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IMPENETRABLE PLANS AND POROUS EXPERTISE: BUILDING A SOCIALIST BUCHAREST IN THE 1950s

Introduction

For Bucharest's inhabitants, in comparison to other people living behind the Iron Curtain, 1953 meant something more than the year when Stalin died. It also marked the beginning of a massive project of a radical transformation of the city landscape. The plan for constructing "the socialist city of the future" had begun to be drafted as early as June 1949, but only in November 1952 a ministerial decision was issued "on the construction and reconstruction of the cities and the organization of the architectural activity".¹ By setting forth an agenda of bringing radically new urban forms into a city depicted as being like "a spider web of skewed and narrow streets", a city whose "3/4 of its total surface is currently occupied by hovels", the political actors of the new regime praised a centralized aesthetics of order that was to stretch upward the city skyline while forbidding the city's horizontal development into extraterritorial areas.² Dismissing earlier plans of modernization of the city as inherent failures of a capitalist order,³ those politicians hoped to achieve as soon as possible a vertical city, as the radical urban form that, to them, represented architecturally the socialist revolution – that is, a total reordering of space that would accompany and enforce that of social and political forms.

A close reading of the stenograms of the meeting of the Council of Ministers on November 13, 1953, which discussed the first year work on the systematization plan of Bucharest and its further development, helps us gauge the extent to which the Party leadership had to walk a fine line between rejecting a total supervision of the plan by the Soviets and facing the external and internal pressures to speed up the plan's execution. The stringent matter was Bucharest's significant housing crisis, which was to be solved only by rapidly launching a massive building project of blocks

that would meet both criteria of functionality and maximal usage of the city space. More importantly, this project had to be pursued by relying as much as possible on autochthonous resources and expertise, without creating further debt to the Soviets and thus allowing their perpetual immersion in Romania's internal affairs.

In what follows, I rely on the 1953 stenograms and other secondary sources to examine what more exactly was meant by a systematized Bucharest for the Party leadership and how they went about achieving it. Also, besides a more refined understanding of the Party's priorities at that moment, those materials offer a glimpse over the internal conflicts among the key political figures and the architects directly involved in the drafting of the plan. This set of discussions also points out internal conflicts among the specialists, as well as their various degrees of "faithfulness" to Moscow.

Those documents must be read against a political context that was itself under radical change. From the installation of a socialist government in 1947, the issue of political control appeared as a *sine qua non* condition for the development of any grand project under socialism. During the period prior to 1953, this control was directly exerted from Moscow with the technical help of different Soviet councilors, as well as those Party members who had been earlier sent by the Soviets into the Romanian communist Party. Following the triumph of Gheorghiu Dej over the Moscow faction (the Pauker group), and especially after Stalin's death, this form of direct and total control of Moscow over Romania's internal affairs shifted to a more mediated one, under which diverse forms of planning and other significant projects were no longer required to be automatically referred to the "Soviet specialists", nor necessarily endorsed by the Soviet councilors.

This shift of the ultimate center of decision from Moscow to Bucharest led the Romanian Party leadership to become increasingly aware of a deficit of both expertise and highly skilled labor. This new "awareness" became possible under the relative political relaxation that followed Stalin's death, when the first wave of political prisoners had been released and brought back into the socialist labor force. Many of those released in 1954 belonged to the liberal professions in the interwar years, as engineers, architects, lawyers, doctors, etc., and their technical expertise suddenly appeared as a valuable and timely resource for a socialist state struggling to build itself while keeping a relative distance from USSR. At the same time, the question of how to keep the socialist project uncontaminated by

“the old beliefs” of this category of experts lay at the kernel of the official discussions of that time. As the 1953 stenograms show, the immediate solution was an increasing centralization, which became then enhanced by another form of control: an appeal to the revived discourse of the Nation.⁴ As such, an analysis of those documents helps us grasp the inherent porosity of the regimes of expertise summoned up to lay the foundations of the grand project of “building socialism”.

The Plan

As early as June 1949, the Council of Ministers had already set up a Provisory Committee for the Capital, in charge with outlining “the systematization plan of the capital and its influence zone”. “Systematization” became one of the crucial terms, continually used by politicians and specialists alike, to describe in one word “the standardization and rationalization of both the design and building process”,⁵ over which the state intended to exert a full monopoly. The Provisory Committee’s main task was “to set order into the city via the development plan of the Capital”.⁶ Alike other operations, this plan also was meant to endorse the absolute newness that the socialist regime was supposed to represent. This is why the “old plan” (the 1935 plan of the city’s systematization, elaborated by a team supervised by urbanist Cincinat Sfintescu) was condemned as having been a “failure”, as “any plan elaborated under the capitalist regime”.⁷

Despite their stated criticism, the Committee asked though that the second team, formed of the specialists in charge with drafting the plan, include, among other key architects involved in building socialism, two of the experts who had played a crucial role in the making of the 1935 plan: architect Duiliu Marcu and urbanist Cincinat Sfintescu. The committee advised that instead of being assigned to the Systematization department within the city’s Local Council, the plan be drafted within Bucharest’s Institute of Architectural Design (*Institutul de Proiectări București*), which was under the supervision of the Ministry of Constructions.

This appeared as the best solution, since most of the specialists proposed to be part of the second team had already been working for the Institute. Moreover, as they stated, “it would not be healthy to mix the collective in charge with the supervision with the collective that elaborates the project.”⁸ Those two teams were to be supervised by a third group,

the “consultants”, representing in fact the political apparatus ranging from members of the Central Committee of the Party, the State Commission for Planning, the newly reformatted Academy, a team whose main role was to control and politically endorse the proposals outlined by specialists. The Provisory Committee asked for help from other institutions that would offer resources, as well as seek, acquire and translate the Soviet technical documentation. The operation was already understood as a vast one, as “a prestigious project for the Local Council and as an act of great importance for the current political moment”.⁹ The urban remodeling of the city represented the material proof of “the transformation of our Fatherland into a socialist country”.¹⁰

A detailed overview of this remodeling went public in November 1952, when the Council of Ministers issued the decision over the reconstruction of the city of Bucharest. It followed the establishment of the State Commission for Architecture and Construction, in charge with the supervision of the systematization of all cities in socialist Romania. Architect Nicolae Bădescu, one of the faithful members of the communist party before 1945 and professionally formed under the best interwar architects, was elected the president of the new commission, holding the rank of a minister in the Council.¹¹ The resolution (who wrote it or contributed directly?) set out the main elements to be pursued in most of the systematization plans to follow. It limited the perimeter of the city as well as its population (to a maximum of 1.7 million of inhabitants). The resolution introduced a “novel model of urban development”: the *cvartal*.¹² Imagined as economically self-sufficient residential districts, formed of 6-story residential buildings and aligned by 8-story buildings on the main arteries, those new social units were to be replaced by 15-story superblocks in the second stage of the project.¹³

The resolution laid out two long term goals: **1)** to smooth out the striking difference between the center and the periphery and **2)** to bring order into the city. One of the key words constantly employed to describe the current state of the city was *chaos*. The topic of Bucharest’s chaotic development had already been largely pondered on during the interwar debates on modernization, which led to the formulation of the 1935 systematization plan. However, this plan was now deemed “a dead piece of work, with no technical and economic foundation”.¹⁴ Consequently, “the city [had] continued to develop anarchically and conform to the interests of the dominant class”.¹⁵ By denying then the previous attempts to shape the urban form according to a western ideal of modernization,

the Party appropriated the discourse of “order” to presented it as an intrinsic element of the socialist project. Order was to come in the city in multifarious forms—spatially and temporally. Everything that was disordered had to be ordered, disciplined, tamed down.

However, even though the Resolution seemed to offer a thorough guideline for constructing a modern socialist city, its implementation (obviously) proved to be more challenging. A year after the resolution had been issued, when the chief architect of the capital, Pompiliu Macovei, was summoned to present the first results of the work on the systematization plan to the Council of Ministers, he had to explain why the plan had not yet been fully drafted. He exculpated himself by pointing out the inextricable link between the city’s systematization and the economic national Plan, which was itself under development/ under way.¹⁶ As he put it, the team did not have “an whole array of data and elements, especially those of economic nature, that could clarify the socio-economic profile of the capital and which then [the team] could afterwards translate into definite building projects.”¹⁷ He specified that “many of the ministers responsible for key economic sectors could offer [them] no data on the current situation, and more importantly no estimates of the future.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, the significant housing crisis (a deficit of 40-50.000 residential units only in Bucharest) and the impossibility of the Local Council to fully control the underway constructions in the city emerged as two main conundrums.¹⁹ During the debates, the chief architect admitted that “the Popular Council could not hold an efficient control of the building undergoing in Bucharest [since] currently 1500 blocks are being built in unhealthy conditions, which only worsens the actual state of the inhabiting.”²⁰

Macovei’s proposals stayed within the directions outlined by the 1952 Resolution. He started by presenting the city’s evolution up until 1945 as having been “chaotical”, “extending outwardly in an uncontrolled manner through small buildings with rural character,” which produced a forced extension of the city surface.²¹ In these conditions, Macovei suggested to start by demarcating a surface for the city out of the larger area that at that moment would administratively mark the city limits.²² According to Macovei, this new area could provide for a population of 3 million, since the new several story buildings would be able to accommodate vertically the inhabitants that the older city had incorporated horizontally.²³ The most efficient solution to the housing crisis, suggested Macovei, was to focus first on more peripheral empty areas, whose width could allow for

a better organization of building sites while preventing the delay that any prior demolition would entail.²⁴ This approach would not only have offered a rhythm of work, “with teams moving from one site to another every 4 months”, but it would also have “directly contributed to the accomplishment of socialist character” of the city.²⁵

Even though he declared those suggestions to be “only hypotheses, which must be run by specialist in different ministers”, Macovei confidently claimed that his team would be able to come up with a final blueprint of the systematization plan in the first semester of 1954 (that is, within the next six months). The indispensable help, however, must come not only from the ministers, but also from another source: the specialists who contributed to “the construction of the grand cities of the Soviet Union”.²⁶ More specifically, he proposed that a team of specialists be invited to Bucharest, so that they could confront the recommendations against the real ground, and then take them, together with the [Romanian] team study, and submit them both to the Academy of Architecture of the Soviet Union. “Such help,” he emphasized, “had been also offered to the Polish comrades for Warsaw’s reconstruction and for the reconstruction of Berlin.”²⁷

Macovei’s presentation was met nevertheless with concern by the other participants to the debates, because he did not seem account for the complexity of the operation and did not carefully assess all the stages that such a project involve. Architect Badescu cautioned that before asking for help from anyone else, the team should first come up with several variants of the plan, which the Committee for Architecture could then assess and approve before submitting it to the Council of Ministers for the final decision.²⁸ The two key political figures at the discussion table—the president of the Council and the general secretary of the Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, and the president of the State Planning Commission, Miron Constantinescu—were also critical of Macovei.

Gheorghiu Dej pressed Macovei for more details about the strategy the team employed to gather the preliminary data, especially inquiring into the role the State Planning Committee had in the drafting of the project.²⁹ He wanted to know why the team had not been able as of the presentation date to come up with “a complete project”, instead of a more historical overview on the city development. This is when Macovei confidently replied that “a complete outline could be offered at the end of the first semester of 1954”.³⁰ More specifically, he claimed that “if we use a month to analyze all the problems with all the specialists we have

in the country, and we succeed in securing the Soviet specialists' help during the months of January, February, and March, then we can [...] put together and present the outline".³¹

When Macovei restated that the missing economic profile prevented the team from completing the preliminary work on the plan, Miron Constantinescu, the president of the State Planning Committee, strongly intervened, challenging the former claims.³² Constantinescu set the discussion within a different temporal framework, by pointing out the importance of concocting a plan designed for a 20 year span. Therefore, given the gravity of the task, the preparations would involve a significant amount of time and labor, which "cannot be carried out by medium cadres or even the leaders of the State Planning Commission."³³ Rather, "several variants of the projects should be examined by a special commission, which included comrades from other institutions, from the Academy of Popular Republic of Romania, from the Academy of Architecture, and the most competent cadres within this branch".³⁴

Constantinescu asked not only for a shift in the temporal scale of the project, but also for a differently situated regime of expertise. That is, while subtly refraining to comment in any way on Macovei's proposal of fully relying on Moscow as the center of operation, Constantinescu endorsed the building of an extensive team out of the best specialists in the country. He picked upon the suggestion thrown on the table by other members of the Council, that of forming a special committee that would exclusively focus on the plan by bringing in the best specialists, and suggested to include into this committee "the good constructors and architects from the past."³⁵ He supported the idea of supplementing the Institute Project Bucharest with new personnel, especially with the architects currently holding positions where their expertise "could be not fully utilized".³⁶ Moreover, he insisted on having older architects among those new employees. His comments point to a significant shift in the regime's official attitude towards the pre-1945 specialists:

The employment of older architects has started this year [1953, the year when the first wave of the political prisoners had been released and brought back "in the labor field."]. [...] [However], there are architects of great talent and experience who are still very little used/exploited by the Insitute Project Bucharest. I think that the comrades in the Committee of Architecture must improve their methods of work and engaging [others].³⁷ There is a certain sectarianism here, which must be jettisoned. We must

engage the highly experienced engineers and architects, however, [set them] under the supervision and line of the Party and the government, and not under their old beliefs.³⁸

Despite his earlier criticism, in the end Constantinescu sought to exculpate/absolve the Committee of Architecture, the team supervised by Macovei, from not having produced yet a complete outline of the plan. He pointed out that the team “had faced great difficulties and resistance from all the institutions” when attempting to supplement their rows with architects specialists.³⁹ “They had tried several times, they had contacted all the ministers and institutions; they had come to the Office of Internal Affairs of the Council of Ministers.”⁴⁰ However, as “the ministers did not have sufficient personnel, their request was left unsolved”.⁴¹ He suggested that “the Council of ministers issue an ordinance compelling the ministers to help the Committee of Architecture and the Architecture department of the Local Council with a large number of specialists”.⁴²

Constantinescu’s comments alluded to a much larger problem, which the new political regime had been struggling with since its formation: the lack of “qualified cadres”, that is, of professionals who could meet both criteria – that of being “politically correct”, or having “healthy social origins”, faithful and committed Party members, and being simultaneously highly qualified, especially in scientific and technical domains.

The Party leaders became increasingly aware of the difficulty of “growing cadres” simultaneously with engaging in a speedy process of “building socialism”. Under these circumstances, the Council of ministers was much more willing to accept the recruitment of more experienced architects for Bucharest’s systematization – a crucial project for the Party. However, if this threshold (between the “new” and “old”, marking the “sectarism” that Constantinescu mentioned) was to be broken, then control had to be reinforced under novel forms. Finding new modalities to increase political control at the very moment of expanding the professional circles appears as the main concern underlying Gheorghiu Dej’s concluding remarks.

After listening to the commentaries of the other members of the Council, Gheorghiu Dej gave the final instructions. He insisted that “we need to force the strategy of development of the systematization plan”. “To force out”, he elaborated, “does not mean to pursue a study that has no scientific basis, [but, in order] to achieve this, we need to expand the existing framework, to mobilize all the institutions that could contribute

to a systematic data gathering and preparation of the final form".⁴³ He expressed serious doubts about the deadline proposed by Macovei, pointing out that a more realistic deadline for the plan's final draft should be the end of 1954. At the same time, given the importance of the plan, Dej asked that the State Planning Committee be the main supervisor and be responsible with the plan in front of the Council of Ministers. He insisted on a stronger centralization and a better organized distribution of tasks, under a strict schedule and a detailed set of deadlines.⁴⁴ He suggested that the work on the plan be organized as a "military unit," controlled by

someone from the Government, someone who is more competent, comrade Miron Constantinescu. We need foremost economists. We need to locate the brightest minds in different ministers to establish the economic profile of the city. [...] we need to stop this anarchy. We need establish precise tasks, who should do, what to do, and how to do it. We need to forgo bureaucratic methods of work, we need to find operative measures, and work directly, cooperatively, and competitively. We need to search [for specialists] not only in Bucharest, but also in other parts of the country. Bucharest is the heart of the country, there should be brought in workers, constructors, engineers, architects from other regions, and also employed older cadres.⁴⁵

Thus, even though Dej seemed not to reject the proposal of getting the Soviets involved,⁴⁶ he stressed that the main priority is to "grow cadres", and form a team of the best specialists in the country. By the very fact that he appointed Miron Constantinescu as the principal supervisor of the team, Dej endorsed Constantinescu's favoring a domestic approach to the plan development. This approach implied, in fact, an increasing autonomy from the post-Stalin USSR and thus an immediate and exclusive command over the making of the city. We must note that Dej ignored the suggestions made earlier in the meeting by the Soviet councilor Zvedin, who had been assigned by Moscow as a direct and active "voice" and participant in any of the major decisions taken by the Romanian Party leadership after 1947.

Commenting upon Macovei's presentation, Zvedin criticized Macovei for "not knowing well the city" and proposed a more pragmatic approach to "the city's reconstruction". Expressing his concern that the Committee of Architecture does not consider the life of the city, he asked that the "planners become more attached to the ground, to walk on the ground". He advocated in fact for a more hegemonic form of control of the city,

which could have been achieved only by “getting to know the city, all of the streets, all of the paths, all of the corners”. He thus suggested that the Local Council “better grasp this issue of Bucharest’s reconstruction”, in a manner similar to the systematization of Moscow.

In his concluding remarks, however, Dej did not seem to find such a pragmatic knowledge of the city necessary, since he asked for an extension of the team working on Bucharest’s systematization with the best specialists *in the country*. To Dej, what was of crucial importance was that Bucharest’s spatial planning exclusively follow the economic planning (the Plan). As he put it:

[the plan] must be the dictator in Bucharest with regards to any further constructions. The local council has a good heart, a large heart, it is very democratic [so that it allows for uncontrolled constructions to be erected] but this rotten bourgeois liberalism must cease now. No one is allowed to squander the goods of the state, to waste energy for nothing. There should be a body of control, and everyone should know that they must submit to it. [...] This control must be strengthened, we need a more severe control of the dispositions for construction. We must be very strict with the architects and everyone involved.

In fact, in his comments Dej did not mention Zvedin even once. Dej was fully aware of the deep political implications of Bucharest’s systematization in the larger scheme of the new relations with the Soviets. A strong opponent of Krushev (who, after a tight fight for power, just became the First Secretary of the Party in the Soviet Union in September 1953) and especially of his agenda of political relaxation, Dej understood that “the only way to defend [his] political hegemony was to ensure the country’s economic independence”.⁴⁷ As it also becomes transparent from those stenograms, Dej’s leadership was very much influenced by Stalin’s strategy of total control. His “policy amounted to unwavering Stalinism: he favored breakneck industrialization and waged a merciless collectivization campaign”.⁴⁸ At the same time, Dej, a well versed politician, knew that he had to play a double game with Krushev, by trying to maintain full control over the country’s management while persuading Krushev of unwavering loyalty. Dej succeeded to win this game with Krushev, as it turned out, after Krushev withdrew the Soviet troops from Romania in June 1958, that the main purpose of Dej was “to ensure a margin of autonomy against any Soviet injunctions for further de-Stalinization”.⁴⁹

At the time of the discussion on the systematization blueprint, Dej knew that such an autonomy was to be gained through a combination of strategic decisions. It was crucial for the Party to closely monitor every individual or institution directly participating to the drafting of the systematization plan. Otherwise, any extraneous interference (in the form of *unplanned* new buildings or design) would have caused not only a breach into the targeted urban order, but it would also have hit into the system's very core: such interventions might have broken the relation of subordination of the city to the Plan and thus call into question the totality of the Plan and thereby of the system itself. This was one form of "anarchy" so much criticized by Dej in his commentaries.

Another type of "anarchy", which Dej could not yet overtly address regarded the relations with the post-Stalin Soviet Union. He insisted on having autochthonous specialists, led by Constantinescu, who was entrusted to come up with a version of the Plan that would be then integrated into the urban form. The trick here was the awareness of the totality of this project and the exclusive interdependence of the systematization blueprint (Plan 1) and the economic planning (Plan 2). The two Plans were forming a rather rigid mechanism, whose lack of flexibility allowed for a particularly powerful manipulation. In other words, who controlled the economic planning, controlled Bucharest's form, and vice-versa. That is, had the Soviets been invited to "contribute" to the making of the city (in fact, fully supervise the systematization), they would have been automatically given a free hand over the national economic planning. Macovei's proposal went then directly against Dej's intentions to seek autonomy.

The new meets the old

The city of Bucharest was then to be conceived as an autochthonous socialist product. $\frac{3}{4}$ of its buildings were to be demolished, as they did not meet the standards of economic space usage and modern comfort. The systematization blueprint did not account for the past in any form. On the contrary, as it had been agreed at the meeting, "the preparation [of the blueprint] on scientific basis did not entail a preparation on a historical basis".⁵⁰ That is, technology and mass scale industrialization had to facilitate the employment of prefabricated materials in the production of serial residential units, an operation that Dej had already outlined at the end of the meeting:

We must gradually move to the industrialization of constructions. We also should know which technology we need and what kind of architecture. [we must know] how much of the built space is for practical use and how much is used for pure embellishment. For there are some who assign 30% for effectively utilized space, and 70% for beauty. We must forgo this approach.

Dej's view of the making of socialist Bucharest as an industrialized process only anticipated Kruschchev's own endorsement of the standardization of the construction techniques and materials, a systematic focus on building collective residential units rather than distinct edifices, and rejection of gratuitous embellishment.⁵¹ This strategy began being increasingly applied in the new residential districts under construction at the periphery of the city. Between 1955 and 1960, several quarters had been built.⁵² During this time, the center of the city underwent few significant changes, with many of the older constructions in the center enduring despite their failure to meet the new standards. Carmen Popescu points out this paradox, and identifies the link between the interwar modernism and the projects pursued in the 1950s, often by the same architects:

Although they almost always ignored precedent [architecture], the interventions on the urban fabric did not radically modify the central area of the city until the last years of the communist regime.⁵³

What combination of factors did lead to Bucharest's city center to retain its urban form until late in the 1980s? One explanation is that it...just followed the plan. The creation of sequence of public squares and civic centers constituted a focal point of the 1963 systematization blueprint. Evidently, Dej's directives were quickly followed up, so that in October 1963, the architect chief of the capital, Horia Maicu, presented the General scheme of the systematization plan of the city of Bucharest to the plenary meeting of the national Architects' Union.⁵⁴ Maicu offered an overview of the scheme, mentioning that the 3rd Party Congress had brought in a new agenda, which the systematization plan had to adjust to. Presented as the "result of the scientific work conducted by circa 350 architects, engineers, economists, technicians from the Local Council, the Project Institute Bucharest, ministers, institutes, and institutions",⁵⁵ the 1963 outline of the systematization scheme directly reflected Dej's instructions given ten years earlier. The blueprint gave detailed explanations on the remaking of the

city by mainly invoking economic factors (traffic, electricity, infrastructure, etc). As a whole, the scheme did not differ much from the 1952 Resolution; rather, it was a much more complex project set on a similar goal: “the liquidation of the improper constructions”, which had to unfold along a several decade time span. According to Maicu,

In order to maintain the demolitions and the relocation of families under the admissible limit, in the first stages the reconstruction of the city will be mainly conducted on the large areas, partially empty or with run-down buildings. [The process will be less focused on] the central zone, which is to be reconstructed only after 1980. The reconstruction of the central zone, which currently offers an inhabitable structure, will be done via gradual decommissioning.⁵⁶

There could be also another explanation on to why radical interventions into the central urban fabric had been postponed until the late 1980s and why even then, they were not carried out according to the 1963 blueprint. My argument has to do with Dej’s quest for a total control over the national resources and means of production and the acquisition of a relative independence from Moscow. In 1952, he had already ousted the “muscovite” faction, formed of the three members of the Politburo who shared absolute power with Dej since the war, when the Soviets had facilitated their “implantation” into the Romanian Party émigré center in Moscow.⁵⁷ Both their non-Romanian origins and Dej’s personal ambitions played crucial roles in this elimination. Even though prior to 1953 Dej justified his move by calling upon Stalin’s “interest in the ‘ethnicization’ of East European communist elites”, he later officially disclaimed himself by accusing Pauker and Co. of “dogmatism”, describing them as having adopted an inflexible Marxism and thus “be willing to sacrifice the values of the Nation [...to] an outside power”.⁵⁸ In 1957, via a Janus-like political twist, Dej eliminated Miron Constantinescu, who had sided meanwhile with Kruschev and openly criticized Dej, and Iosif Chisinevski, “the chief ideologue of the Stalinist period in Romania”.⁵⁹ A new wave of purges followed during 1958, with “tens of thousands” being expelled from the communist party.⁶⁰ To counteract Kruschev’s potential attack on Dej’s local “cult of personality” as well as tame down any internal revolts, Dej “turned to the weapon of nationalism”.⁶¹ Verdery points out the importance of Romania’s “declaration of independence”, issued in April 1964 to declare “the Party’s refusal to subordinate national needs

to a supranational planning body in which others would dictate the form of the country's economy".⁶²

What impact did this shift have on the making of Bucharest into a socialist city? I would argue that this double condition (of keeping Moscow at arm's length, while trying to set up a grandiose plan of speedy modernization) made the Gheorghiu Dej team take some decisions that were to have a long term impact on the unfolding of the socialist project in Romania. Among such decisions, the Party's newly awakened interest in the older specialists played a crucial role. It was in the mid 1950s that an increasing number of intellectuals joined the Party, so that they could enter the central institutions and the institutes in the making. "Many of them were 'liberals' whom it would later prove difficult to dislodge."⁶³ Among such "liberals", there was also a number of architects, already well established in the interwar, who were allocated a (sometimes) peripheral role in the central bodies supervising Bucharest's systematization plan. Notwithstanding their relative marginality, many of them brought along not only their expertise acquired in the pre-1945 times, but also an approach to urban planning rooted in a modernist framework.

As other scholars already pointed out, those architects' immersion in the searches for representations of the "modern" in Bucharest of the interwar ended up steadily percolating the architectural culture of the earlier socialism.⁶⁴ Maxim insightfully argues out that "the 'modern' under socialism oscillated constantly between the two extremes of the New and the Old, at once promising perpetual renewal and in the act of fulfilling that promise, becoming a mere repetition of a previous self".⁶⁵ As such, the socialist attempt to articulate a radically novel urban form and thus disposing of any "bourgeois" quests for "the modern" turned to be an impossible project, as it ended up being challenged and then transformed to a certain extent by some of the very people who had participated in the previous architectural debates. For among the architects who joined the state institutions after 1953 were not only those who had been heavily influenced by the interwar modernism (such as Richard Bordenache, Horia Teodoru). There were also others, much more interested in the "national question", who had already shown a propensity for identifying a coherent "Romanian style" in their earlier projects (such as Constantin Joja), and who managed afterwards to find a niche for themselves in a socialist architecture increasingly captured by a hegemonic nationalist discourse.⁶⁶ Those distinct perspectives resurfaces later in the debates occurring during the 1960s, when under the impression of a delusive

political relaxation some of those architects engaged in strong arguments over what is “historical preservation” and how should (could?) they engage in such preservation while constructing the modern socialist city.

At the time when the stenograms were taken, those potential future tensions among different “factions” of architects, or the institutions involved more or less directly in the general plan of systematization, did not appear as points of concern. It is likely that Gheorghiu Dej did not anticipate them or rather he dismissed them as shallow, as arguments belonging to a now fully erased past. However, the regimes of expertise that the Party leadership tried to produce gradually became more porous than they had initially been envisioned. The conundrums of putting the plan into action as well as the tensions that arose among specialists involved in the plan’s implementation point out the struggles over political and symbolic capital that became imprinted onto Bucharest’s urban fabric.

NOTES

- 1 See A. M. ZAHARIADE, 'New Buildings and Forms [Locuinta si Orasul Socialist]', in T. SANDQUIST — A. M. ZAHARIADE (eds.), *Two Books, The Communist Dream & Dacia 1300. Fragments of an Architectural Landscape in Dacia 1300 – My Generation* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2003), 68-79.
- 2 Pompiliu Macovei in *Stenogramele ședințelor prezidiului Consiliului de Miniștri și a Biroului politic al Comitetului Central al PMR din luna noiembrie 1953. Dosar nr.9 [The Stenograms of the meetings of the Council of Ministers and the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party in November 1953. File no.9]*, in *Fondul Consiliul de Miniștri-Stenograme*, The National Archives, Bucharest, p. 148. See also comments by Parvulescu in the same file, p. 209. Henceforth, I will refer to this document as *Stenograms 1953*.
- 3 'File nr. 220/1949', in *Fond CC al PCR– Cancelarie*, The National Archives, Bucharest, p.2.
- 4 See V. TISMĂNEANU, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) and K. VERDERY, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- 5 J. MAXIM, *The New, The Old, The Modern. Architecture And Its Representation In Socialist Romania, 1955-1965* (Massachusetts Institute Of Technology. Ph.D. thesis) Boston, 2006, p. 52. Steven Sampson offers a more detailed description of the systematization project:

In the Romanian context, sistematzare 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.

S. SAMPSON, *National Integration through Socialist Planning: An Anthropological Study of a Romanian New Town [East European Monographs, Boulder]*, New York, 1984, p.75.
- 6 'File nr. 220/1949', in *Fond CC al PCR– Cancelarie*, The National Archives, Bucharest, p. 2.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 3
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 10 *Ibid.*

- ¹¹ Eugenia Greceanu talks about Bădescu’s competence and “bright ideas,” but she condemns him for “having bowed in front of the system,” which explains his quickly rising within the political structures after 1947. E. GRECEANU, “Sovietizarea învățămîntului de arhitectură” [The Sovietization of the Architectural Education System], in Viorică Iuga Cărea (ed.), *Arhitecți în timpul dictaturii--Amintiri* [Architects under Dictatorship--Remembrances] Uniunea Arhitecților din România, Bucharest, 2005, p. 116 and 124.
- ¹² See A. M. ZAHARIADE, “New Buildings and Forms”, and J. MAXIM, *The New, The Old, The Modern*, p. 42-46. Both authors point out that the cvartal as an architectural form should be understood as a continuation of the interwar modernism rather than a break from it.
- ¹³ See Pompiliu Macovei’s discussion on the second stage of the systematization, and Miron Constantinescu’s critical comments that the systematization team could not envision building 14-15 story building too soon. Constantinescu pointed out that “currently [1953] there is neither the technology, nor the technicians and highly skilled labor force that could construct buildings higher than 6-7 stories. *Stenograms 1953*, p. 203.
- ¹⁴ H. MAICU, “Probleme de sistematizare a capitalei [A discussion of the systematization of the Capital]”, *Arhitectura*, 90/5 (1964), 8-13, p. 9.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ The other reason invoked by Macovei was the team’s immersion into the organization of the Festival of the Youth (1953). However, Gheorghiu Dej reproaches him later in the meeting that this is not too good of an excuse, because if they [i.e. Dej] had done the same to the Party [the Politburo], they would immediately have been found culpable.
- ¹⁷ *Stenograms 1953*, p. 146.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Bucharest’s residences deficit was estimated as 40-50,000 apartments in 1953. *Stenograms 1953*, p. 173.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ²⁹ An excerpt of this discussion offers a glimpse of the overall inquisitorial tone of the discussion:
 Gh Dej: what methods and management did you use for this project and the future works?

Macovei: We requested data from ministers and institutions...

Gh Dej: which institutions and how many people participated in this project?

Macovei: The team who worked directly on this project has 25 technicians. We asked for data from ministers and the central institutions. Out of the 43 of institutions, only 17 submitted reports. Besides this, we requested studies from different institutions on the climatic conditions, on the railways system, transport, of which 11 studies had been conducted by the Technical Council of those ministers. [...] Normally, we should have submit our analysis to the State Committee of Architecture and Systematization (SCAS), but we could not do it due to time constraints. In the next stage, we plan to consult the specialists of SCAS in order to establish which of the variants should we pursue next.

30 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 193

31 P. 195.

32 At that moment, Miron Constantinescu was "one of the best-educated members of the Rumanian leadership," having occupied key roles in the Party apparatus. Having joined the Party in 1936, Constantinescu became member of the Politburo and the CC in October 1945. A Radio Free Europe report offers an outline of his political trajectory:

He was managing editor of *Scanteia* from 1947 to 1949, Minister of Mining and Petroleum in 1948-1949, and president of the State Planning Commission from 1949 to 1955. He became a full member of the Politburo in October 1951, and remained on it until June 1957. He was a CC secretary from 1952 to 1954. He was elected to the Grand National Assembly in December 1952 and again in February 1957. From 1954 to 1955 he was Vice-Premier, and from 1955 to 1957 First Vice-Premier; in 1956-1957, he was also Minister of Education and Culture. In March 1957, he again became Vice-Premier, but remained in that position only until July, when he was accused [by Dej] of "acting against party unity", and was reduced to the position of director of the Economic Research Institute (the accusation was repeated in June and August 1958, December 1961, and January 1962).

He became relatively rehabilitated under Ceausescu, and benefited of a comfortable political position until his death in July 1974. Radio Free Europe Report *Death of Miron Constantinescu*, August 12, 1974. Open Society Archives, 300-8-3, <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/52-2-162.shtml>

33 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 196.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Constantinescu in *Stenograms 1953*, p. 218. As another member of the Council, Petre Borila, put it: "it would not hurt if one or two of those old men were here today at the meeting, especially if they had worked before

- on these issues [the systematization and urban planning].” *Stenograms 1953*, p.205. His comment was endorsed by Petru Groza, who said that “[they] should not fool themselves [by thinking] that such a small team [Macovei’s team] could be responsible all the entire ensemble of constructions and systematization of Bucharest. We must use also those capable elements—the architects with specialization and experience.” *Stenograms 1953*, p. 209. Chivu Stoica added to those comments, by saying that “the most qualified cadres were not assigned to this project. There are still many cadres who do secondary jobs in different ministers and institutions.” *Stenograms 1953*, p. 209-210.
- 36 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 219.
- 37 In Romanian, “metode de munca si atragere”, a key term in the socialist newspeak, used to describe the process of “growing cadres” by (sometimes forcefully) persuading them to become faithful to the Party and the communist ideals.
- 38 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 219.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 220.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 230.
- 44 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 233.
- 45 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 234-235.
- 46 As Dej put it, “we need to make cadres, and we could appeal to the Soviet experience. On this matter, it is the only place where we could ask for help”.
- 47 V. TISMĂNEANU, *Reinventing Politics*, p. 82.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Stenograms 1953*, p. 220. This comment belonged to Iosif Chișinevchi, “the chief-Inquisitor of the Romanian Stalinism,” as TISMĂNEANU describes him, who will be ousted from the Party by Dej in 1957, together with Miron Constantinescu. If Constantinescu lived enough to be socially and politically rehabilitated by Ceausescu, Chisinevschi will live his last years at the social periphery. V. TISMĂNEANU, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu Dej [The Ghost of Gheorghiu Dej]*, Bucharest, 2008, p. 133.
- 51 See a detailed analysis of the 1954 Kruschev’s the discourse in A. IOAN, “Ziua 18: Spania – Rusia”, *Arhitectura*, (26.06.2008). <http://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/6176/Augustin-ioan/Arhitectura-Ziua-18-Spania-Rusia.html>
- 52 Such as, the quarters Floreasca and Drumul Taberei.
- 53 C. POPESCU, “Bucharest, Romania” in *Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture* (1 (A-F); S. SENNOTT (ed.) London, 2004, 182-84. P.184

- 54 "Plenara Uniunii Arhitecților din R.P.R. (The plenary meeting of the Union of Architects of the Popular Republic of Romania)", *Arhitectura*, 85/6 (1963), 54-57.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 V. TISMĂNEANU, *Reinventing Politics*, p. 45.
- 58 K. VERDERY, *National Ideology under Socialism*, p. 120.
- 59 V. TISMĂNEANU, *Reinventing Politics*, p. 80.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 62 K. VERDERY, *National Ideology under Socialism*, p. 105.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p.111.
- 64 For instance, see A. M. ZAHARIADE, "New Buildings and Forms", J. MAXIM, *The New, The Old, The Modern*, and M. R. POPA, *Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest: The Socialist Project in The Context of Romanian Planning for a Capital, a Fast Changing City and an Inherited Urban Space, 1852-1989. An Exercise in Urban Imaginary, Collective Memory and Planning History* (Central European University. Ph.D. Thesis), Budapest, 2004.
- 65 J. MAXIM, *The New, The Old, The Modern*, p. 23.
- 66 For two detailed and insightful analyses of the interwar politics of the "Romanian style", see A. IOAN, "Arhitectura interbelică și cheștiunea identității colective [Inter-war architecture and collective identity]", *Echinox Notebooks*, 3 (2002), p. 80-91. C. POPESCU, *Le Style National Roumain. Construire une Nation à travers l'Architecture*, Rennes, 2004.