

# Identification and interpretation of the historical dimension of urban landscape. Case study: the historical centre of Bucharest

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**Abstract** *The article discusses the importance of knowing the history behind the buildings of the historical center of Bucharest Municipality, for proper management of the space for future generations. The historical component of buildings represents one of the main elements of information on urban development, implicitly its processes. The administration of historic buildings and the built environment is based on collecting, analyzing and interpreting information, both using documents (books, letters, plans, maps, and images) and existing buildings. Although this historical characterization is not a solution itself, it may represent an early stage of a development plan or project, especially when it is intended the image of buildings and adaptability in the current context. Each building from the historical centre of Bucharest stores information about the stages that were followed, the factors that influenced changes and also about the human component, all of those determining the current status and the image that is transmitted in the future. Important notes of the time on the early stage of the city were made by foreign travelers, providing an external view of the place.*

**Key words** Historical Centre, Urban Landscape, Bucharest

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## Introduction

Testimonies of the history of Bucharest city can be found throughout its historical centre (fig. 1), being visible on old buildings the plates with minimal information regarding their dating. The rather complex history, the influences of old times and of the people who lived there, shows us that Bucharest was, over time, a multiethnic and multicultural city.



Figure 1. Location of the study area

Council of Europe, by Article 17 of Granada Council 1985, requests the Parties to exchange information on the "possibilities offered by new technologies for identifying and recording the architectural heritage." Following meetings of participants from 24 states, it has been approved the use of an index that is designed to allow the compiler to make references to more detailed information about a building, including written descriptions and photos. Thus, the second image shows the relationship between the parties of the index for each building or historical monument and the figure 2 the way in which the basic registration for a building or monument can be linked to a more comprehensive level of information.



**Figure 2. Schematic representation of a record for a building or monument**

Source: European Council, Core Data Index to Historic Buildings and Monuments of the Architectural Heritage, 1995



**Figure 3. Schematic representation of the potential relationships between records basic monument and related information**

Source: European Council, Core Data Index to Historic Buildings and Monuments of the Architectural Heritage, 1995

The analysis of urban dynamics of historical centre and the characterization of historic buildings helps us determine the values and the meanings of these places, also having an important role for sustainable development. Thus, in the following, the city will be presented in different moments of the history, each with its own characteristics on urban development.

### **The urban development context of Bucharest city centre**

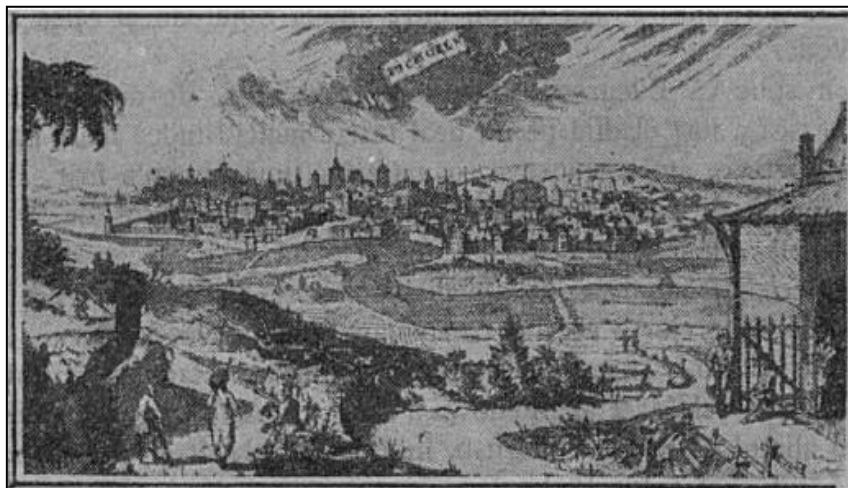
The development of Bucharest city, like other capital cities, is closely connected with the history of the country and of the Romanian people. If anciently this was a favored place from a "fair, strategic and commercial" point of view, located on the lower reach of Dambovitza River, Bucharest becomes in the Middle Ages an important citadel of Tara Romaneasca and then "throne" in the second half of the fifteenth century (Moisil, 1932).

The economic life of Bucharest begins in the second half of the fifteenth century and is rapidly growing in the sixteenth century when the city becomes an economic center of transit for exchange of goods between Vienna, Leipzig and Istanbul, and a fair exchange of Romanian and foreign goods (Potra, 1985).

The first description of Bucharest, dating from the late sixteenth century, belongs to the French traveler Pierre Lescapier during the visit that took place in 1574. From his description we find that the city pavement is made of tree trunks and the palace from framework structure, stating that during the visit to the city he did not see any beautiful building. A similar impression has another traveler, Iacob Bongars that, following his visit in 1585, he observed small houses, free of art elements and badly constructed. The Princely Court (or The Royal Court), representing the center of the city, was mentioned as the most important building.

But the city begins to develop, new streets and churches are build, so in the description made by the Swedish Ambassador Paul Strassburgh (1630), Bucharest is a big and extended city.

Deacon Paul of Aleppo, who visited the city in 1856, described this settlement as being a large one and comprising approximately 6000 houses and 40 churches and monasteries (fig. 4). The Princely Court, previously described by other passengers as old, was rebuilt and is now a large building "stunningly elegant, with a pleased look."



**Figure 4. Bucharest of XVII century**

Source: Bucharest Official guide with 20 maps for orientation, 1934

It can be observed an evolution of Bucharest both economically, politically and administratively.

Vintilă Mihailescu describes the center of the city and the placing of the main buildings as follows: "Old inns from Lipsicani and Carol streets, have meant in the past, the most advanced type of economic use of space in fair. However, with the modern era, which for Bucharest was just beginning in the 1860s, will be added to the needs of trade and guilds of artisans the financial market requirements (banks), of the Administration (central buildings "). It may be noted the important role which the economy has on the

development of the city, as we shall see below, this mark will be present on the appointment of the streets. The buildings were representing at that time important points in conducting business activities. Continuing the description of the historical center, the narrator states that "In the middle lies the Central Market with its narrow streets and often crooked, with tall and massive buildings near old stores having only ground floor or a single floor. Tall firms still hide on Lipsyani, Baratiei, Carol streets etc. the true dimensions of buildings 50-100 years ago. On these streets, some of which still have the name of former guilds (Băcani, Șelari, Șepcari, Blănari, Lipsyani, Gabroveni, Cavafi, Covaci etc.), the stores are piled with goods on showcases and often in the street (Bărăției, Văcărești, Bazaca etc.)" (Mihăilescu, 1934).

Constantin C. Giurescu informs us that there were several criteria that were important on the names of the streets of the historic center of Bucharest, which are named after local artisans and merchants, after churches and monasteries or even after regional or ethnic groups. Thus, the name of Lipsyani Street is given by merchants who brought goods from Leipzig, Selarilor street reminds us of saddlers or "harness makers". Gabroveni Street also bears the name of some merchants who brought goods from Gabrovo (Bulgaria) (Giurescu, 1966).

George Potra highlights the importance of Lipsyani street from past until present, this being the only street without residential buildings, designed entirely for trade. The author dates the street as being since the early seventeenth century and representing a narrow alley that connects the center of Bucharest with the new artery - Mogosoia Bridge (Calea Victoriei).

A street full of historical monuments, Lipsyani is the place where, until 1880, Șerban Cantacuzinos inn existed, instead of it the National Bank Palace was built. Also on this street it was Greci Inn, Zlătari Inn and Filipescu Inn. A current historical monument is Hanul cu Tei (The Linden Tree Inn), built in 1833 (fig. 5).



**Figure 5. Lipsyani Street**

Source: [www.digibuc.ro](http://www.digibuc.ro)

Having a very prosperous business, the spaces were very expensive and narrow in front. Putting in parallel the situation existing in the past with the present one, we can say that the value of premises located on Lipsyani Street is currently very high. Along this street we can find both shops and several restaurants and pubs. Just as in the past this represents a peak of interest of the old center, being now very populated both by tourists and young people.

Each street is occupied by the merchants of the same economic segment, which helps us now to superimpose historical data on the elements that were preserved and to form a more complex image on them.

Although the importance of Lipsyani Street was always very high, other streets also have a special role on the image of the historical center and can help to create the image of this space. Continuing the presentation of the historical center, Vintila Mihailescu informs us about the location of other guilds, economic branches: "To the North stretch instead the streets with shops increasingly demanding: Smârdan (technical articles, electrical, fashion, household goods, furnishings), Șelari (manufacturing), Blănari (furs) Gabroveni (furnishing wholesalers, haberdashery, furs) Colței (technical articles, smithery, manufacturing),

*Doamnei (idem), Lipscani (Manufacturing quality fabrics), ultimately the block of large banks and the Stock Exchange around National Bank (Romanian Bank, Marmoroș-Blanc, of Discount, of Trade etc.)."*

Zarafi Street reminds us of money changer merchants who had an important role during 1750-1850, they were dealing with the exchange of money. This trade was conducted by foreigners, including Greeks, Hebrews, or Armenians. Their number increased with the intensification of trade activities from fairs. The money changers were those who held offices (cantons) in large inns from the center of Bucharest. (Potra, 1985)

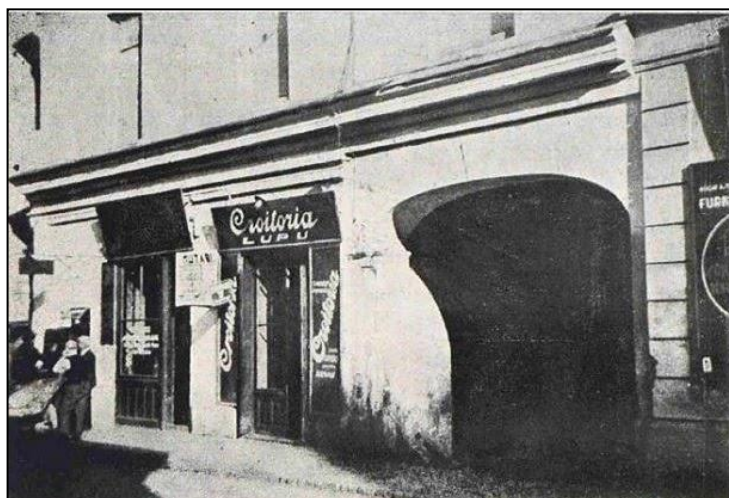
Constantin Moisil also brings into account a series of fires and earthquakes which resulted in a number of changes and rebuilding of houses, widening the street alignments or moving the Princely Court. The nineteenth century brings important changes in the evolution of Bucharest; Lipscani and French street are increasingly populated by modern houses, also starting to be present the paving stone.

Among the first streets paved with river rocks in Bucharest, in 1830-1831, there was Covacilor Street, Selarilo Street, Nemtilor Street (Sandulescu, 1936).

In his book, "Bucharest, history and urbanism", Andrei Pippidi quotes Nicolae Iorga, who talks about the historical center of old Bucharest: "Coltea street goes in a wide market of St. Gheorghe, with a big church in the middle. This can be seen as the core of Bucharest that sells. Noisy island with goods hanging on the wall or displayed in the windows of high houses stuck, as in the West scooped of space, one from another, it is crossed by three long streets: Doamnei street, Lipscani street, where the Greeks and Bulgarians were selling their merchandise brought from Lipsca, the famous fair; Carol street, with Sfântul Anton Square, where they sell flowers. In wide, descends to Dâmbovița River the Selarilor Street and Baratiei Street" (2002).

Author H. Stahl in „Botezarea și răsbotezarea străzilor Capitalei" (Naming and renaming the streets in Buchares) informs us about the change of street names in the historical center, so Lipscani Street was initially known as Ulița Mare (The Big Street) and Ulița Isicariilor was called later Strada Franceza (French Street), then Strada Carol (Carol street), now back to the name of Strada Franceza (French Street) (1935). Knowing the old names of the streets represents the base in the request for information on buildings located on them and on their correlation with historical events. To achieve a more accurate dating and description thereof, we must take research on initial names of the streets, each historical period giving a different view on them through their own events.

In the following, I will present one of the main historical monuments located on Lipscani Street - Hanul cu Tei (The Linden Tree Inn), using the model Core Data Index to Historic Buildings and Monuments of the Architectural Heritage. As we discover from the book "The history of Bucharest's Inns", its exact location is between Blanari (fig. 6) and Lipscani Street (Potra, 1985).



**Figure 6. Entrance of Hanul cu Tei from Blanari Street, 1933**

Source: The history of Bucharest's Inns, George Potra

The inn, known as the *Hanul de pe Ulița cea mare a marchitanilor* (the inn located on the main street), was built in 1833 by Anastasie Hagi, Gheorghe Polizu and Stefan Popovici, their initials and the date

of construction are visible above the entrance from Blanari Street. In 1835, the owners split the inn divided into two parts, each having 14 shops and a warehouse, this agreement being considered by the owners for life and after. Hanul cu tei (The Linden Tree Inn) is one of the buildings that even today conserves old elements. Stefan Popovici, one of the owners, sold in 1837 two of his shops to Ioan Lambru Polizu. Over the years those shops will have different owners as follows: from 1853 - Gheorgachi Anghel Hagi, from 1858 - Leon Monach and Gheorghe Marin (the first remained the sole owner since 1867) and then passed into the property of Sofia Manoach, following her son to the succession. Since 1944 the two shops were sold to Carnic Dermengian (Potra, 1985).

In 1871 was reported a fire at Hanul cu Tei (The Linden Tree Inn), but the fire didn't destroy the shops and their merchandise. In 1970 the inn was restored by the architect Constantin Joja, who kept the exact shape of the facade and paved the courtyard with stone paving. Nowadays, Hanul cu Tei (The Linden Tree Inn) is the place where we can find hobby and art shops and handmade objects.

### Conclusions

History has left its mark differently on the development of each city, every one of them having different stages and characteristics. The buildings render the history of places by uniqueness, identity and distinctiveness character, there directly referring to the visual aspect and physical characteristics such as shape, building materials, architectural details. The passage of time gives value to the place, by keeping some elements of history also creates a link between generations. A sustainable development of historic areas, such as the historical center of Bucharest, must start from the historical characterization of this place. Although some buildings disappeared, it is important to know the evolution of each element and the decisive role of the area. In this case, the historical centre of Bucharest was the core of the development of this settlement, having a great role in terms of administrative and economic point of view. The building itself, we can take the example of inns, have represented points of trade development, the changes of this area taking place following market demands at the time.

A complete understanding of these buildings is determined by knowledge of information such as year of construction, owners, previous changes made and the specific of activities that were held in them. The present study was conducted on a relatively compact area of historically point of view, most buildings were declared historical monuments, their history being quite well known through some old writings, plans and existing maps. Although there has been a change in the names of the street from the old center, most returned to the original name, this being the first step in knowing the past and, thus, in creating the identity of the place.

As I previously mentioned, although knowledge of historical features is not a solution in itself, the parties involved in reconditioning and preservation of this heritage (authorities, owners, architects) must also take into account this element.

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