Argument

Abstract:

The realism of the new times referred to by Otto Wagner in the late nineteenth century, reflecting the necessity of adopting the art of change in society,1 certainly did not only characterize the urban development of Vienna, taken under consideration by the architect. Other important centers of the dualist Monarchy – such as Budapest, Prague, Pressburg, Lemberg and Krakow, which, after 1918, became major urban landmarks of the new political realities in Central and Eastern Europe – have undergone similar developments, more recently investigated by historians.2 These and other cities not mentioned by Wagner have thus far seen fewer historiographical reflections on their evolution in the literature, although recent years have seen a shift in this regard.3 This situation gave birth to the initial idea of this volume of studies, which proposed a comparative reflection on the evolution of the representative cities of the states which succeeded the empires dissolved in 1918, from the perspective of the relationship they display between architecture, urbanism and society.

Being dedicated to the centenary of Romania, this volume also introduces a second dimension, which in fact emerged in the wake of the selection of contributions: namely, the attention paid to the evolution of "Cities of Union", that is, cities where Union declarations were drawn up with the Kingdom of Romania in 1918: Chişinău, Cernăuţi and Alba Iulia. But this fact was rather a pretext by which we set ourselves apart from the dominant exaggerated festive character of the centenary by trying to offer a publication covering a less attended issue in Romanian historiography. Of course, in recent years, several relevant studies and outstanding books devoted to the contemporary destiny of Romanian cities or urban policies of this period have been published.4 However, a general approach to the theme was missing, an approach illustrating the trends in the urban development of these cities, tracked via a collaboration between historians, architects and historians of architecture. This approach was appealing because the tradition as a whole, and the tradition of living in particular,5 can be the most appropriate occasion for the representatives of these domains of study to meet, and also for proposing development perspectives. Thus, the reflections on the demolition of urban spaces during the communist regime6 cannot be neglected by historians, as a project initiated by trained historians led to a welcome addition to the image of the 1918 era, which was not just one of neo-Romanian architecture.7

This retrospective view of a century of evolution of urban architecture and Romanian urbanism is focused on four major themes. Investigating new demographic realities and their influence on urban development after World War I reveals issues such as the expansion of urban territory and the policies surrounding the construction of housing for new city inhabitants that reflect the changes in Romanian cities' demographic structure. These issues are addressed by the study on land distribution under the Agrarian Reform legislation, with examples from the Old Kingdom and Transylvania (authors: Diana Mihnea and Irina Calotă). The development projects undertaken in order to adapt to the transformations in society and express new elements of the collective identity through modification of the urban architectural landscape led to two other themes primarily focused on the

interwar period, but incorporating pre-war antecedents and post-war evolutions. The first theme is expressed through a study on the often tortuous process of constructing three representative buildings in Bucharest: the National Art Museum, the Senate Palace and the Palace of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (authors: Ioana Maria Petrescu and Constantin Bogdan Stanciu). The second theme is illustrated by a number of studies. One examines the role of minor architecture in shaping the urban identity of Bucharest, questioned by the survival of only a few of the architectural landmarks (author: Valeriu-Eugen Drăgan); another proposes a visual reading of the Cotroceni district of Bucharest from a dual perspective: the photographs made in the 1940s by Willy Pragher and the contemporary observer (author: Cristina Bogdan).

The fate of Romanian cities during the communist regime, which in too many cases involved the loss of urbanistic traditions and the undermining of not only the identity but also the cohesion of the communities living there, is the final major theme of this volume. This last theme is covered in two case studies. The first is on the town of Târgu Mureș, where the project to build the National Theater (an urban work that was widely lauded in the publications of the so-called "Golden Age") involved the demolition of an eighteenth-century monastery and Franciscan church, leaving only its tower standing (author: Ioana Rus-Cacovean). The second is on the town of Alba Iulia, and focuses on the projects to develop the Platoul Romanilor (Romans' Plateau) area and the old city center during the Communist regime (until 1975), comparing these projects to similar endeavors from the interwar period and the 1940s (author Daniel Dumitran).

The not necessarily deliberate favoring of the "Cities of Union", to which one third of all studies refer (we would have liked to include more case studies from Transylvanian and Moldovan cities), is accentuated by the two contributions dedicated to what we might call places of memory – the edifices commemorating where the resolutions of union with the Kingdom of Romania were adopted in 1918. Similarly to the cities themselves, these places illustrate an amputated memory – with one exception, that of the Union Hall of Alba Iulia, which could better be described as a manipulated memory.8 This is no coincidence, since this city has transformed its history as a "City of Union" into an identity trait, although this is not necessarily reflected in the levels of attention paid towards the monuments that represent this moment in the city's history. Only in 2018 did the Union Hall undergo major restoration, and this remains the only achievement in terms of preservation of heritage in the year of Romania's Centenary celebrations, which was also the European Year of Cultural Heritage. A detailed analysis is dedicated to this edifice in the article by Valer Moga.

The other two "Cities of Union", Chişinău and Cernăuţi, were (as they are today) cities with provincial capital status, for which the Act of 1918 represented only a brief episode in time, enveloped by oblivion. The ensemble of buildings that form the Residence of the Metropolitan Church of Bucovina and Dalmația in Cernăuți (nowadays the headquarters of Yuriy Fedkovych National University) has recently been the subject of a volume presenting its history in the context of its inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011.9 This volume also mentions two episodes connected to the history of the Synodic Hall of the Metropolitan Residence: the Romanian Unification Congress of 15/28 November 1918, provisionally imprinted in the historical memory by a commemorative plaque (no details on its preservation), and the Assembly of the Russian Bukovina populace in June 1917, which declared itself for the union of Bukovina with Ukraine in the composition of the Russian state.1^{0} A third episode was the festive inauguration of the Romanian University of Cernăuți on 24 August 1920, in the presence of King Ferdinand I and Queen Maria, which was immortalized by a memorial plaque.1^{1} One of the studies included in this volume (authors: Valentyna Bohatyrets and Liubov Melnychuk) refers to the Romanian Bukovina period, expeditiously treated in the above volume. The urban

and architectural history of the city of Cernăuţi deserved a richer reflection, but this did not materialize in the submitted texts.

The case of the city of Chișinău is somewhat better illustrated, both in the article dedicated to the edifices of the Union by Liliana Condraticova (the author refers to the "Alexandru Donici" Gymnasium in Chișinău and the Metropolitan Palace in Cernăuţi) and the contribution by the same author examining the development of metal art in the big cities of interwar Bessarabia. Also from this city, we include Alla Chastina's article on the reconstruction of a monument commemorating the ruler Ştefan the Great, created by the sculptor Alexandru Plămădeală and the architect Eugen Bernardazzi: a symbol of the present identity of Romanians in the Republic of Moldova, but also speaking to the attempt to build a distinct Moldovan historical identity. The interwar urban development projects of Bessarabian cities are reflected in the article on the city of Soroca by Vitalie Iaţiuc.

In conclusion, our volume offers an interpretation of the contemporary history of Romanian cities and examines various perspectives on their evolution. Although dedicated to the Centenary – but in the sense of a lucid, and therefore critical, look – the volume is published with a certain delay, because it did not find its place among the projects agreed in 2018. For the form in which it eventually emerged, we owe thanks to our collaborators, and especially to Liliana Condraticova, who liaised with the authors from the Republic of Moldova.

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