

***Planning as interface, The
Strategic Concept of
Bucharest***

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Introduction.

Urban planning in Bucharest in the last seven decades can be broken-down into two major periods: five decades of totalitarian regime in which planning was exclusively publicly run and funded and the following two decades that were under the auspices of the private sector. Nevertheless, the recent five years marked by the financial crisis are also opening new planning perspectives.

Following the over-turn of Communist Regime in '89 the city of Bucharest experienced 20 years of dramatic change, such as massive sprawl development and running down of existing areas inside the city. Furthermore, as mobility increased and people's reasons to get around diversified, the city center could no longer satisfy an augmenting overall demand for services, retail, and workplaces and thus became an "undesired" place.

Parallel to this process the involvement of the municipality was almost inexistent, discouraged by the absence of a guiding strategic framework, so the private sector became a key player in development as well as in planning. Consequently, social and economic inequalities rose and new "profitable" interventions turned old historical fabrics in conflicting areas. In present, due to the financial crisis, neither the public nor the private sectors can sustain the development of the city and this apparently decreased dynamic in investment sets the premises for the creation of the Strategic Concept for Bucharest 2035 (CSB2035) that comes as a response to the need of having a guiding vision for Bucharest.

Although it is meant to be a strategy in its complete form, it is before everything aiming at three major points:

- A regeneration of the valuable areas that instate Bucharest with its current identity
- A recuperation of the places that were left behind by the recent development so as to a system of centralities is reinforced.
- Creating a basis of dialogue for the different involved actors and stake-holders so as to the further development is done on a democratic basis.



Development.

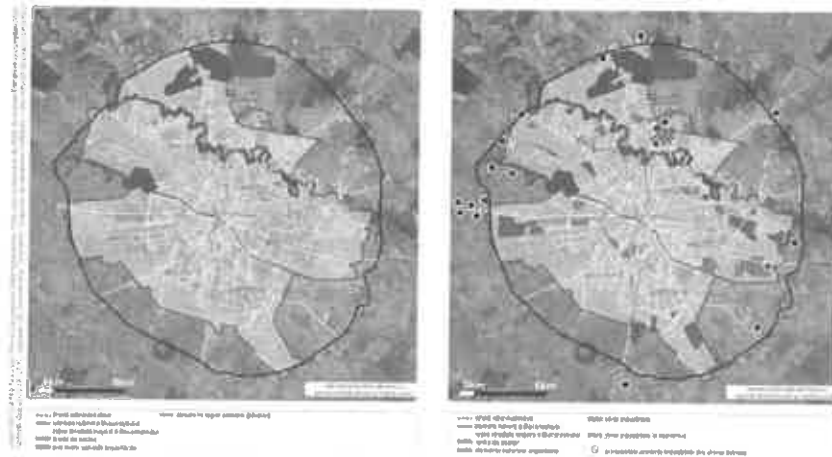
For a better understanding of the present situation a short overview of the premises and traits of previous major periods is necessary

Convergence of planning and ideology in the communist period

The situation of Bucharest in 2011 cannot be judged separated of its historical context: having been severely transformed by centralized authoritarian interventions for several decades before 1989, it witnessed a dramatic turn right afterwards. In the communist period, through a massive and exclusive public funding construction process, intensive building projects focusing on radically changing the image of the pre-existing city took place all over Bucharest, in order to ensure the representation of the political and ideological order.

Today these projects have become very strong constitutive elements of the city: a collective dwelling area belt around the city center, followed by a belt of industrial areas as well as large projects for public representation, namely the People's House (for which 450 ha of land was cleared out in the historical area). In the meantime all these interventions were thought in an interdependent manner, so for example the dwelling areas were very well connected to the working places by good public transport infrastructure. Also, this ideal of strong and predetermined vision comes with an obsession with the idea of containment, of over-regulation of both social life and of physical aspects of the city which was the driving force behind the communist ideology.

Let alone the constructive impulse of this period, three aspects have to be emphasized as everything has to succumb to a new order and so several consequences arise: almost everything that pre-exists these interventions is either ignored, or in some unfortunate cases destroyed; a progressive erosion of urban public space occurs and city life and public manifestation is reduced to acclaiming the political order, and thirdly, the individual initiative is almost completely oppressed so no private initiative acts in a disobeying manner.



(image1 source: www.csb2035.ro)

The two belts (collective dwellings and industry) added during the communist period

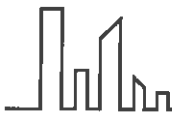
The post-communist period: disjunctive planning and laissez faire

The fall of the Communist regime in 1989 represents both a symbolic and a physical liberation from this containment. This is why it coincides with an explosion, a fast outburst that makes all the layers of the urban existence expand in the periphery. Taking advantage of a disoriented State the openness towards the market logic leads to a strong emergence of the private sector which is apparent both in real estate sector as well as in other layers of the city's economy.

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Up until 2008, following different phases of development, the city is confronted with a process of de-containment by progressively conceding its substance. Its outside borders disappear, ceding place for successive residential areas: „the Megalopolis of today and tomorrow seems only to extend the metropolises beyond their limits, to add a new belt of residential suburbs and thus to aggravate fatigues, uncertainties and insecurity” (Lyotard 1993).

The second phase of this expansion, although similar to the first in its character, is pertained by a reorientation in two directions: the inner void left between the older city and the further outskirts witnesses the accumulation of capital that is dramatically reshaping a former natural landscape and, secondly, small, fragmented and over- densified interventions alter the historical, old, fabric of the city through contrasting insertions.



(image2 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
The Diagram is showing the recent fringe development of Bucharest leaving behind large empty spaces between the corridors of urbanization. While the overall urbanized surface increases by almost 30% a series of problems is emerging: extreme soil coverage, territorial fragmentation, increased traffic and a higher complexity of accessibility and mobility patterns. The apparent extension of the city (in light-yellow) stimulates large investments and projects for high capacity road infrastructure. The tentacle development comprises mainly individual housing projects (light-yellow) and some large retail or storage areas (orange) that revolve around the inner city.

We must at this point emphasize an important aspect: the urban development following the change of political power in 1989 is done, almost entirely, with very little public control but most of all without a centralized vision, only through incremental add-ons. Private initiative triggers a very dynamic development, sustained by the openness to the global market. Headquarters and the subsidiaries of multi-national companies and large retail surfaces are artificially replicating the idea of center as every new investment is the promise of a focal point. The newly invested void areas are also occupied by large residential areas in a continuous fringe of urbanization especially in the northern part that goes as much as 40km away from the city center. The city acquires two different perspectives: a territorial city that gradually dissipates from the center towards the margins and immerses in its environment, defining an urban continuum that follows the main regional thoroughfares; on the other hand, a fragmented structure as this territorial structure integrates former outside areas in its confinement: patchwork city, territorial city (Gausa 2005). Following the city's historical radio-concentric development it can be argued that the new territorial structure is just a natural



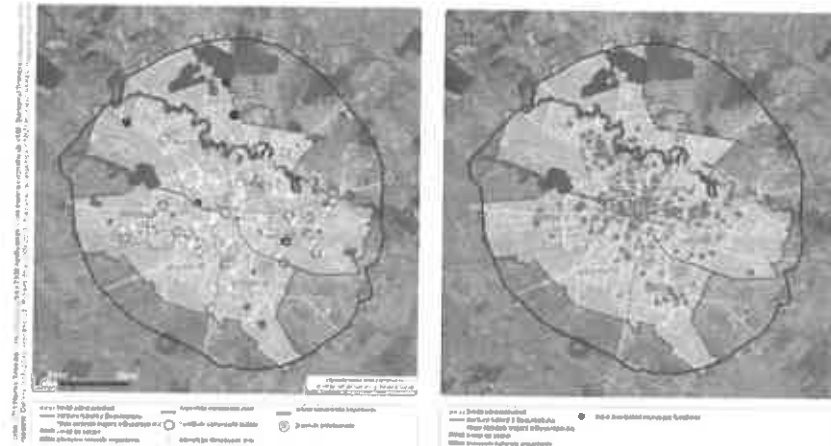
continuation, although meanwhile the radial development occurs almost naturally the concentric development comes just as a way of artificially maintaining a geometric vision of the city.

So, in the two decades following the overturn of political regime in '89 the value added to city life was in its majority related exclusively to people's revenues and to a change in lifestyle whilst a progressive consumption of urban space and inefficient conversions of large industrial areas were apparent.

„The general lesson taught us by the world is that relative deprivation alone may not abort the take-off of development. But when it is combined with adverse market trends in historical moments of great vulnerability, it is almost certain to do so.” (Janos 2000, p. 410)

Similarities and learned lessons?

The two decades following the revolution of '89 were also characterized by a development impulse that in some aspects was similar to the previous one; both periods responded solely to their dictating factors and tendencies; so first point would be a sort of tunnelled-vision thinking that creates collateral problems. Secondly, an almost complete ignorance of city's historical fabric which led to its constant destruction or alteration. A third problem is the time span envisaged which was either too long-term oriented and rigid or too short-term oriented; in short a lack of realism. Last but not least, the actorship was limited to those involved in decision-making thus excluding other important layers of the overall population such as civil society representatives or disadvantaged layers.



(image3 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
The new retail areas developed after '90 and main functions of the city demonstrate a very poor service for peripheral areas oriented almost exclusively towards commercial activities.



(image 4 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
The areas of poverty (left) and the high capacity public transport infrastructure (right) show an enclavisation in the marginal areas further amplified by the lack of transportation.

Before and after the fall of the communist regime in '89, Bucharest saw a very dynamic development, unequally reflected in its territory of influence with negative consequences. But, in both periods these consequences were also amplified by binomial of too much or too few:

- control: proper strategic and operational documents
- orientation: planning mechanisms and no adequate institutions
- coordination: coherent financing
- monitoring: system of benchmarking or indicators to evaluate the development



The immediate effect of this complex of factors is visible in the present city under the following aspects:

- a continuous territorial expansion that generates an exhaustion of the surrounding areas through sprawl and tentacle development that goes as far as 40 km away from the city-center
- an increased vulnerability of the natural environment doubled by an aggravation of climatic behavior
- the functionality of the city as a whole is severely altered as new parasite areas induce a dramatic increase of mobility demanding infrastructural support at high costs. An increase of social segregation and territorial imbalances mainly between the North and the South are also strong issues to deal with

The economic crisis – a possible opportunity?

The area of influence of the city is characterized by a process of economic and demographic decline with ample imbalances between North - North East and South whilst the Capital is putting pressure on this territory, absorbing socio-economic resources and compromising natural resources. Initially, the economic structure of Bucharest is strongly affected by a deindustrialization process followed by an interval of economic growth based on consumption, associated services as well as speculative real estate. Their effect is detrimental, and amplified in the economic crisis period, with regard to high performance and creative services. The low competitiveness of Bucharest does not value a qualified workforce and is affected by the lack for longer term economic policies, programs or projects regarding the development of technological or research facilities. A further consequence is the attractiveness for investors and visitors as well as the role of capital which are reduced due to a poor infrastructure for accessibility. Even if more developed than at the national level, the overall competitiveness is clearly insufficient at a regional level, not to speak of the global one.

In 2011, Bucharest is "the result of an incoherent and unequal process of development, lacking a clear long-term vision, unsupported by territorial cooperation, unsustainable and generating multiple social imbalances, development that took inadequate advantage of its resources by ignoring its local distinctive competences. The city is perceived by its inhabitants as not having fulfilled its role as a catalyst of the Romanian economy in the last ten years whilst offering a poor quality of life and attractiveness" (CCPEC 2012).

Nevertheless, an appreciation of the workforce development can be noticed, doubled by a more recent estimation, made by CNP¹, in 2011, that the rate of occupancy of the 20-64 age sector will be as much as

¹ Comisia Națională de Prognoză (CNP), Proiecția principalilor indicatori economici și sociali în profil teritorial până în 2014, martie 2011.



75% up until 2020. For what concerns the service sector, that counted 68,2% of the workforce, the same source indicates a recovery after the 2009 threshold in the four following years. While the GDP of the București-Ilfov² region grew exponentially till 2008, in 2009-2010 slowly decreased but it is expected to grow with a 5% annual rate.

The R&D³ sector instates the same region as being one of the regions that concentrate more than 39% percent of the top expenditures in R&D although below the European average⁴ and in slow decrease in the last two years.

We must point out the fact that the economic crisis is very deep, reflected in social and economic life of the citizens. Our interest in this subject, however strange may seem, is with regard to three elements: the economic crisis allows for a deeper reflection on Bucharest's territory as its influence allows a diminution of pressure elements that drove development in the recent years; secondly, its threat and its consequences are motivating a softer approach with better regard to durable elements; the relative uncertainty both in public and private sectors create the opportunity of changing the perspective on the city.

The time for reconsideration

So, the Strategic Concept of Bucharest 2035 (CSB2035) comes in a time when Bucharest is disputed by three different attitudes: an international aspiration that slowly replaces its local values, a political aspiration towards an affirmation of power that provokes social and structural imbalance, and a more and more fragmented structure disintegrating communities and urban life. The present city exposes the co-presence of its past elements - the old, the modern, the socialist, the new city - but in the meantime, no collective aim seems to arise, no communication between disparate elements: the initial purpose of every city as a gathering place for exchange and communication is ceding place to expansion and to loss of cohesion.

Bucharest's situation seems to be best characterized by the words of Friedmann (1987) the growth of turbulences⁵ : multiple processes with fast speeds and hardly quantifiable consequences. Nevertheless, strategies don't lose their relevance, only the accent is shifting from certitudes towards:

² 4The region consisting of Bucharest and the Ilfov Department surrounding it

³ Research and development

⁴ Proiect PNCDI, 2008-2011, Analiza corelației dintre cheltuielile de cercetare-dezvoltare și performanța economică a principalelor companii din România, consorțiu CERME, IEM, INS și ASE.

⁵ Informally called The Bucharest Delta or The Delta between the Blocks of Flats



- (1) understanding the context and its evolution
- (2) coherence of the given answer through coordinated actions and different temporal horizons and
- (3) flexibility of short term interventions and institutional adaptation

The opportunity for this reconsideration is mainly triggered on one hand by necessity and on the other hand by possibility: if in the last seven decades the urban development of Bucharest was either too controlled and oriented by a centralized vision, or abandoned in the face of external and disjunctive forces, the beginning of the economic crisis is also an occasion that allows planners to think of the city in a more proactive manner, thus making planning a new possible instrument to deal with the crisis.

The idea behind CSB is first of all to put things in a certain order so as to privilege the quality of life and to give the public sector a powerful, but not exclusive, tool so future initiatives or interventions are not ad-hoc, but subsumed to a larger vision. It is about a different look, at a different scale.

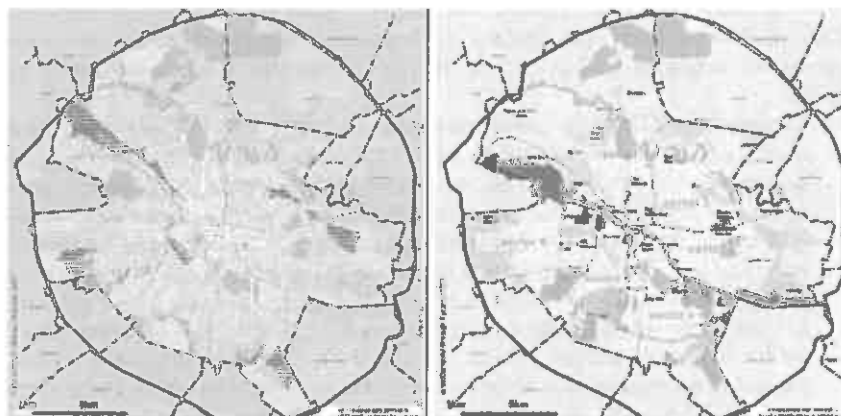
This is why several main elements are crucial to its construct, each one of them co(responding) to a specific larger problem:

The valuable areas: as a response to their progressive erosion and decline of the past years the valuable areas such as the city-center, the lakes or the Dâmbovița River regain a central role in the future structure of the city.

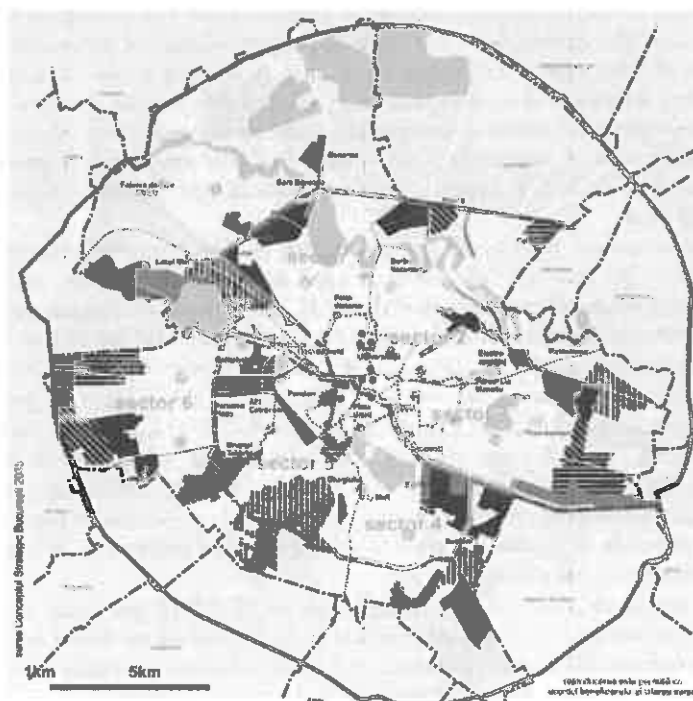
The city-center is currently almost hollowed-out of any activity except bars and terraces so there is a great problem regarding mono-functionality. Even if it was refurbished between 2007-2008 it rarely addresses the inhabitants of the city and its precarious functional specialization indicates a short-term success of this operation.

As a response CSB2035 is proposing an integrated policy especially designed for the city-center and strongly related to public transport, the creation of some pedestrian areas, an extension so as to comprise some isolated functions such as the Opera, but above all a functional enrichment.

The Dâmbovița River is, if not a structural element of the city, an element that is full of potentialities: alongside its path there are several public buildings, large empty plots, an almost Delta like area and also a very pregnant ledgy that confers Bucharest one of its few topographical elements. As a response, CSB2035 proposes its path with the associated harvestable vicinal areas as a backbone of development, thus shifting the view towards public space and quality of life.



(image 5 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
The large empty areas (left) with different degrees of intervention and Dâmbovița River as a backbone (right) show the potential for intervention through the valorization of un-built space.



(image 6 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
The different degrees of intervention regarding the valorization of un-built space. (acupuncture, regeneration, recuperation, reconfiguration, restructuring interventions)

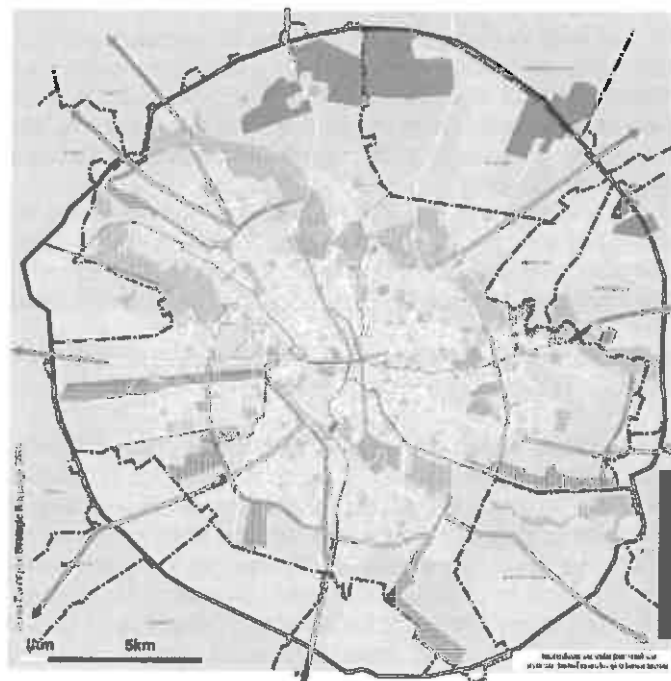


Void areas and areas in decline: as a response to their progressive conversion into smaller plots for services or retail CBS2035 is proposing them as focal points. Most of the void areas are usually generated either by large demolitions during the communist period, that later on were not rebuilt entirely, or by different types of functions that occupied large territories but due to poor rentability issues they had to be closed down or be moved elsewhere. Nevertheless, there are several large empty areas that are not far from the city-center or in key¹ locations of the city and that are seen as future vectors of cohesive development.

Regarding the industrial sites in decline, for a large part of them the period between 2000-2008 has had a dramatic impact leading to the complete disintegration or partial replacement with office buildings. For some of them that are still functional or may require massive financial interventions CSB's response is either classifying them as a future strategic resource or, for those that have a better connection to the city, as places that can lead to a synergic effect if developed with other neighboring elements. The suggested functions are R&D or creative industries that can take advantage of the qualified workforce of the city. The economic ranking of Bucharest at a National level, its population consisting of young highly educated population and an overall GDP better than the National level based on a strong emergence of a creative sector make creative industries a top priority for the regeneration of declined areas. A network, not isolated elements:

Long-time ignored and reduced through planning measures, the green areas and the public spaces of Bucharest are essential for a capital that has one of the highest percentages of soil coverage in Europe (EEA 2012). As available space still exists it is very important to try to introduce it into a channeled logic in which isolated elements can act together to tackle the climate or pollution problems. Existing elements as well as new green areas are contributing to the creation of some green corridors that ensure a better connectivity with the surroundings. People's recent growing appetite for open public spaces and for urban space constitutes a strong premise for valuing these areas.

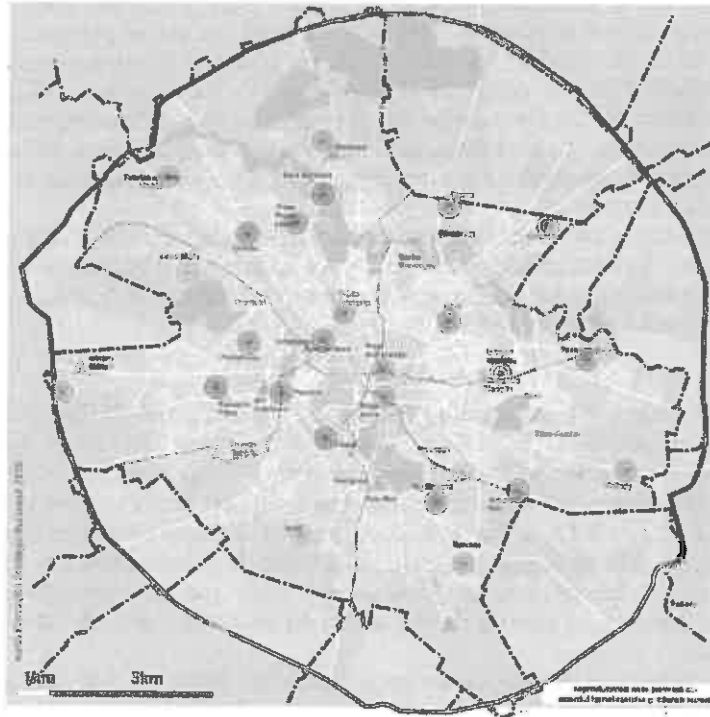
¹ Key here is not referring to places that already play an important role but to places that by their development can trigger a chain of benefits for large areas



(Image 7 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
Priority areas for extending the green areas network

A system of centralities

Holding the ever expanding territory together can be done through a system of anchor points with different multi-specialization according to their vocation at the urban level but that also have to work together. The advantage of this system would be an overall increase in the city centrality and its competitiveness as well as a better balance of the city structure. As the central area contains very high-level functions (political, administrative, juridical etc) the idea behind some of the sub-centers is to help at gathering the potential of dissipated functions around them and create support centers for the central area. In the meantime, some of them are created around town halls of smaller districts and they are encouraged in this manner so they give people a better sense of community. Their purpose is to foster communities and to re-link disaggregated neighboring areas. Last but not least, especially in the southern part centralities are reinforced in order to help at integrating poverty pockets.

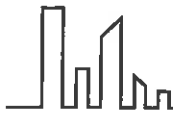


(image 8 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
Priority areas for developing the system of centralities

A change in modality and mobility

The auto-mobility was very restricted during the Communism and exploded after its fall as the car ownership and auto-mobility grew exponentially¹. The strategic concept aims at car traffic reduction by proposing privileges to public transport and pedestrians in the central area. Exclusion not being the only solution two important measures are also proposed: a system of intermodal hubs and several parking facilities in relation to high capacity public transport and, secondly, the development of high capacity transport network based mainly on subway and regional train system strongly related to dense neighborhoods and to existing and proposed centralities of the city. Eco mobility is also encouraged especially in the city-center and in some dwelling areas.

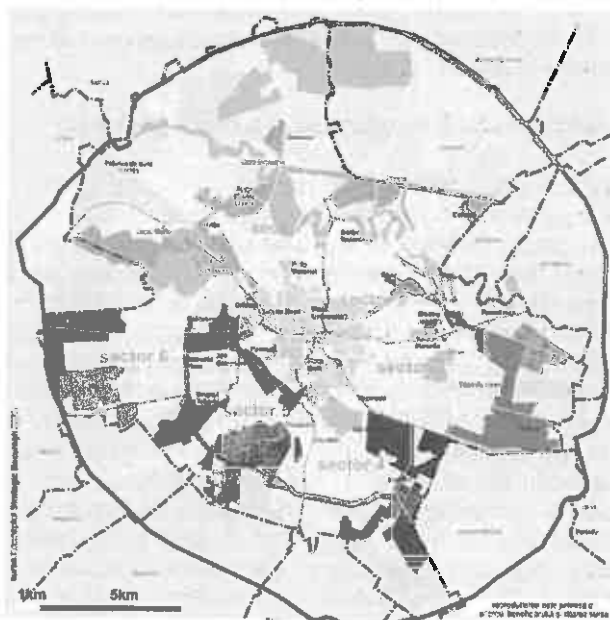
¹ From 300.000 in 1998 to almost 2.000.000 cars cross Bucharest in 2010 according to Bucharest Transport Masterplan, 2008, Urban Traffic, PMB



(image 9 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro) Road infrastructure development (left) and high capacity rail transport (right) with emphasis on the central area with reduced auto traffic and prioritization for public transport and pedestrianization.

Scenario planning not fixed planning

Finding an in-between measure is not a very easy task: over-planning was done several times in the case of Bucharest and negative results were very hard to sweep away; a too loose planning led to a chaotic development that multiplied the existing problems of the city. What is proposed by the strategic concept is a well-documented (through a 60 criteria analysis) identification of potential areas of priority intervention which can act together, or separately, depending on the needs to rebalance certain tendencies. The central area as well as the four surrounding areas are determined through a superposition of large empty spaces, good accessibility, good centrality potential and public space potential but above all they constitute transition zones between very disparate elements. In this sense they are seen as healing areas for the city. A scenario planning presupposes the possibility of a dynamic management and monitoring of these key areas and for that a more flexible structure of the administrative structure was proposed in which agencies of development for specific areas based on a public-private partnership should be created. The main idea is to assess periodically the degree of confirmation of each area and to keep possibilities open, while keeping the basic criteria as milestones.



(image 10 source: Bucharest Strategic Concept of Development 2035 - www.csb2035.ro)
Strategic areas of intervention

A tool for dialog

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CSB2035 has a set purpose of stimulating the dialogue between the main urban actors of urban development of Bucharest: inhabitants, administration and other implicated institutions, NGOs, etc, while assuring both the complete transparency of the elaboration process and the openness towards the implication of citizens and specialists in this process. The data collection of opinions, remarks and critiques coming from citizens and specialists during the public debates or during professional focus-groups as well as via the project dedicated site (www.csb2035.ro) where all the information regarding the project was made available for consulting and reacting, were all part of the participative approach of the project. All the reactions were further included in a synthesized form in the proposal phase and diffused through materials (brochure) especially conceived in a very legible visual and linguistic manner so they become accessible to a large number of people. The project passed through several phases of consultation till its final approval by the authorities. Certainly, a lot of potential actors were not involved in the process, either because they were non-responsive to dialog initiatives, or because of the short time span of the overall project.



Conclusions.

Conceived in times of planning uncertainty as well as in times of crisis in the development initiative the Strategic Concept, as the result of a concerted process, allows for a more flexible and participative planning manner and provides in the same time an instrument for future debate capable of articulating public and private sectors. It is promoting a slow "urbanism" that articulates major and small-scale interventions.

In conclusion, the main idea behind the Strategic Concept of Bucharest 2035 is to become an interface between: urban actors that can use it as a tool for debate; regional, local and sub-local levels in order to privilege the quality of life in the city; public and private sectors that can develop partnerships based on mutual interest in key locations of the city; past and present in order to build the city's identity; different sectorial interests in order to conciliate them and better articulate economic growth and quality of life. Clearly, most of these aims need a long time span in order to become tangible, or even to begin to become so, and expecting them to do so may seem an optimistic, if not idealistic, statement. However, it is clear that fixed planning is no longer an answer to increasingly complex problems and an essential factor will be a periodic revision of the document based on a participative process. Furthermore, scarce resources means that both innovation and efficiency become key traits in conceiving our cities and thus pro-active and inclusive planning must be seen as an indispensable instrument.

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