POLITICAL LANDSCAPES AND URBAN IDENTITY. BUCHAREST′S DEMOLITIONS AND WORLDWIDE CORRESPONDENCES

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Abstract

A city is made up by its people and by its architectural, urban characteristics. Bucharest lost most of its central historical sites during the last decade of communism. The shifts of paradigm of those days shift the entire history of a city, ripping away the historical, cultural and social center of a European capital. Even if the turnovers in Bucharest are never to be seen elsewhere in the world, the political decisions and expression that lead to a new urban landscape construction have correspondences in many other cities of the world, most of them marked by a similar history, thus totalitarian systems. In order to better understand the scale of what J.B. Jackson called the Second Landscape, at its most extreme expression, our paper will present the effects of totalitarian political systems on various urban landscape in the modern period, comparing the scale of the communist demolitions in Bucharest and the corresponding urban tragedies in cities like Berlin, Rome, Paris, or Pyongyang. The study reveals similarities between cities like those mentioned earlier and Bucharest in terms of political construction of the urban landscape, the landscape as a political tool, the impact of these politics on historical cities and their ″absorption″ by the daily life landscape. In order to understand the scale of the tragedy and its consequences in the future it is important to look for examples similar to the one given and to search for answers that may solve the problems that the ruins of the late communism era left to the capital-city of Romania. It is also important to understand how the daily spatial practices (de Certeau) are finally engulfing and integrating the political landscape from the collective memory.

Key words: demolitions, corresponding urban tragedies, ruins, turnovers, urban identity.

INTRODUCTION

A city represents a series of layers of people that lived there. All those layers brought significant changes in the way the city transformed over the years, but few of them left scars as deep as the ones found in Bucharest. Many old tourist guides and historical albums show images of buildings or places that you will never find today. Though they don′t exist anymore, they are part of the city′s collective memory. When the generation that has seen those places in reality is gone, those pieces of urban history will remain present only in books and some filmed images, but they will cease to speak to common city dwellers.

The human memory associates feelings with places and this is why everyone remembers a moment and the place where it took place. However, if such places disappear, what is to happen with both one′s memory and with the urban-collective memory?

Ones of the most aggressive interventions on the urban tissues were made in various capital-cities under totalitarian political systems. In the frame of this article we will try to observe similarities and regularities of these totalitarian landscapes, the outmost expressions of the ″Landscape Two″, not in terms of aesthetics and order but in terms of imposition on a specific site (Jackson, 1984).

We also try to further analyse these integration of huge urban ruptures in the collective mental landscapes and memory by daily practices, tactics and rhetoric (de Certeau M., 1990).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in the central area of Bucharest, in the new ″civic centre″ of the communist era and within the places nearby. A series of short questionnaires are revealing the variations in the collective memory of Bucharest dwellers and the manner of collective memory-erasing by time.

Also, comparative studies, concerning other capitals that submitted under totalitarian regimes and the modification in the urban landscapes imposed by political systems as well as similarities and differences of space-scale and style between these projects. The study was based on a number of historical descriptions and plans, some *in situ* observations and other previous analyses concerning the different cities.

BUCHAREST'S DRAMA

The House of the Republic was the result of the fear that Ceauşescu felt over the 1977 earthquake, or so it is presented in the urban mythology. Even if related to the 1977 and subsequent studies on Bucharest, the project is a prolongation of the old – interwar period – for the new Senate House on Dambovița River (the ancient Senate Place). The development of the entire project during the time was exhaustively presented in an exhibition organized in 1991 at Dalles Hall.

As any other dictator, hoping to forever be present in history, he wanted to build something monumental – a new political centre capable of holding huge masses of people that he could control. After a series of seismic and topographic studies he decided to build his new centre not on the Dambovița benches (as the old Senate was foreseen) but upwards, on the safest ground of the capital – Arsenalului Hill, on the southern cornice of the river.

The project, started with some modernist style proposals for the Republic House, developed, with the willing participation of some of the architects involved in the project, towards a huge urban-scale project as a new ″civic centre″. It has to be said that the ″civic centre″ idea is neither a communist one. As was largely demonstrated by Radu Alexandru Rauță the civic centre originates in the American City Beautiful Movement (Rauță, 2012). Nor in Romania it was a communist idea. The first civic centres were proposed in the interwar period by architects or planners that studied abroad, as Cincinat Sfinţescu who studied in Germany. Sfinţescu developed the idea of civic centre and proposed a series of projects for Bucharest, including the one on Senate Place on Dambovița River (Figure 1 - Sfinţescu, 1932). The civic centre was not initially seen as a concentration of official buildings (as showed by part of the proposal for Bucharest or other cities realised by Sfinţescu and others), but slowly evolved towards a civic centre as a political and administrative centre (Rauță, 2012).

Figure 1. Sfinţescu's drawing about a separate location for the Senate Palace (Rauță, 2012 p. 24)

The evolution of the house of the People and the Civic Centre during the 1980[es] was of such kind and scale that offered a good reason for Ceauşescu to demolish, in the most chaotically manner the most part of the city centre and to erase some of the most important and emblematic buildings and landmarks, counting lot of Bucharest's old churches, the Mihai Vodă Monastery and the State Archives within it, the entire Unirii Place area – the very generator centre of the city and many others. The eagerness of these demolishing was explained by the awkward relation of the Dictator with the city. As ″simple peasant, Nicolae Ceauşescu admired and hated the capital. The city was overwhelming. Though he became absolute leader of Romania, he felt as a stranger in Bucharest and worthless in the face of the city, a city he felt somehow hostile. The House of the Republic [...] was his revenge and a fortress for him to hide against a city he could not understand (Pandele, 2009).

Demolitions are usually considered as normal acts, absolutely necessary in any urban society. They are the premises of new, modernising urban and architectural development. Although Françoise Choay presents demolitions as a necessity, one must well analyse the situation before the demolishing being done. "On the other hand, following another type of logics, but of a similar violence, they [demolitions] never stopped destroying their own patrimony. They destroyed it considering it was of no further use, old, malfunctioning, no longer up-to-date, lack progress, lack of comfort, and, in positive terms – standing in the way of modernization." (Choay, 2011)

But in Bucharest's case "many demolitions were conducted without any project, based only on hand gestures made by The Great Leader. His gestures were firm and clear either nervous and panicked. Projects were made after the demolitions, only to fill the empty spaces. Their role was to create a scenario – it did not matter what was left behind." (Pandele, 2009)

Figure 2. The historical city and the area demolished in order to build the House and Axis (Harhoiu, 1997, p.14)

As a result of this "monumental bricolages" a quarter of the historical city disappeared and another part of it rest mutilated (Figure 2). A huge urban fracture was thus created, separating the north form the south and generating a sort of "two cities in one" that

doesn't give any sign of reweaving in the last 20 years.

What makes The House of the People and the Civic Centre the most dramatic project of the Romanian communist era is not just its out-of-scale dimension but also the different logic from what was done before. Up to the 1980[es] the entire city was already transformed by the communist regime. During the '50[es], in the Stalinist period, the Soviet model didn't create impressive landscapes. Some new, relatively small neighbourhoods were built and the only emblematic building that was erected was the Scânteia House (the centre or the communist press – figure 3), a small Lomonosov University-like that somehow succeed to integrate in the 19th century urban frame without any disruption.

Figure 3. Scânteia House 1952–1957 (Google images)

In the next two decades huge avenues and boulevards were built, thus creating an entirely new urban landscape. But these interventions were done mostly along the ancient urban axis, in the well-known plating manner or the huge new assemblies were built on almost empty lands, so, hidden behind the new city, the old, historical one was still surviving even if in a somehow scattered way (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Griviţei Avenue and Balta Albă Assembly (Locuinta urbana 1961-1964)

So, the massive demolitions of the '80[es] represented a shock, something that never been

done before. Also the speed of the demolishing and mostly the lack of any urban logic (that previously was quite clear) generated a sort of paralyse and awe. We can consider the building of civic centre project like a Shock and Awe urban strategy, in the perfect logic of Blank is Beautiful („Shock and Awe are actions that create fears, dangers, and destruction that are incomprehensible to the people at large...″ Klein, 2007).

worldwide correspondences

Though the Romanian communist demolitions represent the biggest European urban drama since the last world war, this is not unique, and, in the course of history, many large scale, dramatic demolitions took place in many other countries and in all types of totalitarian political regimes. The study is to reveal, through the following examples that, the urban-collective memory was seriously affected not only in Romania, but also in other cities and countries of the world.

Haussmann's Paris

The 19th century Paris was almost completely transformed, following the Napoleon III's London-like dream and due to the prefect Baron Haussmann relentless works of demolition and reconstruction (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Demolition of Butte des Moulins for Avenue de l

″The city of lights inherited a medieval structure, one that did not faced the needs of the 19th century. Baron Haussmann proposed a series of principles that were approved by the mayors. He founded specialized services that were later used with success. Haussmann asked for the measurement and the photographing of the buildings that were to be demolished. He chose the best professionals of each domain and asked for the pragmatic solutions.″ (Pandele, 2009)

Unlike Ceauşescu's demolitions, Haussmann's were based on principles. All the buildings that were to disappear were carefully photographed and measured in detail in order not to be forgotten, while on the area of the new civic centre, photographing was forbidden. Also, Haussmann had motives for his actions and he began his demolitions by founding specialized services at first. Baron Haussmann became, from a destroyer a praised person. ″And Haussmann – without question, the greatest destroyer of our capital, as, unlike the case that he would have made a ″historical centre″ *avant la lettre* and a museum, there was no alternative to this violence – he had to continue Paris as Philippe-August, Charles V, Francis I, Louis XIV and their contemporaries done before him.″ (Choay, 2011)

Figure 6. The achievement of Boulevard Haussmann (www.gutenberg.org)

As Françoise Choay presents it, Haussmann's demolitions are not singular in Paris. The previous debatable disencumbering works destroyed part of picturesque sceneries of the city in order to reveal some monuments. However, though Francoise Choay critics are well funded, the demolished spaces were rebuilt in a most coherent way and they contribute to the heritage of the urban memory, representing – back then and today – one of the most admired urban development models. Napoleon III's vision, accomplished by Haussmann was such a success partly because he proposed a functional urban system, one that still works (figure 6). ″Haussmann's changes find theirs most complete form in the public squares, gardens and parks that articulates the

old and the new parts of the city." (Choay, 2011)

The success of Paris's destruction and reconstruction is related to the respect due to major buildings of the city. Although that Haussmann demolished some 4300 houses and made major urban surgery, he called his critics to name "even a single monument worthy of interest, one building precious for its arts, curious by its memories." (apud Kostof, 2005).

Today Paris is considered the most beautiful city in the world and the old pre-19th century city is almost completely forgotten. The entire urban culture of 19th and beginning of 20th century Paris replaced the past, creating the new world-wide landmark and generating entire new layers of urban memory. And mostly, Paris proposed a new urban culture: a public space, one thus integrating the overwhelming Napoleon project in the city life.

Rome – Antiquity and Fascism

In a city as Rome almost any demolition supposes a destruction of history and heritage. "The reference western example is the one of the Constantine Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, the most precious monument of Christianity, demolished in the 16th century by the will of Pope Leon the 10th and Julius the 2nd." (Choay, 2011)

The example of the Basilica is not singular in Rome. In the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, he considers that the true heritage of Rome is its antic city form and structure. Obsessed by his idea that "Rome, will again, rule the world!" it was absolutely normal that he would want to bring Rome to its empire glory. In order to do this, he had to bring back to surface the ancient city. All the relics could now be used as propaganda as well.

Though he destroyed a large part of Rome and thus affected the collective-urban memory, ripping out memories and landmarks but also Renaissance or Baroque period monuments, Mussolini brought back into the public eye and memory, the old urban tissue of Rome and did not left behind an empty area (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Via dei Fori Imperiali making (Google images)

Somehow *Il Duce* cannot easily be condemned, at least not in its own time paradigm, for those actions because, in the logics of that period of time, his actions were justified, and he did nothing else but brought to light what it was seen as heritage by demolishing "unimportant" and "ordinary" buildings, also in order to highlight Rome's monuments, continuing, among others Michelangelo's dreams of Spina dei Borghi (Figure 8). If monuments and sacred buildings were to be considered the expression of the past periods of history the common houses were profane, unimportant and almost "silent" documents so Mussolini states that: "The millennial monuments of our history must loom gigantic in their necessary solitude", a vision well integrated in the generalised disencumbering acts all around the European big cities of the time (Kostof, 2005)

Figure 8. Spina dei Borghi before demolitions (Google images)

On another hand it should be observed that what was considered as the "liberation" of the antic area, in order to put forward monuments

as Marcellus theatre or Trajan forum was doubled by a real development of Rome as a polycentric city, with new avenues and neighbourhoods but without any strong de-structuration of the urban organism. It is also important to mention that all these visions were developed by a commission formed of specialists like Manfredi, Giovannoni, Piacentini, Gerola and others, thus guarantying the quality of the future city (Vasilescu, 2011).

As a result, today's Rome, a result of the confrontation between Mussolini's totalitarian vision and the Citta Eterna, gained its past while forging its future, both of them melted in an emblematic, unitary image (Vasilescu, 2011). Rome cannot be imagined anymore without its antic monuments and noisy Vespas running in-between.

Berlin, post-war and post-wall

Berlin is a city that, despite its dramatic history, has reborn and despite the destructions he faced, he became a blooming city, one that is appreciated both by its inhabitants, and by foreigners. The city's memory was seriously affected, not only once but by several huge political projects that changed it forever.
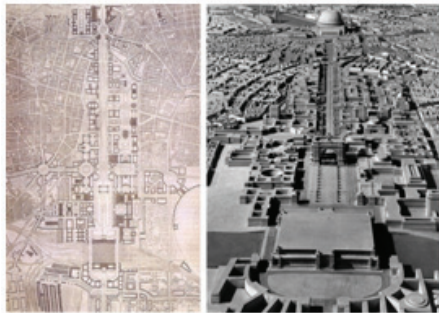

Figure 9. The Albert Speer Plan" - Hitler

One of the most important reconstruction projects for Berlin, in order to transform it in a symbol of power, was lead by Hitler, together with his "personal architect" Albert Speer. Hitler wanted the destruction of a vast part of the historical Berlin in order to build his centre. "Hitler never appreciated Berlin, he saw the city as dirty and too liberal, and he was disgusted by the political orientation of its inhabitants. In consequence, trough Speer, the fuehrer wanted to transform the capital in his vision and he estimated that he will finish by

1950, when he also estimated that he will win the war (Figure 9). In the centre, partially over the river Spree, an impressive dome would have been built, and it would have been named Volkshalle, that in an approximate translation means *The House of the People*. The monumental building, measuring 290 meters high would have made the Reichstag a toy house, and it would have been used by Hitler to hold his speeches in front of more than 180.000 people." (Bisky, 2006)

The project was however seized in 1943 due to Ally bombings. Thus, Berlin escaped from the "architectural demolition" just in order to be erased by the heavily bombardments.

Another wave of demolition was deployed, in Eastern Berlin, during the communist regime. The emblematic Berlin – Alexanderplatz (transformed in an international symbol by Alfred Döblin's novel and mostly by Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film) was one of the most swarming and fashionable urban spaces of the 19th century Berlin (Figure 10). The day-life, around the Hermann Teitz commercial centre, and the night life, around the restaurants and bars, was equalled only by the Potsdamer Platz (another space that was wiped off and replaced with a sort of mall-complex).

Figure 10. Alexanderplatz in 1906, foto: Max Missmann

During the 1960[es] Alexanderplatz was rebuilt in the new, modern but socialist-realist style. Thus it was transformed in a huge – out of scale – pedestrian area, seen by the communist regime as the new, modern, ideologically adapted city heart (Figure 11).

After the unification a new reconfiguration of the space was proposed. Some skyscrapers are still waiting for the construction while a new

commercial centre was built, knowingly an electronics megastore (Figure 12).

Figure 11. Berlin-Mitte, Alexanderplatz, 1966, Dick-Foto-Verlag

Figure 12. Berlin-Mitte, Alexanderplatz, 2006
http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de

At the other end of the former East-Berlin centre a new step in the city's demolishing took place: the intensively debated destruction of the *Palast der Republik*, the communist parliament (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Palast der Republik last traces
(Google images)

This late demolition raised huge protest of the younger and older generations that were asking

for the communist memory comprehension. And while we are just finishing this paper another Berlin tragically demolition is taking place: the Berlin wall, the historical, collective city-scar is removed in order to give place to commercial, private ″beautification″.

But, despite the destructions, Berlin demonstrates an incomparable aptitude to integrate its scars and transform them in new life-generator places. Thus it still stays as the cultural capital of 21th century Europe.

Moscow and the stylistic indecisions

In ″Project Russia − Architecture after communism″ we found a very interesting, although exaggerated, quote that describes most of the Russian cities as being totally synonym with soviet or communist cities: ″Russian city = soviet city. There are huge differences between Russian cities and European cities. Excepting Sankt Petersburg, the Russian cities of the 19th century were mostly made out of wooden houses and only a handful of houses, government buildings, churches and monasteries were made out of stone. This meant that, in time, very few traces of the past will survive, even in cities with a history of over a thousand years old. But while communism first appeared in Russia before entering Europe, so did the industrialization began in Europe and then extended to Russia. During the civil war, while the middle class stated in Central Europe, Russia was evolving in the form of dictatorial proletarian. This means that the industrialization process in Russia took place exclusively during the soviet regime. The Russian city is thus the soviet city.″ (Goldhoorn, 2002)

Figure 14. Development plans for Moscow proposed by Le Corbusier and E. May (Quilici, 1976, p. 269)

Moscow development, much older than the communist era, was marked, during the totalita-

rian regime, by huge contradictions between two main trends in architecture and planning. On one hand the raise of the Soviet Union was marked by the modernist avant-garde, on another, retrograde visions were seeking for more monumental expressions, paradoxically inspired by the European classic architecture (Figures 14, 15).

In 1931 the Direction of the Office for Moscow Plan created the Project Brigades in order to define the future development plans for the city. Three of the Brigades were formatted by foreigner technicians (E. May, H.Meyer and K. Meyer) but the rest of them were soviet associations. The projects were considered insufficiently adapted to the Party's directives being not-realistically or not enough revolutionary (figure 14), mostly May's project that tried to keep the central historical structure of the city (Quilici, 1976).

In the same time classicising forms of urban spaces were chosen to express the new Soviet power and the Red Square (Figure 15) became the prime model of the Socialist square.

Figure 15. Red Square plan - 1932 (Quilici, 1976, p. 265)

At architecture abject level the same struggle between modernist and classicist form is to be observed. While some of the architects were seeking for simple, modern forms, not belonging to any passed times; the politicians, as Ščusev did in 1933, were asking for more classicising forms as "indicated solution, better solution for the form and the idea, solution that express the ideology in the most adapted form" (apud Quilici, 1976)

Stalin wanted, alike Ceauşescu, to create mega structures. He decided to destroy the Cathedral of Jesus the Saviour, in order to build a future administrative and political centre of the country - the "House of the People" or the "House of the Soviets". The House of the People was never realized. This incredible host
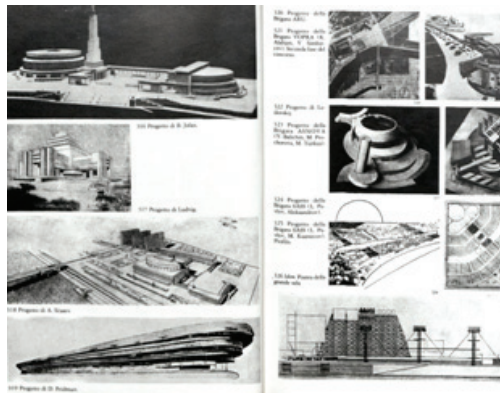
for the party members would have been taller than the Empire State Building and it would have had a statue of Lenin on top. Only the statue was taller than the Statue of Liberty.

Figure 16. Proposals for the Soviet Palace - the wining, Jofan's project proposed a 50-70m tall Lenin statue in the top of the building (Quilici, 1976, pp. 258-259)

The most impressive classic architecture was also used for the Moscow subway while the entire city was wiped off in order to make place to huge neighbourhoods and huge official buildings (Figure 18).

Figure 17. Komsomolskaya station, New Arbat Street, Lomonosov University (Google images)

But the new, capitalist Moscow, even if is still facing totalitarian politics, became one of the most dynamic cities of the world and now tries, with the help of Jan Gehl's methods, to re-humanise its gigantic scaled spaces.

Beijing and the Chinese urban landscape

Beijing, the last imperial capital of China is a city with a fascinating history. However, the city went through a series of successive waves of demolitions and reconstructions. With the proclamation of The Democratic Republic of China in 1949, the city suffers numerous mutilations that can be even seen today. One of the most controversial destructions was of the Legation historical district (1856) and of several nearby districts in order to re-plan the

huge square Tiananmen. In order to transform The Tiananmen square event the Gate of China was demolished in order to enlarge the plaza (and afterward replaced by the Mao′s mausoleum in 1976). During the 50es the expansion of the place continued, following Mao Zedong′s vision who wanted to make place for huge and enthusiastic popular manifestation of some half of million people. New symbols are scattered around the place as the Monument of the People′s Heroes, the Great Hall of People or the National Museum of China. ″In 1958-1959, the square was expanded from 29 to 98 acres (11 to 40 hectares). The great Hall of the People occupied the west side, a building one quarter of a mile (400 m.) long; the Historical Museum occupied the east side. The Monument of the People′s Heroes is now overshadowed by Mao′s tomb.″ (Kostof, 2005).

Figure 18. Tiananmen Square (Google images)

After Mao′s death the plaza was further enlarged in order to gain a perfect shape but also to increase the number of public manifestations participants. Thus Tiananmen became the absolute symbol of the communist power, practically erasing the hole (glorious) Chinese (un-communist) past and staying as a vainglorious, overwhelming space (Figure 19).

Tiananmen Square is not a singular example; it is known that Beijing is facing a series of frequent demolitions of historical buildings and neighbourhoods in order to make room for unrealistic constructions such as highways, huge block of flats, office buildings and malls. Just these new demolitions are not made in the name of the communist ideology but in the name of the new development toward an original social-democracy (Figure 20).

Figure 19. Beijing demolitions (Google images)

In an article by Octavian Ciuputu in Curierul Românesc, the author asks: ″who will benefit from all those concrete and glass structures that seem to continuously rise from the earth. At their feet, you can still be able to see remains of the old city, now on the edge of extinction.″ (Ciuputu, 2006)

Somehow Beijing succeed in illustrating an apparent ″harmless″ political system and to put capitalism (in its wilder but, paradoxically, extremely state-controlled form) in the list of political systems that are mutilating cities and history in order to express its own power.

Chaotic demolitions occur in all Chinese cities; traditions and culture are lost in the new urban landscape. The population thus loses its identities and landmarks. Françoise Choay askes herself if these new cities, without a past will they ever became cities? ″They rather risk ending up at the museum under the 20th century heritage label to illustrate a moment of decisive rupture, although no responsibility was assumed, with the urban tradition. [...] For the urban, today so largely used, is no longer something more than a place in a state of general confusion, waiting for the ″post-urban″ term, yet absent from the dictionary to take its place and be recognized.″ (Choay, 2011)

The new Beijing, still growing fastly, already shows its failures but it is also developing new social and environmental politics. It is so difficult to say now how its public space will be lived in the comming years. Today it′s public life still rest confined in the old, traditional neighbourhoods, but new landscape and urban design projects are indicating another possible future for the city.

Pyongyang, the hidden city

The capital of the North Korean Republic is a city that suffered a series of important destructions and a city that has lost its past in favour of its present, a past that was abandoned by the nowadays society. The city was seriously damaged during the Korean War, being estimated that 90% of the city was destroyed (Joinau, 2012). From this point of view the new established regime found the urban past already obliterated.

Figure 20. The Triumph Arch in Moranbong Place (Google images)

The civic centre model seems to be used by the Korean architect. Moranbong hill (legendary place of the city) became the favourite site for most of the new, emblematic buildings: the first History Museum, Kim Il Sung University, Liberation Tower, the Moranbong Theatre, the Kim Il Sung Stadium and the Triumph Arch (Figure 21).

Figure 21. 22 Kim Il Sung Place, dominated by his huge statue (Google images)

Following the new monumental axis are developed – the Yonggwang and Sungri ave-

nues are connecting the historical centre with the Moranbong hill, while the new Kim Il Sung Square is built to became the political centre and emblem of the city (Figure 22).

During the 1950-60es the rebuilding of Pyongyang was mostly focused on new monumental plazas and official buildings while the whole city was forming from little shacks scattered along the avenues.

Figure 22. Pyongyang avenue and the reality behind (google images)

Afterword new blocks of flats, or, it is said, just block facades were built along the un-scaled large avenues, hiding the ever-unfinished neighbourhoods, lacking streets or any other public amenities (Figure 23). These huge avenues plated with dull structures, specific to most communist cities, cannot hide the improvisation and dummy-air of the buildings as "you don't have to stand very close to buildings to see that balconies, tiling, vertical and horizontal joints often depart from the plumb-line. Interesting concave and convex patterns appear in prefabricated, hand-finished concrete walls. Windows panes have bubbles, bands, fish-eye and bottle-glass effects. Spaces exist under doors and their frames." (Willoughby, 2008)

This plating logic seems to be the inspiration for Ceauşescu's dreams for Bucharest, or so it stays in our urban mythology. It is still believed that Ceauşescu's visit, in 1971, was the trigger for the further development of Romania, Bucharest as well as his own personality cult. necessarily successfully done neither. Among them the emblematic Ryugyong Hotel (Figure 24), was erected between 1987 and 1992 when the financial difficulties put the construction at a halt. It was planned to be finished in 1989 and

to be the tallest building in the world, but when it was finally done (on the outside), in 2012 but now it is only the 47th tallest one.

Figure 23. Ryugyong Hotel (Google images)

Meanwhile the city, as the entire country struggle with the famine, but Pyongyang is maybe the outmost political landscape. As Philipp Meuser describes Pyongyang, the North Korean psycho regime's capital, as "arguably the world's best-preserved open-air museum of socialist architecture" (Meuser, 2102)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As we stated in the previous chapters, cities all over the world have lost or have never had a kind of urban memory. Either it's about demolitions, reconstructions, wars or any other kind of events that triggered urban traumas, many cities have lost parts of their culture, traditions and memory. "All cultures and all societies have built and developed themselves through demolitions." (Choay, 2011)

But what are the similarities or the differences of this destruction and rebuilding cycling acts?

The most clear and common feature of all this reconfiguration of historical cities in order to became political statements is the "bigness". We don't refer only the impressive dimensions and richness in decoration of the buildings, but also the inhuman scale of the urban spaces – plazas and avenues – that were created. What stays as the common tool for the totalitarian landscapes is the presence of huge urban voids, conceived as parade spaces and calculated to contain impressive parades and popular, more or less enthusiastic, gatherings.

On another hand the obliteration of an "embarrassing" past was hidden under the new monumentality. In order to create this new spaces the old cities' cores, layered expressions of the previous political periods and social values, were wiped out. It was not only imposing a new political landscape but also it was all about erasing the old ones. It is like all the dictators were trying to stay as unique, solitary figures of their national histories. It was an entire history rewriting in stone.

Also it is quite similar that it was one person's vision that was imposed over the city. Even though sometimes specialists were consulted, the vision was clearly imposed by the political leader(s) and the technical advice was necessary just in order to find the best solutions for that visions *mise-en-place*.

What differ the political landscape is the architectural language that was chosen in order to express the political new values. Even if we can find a strong penchant for the classical expression, modernism was also part of the game.

We can witness a subtle balance between the ruptures with the past, sustained by the new architectural expressions, and the need of historical quotations as legitimation tools. Also the classical architecture seem to be more fitted for the monumental expressions while the modernist forms are staying insufficiently rich in expression means and less sumptuous and impressive. And impression is all it is about the political landscapes. Out of this balance between modernity and classic result the originality (or the lack of it) in the analysed urban totalitarian landscapes. Also it is their historical and aesthetical value. If Napoleon III's urban order, the Russian modernist avant-garde and Mussolini's fascism have their unchallenged places in the architecture and arts history it is difficult to imagine the Romanian, Chinese or Korean edifications entering the aesthetical history but as sort of freak expressions of political regimes, sort of power-story-tellers architectural Disneylands.

Another difference to be noticed is the balance between monumental buildings erecting and the more social-oriented projects. Thus, in Haussmann's project the rebuilding of Paris took in charge equally the monumental buildings, boulevards and places but the entire coherence of the project was realised using

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"ordinary" buildings as the general background of the new political scenery. Mussolini's projects were more clearly separated – the centre was the ground of the new monumentality while the new, modern neighbourhoods, without lacking their own monumental places, were more peripheral. In Romanian and Korean case we can witness a time-splitting between monumental and regular buildings. While Bucharest was submitted first to a social revision as huge new residential assemblies were built and while the outmost expression of the communist era was also its last project, in Korean case the timeline was inversed. The social projects were started just after the accomplishment of the new "sacred places" of the city.

CONCLUSIONS

Bucharest case is neither new and neither unique if we look at the destructions that it suffered. On another hand some features of these destructions are strikingly different.

On one hand is the further continuation of demolishing after the fall of the communist regime. If we could expect a revalorisation of the old city after 1990, this change of perspective never came. The only noticeable act of promoting the past is the skin-deep refurbish of the Lipscani area. But it was done just in order to transform it in a tourists-trap, a historical Disneyland out-door mall that is not appealing neither to locals nor to foreigners.

On another hand, even if we somehow accept now the House of the People, or at least the idea that it can't be demolishes, but what can strike one visiting the city is the incapacity of reweaving it, of occupying and transform its scars. It is like, behind the huge boulevards' facades, the time stopped. We are neither able to recover the past of the city, as the harm done is way too big, neither to integrate its present and to recover the urban space.

Though the city fascinated due to its particular culture, traditions and heritage, the modern project (although heavily imposed by the communist era and strongly refused at that time) still haunts Bucharest. It seems that we are not able to learn neither form our own, past mistakes nor form the others'.

After 20 years of democracy we still wander what to do about the city, still expect for one's alone idea instead to try, as Germans did for an example, to take the space in our own hands. The political projects are clearly oriented towards further destructions and while we are fighting to save what is still standing we forget about our scares. As a result we risk facing, in some time, a totally mutilated city that we are no more able to cope with. Or, as it started to happen, if we will let it go, the nature will succeed to bring the life back in the forgotten fractured spaces. But nature is so "unmodern"...

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