interview was written (conflict of interests in the administrative offices, personal data<sup>16</sup> on a certain nationalized house). Most of the new information was made available as a result of using mental mapping as a research instrument. No predetermined categories meant no restrictions in introducing new data.

The sample of my analysis was comprised of two main categories<sup>17</sup>: the *political society* (city officials and architects teaching at University of Architecture and Urbanism “Ion Mincu” whom I regard as part of the local administration due to their involvement in creating the Urban Plan of Bucharest) and the *civil society* (NGO’s, journalists - and architects). The first group is represented by officials from the Urbanization and Territorial Rehabilitation Management (“Directia Urbanism si Amenajarea Teritoriului”); it is part of the Bucharest city government and is managed by a chief-architect; it has the right to coordinate the activity of the Urban and Metropolitan Planning Center from Bucharest (“Centrul de Planificare Urbana si Metropolitana Bucuresti”) and the Territorial Planning Design and the Urban General Plan of Bucharest (“Planul de Amenajare a Teritoriului si Planul Urbanistic General al Municipiului Bucuresti”). I have chosen to interview these administrative players as a result of their engagement in the local institutional process of evaluating and deciding the affiliation of a historical building to a cultural

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<sup>16</sup> By personal I refer to data that describes the mundane, the everyday life of the owners. Even though is subjective and relies mostly on secondary data, I found it extremely useful when outlining the socio-demographic profile of the centre and peripheral inhabitants.

<sup>17</sup> The distinction is drawn based on Gramsci’s model – see page 3, footnote 3 for more details.



heritage domain in accordance to certain criteria. Hence, their role within the debate of the nationalized houses is crucial. My questions have addressed first of all, the nature of the agreement signed in 2006 between the University of Architecture and Urbanism “Ion Mincu” – *Bucharest through the Research, Design, Expertise and Consulting* (“Universitatea de Arhitectura si Urbanism “Ion Mincu” – Bucuresti prin Centrul de Cercetare, Proiectare, Expertiza si Consulting”) and the Bucharest city hall through the Urban Design Centre of the capital Bucharest (“Centrul de Proiectare Urbana a Municipiului Bucuresti”); the practical purpose was the protection of the architectural and urban heritage of Bucharest. At the same time, I have addressed issues such as the responsibilities and the rights of each part, with particular emphasis on evaluation and renovation of the buildings declared part of the Romanian cultural heritage; the purpose of the interviews was nevertheless, the desire to find out whether one can talk about a community of architects as social actors that influence the outcomes. Within the broader group of participants to the making process, I have opted for a snowball sampling. I am aware of the main disadvantage (the possibility of gathering the same sort of data or simply put, to be a witness of a data noise) but due to restricted social capital in the architectural field, my choices of recruiting interviewees were restricted. The interviews have started with the drawing of mental maps by the interviewee as I see them as a pretext for an interview, which aims at moving beyond an understanding of a spatial practice or a conceived space of the city towards a revealing of a representational space, of the social production of meanings. In addition, as my research interest shifted towards heritage tourism strategies, I have conducted structured interviews with official employees by the Ministry of Tourism and Territorial Development. The intention was to address the themes such as the use of the built environment in the construction of a public relation strategy for the cultural promotion of Bucharest.

Furthermore, my focus has shifted towards the architects that do not take part in the local decisional debate but rather were employed by the owners of the old buildings for supervising the renovation process. The distinction between the employed architects and those

who co-operate with the state is of a crucial importance, as the former needs to cater to a client's esthetical desires, to the owners of the nationalized houses who, in my view, represent the first property owners in a capitalist mode of thinking. As Lefebvre (1991) showed the social production of urban space is fundamental to the reproduction of society, hence of capitalism itself and is commanded by a hegemonic class as a tool to reproduce its dominance. I conducted walking interviews with this later group of architects, the questions referring to the main purpose of the space: do these architects regard it like Lefebvre as a tool of thought and action? Do they regard the renovation process as a first step towards a social production of the space?

At the same time, I conducted open-ended in-depth interviews with those journalists employed by be three cultural newspapers that engaged themselves in a public debate on the urbanization process and in particular on the renovation of the nationalized houses. These newspapers have played the biggest role in these urban scandals, role evaluated in accordance to the number of articles published and the public debates they took place either on television or in open spaces. The reasons for choosing these three newspapers are their profile (cultural newspapers), target (middle upper class, highly educated individuals and students) and the number of copies sold each week (Old Dilemma ("Dilema veche") – 13.200 , The Literary and Artistic Truth ("Adevarul literar si artistic") – 7.000 and 22 – 5. 800<sup>18</sup> ) . The debate they took part heavily promoted a consciousness rising towards the cultural heritage of preserving and renovating certain parts of the Romanian capital.

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<sup>18</sup> numbers taken from their official sites: <http://www.dilemaveche.ro/>, <http://www.adevarul.ro/> , <http://www.revista22.ro/>, all accessed on 25<sup>h</sup> April 2011, 13.45

## **Bucharest - the Little Paris of The East**

The spatial division of Bucharest is a testimony to the multiple political regimes that have ruled it; the architecture has divided it into small quarters transforming Bucharest into an eclectic city. An analysis according to the historical evolution of housing can better grasp the discrepancies in the urban perceptions of my interviewees and understands the role of the city spatial division in the preservation of the patrimony. The nineteenth century, starting with 1830, and with increasing intensity towards 1900, was defined by an intense modernization. As a result of an impressive French transfiguration, Bucharest became known as 'Little Paris'. More precisely, houses began to have more than one storey, and public buildings began to be erected; in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and in the years immediately after 1900, French architects or their Romanian disciples designed an increasing numbers of buildings in a variety of French styles (eclectic, neo-Classical etc.). During the World War I, the Central Powers occupied Bucharest stopping the development process that restarted only in the 1930s. The inter-war era is regarded as the most culturally and economically prosperous in Romanian history and it is defined as coexistence between the French influenced urban planning and the local urbanism, a mixture of urban plans and forms. . Under King Carol II, the city skyline began changing, numerous art deco- and Neo-Romanian buildings and monuments were built, including the new Royal Palace, the Military Academy, Arc of Triumph, the University of Bucharest Faculty of Law, the new main wing of North Train Station, the Victoria Palace, Dimitrie Gusti's Village Museum, and the present-day Museum of the Romanian Peasant. The World War II defeat led to the communist invasion, regime that came to an end in 1989. The following sub-chapters will present first of all the communist urban geography with a particular focus on Bucharest as having undergone a shift from the rationalized spatial distribution to the capitalist space of accumulation; the historical insight is essential for the understanding of the fixed capital (the built environment) as an important factor in the political economic change; it has transformed the

social relations of capital and labour but most of all, the reproduction space of accumulation.

## A SOCIALIST URBAN GEOGRAPHY

The solution found by communist regime to the housing shortage following the World War II was a social program of building up cheap dwellings<sup>19</sup> (usually blocks of flats, built in urban areas); nevertheless, this has to be understood as part of a wider process, *systematization* that aimed at the total restructuring and rationalization of the urban space and urban life. The main outcome was the creation of an “abstract space” in which private and public were separated. The city itself was divided into smaller parts; each division was able to sustain itself socially and economically, as the production site (usually a factory) was situated in a closed proximity to the residential area (Chelcea, 2008; Turnock, 1990); they were smaller cities in themselves able to cater to the entire circuit of accumulation. Public authorities made the distribution of the social housing based on the state factories/enterprises recommendation, favoring the state-employed citizens (Dan&Dan, 2001:2). The entitlement was linked to the communist ideology and propaganda, conditioned by working in the state economic sector despite the legal entitlement as highlighted in the Romanian Constitution from communist period: every citizen has the right to housing and the state has the obligation to provide adequate housing. A sort of “wage welfare state” (ibid:2), the state socialism adopted an overcrowding and non-residential segregation policy, massively moving people from individual housing to blocks of flats leading to a residential mixture of social classes.<sup>20</sup> Under the Ceausescu regime, the country undertook massive programs of reconstruction and consolidation of cities, towns and villages. The urban planning had at least three forms: juxtaposition, infiltration and replacement, implant (Oroveanu, 1986); the housing sector was developing at the same pace as the industrial (spatially

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<sup>19</sup> “In the best traditions of vulgar Marxism, the Communist regime believed that people were shaped by their environment. New uniform socialist housing, it reasoned, would produce a new uniform Socialist Man born of bourgeois individualism” (Hanley, 1999:5).

<sup>20</sup> Such a case was the Uranus neighbourhood, which was demolished in the 1980’s to make room for the working class neighbourhoods (Ferentari, Rahova, Ghencea). For a precise geographical position, see Map 2

they were identical); one reason for this was the intention of outlining “rational rapports between workplace and the place of residence” (Cucu, 1977:92)

In Bucharest, the city analyzed in the present paper, it is widely accepted that the 1977 earthquake triggered the radical transformation of the 1980s (Popa, 2007). A mis-constructed perception showed that the urban plans highlighted Ceausescu’s intention to clear the city centers of their historic buildings and replace them with new street networks and large blocks of commercial and residential buildings. Evidence (Celac, 1998) shows, however, that urban plans were already designed (such as the 1935 first developmental plan) to reshape the capital’s structure. The right moment was expected and it came as a natural disaster. Nearly one-quarter of the old town centre that included churches, monasteries, hospitals, schools, and residential homes, were demolished (Salecl: 100). This destruction should be interpreted as a perfect embodiment of the socialist ideals that stood behind the urban plans; the intention was to “physically erase the historical memory of the people” (Scott, 1999:42), to rebuilt a Romanian national identity embodied in the architecture of the past (Petcu 1999: 177<sup>21</sup>). His aim was to disclose any connections the previous Romanian national identity, which was represented in the architecture of the past (Petcu, 1999:177). The demolitions provided the opportunity to elude social aggregation by relocating and placing the high-income, highly educated citizens that lived in the city centre in the marginal areas in the same blocks with the working class representatives. But as Petrovici (2006:107) noticed in a research conducted on Cluj Napoca, “the urban space was disconnected and dual, a result of the intersection between the operations of a shortage economy and an ideology that legitimized the political system”.

Bucharest urban plan included the creation of a wider street than Champs Elysee aimed at uniting the main squares (Unification, Romana and University) but most importantly to host on each of its side as many blocks of flats as possible for the “new man” (the citizen

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<sup>21</sup> “Building socialism involved changing people’s minds and view of history...and new public monuments were expected to play a major educational role in this respect” (Fowkes, 2002:65).

brought from the rural areas housed and offered a job in one of the socialist factories). Bordered by blocks built in a socialist-realist manner (see Picture 1) The Unification Boulevard was the perfect example of a canyon boulevard: the blocks have no space between them and the access in the behind of the flats is made through passages. This particular model was intentionally different than the old bourgeois neighbourhoods (see Picture 2, back of the blocks). The national space was a testimony for a cross-section of material and social relationships and an expression of political ideology and state control (Passi, 2003:109–111). In the former planned economies in Central and East Europe, state control over individuals' economic and social relations was reflected in the total centralisation of ownership (Dawidson, 2004a). Since it was believed to lead to the accumulation of wealth among prioritised groups in society, private property was to a varying extent confiscated, nationalised and collectivised (Marcuse, 1996: 125-129).

## **THE TRANSITION TO MARKET**

In 1989, the Romanian state socialism regime was replaced by a so-called socio-democratic one. In light of this conversion, dramatic adjustments in the housing sector oriented at this point in time towards the free-market direction led to a re-stratification of the population from the point of view of financial resources and location. Changes in housing standards and conditions such as housing deprivation, subsistence living and marginality lead, at this point in time, to the growth of an individual home ownership conditioned by the development of contemporary financial mechanisms (Forrest, Williams, 2001) such as bank loans or mortgage finance. The shape of the finance system influenced the access to home ownership but I believe that the involvement of external agents such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund truly influenced the transition to market. Even though, in effect, the Structural Adjustment Programs implemented by the later, have demanded that poor nations to lower the standard of living (Davis, 2007), one must concur that the same neoliberal agenda helped the birth of a real estate market through privatization. Former construction companies were split and privatized as well as a significant part of the state owned housing, liberalization of the sale of construction

materials took place, and restrictions on owning property were eliminated. The first step towards decentralization was made: the transfer of assets (housing stock, land) from the previously state to the newly owners along with an increase of the elected governments in responsibilities and control power (Forrest, Williams, 2001). The transfer of properties from the public rental sector became emblematic for a new social order defined by elements such as changes in housing provision, management, ownership and privatization. It's important to mention that much of the housing activity occurred through face-to-face exchanges, hard-currency deals and self-built (Telgarsky, Struyk, 1990).

The disintegration of the Communist systems in the early 1990s has involved significant spatial reorganisations of ownership by means of (re)privatization; the shift marked a greater role for the market and an active privatization of housing (Nord, 1992; Schmidt, 1992; Siksio, 1992; Turner, 1992; Hegedus and Tosics, 1994; Nataliya, 1994; Clapham et al., 1996; Struyk, 1996a). The study on the eastern European reform, reveals that privatization, favored a certain people with valuable financial, property and other assets, at the expense at other groups (Andrusz, et al., 1996; Struyk, 1996b). There is a growing consensus that market reform in many countries has been a partial reform, preserving some features of socialism and particularly the advantages of many members of the old political class (Gaubatz, 1995; 1996; Zhou and Logan, 1996). Party members and factory managers in the former Soviet bloc have discovered that their political connections and control over scarce resources can be profitable (Staniszki, 1991; Burawoy and Krotov, 1992). The involvement in the property rights process among the post-socialist political elites, however, has resulted in different spatial patterns: restitution of confiscated properties to former private owners in part recreates pre-socialist ownership; hence public sale to current users involves the privatisation of the existing property distribution (Dawidson, 2004a, Dawidson, 2004b). If we define space as a territorial organisation emanating from the practice of political institutions (Painter, 1995), socialist space was characterised by the centralisation, post-socialist space by decentralisation of ownership. Based on an understanding

that space is the creation of social relations and since various societies differ in time and space, Petrovici (2006) highlights that it is legitimate to assume the existence of socialist spaces and times and capitalist spaces and times.

In terms of nationalization and restitution in Romania, Chelcea (2001) saw Bucharest as a genealogical practice, as the social organization of domestic groups whose homes were nationalized in the name of housing inequality elimination and private rental sector dissolution. The central issue for his research targets “the relations created among tenants and landlords that inhabited these houses before and during socialism understood within the role played by the state” (Chelcea, 2003:714). It is with this in mind that the housing policy preoccupations of the post-89 regime, the institutional structures and the state and market responses should be addressed. After 1989, former owners and their descendants began seeking to regain the property rights for the properties confiscated by the state-socialist regime (or in Harvey’s terms, properties lost and gained as a result of accumulation by dispossession)<sup>22</sup>. Two important remarks have to be made at this point. The first one outlines the post-1989 restitution legislation in Romania, publicly and politically debated, as a rather unique case situated in the East European context since it focused and favoured the tenants rather than the previous owners. The state allowed the former to privatize at very low prices rather than providing true restitution or compensation to the previous owners, favouring and declaring as successful restitution cases those where “politically powerful individuals had used state authority before 1989 to evict owners from desirable apartments so as to appropriate for the personal use” (Chelcea, 2003:718). The second remark addressed, the transformation of the nationalized houses into a “manipulable resource” (apud Chelcea, p. 718), in the context of an improper application of the major nationalization decree of 1950 (administrative errors such as incorrect transcriptions of owners’ names and houses’ addresses): the leasing contracts were awarded in response to political fidelity or distributed in order to avoid political conflicts. In addition, political pressures or state managed

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<sup>22</sup> compensation for the chronic problems of over-accumulation arising within expanded reproduction” (Harvey, 2003:156)



bureaucratic strategies helped the ruling parties to reinforce political patronage.

A particular feature of Bucharest's housing stock is the highly dominant share of single-family houses which they total 95.1 % of all residential buildings out of which 55.7% are dwelling units (see Picture 3), 39.2% presents the proportion of dwellings in apartment buildings and the remaining 5.2% are non-detached houses (semi-detached terraces) (UNECE, 2001). Bucharest's nationalized houses belonged to two different categories but no district should be perceived as being perfectly homogenous; rather the overall description can be qualified either as registered into a good or bad quality dimension. So, one can find the residential district with the most desirable housing accounting for 11.000 the well-located and well-designed dwellings located in the city center (between University Square, Romana Square and Unification Square) and the social housing during socialism characterized by poor quality houses located in slum areas (neighborhoods such as Militari, Titan, Dristor, Drumul Taberei, Pantelimon, particularly built for those Romanian citizens who were brought into the capital as a result of a exodus from rural to urban areas that took place at the beginning of the 1950's) (Chelcea, 2003). Two phases can be noticed in the political and historical evolution of the Romanian capital. The first was the policy of the former communist government, which started in 1970's and continued into the 1980's. Characterized by massive State-led housing programs, it regarded housing as a means of achieving urban expansion and rapid industrialization. Despite this large-scale activity, by 1990 the public sector's share of the housing stock in Romania had increased to only 32.7% - i.e. two thirds was still in private hands (UNECE, 2001:4). The second stage was defined by the state's relinquishing of a large share of the national housing asset political control. The new post-communist government's wished to pursue a policy of mass privatization of the State-owned housing stock so between 1990 and 1993 state-owned housing was offered to the tenants on the condition of a 10% down payment. The price was dependent on the age, structure, category and size of the dwelling and the potential owner could have applied for a soft loan offered by the State. Mass privatization resulted in an increase in private housing from 67.3% in 1990 to over

90% in 1993 and by the end of 1999, private sector stock had reached 94.6% of all housing in Romania (UNECE, 2001:5). Purchased at heavily discounted prices, few of the homeowners would necessarily have calculated or appreciated the true value of the acquired properties and even fewer were able to evaluate the true costs of repairs and maintenance those properties truly needed (UNECE, 2001). I truly believe that a particular attention has to be given to the manner in which the apartments were sold within the same block. To be more precise, in a 4-floor block, the upper and the lower levels located at the extremities of the block were sold to the working class while the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> were usually reserved for intellectuals. At the same time, extended family members had priority: children were encouraged to buy apartments on the same staircase or even floor. Even more important, the similarity of the apartments increased the chances of random distribution of dwellers by social class (Bodnar, 2001) decreasing the chances of a social segregation.

Progressively a retrenchment of state from financing the construction of social housing was registered (this state withdrawal from housing policy is a common feature of ex-socialist and took the form of housing privatization and stimulation of homeownership) (Dan&Dan, 2003:3). Since 1990, “housing privatization reforms have been taking the same direction in the Central and Eastern European countries, but different forms in the process of their formulation and implementation” (Pichler-Milanovich, 2001:105). A shift regarding residential areas defined by the building process oriented toward rural areas, villages around Bucharest (Baneasa, Pipera) was a result of housing costs augmentation and dramatic decrease of population’s purchasing power. In 1990, the new elected government adopted the Law Decree 61/1990. Aimed at solving the issue of selling out to the tenants the social housing stock, one positive effect was the ability of the low-income class to become owners and gain an asset of a high importance and high market value. In contrast, a negative effect was the transferring to population a hard manageable low-quality housing stock leads to the escaping of the public authorities by a huge burden (Dan&Dan, 2003:3).

## *Statistics*

Housing in Romania in the communist period was produced by the socialized sector (represented by the state and cooperatives) and by private individuals. In 1980, the socialized sector accounted for 94% of all new housing; the private sector produced only 11,200 units built almost entirely in the rural areas as building individual units in urban areas was prohibited (Telgarsky, Struyk, 1990). The statistics, which are going to be presented in the following lines, have been taken from the 2001 official report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. So the housing built by the state over the past 50 years has conformed to a limited range of standardized flats in large blocks; they were built in three basic standards, with up to 6 habitable rooms (1 kitchen, 1-2 bathrooms, 2-3 rooms) and floor space ranges from 24 square meters (“low-comfort” one room unit) to 171 square meters (6 rooms “increased comfort” unit). The private sector construction industry did not formally exist before 1989 when legislation allowing the creation of private enterprises was enacted. Housing under communism was a state managed and built system while the sections of the society that stood outside this formal “Stalin model” of housing (Buckley, Tsenkova, 2003:15) stood for a primitive type of housing market and with few institutional supports (ibidem:16).

## *Legislation*

Nationalization of housing in 1948 restricted private ownership to one unit per household with most other units confiscated and turned into public sector housing (Dorin, 1990). In theory, it was possible from 1973 for private individuals to construct and purchase individual dwelling units (either from other individuals or from the state). However, as Dorin (1990) reports the 1973 legislation was not followed by contractual and administrative procedures adequate for its implementation, but allowed the sale of state-owned dwellings to private citizens (UNECE, 2001). So, further legislation to protect the rights of the buyers was promulgated in 1977. However, not even this measure led to an appreciable increase in the number of flats and

houses being built, as households found legal recourse difficult and usually ended up simply paying for the necessary repairs themselves. From 1979 to 1985, under very favorable conditions, the tenants who lived in rental flats were able to buy them. Suspended in 1985 as part of a generalized drive against private ownership, sales have been allowed again since the modified law of 1990. Finance for housing purchase during the 1979-1985 period was provided through the Romanian Bank for Investment that granted loans according to the salary and size of unit: down-payments increased from 20% to 30 and loan terms fell from 25 to 15 years as salaries rose; loan ceilings ranged from 35,000 lei (2,300 dollars at the 1981 official exchange rate) for one-room flat to 90,000 lei (6,000) for a five-room flat; and interest rates ranged from 3% to 8% according to the type of loan granted (Telgarsky, Struyk, 1990: 217). In 1990, households were allowed to obtain credit from state banks to finance individual unit construction as the restrictions on housing purchase were lifted.

## URBAN POLITICS OF NEOLIBERAL RESCALING

### CULTURAL SPACE AND HERITAGE TOURISM

In a neoliberal era, city officials are aware of the necessity to find alternative ways of generating wealth by engaging in a wider process of cultural promotion through the augmentation of the uniqueness of the built environment, the overall experience and finally, through the minimizing of a negative perception (Ward, 1998). In the particular case of Bucharest, this has been done, at the *national level*, through an intensive public relations campaign that puts cultural circuits at the core centre, including the Romanian cultural landmarks. The Ministry of Tourism and Territorial Development in its plan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026 promotes Bucharest as part of tourism “city break” defined as a small trip, usually during the weekends, in major European cities. At the centre of the promotion is the concept of “heart of the city” characterized by buildings with “a fascinating architecture, museums, churches”. No details, however, on the spatial limits of the centre, the type of buildings or the architecture, are given. In a short paragraph only two types of tourists circuits - walking and bus – are given and presented only as a point of reference; the walking trails should include areas such as: the old city centre (no mentioning of what that really is), from the Parliament Palace to the University Square; Lăscărului Square, Cantacuzino Square and Revolution Square; Herastrau Park and the Village Museum; the bus circuit should follow the path: Charles de Gaulle Square – Herastrau Park – Arc of Triumph - Village Museum – Kisseleff Avenue – Victory Square – Revolution Square – Queen Elizabeth Avenue – Cismigiu Park Palace of Parliament – Unification Square – Old City Center – University Square – Roman Square – Dorobanti Square (focus on the architectural styles of the embassies) - Charles de Gaulle Square (the point of departure). The urban space becomes in this context an instrument of history and memory construction. As a recording means of history, space as used by the ministry facilitates the omission of the present history and in the end, influences the creation of collective memory. At the local level, the cultural heritage has been interpreted in distinct manners. Even though, formal ways (the Pact for Bucharest presented

later) of acknowledging the lack of a legislative framework for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Bucharest and of a transparent relation between the authorities and the citizens, numerous examples have shown that, at the practical level, local authorities try to find gaps in the Romanian legislation. First of all, by delisting monuments from the Historic Monument List, hence by changing the initial status of “representative for the Romanian cultural heritage”, authorities are allowed to demolish it and later on, to privatize the land; it is essential to understand that any building declared representative for the cultural heritage cannot be demolished. It can only be renovated only under certain conditions: inside changes can be made but only with the approval of the city hall whereas the exterior has to be preserved in its initial state. Secondly, part of the demolished houses is defined by an uncertain legal status (the owner is yet to be determined in court or it is yet to be reposed) as a result of the 40’s nationalisation process. After the forced abdication of King Michael in 1945, the communist agricultural and monetary reforms have been implemented; it was shortly followed by the nationalization reform, a means of transfer from a market economy to a planned one. Private assets (in this case, houses) have been taken into public ownership with the purpose of being operated or owned by the state - it has to be distinguished by the property redistribution (another defining feature of the communist regimes) in the sense that the government retained control over the nationalized property. After 1989, the previous owners have tried to regain the once stolen property. Thirdly, refusals to reach an architectural coherence favour the private sector through its Local Urban Plan (Plan Urbanistic Zonal) – this issue in Europe will be explained in more depth in the following chapter devoted to the empirical and theoretical background<sup>23</sup>. For the present moment <sup>24</sup> it is suffice to understand that the urban coherency of any city is provided by a General Urban Plan (GUP) and Local Urbanism Regulations (LUR). However, when the GUP is

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<sup>23</sup> A similar situation can be noticed in Riga, Latvia where historical buildings are demolished, motivating that it is easier and cheaper to build a new one than to restore the historical buildings, attempts to build up public open space, green zones have been made and original elements of the buildings have been changed leading to the lose of the buildings’ authenticity.

<sup>24</sup> Further details will be given in the following chapter

too general, local authorities design a Zone Urban Plan (ZUP) which details GUP's technical parameters for a certain area, without altering, in theory, any of its essential figures (estate occupying percentage – EOP, estate occupying coefficient – EOC, maximum height – Max.H). Nevertheless, according to the Romanian Urbanism Law, each of these ZUP's receives an authorization from the City Hall Office, generously given to all applicants, which in the end entitles and empowers the private developer to alter these parameters as he wishes. The ZUP becomes in this way a tool of abusive, but most importantly, a legal action of breaking the urban parameters or rules (one of them being the patrimony houses). This is translated into a possibility for the owner to obtain a construction permit from the sector town hall contradictory to the GUP's initial parameters. The process is quite simple: if the owner wants to build taller and denser than the GUP allows, he contracts a private urban planner who designs a ZUP by altering GUP's parameters (estate's occupying percentage; estate's occupying rate; maximum height). There is an obscure interests-based network between private urban planners who design new “successful” ZUPs and members of BGLC's Technical Commission, who approve the new ZUP. Once approved by the commission, the ZUP is passed easily by BGLC and then the owner may obtain a construction permit from the sector's town hall. The actions of the local authorities have to be analyzed within the larger process of capitalist structural rescaling. It is through the ZUP as a instrument of creative destruction that the state ensures the circularity of capital accumulation.

### **THE PLATFORM FOR BUCHAREST**

The Platform for Bucharest, as they describe themselves, is a network of NGO's united with the purpose of contributing to the sustainable development of Bucharest; it is composed of specialists in various domains, individuals with experience in the area of interest of each organization. Their discourse of action is focused on an efficient communication between these associations; this leads, on the one hand, to a greater impact on the local community, hence the risen efficiency in a project implementation, and on the other hand, to the development of interdisciplinary studies, impossible to accomplish on their own; finally, it aims at a risen pressure

on the local authorities and administration, through the enlargement of legal projects useful for a proper growth of the city, the appliance of the existing laws and the rise of a transparency level in the decision taking process. The platform “Together for a better city” was founded in 2007; at the present moment, it comprises 40 organizations which target issues such as environment, cultural heritage, local and cultural development, decisional transparency (for a clear division according to the area of interest, see Appendix 1). The interviews revealed that the platform as a point of conjuncture between associations was brought into the public attention with the report on the “urban disaster” of Bucharest published by the association “Save Bucharest” in 2008; the exposure brought a civic involvement from other NGO’s but most importantly it confirmed that the urban problems were not identified in a professional manner, the solutions were not met and the communication between the local authorities and the citizens was absent. “Everyone was aware of the issues Bucharest was confronting, moreover when everyone was preparing for the 2008 local elections (RB, president of “Save Bucharest”). The report included issues on urbanism (including architecture), constructions, demolitions, legal restitutions, green areas, pollution, environment protection, and decisional transparency.

The NGOs interpret the urban space of Bucharest in terms of identity formation and collective memory. The buildings are seen as a key to creating a sense of belonging, to shaping the national identity as a connection with the past. The architecture becomes in this manners, a testimony of the principles and values that derived from the inter-war cultural heritage: modernity, prosperity, financial success (dollar – lei parity), competitiveness, ability to match any other European city socially and economically. The general discourse propagated by NGOs falls within the limits of a community awareness and citizenship engagement. This is done through projects that aim at founding *a database* on urban legislation, heritage, green areas and *an outline* of action models for those citizens who wish to get involved or are confronted with various urban



matters<sup>25</sup>. The citizen becomes in this manner an active participant; it can influence the spatial organization of the built environment. In addition, a project on 20 protected areas has been started; it aims at informing the citizens on the legal ways but most of all, on the manner in which one is supposed to preserve and protect the cultural heritage. This includes a photographic inventory of all the houses that are presently in decay and an open area for communication where citizens are invited to discuss with the NGOs the cultural value of the urban area and an eventual plan of action, if one is needed.

### 1. Pact for Bucharest

Signed in 2008, the Pact for Bucharest is the first formal contract between the local officials (in this particular case, the mayor of Bucharest - Sorin Oprescu, the General Local Council) and the civic society represented by the above-mentioned Platform for Bucharest. It outlines a strategy for the development of Bucharest and based on this, the renewal of an Urban General Plan (UGP). The formal act by recognizing the need for measures in an urban development process of Bucharest acknowledged the lack of mutual agreement and transparency on public matters. Social, political and economic actions have to be promoted on a dual plan: *directly* through an administrative decision of the local authorities belonging to the political party that will win the elections and *indirectly*, through an official support in the Parliament – the political party by assuming the Pact, agrees to support its points of references and sustain it legally. It is a call for a community involvement, for a transparent cooperation between the citizens and the local officials. In addition, it suggests as solutions for a better practice of urban renewal, that *local administrative decisions* (rejection of private propositions), *support for the amendment of the law number 350* and *modification of the Zonal Urban Plans* to be initiated only by PMB, through a common procedure in accordance to international regulations (open, transparent competition based on the public involvement).

With concerns to the protection and rehabilitation of the historical monuments, the

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<sup>25</sup> [www.lexcivitas.ro](http://www.lexcivitas.ro) is such an example

pact suggests that, even though at a theoretical level rules have been outlined, in practice, through the Zonal Urban Plans or procedures of declassification of the monuments, the efficiency of the regulations is practically non-existent. To improve the bureaucratic process, the Pact for Bucharest has outlined certain legal, administrative points: an evaluation of the buildings that have an architectural value and are not listed as historical monuments must be done by the CGMB; demolitions in the protected and central areas are forbidden until the end of the classification process. Based on this, a program in accordance to the protection and rehabilitation of the historical monuments and the protected areas must be implemented and a structure in PMB for the support of the owners' cultural heritage buildings. Fines will be given to those owners that allow or commit actions that lead to the decay of the building. For a real protection of the buildings, measures in steps are needed, with coercive measures in crescendo, going even as far as expropriation.

## **2. Urbanism Law**

Until October 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, the Urbanism Law allowed the investor to commission an urban planner, a unique situation in Europe. This was later on translated into a possibility for the owner to obtain a construction permit from the sector town hall contradictory to the GUP's initial parameters. The process is quite simple: if the owner wants to build taller and denser than the GUP allows, he contracts a private urban planner who designs a ZUP by altering GUP's parameters (estate's occupying percentage; estate's occupying rate; maximum height). Based on this, he would latter on obtain all the necessary documents (from environment, traffic, cultural even though it was a protected area, from the technical commission of urban planning and the bureau of the chef architect of Bucharest. Once approved by the commission, the ZUP is passed easily by BGLC and than the owner may obtain a construction permit from the sector's town hall. We are dealing in other words, with an interests-based network between private urban planners who design new "successful" ZUPs and members of BGLC's Technical Commission, who approve the new ZUP. Unfortunately, this relation has lead to the illegal demolition of more

than 2,800 buildings in the last 10 years. Starting with October 1<sup>st</sup>, this system of “demanding your own ZUP” applies only in exceptional cases: when the investor asks for an exception lower than 20%; however this is not translated into a financial gain for the investors so the procedure becomes financially non-profitable. For any exception higher than 20%, the owner can ask to the city hall and the chief architect an “opportunity notice” (approval) and based on this, the city hall hires an urban planner who is commission to draw a plan for the whole area. Hence, exceptions can be made but only for plans that ask an exception starting with 20% of the initial Urban Plan and only by the city hall, for the whole area, as a result of a public auction; a heavy mechanism.

## THE CONSTRUCTION AND CONTESTATION OF THE NEOLIBERAL SPACE

An inquiry into the roles played by the social actors in the construction of cultural heritage as part of Bucharest's new urbanization process occasions a reflection on the public space as an *aide de memoires*; it stabilizes, confers durability and structures the relations between the stakeholders and the professionals. In addition, a new empirical space will be opened with an analysis on the cultural heritage as means to the birth of an advocacy for the right to participate in a public space discourse. This focus implies an understanding of the social space as incorporating social actions, as a means through which the social actors (architects, state officials and NGOs) develop a general discourse or engage in a representational space by attaching meaning and regarding the nationalized houses as statements of esthetical perception, means of increasing the cultural heritage or excuses found by the political class in the process of establishing their positions in the field of power. The space of the nationalized houses can be interpreted as an exchange tool of social memories (a constant re-iteration of a glorious past), interpretations and representations (each house is presented as a story), a means of thought and of action. In addition to being a means of production, the social space is also a means of control (Lefebvre, 1991). On the one hand, the state authorities through their spatial practices stood for constant power reinforcement through political pressures or state managed bureaucratic strategies as they helped the private interests of investors. On the other hand, they expressed a dominant discourse that focused and favoured the tenants rather than the previous owners in what is defined as a rather unique debate in the East European context as it took place at a public level and engaged the political field in the outlining of the post-1989 restitution legislation (Chelcea, 2003).

Lefebvre's theory seeks, as Protevi (2006) incisively interprets, to create on the one hand, an awareness of social space as produced by the state and by capitalism, and on the other, a repeated calling for the recovery of 'authentic' spaces that neither commodify nor oppress, yet that are not simply 'leisure spaces' set aside for workers. In addition, the spatial practices enabled

by the infrastructure of the Bucharest city allow a development of the daily routines of the social actors that are the object of my inquiry; we are witnessing, hence, an inter-relational process between the local institutional practices and the everyday experiences. A requirement of a degree of performance and a level of competence by the production, reproduction of the space and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion (Lefebvre, 1991)<sup>26</sup>. The urban place of Bucharest stabilizes and gives durability to social structural categories, it differences and hierarchies the relations between the civil and political societies, arranges patterns of face to face interaction that constitute group formation and collective action, embodies and secures otherwise intangible cultural norms, identities, memories, values (Gieryn, 2000). The built environment of the nationalized houses becomes the means through which exchange, conflict and control processes empower the social actors; within the context of the social construction of space, a mediation of the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space is noticed (Low, 1996). Social space is a material product: it is both a producer and a produce of the social, is all about the “spatio-temporal rhythms of nature transformed by social practice” (Lefebvre, 1991: 117).

For the purpose of the present research, the brief contextualization from above implies that the lived and perceived individual space as met in Lefebvre’s work may be conceptualized and described by core activities, sites through which humans produce social relations. Alongside technology, human knowledge, and labour power, space is perceived as contributing to our productive potential, as an element of the productive forces in society (Lefebvre, 1991)<sup>27</sup>. The same idea of stability found in Gieryn’s (2000) work on production of space is to be met here, also. It is stated that spatial practice embraces production and reproduction of the space and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation (Lefebvre, 1991). It ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion (ibid). The social

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<sup>26</sup> “Space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations” (Lefebvre, 1991: 286).

space in Lefebvre's perception refers to the unique character of the productive occupation. To be more precise, the social space is "a specific space produced by forces deployed within a social practice" (ibid: 171), a space that embodies an inclusive feature of the production and reproduction of human needs. Lefebvre's space is one created by human groups in specific places, where physical space reproduces itself; the social space is a real space.

The interviews have revealed that the cognitive image is dependent on an environment in which one can find meaning and it is strongly correlated to imagination. The image developed in the mind of the individual is a result, on the one hand, of what is visible at the present moment, the outcome of our senses and, on the other, of the memory of past experiences that guide him into acknowledging and providing meaning to our surroundings. Within the space created and absorbed by the individual, perception and cognition are the key players. The intention of the proposed paper was make use of cognitive mapping as a way of contextualizing the relation between the individual and the space; a proper starting point started with Lefebvre's understanding of the social space as defined by a lived spatial practice, conceived representations of space and perceived representational spaces, a unitarian concept between the space and its users. In relation to this, the proper relational concept, a "toolkit" – as used by Archer (1982) is Lynch's mutual determination between space and the individual which come to be seen as "the nodes and intersections between culture and nature, abstraction and reality, past and future, form and inform, the abstract and the real" (Lynch, 1960). A similarity between Lynch and Lefebvre cannot be denied: this concept of nodes and networks as observed above in Lynch's work resembles Lefebvre's intertwinement of social spaces, which achieve real existence "by virtue of networks and pathways, by virtue of bunches or clusters of relationships". (Lefebvre, 1991: 86). The nodes become in the present paper the nationalized houses; they are the ones that restructure the relations within the general discourse "right to the city". Despite the fact that the two perspectives, when considering space in isolation, are mere abstractions, but

through the continuity of time and cultures (Lefebvre's case<sup>28</sup>) or through the construction of a "cognitive space" (Lynch's case), space becomes the main activist of a law, an interconnected link between the planners and the social space users. One can observe easily that as both of the sociologists emphasize, the planners as being first of all the players that engage in a process of handling, approaching and comprehending a dimension, which is in progress, and secondly, the visionaries who share their images and construct representations of a new reality by conceptualizing things that are emerging and have not yet been understood by the social space users. For Theodor Adorno (1997), this duality stems from the fact that architecture is directed towards a practical aim but is also an independent art form, and from the impotence, which arises due to this ambiguous character. Interviews with the architects who were neither part of an NGO or outlining the Urban Plan for Bucharest revealed this duality between their desire to preserve and the capitalist interests of restructuring the urban space. Further, as Charles Jencks (1985) puts it, the architects of today are much more dependent than in the past on the collective patronage of the state, the municipality or the businessmen's committee. In this context, conflicting interests can set up serious obstacles to the architect as he or she seeks to carry out the profession. None of this prevents architects from espousing a "professional ideology" in which architectural practice can be an independent profession and architecture can by itself produce solutions (ibid). This ideology in particular leads to different interpretations of how the architect should define him or herself and the profession, and thereby brings to the fore different perceptions of space to which Lefebvre (1991) referred, turning the remaining part of society into the "other".

The cognitive mapping revealed that the image developed in the mind of the individual is a result on the one hand, of what is visible at the present moment, the outcome of our senses and on the other, of the memory of past experiences that guide him into

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<sup>28</sup> 'We are confronted not by one social space but by many – indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as "social space"' (Lefebvre, 1991: 86)

acknowledging and providing meaning to our surroundings. Within the space created and absorbed by the individual, perception and cognition are the key players; perception represents “an openness to being ”that occurs in-the- world” (Crossley, 1995), is an active process, a “sentient body-subject who points ‘outwards’ and is directed towards a common world of learnt practical skills and existential understandings” (ibid:59). The concepts of imagination and of basic concepts related to cognitive space met in Lynch’s case can be observed here as well: imagination links cognitive and bodily structures, and terms such as balance, scale, force and cycles (or paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks as in Lynch’s case) emerge directly from our physical and corporeal experience as “contained’ embodied beings” (Lynch, 1960).

Similar to Lefebvre’s understanding of the social space, a unitarian concept between the space and its users established through the individual body, a relational concept is formed when it comes to Lynch’s mutual determination between space and body which come to be seen as “the nodes and intersections between culture and nature, abstraction and reality, past and future, form and inform, the abstract and the real” (ibid). The same concept of nodes and networks observed in Lynch’s work could also be seen in Lefebvre’s intertwinement of social spaces, which achieve real existence “by virtue of networks and pathways, by virtue of bunches or clusters of relationships”. (Lefebvre, 1991: 86). It is true that the two perspectives, when considering space in isolation, are mere abstractions, but through the continuity of time and cultures (Lefebvre’s case) or through the construction of a “cognitive space” (Lynch’s case), space becomes the main activist of a law, an interconnected link between the planners and the social space users. To be more precise, both of the sociologists define the planners as being first of all the players that engage in a process of handling, approaching and comprehending a dimension, which is in progress, and secondly, the visionaries who share their images and construct representations of a new reality by conceptualizing things that are emerging and have not yet been understood by the social space users.



## CONCLUSION

The intention of the present paper was to underline how arrangements such as the architecture, memory and the cognitive process of spatializing assume the role of factors in the process of social constitution of a cultural heritage of Bucharest. Through the practices employed by the individuals engaged in the urban space of negotiation, they confer meaning and attach significance to the built environment. This process of construction has been translated into various perspectives. At the *civil level*, the cultural heritage has become seen as a key to creating a sense of belonging, to shaping the national identity as a connection with the past. But most importantly, it regulates the activities process and transforms a group with no structure into one that shares a common behaviour, goals. This is done through a facilitation of interaction for those who share the same beliefs and the creation of a common legal database.

At an *administrative and political level*, it has described patrimony as an economic tool used in the image promotion of Romania, and Bucharest in particular, but most importantly in the construction of a national identity through memory and omission of history. In addition, it has proven that urban instruments of evaluation such as the ZUP become tools of abusive, but most importantly, legal actions of breaking the urban parameters or rules (one of them being the preservation of the patrimony houses). Within a general neoliberal framework, the ZUP is the “new form of statecraft” through which the government creates a regulatory space (Peck 2003: 222-3). These governance structures and the modes of regulation that favor the capitalist accumulation have shaped the spaces and spatialities of everyday life (Newman&Aston, 2004). As a result of this, the neoliberal mechanisms have transformed the urban space of the nationalized houses into a place of contrast: on the one hand, it is marginalized through the public policies, yet it is transformed into a place of capital accumulation, financial transformations and even economic prosperity. I think this is the main contribution of the paper: the construction of cultural heritage not as a way of reclaiming the city history but rather as a means in the reinterpretation of the politics of accumulation.

## APPENDIX

### PHOTOS ON THE ARCHITECTURAL EVOLUTION OF BUCHAREST



PICTURE 1

SOURCE:

rezistentia.net, accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April  
2011, 11:00



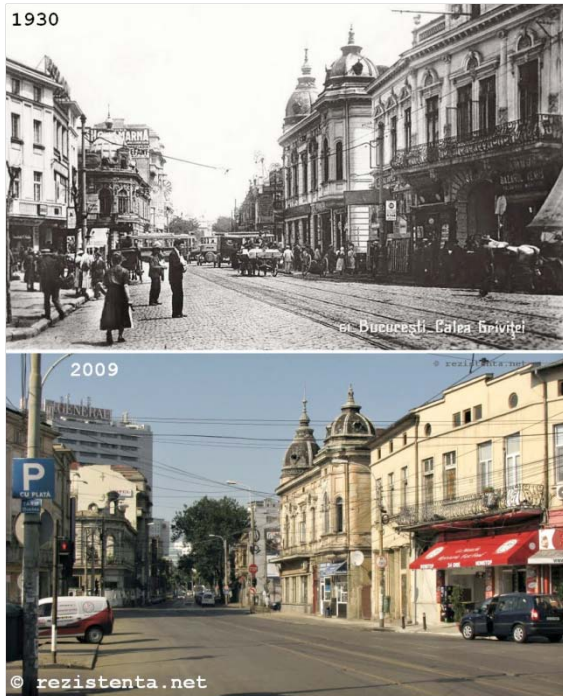


## PICTURE 2

### GRIVITEI RUE

#### SOURCE:

rezistenta.net, accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011, 11:00

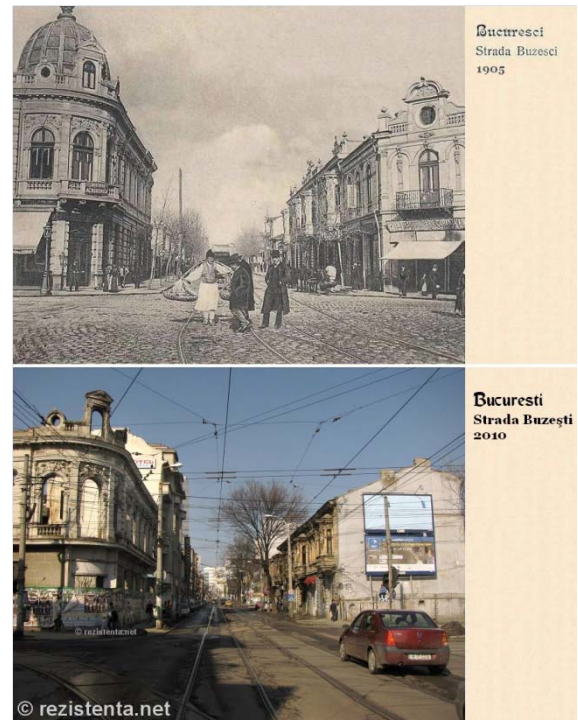


## PICTURE 3

### BUZESTI STREET

#### SOURCE:

rezistenta.net, accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011, 11:00



## PICTURE 4

### MOSILOR RUE

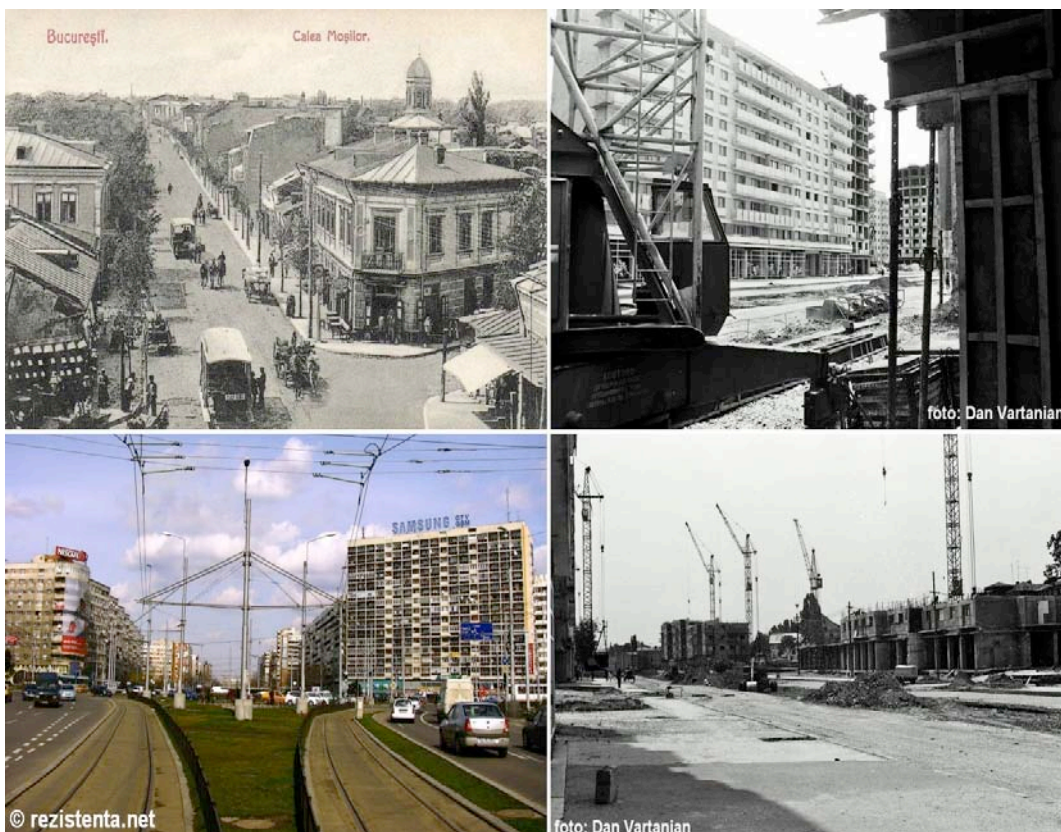
The first frame from the left shows the rue in the 1900's

The black and white photos were taken during the communist regime

The color picture is a present view of the rue

#### SOURCE:

rezistenta.net, accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011, 11:00



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