Bucharest: The public space in the residential areas.

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Abstract:
Used inevitable every single day, by all people, despite the age, social class, economic status of ethnicity, public space represents a great deal in our wellbeing and in the image of the city. In particularly, residential public spaces do have a high economic, social and emotional importance. The present empirical study aims to highlight the first step in a complex process of planning. The observation of the most important issues of the residential public spaces in Bucharest represents the foundation of future researches themes like urban planning, social wellbeing and segregation, urban image and urban identity. Considering the recent history of the city the main focus is set on the elementary challenge to adapt the democratic modern life style and expectation to a predominantly socialist urban structure.

Key words: public space, Bucharest
Introduction

The public space in the residential areas is of great importance out of economic, social and emotional point of view. More than that, it represents the mirror of the people living in a specific area. Of course, a great responsibility lies on the local authorities and the urban planners shoulder within this areas. Over the time the public space caught the attention of sociologist, planners, economists or geographer. From the simple definition, as an area accessible for everyone at anytime (DEX), it revealed a complexity of issues concerning the property, use and design of those spaces. Consequently, R. Sennett (1983) is talking about the fall and the end of the public space, while Carr S. (1992) is looking for a new form and describes it as a scene where the drama of the common life takes place. A detailed study on the public space “between buildings” is made by Gehl J. (1986). The urban designer, recognized about 30 years ago the importance of the relations between the environment and the activities in the public urban space. Based on former studies we can say that every public space has the same pattern, but still there are considerable differences stressed out by historical, cultural, ethnical and social singularities.

Public spaces, generally speaking, do represent an important component of the perception of urban image and further more of the urban identity. It can be in the same time of high influence in the potential and competitiveness of a city, especially considering the more globalised tendency of development. R. Comfort (2011) stresses out the economic impact in the identity creation of a city, by using visual elements to increase competitiveness. At the bottom of the visual elements that has as purpose to increase its attractiveness lies the public space.

The study is based on a long term critical observation of the different residential areas (highly dependent on the morphology and structure of each neighbourhood), a subdivision and typology of the public spaces in cities, with a focus on those located in the residential areas and an interactive communication with citizens and visitors on the image of the capital neighbourhoods. The following paper examines the public open space in the residential area of Bucharest using the above presented study methods and zooming in on the challenges of the new modern era trying to adapt to out-
dated planning structures of the past. The aim of the paper is to point out in a critical view the main issues of the open public space in Bucharest. It is so for the reason that before taking any action in overcome planning and social difficulties it is first of all important to identify the problem as a hole. Therefore the approach is rather descriptive than analytical.

**Historical framework**

As most of the old cities, Bucharest was strongly influenced by its historical past, leaving behind visible evidences. In its morphology and structure harsh disruption are distinguishable, especially between the areas dominated by single houses and those marked by narrow block of flats. These fractures were caused by the power takeover in 1947 by the socialist regime, a fact that lead to a complete change of the original pathway development of the city. The new policy, or rather the new ideology, brings fundamental changes on the political, economical and social level. (Giurescu C. G., 2009) The main focus was set on the enforced industrialization and so the urban areas. The urban industrial boom of that period and the migration flow from the rural to the urban areas brought with it duplication in time of Bucharest residence from 992.536 people in 1941 to 2.036.894 in 1989. (INSS) To support the newcomers, workers in the new built factories and plants entire districts rose from the scratch at the periphery of the capital city. In the same time through a embedment of surrounding localities and the creation of new neighbourhoods the total surface of Bucharest from 6.800 ha in 1935 to over 25.600 ha in 1951 (Ionăşcu I. at. al., 1961; Parusi GH., 2005a).

Different than before, when private constructions were built without a proper urban planning and when the private interest prevails over the collective, in the socialist era the housing assembles had a very clear structure (see Figure 1). The smallest administrative unit, between 2 and 8 ha, is designed for to serve 400 to 2.500 inhabitants. The access to the so called group of dwellings is made through local streets or dead end streets and has daily facility units (play grounds, rest areas, parks, and basic products and services units). The micro-districts (“microraioane”) are composed of several groups of dwellings serving 3.000 to 12.000 inhabitants.
and covering between 15 to 45 ha. These units are bounded by collector streets and equipped with daily and periodical units to serve the population, respectively sport, recreation and leisure facilities, library, sanitation and maintenance centres, parking lots and garages. The more complex *neighbourhoods*, bounded by large roads, include occasional service units (mail office, police, polyclinic, cinema, market and shopping centres). And finally, the district considered by the planners a local administrative unit designed for cities of over 200,000 inhabitants and includes in its structure city halls, parks, schools, etc. (Radu L., 1965; Stoian D. 2011)

![Diagram of territorial-administrative organization in socialist Bucharest.](www.britishpathe.com)

**Public space in residential areas**

Public spaces are used every single day by a wide range of people. But in time the reason of using those spaces changed once the society developed. If in former times the main reason for using public spaces was to socialize, to meet other people, it is now rather an act of necessity. Therefore J. Gehl (1986) divides the urban public spaces in three types of activities: necessary, optional activates, and social activities. Schneider B. (2000) classifies public
spaces using criteria as: accessibility, permeability, orientation, cohesion, proportionality, and attractively. A third method to classify those spaces is by taking in consideration the level of usage (see figure bellow).

![Fig. 2 Pyramid of public spaces after the level of usage](image)

The public spaces in the residential areas in Bucharest are very complex. As mentioned before, this complexity is based on the varied typology of residential areas, depending on the structure of the housing assemblies: single family or collective housing, property value, the ethnic composition and the degree of modernization. To this we need to add the political and administrative factors/division, most of all a good management of the responsible institutions and a good legislation on the use of areas of common interest. Starting again from the classification made by J. Gehl (1986) we can dived the residential public spaces in three categories: necessary spaces including parking lots and garbage disposals), leisure and socialization area (playgrounds for children of different age, meeting points for young and old people) and aesthetic and well being elements (image of the neighbourhood, cleanness, safety).
Considering the historical background of the Romanian capital city functional and structural challenges are to be recognised. The strongest issues of the urban public spaces in Bucharest are concerning the parking lots, the playgrounds, green spaces and leisure places, safety, cleanliness or aesthetics. For a better understanding of the current situation, and as a first step in finding solutions, this challenge is as in an empirical way analysed bellow.

**Parking spaces**

The number of cars compared with that of the residential parking spaces is overwhelming. According to the Direction of Driving Licenses and Vehicle Registration in 2006 almost one million personal cares were registered in Bucharest and it is estimated to reach 1.6 million by the end of 2012 (www.wall-street.ro). This is the main cause of the overcrowded public spaces in the residential areas, especially the sidewalks and green areas, provided actually to serve other activities and limiting the space of pedestrians (see Fig. 1). While in some districts authorities try to find solutions and to plan parking spaces (see Fig. 2), others give proof of indifference by neglecting useful space (see Fig. 3). Another issue in relation with the “asphyxiation” of the residential public spaces by cars is the unauthorized constructions of car sheds in some districts (see Fig. 4). Not only that they occupy public property in personal interest but the overall image of those constructions is negatively influencing.

![Fig. 3 Overcrowded residential street (Drumul Taberei Neighbourhood, 2011)](image-url)
Fig. 4 Parking spaces in Aviatorilor Neighbourhood, 2011)

Fig. 5 Neglected parking space in Militari Neighbourhood, 2011)

Fig. 6 Unauthorised cars sheds in Ferentari Neighbourhood, 2011
The issues raised by the deficient parking spaces to serve the population is caused by a defective planning in the socialist area, where only few people could afford to own a car compared with today’s state of arts. It is in the same time a question of mentality since the ownership of a car is a social status indicator for Romania. This is why the solution to these problems lies in the residence of Bucharest much more than in the planning capacities of the authorities.

**Green spaces**

The green spaces in the residential areas represent an extremely important factor in the wellbeing of the residence. The distribution and the biodiversity are as important as the care with which it is organized. If the main issue of the parking spaces is the insufficient number for the constantly increasing personal cars, in the case of the green spaces the main concern is the neglect to care for those spaces. It is common seen that large green areas around buildings are covered with wildly grown weeds affecting the image of the place (see Fig. 5).

The design and care of the public space is a direct responsibility of the each district hall and its close cooperation with the Organisation of the public and private domain. An example of good practice was shown in recent years by the 4th district of Bucharest. In a very short time most of the green spaces had been taken care of, a fact highly appreciated by the local population.

It is known that one of the main activities in residential areas is that of socializing. The socialization takes place in this environment for all age groups (children playing around, teenagers meeting and spending time together, adults who meet up, or elderly joining in there lowliness). The observations made by the authors of this paper reviled that the more an environment is visually attractive and planed in supporting social activities the more people participate. As a result this rules out in some way the statement of Ioan A. (2007) that for having public life there is no need to have a special planed area.
Free time / Playgrounds

Closely related to the green spaces are the “free time” spaces and the playgrounds. Even in the modern society, where the virtual world took over our lives, open public spaces are sought. Especially young children and elderly use on a constant basis these meeting environments. More than that, the modern society understood the advantages of a well planned playground by its educational and social role. Playgrounds stimulate creativity, forms aptitudes as communication, team play, self confidence or emotional intelligence. For the children’s pleasure but most of all for their safety, playgrounds need to follow strict rules. In case of Bucharest playgrounds in most of the neighbourhoods need improvement. Insecurity and neglected is a characteristic for some, congestion for others.
Safety and cleanliness

Safety in open public space is another important issue to be discussed. And it is not about the criminality rate, but the huge number of stray dogs that become a widely problem as well for the residence as for the animal lovers. According to the Authority for Animal Supervision and Protection, Bucharest hosts more than 40 000 stray dogs. Numerous attempts were made to find a solution, but with low success.

Unresolved are in many places cleanliness of the public spaces. A practical example lie in the garbage bins of the common dwellings (see figure 9). As you will see bellow the cleanliness represents for the residential population an important fact in the perception of the urban image.
Image and perception of selected districts in Bucharest

In former researches the image of Bucharest city was analysed by involving as much as possible the residential as well as the visiting population of the capital. Yet unpublished results show interesting opinion in the population’s perception of the urban image. Using questionnaires we could obtain results on the urban perception, image and satisfaction of the local population, but also the main causes of dissatisfaction. In relation to the current paper we selected two analysed aspects. First of all we asked what are the features that a neighbourhood needs for a favourable urban image and second the main factor of dissatisfaction in the residential neighbourhood of the interrogated individual. As we can observe in figure
10 to 14 it is clear that the main factors of dissatisfaction lie among the main issues of the open public space.

Fig. 10 Main feature lieng on the basics that favours urban image, 2006

Fig. 11 Main factors of dissatisfaction towerd the residential area, 2006
Fig. 12 Main feature lying on the basics that favours urban image, 2008

Fig. 13 Main factors of dissatisfaction toward the residential area, 2008
Conclusion

It is easy to conclude that the main planning and social issues detected among the public urban spaces in the residential area of Bucharest are in accordance with the basic elements in the populations need for an ideal neighbourhood and represent in the same time the main elements of dissatisfaction toward the residential area in which they live.

Secondly, it is clear that even an up in detailed planned urban structure will sooner or later obsolete, needing works of adaptation to a new society that has other expectances and aspirations. As a result the socialist regime did not planed the micro-districts having in mind such a huge number of cars. On the other hand the possession of a car nowadays represents for many Romanian people a mark of the social status. The green spaces, playgrounds, garbage bins or the safety requires more attention from the local authorities as well from the owners association. The question of the ownership and the actual responsibility for these spaces prevented from a good planning and management.

Finally, closely related to the problem of ownership is the question: “If the public space belongs to anyone, than who takes relay care for it” and then the attitude “if it doesn’t belong to me, than why should I care”.

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