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## Central public spaces – Neighborhood public spaces

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### Abstract

*Public spaces represent important attraction points of the city, places of encounter and interaction for the inhabitants, cluster points that aim to gather people from different parts of the urban area through a large variety of activities. There are two main categories of public spaces within the city: central and local public spaces. Central public spaces have a key role in defining the urban area, representing the heart of the city and the most touristic place within it. Same as the history of the city, the central public space needs to contain valuable and representative elements, those that can resume, this time without the need of words, the social identity of that urban area and the city itself. The lack of a central public space within a city can be assimilated to a lack of order and discipline or furthermore, it can signify the absence of a clearly structured space, one without landmarks. As disorder means chaos, an unattended central public space leads to social disorder. For a local public space, the role that it plays in the urban life is different. Characterized by smaller dimensions compared to the central public space and with different purposes, structurally speaking, local public spaces represent attraction elements especially for the neighborhood that accommodates them. Their main purpose is to create a friendly environment for the community members, being slightly restrictive for the outsiders. On the other hand, these small but socially significant spaces represent a great threat if they don't manage to fulfill their purpose. In case they don't represent an interest for the community, they might end up by being abandoned and unattended places, predisposed to different social problems. They can become a disturbing element for the neighborhood and the community, strongly capable of transforming privacy into isolation and peace into insecurity.*

Keywords: public space, identity, community, socialization, order, system

### 1. Purpose and structure

The paper “Central public spaces – Neighborhood public spaces” emphasizes the social implication of these two types of urban public spaces, different not only by surface but also by their role at district and city level. At the same time, this research aims to bring a contribution to the identifying and better shaping of techniques of development and placement of urban public spaces. Starting from the hypothesis which suggests that “A correct urban public space has the ability of bringing together a community of people, contributing to their urban identity”, the work accentuates the social vector of local and central public spaces within the city structure.

“Central public spaces – Neighborhood public spaces” has a structure which starts from the definition of the public space as a concept, continuing after this with a presentation of its social and physical significances. Within this chapter, we offer a special attention to the types of public spaces, naming the designed ones in comparison with those that emerged spontaneously over the year, in places that were left unattended by the authorities, at first. Another important place is accorded to the events which are organized inside these spaces, whether they are spectacular and premeditated or they represent the everyday life of the population.

The third part of the presentation is reserved for the comparison between the local public space and the central public space. It is emphasized the main difference between them, with concern to the importance for the community. At the same time, it is analyzed the relation developed between the local and the central public space, and their implication in creating a network which helps the improvement of the communication at the city scale.

The last part of the paper is dedicated to the modern tendencies and their influences on the society and urban design. Under the name of “Spaces of consumption”, we emphasize the effects of accentuated mobility on the urban space, its positive and negative influences and the possible future transformations.

*Accessibility – a key factor for the existence of a public space*

Francoise Choay defines the mobility as the total number of everyday movements of individuals within a territory. Urban mobility represents the movement inside a certain space. There are also other interpretations of the term “mobility”, as a form of residential mobility, signifying the change of placement of a family. There is also the notion of *social mobility* and *professional mobility* for the definition of changes through which a person might pass. The mobility is registered at different time intervals: everyday movement (alternative migration, migration movement etc). The researchers seek to understand different types of mobility as an optimal system of analysis for the interdependence between the everyday movement and the residential movement, or between spatial and social movement. The mobility, which involves at the same time, the idea of accessibility, poses numerous problems which are the cause for different debates between urban planners: some of them promote the idea of mobility reduction, especially when it comes to automobiles inside the city area. Others consider that mobility is an element indispensable for the economic development.<sup>1</sup>

Using as research methods the participative observation, study of charts and the photographic studies, as well as documentation with regard to the history of urbanism, we search to understand the relation between the placement of urban public spaces and the hearts of different communities and districts within the structure of the city. The case study is Bucharest, the capital of Romania, a city with a radial-concentric development, characterized by a vague central space. More precisely, Bucharest’s central space is perceived as a conglomeration of different central points, as it resulted from the studies carried out among the young population, situated at relatively large distance between them, on a length which can be estimated, on the N-S axis as being approximately 3 km and on the W-E direction, as approximately 2 km. The social studies involved the young population of Bucharest and searched to understand the way in which they perceive the space within the center of the capital. From the physical point of view, conventionally, the center of the city is located (considering its name) in the Lipscani area, the “historical center” of Bucharest.

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<sup>1</sup> Francoise Choay, Pierre Merlin, *Dictionnaire de l’urbanisme et de l’aménagement*, ed. PUF, Paris, 2000

Another important factor in the image of this city is that, at the moment, one of the Bucharest is one of the few cities in Romania and probably in Europe which doesn't have a proper cathedral. As the capital and the most important city of Romania, a country which is predominantly orthodox, Bucharest doesn't have in its urban structure an architectural - symbolic space dedicated to Christians and to religion. The only place which plays this role is the patriarchy hill, which is situated somewhere in the central area but which doesn't benefit of a high accessibility or a great number of population, excepting the special days. At the moment, the construction of a cathedral was emerged, but it will not be completed until 2017.

*Mobility in Bucharest – relation with the center of the city*

Bucharest presents a great difference between different parts of the city, and the main reasons for these discrepancies are the accessibility level to different services and the activities. The current policies for development seek to reduce the differences between different parts of the city. There are some projects that involve the enlargement of the infrastructure in districts as *Drumul Taberei*, which is situated in the south-western part of the capital and which has a very difficult accessibility because of the lack of means of public transportation.

Even if it doesn't have the value of a regulator document, the *Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035*, aims to provide a vision for the city through the harmonization of all the factors that could generate its development. This document suggests an idea of strategic development by taking into account the area of influence of Bucharest.

At the moment, Bucharest is confronted with a big problem of circulation, given the fact that most of its main boulevards are overburdened at peak hours and the majority of the people prefer to use their own cars than public transportation. The main reason for this behavior is the poor public services and the weak relation between the city center and the peripheral areas.

“The nucleus of an urban aggregation is constituted naturally or artificially, conscious, along some structural axes (indifferently if they are natural or anthropic axes). It doesn't matter the road where that specific urban aggregation is developed, the city is still a nucleus which is relatively independent, in relation with its exterior territory” (*prof. dr. arch. Alexandru M. Sandu, “Theories of Urban Structures”*)

*Mobility in Paris – relation with the center of the city*



France represents a model with respect to mobility and an example is the phenomenon of multimodality. In Paris there are 11 complexes of this kind. Given the fact that they play a very important role for the accessibility, it is necessary to progressively increase the quality of the mobility through these competitive intermodal poles. A good example is *La Defense*, situated in the well-known business district with the same name, in the northern part of Paris. As most of the great operations, the infrastructure is considered one of the most important parts, its role being essential in the stabilization of the system.

The intermodal pole *La Defense* was organized starting from the idea of interconnectivity through traffic flows and railways which lead to an intermodal node with a length of 400 m and a width between 50 and 100 m, containing a RER railway, a SNCF railway, a metro station, a tramway station, a bus station which contains 15 different lines, a taxi station, a station for touristic buses, numerous parking spaces, commercial spaces and different service and information points.<sup>2</sup>

*Neighborhood public spaces*

Local/neighborhood public spaces are also of important matter for Bucharest, given the fact that this city has known a rapid and chaotic urban growth over the last 30 years, which caused a lack of attention accorded to the design of public spaces, determining the concentration of day-time and night-time activities within the Center and transforming the periphery into “sleeping districts”, which present no interest for the inhabitants. The only exception which might “animate” a little these areas are the occasional malls, but which have the property of clustering in a single covered space all the necessary functions that people need, contributing with almost nothing to the life of the district. On the contrary, they seem to steel and hide it.

*The urban character and the quality of a city depend on its center, which represents, in essence, the image or the city perceived through the utility, the aesthetics and the ambient, said prof. dr.*

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.archiscene.net/location/france/paris-la-defense-cbd-awp/>

arch. Alexandru M. Sandu. Policies regarding the parking spaces are ones of the most important instruments for the reorganization of mobility, which contributes to the traffic fluidization in different urban zones. Depending on different visions of the authorities, and also because of the continuous transformations that take place in the living style of the population, on all levels of the everyday life, the decisions regarding parking solutions in rapport with the city vary between imposing a certain number of parking spaces (decisions that depend on the building regulations of each city or district), and the limitation of parking spaces (especially in central zones or in the sensitive areas of the city, where it is necessary to introduce alternative transportation). Another point of view suggests a *median approach*, understood as a relative permissiveness with regard to the inhabitation – work place movements.

The method that implies a minimum number of parking spaces in rapport with the activities located in a certain place is imposed by the local administration to the owners or promoters. It is necessary that each office has at least one parking space (example France). The method which limits the number of parking spaces is applied, as previously mentioned, in the central zones and appears as a reaction to the first method, in order to discourage the utilization of the personal automobile and to encourage public transportation. These types of methods are very much approved by countries such as France, Sweden or the Netherlands, which have a large tradition in promoting alternative mobility.<sup>3</sup>

The *median approach* suggests a relatively good tolerance to automobiles on the direction home – working place, because of time reasons. In this way, it is encouraged the automobile mobility strictly on working reasons, involving large distances, and avoiding as much as possible the transit mobility, considered as being the main reason for pollution and traffic problems.

## 2. Defining the “public space”

“During the Medieval Ages and the Renaissance, the Urban Squares were still playing a vital role for the public life, and, as a consequence, there was still a fundamental relationship between these spaces and the public buildings that surrounded them”<sup>4</sup> (C. Sitte, 1889, p. 15)

The word “public” was firstly mentioned in the Romanian language at Dimitrie Cantemir, with both the sense of “council of the Lord” and “country, state”. It derives from the Latin word “publicus”, according to the Small Academic Dictionary, 2003, which comprises “*the totality of persons considered in rapport with an element which was attributed to them, which was destined to them; it is something that permits the participation of all the people that meet the necessary conditions; something that belongs to a human collectivity; something that belongs to the state, regarding the state, which comes from the state; an asset that can be used by everybody or a certain category of people*”.<sup>5</sup> (C. Țurlea, 2008, p.10)

The public space, in all its complexity, includes streets, parks, gardens, public squares, playgrounds, parking places, horizontal surfaces, vertical surfaces, abandoned buildings etc. The public space could be planned or not, most of the time, the last mentioned being the source of

<sup>3</sup> Mihaela Negulescu, *Practica urbanistică de remodelare sustenabilă a mobilității*, ed. Universitara “Ion Mincu”, București, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Camillo Sitte, *The Art of Building Cities*, Romanian version 1992 (*Original 1889*), Technical Ed. Bucharest, p. 15

<sup>5</sup> Cristina Turlea, *Arhitectura si spatiile publice – interconditionari dintre spatiul construit, comanda sociala si normele de drept*, Bucuresti, Editura Cadmos, 2008, p.10

more interesting and complex studies, as it is more spontaneous and easier to transform. We understand in this case a «residual public space», which remained after some architectural or urban interventions. It is a place which was abandoned by the authorities. "An undefinable place, without a clear morphology, a zone of adaptability. It's a place of optimism". (Manuel Gausa, 1995, p. 562).

During the Antiquity, the public space or public sphere represented "the mince of the free association between free people" (Slater, 1998, p. 138). Essential for the definition of the public space during Ancient times is also the platonic concept which introduces the notion of "matrix space" understood as an ideal space where the models are situated. It's a place where we can find both innovation and conservation, defined by Platon as: "there's a third thing, the space, which is eternal and cannot be destroyed and which offers a shelter to all the elements which are related" (*Timaios 51 e-52b*)<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, in the second book of the Republic, Socrate searches for the justice in the city, building a series of arguments which define the city as "an organized space" (Republic, p. 35).

The definition of the "public space" can be built starting from different points of view. If we try to define it from the sociological point of view, than it can be understood as "a collective space, of proximity, together with the free or the residual space". If we look at the same public space, but in terms of architecture and urbanism, we can state that it is a "boulevard, street, sidewalk, square, gallery, intersection, endpoint, garden, park, public building (museum, theatre)" as the architect Cristina Țurlea explains in her book "Architecture and public space"<sup>7</sup> (C. Țurlea, 2008, pp.12-13). At the same time, I think that it is worth mentioning on this list the abandoned buildings, the ruins. They are buildings more or less valuable from the architectural point of view, but which are undoubtedly bearers of the history of that place, essential for the "Spiritus Loci"<sup>8</sup>. The argument for this affirmation can be found in the juridical qualification, which we can apply to the notion of "public space". From this point of view, the public space represents "the public domain, the public property, the immobile heritage".<sup>9</sup> (C. Țurlea, 2008, p. 13). Most of the definitions given to the concept of "public space" have as main objective the rapport between public and private. The modern researches showed that not all which is not private is public or vice-versa. There are some spaces which are semi-public, suggesting in this way, the complexity of the concept which we have in mind. At the same time, the semi-public spaces have

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.arhiforum.ro/agora/vecinatatea-ca-arhipelag-ii>

<sup>7</sup> Cristina Țurlea, *Arhitectura și spațiile publice – interconștiență dintre spațiul construit, comanda socială și normele de drept*, București, Editura Cadmos, 2008, pp. 12-13

<sup>8</sup> (lat.) «Spirit of place» is a Roman concept. In the concept of the antique Rome, each independent individual has his own «genius» as a guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and to places, accompanying them from the moment of birth until their death and it determines their nature and essence. The concept symbolizes a spiritual being, which is situated in a particular geographical area. Some modern writers interpreted this as a «space where the spirit appears», a «locus spiritus» A.G.H.

<sup>9</sup> Cristina Țurlea, *Arhitectura și spațiile publice – interconștiență dintre spațiul construit, comanda socială și normele de drept*, București, Editura Cadmos, 2008, p. 13

the capacity to show us the interaction between public and private. The transition is not sudden, as a barrier, but gradual, progressive, slow.

Françoise Choay brings an interesting vision of the “public space” regarding “The Art of building cities”<sup>10</sup> (C. Sitte, 1992) of Camillo Sitte. In the work “For an anthropology of space”, the author states: “So Sitte provides self-awareness, which means the reflexive dimension accompanying the architectural design from the Renaissance, the construction of cities and the birth of urbanism, its true historical significance. When he regrets the loss of correlative *Kunsttrieb* (artistic strength of memory, artistic impulse, artistic behavior), it is intended, at the same time, a process that the development and technical progress only accelerates and generalizes from one day to the next: I'm talking about the disappearance of our physical engagement in the real space.”<sup>11</sup> (F. Choay, 2011, p. 70). Choay draws the attention towards the current trends of formal approaches in the design of the public space. It is regrettable the way in which the public spaces are starting to lose their most important component, their public, by being transformed into some simple spaces of transition.

The urban reality nowadays suggests only the idea of a “modern public space”, through the mega tendencies of globalization, most of the time understood as a theoretical construction which gathers together different activities related to the urban life, to the urban culture. The public space is perceived as a living space, a space of interaction and socialization, a space of everyone. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples which lead us to the idea of “vague spaces” in the Romania, given the fact that they are abandoned by visitors or used just as transitory areas. Its role is diverse, multiple, probably because of its complexity. It is extremely difficult to define it because, given the fact that it lacks a clear delimitation, not only from the physical point of view, but also from the conceptual, functional side, we can also speak of a public space as a place, a building or a courtyard whose owner is not known (this is a case frequently encountered in Romania because of the lack of information in the juridical status).

The buildings are the static-symbolic elements of the public space, the decorative or functional elements which have both the role of framing and defining, giving in this way, a concrete image to the idea of space/place. The buildings are landmarks at the perceptive level, a fact that allows us to understand the role of the public opinion in the development of the public space. Michel de Certeau highlights a very important difference between space and place in its work “L'invention du quotidien – 1. Arts de faire”. He defines the place as a form of order (it does not matter under what circumstances it is obtained) and where the elements are found in a systemic relation of coexistence<sup>12</sup> (M. de Certeau, 1990, p. 172). The space, in his opinion, produces itself when “we take into account the directional vectors, the speed and the temporal variables”<sup>13</sup> (M. de Certeau, 1990, p. 173). The space represents moving places, more dynamic and under the influences of time changes. We can speak, in this case, of places in rapport to the physical environment where

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<sup>10</sup> Camillo Sitte, *The art of building cities*, Bucarest, editura Tehnica, 1992

<sup>11</sup> Françoise Choay, *Pour une anthropologie de l'espace*, București, biblioteca Urbanismul-serie nouă, 2011, p.70

<sup>12</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. 1. *Arts de faire*, Paris, folio essais, Éditions Gallimard, 1990, p. 172

<sup>13</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. 1. *Arts de faire*, Paris, folio essais, Éditions Gallimard, 1990, p. 173

we find ourselves in a certain moment and of their value in the temporal context in which the history produces itself. It is so that, probably, starts the modifications between values, significations and vocations of a certain place in the face of time, when it comes to the analysis between present and past. Probably this is why some places lose their value in the face of time, while some others increase it.

### 3. Social and physical significances of public spaces

Public spaces have a very important social significance, being key points of the city, where people meet and interact. The image and the identity of a city it is built throughout its public spaces, the most evident to the outsider's eye. In order to have public interaction, it is necessary to have a system of public spaces, hierarchized and prioritized according to their role in the city life.

Jane Jacobs makes a very interesting remark with regard to the neighborhood parks, as a form of local public space. She states that "Conventionally, neighborhood parks or park-like open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived populations of the cities."<sup>14</sup> (Jane Jacobs, 1961, p.89). If they are perceived as "unimportant" or "unessential" for the city neighborhood, than these local public spaces could never be taken into account as real part of the neighborhood structure, much less as a part of the city structure.

Henri Lefebvre, in his work "The production of space" notes the importance of the difference between the ideal-space (our mental projection of a certain space), the physical space (projected by the designer, if any) and the social space, interpreted as the space that actually turns out to be. "What term should be used to describe the division which keeps the various types of spaces away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space do not overlap? Distortion? Disjunction? Schism? Break? As a matter of fact the term used is far less important than the distance that separates "ideal" space, which has to do with mental (logic-mathematical) categories, from "real" spaces, which is the space of social practice. In actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins and presupposes the other"<sup>15</sup> (Henri Lefebvre, 2007, p. 14).

The success of a certain imagined space consists in managing to create an area where the mental projection is in accord with the social interaction and coexists harmoniously with the physical image, formed of symbols and monuments designed to offer a specific meaning and purpose.

If we analyze "space" through its relation with the society, or through its role in its definition, it is essential to mention that the variable of time plays a very important role in this context. The temporal notion is strongly related to the spatial one, playing a key role in the rise or fall of a mentioned physical space. As Henri Lefebvre states with reference to Hegel, "According to Hegelianism, historical time gives birth to that space which the state occupies and rules over. History does not realize the archetype of the reasonable being in the individual, but rather in a coherent ensemble comprised of partial institutions, groups and systems (law, morality, family, city, trade etc). Time is thus solidified and fixed within the rationality immanent to space. The Hegelian end of history does not imply the disappearance of the product of historicity. On the contrary, this product of a process of production which is animated by knowledge (the concept)

<sup>14</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books – A division of Random House, New York, 1961, p. 89

<sup>15</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson Smith, Blackwell Publishing, 2007 (first publishing 1991), p. 14



and oriented by consciousness (language, the Logos) – this necessary product – asserts its own self-sufficiency.”<sup>16</sup> (Henri Lefebvre, 2007, p. 21).

The social meaning of a public space can be differently interpreted, given the fact that it involves concepts which are controversial sometimes. When speaking of a social space, inevitably we are traced back to the Antique times, where it was developed the concept of *Genius Loci*, as an attribute of a built/physical space. The importance of this concept consists in its “subtle” connotations with regard to the conceptual category of space, being situated somewhere at the intersection of the conception with the receiver. As previously stated, this “allegory of the place” was developed for the first time during the Antique times, by the romans. *Genius Loci*, with an equivalent in the Greek culture, *Daimon* (guardian spirit), it is assimilated with a *god of a certain place*.

“The entire philosophy of *genius loci*, its creation throughout the years, with an impact in the attitude towards the space, was reflected not only in the mentioned meanings, but also at a pragmatic level of the concept and conception of space, in Architecture and Urbanism.

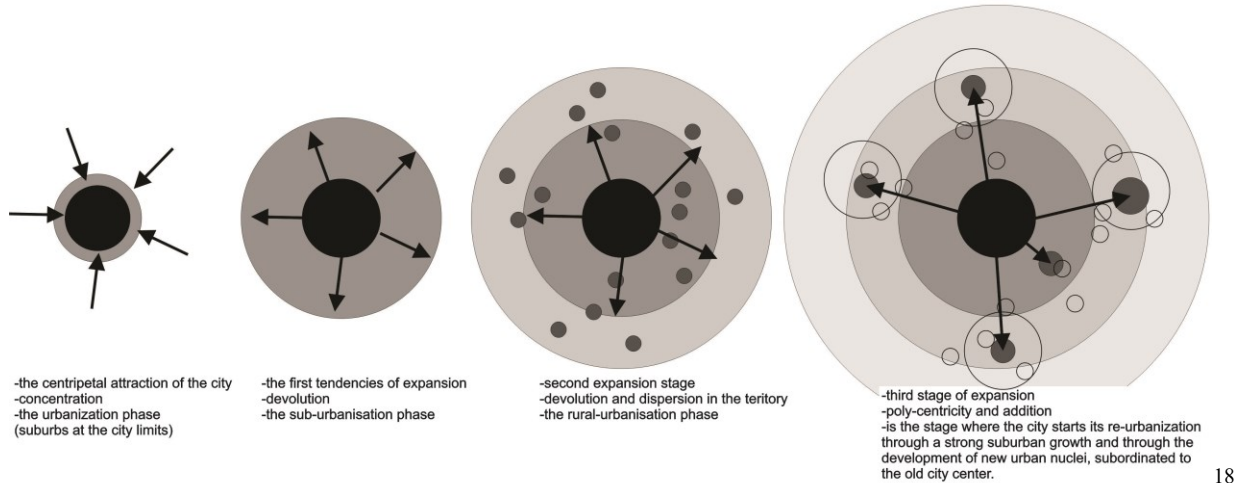
If the theory of Ch. Norbert-Schultz, with regard to the creation of Architecture, means visualizing the *genius loci*, and a place represents a space gifted with a distinctive character/ differentiating it from others, the definition and this Heidegger conception about space seems to be overcome in the light of new researches. As R. Pfuner states, even if the production of a “place” is still possible, only the crossing of a multitude of different spaces is real, and not as a revelation of something that already exists, but as the production of new events.”<sup>17</sup> (M. Eftenie, 2006, pp. 26-27)

Places have to be analyzed through their variables of time and space. We cannot speak of a physical or social structure in terms of static elements. The social structure of a nation, as well as its physical one, is inevitably influenced by both its history and time changes as well as by its spatial situation.

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<sup>16</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson Smith, Blackwell Publishing, 2007 (first publishing 1991), p. 21

<sup>17</sup> Mariana Eftenie, *The psychology of the built urban space – class*, second edition, The Academic Publishing “Ion Mincu”, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 26-27



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*Urban Periphery, Master Urban Management for Competitive Cities, second course, 2010*

Cities have the tendency of expanding their territory horizontally if they are not carefully controlled and managed. In the case of Bucharest, this problem grew bigger and bigger after the systematization started by the communist leaders approximately 30 years ago. In the present, there is a great problem with the difference between south and north from the economic point of view, causing a greater and far more rapid expansion for the northern side of Bucharest, even if the southern part is very reach when it comes to parks and green public spaces.

When it comes to public spaces, there is a notable difference between the central public spaces of a city (especially when we take into account a metropolis) and the local public spaces (the ones that are only known by the nearby inhabitants). Nevertheless, we can pose ourselves the following question: “Is it possible to make a local public space attractive for the entire city?”. The answer is “Yes, but we should not, because in this way, the space will lose its main purpose”. The first thing that characterizes the “local public space” is *intimacy*. A local public space, in order to fulfill its purpose as “local” needs to be sufficiently *attractive for the community* by incorporating features, unique and solid, that separate them from the rest of the city. Is this what makes those spaces attractive for the membership but not so that they attract “outsiders” too. The local public space needs to *unite the community*, to be an accomplice to its uniqueness and to help that part of the city individualize it through those features.

On the other hand, a central public space has the responsibility to attract the entire city and not only that. It needs to represent the *image of the city*, the landmark, the identity. Its structure invites inhabitants and visitors alike to discover, appreciate and admire the complexity of that space. It represents history and present at the same time. It also represents future tendencies, being a place of encounter and development for the inhabitants.

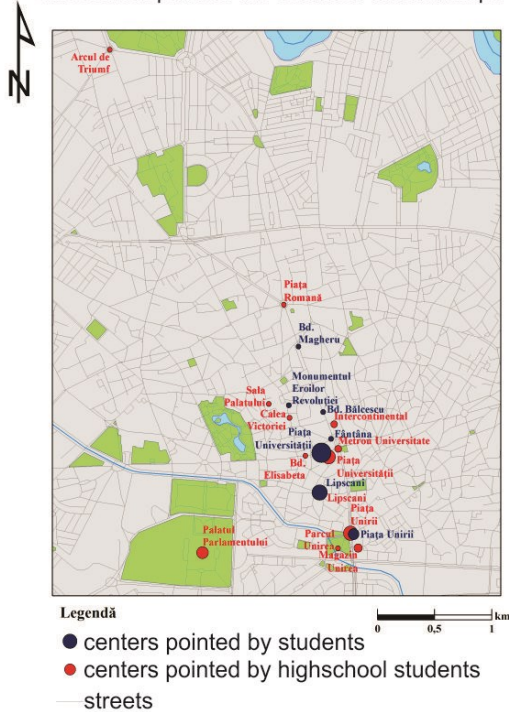
**4. Creating a public space: designed or spontaneous?**

Some studies carried out in the period May-June 2010, involving a series of students from the Faculty of Geography and Master in Tourism (60 students) and the High-school Eugen Lovinescu (97 students) aimed to discover the central space of Bucharest through mental maps.<sup>19</sup>

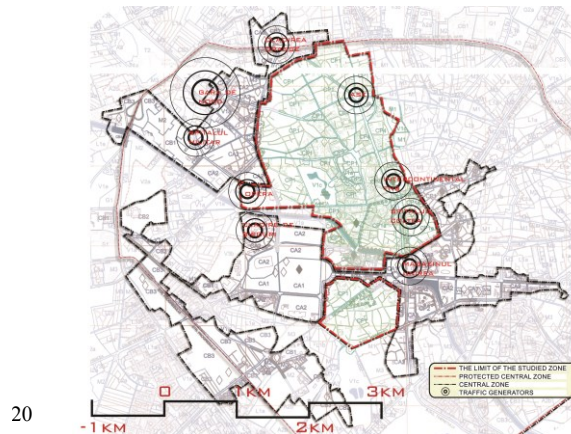
<sup>18</sup> This scheme represents the evolution of a concentric city, developed radially from the center and extending its peripheries almost equally in all directions. Bucharest is an example of a radial-concentric development, along with other cities like Paris, Milano, Köln, Moscova etc.

It has been noticed that large boulevards, like the Unirii Boulevard, for example, do not manage to attract people. The main reason is the lack of commercial places, of course. On the other hand, there is the Victoriei Road, which is full of commercial places. The only problem here is that these places are meant for an exclusive category of people, which cover only a small percentage of the population and which would never be able to animate that space. Secondly, the Victoriei Road, as well as Unirii Boulevard, they both have the great disadvantage of small and unattractive sidewalks, while the space dedicated to the automobiles is generous and large. That makes these spaces not only crowded, but also tiring, exhausting.

The central point of the common mental maps



*The area revealed by the study as representing the central zone of the capital for the young people of Bucharest indicates a large discrepancy of perception. Bucharest does not have a specific central place, but it has a multitude of central points scattered on a distance of approximately 3 km on the N-S direction and other 2 km on the W-E direction.*



Henri Lefebvre analyzes the space from the three perspectives: the social space, the mental space and the physical space in his work *The Production of Space* (1991). In his opinion, these three concepts mentioned earlier are essential for the determination of a space and it is impossible to exist one without the other. “Each society produces a space, that can be seen and understood as its own space”<sup>21</sup> (Unwin, 2000, p. 16). Lefebvre understands the *social space* as a dual space, with both present and potential importance. The social space is not only the existing one, but also the space that might become. It incorporates social actions, the actions of people, both individually and of groups. It is analyzed and created as such.

Lefebvre suggests the importance of social studies with regard to public spaces by stating that a specific public space is defined by the activities that take place inside it. Its existence is confirmed by the social relations found there.

<sup>19</sup> <http://mentalgeo.wordpress.com/2012/02/12/cine-stie-unde-i-centru-n-bucuresti/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://mentalgeo.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/centre-comune.jpg>

<sup>21</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson Smith, Blackwell Publishing, 2007 (first publishing 1991), p. 16

## 5. Use of public spaces: spectacular and common events

*The street* represents an important space of manifestation of the drama in the public zone, place of dynamism and socialization, of contemplation and of the liberty of individuals. People form their proper mental maps with help from the linear elements of the city, which are the streets. They play both the role of limits and connection between two different spaces of the city. They reunite within them at the same time, the urban life, the everyday life and its spectacular, as well as the history and value of the city they belong to. Kevin Lynch characterizes the street as a “channel” with a dynamic potential: “Paths are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads. For many people, these are the predominant elements in their image. People observe the city while moving through it, and along these paths the other environmental elements are arranged and related.”<sup>22</sup> (K. Lynch, 1960, p. 47). The description of the direct relation between the static elements and the dynamic elements of the urban life result from the fact that the most significant part of the city appears through the detection of the activities produced in its interior through the social component.

A notable observation has been made by Allan Jacobs, who states that “*good cities are made of good streets and we’re rapidly losing our talent for creating them*”<sup>23</sup> (A. Jacobs, 1995). Allan Jacobs supports the idea that “If we can develop and design streets so that they are wonderful, fulfilling places to be — community-building places, attractive for all people — then we will have successfully designed about one-third of the city directly and will have had an immense impact on the rest”. (A. Jacobs, Florida APA Conference 2009 Jacksonville).

For the urban planner A. Jacobs, “correct streets” are made out of two essential elements. On one hand, there is the history of those places. They are recognized and appreciated for what they represented, their role in the history of that specific city. They are, at the same time, appreciated for the image they created in the perception of the inhabitants. The people are those that accord the name of “main streets” and recognize them as being “important”. On the other hand, there is the urban and social reality, represented by the present, by the role of the street, by its integration in the urban system etc. In this category we include characteristics as the safety of the street, limits and the correct lightning, correct proportions, street width, the capacity of responding to present traffic flows, ability to receive modern means of public transportation, functional diversity etc. The streets today are extremely different from the streets from the past and one of the reasons is that they are meant for other objectives, other purposes. Even if, from the physical point of view, they remain sometimes unchanged over the years, the spaces that they serve are different and respond to other requirements.

When we analyze the street as a space of spectacle, we can talk about multiple variables of occupying it, through the spatial and temporal vectors. It is necessary to take into account the spatial occupation by referring to the use of terrains, the use of public or private zones and the use of closed zones. When it comes to the second variable, we discuss the temporal occupation of a

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA, Library of Congress Catalog, 1960, p. 47

<sup>23</sup> Allan Jacobs, *Great Streets*, University Press Group Limited, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA

certain space, as index for different time intervals, as prof. dr. arch. Alexandru M. Sandu states. He mentions this variable during his course “Urban Structures”<sup>24</sup>, pointing out the temporal occupation in terms of “time cycles, when the initial function is not manifested, maybe because of its traditional normality or because of the lack of interest showed towards it by the present tendencies of social development.”<sup>25</sup>

The urban space needs to be understood through its double reference, firstly towards a logical urban structure, systemic, and secondly, through its social structure. Henri Lefebvre<sup>26</sup> mentions with regard to this idea, a clear distinction between the terms “city” and “urban”, showing that the “urban” represents a phenomenon completely *socio-logical* (determined strictly by the social logic) and, by this, it is impossible to be analyzed from the systemic perspective or through its relation with any other order, except for the one belonging to the human practice. The urban, through all its complexity, is submitted to an order profoundly subjective and relative, including the characteristics of the past, of the actions, of the people and of the relations between them in a context characterized by simultaneity and coexistence. On the other hand, the idea of the “city” and its meaning cannot be understood in the absence of the profound analysis of its physical structure, with reference to the logic of forms, which prof. dr. arch. Alexandru M. Sandu<sup>27</sup> mentions in his work. The city represents that specific architectural-urban space, characterized by materiality, tangibility. We can conclude that the everyday life represents a mixture between the urban and the city, representing the two plans previously defined through the material-pragmatic logic and the social-human logic. The „urban show” is defined and supported by the overlay of these two plans, having, at the same time, as binder, the activities, the dynamics and the spontaneity of each moment of encountered within the urban space.

## 6. Roles of public spaces – between central and local

“Parks are volatile places. They tend to run to extremes of popularity and unpopularity. Their behavior is far from simple. They can be delightful features of city districts, and economic assets to their surroundings as well, but pitifully few are. They can grow more beloved and valuable with the years, but pitifully few show this staying power.”<sup>28</sup> (Jane Jacobs, 1961, p. 89)

<sup>24</sup> Alexandru M. Sandu, *Structuri Urbane*, curs tiparit UAUIM, an IV, Capitolul III.3.4 Integrare, Biblioteca de cursuri UAUIM, Bucuresti, 2010, pp. 149 – 168

<sup>25</sup> Alexandru M. Sandu, *Structuri Urbane*, curs tiparit UAUIM, an IV, Biblioteca de cursuri UAUIM, Bucuresti, 2010, pp. 160

<sup>26</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space, Social Space*, Blackwell Publishing, Translated by Donald Nicholson – Smith, 1991, pp. 68 – 79

<sup>27</sup> Alexandru M. Sandu, *Structuri Urbane*, curs tiparit UAUIM, an IV, Biblioteca de cursuri UAUIM, Bucuresti, 2010, Capitolul IV – Fenomen si Forma Urbana, IV.1.2. Fenomenul Urban in Sistem

<sup>28</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books – A division of Random House, New York, 1961, p. 89



Parks, whether they are situated in a central area or they present interest only for the inhabitants of a certain district, have as a main purpose, to reunite the population and to create spatial environments for interaction and socialization.

As well as the city, the public spaces represent *living organisms*, in continuous change and transformation. They exist in a certain place only because and if they are needed there. If not, they disappear.

For a city with a radial distribution, the main problem might consist in the concentration of activities within the center, leaving the rest of it under-used or abandoned during daytime. This is a situation when a system of public spaces is required, in order to gather together a diversity of activities which could restart and scatter throughout the entire territory almost the same density of activities and interests. In any case, this system needs to have a hierarchical distribution, with a central space, dominant, which includes not only a great variety of activities but also a historical memory of the city. It should represent both a symbol and a touristic attraction, a focal point for the visitors.

“As an *urban organism*, the city is constituted as an existential system for human, therefore, for the society. It represents an agglomeration of interests from which results the most complex activity system, from the point of view of a certain way of classification of these activities inside a territory: *the human settlement*. The city as a system, is certainly larger, and therefore, analyzing it from the sort of relations perspective and the territorial area, is more complex. At the basis of the naissance of the city is the human activity, the *urban activity* in the context of the urban territory.”<sup>29</sup>

## 7. The globalization: spaces of consumption

Davis states that “as the Industrial Revolution occurred in England, rapid population growth combined with rural-urban shifts changed both the proportion of the population living in cities and absolute city size very quickly”<sup>30</sup> (Richard LeGates, Frederich Stout, 1996, p. 1). The cities emerged from the beginning as trade places, boosted by economic, practical reasons. They were from the beginning *places of consumption*, where people came for a better, easier leaving.

As Childe mentions, there were three major turning points for the *evolutionist development of humanity*. “For Childe, however, the development of writing was crucial cultural element of true urbanism, and the emergence of the cities of the ancient Near East, where writing began,

<sup>29</sup> Alexandru M. Sandu, *Theory of Urban Structures*, Course – fourth year, Library “Ion Mincu”, p. 61

<sup>30</sup> Ed. Richard LeGates, Frederich Stout, *The City Reader*, Routledge England and New York, 1996, p. 1

constituted the second of a series of massive transformations that gave shape to the whole of human evolutionary development. Although the successive stages overlapped, each of his three “revolutions” – the agricultural, the urban and the industrial – totally changed the world as it had been before”<sup>31</sup>. The present days, however, transformed these places into something more, causing us to say that we probably assist to a forth revolution, a *technological revolution*. We live in the century of communication, one of its main features being *the mobility*. There is a large mobility encountered at the economic level, as mobility of activities, there is also the capital mobility, mobility of qualified people, of services and last but not least, information mobility. These five types of mobility represent at the same time causes and effects of what is called the mega-tendency of *globalization*, imposing new rules within the urban public space.

It is still A. Jacobs who states “Streets are places of social and commercial encounter and exchange. They are where you meet people – which is a basic reason to have cities in any case.” (A. Jacobs).

The globalization involves not only physical migration, but also migration of culture, of traditions and customs, open boundaries and transgression of information, claiming the need for adaptation, not only for the persons who migrate but also for those which are already in that place and who receive the immigrants and include them in their everyday life.

“At least on the surface, the spaces for consumption offer the consumer opportunities to satisfy wants and desires. In a world in which basic necessities are more readily satisfied than they were in the past and in which consumption generally exceeds physiological need, the role of consumption as a means of self-actualization becomes increasingly crucial, as does the city as an area within which that self-actualization can be achieved. The irony here, however is that the seductive vision of the city that is promoted as a means of reasserting the legitimacy of the post-industrial city is fundamentally incompatible with that city’s lived reality. The idealist consumer which a city purports to attract is very different to the consumer of limited resources who accounts for a large proportion of the city’s “indigenous” population.”<sup>32</sup> (S. Miles, 2010, pp. 164-165) The spaces seem to be consumed by the inhabitants, fulfilling only their need of motion. Today’s public spaces represent, most of the time, transition points or, in a more optimistic scenario, places of short interaction. They do not own the ability to retain the citizens for long time, to make themselves admired and enjoyed, partly because of their lack of diversity, as Jane Jacobs remarks, and partly because of the psychological changes that happened within the society. People are no longer attracted by static artistic elements because they are in a continuous search for “*new*”. Unless the public space doesn’t transform itself continuously, offering dynamism and change, it will not survive. It will only serve as transition space.

Baudelaire said in “The painter of modern life” (Baudelaire, 1863) that “Modernism represents the ephemeral, the rapid, the contingent; it is one of the two halves of art, while the other represents the eternal and the immutable”<sup>33</sup> (D. Harvey, 1990, p. 25). It is here emphasized that modernism represents incompleteness. It is a superficial current, based on continuous changes and rapid satisfaction of immediate needs. It lacks consistency, being based on a fragile *ground*.

<sup>31</sup> Ed. Richard LeGates, Frederick Stout, *The City Reader – The Evolution of Cities*, Routledge England and New York, 1996, p. 16

<sup>32</sup> Steven Miles, *Spaces for consumption – pleasure and placelessness in the post-industrial city*, SAGE Publications, 2010, pp. 164-165

<sup>33</sup> David Harvey, *La condición de la postmodernidad – Investigación sobre los orígenes del cambio cultural (The condition of Postmodernity)*, 1990, p. 25

## 8. Conclusions

“It is certain that as the distance from the interior to the circumference of town shall increase with the enlargement of their population, the less sufficient relatively to the service to be performed will be any given space between buildings.

In like manner every evil to which men are specially liable when living in towns, is likely to be aggravated in the future, unless means are devised and adapted in advance to prevent it.”<sup>34</sup> (ed. R. LeGates, F. Stout, 1996, p. 339)

Public spaces, streets and parks alike, have a special structural role inside the city, representing not only relaxation places or socialization points. Their purpose is to keep the city under control, providing a clear delimitation and preventing it from expanding chaotically on horizontal direction. As Frederick Law Olmsted stated, the larger a city gets, the harder it is to manage and to control.

Urban public spaces, both central and local, act as social magnets, and as long as they are placed in key points of the city, they might represent strategic elements for the unity of that urban settlement.

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<sup>34</sup> Ed. Richard LeGates, Frederick Stout, *The City Reader, Frederick Law Olmsted, “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns”*, Routledge England and New York, 1996, p. 339