

Building from the Past

Exemplary project regarding the transformation of Kogălniceanu Street in Cluj-Napoca

The architectural development of Transylvanian cities has undergone many changes since the First World War until the end of the century. The Trianon Peace Treaty, the Vienna Dictate, the Second World War, the new political order that followed these periods impacted the organic development of the cities. These changes and their stratification can be felt especially when we analyze public spaces. Disappeared or relocated works from public spaces, functional transformations of squares, new approaches to urban development determine more significantly and faster the link that expresses the identity between the urban public space and its environment, than changing the number of buildings. These changes can be observed in many Transylvanian cities and can be considered typical of the region in a certain sense.

As part of my research, which deals with the contemporary transformation of Transylvanian public spaces, I focused on areas with historical tradition that have recently gone under restoration or have been planned to be transformed in Cluj-Napoca. In this publication, I focused on the project in Kogălniceanu Street, conducted by MOSSFERN and MVAA Office of Architects. This project promises a special renewal, which will integrate the historical layers of the street, and strives using the broad spectrum of perception to reintroduce this essential historical space of Cluj-Napoca in the pedestrian circuit.

The project regarding the transformation of Kogălniceanu Street in Cluj-Napoca was announced in 2018, being designated as the winner project, which was submitted by the MOSSFERN and MVAA Architecture Office. The primary purpose of the project is not only to hand over the street for pedestrian traffic, but to create an intervention, taking into consideration the architectural and cultural values in the street, which respond appropriately to the complexity of the place: the Baroque, the Neoclassical, the Modernist and the Brutalist architectural heritage. But in the project made by the architects, knowing the past did not play just a role in understanding the character of public spaces. Through the analysis and integration in the project of the values created over time, they have strived to create an architectural quality that would become an example for the transformation of other public spaces in Transylvania. An interesting curve, the smooth changing of the textures, a small fountain, are all new elements of the space, which were made in a planned way and with purposeful meaning. Such barely perceptible changes at first sight will make the appearance and the intellectual content of Kogălniceanu Street unique and more significant. The gradually narrowing width of the street, the reformed church built in Gothic style at the end of the street, the Tailors' Tower, the displaced statues which adorned the tympanum of Babeş-Bolyai University of Sciences, the stones of the church which were used to build the Báthory István Highschool, the former theatre in the street - where Jászai Mari once played the role of Gertrudis - all represent the layers and the events of the past, which cannot be left out of attention during the transformation of a public space.

In order to find out more about the transformations that will take place, I contacted the architect Macalik Arnold, who told me that the details of the architectural intervention were consistently thought out, from the most important parts to the smallest details, and that during the design not only the visual elements were taken into consideration, but also their overall perceptual projection (auditory, haptic, olfactory) and the effect exerted by them. But let us move from the most important parts to the smallest details.

What we will notice for the first time is the change in the size of the cobblestones: in University Street, a larger cobblestone has been designed, and in Kogălniceanu Street, a smaller one. On Kogălniceanu Street, we will be able to see again larger elements only at the entrances of the houses, respectively at the entrance to the garden of the ruins. This feature, aimed to emphasize the representative character of the buildings, can be observed in many places, especially in front of the entrance to St. Michael's Church.

The formation of a green area in front of the church is also an important and vigorous feature of landscaping. This comes to emphasize the vertical dimensions of Gothic architecture; thus, the church will look higher. Because its weight and size cannot be perceived from a distance, we will notice its grandeur only after we get out from under the trees.

Another peculiarity, which strongly defines the character of the street, is its level (height) and its sloping. The level of Kogălniceanu Street has not changed much in recent centuries. This feature was treated by the designers

as a special architectural value, because the street kept in its longitudinal direction that fine elevation which characterized the construction of the old streets. One of the characteristic elements, the slope towards the water collection ditch located in the middle of the street, has been transformed over time. However, following the restriction of vehicle traffic and its transformation into a pedestrian street, the need to direct rainwater to the edges has ceased, and thus the characteristic fine slope can be restored, which defined the image of the street before the 19th century.

In order to remove the unworthy situation that appeared on University Street, the current parking lot is arranged, and the statue of the Virgin Mary is moved back - which is currently behind the church of Saint Peter. The reinstatement of the statue will be the most important element of this part of the space, an artwork that was commissioned by Kornis Antal and his wife in 1744, on the occasion of the cessation of the plague epidemic. In order to emphasize its central role, the statue will be visually interconnected with the old gates in the square. Thus, by interpreting this part of the market as an open-air urban salon and focusing on the column of the statue of the Virgin Mary as the central nucleus, the market will undergo significant changes, both in terms of form and content. In addition, it is worth mentioning here that the reinstatement of the statue will take place after a new epidemic, a new difficult period.

In terms of vegetation, Kogălniceanu Street will be enriched. Not only the space in front of the church will be populated with vegetation, but the street will be colored with lime trees, whose flowers bring a new sensual layer to the renewed atmosphere. Also, around the statue of the Virgin Mary there will be placed Ginkgo trees, which are not only the oldest plant species on Earth, but they are also known as a symbol of harmony and vitality. Alongside with the planting of new trees, a large part of the old trees has been preserved. Significant replacements took place only in the University Square, in order to highlight the statue of the Virgin Mary and to better highlight the baroque facades that define the square.

After discussing the major details, I moved on to the discussion of those minor interventions, which have a significant effect on the perception of the atmosphere of the space. One such element is a feature of the sound of the street that they want to bring back at several points. The presence of bird nests and thus the amplification of bird songs would take place following a conscious architectural decision. It is desired to achieve this by placing the lighting in a lower position because, due to the current height of the electricity poles, the crown of the trees is illuminated from a higher height, which is why birds do not build their nests in those crowns. Another planned auditory experience would be the sound of water dripping in front of the church. Water has an obvious symbolic role in the Christian culture. In a religious sense, it has a role in the process of baptism, initiation, purification, so this gesture would strengthen the sacred character of the church and the square. Another important auditory element is represented by the smooth sound of footsteps, determined by the beaten earth surface in front of the church, which gives the square a garden look, thus supporting the creation of a quiet and peaceful historical atmosphere around the church.

From the point of view of memorials, Kogălniceanu Street is enriched after the transformation. A new memorial is set up for great personalities and university professors, located in front of the main entrance of Babeş-Bolyai University of Sciences, placed on the pavement. Because there have been countless ruptures during the operation of the university in its history, throughout the enumeration, the boundaries between certain periods will be indicated by leaving larger blank spaces. According to the architectural idea, this inscription will appear more withdrawn, not as a characteristic accent, but as part of the street.

The tools of the planned transformation of the public space do not aim to make observable the historical layers of the space in a didactic way, but by using symbolic means, small features; it was more important to make them become an integrated part of our everyday life. Instead of egocentric architectural solutions, the role of contemporary architecture here was to focus on creating a dialogue between eras, so the architectural problems could be solved by minimal interventions, by simple changing of functionalities, as in the future reconstruction of the Cetățuie Hill (Citadel), where - for solving the existing imbalances between the Cetățuie Hill (Citadel), the Belvedere Hotel and the existing natural heritage - the project members, Metapolis Architects, Atelier Mass and Horhat Ana propose an elegant solution, using, first of all, landscaping tools. While working on obtaining information related to the contemporary transformation of public spaces in Cluj-Napoca, my research focused on the analysis of elements that did not refer to issues related to traffic or urban planning, but belonged to the projection aimed at the sensual aspect, which is able to highlight the historical layers of the space as an auditory effect, as a sensation, as a simple gesture. The transformation of Kogălniceanu Street, by MOSSFERN and MVAA

Office of Architects will make the diverse and rich cultural heritage of Cluj-Napoca a worthwhile part of our everyday life.

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