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European  
Association for  
Architectural  
Education

**CONSERVATION / REGENERATION  
THE MODERNIST NEIGHBORHOOD**

**EAAE Transactions on Architectural Education**

Rodica Crisan  
Giovanna Franco  
Loughlin Kealy  
Stefano F. Musso  
Editors

**CONSERVATION/REGENERATION:**  
**The Modernist Neighbourhood**

**Rodica Crişan**  
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EAAE - European Association for Architectural Education



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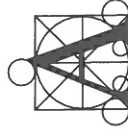
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**Organising Institutions**

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This book presents the papers written by 47 participants after the 3rd Workshop organized by the Conservation Network of the European Association for Architectural Education in 2011 in Romania.

The workshop was attended by 51 participants from 22 universities, representing 8 countries: Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Turkey.

**Scientific Committee:**

Professor Rodica Crişan  
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Professor Loughlin Kealy  
Professor Stefano F. Musso

Illustrations to the text were provided by the authors, organizers and editors.

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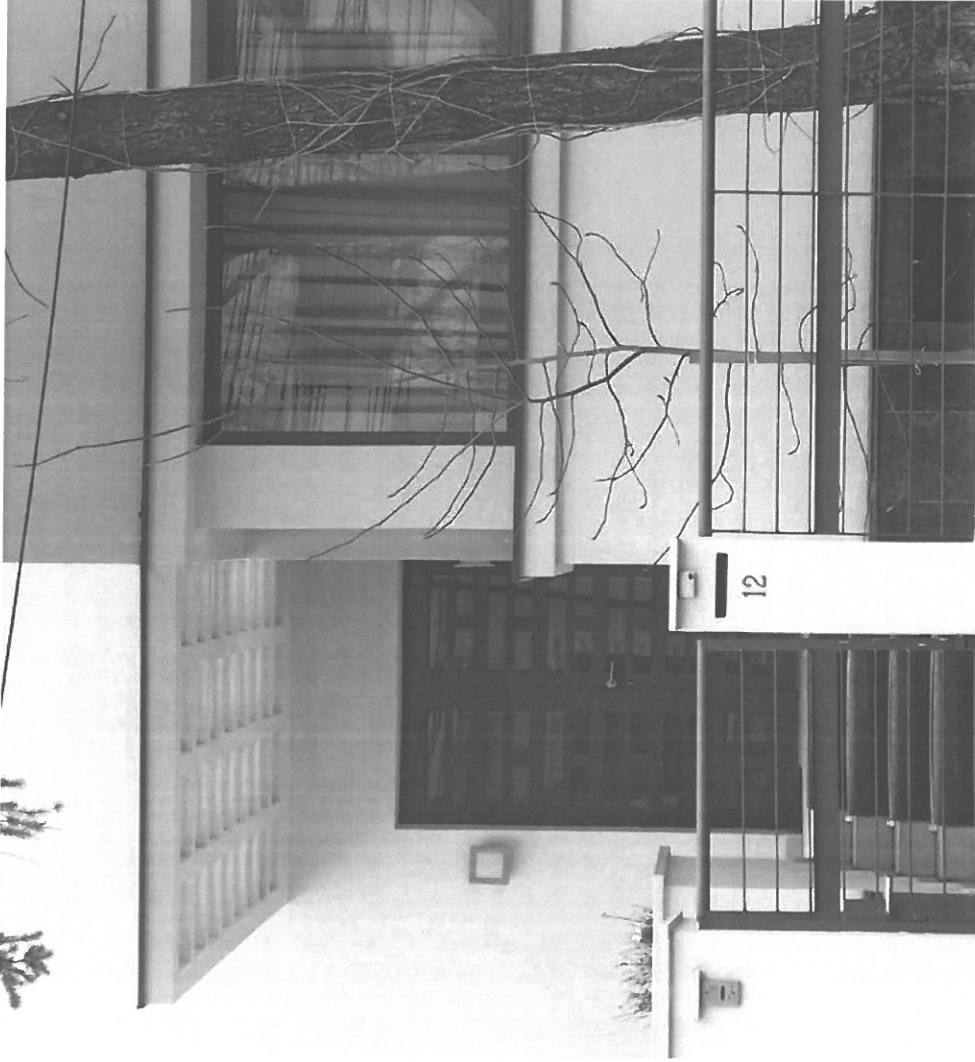
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## Preserving the identity of urban heritage: the safeguarding and development of a district of Bucharest

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### Introduction

The area of the city under consideration is located in the northern part of Bucharest, identified as the zone bounded by the following three principal thoroughfares: Iancu de Hunedoara Boulevard, Aviatorilor Boulevard and Calea Dorobanților.

The present plan has resulted from a series of uncoordinated cadastral sub-divisions that were executed in a piecemeal manner. The absence of any unifying criterion has led to the formation of a series of building styles whose architectonic, material and urban composition express differences in social status as well as in approach to managing open spaces and in the constructions themselves.

This lack of any underlying unifying planning principle has led to the juxtaposition of various and sundry styles of building and construction materials, among which some examples of architecture stand out whose quality is sufficiently high to rank them as 'national monuments'. However, this overall heterogeneous picture is at risk from a further process of transformation – one that threatens to

bring about the disappearance of cityscape described above. This threat comes in particular from recently constructed building complexes whose main function is to house service industries, as well as from the conversion of elegant residences into embassies. The control of urban areas necessitated by consular activity creates an environment that is difficult to 'experience at first hand' due to the impossibility of free and spontaneous social activity.

Although forced to respond to this challenge, municipal planning regulators do not have the wherewithal to cope with all of the forces present on the ground. In particular, there has been a failure to counter speculative interests that frequently lead to the indiscriminate transformation of existing buildings, or to their complete demolition. While the ensuing new construction may follow a similar architectural style 'on paper', the radical change brought about by the construction process produces results that are unrecognisable (Indelicato 2004). Lack of regulation exacerbates the dangers inherent in choosing pseudo-historical forms. It leads to a use of colours that create garish combinations as each project is assessed on its own merits and not in relation to its urban setting. It abolishes the social contribution made by gardens, which become completely private areas, enclosed by impenetrable hedges or by fully opaque metal and plastic barriers.

The absence of proper management of shared spaces (streets and gardens) works against the opportunity to create social forums that are suited to nurturing a watchful civic spirit, which may in turn safeguard the lived-in urban environment.

What becomes clear in the light of observations made across the neighbourhoods comprising the urban area in question is the complexity of the architectural and functional characteristics that lend this district its particular identity. But equally clear is the aggressive nature of interventions carried out over recent years,

both in terms of urban planning, of built heritage and of the poor maintenance of public spaces. This lack of governance can only be corrected through the civic education of the residents, which must follow on from the training of town planners and awareness-raising among administrators regarding the identity-linked values of place.

### Recognising values

Identifying the values that have marked the area in a profound way means assigning power and fresh energy to architectonic and urban symbols and characteristics that set the location apart as different, cohesive and liveable.

The first thing that needs to be recognised is the 'historic value' of the district as a concrete witness to the plurality of members co-present within it. When diversity emerges, it highlights a common focus on details – be they decorative or typological – that testify to a special identity. This identity has been levelled by neglect, by lack of maintenance, by the absence of material acknowledgement of the characterising element of one architectural structure or another, and by obsolescence as technologies become outmoded.

In terms of city planning, recognition of historical parcelling and architectures allows an urban space to be safeguarded as a testimony to a past liveable space that is no longer recognised as such – at least not known as such by its present inhabitants. 'Social value' does not find communal relational spaces because these are not 'tended' by the local community: citizens do not feel they belong in the existing urban fabric and contacts flow into private outlets, or outside the local area. Practices, customs and activities do not inhere in a given context as its points of strength, but only 'lap at its edges', or are physically imposed without becoming vehicles for human relations.

### **An identity to be recognised**

The issues identified so far could be grouped together under the general heading 'loss of identity'. They are nonetheless deserving of a search for solutions to enhance the urban landscape; solutions that are to be considered as the product of a guided transformation of a space lived in by people and which enable these people to become actors who shape the space and take care of their habitat.

The dialectic that springs from this comparison between conservation and change can, if steered appropriately, be considered a resource to be used to save 20th-century cities from being lost to us utterly. This action does not aim to assume the demiurgic mantle of one who is aware of saving the area for posterity; what it does propose is a 'tending' of the local social dimension over time, guiding changes to a constructed expression of a plural and open potential. It takes on the task of defending, planning, nurturing and progressing with the transformation.

First and foremost, the proposed activity is that of recognising historic stratifications, which collaboration with the Ion Mincu University could further emphasise, identify and easily communicate through its privileged channels. As an active player in the integrated enhancement of the area, the University could proceed with cataloguing the architecture present both directly in the field and through retrieval of documentary archives. These could then be used as material for a widely available museum project involving an historic itinerary: an open-air museum, to be understood as the set of places and itineraries that together comprise a logically unified route through the city with the purpose of telling the story of its historical and architectonic stages and events. It is a scheme to bring inhabitants closer to their city, to show visitors the importance and the value of its architecture, to unify one or more actualities by contextualising them in a way that enables people to perceive them as part of a unified local entity, whose telling will restore

independence to historic-cultural and societal components (Artibani 1999; Lascu 2011).

The creators of the projects and works that may be encountered when walking around the streets of these neighbourhoods were mainly qualified Beaux-Arts style architects – versatile professionals who proved themselves capable of working in whatever style their patrons desired, mastering the craft right down to its details. The great variety of techniques and materials, as well as of detailed project blueprints, combine in adding value to the buildings and to their component parts. These factors also bring about a strong overall identity of the district as a general framework within which local identities are expressed either through the original sub-divisions or specific micro-zones (defined according to chronological, functional or stylistic criteria) or through the individual identity of each building.

The compilation of a catalogue would provide a complete overview of building stock present, of architectural characteristics and building types, of materials and variety, and would usefully be accompanied by knowledge of the state of repair as well as the causes of any pathology in progress. Such a cataloguing should not prove excessively costly to undertake as the area, although large, is bounded and clearly identified. The material thus acquired would take on a strategic value for the purposes of drawing up criteria for the preservation and safeguarding of this heritage.

Subsequent to this, a set of regular planned interventions should be identified for the maintenance of the architectonic character and functioning of the buildings. This will be a necessary and effective practice for the preservation of entire sections of the city. Retaining the efficiency of the urban infrastructure equals providing opportunities to avoid spontaneous and unorganised drifts in behaviour and to promote the recognition of that place, of those signs left by history as signposts on the arduous path towards restoration and preservation. These are guidelines that have to be laid down in order to proceed

with an attempt at charting the urban space; although partial and provisional, such a charting opens the area's 'identity' to decoding.

Maintenance cannot be an off-the-shelf practice. It has to be a heterogeneous and flexible action, constructed with the active participation of residents and institutional players in a framework of changing needs and nascent cultural awareness -- often unperceived or not willingly understood in the name of economic goals that are so highly coveted because they are so laden with the elitist socio-economic values of global currency.

It is, of course, necessary that this input should spark a reassessment of open green spaces on the part of public administration, giving added impetus to a 'green feeling'. This is a feature that has been generally appreciated. Alongside the regularities of the urban fabric (with its distinctions between each historical sub-division), the presence of plant life adds unity and cohesiveness to the entire zone, which may become a centre of high residential quality. When appropriately maintained, shared areas of vegetation can boost an area's quality of life. In this regard, there can be no doubt about the positive effects of opening up overlapping spaces of inclusion, enabling private green architectural areas to be perceived as part of the general ways through the city, which already benefit from an abundance of planted trees. This richness is made sterile by the visual barrier of those stretches of fencing whose sole function is to mark off private property and to ensure a kind of protection against an outside perceived as hostile.

Governing maintenance also means regulating installations in ways that do not determine changes in architectural structure, thereby indulging impulsive drives for oversized energy efficiency solutions -- the expression of status that turn out to have been above all a waste of shared economic resources. A prime example of this is the external mounting of heating and air-conditioning systems, an operation whose complexity demands the use of entire rooms capable of

housing the control mechanics, to which must be added the extra metres of tubing which snake around, entwine and cut through the supporting structures in every direction. This drive towards energy efficiency also takes the form of alteration to masonry work through the indiscriminate application of 'thermal overcoats' that obliterate exterior decorative richness. Efficient maintenance of existing technological solutions -- which themselves often demonstrate a high level of artistic attention to detail -- means thinking up new, non-hackneyed solutions. Instead of letting design be ushered in by the architectural features of a new build, a virtuous search should be undertaken, probably one for craftsmanship, which evaluates the possibilities of repairing and/or complementing historic technology with new one-off systems, i.e. solutions whose range of application is limited to one historic construction, or at most to a series of constructions sharing common architecture and fixtures.

### Seeing unique value in individuality

A first step towards the enhancement of the area is already being taken: there is an awakening awareness of the danger that the individuating signs of this urban environment are at risk of being lost. This is already to recognise the area's own identity and distinctiveness. So far, this act of recognition has been limited to academic circles. A possible explanation for this fact could be found in the general lack of education among Romanians regarding their built heritage -- a lack that has been accentuated in recent historical periods.

Undoubtedly, a decisive role will be played by municipal policies, which is why collaboration with research institutions will be conclusive and successful if conducted in a consistent manner.

Beginning from the city-planning perspective, an initial move would be to set up locally an 'observatory across the landscape' capable

of identifying the main threats from within property speculation. These forces are highly aggressive and combative, due to the desirability of the zone and to a lack of respect for the law; this sees harmful operations leading to the mutilation, amputation and demolition of highly esteemed buildings, and with them of the city itself (Indelicato 2004).

A second aspect for verification is represented by the changes of use that have been introduced to old residences. These often impede social interaction in the immediate surroundings through police and security activity. A change of location, or a more restrained presence of embassies would not lead to moral panics at the sight of groups of tourists armed with nothing more than their cameras.

Moving on to the architectural perspective, decisions and interventions can largely be guided by compliance with the geometrical form of the cadastral parcels (the size and proportions of frontages and boundaries), with the forms of the buildings (positions and surface areas in relation to markings, size, roofing), construction materials, and architectural language (lexis and morphology, composition and style).

On the scale of architectural details and materials, interventions can draw on a solid body of informational support from research into materials and building techniques held by Ion Mincu University, which has yet to be distributed among professionals.

The methods for attaining these objectives are common knowledge: detailed town planning; planning of colour schemes; of green spaces; of traffic flows and of transportation, etc. It is incumbent upon the conscience of the political classes to aim for such socially worthwhile objectives. There can be no doubt that these actions are undermined by consolidated practices centred on speculation involving urban property and architecture. In this regard, it would be interesting to apply to the area under study the same methodologies

for research, project planning and execution as were used in the *Siedlungen der Berliner Moderne*, which enabled the need to modify the habitations to be reconciled with maintenance of the area's individual characteristics. If the operation is successful it would, without doubt, serve to trigger similar virtuous schemes in other districts of the city. It would, furthermore, be advisable to include the area on the UNESCO list of protected sites in order to create here, too, a kind of open-air museum tracing the area's evolution, along the same lines as has been experienced in the Carbonia project in Italy (Peghin 2010). This international recognition is the outcome of a broader policy of safeguarding modern residential heritage. The policy does not act upon local public opinion alone: the internationalisation of the social, economic and architectural value inherent in the area furnishes inspiration for new developmental projects that arise principally from the preservation of the area's identity as a value in itself.

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