



Field ARCHITECTURE

**PhD THESIS**  
**- SUMMARY -**

**Identity elements in the transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period**

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## MAIN BODY OF THE SUMMARY

### Coordinates of the research theme

The doctoral thesis under discussion here researches the transformations the central area of the City of Satu Mare has gone through in the post-war period, observing the identity aspects – with the purpose of identifying and bringing into discussion several “identity elements” that can be related to the transformations of the studied area, during the studied period. The title of the thesis is consequently built with the aim of expressing the approached theme in the most coherent, complete, precise and condensed way possible: *Identity elements in the transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period*.

At a preliminary analysis of the structure of this title, the research theme is shaping up as an association between a thematic range that is apparently specific to the fields of architecture and urban planning (by means of the syntagm “transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period”) and a thematic range that is apparently external (or adjacent, at the most) to this field (by means of the syntagm “identity elements”).

On the one hand, the syntagm “transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period” is placing the thesis in the category of the recent date papers – since the study period is “the post-war period”. It should be mentioned here that the syntagm “the post-war period” is employed in the thesis as referring to the interval between the end of World War Two (around 1944) and the present time (around 2020). There are and there have been circulating, in various sources, several understandings of the “post-war” term – respectively several time intervals that have been associated to this term, from case to case and from author to author, depending on various considerations and circumstances. The research for this thesis has not been able to reveal, however, a widely established or acknowledged time interval that would define the discussed syntagm (either 1944-present, 1944-1989, 1944-1965, 1948-1989 etc.). Both the beginning of the post-war period and the end of it are questionable and disputable, as dates. In this context, without making the claim of solid historical knowledge, respectively of consistent critical skills on historical topics such as this – knowledge and skills that would serve as a base for a professional selection and argumentation of the beginning and the end dates of the so called “post-war” period - the author has chosen to work with the interval 1944-present, as a time interval that could be associated to the post-war period (as a study period).

As for the orientation of the research towards the city of Satu Mare, it implies a certain monographic valence of the thesis. It is worth mentioning here that the paper also includes references to other cities, both as useful examples and as general context elements – without, however, detailing the situations of other cities, except for Satu Mare. Next, with respect to the city that has been selected for the study, namely Satu Mare, the research interest is oriented towards its central area. Following this direction, the work is falling within a thematic range that is shaping up at the interference point between architecture and urban planning. In this respect, the study is, in the first place, an architecture one – but the focus on the “central area” of a city is also entailing an urban planning-related valence of the research, as following the theoretical term of “central area” employed in the urban planning field.

Also, the presence of the term “transformations” (of the central area) is pointing out both towards quite a consistent visual dimension of the paper (the visualisation of the actual transformations being a priority) and towards a chronological organization and presentation of the material included in the paper - so as to follow those particular facts that have led to transformations in relation to the existing situation at a certain point in time.

On the other side, the syntagm “identity elements”, through the employment of the “identity” concept – a concept that is specific, firstly, to the field of Social or Social-Humanistic Sciences (Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy etc.) – is entailing an interdisciplinary valence of the thesis with an orientation particularly towards Anthropology and Sociology. Around the approach to this “identity” concept, there is also developing a certain conceptual and theoretical dimension of the thesis, along with the historical one that has been mentioned above.

## **Motivation and working hypotheses**

The general, broad-spectrum (and, somewhat, also subliminal) motivation, lying at the core of the research theme, has been the desire to add value to the production of architecture and urban planning of the post-war period in Romania. Following the processing of this motivation, in consecutive phases, depending on various factors, the research theme has been shaped: a study on identity in architecture and urban planning, during the post-war period, following and analysing the central area of a city in Romania. Why a study on identity? Since one of the earliest observations of the research, that has become a working hypothesis and has gained a structuring role in the shaping of the research theme, was that the production of architecture and urban planning of the post-war period is massively suffering, in Romania, from an identity issue: a rather low degree of attachment of the population, in its whole, to this generation of buildings and spaces.

A second working hypothesis has followed the first: namely, that this “identity”-related issue adds a rather low value, often below its potential, to the production of architecture and urban planning of the post-war period– in the sense that the rather consistent aversion of the current society, as a whole, to the memory and the reminiscences of a difficult and, at times, traumatic, historical period (namely the post-war period) is taking its toll on the way that even some products of architecture and urban planning of the period (buildings, urban ensembles, public spaces etc.) are being regarded nowadays. In this respect, the simple association between some buildings or spaces (such as former Political-Administrative Headquarters, Houses of Culture or Civic Centres) and the period when they were built (the post-war, communist or “sad memory” period) brings frequently about the rejection and disregard of their qualities – whether architectural, of urban planning, aesthetical or artistic. As a consequence, the production of architecture and urban planning of the post-war period is, as a whole, a frequently repudiated, stigmatized, rejected inheritance... an inheritance that people seldom identify with or wish to identify with - which is particularly, per se, an identity issue (because it is related to the idea of “identification”).

Going down this path from motivations to hypotheses that would stimulate the emergence of a research theme, a third working hypothesis has developed, namely that the rather low degree of attachment referred to is aimed mostly at the so called “communist period” (circa 1944-1989) within the post-war study period (circa 1944-present, according to the understanding of the “post-war period” in the thesis). Therefore, “the post-war period” has been divided in the thesis into two sub-periods: “the communist period” (circa 1944-1989) and the “post-communist period” (1989-present). This splitting of the study period, with the use of a terminology that pays tribute to the term “communist”, is a decision that relates to the research theme, where the identity aspect is in the foreground.

Thus, one of the most eloquent, structuring and even defining identity labels of the post-war period has been the term “communism” (together with its derivatives). Although it can be argued that this term (namely “communism”) would not have a key echo and/or a major relevance for the study period, in what regards strictly the practice of the architecture

and urban planning fields, the considerable social-humanistic component of the thesis (due to the centrality of the identity theme within the research theme) has grown into an argument supporting the decision to work, quite extensively, in the thesis, with this terminology that is dependent on the keyword “communism”. This decision was based on the relevance of the word “communism” (and its derivatives) at the level of the collective mentality of the study period. And since the collective mentality is an important aspect within the identity discussion, and the thesis has an identity-related orientation, the keyword “communism” has gained, for the stated reasons, a key-position within the paper. The identity echo of the keyword “communism” for the study period and in relation to the research theme has been decisive.

On the background of this rather low general attachment of the society to the post-war production (and particularly the “communist” one) of architecture and urban planning (meaning buildings and spaces) there is felt an expression of the natural phenomenon of physical and material wear of this generation of buildings and spaces – phenomenon that entails the more and more accentuated necessity for intervention with the purpose of repairing or rehabilitating these buildings and spaces.

For example, most of the so called “Houses of Culture” of the Romanian cities – many of which were built between the years 1960 and 1970 – have now reached an age of almost half a century. Therefore, such buildings have already entered a stage of their existence when quite consistent intervention works are being necessary: facade repairing, replacing of some installation elements etc. And since the conservation concerns regarding the integrity of these type of buildings are rather low, also due to the society’s general low degree of attachment to them and to the almost inexistent acknowledgement of some potential value of these buildings (value that would generate quite consistent conservation intentions), the most frequent scenario is that where interventions on these categories of buildings result into modifications that bring about the loss of original material, affecting the integrity of the buildings and causing the loss of potentially valuable elements.

Of course, the reasons for which many of the buildings and spaces of the post-war period – and particularly of the communist one – get to be modified, many times with the loss of significant parts of their initial entirety and coherence are multiple... However, one of the factors that take a part in this trend is, according to the working hypothesis developed in relation to the research theme of the thesis, the rather low capacity of this generation of buildings and spaces to attract a really consistent interest at the level of the society for the conservation and valorisation according to the originals. Thus, we could hardly talk about a potential post-war “heritage” in what concerns the architecture and urban planning in Romania, around the year 2020 – which is, from the point of view of the thesis author, also an identity issue, since a rather insignificant part of the society can state that it “identifies” itself (from a cultural and a value-generating point of view, in the sense of attachment and representativeness) with this inheritance projected and executed at the level of building and space.

On this train of thoughts, it has been shaped what could be labelled as „the research issue”, which is the identity issue of the production of architecture and urban planning of the post-war period: an issue that has an influence on the contemporary interventions on this generation of buildings and spaces with the risk of compromising (in by no means insignificant ways) the chance of this generation to preserve its valuable side. Consequently, the thesis is dedicated to the identity issue related to this group of buildings and spaces. One of the reasons for developing the theme this way, between these coordinates, is that of making a contribution, through the research and understanding (at least a partial one) of some

considerations and implications with identity valence, to the stimulation of a contemporary attitude that would be as correct, sensitive, opportune and fruitful possible with respect to this problematic inheritance of post-war origin built and not built space.

Next, as part of the endeavour to shape the research theme in relation to various motivations, considering the necessity to narrow down the relatively wide thematic scope that has been detailed so far, the next step has been the limitation of the study area. In this respect, in a first instance, it has been decided to concentrate, as study area, on the central areas of the cities of Romania. The main argument for this decision is that the central areas are some of the most representative types of spaces for certain communities, thus they prove to be some of the most fertile grounds for the targeted identity focused discussion. The central areas of the cities usually concentrate the most representative buildings and spaces of these communities, thus a considerable and representative part of their identity landmarks and, consequently, a significant part of their “identity”.

However, considering the extensive number of cities in Romania and, consequently, the relatively high number of central areas with potential for research, it has been decided – in a second phase of narrowing down the thematic scope of the thesis - to study only one central area, belonging to only one city. It has been considered here that a relatively complex discussion on the identity topic, that could also capture certain nuances and details, would be rather hard to develop within the limits of a doctoral thesis, if the target were the study and presentation of a relatively high number of cities with their relevant central areas. The acknowledgement of the complexity of the identity topic has led, in the end, together with some other considerations, to the decision of limit thus the study to one city and its central area – and the chosen city is Satu Mare.

The choice of the central area of the city of Satu Mare as a final study area has been based on several considerations, among which:

- the existence, in the central area of this city, of one of the most extensive, remarkable and representative civic centre in Romania. Designed and completed throughout the years 1970 and 1980, the civic centre of Satu Mare includes all the architectural pieces that are specific to such an urban central ensemble: political-administrative headquarters, house of culture, universal store, square for festivities, collective housing blocks. The building of the civic centre on a relatively extensive ground, situated at the margin of the central area, supposed a radical transformation of that site – with the relevant identity implications;

- the former so called “political-administrative headquarters” of the civic centre, also known as “the administrative palace”, is the highest building of the central area and of the entire city. It is, consequently, the highest landmark of the city and of the central area. Due to its remarkable visibility at the urban level and its spectacular and unique (although controversial) architectural image, the “political-administrative headquarters” is one of the few city landmark buildings of post-war origin. For these reasons at least, the administrative palace of the civic centre incorporates a significant identity dimension for the city, for the period when it was built, but also for other entities;

- the buildings that form the civic centre fall, as aesthetical and/or stylistic orientation, into an aesthetical and/or stylistic movement with a consistent focus on identity and on specificity in architecture: the so called “architecture with national specificity”. Moreover: the main creative power, as an architect of the civic centre of Satu Mare (as an urban ensemble formed by buildings and landscaped space) is Nicolae Porumbescu – namely, the main exponent, at the level of the post-war period, of this architecture “with specificity” (be it national, regional or local).

- Satu Mare had, before the post-war period, the social profile of a multiethnic and multi-confessional city (such as many other cities in Transylvania). Consequently, in time, a series of group identities (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Orthodox, Greek-Catholics, Roman-Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans etc.) have started to come into shape. These ethnic and confessional groups have marked, through their specific constructions and through the areas they inhabited and frequented, the history and the image of the city. In this way, the result was identity coordinates and facets – of some buildings and areas of the city – that are claimed through these ethnic and confessional identities that have marked the existence and the history of those buildings and areas (churches of various rites, the Jewish district etc.). On this background, the post-war period brought about transformations, more or less substantial, of this situation. Actually, the current patchwork of urban identities in Satu Mare has been appreciated by the author of this thesis as quite a fertile topic for an identity-oriented analysis;

- Satu Mare is part of that category of cities in Romania that were raised, through the administrative reform of the year 1968, to the rank of county administrative centres (the so called “county capital cities” or “county capital municipalities”). This emancipation of the locality status brought about its eligibility for certain state investments that had been conceived to serve the new acquired administrative role. These state investments targeted, in the first place, the construction of a political-administrative headquarters (as a new building), respectively of a civic centre (as a new ensemble, that would be formed by several new buildings, including the political-administrative headquarters, together with a house of culture, a universal store etc.). Emancipation came along with a certain identity rhetoric, via political influence – and this rhetoric came to be translated to the architecture of the new facilities – in the sense that political power had, among other things, also the aim of producing, on this occasion, a series of emblematic and representative images of the regime, namely images that would relate the emancipation moment of these localities to the political power under which the emancipation was undertaken. In this context, the situation of Satu Mare has been considered to highlight some identity elements that came along via political influence;

- (not lastly) Satu Mare is the hometown of the author of this thesis – which has become both a personal research motivation (actually, a motivation with a certain identity dimension) and an argument of close acquaintance with the topic (considering the life experience of the author in this space).

## **Scope and Study Goals**

In relation to the theme and the motivations detailed above, the main study goals are as follows:

- to put together a record, as complete as possible, of the transformations the study area (the central area of the city of Satu Mare) has gone through during the study period (the post-war period). By “transformation” (of the central area) we mean here any architectural or urban planning intervention, so, any intervention on the built environment or landscaped space – however extensive or reduced it might be, from the point of view of its scope. Thus, at least the following types of events qualify as “transformations”: the construction of new buildings, the disappearance of some buildings (by abolition or demolition), the modification of some constructions that are visible from the public space (such as, for example, modifications to the facade decoration), modifications to the street network and to the cadastral plan. The aim of this goal is to practically compile the most complete history possible of the building and landscaping events of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, during the post-war period;

- to analyze, in terms of identity, the transformations detected within the study area, during the study period. Such an analysis aims at bringing up those identity issues that could be associated to the transformations in question. Among these issues, we could find the following: identity significances and valences of some transformations, elements of identity rhetoric involved in some transformations and certain entities (groups of individuals, ideologies, movements, historical periods, places etc.);

- to highlight, in relation to the identity analysis of the transformations of the study area in the study period, some particular elements (in the sense of physical, material objects) that could be considered as "identity elements" and that could, thus, be the carrier of identity messages, with a certain identity significance;

- to detect, to mark, to visualize and to bring into discussion the most relevant and solid "identity elements" possible, in what concerns their identity valence in relation to certain entities (whether groups of individuals, ideologies, movements, historical periods, places etc.)

- to assess the identity valence and relevance of some component elements of the study area that could be considered "identity elements", by measuring the attachment degree of some individuals and groups of individuals to those elements (such as churches, public buildings, public spaces of the type "urban square", towers, urban ensembles, sub-zones of the study area etc.). This goal is marking the approach to a thematic area corresponding to the field of the Social-Humanist Sciences. In order to complete it, it has been taken into account both a bibliographic research of some relevant testimonies (that could be found, for example, in the local press, through press articles that record representative elements of the collective mentality) and the initiation, by the author of the thesis, of a sociologic survey consisting of a set of questions elaborated with the aim of approaching this issue of identity relevance (namely, the idea of "the attachment" of some individuals to certain elements of the built and landscaped environment).

## Methodology

Among the methodological coordinates of the research and of the thesis, at least the following can be stated:

**M1.** Considering the chosen research theme – and the consequent title of the thesis – it has been considered appropriate for the study of the situation in Satu Mare to be preceded, for contextualization reasons, by a narrower study of the situation concerning the whole country, for the chosen theme. It has therefore been developed, within the structure of the thesis, a so-called "general part" that treats the situation at national level, namely what can be labelled as "Identity elements in the transformations of the central areas of Romanian cities, in the post-war period". In this sense, correspondingly, the situation in Satu Mare – which is the research theme and which is being expressed by the title of the thesis itself, namely "Identity elements in the transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period" – has been approached, following the "general part", within a so-called "specific part" that makes the largest part of the thesis and, therefore, constitutes itself in the main part of the work. Alongside the "general part" and "specific part" thus constituted and motivated here in short, the thesis also comprises a so-called "experimental part" in which a short sociological survey is being developed, on the basis of a sociological questionnaire.

Next, "the specific part" and "the experimental part" have been grouped under the label "the personal contribution", whereas the "the general part" has constituted itself in "the current state of knowledge". These 5 terms that have been employed here – namely "the general part", "the specific part", "the experimental part", "the personal contribution" and "the

current state of knowledge” – have been acquired from the terminology that is being used within the PhD thesis template and the indicative guide for writing the PhD thesis, in UTCN. These are, in a broad sense, the methodological considerations that have founded the decisions concerning **the overall structure of the thesis**.

**M2.** The historical, factual, theoretical and conceptual basis of the thesis has taken shape, first of all, via a general and specific documentation in relation with the research theme. The documentation process has mostly been of bibliographical nature – and has been carried out, in general, through the following research pathways:

- the identification and processing of bibliographic references (books, articles etc.) that have been considered, in a critical way, to be relevant for the research topic. They have touched on the research theme, in direct or indirect ways. Among the titles with the most impact upon the thesis, the following stood out among the others: the book entitled *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist. România 1944-1989* by Ana Maria Zahariade (published în 2011), the book entitled *Arhitectură și urbanism în România anilor 1944-1960: constrângere și experiment* by Irina Tulbure (published în 2016), the book entitled *Negocierea centrului civic. Arhitecți și politicieni în România secolului XX* by Alex Răuță (published în 2013), the book entitled *Uzina de fapte și alte povestiri (nemărturisite)* (edited by Alina Șerban and published in 2017), the book entitled *Identitatea urbană: spectru, obsesie și politici* by Augustin Ioan and Ciprian Mihali (published in 2013), the archive of *Arhitectura* journal from the study period, *Monografia județului Satu Mare* from the year 2016 (edited by Doru Radosav and Claudiu Porumbăcean), *Satu Mare – ghid de oraș* by Doru Radosav (published in 1984), the article entitled „Direcții de evoluție urbană în istoria orașului Satu Mare” (signed by a group of authors composed of Diana Iegar, Sárándi Tamás and Szocs Péter Levente, and published in a number of the professional journal *Satu Mare – Studii și Comunicări* of the Satu Mare County Museum) or the article entitled „Specificul în arhitectură” (signed by architects Nicolae Porumbescu and Maria Vaida-Porumbescu, and published in 1967 in *Arhitectura* journal);

- research within some public and private archives, such as the public archive of the Satu Mare County Museum or the private archive of Mr. Sándor Muhi;

- the approach of several institutions and state authorities, for the acquirement of documentary material (that would be) relevant to the research (Satu Mare County Museum, Satu Mare County Library, Satu Mare Office for Cadastre and Land Registration);

- field work;

- the conduct of several interviews, both in person and in online/virtual mode, with the aim of obtaining data and opinions necessary for the research. Among the persons that have been contacted and interviewed, can be mentioned: Sándor Muhi (outstanding personality of the Satu Mare community, teacher, graphic designer and writer, owner of an extended archive of historical images from Satu Mare), Ludovic Gyüre (architect who was involved in the design and construction of the Satu Mare Civic Centre, then director of the House of Culture of the Workers’ Unions in Satu Mare for approximately 25 years), Aurelian Gheorghiu (former architect-in-chief of the city of Satu Mare, owner of an archive of historical and contemporary plans of the city, and also author of several studies about the urban history and urbanistic evolution of the city of Satu Mare) or Norbert Lorincz (curator within Satu Mare County Museum)

- the access of several online sources. One particular site, from where several maps and historical plans relevant to Satu Mare could be extracted, stood out at this level: Arcanum Maps (<https://www.arcanum.com/en/maps/>). Also, a few sites and webpages have stood out as extended and solid databases for graphic material (photographs, postcards etc.): Lokálhistóriák (<https://lokalhistoriak.blogspot.com>), Régi Szatmár



(<https://www.facebook.com/www.muhisandor/>) or Szatmárnémeti anno  
([https://www.facebook.com/Sz atm%C3%A1rn%C3%A9meti-anno-537503453014131/?ref=page internal](https://www.facebook.com/Sz atm%C3%A1rn%C3%A9meti-anno-537503453014131/?ref=page_internal)).

This is, in a broad sense, a selective list of some of the most important and remarkable **sources of the thesis**, many of which have had a considerable influence in the development of the thesis.

**M3.** The processing of the documentary material (as it has been presented at M2) has led, further on, to a stage of the research process that was mostly concerned with the correlation and processing of the information, data and ideas that resulted, in a direct way, from the documenting activity. This correlation and processing activity has been carried out in a critical and selective way, in relation to the paper. Most of the paper has resulted through this process. Therefore, as a result of this methodological approach, the written part of the thesis has emerged as a particular assemblage, in relation to the research theme, of all the information, data and ideas that resulted from the documenting stage. Alongside this ordering/systematization of the documentation in relation with the research topic, an interpretation of the results of the documenting stage has also been carried out. This interpretation has led, among other things, to the formulation of several personal ideas of the author of the thesis, which were inserted in the paper. Consequently, a considerable part of the thesis' text is a critical filtering of the documenting material, in relation to the research theme, done by the author. In effect, the author's contribution resides not only in the ordering/systematization of the documentation in relation to the research theme, but also in the formulation of several critical interpretations concerning several elements of documentation.

**M4.** Considering the structure of the research theme, through the title of the thesis, as an association between a more concrete component, of documentation (namely the topic of the "transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period") and a component that is less concrete, being a critical interpretation of the more concrete aspects (namely the topic of the "identity elements"), the research method has firstly assumed, as a foundation, the study of the transformations through which the central area of the city of Satu Mare has gone through, during the post-war period (the more concrete component). As soon as this historical and factual foundation was shaped, it became raw material for the less concrete component, that of critical interpretation corresponding to the identity theme – in order to detect some "identity elements" that can be associated to the "transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period". Though this methodological approach, the discussion about "identity elements" has been mostly shaped in the wake of the study of the transformations through which the central area of the city of Satu Mare has gone through, during the post-war period.

**M5.** In what concerns the more concrete component of the research theme, namely **the study of the transformations through which the central area of the city of Satu Mare has gone through, during the post-war period**, this has been conducted through different ways, such as:

- the identification (from different sources, in different ways), as much as possible, of all the interventions upon the urban tissue and built environment that took place in the central area of the city of Satu Mare, during the post-war period. Among the types of interventions that that were followed, considering that they had transformative impacts upon the studied area, were the interventions upon the built environment (demolitions of buildings, constructions of new buildings, modifications of existing buildings) and the

interventions upon the unbuilt environment (concerning the road network, squares, green areas, other types of open spaces and public spaces etc.);

- carrying out a chronological systematization of the events that generated transformations in the study area, in the text of the thesis;

- the fabrication of two relatively large and detailed overview plans – in order to illustrate all the transformations that were identified, through research, in the study area and in the study period. The age of the buildings and of the streets from the study area are featured, among other elements, in these overview plans. The resulting plans were overview plan no. 1, entitled “The age of the buildings in the study area”, and overview plan no. 2, entitled “The analysis of the structure of the central area”;

- studying, in extension, the whole history of the city of Satu Mare – with a special concern for the transformation or evolution, in time, of the city and (mostly) of its central area, at the level of urban structure. This study has been made in the context of recognizing the necessity to contextualize the transformations from the post-war period, in relation to the situation corresponding to the moment when the transformations had actually occurred. The usefulness of the awareness of the features of the situation at the beginning of the post-war period has emerged, in this way – ultimately leading to an extensive study of the whole history of the city. This awareness of the situation at the beginning of the post-war period was useful, on one hand, as an element of context within the historical study of the transformations of the target area, in the post-war period. On the other hand, it was also useful within the discussion concerning identity – where the identity-themed critical commentary, developed in relation to these transformations and their effects, was largely based on making comparisons between the new situation and the old (lost) situation, with implications and considerations concerning the topic of identity. In a concrete way, this study of the evolution of the city of Satu Mare in relation to the research theme was based on a processing of the concrete historical data (that was extracted from various historical sources, such as city monographs) and, as well, on an analysis of the historical plans of the city (where the transformations that had taken part at the level of urban structure were especially followed);

- the addition of some objective and argued considerations of the author, on top of the data and information that was acquired through documentation. Such interventions, throughout the thesis, were especially made in the context of the emergence and persistence of gaps in the formal documenting activity (from books, articles, archives or other sources considered to be relatively solid and precise). A eloquent example, here, was the critical assessment of the age of some buildings from the study area in Satu Mare – when the research of available sources did not lead to the emergence of concrete and solid data regarding when exactly were the buildings completed. For example, the categorization of a block of flats from the central area as a 1950s building could be done following a critical analysis of the general appearance of the building and its facade – where several elements that are characteristic for the so-called „socialist realism” in architecture, typical to the 1950s, could be detected.

**M6.** In what concerns the less concrete component of the research theme, namely **the discussion about the “identity elements”** (with regards to the “transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period”), this has gravitated around what could be critically labelled as “identity element”. It consequently became necessary to select, from all the constitutive elements of the study area, those specific elements that could be qualified as “identity elements”. This resulted in a critical selection of elements whose identity load and identity relevance were considered significant, remarkable or outstanding.

These elements have been pointed out and addressed throughout the thesis, in the text. They have also made the subject of an overview plan, entitled “Identity elements in the study area”. That respective selection of elements that could be qualified as “identity elements”, for the study area and for the study period, is being transposed in this overview plan. Note that the selection of the aspects and elements to be discussed, in the place of other potential ones, both in written and graphic form, was one of critical nature, dependent upon the various levels of relevance of the identity factor that were considered, by the author, for each of these elements

In addition to this, another methodological aspect that had influence upon the study process and, then, upon the way in which the thesis ended up being constructed, was the prioritized targeting of those identity aspects that were involved in the operations that were specifically transformative for the space within the study area. Therefore, so-called “identity elements” could be pinpointed in relation to the actual “transformations” of the central area of Satu Mare, in the post-war period. The title of the thesis could thus be followed, in a relatively rigorous way. Two categories of “identity elements” emerged, in this way: those that are associable with the transformations (these being the new elements of the space), and those that have not been affected by visible transformations in the study period (these being the more stable elements of the space, like old buildings and historical monuments that were preserved or restored, with no significant changes, in the study period).

If, considering the title of the thesis, the emphasis was understandingly put on the identity elements that could be associated with transformations of the study area in the study period, the need to contextualize those respective transformations, as well as the need to assess the identity-related significance of those transformations in relation to the situation in place before the transformations took place, also led to the development of a discussion about the relatively stable (in time and space) “identity elements” of the study area, such as the historical monuments.

Taken together, these two categories of “identity elements” are coming close, from a conceptual point of view, to what can be labelled as “values” of the studied urban space. A debate concerning the potential usefulness of the concept of “identity elements”, within the professional practice in architecture and urbanism, can develop from here – in the prospect of working with this concept when having to do with interventions on personality-infused sites. Surely, the theoretical debate about identity and identity elements with regards to other aspects and theoretical concepts – such as the idea of the „historical monument”, the idea of „heritage” (be it material or non-material), the idea of „values” (of a space or of a community) or the idea of „landmark” (an urban landmark, a landmark of an area, a landmark of a community etc.) – is complex. The paper has, at least partially, touched on some facets of this complex theoretical matter.

Taking all these considerations into account, the following categories of identity elements have been used within the dedicated overview plan:

- buildings;
- parts of buildings (namely volumetric sub-parts, architectural elements and building details);
- areas of the city, comprised of built and/or unbuilt space (namely urban ensembles, groups of buildings, public squares etc.);
- streets, boulevards, major roadways and urban axes of the city and its central area;
- statues, public monuments, fountains and other spatial elements that are relatively similar.

**M7.** The discussion about identity and “identity elements” has led to the emergence of an apparent need to theorize the concept of “identity element”. This resulted in an effort to define the term “identity element”. In this respect, the thesis uses the term “identity element” for every component of an urban space that conveys an identity-relevant message and that has a specific significance, valence or relevance, when it comes to identity, for a specific entity such as a community, a place, a historical period, an ideology, an artistic movement etc.

From this point of view, an identity element is characterized by the attribute of representativeness in relation to such an entity (individual, group of individuals, community etc.). It is associated with such an entity. Such an entity identifies itself with it – and this makes it, linguistically speaking, specifically an “identity” element (because an entity specifically “identifies” itself with it). As a component of an urban space (such as the central area of a city), an identity element can effectively be (in the palpable, physical or material sense): a building, a part of a building, a group or ensemble of buildings (containing both built and unbuilt space), a public space, a public monument, or any other type of material element that, being part of that urban space, can have a specific identity-themed relevance being attributed to it, in relation with an entity.

Surely, it can be argued that an identity element could also be an element of immaterial or intangible nature (such as an idea, a concept, an expression, a notion or a tradition with some relevance when it comes to identity). A relevant example would be the phrase or slogan “the raising of the cultural level of the masses”: an idea that’s embedded in the multitude of so-called “houses of culture” that are being built, in a specific context, in the communist period. This phrase or slogan can be interpreted as an identity element of immaterial nature, of the post-war period, in Romania – something that expresses itself, however, in material form as well, in the architecture of the so-called “houses of culture”. Also, the idea of “the political party as the state itself” or the merging between political party and state/administration – and idea that’s embedded in the architectural program known as “political-administrative headquarters” – can also be viewed as an identity element of immaterial nature (something that, however, also has a material form of expression and occurrence) of the post-war period, in Romania.

Without ignoring the immaterial or intangible dimension that can therefore characterize, in principle, the notion of “identity element”, the thesis is centred on the material and tangible dimension of the notion – and especially on buildings, parts of buildings (volumetric sub-parts, details, decorative elements) and urban ensembles.

**M8. From all the constituent elements of the central area, the elements considered to be labelled as “identity elements” have been selected via several criteria.** These criteria derive, to some extent, from the effort to theorize and/or define the term “identity element” (discussed in M6 and M7). These criteria were:

- the landmark condition (in the physical, concrete or material sense) of the element, at urban level – and its level of visibility (namely the strength of this landmark condition). This criterion is arguably in line with the notion of “landmark” in Kevin Lynch’s “mind maps”, being dependent on the size and scale of the object, its height, its dimensional and volumetric relationship with the surrounding buildings and spaces, the degree of enhancement of the element from the point of view of urban perspectives etc.;

- the benchmark condition (in the sense of “representative example”) of the element with regards to an entity that is relevant for the thesis’ theme (such as “Socialist Realism” or “architecture with national specificity”), and the degree of relevance of the benchmark element for that specific entity. This criterion can be labelled as “representativeness”,

respectively degree of representativeness (that is, the strength of the representativeness factor);

- the degree of human attachment (of a community, of a part of a community, of an individual) for that specific element;

- the sheer notoriety of the element, and its degree of notoriety (with respect to the collective mentality, the community, a part of the community etc.).

## **The content of the thesis – brief presentation**

According to the Contents and the considerations included at point M1 of the “Methodology”, the thesis is structured in three parts:

- The General Part: the situation at national level, on the entire territory of Romania, as an element of general context;

- The Specific Part: the situation at the level of the city of Satu Mare;

- The Experimental Part: Sociologic Survey.

The General Part, where a discussion is developed about “identity elements in the transformations of the central areas of the cities in Romania, in the post-war period”, is made up of two chapters (chapters 1 and 2). These two chapters discuss the situation of the two sub-periods in which it was decided to split the post-war study period (1944-present): “the communist period” (1944-1989) and “the post-communist period” (1989-present). The names of the two chapters that form the General Part take over these syntagms.

Therefore, on the one part, Chapter 1 of the thesis is dedicated to the situation at national level, on the entire territory of Romania, during the communist period (1944-1989). This chapter is formed by two sub-chapters corresponding to the two time intervals in which it was decided to split the communist period (1944-1989): 1944-1965 (the interval corresponding to the beginning of the post-war period, with the installation and the stabilization of the Communist Regime, respectively the Gheorghiu-Dej Regime) and 1965-1989 (the so called “Golden Era” or “The Nicolae Ceaușescu Era”). In the context of this division, this Chapter 1 approaches, among other things, topics such as: the post-war reconstruction, the appearance of identity symbols and marks of the Soviet culture on some buildings (Soviet stars, portraits of certain personalities, slogans etc.), the Socialist Realism and the “cvartal” housing blocks, the Socialist Modernism, the so called “architecture with national specificity”, civic centres, political-administrative headquarters, houses of culture, universal stores, demolitions, systematizations etc.

On the other side, Chapter 2 of the thesis is dedicated to the situation at national level, on the entire territory of Romania, during the post-communist period (1989-present). There are discussed here aspects such as: the management of the buildings and the spaces undertaken in the communist period, changes at the level of visual identity of retail architecture (with the transition from “the universal stores” to the “malls”) etc.

The end of Chapter 2 is marking the end of the General Part and, consequently, the advance towards the Specific Part of the thesis, which discusses the situation at the level of the city of Satu Mare – so, where the discussion is practically about the “identity elements in the transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period”. The topic of the Specific Part overlaps or is practically merging into the theme of the entire thesis. Consisting of 5 chapters (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7), the Specific Part is the main part of the paper – both as topic and as expanse.

Chapter 3, which opens this Specific Part of the paper, is dedicated to the relatively accurate establishment and delimitation, on the plan, of the study area (the central area of the city of Satu Mare). Considering that the limits of the central area of the city of Satu Mare have

not always been the same, throughout the study period (1944-present), setting the limits of the study area has turned into a theme itself, within the research. In principle, it has been taken into account here the usual expansion trend, in time, of the central areas of the cities, as a consequence of their development. Another argument for dedicating a chapter to this theme at this point in the paper, namely at the beginning of the Specific Part, has been that of taking into account a relative necessity, in relation to the research theme, to approach the meaning of the notion “central area” (of a city) – an aspect of influence when it came to the task of selecting those parts of the city to be included, or excluded, from the study area.

In relation to the topics approached in this Chapter 3, in the following, on the background of the research theme, it came about the opportunity and/or necessity to develop a historical study of the city of Satu Mare, with a special focus on its central area, from the moment of the foundation of the locality up to the beginning of the study period of the thesis (year 1944). Such a study was considered opportune also due to its potential of detecting and raising awareness of those sites and buildings of the central area that, considering their history, have gained in time a higher or a smaller relevance and amplitude in terms of identity from several points of view. Such awareness was considered useful in the appreciation effort of the way in which the interventions in the study period (post-war) were related to the identity profiles of the various sites and buildings of the study area (the central area of the city of Satu Mare). All these being considered, this is how Chapters 4 and 5 of the thesis have gained form.

On the one hand, Chapter 4 is dedicated to pursuing, on a planimetric level, by studying historical plans, the transformations the settlement Satu Mare and its central area has gone through from its oldest recorded historical events (from when, preferably, we also have surviving plans) up to the beginning of the study period of the thesis (circa 1944). The historical plans are, therefore, in Chapter 4, the main type of studied documents. They are structuring, in chronologic order, the whole chapter: from the oldest surviving historical plans (a plan from around 1570, in this case) up to the most recent ones from before the post-war period (a plan from around 1930 and two plans from around 1941). The analysis of the historical plans is observing, in the first place, both the current perimeter of the central area and also its connections to the rest of the urban organism and, thus, by extension, to the entire territory of the locality.

On the other side, following Chapter 4, thus channelled from the thematic point of view, Chapter 5 is an approach, both analytical, synthetic and of systematization of the identity coordinates of the study area and its components (buildings, spaces etc.), before the beginning of the study period (the post-war period). Chapter 5 is, thus, a kind of identity radiography of the study area at the entrance to the study period, namely at the beginning of the post-war period or at the end of the inter-war period, as work background for the interventions to come in the post-war period. It is, therefore, practically an effort to shape up what could be called the “identity profile” of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, at the beginning of the post-war period or at the end of the inter-war period.

Chapters 4 and 5 are thus gaining form as context chapters, whose main goal is to contextualize and support the main debate of the thesis, developed in Chapter 6, namely: the identity-focused comment on the transformations the central area of the city of Satu Mare is going through in the post-war period. Considering this thematic orientation that is tending to overlap the theme of the entire paper, Chapter 6 is standing out as the vastest chapter of the thesis, in terms of extension. The structuring and organization of Chapter 6 is following the same method that has been used in the General Part of the thesis: a chronological presentation of the events occurring throughout the study period and a splitting, for this

matter, of the study period into two sub-period, namely “the communist period” (1944-1989) and “the post-communist” (1989-present) – where “the communist period” (1944-1989) is further subdivided into two time subintervals, the same as in the General Part (1944-1965 and 1965-1989).

This way, the situation at the level of the city of Satu Mare appears as a reflection and/or a particularization of the situation at national level, under discussion in the General Part of the thesis (in Chapters 1 and 2). In this respect, Chapter 6 approaches, on the whole, the same aspects from the General Part of the thesis as well as the particular aspects from Satu Mare – except for the eventual aspects that, in spite of their relevance at national level, do not apply in the case of Satu Mare. Thus, here are some of the aspects and topics that are approached in Chapter 6:

- the war consequences and the attitude towards the built environment in the first years of the post-war reconstruction (1944-1950), in Satu Mare;

- the marking of the territory by the new political power installed after 1944, by means of identity elements of the Soviet culture: The Monument of the Soviet Soldier, the Soviet star, 23<sup>rd</sup> August;

- the first blocks of flats of the post-war period in Satu Mare, in the central area, as manifestations of the Socialist Realism, which is characteristic for the 1950s;

- additions to the street fronts and insertions of Socialist Modernism, in the first part of the 1960s;

- Satu Mare and its central area in the mid 1960s, when Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power. It is discussed here the event of the demolition of the synagogue Status Quo Ante, circa 1965. On the site of the demolished synagogue, there is constructed an office building, which shall accommodate the Satu Mare Police headquarters. The event has considerable identity significance and also important consequences in terms of identity;

- the administrative reform of 1968;

- the flooding of 1970 and their consequences (damaged and destroyed buildings that open the perspective of new building and eventually demolishing interventions in the central area);

- newly built landmarks in the central area, right after the flooding: the two residential high-rises next to the current headquarters of the County Museum, the building of Hotel “Aurora”, “The Fashion House”;

- the first ideas for the civic centre;

- the building and inauguration of the civic centre;

- intervention plans in The Liberty Square, in the old/historical centre, in the context of the affirmation on the urban scene, of the new/civic centre;

- the civic centre: the impact on the area, the relationship between the new and the old, elements of aesthetical and visual identity, critical comments, interpretations, significance and relevance in terms of identity, positioning at the level of the collective mentality, evaluation and revaluation of the collective imagery;

- the transition to a new economic model, after 1989, and the impact of this change on architecture: shopping kiosks, advertising posters, the decay of the so called “universal stores” of the communist period;

- new landmarks of the retail architecture, after 1989: shopping spaces of the type “shopping centre” and “shopping mall”;

- the construction of new churches, after 1989, in the central area;

- the rehabilitation of the civic centre, in the post-communism.

Following this vast Chapter 6, the next chapter, namely Chapter 7, is conceived as a partial synthesis that puts an end to the Specific Part of the paper. This chapter shows the three specialized, synthesis plans that have already been mentioned in this summary, under Methodology. These plans are made on the cadastral support of the central area. The first plan is dedicated to the old age of the built environment, the second plan is an analysis of the structure of the central area and the third plan refers to the identity elements in the study area. The plans are conceived so as to be read together. They are, to a certain extent, complementary. Likewise, they are conceived as a planimetric support, serving for the orientation through the study area, by highlighting on the plan the component elements of the central area (buildings, groups of buildings, spaces etc.) that are mentioned throughout the thesis, in the Specific Part. The third synthesis plan, regarding the identity elements, is also accompanied by an annex extended on a few text pages that explain the identity elements highlighted on the plan.

After the closing, by means of Chapter 7, of the Specific Part, the paper advances towards the Experimental Part – it gains the form of a sociologic survey backed up by a brief sociologic inquiry. It has only one chapter, namely Chapter 8 – dedicated to the perception of the new centre of Satu Mare, at present, at the level of the local community. Chapter 8 is divided into 3 subchapters. Subchapter 8.1 shows the structure and the content of the sociologic inquiry that was used, subchapter 8.2 presents the data collected by means of the inquiry and subchapter 8.3 is dedicated to the analysis of the received answers. Subchapter 8.3 is also functioning as a space for formulating some conclusions resulting from the undertaken sociologic survey – and, implicitly, regarding the Experimental Part of the thesis.

## **Achieved results. Discussion on the significance and the relevance of these results**

The research has led, in relation to its goals, to a series of results. In the following, we there shall be mentioned, briefly and selectively, a representative part of these.

At the level of the historical study of the transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare in the post-war period, the achievement was the compiling of a relatively complete chronology, under the given circumstances, considering the specificity and the limitations of a paper such as the one under discussion here, in the present summary. There have been covered, thus, a series of less consistent and less circulated information, even lacunary, regarding certain moments (of the study period) or parts (of the study area). For example, it was possible to reconstruct, broadly, the configuration and the general aspect of the civic centre ensemble, in its hypostasis previous to the construction of the ensemble (in the 1970s and the 1980s). It was possible to further shape up, on this background, what was called “the identity profile” of the site under discussion. In this respect, the information about the particularities and the characteristics of this site, throughout the history of the city, before the construction of the new centre within its limits, has proved to be – in terms of documentary sources – quite rare, incomplete or dissipated.

Also, within the range of quite remarkable results of the research, it should be mentioned, for example, the opportunity to gain access to a few document-photographs regarding the construction of the civic centre of Satu Mare on its site (through the County Museum of Satu Mare) as well as to certain hardly accessible plans from the systematization project of the same civic centre.

Next, at the level of the theoretical study of the identity coordinates of the study area in the study period, the achievement was, on the one part, to highlight and to articulate some considerations of this type (in terms of identity) in relation to a series of buildings and spaces



of the study area. On the other side, another achievement was the shaping of an apparent “gallery” of “identity elements” for the area and the period of study. In this respect, among the elements that form the central area of the city of Satu Mare that were qualified, in a critical manner, as “identity elements”, there could be counted the following:

- the urban ensemble known as “The New Centre” or „The Civic Centre” (constructed during the 1970s and 1980s of the post-war period): probably the most eloquent and representative urban landmark (as surface, size, scale and image) of the post-war period and/or of the so called “communist period” and/or of the so called “Golden Era” in Satu Mare;

- the urban ensemble “The Liberty Square” (classified as a “Category A” historical monument on “The List of Classified Historical Monuments”): the main public space of the type “urban square” surrounded by fronts of buildings, of the so called “Old Centre” of the city (namely of that part of the central area where great part of the old built environment and the old urban tissue has survived, with no considerable interventions in the post-war period);

- “The Administrative Palace” of the “New Centre”(worth mentioning under its original title, namely “The Political-Administrative Headquarters”): the key piece (as an object of architecture) of the “Civic Centre”, the highest landmark of the central area (and of the entire city), the most visible building constructed in the post-war period in the central area, as well as a first rank landmark (in the sense of “exponent”) of “the aesthetics of the national specificity” in the Romanian post-war architecture;

- “The House of Culture of the Trade Union” and “Someșul Universal Store”, of the “Civic Centre”: other two landmark buildings of the so called “communist period”;

- The Great Temple: the main place of worship of the Jewish community of the city that could be considered the main identity landmark of the Jewish culture and of the Mosaic cult in Satu Mare;

- Vasile Lucaciu Boulevard: a public space of the green esplanade type, landscaped on a segment of a disused branch of the river Someș. This space is considered an “identity element” at least from the perspective of preserving the memory of this disused branch of the river.

- a Socialist-Realist housing block on the Ștefan cel Mare Street, corner with Marsilia Street. This is one of first larger blocks that were built in the central area, in the post-war period. It could be appreciated, within the context, that its edification was an event with a certain identity significance of “new”. Likewise, some of its architectural characteristics, such as the size or the decorative approach, is recommending it for the status of the most representative exponent, within the central area, of the aesthetical model of the Socialist-Realism – an aesthetical model of Soviet import that is carrying, in the opinion of the author of the thesis, quite a strong identity dimension, as benchmark of the Soviet cultural colonisation of the Romanian space, at the beginning of the post-war period. It should be mentioned here that not all the buildings and blocks of housing constructed in the so called “communist period” have been considered in the paper “identity elements” – although they all carry to certain extent identity significance. Their identity relevance, as a group, was however pointed out in the text of the paper.

The above examples represent only a small part of the component elements of the central area that have been classified within the paper as “identity elements”. In this respect, in the synthesis plan on identity elements there have been marked as such around seventy elements.

Also, the thesis has pointed out some identity elements that were put in relation to the transformations of the central area, but which are now lost, having disappeared over time. A relevant example would be the Monument of the Soviet Soldier – a public monument topped by a Soviet star, implanted at the beginning of the post-war period in the main public space of

the central area, today's Liberty Square. Although the monument was removed from the square at the beginning of the post-communist period, it was considered as an "identity element" because it carried an identity-relevant message of belonging to the Soviet world and culture, being implanted in the space as a vector of identity rhetoric, through politics. Its positioning in the very core of the central area, within the main public space of the city – on a site where a statue of Vasile Lucaciu once stood – brought about an impactful transformation of the image of that particular public space within the central area. Replacing the image of Vasile Lucaciu with that of the Soviet soldier and that of the Soviet star was thus an act of "transformation", with important identity implications, which entailed some elements that could be labelled as "identity elements" (the Monument of the Soviet Soldier, the Soviet star on its top, and the statue of Vasile Lucaciu). Currently, on the site that was made available following the dismantling of the Monument of the Soviet Soldier, one can find the statue of Vasile Lucaciu being placed, once again, on its original position – and all these events have been approached and commented, within the paper, from the point of view of identity.

## **Conclusions – in brief**

Every transformation of a space has a dimension of identity. A transformation of a space, such as an urban space, means the disappearance of something, respectively the appearance or emergence of something else, in that space. The thing that disappears has a specific identity profile, while the thing that emerges has another such profile. The differences between these identity profiles can be bigger or smaller, more numerous or less numerous, more profound or more superficial, more consistent or less consistent – as the transformation of the space can be more or less consistent. In this sense, the thesis has explored the identity-related profiles and facets of the more or less consistent transformations of the central area of the city of Satu Mare, in the post-war period: from the scale of the architectural detail (micro) up to the scale of urban restructuring (macro).

At the level of the architectural detail of a façade of a building, for example, a beam end that is modelled to evoke the "swallowtail" model of wooden jointing has, according to the considerations that have been exposed within the thesis, a certain degree of relevance for the idea of "identity". It expresses the idea that the building belongs to the Romanian cultural space – where "swallowtail"-type wooden joints are frequent and, in a sense, "specific" to Romanian building culture. Such an element of detail is, in this way, an argument for an architecture "with specificity", be it "national". It is, therefore, a vector of identity rhetoric and, if it's to invoke one of the key phrases of the terminology of the thesis, an "identity element". When such an "identity element" is being used in the architecture of a new building, such as The House of Culture of the Workers' Unions or the Political-Administrative Headquarters in Satu Mare, as the construction of these buildings induces a transformation of the sites on which they are standing, the "identity element" is associable with the transformation of those sites. And if those sites are located within the central area of the city, then the architectural detail in question ("the swallowtail") is an "identity element" that's associable with the transformation, in the broader sense, of the central area of that city. In this order of ideas, the "swallowtail" architectural detail is relevant for the topic of the thesis.

At the opposite side from the point of view of the amplitude of the transformation, in terms of size and/or scale, the restructuring of a whole part of the central area obviously has a considerable relevance with regards to identity – through the amplitude of the change that, naturally, triggers a review of the identity profile of that specific site. Between the scale of the architectural detail and the scale of urban restructuring, the sheer construction of a building could be viewed from the point of view of identity, through the identities that it represents or

embeds. If the new building replaces an old one, which is demolished in order to make space for the new one, then one can discuss about the disappearance (or the disintegration) of the identity associated with the demolished building, and respectively about the emergence (or the aggregation) of a new identity, specific to the new building. Several examples have been approached throughout the thesis, in this sense. Comparisons between old and new are, in such cases, relevant for the identity-oriented critical debate.

Therefore: every transformation of an urban space, regardless of the amplitude and features of the transformations, has a dimension of identity. The transformation engages a series of aspects that are relevant for the topic of identity, respectively elements that can be labelled as “identity elements”. Every transformation of a site thus generates a review of the identity profile of that specific site – and the study of the dimension of identity of an urban space that has been transformed in time could prove itself useful in many ways, on multiple layers.