

BUILDING PROJECTS IN BUCHAREST AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY BETWEEN DELAY AND ABANDONMENT*

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Abstract: During the last decade of the 19th century, several large-scale architecture projects were launched in Bucharest, dealing with outstanding public edifices. Unfortunately, the insufficient financial resources repeatedly forced the mayorship and the Government to postpone, or even abandon for good, the accomplishment of a number of these works, although in some cases all the necessary demarches had been already carried out. Additionally, for lack of a coherent strategy on the capital city development, several urban interventions, deemed as vital in terms of city modernization, were irrevocably given up.

Rezumat: În ultima decadă a secolului al XIX-lea, în București au fost începute mai multe proiecte de anvergură pentru realizarea unor edificii publice importante. Din păcate, lipsa mijloacelor financiare a constrâns de multe ori Primăria și autoritățile să amâne, sau chiar să renunțe definitiv, la finalizarea unora dintre aceste construcții, chiar și în cazul în care demersurile necesare fuseseră deja încheiate. În absența unei strategii bine definite privitoare la evoluția orașului, mai multe intervenții necesare modernizării capitalei și îndeosebi bunei funcționări a acesteia, au fost complet abandonate.

In early 19th century, once Romania perceived the influence of the western cultural movements, Bucharest gradually underwent a change in its look from an oriental settlement toward a European city, albeit it reached a modern appearance not before the first urban scale operations were carried out. During the last decades of the 19th century and early 20th century, the building works conducted in the capital city significantly modified the urban shape, while the reconfiguration of the street network and, implicitly, that of the plot pattern brought about changes in the land division and renewal of the building stock. Since then, Bucharest's development has been coordinated by specific regulations, with the new legislation on building and urbanism exerting a powerful influence in terms of modernization.

The process of the urban metamorphosis, which started since the very first years of the 19th century, gathered momentum in the aftermath of the Union of the Principalities,¹ once the public institutions of the modern Romanian State have been set up. There was an undoubted need of appropriate buildings for all the bodies settled in the days of Cuza² and consolidated after the coming of Carol I,³ in such fields as administration, legislation, justice as well as education and culture. The great public edifices erected in this respect have contributed to the reshaping of the city's architectural profile.

Nevertheless, until the Romanian War of Independence (1877), which brought the autonomy from the Ottoman Empire, the Government lacked the necessary financial resources to provide public institutions with their own new premises. Following the proclamation of the kingdom,⁴ the economy went on an upward path⁵ and public budgets continuously expanded, allowing the Government to lend substantial amounts of money⁶ with an aim to build railways, modernize roads and erect public edifices. Against the background of the significant progress recorded after 1881, Romania could be deemed as a prosperous state.

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¹ The Union of the Principalities took place on January 24, 1859 and consisted of the unification of the old states Moldavia and Wallachia.

² Alexandru Ioan Cuza. The first ruler of the United Principalities between 1859 and 1866.

³ Carol I, born Prince Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. He was reigning prince and then King of Romania from 1866 to 1914.

⁴ Romania was proclaimed kingdom on May 10, 1881.

⁵ Aslan 1905, p. 167.

⁶ Aslan 1905, p. 182. From 1881 to 1887, the loans extended to various ministries amounted to lei 471,574,203.73.