An Archeology of a Civic Center

Redefining Urban Centrality in Brașov during Socialism

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Submitted to:

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2011

Abstract

This thesis inquires into the urban planning notion of "civic centers", by regarding it as a main tool used by socialist regimes for redefining urban centrality. Building civic centers during socialism will be framed as a technical and political act that had the function of freezing temporarily shifting visions of uncertain historical configurations of power relations. The case study that will be discussed, the Civic Center for Brașov project, will analyze the way in which a typical example of high modernist plan was articulated and how socialist urban centrality was negotiated at the intersection between local planners, the state and its citizens. The thesis will focus on the development of the "civic center" planning solution in Romanian socialism at the level of ideology, which it will then connect to the question of how a specific "civic center" project came into being at ground level and reveal the reasons why it failed to fulfill its ideological function – re-centering the city.

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(Photo taken in 1987 during the demolition process of the area that would become the New Civic Center of Brasov; Source: www.orasulmemorabil.ro)

*He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. This determines the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences. They must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is merely a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images, severed from all earlier associations, that stand - like precious fragments or torsos in a collector's gallery - in the prosaic rooms of our later insights. **True, for successful excavations a plan is needed.***
(Benjamin, 1978: 26)

Introduction

This thesis will focus on the Civic Center in the Romanian city of Brasov, a socialist urban development project that got under way in 1987 and was supposed to re-center the city – a project that never got to be completed. The Civic Center will be approached by means of *excavating* the past, each stratum removed revealing yet another meaning and adding to the general picture that the research will attempt to reconstruct. Following Holston (1989) and Scott (1998) the argument will frame the Civic Center as an exemplary high modernist project, meant to bring about the new "socialist urban society" by changing the bureaucratic *locus* of power in the city. Urban planning will be regarded as a tool meant to bring about high modernism and it is in practices of urban planning that this thesis will search for the reasons for how and why high modernism failed to redefine the center of the city.

The present research contributes to a body of literature that deals with "socialist cities" and the legacies that these cities have left behind after the end of the socialist experiment in Eastern Europe. Partially following Buchli (1999) in method and scope, it regards a civic center as a key structural element of socialist urban development. The importance of this unit in planning will be revealed by looking at how part of the socialist plan of creating or reshaping urban society was aimed at reshaping the urban build environment. As Häussermann points out, "a principal characteristic of the socialist city was the dominance of the city center" (Andrusz et. Al, 1996: 217), therefore my focus will be the process of redefining and shaping urban centrality during Romanian socialism, using civic centers. By articulating the development of the civic center notion in Romanian planning in parallel with the development of the site that represents the case study for this research, I will recreate the tension between the ideological challenges posed to urban planning by socialism

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and the challenges that planners were facing on ground level in their attempt to translate the ideology into reality.

The main aim of this thesis is to explore the points of articulation of Brasov's Civic Center project, understood as a complex of spatial, economic, social and cultural planning devices through which urban centrality was supposed to come into being, and the ways through which this project was negotiated and implemented in order to channel urban restructuring in the direction set out by the socialist state. My questions are framed as a historically inspired sociological critique of urban restructuring in Brasov, which will go back to the specific path dependency that the city is inscribed upon.

My first encounter with the Civic Center took place through the material stratum, the built environment of the site that was supposed to constitute a cohesive new center for the city. The first series of questions that I started off with were directed at the objects – a bricolage of unfinished, decaying buildings and ultra-modern sky-rises - that were located in apparent disarray on the site of the "center". Why was this supposed to be a center? Why a "civic center"? What was the plan behind the project and why did it fail?

In order to answer these questions, my *excavation* proceeded to another stratum by asking what a civic center actually is, what makes it different to the historic center of town, why its construction was necessary and how this project integrated in the socialist program of reshaping society by reshaping the built environment. The story of Brasov's Civic Center is a the story of a failed attempt; therefore the main part of my analysis will take a step back and start *excavating* yet another layer of the project in order to answer my questions – the planning process behind it, the different plans that were proposed and contested and the negotiations of local actors surrounding the completion of the plan.

I understand the Civic Center project(s) as part of an ampler (from here on called high-modernist) open-ended process of control over nature and bodies, as part of a

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continuous production of space and knowledge, being at the same time a source and a result of various and sometimes conflicting institutional rationalities and practices. As a consequence of this perspective, I see the plan behind the Civic Center as a technical and political document that had the function of freezing temporarily shifting visions of uncertain historical configurations of power relations, yet at the same time as a document that shifted according to changing historical configurations of power relations. I believe that this statement very much applies to high modernism as a (failed) project of reshaping society in general, this being the main reason why I argue that the Civic Center is an exemplary case.

The plan(s) for Brasov's new center will be approached as the product of a collective actor (Koch, 2010). For that reason, the networks created by various actors involved in the field of urban development, and more specifically involved in putting together the Civic Center project(s), will be identified and mapped for the socialist period. This field will prove to be political to the extent that the claims of the actors involved will be public (Verdery, 1996: 56) and contested, therefore, my first aim in the analysis part will be to identify these actors and to follow the formation of the networks through which they negotiate their claims. At the same time, this field will be "aesthetical", meaning that the same collective actor that was negotiating the politics of urban planning in order to enhance the advancement of the "socialist society" had to negotiate various styles that were meant to represent this advancement at specific points in time.

By further imagining the city "as the areal expression of some land based elite" (Molotch, 1976: 309), the question of how local elites come into being, what interests they try to put forward, and what means they use for shaping the vision about what good urban living is will be asked. For the socialist period, which represents the main focus of this thesis, local planners will be the key representatives of the "land based elite", having the power and means to channel urban investments in specific directions and to personally decide upon what

urban centrality should look like. During post-socialism planners will loose their key position in devising the plan and new actors will come into the picture, reshaping the image of the earlier mentioned collective actor and of the interests that it represents – an issue that will represent the topic of the final chapter of this thesis.

Another question that this thesis will try to answer will be for whom the plan was initially made? And, subsequently, whose city was the plan intended to bring about in the future? A high-modernist plan of such ambition is generally contested by some of the actors involved - local communities or other competing land based elites - which do not perceive their interests to be properly represented in the final document. As a fully relational understanding of the plan dictates, I will identify the potentially diverging claims for the "right to the city" (Harvey, 2008) of other actors, and the sources of their success or failure in being represented in the urbanization plan, by constantly considering class, ethnicity and their intersection as the main roots of different forms of memory, belonging, and (dis)possession within the city. As it will turn out, contestation during socialism from the side of the local community regarding the Civic Center project was never openly voiced. It was rather voiced through minor subversions of the plan by the relocated residents, subversions that will be aimed at negotiating centrality in an advantageous form. Yet these minor subversions are important, because they will open up the way for other forms of open contestation and claims towards the center by actors that felt misrepresented in the "plan" after socialism.

Chapter one of this thesis will introduce the reader to the site by offering a "prehistory" of what would later become the Civic Center. It will also sketch out an overview of Brasov's development in the 20th century from a merchants and traders outpost located at the periphery of an empire to a highly industrialized city and draw upon this development to

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show how the importance of the site shifted in the geography of the city until it finally became the site of the new center. This chapter will be important for the further development of the thesis because it will reconstruct the preconditions for centrality that the industrial development of Brasov provided, preconditions that state socialism in its late phase seized upon and attempted to materialize according to its own ideology.

Chapter two will take a step back and frame the historical development that was discussed in the previous chapter by introducing the planning category of "civic centers" and by integrating it in the broader debate regarding socialist cities. It will serve both as a literature review, as well as a chapter that clears the way for the rest of the analysis. The focus of this chapter will be on ideas that were circulated in Romanian planning during socialism and the main voices will be those of Romanian planners that were producing literature in the field. These internal debates on planning in Romanian socialism will be then connected to internationalist influences, both Western and Soviet, as well as to the broader academic literature concerning the relation between socialism and urban centers. This chapter will also point in the direction of how the constant refinement of planning solutions was also an attempt to deal with the internal contradictions of planning in a centralized socialist state, an issue that will create the bridge to chapter three, where this issue will be approached in detail by focusing on Brasov's Civic Center project.

Chapter three will analyze the Civic Center project for Brasov as an exemplary project of high modernism – at least in theory. At first it will give a short overview of the methodology used for this thesis, after which it will build upon the previous chapters and introduce the main actors that were negotiating the re-centering of the city. It will explore the different solutions that were proposed and eventually discuss in depth the complex negotiations that brought about the actual Civic Center project from 1987 and point to the reasons why in practice the project failed to be completed. Urban planners will act as agents

of "high-modernism", circumventing both the restrictions imposed by the state, as well as feeding the urban aspirations of the local community.

Chapter four describes some of the attempts to finish the Civic Center project after the fall of socialism. It introduces new actors that came into the picture under the new urban regime and it concentrates upon the demise of the "plan" and the inability of planners to continue to push for the project under the circumstances of a market directed urban regime. This last chapter will not aim at reconstituting the entire field of planning that surrounded the Civic Center during post-socialism. The scope will only be to follow the fragmentation of the urban centrality idea that the Civic Center project was based on up to the point when it was finally dismissed and rendered as unsuitable for the city.

The conclusions will round up the argument and suggest a potential further path for analysis.

1. Deconstructing the site: A history of place

This chapter will introduce the reader to the site by offering a "prehistory" of what would later become the Civic Center. It will also sketch out an overview of Brasov's development in the 20th century from a merchants and traders outpost located at the periphery of an empire to a highly industrialized city and draw upon this development to show how the importance of the site shifted in the geography of the city. At the same time, it will briefly introduce some of the main working concepts and practices of planning relevant for the case that will be discussed in depth in chapter two.

1.1 "Endstation Kronstadt"[1] – A Railway Station at the Periphery of the Empire

The first railway station in Brașov was opened in 1873, connecting Budapest to what was at that time the eastern most point of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The railway station had been built outside of the city limits (See Fig. 1), on an empty plot near the area of the city called "Blumenau"[2] – the Flower Meadow. Blumenau itself was just a meadow at this point, with only one noteworthy structure, the Luckhardt summer garden and villa, located next to the railway station, at the intersection between the Tömös and Szentgyörgy roads that were leading into town. The Szentgyörgy road was of high importance, being Hungary's first "highway", of high engineering quality (Interview with G.H.), that connected the Szeklerland towns to Brașov through a straight, wide traffic artery, while the Tömös road, of much lower

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[1] "Brasov, Final Station" - for reasons of terminological ease, in what follows this paper will use the Romanian name, Brașov; older documents that were consulted switch between the German "Kronstadt", the Hungarian "Brassó" and the Romanian name;
[2] "Bolonya" in Hungarian, "Blumăna" in Romanian;

strategic importance at this point, was turning north to a mountainous pass, connecting Braşov to the Romanian capital of Bucharest.

The moment is important because the arrival of the railway in a city is usually seen as the entry point into industrial capitalism (Berend, 1982; Szasz, 2003). However, merchants and craftsmen in Brasov saw mechanized production as the main enemy that was killing the guild system – and autonomy towards the crown. Subsequently, their main efforts were directed towards revitalizing or expanding their trade based on the type of merchandise that they had been producing for centuries. Capitalism, in its western urban industrial form, did not develop in Brasov in a timely manner not because of a decline in urban autonomy[3]. On the contrary, as several historians (Szász, 2003; Pál, 1999) suggest, Brasov fought hard to maintain its autonomy towards the crown during the 19th century and, in many important aspects, it succeeded. But, by succeeding in maintaining its autonomy towards the crown, it also kept the main enemy of the guild system, mechanized industrial production, at a distance. Ironically, Brasov was a latecomer to capitalist industrial production because it already had a vibrant artisan production and trade environment.

The Transylvanian railway network was seen only as an opportunity for opening up new trade routes. During the absolutist Habsburg monarchy, the Brasov Chamber for Manufacture and Trade sends two successive memos (1855, 1865) to the royal crown, trying to negotiate the arrival of the railway to Brasov. The purpose, as the documents clearly state, was to connect Brasov to the Danube port of Galati and thus enhance the trading capabilities of the town by creating several new export routes[4]. At the same time, as it becomes clear from the very dense data provided by the annexes of these documents[5], there was no

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[3]As Szelenyi (1981) suggests that it was the case for all urban centers "East of the Elbe";

[4] At the same time, another railway route was being negotiated by the eternal rival of Brasov in Southern Transylvania, the Saxon city of Sibiu (Hermannstadt), which should have connected it to Bucharest;

[5] Dense statistics about the number of foreign ships going through the port of Galati, the type of merchandise traded, the type of merchandise that Brasov could trade in this port etc.

intention from the Brasov representatives to change or diversify their type of manufactured goods towards a mechanized industrial type of production.

But the influence of the representatives of the "Royal Free City of Brasov"[6] was not sufficient to make this dream happen. The Hungarian railway reached Brasov in 1873, only after serious scandals of financial speculation and high corruption (Berend, 1982), and it stopped there, failing to connect the city to any of the Danube ports[7].

The year the railway reached Brasov is important for a series of other reasons, that had very much to do with the generalized speculations surrounding railway building that were going on in Europe and the US around that time. In 1873 the Vienna Stock Exchange crashes' triggering the start of what is now called the "Long Depression" (Berend, 1982; Szasz, 2003). After a period of intense market liberalization reforms and free monetarist policies, European empires return to strong protectionist measures. What this meant for Brasov, in practical terms, was that the railway station was unable to trigger the level of investment needed for industrial development, as the financiers expected, nor to enhance trade opportunities, as the local Chamber for Manufacture and Trade wished. At the time when the railway station opened in town, banking and investment institutions were collapsing one after the other all around Europe and the main Vienna and Budapest based investment bank branches from Brasov had to close down or move their operations (Szasz, 2003).

But the fact that large scale mechanized industrial production did not start in Brasov because of the economic depression did not mean that the traditional manufacturing industries of the Saxons were receiving a second chance for prosperity. Brasov's most important external trading partner in the second part of the 19th century remained the

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[6] All documents refer to the city as "Königliche Freistadt Kronstadt" up to the First World War;

[7] For a detailed explanation of the speculations behind the construction of the Eastern Hungarian Railway in Transylvania and the connections with the speculative bubble around railway construction in Europe, that partly led to the crisis, see L. Schönberger's reports "Die ungarische Ostbahn: Ein Eisenbahn- und Finanz-scandal" (1873) and "Die Actionäre der Ungarischen Ostbahn und der Hungarische Staat: Ein Drama aus dem Volkswirtschaftlichen Leben" (1875);

southern newly forming state of Romania. Following the crisis and the imposition of new protectionist measures on trade from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Brasov lost its main southern trading partner and was pushed back into trading opportunities with its hinterland. The „customs war" (1879) between the empire and Romania began with an imposed embargo on cattle imported from Romania. The textile industry in Brasov, the main industrial branch, and the only one that was already mechanized and producing for distant markets, was very affected by this move. Romania reacted and imposed another set of customs restrictions and additional taxes (Szasz, 2003), which signaled the final dissolution of the craftsmen and merchants from Brasov. The southern Transylvanian Saxons from the late 19th century were finally being forced into admitting that the times of the medieval guilds system were over.

1.2 A working class neighborhood on the outskirts of town

Brasov enters a period of relative prosperity after the „Long Depression" and the city starts to change its appearance following the turn of the century. The architectural and urban magazine „Der Städtebau", edited in Berlin, reports in three consecutive years (1909-1911) the urban changes taking place in the newly developing city. The mastermind of these redevelopment projects is the Hungarian engineer and planner Imre Forbath, who wins the 1910 competition for the master plan of the city, the design for the new political center, located outside of the old city walls and the new integrated sewage system. The future of Brasov at this point in its history is being planned according to an important tourism resort of the Empire, having a high potential both for summer tourism - because of its thermal and mineral waters - and winter tourism - because of the mountainous location[8].

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[8] The yearly reports of the city administration during that period confirm this fact by showing that the revenues coming into the cities treasury from tourism exceeded those from industry and manufacturing (Jahresberichte der Königlichen Freistradt Brasso, 1892-1905);

At the same time, industrial production starts playing an increasing role in the economy of the city. The 1910 map of the railway station area (Fig. 2) shows that, as opposed to the period when the station was first opened (Fig. 1), the city had been growing and adding to its industrial base. The main additions to the map are the newly relocated Schiel Brothers Machine Building Factory, located on the former plot of the Luckhardt Summer Gardens, the Albina Enterprises, the City Gas Factory and several other smaller zoned areas for warehouses or depots of the train station. At the same time, there is an increase in residential zoning, the Elisabeth street already having the compact form that it will maintain up to this day, while other scattered residential zones are also noticeable around the area of the railway. Around the same period the railway station itself is being expanded and improved, becoming an important traffic node that by this time was not located „at the end of the Empire" anymore, but was connecting Budapest to Bucharest by rail. New streets are being cut and a new tram line is being built that connects the city center to the rail station and to villages located further out of town.

1.3 When periphery becomes central

From being a periphery, a "station at the end of the Empire", the city will become of central importance in the geography of Romania – central both in a symbolic sense, being located approximately at the topographic center of the new state borders, and in a strategic sense, becoming a central traffic and railway node in the country. Having an already developed industrial base, even if incomparably weaker than Western cities of the same period, and already a relatively consistent skilled labor pool, the city becomes the place of further major industrial investments. Starting with the early thirties Brasov will be always second after Bucharest in the countries statistics in terms of industrial development and

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number of skilled workers, a position that it will not loose until the end of socialism (Monografia Judetului Brasov, 1981). The 1920's and 1930's will witness the opening of new industrial plants outside of the city limits and in the urban satellites and by the end of the thirties the Brasov area will be the main machinery production site of the country, having the only aircraft producing plant, train carriages and train engine sub-part plants, weapons producing facilities and several other smaller plants that were serving these bigger factories. At the same time, the number of laborers employed in industry rises from 5.676 in 1919 to 24.795 in 1939 (Monografia Judetului Brasov, 1981:88).

Socialism only capitalizes upon the existing industrial facilities and expands them by changing their lines of production after the war, without opening any new ones. From the period following the Second World War, until the early sixties, the new socialist residential neighborhoods, the *grand ensembles,* are being built around these factories. The Red Flag neighborhood will be located next to the Red Flag truck factory, while the other *grand ensemble,* the "Tractorul" neighborhood, is will spring up next to the tractor producing factory, following the factory housing estate model. Consequent to the *microraion* principles of the period, planners place the two biggest new residential neighborhoods next to the two main industrial facilities of the city after the nationalization of the industrial assets.

These two main factories, together with the residential areas located next to them, constitute the new periphery of the city. But it is a peculiar periphery, for the population of the two neighborhoods, taken together, is larger in number than the entire population of the inter-war city[9]. Paralleling the completion of the *grand residential ensembles*, city authorities

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[9] In 1948 the total population of Brasov was 82.984 (Monografia Judetului Brasov, 1981:166), while the two *grand ensembles,* completed in the sixties, where designed to house in the first phase 40.000 people each, a number that continued to increase after the new regulations regarding densities per square meter started to be applied (see chapter 4)

and planners decide to limit the spatial growth of the city by setting up a built perimeter[10], beyond which nothing can be built under any circumstances. What this means is that growth has to be channeled inwards, towards the city center. The new socialist city, with its concrete residential high-rises, encroaches upon the old town by pushing ever closer to the medieval city center.

Inward growth is channeled along a series of main axes, boulevards that have already been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, traffic arteries that in the meantime have become of maximal national importance (the national road connecting the Northeast of the country to Brasov, the one connecting the Northwest and the one connecting the South - Bucharest). All this roads, as well as the new residential neighborhoods that appear alongside them, connect in the area of the train station, reproducing on a city scale the centrality of Brasov in the traffic and settlement network of the county.

The train station area, from being located at the outskirts of town, will become the central point of the city in just twenty years, the main traffic intersection and the buffer zone that divides the old town from the new town. But planners from Brasov in the sixties had to find new solutions for growth and the working class neighborhood with single family houses from around the train station that had received its final shape in the interwar period, was not providing arguments that were good enough in order for it to be preserved. In 1961-62 the train station is relocated and a new residential neighborhood with high-rises is being built close to the site (See Fig. 3, where the new boulevard leading to the new railway station, along with the new housing estate, are visible) cutting a new boulevard that was connecting the new train station with the other main axes of the city in the earlier mentioned traffic node. From this point on, the site that I focus on will always be seen as being "in the way", and planners will qualify this area as "de sistematizat" - to be systematized or redeveloped.

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[10] In 1961, a new master plan for the future development of Brasov is being made, where the built perimeter is decided upon as well (Interview with A.T.). However, this type of urban regulation will become the norm for every Romanian city, following the Systematization Law of 1974 (see following chapter);

The following chapter will pick up this point and explain what systematization meant in the Romanian planning context, what solutions were available and how the Civic Center idea got to impose itself against other alternative planning solutions.

2. The Civic Center: Urban centrality and Romanian socialism in its second phase[11]

This chapter traces back the idea of "civic centers" by looking at different planning solutions related to public spaces in urban environments, with a special focus on socialist Romania. In doing that, it connects in a critical manner mainly to primary sources of literature on urban planning in Romania from the 1970's and 1980's[12] and attempts firstly to reconstruct the tension between the notion of "neighborhood unit" and that of "civic centers" and, secondly, to sketch some of the contradictions that the "civic center" approach in planning was revealing about Romanian socialism, while it was entering its second stage of development. At the same time, it offers the framework for analysis of this paper by focusing on some of the relevant features dealt with in the literature on socialist cities and high modernist urban planning.

The recurrent starting point for Romanian planners in the 1970's that deal with the notion of public space is C.A. Perry's idea of the neighborhood unit. Perry, who was affiliated with the Chicago School of urban ecology and was mainly active in the 1920's and 1930's in the United States, envisioned vicinity as the main characteristic of human contacts in an urban space. For him, it is not enough to build proper housing for the urban dwellers; planners also have to think of ways through which to create a feeling of community (Perry, 1931). Community feeling has to be stimulated by some sort of public institution – for Perry the most suitable being the elementary school for small areas and the so-called "community center", an agglomeration of different public services, for bigger residential areas. Only through the establishment of "community centers" could the transitory character of urban

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[11] This chapter will use the terms "socialism in its second phase" and "high modernism" alternatively when talking about Romanian planning;
[12] This chapter will use as a primary literature basis the works of Derer (1985), Jurov (1979), Stahl (1969), Constantinescu (1970), Cucu (1977) and Oroveanu (1986);

encounters be transformed into meaningful, face to face human interactions. This idea was very attractive to almost all of the high modernist political regimes, from interwar social democracies and national socialist regimes, up to the post-war socialists in the Eastern block. After all, the neighborhood unit suited the paternalistic welfare states very well, for all the public social interactions were being filtered through a state institution. It is not by chance that in "Contributions to Community Center Progress", compiled by Perry himself after the "Community Center Sessions", and held on the 26th February 1920 in Cleveland under the guidance of the National Education Association, the motto states: "A community center is an Americanization center" (1920). At the same time, Perry's solution came to suit the "structural differentiation of the urban organism" (Derer, 1985:77) very well.

The *neighborhood unit* accepts the existence of causal relations between the type of ambient, the organization of the community and the individual behavior. These relations lead to the rationalization of social services, according to the demands of a community the size of which it determines. The daily use of services (school, shops, community center) gives life in the neighborhood unit a certain cohesion that explains why Perry's proposal (and the various versions that followed it) was considered to be the basic mode of structural differentiation in the contemporary city. (Derer, 1985:77-78).

On Romanian ground the urban community center and the debate around the neighborhood unit did not become important until after the Second World War, together with the rapid industrialization and subsequent urbanization of the country and the acute need for mass housing. However, the community center was not a completely unknown topic in the interwar period, albeit it was used mainly when it came to "rationalizing" rural settlements. In a popularization book concerning the new socialist territorial organization program of the country, Henri Stahl recounts with sarcasm how the peasants in a mountainous village, that he encountered during his fieldwork, were very proud of the fact that during the war it took the occupying German army almost one year to realize there was a settlement in the area (1969:39). This happened only after the Germans saw a cow wandering through the hills one evening and decided to follow it. The point that Stahl makes is that, contrary to what the

peasants perceived as a reason for pride, the scattered structure of most Romanian rural settlements was a big problem for planners, because it made them unsuitable for modern, industrial production that had to be given a high priority in the new territorial organization program. At the same time, Stahl notes that Romanian planners do not have to search very far for inspiration, because this issue was already of main concern for the first Romanian sociological school of Dimitrie Gusti, active in the interwar period. The only difference was structural, Gusti not being able to put his plans into action because of political and economic limitations, whereas Stahl argues that by the time he was writing, the socialist society had reached a level of development that was high enough to put Gusti's ideas into practice (1969).

A leading role in what Gusti called "cultural action" (1938) of sociology as an engaged science was the *cultural center*.[13] If one wants to be faithful to the original terminology used by Gusti, engaged sociology is a somewhat mild term, because his "Introduction to political sociology" (1935) is actually the subtitle to *"Sociologia Militans"*. The main concern for this militant approach is to find out how "cultural action can be brought about, how villages and cities can be biologically and culturally improved?" (1938:321). In an attempt to make out of culture (rural or urban) the middle term between eugenics and nation building, Gusti argues that health, work, the soul and the mind should be the focus of the sociologist's improvement strategies (1938: 324). In other words, the school, the church, the medical facility, the local administrations' headquarters and the cultural center should be brought together in one place, in order to properly organize community life. The cultural center plays a leading role in this context, for it is the institution that transforms a "social community into a cultural community" (1938:332), creating the institutional framework for all the other leading members of the community – mainly representatives of the other earlier mentioned institutions – to get together and *cultivate* the people.

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[13] In original called *cămin cultural,* 'cultural home'.

This way, for each town and village a cultural center will be created, made up from the locals, which will raise the health and spirits of the social unit through their own struggling and work, according to their own needs and in the spirit of their specific reality. (1938:333)

The problem for Gusti, who was mainly concerned with rural settlements, was not so much to create community by creating a space for dwellers where they could meet and have face-to-face interactions – a situation that was already given in villages – but to create a national "cultural community" by creating the space where people could and would want to meet, while being under the hub of the state. If under Perry's supervision "a community center was an Americanization center", under Gusti's supervision, a cultural center was a *Romanization* center.

While Gusti's cultural center does bear many resemblances to Perry's community center, it was the latter rather than the former that inspired later socialist planners[14]. By the time that Gusti was writing, the late 30s, the neighborhood unit had already become a basic working concept in international modernist planning, creating some of the most famous and long enduring planning schemes of the 20th century: Corbusier's *unite de habilitation,* the Soviet *microraion* experiments or the working class housing estates of Vienna or Berlin. In Romania, in terms of planning residential areas, the neighborhood unit inspired three different waves of approaches during socialism[15] : residential quarters (1952-1960), *microraions* (1958-1975) and the so-called *residential complexes*, following the Systematization Law of 1974 (Derer, 1985:154). The *microraion* imposed itself over the rationalist quarter because the latter was based on an aesthetic approach favoring monumentality over cost-efficiency, a problem that was put under direct attack by Khrushchev in his famous 1954 speech "On useless Things in Architecture".

At the 1959 regional competition in Moscow a new type of organization for residential zones was proposed, that would prove more elastic in its relation to the city, easier to adapt to the natural

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[14] Despite Stahl's somewhat biased suggestion;
[15] Zoning for closed low residential quarters existed already in the interwar period in some of the bigger Romanian cities, but these represented rather exceptions to the rule in terms of planning (Derer, 1985:139).

environment, according to the standards of industrial construction techniques and, foremost, more productive. Organizing residential areas according to *microraions*, by reinterpreting some of the elements of the 'neighborhood unit' theory, contributed one step further to adapting planning to the specific context of Romania (as well as other socialist countries). (Derer, 1985:146).

The *microraion* constitutes the basic urban unit in a city that is perceived as being organized in hierarchical structural units[16]. This shift in planning residential areas led to the building of the first *grand residential ensembles*, functionally divided into complex structural unities – sectors, neighborhoods, microraions, residential groups – with the socio-cultural facilities being spread across the territory according to geometrical criteria.

Le Corbusier's 'ideal size', or Perry's 'self-sufficiency' of the neighborhood, catalogued by some critics as 'invitations to monasticism', are hypostases of arborescent structures. Le Corbusier's attempts to reduce the complexity of the city to some basic components, seen as 'urban dominants', is noteworthy – among these the neighborhood unit plays a key role, because it stands for the primacy of the building against the city. The theoretical foundation of the *microraion,* partially taken over for the *grand ensembles,* shows a clear connection to these ideas. (Derer, 1985:171).

For several reasons, one of the exemplary *grand residential ensembles* is the Steagu Roșu (Red Flag) neighborhood in Brașov: for one, the neighborhood was built on the microraion basis, being one of the new residential neighborhoods in the country that experimented with the most up-to-date Soviet planning techniques, meant to house the newly created industrial working class. But the neighborhood is exemplary from another perspective as well, being one of the very few sites of urban ethnography conducted during that period. Under the supervision of Miron Constantinescu, the head of the Sociology Faculty of the University of Bucharest, a series of three monographs, generically entitled "The Urbanization Process in Romania"[17] were produced in the late 60's, monographs that were meant to study the urban life in newly created socialist neighborhoods in the country. The three case studies were cities that had different levels of urban and industrial development and the goal of the

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[16] "The microraion is an organic residential ensemble, meant to be a unity whose population is connected with the daily socio-cultural services providing institutions (…) It is delineated by collecting streets or natural objects; vehicle traffic should be minimized as much as possible inside the microraion" (Derer, 1985:150);

[17] The three regions that were dealt with were: Slatina-Olt (a newly created urban center), Vaslui (medium urban and industrial development) and Brasov (high urban and industrial development);

research was to establish how the new urbanites were adapting to city life and how planners could improve their satisfaction. Among the three monographs, the case study that dealt with Braşov, and more specifically with the Red Flag neighborhood, was the one representative of a highly developed city, way above the national average in terms of urbanization and industrialization.

Constantinescu and his group start from the same basic premise of Perry's "neighborhood unit" in their research, stating that the ideal according to which the Red Flag neighborhood was built should fit Mumford's standard of "small communities, built at a human scale" (Constantinescu et. All, 1970:298). "After the apartment, which sets the individual in opposition to the community and is an expression of social discontinuity, the neighborhood is the basic collective unit encountered in daily life, a standard form of social continuity" (1970:388). The Red Flag neighborhood, which housed 40.000 people at the time when the research was conducted (1968-1969), had one neighborhood center, three commercial areas, one cinema, one postal office, three schools and five kindergartens. While the authors conclude that compared to the population number, this is not enough, it is "a good start" (1970:389). They draw attention to the fact that planners should not forget that a hierarchical placement of institutions and services, according to urban focal points and without putting too much pressure on the city center is the only viable way to ensure the further development of a harmonious urban habitat. Yet, at the same time the research shows that only 19.7% of the residents are satisfied with the services that are provided, while only 13.1% appreciate the aesthetic qualities on the environment (390).

The moment described above is important because it signals one of the last uses of the notion of the "neighborhood unit", in the Romanian scientific literature on planning, as well as in actual planning strategies. Starting with the 1970's, socialism enters its second phase

and leaves the neighborhood unit behind, drawing upon it just in a critical manner, as a representative of a past working concept that has proven to be unfeasible in reality.

The idea of the *grand ensembles* stemmed from a series of principles used in international practices, meant to isolate the housing estates from the main avenues, with the intention of transforming the territory into a big park for the residences. In practice it has been proven, at least for the case of our country, that the results are doubtful. (Derer, 1985:152).

Romanian planners acknowledge the countries entry into its "second phase of development", a phase that was meant to last until around 1990-2000 (Derer, 1985). What this meant was that planning had to be thought of in a different manner, considering that Romania was now a country of medium development, which had surpassed the first phase of war recovery economy. Although useful and efficient, the functional *grand ensembles* strategy used between 1945-1970, did not seem appropriate anymore.

In contemporary urbanism there can be distinguished two tendencies regarding the creation of urbanity in a public space: social contacts based on the neighborhood unit and those of a collective space (…) In a collective space, urbanity is influenced by some spatial-constructive premises, through which a continuous polarization of people can be attained, a *fluctuation* of them (…) This intention is fundamentally different from the communitarian contact promoted by the neighborhood idea. It allows for the establishment of interactions between people and public spaces in a much more complex way than the neighborhood unit. (Jurov, 1979:23).

The idea of radical contrast between old and new structures, or in many cases the complete erasure of the old and the replacement with legible, objective and continuous structures, as Corbusier's dogma was dictating, was not an option anymore. "Old cities are not just simple objects to be consumed, but depositories of an amalgam of social, cultural and artistic values, that should not be eliminated even in the most radical development programs" (Derer, 1985:103). The alternative solution that is being suggested around that time is that of *mixed integration*, by giving credit to own laws of development of areas and establishing "dialectical connections" between old and new.

Even if Romanian socialist planners might not have been aware of the fact that modernism had died at 3.32 p.m. on 15 July 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing estate in St.

Louis was deemed as an uninhabitable environment and dynamited (Harvey, 1989:39), they were definitely taking over the international critique of high modernism through some suggestions in their writings. Even more so, the tone of some writers was taking on a very "post-modern" stance around that time, although the term was hardly ever used. It might seem somewhat surprising, but the first "post-modern" attack against high modernism came from Ceauşescu himself, during his opening speech of the 3rd Convention of the Union of Architects in 1971. Similarly in tone to Khrushchev's modernist manifesto in 1954, but radically different in content, Ceauşescu insisted that modernism had killed the street, the traditional *locus* of the social in Romanian culture, and insisted upon a "return to the street" with special attention given to specific local traditions[18] (Zahariade, 2003:77).

Having a local equivalent of Jane Jacobs as a head of the Communist Party and of the state was a source of optimism for Romanian planners. Around the period of the passing of the package of laws that was meant to reorganize the territory of the country (4/1973, 58/1974, 59/1974, 37/1975) the intellectual production in the field of urban and rural planning and, more generally, development studies, experienced a boom. Romanian planners were having the chance to participate in international conferences and got to know the intellectual shift that was taking place around that time in world architecture. The *residential complex*, which I already briefly mentioned, was one example of trying to overcome the limitations of high modernism and open urbanism by using mixed (contextualist) integration techniques of planning.

When it came to *residential complexes*, the key words used to explain the new approach were mainly: "filling" of front lines, "thickening" and "plating" of spread out residential areas, "flanking" of main traffic arteries, "framing" of main squares and insertion of additional residential areas inside of the building perimeter of cities (Derer, 1985:173-179).

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[18] "Blocks of flats are placed randomly, without creating streets and boulevards, according to a clear urban concept" (Ceausescu, 1971 in Zahariade, 2003:77);

Public space was not to be located inside of the housing projects anymore, but at street level, on the street and in the public square.

In theoretical terms, this shift was an attempt to move from the fixed hierarchy of the neighborhood unit towards a mobile, flexible hierarchy of streets and public squares. The Systematization Law (*legea sistematizării*) represented a shift in paradigm because it was meant to build a unified network of settlements in the entire territory of the country.

Socialist planning is not total planning, but it is the dominant mode of social, political and economic action, to which individuals, households, localities and enterprises must adapt. Moreover, socialist societies should not be considered planned societies but instead 'societies with a plan'. (Sampson, 1984:58)

While the urban planning strategies that were discussed until now were localized, systematization brought all these interests at the level of spatial planning. Spatial planning had arrived in Eastern Europe only in the early sixties and was being used mainly to prevent the flow of in-migration to already developed industrial centers (Sampson, 1984). While being used mainly as a tool that was supposed to accelerate the development of smaller settlements and to balance the geographical imbalances of the country in terms of economic development – something that is very explicit in Jurov's book on "Civic Centers for small settlements" (1979) - systematization also had a much more pervasive scope:

In the Romanian context, *sistematizare* is more than just a method for the physical transformation of villages and towns. It is, firstly, an ideal of how spatial planning should be integrated with economic planning (*planificare*) and socialist development. Second, systematization is a program for developing (or in some cases phasing out) each settlement in the country, from hamlet to metropolis. Third, systematization involves an organizational structure in which national objectives, regional imbalances and local potentialities are to be harmonized into a centrally administered State policy, codified by law. (Sampson, 1984:75)

Sistematizare[19] had the purpose of creating the earlier mentioned mobile, flexible hierarchy of goods, information and labor not only at an urban level, but at the level of the entire settlement network – something that the localized neighborhood unit could have never

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[19] Meaning, "to systematize";

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accomplished. And this unified, systematic network had to be represented and made functional through a different built environment. "It is well known that such an approach represents a political act, which is possible only in a social system based on a planned economy" (Jurov, 1979:58). Romanian planners, like Jurov in the previous quote, were fully aware of the power that a legally enforced systematization program of the country was giving to planners. Through systematization, planning officially penetrated into all of the aspects of human life[20] with the intent of changing them:

What distinguishes socialist planning is not any particular quality among the nine features elaborated above. Rather, it is the sum total and wide scope in which they are applied, combined with Marxism's ideological legitimation and the practical necessities of "building socialism." Socialist planning is more ambitious and more pervasive than capitalist or nonsocialist development planning. It penetrates through all regions and all sectors of the society, intervening at any level. In theory there is no aspect of life that is beyond its scope. (Sampson, 1984:58)

What this meant was that the network of settlements should be connected by *polarizing nodes* that would eventually converge into a *hierarchical polinuclear system*. These polarizing nodes are civic centers that can be of six different types, according to the importance of the settlement that is in question (Cucu, 1977). The first degree center is the capital, the second degree centers are the 17 municipalities existing at that time, the main cities of the country – Brașov being among them -, while the sixth degree centers are represented by the new urban centers, villages promoted to the status of towns as part of the Systematization Law. Thus the shift in paradigm represented by the Systematization Law was both one of content, and of scale.

At the same time, the systematization law provided – at least in theory - an opportunity to start to lever the imbalances that had been produced at urban level in the first period of socialism. After dealing for a long period of time with residential neighborhoods meant to house the newly urbanizing industrial working class, planners could start to

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[20] An involvement of the state which arguably had always been there, especially under socialism, but which connected through the Systematization Law all the public and private spheres of life under a common hub;

experiment with the ideas that were developed around public spaces for these neighborhoods and apply them for central urban areas. As opposed to other socialist countries[21], Romania did not show much interest towards urban centrality until the early sixties, especially because of the states push towards rapid industrialization and an almost generalized neglect towards urban infrastructure and older residential areas, reasons that were already mentioned here.

However, in reality the Systematization Law signaled a renewed shift towards strong centralization, much like any other project under the authoritarian gaze of any high modernist[22] state (Scott, 1988). What at first sight looked like a potential entry into "post-modernity", soon turned out to be just a coincidence, a temporary similarity in discourses. Romania was not stepping out of the second stage of mature industrial development; it was rather just stepping into it. "Socialist post-modernity"[23] made Romanian planners of this period feel increasingly trapped between the tension of international critical debates in architecture and the political and economic realities of the country. "How could one speak about post-modernity, if we didn't even have proper modernity?" (Interview G.H.) was a question that was plaguing the field. While western scholarship (Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991) was identifying a shift in the cultural production of advanced capitalist societies, based on a shift from a fordist type production to "flexible accumulation" in capitalism, the Romanian political and economic reality was heading in a completely different direction, by stepping up the pace of growth based on archetypical fordist heavy industries (Crowther,

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[21] "A principal characteristic of the socialist city concept is the dominance of the city centre. Its special significance is outlined in the ***Sixteen principks of urban development***, established by the GDR government in 1950. These state: 'The centre is the heart of the city, it is the political centre for its citizens. The most important political, administrative and cultural establishments are in the city centre. On the central squares, political demonstrations, parades and festivals on public holidays take place. The city centre with squares, main avenues and voluptuous buildings (skyscrapers in the big cities) determines the architectual silhouette of the city. Squares are the structural basis for urban development." (Andrusz et. Al, 1996:217)

[22] This thesis uses "high modernism" as a working concept following Scott's definition: "It is best conceived as a strong (one might even say muscle-bound) version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and in North America from roughly 1830 until World War I. At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws." (1998: 89-90)

[23] I refer to "Postmodern socialism: Romanticism, City and State" by P. Beilharz (1994)

1989). What the Systematization Law of 1974 and the subsequent laws, connected to it did, was to centralize all the planning activities of the country into a systematic activity and to attempt to create the high modernist ideal of "legibility and simplification" (Scott, 1998) of production, distribution and movement of labor on a nation wide level.

At city level, what the Street Law[24] (1975) – the legal framing of Ceaușescu's "back to the street" manifesto from 1971 – brought about, barely resembled the initial critique. While the principles of filling, thickening, flanking etc. were the main strategies used, *mixed integration* only meant that new residential buildings were being added to already existing residential housing estates – most of them built in the previous decades of socialism - by respecting strict principles of alignment to the main avenues. The strict enforcement of the built perimeter of cities by the Systematization Law[25] meant that entirely new neighborhoods could be built only under very special and often difficult circumstances – either through manipulating the built perimeter by considering forest areas or riverbanks as part of it, which were afterwards being developed into residential areas, or through creative destruction, by razing entire neighborhoods with low density housing.

The second argument, related to the historicist approach in planning by techniques of *mixed integration,* was put in practice in a rather peculiar way, too. However, at this point it has to be said that the shift from an internationalist discourse, in which the history of socialism was the history of the working class, to a discourse that stressed ever more the national identity, spanned across more than just architectural styles. During the 1970's Romania was insisting ever more on its national identity – a shift that was explained by a series of authors (Crowther, 1989; Sampson, 1984) as an attempt of the state to counteract the increasing risk of a Soviet invasion of the country, following Romania's turn towards the

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[24] Part of a larger package of laws that are generally referred to as the Systematization Law in this paper;
[25] A measure that was being applied in most countries of the socialist block in order to protect and fully exploit the value of agricultural land by preventing urban sprawl and to minimize the costs of urban infrastructure (French and Hamilton, 1979).

West in its economic policies and political alliances. Yet what is of relevance for this paper is the question of how these contradictions were being solved through planning, or at least attempted to be solved, at an urban level?

If finding the unity of the urban, through the construction of a new center, is a process that "becomes historicity of a territory and territorialization of history" [26] (Poulantzas, 2000:114), then the historicity of this act was traversed by a series of contradictions that different levels of bureaucrats from a socialist state had to engage with, in order to be faithful to the ideology of planning in the actual practice of planning. To start with, how could planners put into practice the suggestion launched by the first party secretary in 1971 of a return to local traditions in architectural styles and planning practices? The tension is real because of several reasons. For one, the approach of dialectical materialism towards history was one that was explicitly oriented towards the future, towards modernizing society and advancing on the stages of technological development. The history of the socialist working class was in the making in the *grand ensembles*, an issue that is paramount in Constantinescu's earlier mentioned monograph on the Red Flag neighborhood of Brasov. For Constantinescu and his collaborators (1970) the main question was to understand the urban aspirations of the new residents and to channel these aspirations – mainly by improving the built environment and the facilities offered by the neighborhood – in order to bring them as close as possible to the ideal of socialism's "new man".

However, in terms of representing the "historicity of a territory and territorialization of history" – in other words, building new urban centers that should properly represent the national state - this approach could not give any satisfactory aesthetic solutions. The legacy of Transylvanian urban centers complicated the situation for planners even more, for in these towns the local tradition that the official nationalist discourse was referring back to, was

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[26] "National unity or the modem unity thereby becomes historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history - in short, a territorial national tradition concretized in the nation-States; the markings of a territory become indicators of history that are written into the State." (Poulantzas, 2000:114)

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usually the tradition of a different ethnic group and a different social class than the one promoted by the nationalist discourse. In the case of Brasov, for instance, this situation made it impossible to look for solutions in the medieval city center, which represented through its compact protestant "Saxonness" everything but the future oriented Romanian socialist state[27].

A historicist approach that would have tried to incorporate the historical past into the present and into the shaping of the projected future was a difficult task that had to be negotiated by planners. Contrary to what happened in urban centers in post-socialism, where the focus shifted back towards the historical centers and local traditions – even if constructed or reinvented traditions – in an attempt to reconstruct national identity (Czaplicka and Ruble, 2003), socialism had to interpret local traditions with a specific blind eye in its attempt to stitch together national identity.

By the time Romania was running deeper into economic crisis, in the early eighties, planners were faced with a series of other problems that complicated the debates around the aesthetical potential of civic centers to shape public consciousness even more: the main investments in cities were being directed mainly towards housing again, in a similar manner to what had happened in "socialism in its first phase" and the main challenge for planners was to accomplish the established norm of apartments to be built annually. This mainly implied, as already noted, densification of residential zones through various techniques of the already existing *microraions* or *grand ensembles* and the use of cheap, standardized materials. The interest of the state towards socio-cultural facilities and civic centers was falling behind. Even in the case of second degree urban centers, where the plans for the civic center of the

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[27] At this point, I find it worth mentioning some of the peculiar solutions that were used for civic centers in Transylvanian towns. For instance, in Satu-Mare, the civic center is represented by four modernist towers, housing the main administrative offices of the city, one of them being the highest structure in Transylvania even at this point, surrounded by three lower towers of equal size. The explanation for this solution was that while the three towers that were smaller in size represented the three ethnic groups of the city, the high tower stood for the state, which created the unity between these three ethnic groups. Another interesting solution is that of Tg. Mures, where the Secessionist landmark from the city center was integrated into a modernist central complex of buildings that tried to replicate the style of the original building. In Brasov, planners insisted upon the idea that the city was a traditional "commercial" center and therefore the new civic center should stress the commercial character (personal interviews);

city had to be approved directly by a presidential decree (Sampson, 1984), an actual approval of the project did not necessarily mean that the necessary funding would be granted for the construction [28](see chapter 3).

The following chapter will pick up the story of the site that has been described in chapter one. Already having in the background an overview of what a civic center for a Romanian socialist city meant, the following chapter will continue the excavation process in Brasov and look at the plans for the civic center of the city and the planners negotiations around these plans. At the same time, it will introduce the local perspective and put it in relation to the plan, in order to see how high-modernism worked on ground level.

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[28] The exception to this rule is provided by the Civic Center project for Bucharest, the biggest urban "renewal" program ever to be conducted in Romania, which spanned across the entire period of the 1980's and was funded by the state with a high level of priority;

3. Modernity's Deceiving Smile: A Civic Center for Brasov

This chapter provides the first part of the analysis of the empirical material and speaks about the plans for the Civic Center in Brasov during socialism. It will first introduce the actors and then describe how the different plans for the project were produced and negotiated on ground level. It will also look at how the residents of the old railway station neighborhood were neglected from the plan and how they attempted through subverting practices to become reincorporated into it.

3.1 Introducing the actors and the methods

The argument of this chapter will be built around a series of actors that were directly involved in the Civic Center project. In the first part of the analysis, the front stage will be that of the local planners from Brasov that were directly involved in the project in various periods of time. While creating a timeline through which the idea of the Civic Center for Brasov came into being, the first subchapter will mainly stop at two projects, one from 1968, the other from 1987. In doing that, it will also suggest a tension between two different generations of planners from Brasov that got involved in the project, each of them having different claims on how the Civic Center should look like and what functions it has to provide. Following the analysis that has been drawn out in the second chapter, one can see the two generations as being part of different architectural schools, the first being moderate modernists that were active mainly in the 1960's and 1970's, while the second were high-modernists – although, as it will be the case for the 1987 project, they were promoting themselves as "post-modernists".

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This part of the analysis will be backed mainly by two interviews that I have conducted. The first interviewee, A.T., was one of the planners in the team for the 1968 project, while the second, N.T., was a member of the team that won the 1987 competition for the Civic Center. A.T. was a member of the *raional*[29] planning committee for Brasov in the early sixties and later returned to the local planning office of the city[30], becoming a member of the team of architects that designed the 1968 Civic Center project. He was affiliated with the group that gathered around Iancu Rădăcină, maybe the most famous modernist planner active in Brasov, who created a number of projects that were highly appreciated in the architectural field (Interview with G.H.). N. T. became active in the local planning office in the eighties and is still designing in Brasov, being also involved, among other key projects in town, in most of the redevelopment projects for the Civic Center that were attempted after the fall of socialism.

These sources of data will be backed by a series of other interviews with architects, urban historians and planners in the local planning office of Brasov during socialism[31], in order to provide a better picture of the negotiations around the two different stories. At the same time, my interviewees were kind enough to provide me plans and detailed visual material on the projects, material that will be referred to during this chapter and that I will provide in the annex of the thesis.

The second subchapter aims at reconstructing the social in the old railway station neighborhood and then focuses on the moment when the residents of the old neighborhood were relocated as part of the Civic Center project. It attempts to understand how the residents negotiated their relocation in order to become part of a plan that was neglecting them, and by

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[29] The *raion* was the Soviet inspired basic territorial organization unit, which was replaced by the *judeţ* (the county), through the new Territorial Organization Law. The Brasov *raion* consisted of three microregions, Brasov, Sibiu and Fagaras;

[30] "I did not find my place there. I was an architect, I needed projects, I wanted to design." (Interview with A.T.)
[31] For a detailed description of the interviews that I have conducted, see the Annex part of this thesis;

doing this subverted the plan in a way that played in their advantage. For this chapter I identified mainly residents from the old neighborhood that became relocated in the Civic Center area as well. I conducted interviews with them, focusing both on the neighborhood before the demolitions and on the moment of relocation. I also asked several people to draw maps of the old neighborhood and talk about them. Some of my interviewees also accepted to join me on a walk in the Civic Center and try to remember the old neighborhood as it was while being on the site – an experiment that I would have wished to conduct more in depth. However, this part will not be included in this chapter, for it exceeded the scope of the argument that I am building upon.

3.2 Seeing like a planner, acting like a state

Starting with the relocation of the old railway station in the early 1960's and the opening up of a new boulevard that connected the new railway station with the main traffic intersection of town, the area of the old railway station (from here on called the Hidromecanica area, after the factory in the area) became of main interest for the planners from Brasov. In very broad strokes, the planning solution that had to be applied for the area had to meet three main targets: traffic, housing and centrality.

However, the different solutions that were applied in solving these three problems differed very much from each other, being influenced by a series of factors, starting from influences in architectural styles that the different teams of planners involved were using, up to changing prognoses about urban growth that were drawn out by the central administration and which deemed every plan unsuitable by the time it was about to be actually built. But what mainly differed was the transformation gradual transformation and insistence on the idea of centrality, which began to be referred to mainly in terms of political centrality.

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The first systematization sketch for the town was put on paper in 1961. "Systematization meant to put in order what was scattered[32] (…) It is something that many people forget, the fact that systematization is not one and the same with what they did in the West, called urban planning". (Interview with A. T.) In other words, systematization was possible only in a planned society, because only there could the integrative tools of systematization be put to use in reality and only planners had the means and the technical knowledge to make this reordering of space happen. In 1960, the general theme coming from the central planning committee for planning offices around the country was the systematization of cities. The 1960 sketch for Brasov was based on the idea of a radial city, whereas the focal point of urban radiation should have been the Hidromecanica area.

As already mentioned, the area was of high interest because it was the connecting point of two main traffic arteries that were leading into the city center and two traffic arteries leading out of town. The initial idea for the 1961 project was only a "neighborhood intersection", whereas the plan did not specify with what objects the intersection should have been crowded (Interview with A. T.). The solution was to create a new neighborhood unit, centered by a traffic roundabout connecting the important arteries. However, at this point there was no talk about a new center in the area.

The first planning solution for the area that was referred to specifically as a "Civic Center for Brasov" appeared in 1968 (See Fig. 3). The solution for this project played with the idea of a "bipolar center", which meant that the new center was not supposed to take over all the functions of the old center, but just act as a complement to it. Furthermore, this solution was not based on the idea of a radial city anymore, but of a linear city, connecting the old center with the new railway station through a straight line. There were also discussions about transforming one of the two traffic arteries that connected the old center

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[32] In original "*a pune în ordine ceea ce este răvăşit*";

with the new civic center into a pedestrian artery, which would have enhanced the commercial value of the area in between the three points[33] and made it a lot more attractive for the population.

The project itself was a T-shaped traffic intersection that connected the main arteries into one single point, while the buildings were located at the corners of this intersection.

The solution we thought of might not have been viable for the future traffic predictions of the city, but it was a good solution for that specific point in time. And the project gave room for the civic center to further develop. Everybody knows that you do not base a center in the busiest traffic intersection of the city. (Interview with A. T.)

This statement also works as a veiled critique against the civic center project of 1987, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. "The civic center of 1968 had two advantages: perspective and traffic". (Interview with A.T.) It solved the traffic problem and, at the same time, used the location of the new railway station to enhance the aesthetic qualities of the environment. The visitor coming to Brasov exiting the railway station would have seen a grand boulevard opening up in front of him, with the new civic center at the other end of the perspective. The eye would have skimmed over a tall apartment block right at the other end of the boulevard, and would have focused on Brasov's landmark, the Tâmpa Hill, located in the background.

On one side of the T-shaped intersection there should have been a residential neighborhood, built in the continuation of the already existing neighborhood built parallel to the relocation of the train station that flanked the boulevard, while on the other side there should have been a socio-cultural complex[34]. According to A. T., the socio-cultural complex was meant to house a hotel, a library, a community center and a commercial center. However, there was no intention at this point to bring any of the political-administrative headquarters in

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[33] The old center, the new center and the railway station;
[34] I use the term following the planning literature of the same period;

the new center[35]. In a way, the project of 1968 represented a transitional phase from a neighborhood center to a civic center with administrative functions. It was made according to future growth predictions that were calculated for the following 15 years and, although the project was passed by the central planning committee, nothing else ever happened because funding was not available. When funding had become available, the project did not correspond to the growth predictions anymore. (Interview with A. T.)

While there existed a series of other projects on paper for the Hidromecanica area during the 70's, these never made it as far as the 68' project. Even if the area was "to be systematized" already in the early sixties, the actual project was not started until 87'. In the 80's the area had been ignored by planners because of another *grand residential ensemble* that was underway in another part of town, the Răcădău neighborhood. This neighborhood was constructed by manipulating the built perimeter of the city and counting a forest area as part of the perimeter. This strategy enabled planners to fulfill the norm of housing per year[36], by clearing an area considerably larger than the Hidromecanica neighborhood and preserving the latter area open for redevelopment.

By 1987 the civic center project for Brasov had been part of the "plan" for a considerable amount of time. According to the updated national agenda, in that five year plan three important cities should have received a civic center: Brasov, Timisoara and Alba-Iulia. (Interview with N.T.) From an organizational perspective, the project for civic centers had to be approved by the "Central Committee for Party and State for Regional, Town and Village Planning". The details for the project were established by the local Planning Institutes of the main cities of the country. The Planning Institutes coordinated the entire regional planning activity of the respective counties and were establishing the systematization plans for their region. However, according to the Systematization Law from 1974, large scale plans, be it for

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[35] But, considering that "the project gave room for the civic center to further develop" (interview with A.T.), administrative functions could have been added later on;
[36] 5000 rooms per year (Interview with N. Ț.)

regional or urban development, had to be personally approved by the president of the country.

The Civic Center project was one example of such large scale projects. Only after the plan was discussed by the local planning office and ratified by higher authorities, could the execution of the project be passed onto the hands of the "People's Council", the socialist name for the local administration (Sampson, 1984:82-85). This does not mean that funding had to be provided only by the local administration, because for each building with different functions that was included in the detailed systematization plan a different institution was responsible for it's execution. In a civic center, which was bringing together several functions, the residential buildings were funded by the national housing fund, the commercial buildings were funded by various cooperatives that were funding them, the political-administrative center was funded by the People's Council etc. However, one has to remember that these were all state institutions and funding could have been made available at any time – even if under very special circumstances and sometimes following intense negotiations.

The project for a civic center for Brasov that was passed by the Central Planning Committee in 1987 (See Fig. 4 and 5) attempted to combine elements of "post-modern" architecture[37] with the older imperatives of civic centers, adapted to the local specificity of the site in Brasov.

The project that our team proposed received the first prize from the Romanian Union of Architects that year. It was a project of high quality, done according to the standards of post-modern architecture of the time. I was personally congratulated by Ceaușescu when we received the prize in Bucharest (…) We included a grand plaza as part of the project for mass gatherings. The political-administrative center should have had a balcony, opening up towards the plaza, where the leader of the party could have held his speeches. I believe this impressed him and made him like the project. We had to give him something that he understood. (Interview with N. T.[38])

On the local level it came as a surprise that a team of very young architects had won with their project, leaving older, more established planners in Brasov empty-handed (personal

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[37] See Fig. X for illustration of the "post-modern" influences, visible in the constructions that got to be built. Organic industrial styles were combined with juxtaposed elements of traditional local architecture – for instance, by placing roofs on blocks of flats, but at the same time using the type of windows typical for Saxon house roofs and placing them on the mezzanine of the building, instead of the rooftop;
[38] N. Ț. is one of the architects that participated in the winning project for the civic center in 1987;

interview). At the same time, the solution that was proposed in the project tried to suggest the idea of centrality through all the functional elements that it was using. The perspective from the new railway station was not skimming over the civic center anymore and focusing on the hill in the background, but it was intentionally blocked by the imposing building of the political-administrative center located at the other end of the boulevard.

The problems that had to be solved by the civic center were pretty much the same as the ones in the project of 1968, but this time the scale was different. The project solved the traffic problem by creating an urban island, surrounded by a traffic roundabout that connected all the main arteries into the center[39]. On both sides of the traffic circle the civic center was punctured by residential housing, high-rise apartment buildings which should have been the best that Brasov could offer at that time in terms of modernist housing. But housing was only a corollary of the main function that the civic center should have fulfilled - that of a political-administrative center. The high-rises enclosed a grand square which faced the open balcony of the political-administrative center and made public speeches and big assemblies possible. The ground floors of the residential buildings took on the function of commercial and cultural areas, with an interesting twist.

The project of 1987 maintained the idea of a bipolar centrality for Brasov, but this time the focal point was the new center, while the old center retained only its historical value. The pedestrian flow from the old to the new center and continuing to the railway station was exploited in this project as well, by directing the transit into the so-called "commercial galleries", an enclosed sidewalk at the base of the residential buildings transformed into a "luxury" commercial area, very much like the first Parisian arcade projects[40]. On the opposite

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[39] As opposed to the previous project, where this was intentionally avoided, in order to give room for the center to further develop;

[40] "The state would own all the property, eliminating property speculation and landlordism. The reshaping of the city was placed in the hands of architects, who would remove dilapidated slums and unhygienic structures. But the process would be gradual and avoid the brutality and class biases of Haussmann's

side of the square, facing the commercial galleries was another similar structure, which combined everyday commercial functions with a cultural center, maintaining the arcade structure of an enclosed sidewalk with natural lighting. The triangle was closed by another commercial area located at the base of a complex of three other high-rises, which was supposed to be the "house of fashion". Pedestrian and motorized traffic were kept apart by creating underground passageways at key points of the civic center "island", which directed people directly into the square or the commercial galleries. It was not the square that was supposed to be the site of the social, but these enclosed passageways that combined both *loisir*, commercial and cultural functions.

The project also included two underground supply and waste disposal tunnels and underground parking lots, which were supposed to lever the pressure of traffic at ground level and maintain the aesthetic qualities of the square by keeping the everyday life activities of residents out of sight. The need for housing was combined with the functions of a second tier civic center (see chapter 2), having a political-administrative and a cultural and commercial role for the whole region that it was supposed to supply. At the same time, the project involved the expansion of the elementary school already existing in the neighborhood into a high-school, creating both a new "neighborhood unit" and a new urban center. But what seemed a coherent functional solution adapted into an aesthetic architectural language on paper could hardly be translated into something similar in reality.

The solution proposed sought to stress the commercial and the political character of the Civic Center. Planners involved in the project stressed the commercial character as one of the main features of the "local urban tradition" (see chapter two). Brasov had traditionally

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demolitions. The urban fabric would ultimately be dominated by structures reminiscent of Fourier's *phalanstères,* square blocks of housing with a central space of gardens and courtyards for social and common activities. Connectivity within the city would be assured by second-floor arcades linked together with bridges and passages and serviced with elevators. This provided connected shopping and walking spaces and a sheltered system of communication for the whole of the urban population (ideal for the flaneur). Workshops were located on the ground floor and, light and airy in design, ensured work
under the very best environmental conditions." (Harvey, 2003:279)

been a merchant's town and the new center was supposed to bring this feature back to the front stage. However, one can identify a series of interesting features in the way that this "local tradition" was interpreted in the project, which are very telling about how the field of aesthetic production was combined with the attempt to re-center the bureaucratic locus of power. The square in the medieval part of town had been the traditional open market, located next to the city hall and the gothic cathedral. Even if the new center was using the same functions – except for the church – the way that these functions were integrated spoke a different language. First of all, the commercial function was not open anymore, but was directed in an enclosed space. What Benjamin (1999) identified in the Parisian arcades as the place where public and private collide, was translated in the case of the Civic Center arcades into a place where public and private collide, but under the supervision of the state. Trade could not take place in the open square next to the galleries, which was reserved solely for public festivities and gatherings conducted by the party, but had to be enclosed in a space that at least left the impression of being semi-open.

Secondly, stressing the commercial character of the Civic Center underlined another paradox that planners had to deal with. By the time that the 1987 plan was put on paper, commercial activities of all kinds, spanning from day-to-day services and reaching up to luxury and other low frequency use items were being severely rationalized by the state. The paradox was therefore structural as well: why stress the commercial character and build three imposing structures with primary commercial functions when the commerce with consumer goods was basically deadlocked?

Planners in Brasov were faced with a need to act in two distinct fields and negotiate between them: one of the actual technicalities of urban planning and the other of using the scarce resources that the state was providing in order to accomplish the plan. The "history" of the site was never a problem in this equation, for the Hidromecanica area had only "very few

buildings of high architectural quality, the rest being a typical low density residential neighborhood. What was beyond the tracks, as the rule goes for most cities in the world, represented the *mahala*[41]". (Interview with N.T.) In a similar manner to how Le Corbusier thought of the urban planner as the philosopher-king that was entitled to change the city according to his artistic views (Holston, 1989; Scott, 1998), the authors of the 1987 plan for the civic center had a personal interest in seeing the project come to life. For one, again, there was the creative element in an act that "put order into what was scattered" – and, of course if built, a project of such magnitude would have brought important material gains and recognition for the authors.

However, the problem was that the central authorities were not having a special fund for civic centers, although they were included in the national development plan. Already by the time the demolitions of the old neighborhood began, the future of the political-administrative center was being put in doubt, because it was the only construction that should have been financed directly by the state. What seemed to be a cohesive project of redesigning urban centrality on paper was in reality an intricate network of cooperation between different state institutions that were supposed to finance separate buildings. By 1987, at the peak of the economic crisis that Romanian socialism spiraled into, the central planning committee was pushing hard only in the direction of the housing fund, leaving other cooperatives with basically no funding at all. For this reason, the first buildings that started to be constructed were the residential high-rises. The rest of the buildings were being postponed, hoping that funding would eventually become available for them as well.

Planners had few options available in order to overcome the funding problem. Residential buildings that faced important avenues were receiving a 5% surplus in funding to the pre-established construction fund for additional ornamental details on the facades. In the

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[41] Turkish word for neighborhood, having the common meaning of ghetto in everyday Romanian;

case of the civic center, this 5% was usually redirected into the construction of buildings other than the blocks of flats, in order to get the whole project going (Interview with G.H.). But this was not enough – subsequently, while the apartment buildings were under construction, the commercial galleries and the cultural center, for which the Consumption Cooperative and the Workers Union were responsible, could not be started. Surprisingly, only the "house of fashion", for which the Craftsmen's Cooperative was responsible, and the adjacent three residential towers were started and even finished long before some of the other residential buildings. While it seemed that "for some reason, the Craftsmen's Cooperative was still having funds available" (Interview with G.H.), other informal interviews suggested that the reason why this part of the project was pushed faster than the rest was because of the high-end loft apartments that the three high-rises provided, apartments which had been reserved for the upper echelon of the local party administration.

The other solution for funding would have been to impress the Central Party Committee and convince them to allocate more money. Some people even stated during the interviews (Sz., G.H.) that the demolitions were rushed in order to prove to the party leader how important the project was and to convince him to allocate funding. While this had apparently worked on paper, it did not work in reality. Ceausescu was expected to have a speech at the opening of the academic year in the University of Brasov, in September 1987. Half of the Hidromecanica neighborhood was demolished in August 1987, just before this visit, and not according to plan. The other half, which should have been demolished only in September 1990 (Interview N. T), remained untouched following the fall of the regime in 1989.

Ceausescu cancelled the visit to Brasov scheduled for the following month[42] at the last minute. However, this does not say much about the actual way in which funding could have become available. Refering back to the first party secretary as to someone that had all the strings attached to his hands and decided according to his own free will what is and what is not allowed to be was something that I have encountered very often during my interviews. Yet, I see this as a strategy meant to veil the real negotiations that took place behind the curtains and not as a reference that should be taken as it is – in a similar manner as a one-sided critique of high modernism would argue only for the destructive character of this "totalitarian" attempt meant to enforce complete control over society. And this is something that this thesis very much wants to avoid.

One could actually think of several reasons why the construction works have been continuously delayed and underfinanced between the years 1987-1989. Although none of my interviews made a specific reference to this connection, a possible explanation would be that a few months after the demolition of the first part of the Hidromecanica neighborhood, Brasov actually got on the „black list" of the Central Party Committee. And not because of a personal grudge of some party secretary, but because of the workers uprising from the Red Flag truck factory, which took place on the 15th of November 1987. The state promptly reacted after these events and brutally repressed the uprising. An entire chain of command, from workers to union leaders to local party leaders were held responsible and severely punished.

Planners had to construct the civic center out of bits and pieces, hoping that funding would eventually be made available for the other structures, especially for the political-administrative center. But at that point, there was still time and the plan could wait – nobody

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[42] Another aspect that was revealed during almost all interviews with planners was that everybody was convinced that Ceauşescu had a personal hatred towards Brasov. During the interwar period he was held as a political prisoner in Brasov and during his visits as president he was always sabotaged and made fun of by the workers. Other interviewees confirmed this general idea that the population of the city had regarding the party leader's strong dislike towards Brasov;

really expected that only two years later history would mark the end of the planned socialist experiment in Romania and, therefore, the premature end of the high modernist plan for the Civic Center.

3.3 Aspiring for centrality, subverting the plan

The following paragraphs will reconstruct the social composition of the neighborhood, as it was at the time of the demolition, after which the focus will turn to specific strategies that residents used in order to subvert the plan.

The first generation of residents was forming a relatively compact group of Hungarian or mixed Hungarian-Romanian families that moved into the city around the industrialization wave of the interwar period. Not only did most of them share workplaces, but in many cases they came from the same rural areas of the country. For instance, in the case of the house on Lazar Street 47 (See Fig. 6), a three storey house with two apartments on each floor, five out of six families were from the same village located near Arad and four out of six families had the men employed by the railway company. The house itself had been built in the late thirties in order to be rented out to workers from the area. The developer, Nagyborosnyoi és Dólnoki Bartha Elemér, was an entrepreneur with several industrial facilities around town; one of them, a lumber warehouse, was located in the area of the rail tracks. He decided to rezone the land that he owned and to build rental housing on some of the plots. The future tenants of the house even had a word to say when the house was built:

The reason why we had our bathroom on the corridor, shared between the two apartments of each floor, was because A.[43] specifically asked for it to be this way from Bartha Elemér, fearing that otherwise the rent would rise and their family would not be able to afford the place. (Interview with E.N.)

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[43] The neighbor from the apartment located on the same floor;

Alongside the rented multi-family houses, the area had houses that were in private ownership from the very beginning, although they were fewer in number. They were usually owned by extended families, Hungarian as well, which came into the city around the same period and built their own houses on plots that they bought (See Fig. 6, right), or directly bought houses that had been built earlier.

The "second generation" consisted either of children of the first generation of tenants or house owners, and of newcomers to the neighborhood. But what mainly distinguished them was the fact that the representatives of the second generation were already educated under socialism and had much more diverse employment than the first generation – diverse skilled work, many of them having a university degree, as opposed to the first generation, where nobody had a university degree (personal interviews). The second generation residents were also a lot more mixed ethnically, most of the newcomers to the area being Romanian.

By then there were two generations; the first, older residents, mostly CFR[44] or Hidromecanica[45] employees that moved into town in the thirties and settled in the neighborhood, and a second generation of people that were having a somewhat better education. (Interview with E.N.)

However, in the process of the second wave of in-migration to the neighborhood, only a small number of new buildings were built, and the old housing stock was left mostly untouched, with no substantial upgrades being made. This meant that the neighborhood was experiencing the same process as most of the old residential areas in the socialist block – overcrowding. (Matthews in French & Hamiltion, 1979) Around the time when the demolition of the neighborhood commenced, in 1987, most residents from the second generation were young couples at the peak of their career and already having children. To sum up, by that time the Hidromecanica area was mixed, both in terms of class and in terms of ethnicity. (Personal interviews)

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[44] The Romanian Railway Company;
[45] The name that the former Schiel Machine Building Company received under socialism;

The next paragraphs will concentrate on the different strategies deployed by the residents of the Hidromecanica neighborhood before and during the time of demolition, in order to secure better housing. While in theory the relocation was done according to needs, a series of other factors became important during the process. What I will try to stress here is the growing importance of the idea of centrality of the space that had to be redeveloped, which was determining many residents to seek relocation in the same area. Mainly, it was a decisive factor because the new center was supposed to have the best housing stock available at that time in town and the best connection to a wide range of services. Socialism in its second phase did not succeed to stitch the city back together after the modernist period of the *grand ensambles*. Contrary to what Constantinescu (1970) was suggesting as a potential future development of the urban environment in his monograph, the factory estates of the city had remained peripheral and poorly equipped with socio-cultural facilities. In the meantime, the aspirations of the residents had changed, determining them to seek central housing. The aspiration for centrality was in the making at the same time as the center was in the making.

At first they allocated us an apartment in the 'Zorilor' area. We went there to see it and when we got in front of the entrance of the building we saw a group of children playing. When we got closer we heard them speaking and we were terrified. They were swearing and talking about horrible things. While we were going up the staircase my husband whispered to me that he does not want his child to grow up in such an environment. We immediately started considering other options, closer to the center. (Interview with E.N.)

The relocation process was done with lists timed according to the different stages of the demolitions. The main criteria used in the redistribution were the type of housing, rented or in private property, and the number of children per nuclear family: families with one child were entitled to a two-room apartment; families with two children were given three-room apartments etc. Families that were owning a house could choose between being relocated in another state owned apartment and receiving a fixed sum of money in return for the house, or receiving another house in another part of town. Although the residents knew that the demolition of the neighborhood was about to take place "sometime soon", the decision taken

by planners and city authorities in August 1987 to hasten the process took everybody by surprise. What this meant was that all of a sudden residents had to promptly react, in case they wanted to question the official allocation of a new residence and negotiate for another apartment – which was very often the case.

The apartment blocks built as part of the civic center project (See Fig. 7) were the most sought after in this negotiation process, because they were a lot more spacious and of higher quality – and they had the advantage of a "central" location, which became an important factor in the context of the newly constituted central area of the city. But at the time the demolitions started, most of the apartments had already been distributed, although they were not yet finished. This meant that some apartments would become available for families that were not satisfied with the allocation procedure, but only if a family gave up on the allocated space could another family hope to receive it instead. On the other hand, these apartments were unfinished at that time and therefore accepting the offer would have meant securing an alternative residence for at least one year, until the buildings were completed – a resource which most families did not have and for which the state did not give any assistance.

While the older first generation tenants avoided relocation in blocks of flats and preferred similar multi-family rental houses around the area that had to be demolished mainly because they did not have the resources to negotiate for a central apartment, second generation tenants were aspiring for apartment life in blocks of flats. Although the latter tried to keep some sort of proximity to the neighborhood and maintain family ties with their older family members that moved to multi-family rental houses in the same area, at the same time they seized upon the moment to be able to fulfill the dream of a family apartment, which represented an important step forward on the social ladder.

"At the city hall, when we entered the office were the relocations were taking place, there was a lady from the housing authority and an officer from the Securitate. The Securitate guy was there to intimidate people and he immediately started to yell at us. We came back after we visited the apartment that they wanted to give us, asking for another one. We asked for a three room apartment,

although we had only one child. This made him very angry. But I did not give up. I told him in his face that I will go directly to the institute and bring a certificate on the next day, saying that my husband is a scientific researcher and that he needs a study room for himself. He started threatening us, so we had to leave the room. But then the lady came out of the office after us and told us that we should not insist with him, because we won't get anywhere. Then she said that there might be a solution, but it would involve a lot of sacrifice from us, because the apartment is unfinished and we would have to move in while the workers are still there. Which we did. (…) I think we were just lucky. All the apartments on this wing were given away, but then S.[46], who received an apartment here, managed to get an apartment in the good buildings, at the other side of the civic center. He gave this one up. It was on the fifth floor, where P.[47] is now living. P. was supposed to come in our apartment, but then he took that one, so we ended up here, at the sixth floor. It's the worse apartment on the whole wing, but we got what we wanted, three rooms and a central location in town." (Interview with E. N.)

Ten out of twenty-one families that received apartments on the wing that the previous interviewee refers to were living on the same street in the demolished neighborhood as tenants in multi-family houses. They were all young couples with one or two children at that time. They successfully negotiated their centrality and received a relatively good apartment, despite the fact that they had to move into an unfinished building and pretty much cohabitated with the workers that were adding the finishing touches for one year after the relocation. It was one year in which the central heating was not installed yet and power and water were being rationalized to the extreme, partly because of general rationings of facilities, partly because the plumbing and power grid for the building were not fully completed yet (Interview with E. N.).

Homeowners were faced with another dilemma, which made the situation somewhat different and gave them more space for negotiation. They had the choice between receiving another house in town, or receiving money as compensation and a place in a state owned apartment.

"They were giving a fixed sum of 80.000 Lei for each house that they were tearing down. The money was not enough to buy a new house in town. But most houses were owned by a single family, so what people were doing was to split up the property in two or even three separate properties and transfer it to the children, so that they would receive twice or three times as much. With that money one could buy a decent house. We tried to do the same, but then we realized we had a problem. Our house was not registered at the cadastre office – my mother had just ignored this fact because it was never

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[46] S. lived two houses away in the old neighborhood;
[47] P. lived three houses away in the old neighborhood;

important for her. This way, we would not have received a dime. But I had a client at the pharmacy, a lawyer that had a heart disease and I was procuring him the medicine that he needed. He was so kind to help us to register the house and we got the money. But we did not have time to split up the property anymore. O.[48], for instance, he did succeed! He got twice the money. And then he even got a lot after socialism, with the property restitution law. But we got some money back as well with that law (…) They first offered us a house somewhere else. It was nice, with a big garden. But then we checked the walls and they were soaked with water. The building was old; we did not want any problems. So we ended up here". (Interview with the Sz. Family, residents from the first generation)

Both families that the previous interview mentions were allocated flats on the same wing as the young tenants that I spoke about one paragraph earlier. Although they were older and did not have young children anymore, they had the privilege of being homeowners in the demolished neighborhood and could negotiate easier for a better quality apartment in a central location. However, this does not mean to say that the relocation was advantageous for all the residents. The demolitions meant that residents had to mobilize all their resources in order to be able to negotiate the plan in their favor. Not all people did have these resources, or they could not mobilize them at the right moment.

There were tragedies, too. We had a neighbor on the street that was affected very seriously. When he heard that they would demolish his house that summer, he hanged himself from the inner staircase of his house. He was old and lived there for a long time. His children found him … I mean, the children were adults when it happened, but still, the entire street heard about that tragedy. (Interview with Sz.)

In describing what Marcuse calls the state directed relocation (1985) of the residents from the Hidromecanica area, whose houses were demolished for the new civic center project in 1987, I will use the notion of urban aspirations. The reason why urban aspirations is preferred for revealing the complexity of the process of relocation is that most residents from the second generation actually wanted better housing, but could not move out of their own initiative. This brought them in a similar status of in-betweenness as the one mentioned for the entire neighborhood in the context of the changing geography of the city. While their social status made them feel entitled to better housing – one might even say that they had

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[48] While mentioning O., Sz. points with his finger to the wall. O., his former neighbor, now lives in the apartment located right next to theirs in the building. The difference is that O. owns two apartments in the building after succeeding in the property transfer scheme more than twenty years ago.

middle-class aspirations - many of them were trapped in a neighborhood that did not represent their "territorial history".

High modernism, in the form of late Romanian socialism, could claim the right to relocate the residents because this was part of the bigger "plan" to improve society by improving the urban environment. As Scott (1998) puts it:

The troubling features of high modernism derive, for the most part, from its claim to speak about the improvement of the human condition with the authority of scientific knowledge and its tendency to disallow other competing sources of judgment. (93)

Continuing on the same line of argument, he adds that:

The aspiration to such uniformity and order alerts us to the fact that modern statecraft is largely a project of internal colonization, often glossed, as it is in imperial rhetoric, as a 'civillizing mission' . The builders of the modern nation-state do not merely describe, observe and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation. (82)

Scott places at the other end of a high-modernist project local knowledge, which, he argues, the state can never fully incorporate in its totalizing plan. *Sistematizare*, as the high-modernist tool of late Romanian socialism, was becoming fragmented because of internal shortages that the state was facing. A fragmented linearity in state directed urban planning programs produced fragmentation in the aspirations of its citizens as well. "To become disillusioned one had to have believed in the first place". (Kotkin, 1995: 360) While the official rhetoric was continuing to promote the unhindered progress and the coming about of the "new man", real socialism was encountering ever deeper problems that were contradicting this rhetoric. The fragmentation of the plan created space for different types of aspirations that were only partly the product of the official rhetoric. The other part was that the disillusionment following belief entitled citizens to deploy subversive strategies in order to counter the plan, or to use the spaces within the plan that remained "illegible" for the state for their own advantage.

One the other hand, I do not tend to interpret "local knowledge" and "local community" as cohesive elements that countered the intention of the state. One could hardly

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speak of such a community in the case of the Hidromecanica neighborhood by the time that the demolitions started and aspirations were very diverse and could not be voiced into one common language of protest against the project.

Subversions were minor in the sense that they were case specific. They were minor because they did not count in the grand scheme of systematization; however they were crucial for the residents. Everybody had to go with the plan in the sense that there was no way to openly voice opposition towards the erasure of the neighborhood. Yet there were a series of options available to voice opposition or to think of alternative tactics that the plan could not foresee when it came to the relocation process. The central urban space that the high modernist state was creating by erasing the former neighborhood functioned as a structural element in shaping the aspirations of the relocated residents for an upgraded form of urban citizenship – one which was pushing them to seek relocation in the same area.

This chapter has discussed the different solutions proposed by planners for the Civic Center of Brasov. In doing that, it focused on a variety of elements that were part of the plan and that had to be negotiated in order to get the project going, from structural elements related to financing of the project, to elements that were having to do with the high modernist *credo* that the optimal integration of the idea of centrality into the project, both in a functional and stylistic sense, would bring about a new urban society in Brasov. At the same time, this chapter analyzed the way in which the "local community", the relocated residents from the neighborhood, internalized and processed the plan and negotiated their centrality accordingly.

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4. "Post-modernity's" Grin: From a Civic Center to a "Temporary" Park

> To summarize, the transformation now taking place in the former state socialist nations is path dependent, that is it is shaped by cross-nationally (and sub-nationally) variant historical legacies and current conjunctures. Rather than some simplistic and immediate process of abolition of the economic, political and social structures of state socialism and their replacement by those of an idealized Western capitalism, we see a conflictual and contradictory complex of social actions in which differing groups deploy what resources they have available to secure their position in the new order. In many cases a key asset is the social capital which was accrued in the previous regime. In addition, privatization provides some with valuable financial, property and other assets, while others lose out. (Harloe in Andrusz et. All, 1996:10)

This chapter will concentrate on the legacy that the socialist Civic Center project left for Brasov. In doing that, it will draw upon the shifting configuration of actors that came into play in the process of redeveloping the site. The discussion of the post-socialist transformation of the site will pick upon the "social capital", accrued in the previous regime or under the new regime, of the actors involved and on issues of privatization and market led urban development. However, the main thread will follow the previously mentioned topics mainly through the lens of what I prefer to call the "symbolic capital" of the site itself – its centrality. The purpose of this chapter is not to reconstitute the whole space of the new configurations of actors that became involved in the project after the fall of socialism – for this would be something that would exceed the scope of the paper, but to pick out key interventions in the site by certain actors that were following the path specificity of urban centrality set up by the previous socialist plan.

The material for this chapter is based partly on some of the interviews with planners that were already mentioned in this paper – that remained active in the field of planning after socialism - and partly on interviews with other key actors that became involved in the redevelopment project of the site. One of the methodological limitations of this chapter will be that I was not granted permission to interview key actors from financial institutions that

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were involved in relocating the local headquarters of the firms they were representing in the Civic Center. However, the local press has covered the subject of the redevelopment of the Civic Center to a large extent in the large twenty years and I will add those pieces of information that I could not extract from the interviews with information from the newspaper material.[49]

The path dependency of Brasov after the fall of socialism was indeed shaped by "historical legacies and current conjunctures", which influenced the path dependency of the civic center project as well. On one hand, there was the need to finish the project and give a shape to the new center of town. This issue had to be tackled by adapting to the fragmented reality that the plan left behind, in which half of the area was "ready for construction", while there were still two streets from the old neighborhood that were left behind. The option of demolishing this area as well was out of question from the very beginning. What remained as the only viable solution was to break up the initial plan and to readapt it according to the area that had been made available after the demolition.

On the other hand "path dependency" does suggest a process of rearranging power relations that influence planning. New actors come into play and produce new types of conflicts around the plan in their attempt to "secure their position in the new order" and to become a part of the process of "planning the center". The civic center will work as an empty fish tank during the twenty years of post-socialism that this chapter deals with; a fish tank that everybody was "seeing into", because it was centrally located. It had to be properly ornamented, filled with meanings and structures that should represent the new social order and that had to house the most colorful combination of species that the winners of the new order could provide. The paradox was only that, while in the previous regime the image of

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[49] For a full listing of the articles that were consulted, see the Primary Sources part of the Bibliography;

order – the "plan" – was already there, now the plan was in the making at the same time with the order that it should have represented, while nobody really knew how either of them should look like – or, for that matter, who the fish and who the viewers were.

In 1990 the civic center project came to a halt. Only half of the land area had been cleared and only a few of the residential high-rises were in the process of construction. The site of the new center was a wasteland, an island in the middle of the city, puncturing the skyline with unfinished concrete and steel structures, waiting to receive a shape. Following the collapse of the high modernist state project, the fiscal responsibilities for continuing the construction of the Civic Center were transferred completely into the hands of the local administration. The new local administration realized that it owned a valuable piece of land in the "center" of the city, which it could not develop because funding was not available.

Consequently, during 1991-1993 the local administration auctioned lease contracts for investors that were supposed to finish the buildings. These contracts involved only the structures for which the constructions had already begun: the residential high-rises and the commercial galleries. The lease was established for 99 years, trying to create an advantageous opportunity for investors. The only condition was that they would complete the construction. Until 1993, 113 such contracts were made by the city hall with various interested parties, spanning from private investors to newly established local firms and politicians (Tănăsoiu, 2005). Among these firms were the main economic actors that would operate on local level in the next twenty years.[50] But leases were not contracted only by important players, but by all sorts of private investors that saw this to be a profitable future investment. Even the local planning office ("Institut Proiect Brasov"), the local representative of the Central Planning Committee during socialism, went into real estate and leased surfaces that it still owned in the civic center, in an attempt to find funding opportunities for a public

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[50] "Thalia, Leonro, Aurora, ICCO, Luca, Aurora, Raliv, Ambient, Oligopol, Optica, Bio Plant, BADR, Diamantul, Marka, Sebastian, ICIM" (Teacă, 2005);

institution that was becoming redundant after the fall of state centralized planning. (Interview with G.H.).

Following the distribution of the parcels that had to be developed, the city hall established a new master plan for the area that was setting the norms for the future constructions, put on paper by the same architect that authored the 1987 project. The plan did not specify new buildings for the civic center, other than those that were already under construction and those that were already included in the original plan – with one exception.

The empty plots in the civic center had been kept under public ownership, waiting for other opportunities for investment. However, the first claim for a plot in the area after the fall of socialism did not come from a private investor, but from a public institution: the orthodox church. The first initiative towards building a church in the civic center came long before the city hall decided what the next steps towards redevelopment would be. As early as the 2nd of February 1990, barely a month after the revolution, the "15 November 1987" association sends an official request to the City Hall, asking for land in the civic center. (Interview with S.)

This civic association was established in order to commemorate and make justice towards the workers uprising from the Red Flag factory, which took place on the 15th of November 1987 and was brutally repressed by the socialist regime. Right after the revolution it gathered around it a number of important local figures that went into politics – mainly on the side of the newly emerging conservative party – and used the anti-communist discourse in order to build up political capital. This association, that commemorated one of the few working-class movements of socialist Romania, became the main supporter of a church in the Civic Center.

The association first asked for a location in the perimeter of the Civic Center, more specifically for a piece of land that occupied partly what should have been the political-

administrative center (sic!), partly the open square, totaling 4995 square meters. The city officials tried to negotiate this claim by passing the request to the local planning office, which offered another plot of land that it was administrating, adjacent to the civic center. Yet that specific plot of land was the site of the new headquarters of the national bank according to the old civic center project – which was still being officially promoted by the local administration - and by 1993 it was decided to bring the church back in the civic center.

The request was granted for the initial surface and by this time the project was not referred to as a church anymore, but as a cathedral. The owner of the lease, made for 99 years, was the newly established association "Ascension of Virgin Mary", which was continuing to be heavily backed by the "15 November 1987" association. The cathedral was introduced in the new master plan of the area from 1993 (by the same architect that authored the civic center project from 1987, N.T.). The conditions of the free lease set up by the City Hall were that the Orthodox Church had to complete the cathedral by 1996. The project involved a partnership between the city and the Orthodox Church, through which the city promised to take up the costs for the three underground floors of the cathedral – two levels for parking lots and one for a "Biblical Museum" – while the church was supposed to support the cost for the rest of the structure (Interview with S.).

The partnership was the result of an interesting combination between politics, memory and religion. The patron for the new cathedral, the same as the name of the association, was chosen because the orthodox holiday bearing the same name was coinciding with the secular "Heroes Day" holiday. The religious aspect could thus be linked to the workers that were killed in the uprisings and were afterwards declared heroes. On the other hand, the main representatives of the "15 November 1987" Association, which were part of the main body of the cathedral association as well, formed the backbone of the conservative party that ran the city in the first years after socialism. The vice-mayor, an architect himself,

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was one of the main supporters of the cathedral project and founding member of both earlier mentioned associations, which explains some of the very generous conditions imposed by the city.

The interests that involved the newly emerging local elites played on attributes of the site that emerged through the creation of the Civic Center. The main argument was referring back to the question of what "urban centrality" would best be represented through. As the main religious actor behind the project stated:

"The cathedral was something that became very dear to my heart and by the end of it all I was left struggling alone just to see it built (…) After all, every European capital has its own cathedral in the city center. Even most of the Transylvanian cities do have such a cathedral. Why wouldn't Brasov have one as well? (…) It would have been beautiful to be able to see the tower of the cathedral from all the boulevards running into the center. Basically, it would have been visible from all around town." (Interview with S.)

Although biased, because it completely ignores the gothic cathedral from Brasov's historic center, this view reinforces the importance of the centrality of the site. In the new geography of the city, the new center should be represented by an imposing religious building. The argument circles in an ironic way, using Europe's historic heritage in order to justify an orthodox cathedral as the cities central landmark[51], on a site that had been made central by a socialist regime, while the cathedral was supposed to make a clear statement for the workers uprising against socialism. The civic center project from 1987 was looking into the future by trying to incorporate the "local", while the cathedral project from 1993 was looking into the past and thereby omitted the local.

In 1995 the conservative party loses the local elections in favor of the liberals and the cathedral project becomes threatened. In legal terms, the church would have lost the lease from the municipality by 1996 if nothing would have been built in the meantime. The Church was not able to gather the required funds for raising the construction, but at the same time the

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[51] An argument that was frequently used for the construction of the Grand Orthodox Cathedral of Bucharest as well; there, too, the cathedral was supposed – and still is – to be built in the socialist civic center;

local administration did not keep its promise either, for all it did was to excavate a small parcel of land. The foundation of the cathedral, with the three underground floors, was never built. Risking loosing the lease contract, S., the priest responsible for the project decides to intervene on his own and raises money from his own parish located in another part of town in order to build a "temporary" wooden church, thus laying claim on the piece of land. The church (See Fig. 8, right) was made of "preassembled units that were specifically designed to be rapidly assembled and disassembled". (Interview with S.) Following this incident, the priest is pushed out from the project and he completely gives up any attempt directed at the cathedral. Still, the city hall can not claim the land back, because a structure had been constructed on the site, and a new priest comes into the picture and forms a new neighborhood parish, seated in the "temporary" wooden church. The permanence of the church on the site of the Civic Center was created under the auspices of temporary shifting visions and claims about what the center should look like[52].

"Systematization means to put in order that which is scattered", as A.T. had put it. The question had to be picked up again by local officials, but this time the means used had to be different. Ten years after the first lease contracts had been established not much had been actually built. The construction works were at the same stage as they were when the political regime changed, but in an advanced state of decay.

The civic center is an ugly façade for our city, looking more like a bat's nest. Do you have any idea how many trucks of trash we had to remove from there? Even the homeless started to gather in the area. All that was missing were horses and carriages! (Interview with Mayor Scripcaru, Tănăsoiu 2005)

Putting in order what was scattered first meant to clarify once again the property regimes that existed in the civic center. This was not an issue during the first ten years after socialism

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[52] The comparison between the shifting temporalities of the sites of the two centers that reentered into a competing struggle for claims around the "historicity of a territory" can be brought further by the two competing cathedrals, the gothic cathedral from the historic center and the orthodox cathedral (project) from the Civic Center. While after the renovations of the gothic cathedral conducted during the nineties the motto of the Lutheran Reformation, "verbum domini manet in aeternum" (The word of god flows into eternity) was repainted on the clock tower, the temporality of the orthodox cathedral was constantly being put under question and had to be made permanent by a wooden church. (See Fig. 8);

because there were no substantial interests that justified official involvement. During the nineties, real estate was not a lucrative business and the entire redistribution of the plots got buried under a waiting game that would make the redevelopment profitable for investors. After the year 2000 the situation had rapidly changed. As the chief architect of the city declared in a press interview:

> It is obvious that this is the right moment. There are large amounts of money on the market. But despite of this, the money is not being circulated, because we are lacking a coherent investment policy (…) I find it normal that the city now wants to attract more tax revenues from the lease contracts on the land and I believe that the contracts can be modified by bilateral agreements. (Interview with Daniel Cincu, Tănăsoiu 2001)

However, as it turned out many of the contractors could not be identified ten years after the lease contracts were established. After the city hall started pushing the contractors to finally complete the construction works and started official investigations and prosecutions in courts of justice, it was revealed that from an initial number of 113 contractors, the city now had to deal with 220 contractors. (Tănăsoiu, 2005) Most of the initial contractors had sold their titles to other parties, without notifying the authorities. Very few firms actually had the financial power to buy off titles and to start redeveloping separate buildings independently[53]. The rest of the investors were mostly speculating with their titles, buying or selling them off in order to make profit but not being able to find a common strategy in order to start investing in the same building – this was the case mainly for the "commercial galleries", which had the most contractors.

During the first years of the new millennium, intense negotiations took place between private investors and city authorities regarding the status of the lease contracts. There were different solutions available: either directly sell the buildings to investors, renegotiate the contracts, or completely invalidate them and search for new investors.

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[53] Two of the main Romanian banks – BCR and BRD, the City Hall and a Hotel Chain from Bucharest were the main developers (the latter building was rented out to Siemens after the redevelopment);

The tax revenue problem has to be seriously discussed. It is not normal that in the civic center of Brasov the rents are at the level of New York and Paris rents – around 100$ per square meter in a year (…) No wonder that nothing has been built there for years! Some of the buildings are now in a state of advanced decay. (Interview with Mayor Scripcaru, Ola 2003)

However, the push of the local administration towards completion of the construction works did not have to do only with interests related to tax revenues. Around the same period, two important laws were passed by the Romanian government that significantly changed the landscape of interests on the site. One was the property restitution law[54]; the other was the law that forced all local administrations to finish construction works that had been started before 1989 by the year 2004[55].

Finally, by 2004 the property regimes of the site had become somewhat clearer. The central part of the Civic Center site remained in the property of the City Hall – where the political-administrative center should have been located in the old project – most of the other land parcels were returned to former owners and investors were keeping the buildings on which they were already having lease contracts (See the master plan for the civic center from 2007: Fig. 9, 10). At this point, most of the residential high-rises were completed, the only problem in terms of construction works remaining with the commercial galleries, where the situation of the contracts was still unclear.

After putting at least the fuzzy property (Verdery, 2004) issue into order, city officials were hoping that they could finally attract the interest of developers for future investments into the area. In 2007 a new master plan is being established, which should regulate the further development. It includes a height regime of 30 stories for one of the zones that was passed into private property – while all other buildings are around ten stories high. At the same time, it renders the "temporary" wooden church as illegal and the area is zoned for commercial purposes while the central plot, which remained in the property of the city, is

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[54] Law 10/2001;
[55] Law 149/2002;

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zoned for mixed cultural and commercial purposes. (See Fig. 10 and 11 of the master plan, with 2D and 3D plans for the area)

Regulating the property regimes did not mean, however, that the Civic Center could finally receive a shape. Fragmentation did not refer only to the fuzziness of property, but to the uneven volume of investments in real estate as well. The different rhythms of the site could not be brought together only by regulating property – and least not in a form that would be suggestive for a city center. While waiting for new investments, the Mayor decides to give a "temporary" shape to the Civic Center, by designing a "temporary" park, a "temporary" playground for children, and a "temporary" open air parking lot and by leaving the "temporary" wooden church[56] to occupy the land for the time being (Vintilă, 2002). At the same time, traffic regulations for the city are changed and the Civic Center becomes the biggest traffic roundabout of the country[57], completely isolating the area from pedestrian traffic.

Ironically, after the property issue had been settled, investments failed to appear because real estate market experiences a new recession after 2007. The "temporary" character of the site receives a very strong sense of permanence. Talking about the recent developments from the Civic Center, N.T. signals the potential end of the project:

There is no sense in building more office space in the area. Already there is an oversupply of office space. A lot of those buildings stand empty. There is simply not enough demand. There are no important company headquarters in Brasov in order to justify those spaces. All of them are in Bucharest. It all sums up to speculations that did not take into account the reality of the location (…) Even the opportunity for a land area with high commercial value is now lost. The 'commercial galleries' are anything but galleries now. They[58] have split up the space, they destroyed the initial idea of facilitating the pedestrian flow – look at it now, they are doing business underground, because they

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[56] The situation of the church is interesting for several reasons. Accidentally, an interview has revealed to me that the land where the church is built has actually not been claimed back by the former owners, only the rest of the 4995 sq meters having been taken back by the city hall: "Our house was where the wooden church is now. Well, half of it. The other half was occupying what is now the access road. We received money back from the City Hall only from the piece of land where the road is, because that's what we asked for. We don't want to interfere with the Church, so we did not claim that land". (Interview with the Sz. family). As a side note, the Sz. family members are practicing Catholics of Hungarian ethnicity. According to this information, the wooden orthodox church is not "illegal" at all;

[57] Information that is specified on the website of the Brasov City Hall (www.brasovcity.ro);

[58] They, the investors;

did not respect the zoning and opened commercial spaces even in what should have been the parking lot (…) And if they are going to open up a mall there[59] they are not only going to destroy the idea of a civic center, but they are going to destroy the old historic center as well" (Interview with N.T)

The architecture firm of the planner that designed the 1987 Civic Center project continues to work on solutions that follow the line of an urban central area. The "cultural mall" project (See Fig. 11, 12), which is supposed to bring several of the cultural institutions of the city under the same roof, is their most recent project. Although the site has changed in many ways, the project for the "cultural mall" tries to partially perpetuate the initial idea of the Civic Center by combining in one building cultural functions with commercial functions.

However, there is a clear sign of pessimism in the previous interview that suggests that this project might never pass beyond the drawing table. Other voices that were already involved in planning during socialism and left the field after the change of the regime are a lot firmer in their opinion:

To put it simply, we can not speak about a civic center. That is not a center! There is nothing that can be done anymore. End of story! (Interview with S. U)

Before turning to the final conclusion of the thesis I wish to pick up once again the metaphor of *excavating* the past that the quote from "A Berlin Chronicle" (Benjamin, 1978) used to introduce my research: "He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging." (26) She who sought to approach her own buried past, trying to answer my questions, felt at first that there was not much left to say about the old neighborhood that she lived in almost all of her life. She did not go there in years, although it was located just at a two minute walking distance from her house. There was nothing there that would have mattered for her anymore and crossing the busy street was not really worth taking the risk at her age. Yet, she came along with me, hoping that she could be of any help,

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[59] In 2010, after the Hidromecanica factory has been completely shut down, the German retail company Cora bought the land, planning to open up a shopping mall on its place in the near future;

although neither of us was very sure of what we were looking for. We slowly walked towards the area where her old house was located, crossed the street and sat down on a bench. I started by asking questions about the neighborhood, about where the street that she lived on was, who the neighbors were and how their houses looked like. She looked around at the Civic Center of Brasov, trying to find the familiar in the unfamiliar image of the park, the tall office buildings, the church and the decrepit construction site. "The street should have been around here, where we stand now. But I am not very sure. I couldn't tell where the house was. Some years ago it was still easy to tell, they did not plant trees in the park yet and the tree from our garden was one of the few that were still standing. But now…" She paused, looked around again and continued: "Now I know, it's that one over there!" she points with her hand to an old tree without any leafs, "that's where the house was. I thought they had chopped it down, but its still there." (Interview with K. E.)

High modernism has only partially fulfilled its scope in Brasov. It erased the past in an attempt to create the future, an attempt that did not materialize anymore. The site that should have re-centered the city and bring it together as a unitary "simple and legible" (Scott, 1988) social organism lies in ruin, being the exact opposite of what it was supposed to be – nothing more than a park designed in haste and meant to freeze yet another set of temporarily shifting visions of uncertain historical configurations of power relations.

Conclusions

The main aim of this thesis was to explore the points of articulation of a civic center project, understood as a complex of spatial, economic, social and cultural planning devices through which urban centrality was supposed to come into being, and the ways through which this project was negotiated and implemented in order to channel urban restructuring in the direction set out by the socialist state. It started out by asking how socialism, as part of a wider program of reshaping the built environment of the country, integrated the civic center notion into its ideology and promoted it for creating new urban centers that were supposed to properly represent and further promote the advancement of the socialist society.

By framing the civic center into the language of architecture and planning, this paper has put on the front stage a specific category of actors: urban planners. The research has shown how planners, as technocratic experts active in the field of urban expertise, were constantly negotiating their highly politicized field through continuous attempts of resolving the tensions between the official ideology of state socialism, the internal debates on planning from their field and the structural limitations that the scarcity in resources was imposing on the plan.

The present paper has answered these questions by connecting a specific plan, the Civic Center project for Brasov, into two historical frameworks. On one hand it has revealed how the preconditions for centrality of the site were already provided by the industrial development of Brasov prior to state socialism, preconditions that state socialism in its late phase only seized upon and attempted to materialize according to its own ideology.

On the other hand it introduced the planning category of "civic centers" and integrated it in the broader debate regarding socialist cities. The internal debates on planning

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in Romanian socialism were connected to internationalist influences, both Western and Soviet with the purpose of pointing in the direction of how the constant refinement of planning solutions was also an attempt to deal with the internal contradictions of planning in a centralized socialist state. The backbone of this part was represented by a discussion of the systematization program of the country, into with the Civic Center was incorporated, becoming a main tool of materializing socialism in its second phase in Romanian urban environments.

The ethnographic part of the thesis focused on the earlier mentioned points of articulation of the Civic Center project for Brasov that had to be negotiated in order to get the project going, from structural elements related to financing of the project, to elements that were having to do with the high modernist *credo* that the optimal integration of the idea of centrality into the project, both in a functional and stylistic sense, would bring about a new urban society in Brasov. At the same time, this part analyzed the way in which the "local community", the relocated residents from the neighborhood, internalized and processed the plan and negotiated their centrality accordingly. The findings of this part suggested the reasons for which the actual plan for redefining urban centrality was becoming fragmented, and how, contrary to what the high modernist project of systematization was pushing for, the points that should have articulated the plan into a cohesive political act were becoming disconnected at the peak of socialism in its second phase.

I believe that this thesis is limited because of two reasons: for one, the specificity of the case, an unfinished attempt of building a Civic Center, creates an interesting case, which, however, is not the norm for most socialist cities, where the plan has been brought to completion and the centrality of the city has been successfully renegotiated by the state. This connects to the second limitation, which is both methodological and analytical. My research does not exploit in a sufficient manner the exception of the case by going deeper into the

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post-socialist transformations of centrality and urban restructuring, giving only a hint as to what extend the changes in power configurations of various actors influenced the development of the Civic Center in Brasov.

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Annexes

Illustrations:

Fig. 1: The area of the railway station before 1880

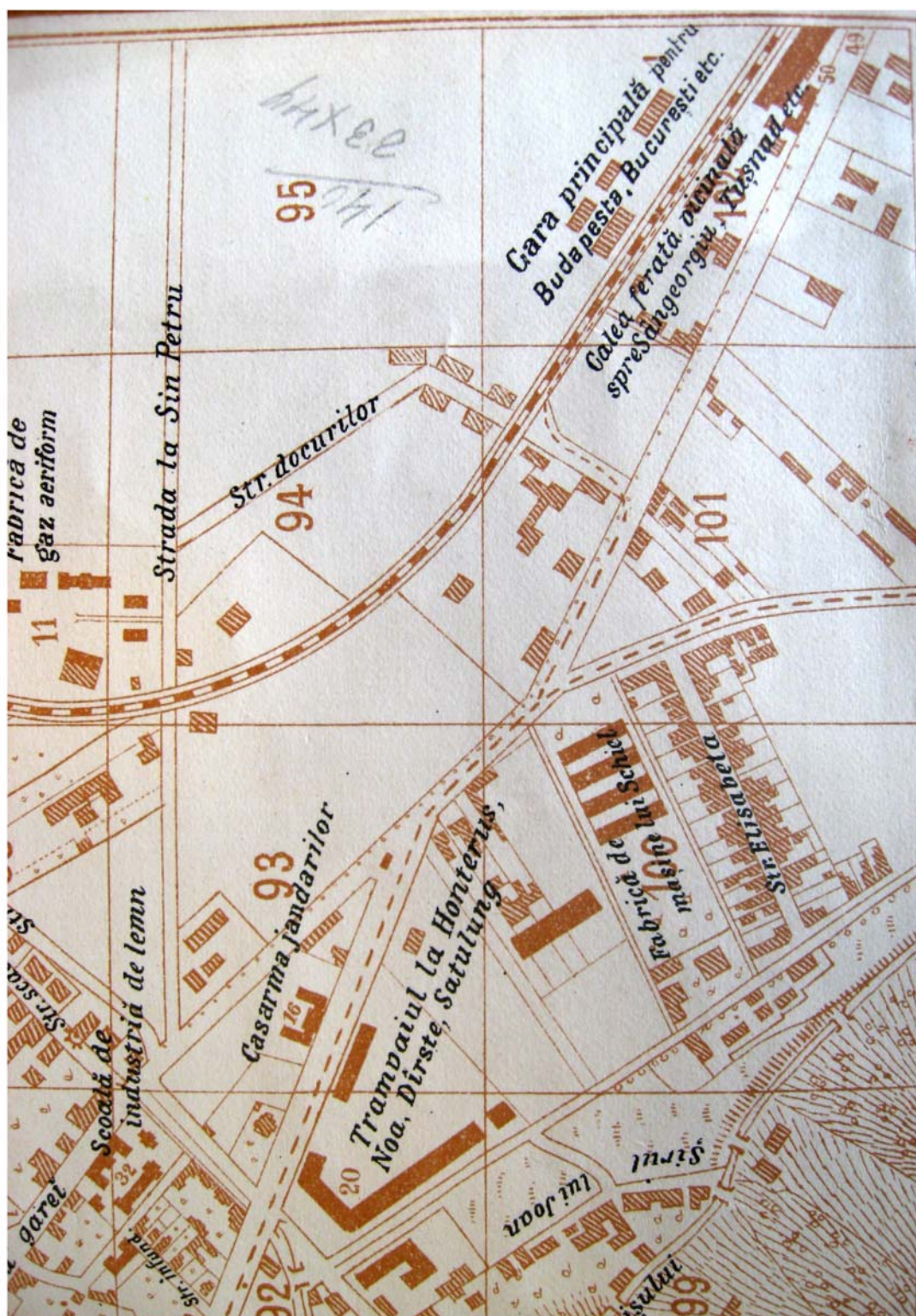Fig. 2: The railway station area in 1910
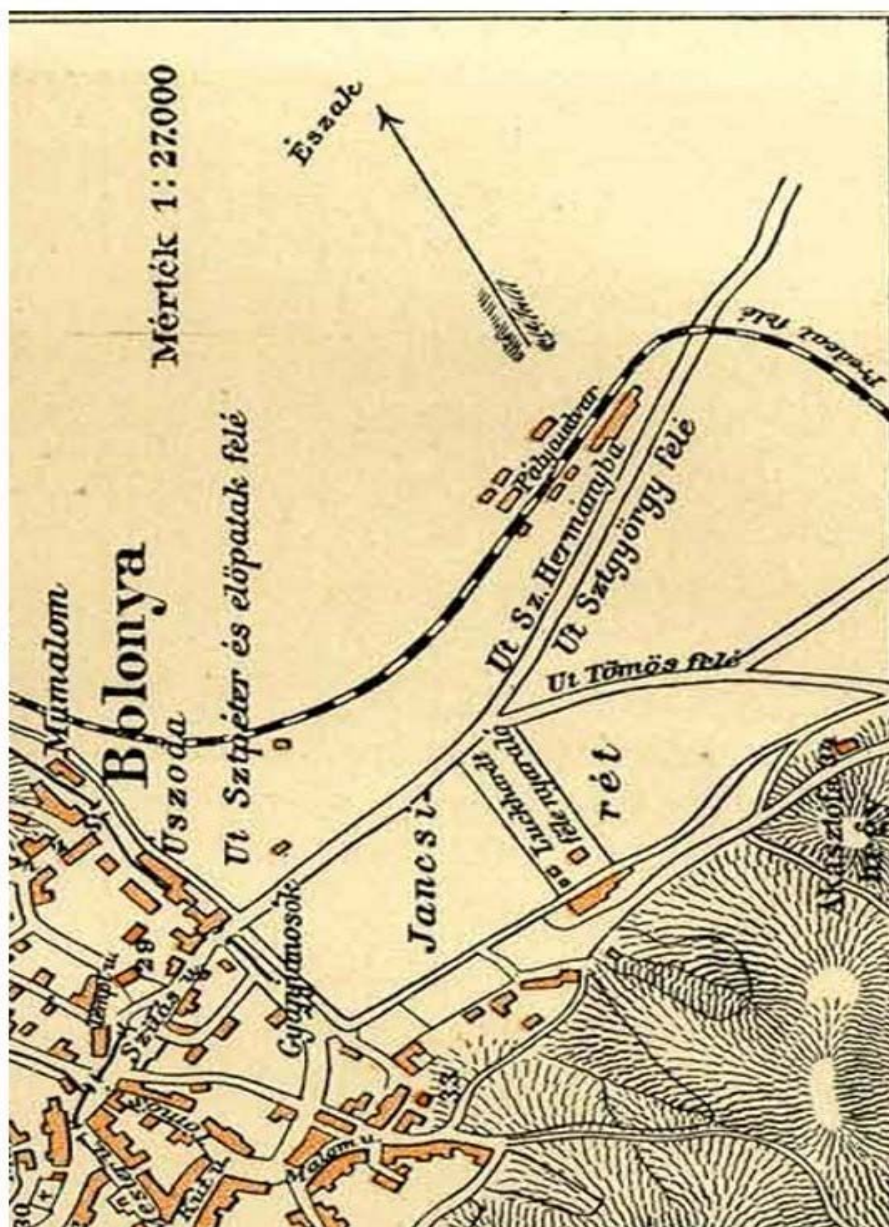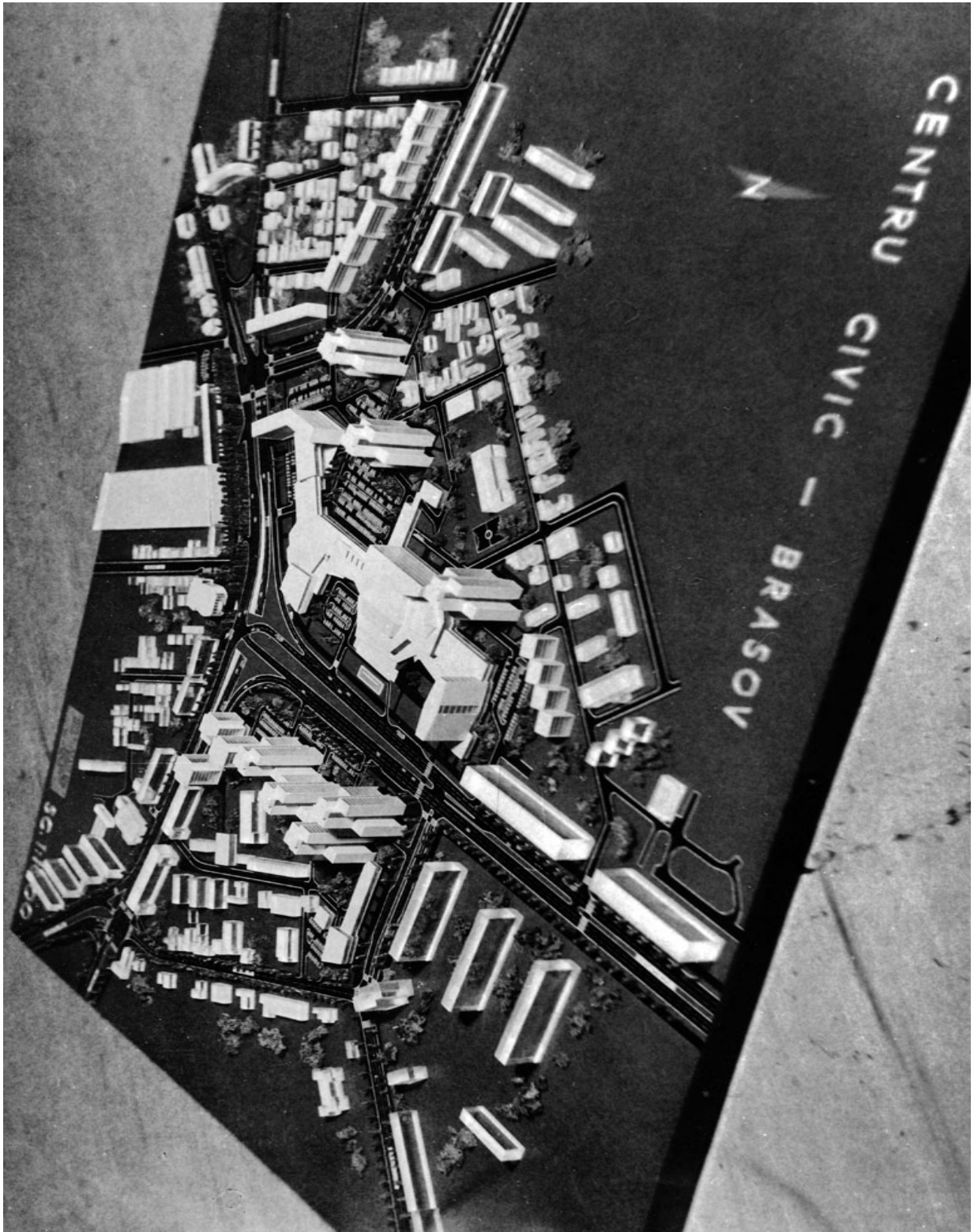
Fig. 3: Civic Center Project from 1968
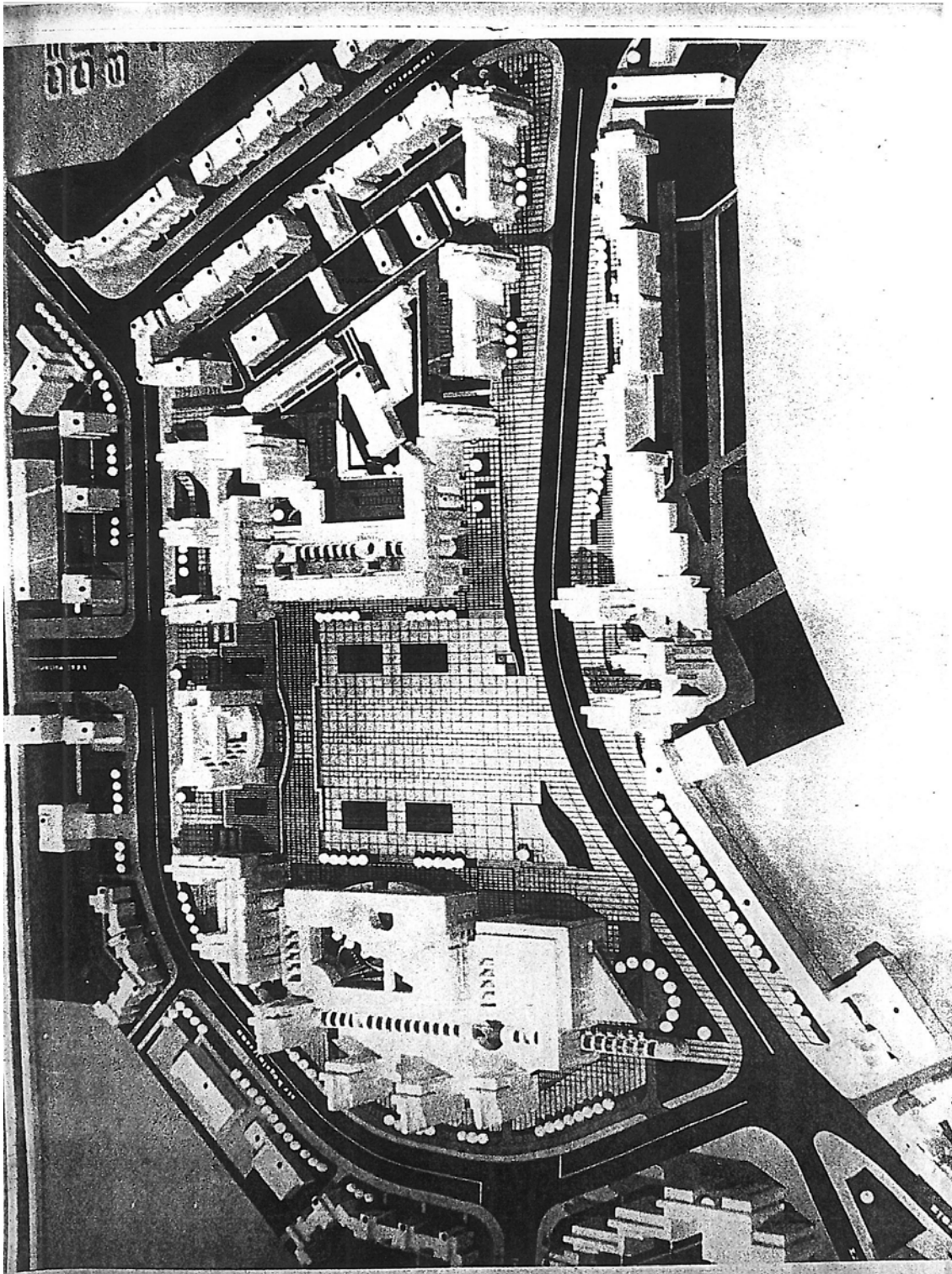
Fig. 4: Civic Center Project of 1987 (a)

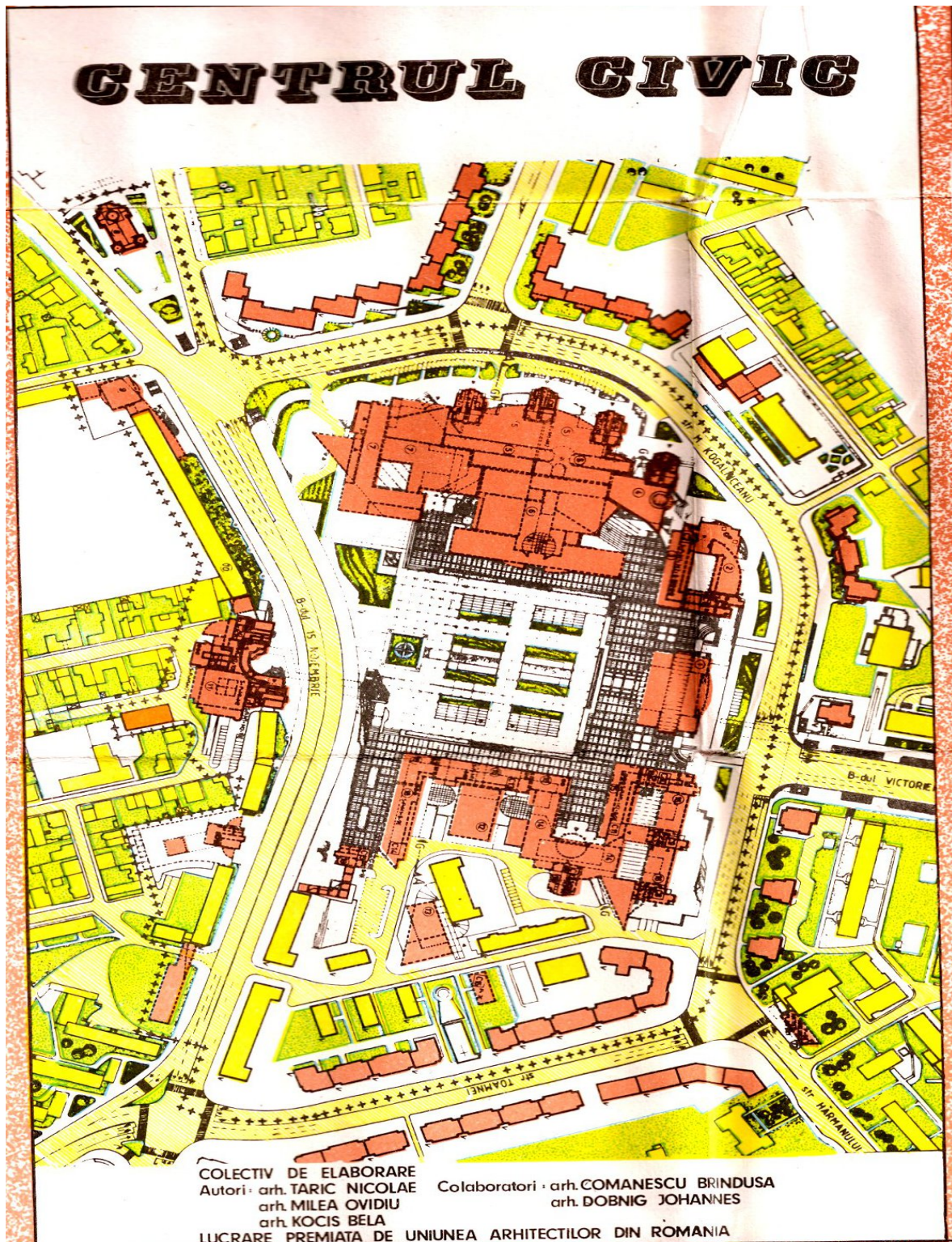Fig. 5: Civic Center Project from 1987 (b)

Fig. 6: Houses from the Hidromecanica neighborhood;
Lazar street 47 (left), Lenin street 67 (right)

Fig. 7: Socialist "post-modernity" – completed buildings that followed the original
architectural plan

Fig. 8: The Black Church, in the historic center (right);
The church in the civic center (left);
Inscription on the clock tower of the Black Church (down);

Fig. 9: New office buildings in the Civic Center

Fig. 10: Plan for rezoning the Civic Center (2007);
Green: private property zones;
Red: Public Property;
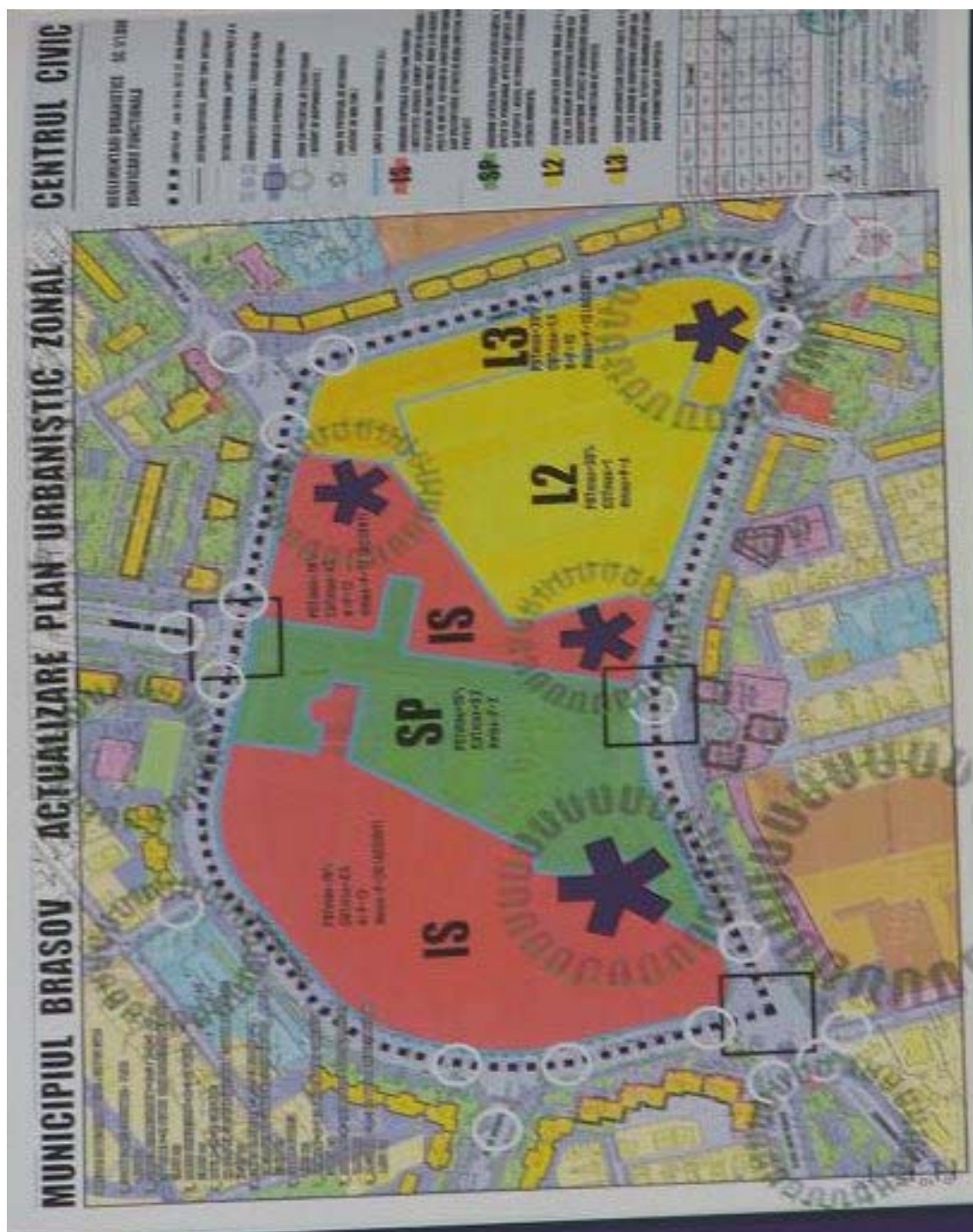Yellow: Area that did not get to be demolished in 1987;

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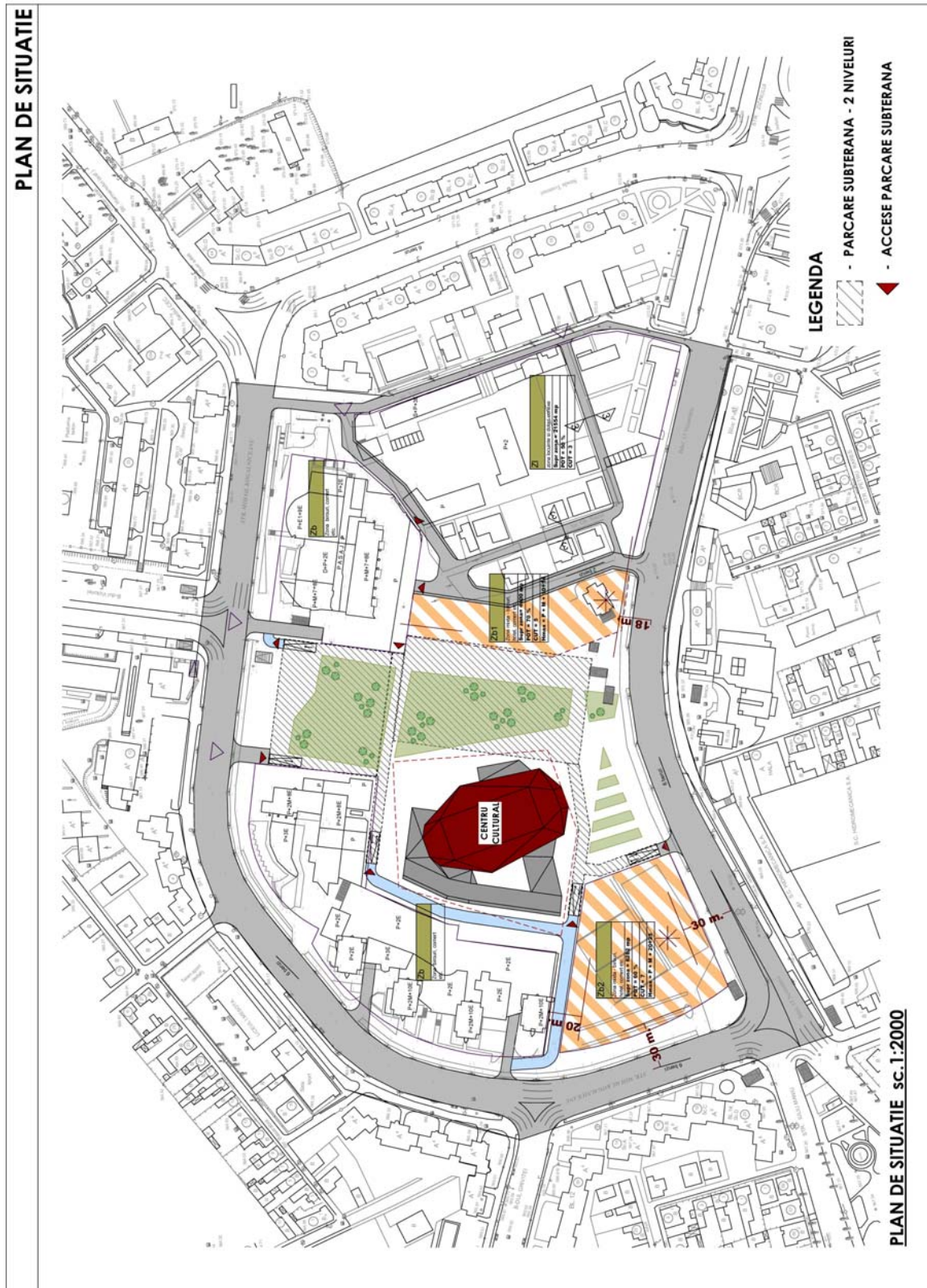Fig. 11: Cultural Center project in the Civic Center (2008);

Fig. 12: 3D plan for the Civic Center, with "cultural mall" and high-rise office buildings;

Fig. 13: Arial view of the Civic Center in the 1990's (up)
Google Maps satellite view of the Civic Center – 2008 (down)

Interviewees mentioned in this paper:

Planners

- N.T.: urban planner, winner of the 1987 Civic Center project; currently active in Brasov, leading his own architectural firm;

- A.T.: urban planner, winner of the 1968 Civic Center project, former head of the Brasov *Raional* Planning Committee; currently retired;

- G.H.: architect and urban historian working on Brasov; former member of the local planning institute during socialism;

- S. U.: sociologist, former member of the Brasov Planning Institute; currently professor in the Sociology Dept. of the University of Brasov;

Residents

- E.N.: Second generation tenants from the neighborhood, Romanian relocated in the same area;

- K.E.: First generation tenant from the neighborhood, Hungarian, relocated in a multi-family apartment house in the same area;

- I.C.: Second generation homeowner from the neighborhood, Romanian, relocated in the same apartment block as E.N.

- M. Sz.: First generation homeowner from the neighborhood, Hungarian, relocated in the same apartment block as E.N. and I.C.

Other interviews mentioned

- S.: priest, main religious actor behind the cathedral project from the Civic Center; became socially and politically active as part of the "15 November 1987" association and built social capital through the association in order to push for his project.