Mutations in Church Mnemotype, from Urban Catalyst to Urban Dystopia

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Abstract

Transylvania has always been a cultural melting pot, a diverse "ecosystem" of different cultures with very different ways of life. In this unique context, Transylvanian Orthodox churches borrowed a lot of aesthetic aspects from their Catholic and Protestant counterparts, a tendency that remained true even after the Union of 1918. It is interesting to notice an evolution in Orthodox architecture in Transylvania until it was brutally halted in 1948, especially in the light of what church architecture looks like today. Following five decades of persecution, the need for new churches has re-emerged although the architectural continuity has been forever broken. New churches appear nowadays by the thousands but they are far from being ideal. We live in one of the most religious countries in Europe yet the question of what should our places of worship look like is more actual than ever before. This paper emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary discussion on one of the costliest endeavours in Romania nowadays.

Rezumat

Transilvania a fost întotdeauna un melanj cultural, un "ecosistem" în care coabitează culturi şi moduri de viaţă diferite. În acest context, bisericile ortodoxe din Transilvania au împrumutat o serie de aspecte estetice de la omoloagele lor de rit catolic sau protestant, o tendinţă care a rămas valabilă chiar şi după Marea Unire de la 1918. Este astfel interesant de remarcat o evoluţie a arhitecturii ortodoxe din Transilvania până când a fost întreruptă brusc în 1948, în special prin prisma felului în care arată arhitectura de cult astăzi. După cinci decenii de persecuţie, nevoia de a construi noi lăcaşe de cult este tot mai prezentă deşi continuitatea formală a fost întreruptă iremediabil. Noi biserici apar cu miile în ziua de azi dar aspectul lor este departe de a fi ideal. Trăim într-una dintre cele mai religioase ţări din Europa dar întrebarea "cum ar trebui să arate un lăcaş de cult contemporan" este mai actuală ca oricând. Acest articol subliniază nevoia acută a unui studiu interdisciplinar pe tema unuia dintre cele mai costisitoare eforturi constructive din România actuală.

Keywords: architecture, context, religious, urban planning, catalyst.

1. Introduction

More voices than ever point out, and not without good reason, that contemporary architecture is in crisis. A crisis that consists of a lack of new ideas not as much as a lack in technique and perhaps

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the very constraints that building materials or cultural habits imposed on architects a few centuries ago are now missing and, as such, they convey upon the contemporary architect too much freedom which becomes too hard to express in his work, specifically because the options are too numerous. As such it is very easy to "err", to adopt one solution or another, apparently viable, maybe innovative but completely arbitrary and sometimes challengeable from an aesthetic point of view, lacking any cultural background or inspiration from precedents.

Ioan Andreescu claimed that 20th century modern architecture continues in an absurd way that of the 19th century [1:5], and criticized it for its over-simplification, mass expansion of a limited vocabulary, the lack of sensitivity towards the *genius loci*, for being expressionless and having a very poor formal representation [2:5], thus being completely unconnected to its recipient - the human being. As such, modernism defies the final constraint, that of the urban context and eventually becomes the reason and is blamed for the lack of cultural identity and grave functional segregation of contemporary cities, planned according to the principles of the Athens Charter.

But modernism is blamed less for its impersonal architecture, which is debatable to some degree, than for its incontestably impersonal urban planning, for failing to consider the human being in its complexity and trying to perceive it as a machine, with identical needs regardless of the different milieus and forms of habitation around the world. Probably justified from a historical point of view, this "conveyor belt" tendency for specialization and multiplication was inspired from the mass production of cars. Today however, as we fully sense the negative effects of this minimalistic misconception of man, a general tendency for change is felt in all levels of society, from education to politics, from motivating the individual to better organizing the space around him and we finally tend to see man not as much as an object but a culturally derived personality.

The main scars in urban tissue that can be attributed to modernist planning derive from its over simplistic rhythmic division and disposition of building-blocks, regardless of their function as residential or public. By negating the conventional "corridor" street, the pedestrian was denied the logic of his passage, a passage that was usually based on positive interaction with nearby buildings that offered commerce and services, optional activities and a human scale, all in all a psychological sensation of safety and comfort. The dissolution of these boundaries also meant the end of public spaces in the recognizable form of streets and squares that were replaced by residual, interstitial spaces that are harder to "digest" because they are harder to perceive and offer a lot less to the pedestrian. Annulling boundaries also meant denying property over the space and was a major cause for the lack of implication from its inhabitants. It can be deduced that the whole logic of the city as a whole has been abandoned.

The public street and private backyard became a melange of spaces that fail to accommodate both the hustle and bustle of public life and the private neighbour interactions altogether. Space now belongs to everybody but in reality nobody cares for it or identifies with it. Intimacy has been discarded for intense auto traffic. Regardless of the fact that the cultural model of the city might have been introverted like in the Muslim or Mediterranean world, or extroverted like in northern Europe, modernist solutions were the same [3:96-98].

When you start the process of design from the physical dimensions of man to create a (minimal) apartment and then you mirror it to create a floor, which you then repeat to create the block and then you repeat the block to create the street or even the entire neighbourhood you cannot reach a pleasant effect on the inhabitants.

By contrast, traditional cities have a strong hierarchy, being created from the centre outwards, they have interesting diversification and vertical landmarks, such as *the tower* - both a visual landmark and a symbol of power, be it religious or secular. Older cities consist of a well defined succession of

streets and squares, similar to the rooms inside a building, each with its own distinct atmosphere and role: the commercial market, the civic square, the honour courtyard in front of the palace. But the most important one of all seems to be the square that houses religious processions. All these squares have a centre of interest, be it the royal palace, the stock exchange or the town hall but, most importantly, the cathedral, mosque or temple.

Tourists are always drawn towards these squares because of their spatial coherency, unexplainable but always necessary to feel the vibe of the city, its atmosphere. G. M. Cantacuzino criticized Bucharest because it lacked squares of public interest [4]. Squares and public buildings are the most important guide in understanding urban space and the places of worship have always held the highest rank in this process. That might be attributed to them being generally different, being perceived as ordering the otherwise amorphous (and profane) urban tissue, as Eliade would put it, in a word they act as the ultimate *urban catalyst*.

That is precisely what modern cities or new neighbourhoods where lacking until recently (recent tendencies in contemporary architecture include the reevaluation of "closed" or traditional urban planning values, some examples for this being the recent National Housing Exhibit Bo01 from Malmø, the Senior Housing Center in Solund - Henning Larsen Architects or some of Bjarke Ingels attempts in New York - West 57 or Copenhagen - 8 Building, to name but a few): a succession of coherent spaces, coagulated around public facilities that could constitute the active centres of those communities. This role was carried out in the past by the worship place and the civic square but nowadays it seems to have shifted erroneously towards the mall and the periphery, leaving the city centre void of most activities.

It is therefore not a coincidence that worship places where the most representative buildings where most architectural styles from the past developed up until some 300 years ago. From the oldest of times (Egyptians, Semites, Greeks, Asians, Pre-Columbian civilisations etc.) up until the advent of Christianity, the Romanesque, Gothic and Byzantine styles and even well into Renaissance there is practically no exception to this rule. The roles that worship places fulfilled, apart from the obvious one, where mainly two: to organize the settlement (town or village), gathering people around and to offer a sense of pride and belonging through its majesty and beauty - to elevate itself into a status symbol of that particular community.

Nowadays it is extremely hard to conceive a worship site that does not plagiarize on the multitude of prior expressions or, on the contrary, is too distant to the commonly accepted idea because of over simplicity and exaggerated pragmatism, the only constraints that architecture seems to follow even nowadays.

The tendency to associate the worship site image with that of a sculptural object is high among architects but it can backfire if it lacks certain symbolic justifications. The object might thus be deprived from its sacred space role and might be easily confused for a theatre or lay public building, such as the town hall-church example.

The present paper tries to ascertain to some degree the relation between religious architecture in Northern Transylvania (Cluj, Bistrița, Sălaj, Bihor, Maramureş and Satu Mare counties) and the societies in this area, deriving from the doctoral studies of the author.

2. General Context

The historical background of the aforementioned area is somewhat special because, unlike in the other historical regions of Moldavia and Wallachia, Transylvania is marked by a strong mixture of

diverse ethnic groups and cultures. This aspect is also visible in the aesthetic diversity of the places of worship and in the different Christian denominations present here.

1. Ethnic composition within the studied area, according to the 2011 census

County	Romanians	Hungarians	Gypsies	Ucrainians	Germans	Slovaks	Other
Cluj	81,76%	15,61%	1,22%	0,02%	0,09%	0,00%	1,30%
Bihor	68,65%	26,32%	3,30%	0,02%	0,09%	1,22%	0,40%
Maramureş	83,96%	7,39%	1,52%	6,69%	0,22%	0,00%	0,22%
Satu Mare	58,32%	39,94%	0,70%	0,38%	0,25%	0,05%	0,36%
Sălaj	72,17%	23,58%	3,40%	0,01%	0,02%	0,55%	0,27%
Bistriţa-N.	93,51%	5,06%	1,18%	0,02%	0,11%	0,00%	0,22%
TOTAL	**76,66%**	**19,18%**	**1,85%**	**1,30%**	**0,13%**	**0,32%**	**0,56%**

2. Religious composition within the studie area, according to the 2011 census

County	Orthodox	G-Catol.	R-Catol.	Reformed	Pentec.	Baptists	Advent.
Cluj	71,79%	3,67%	3,43%	11,06%	3,25%	1,12%	0,52%
Bihor	58,40%	2,28%	8,66%	17,14%	6,93%	3,97%	0,35%
Maramureş	78,13%	5,12%	5,22%	3,65%	3,81%	0,50%	0,77%
Satu Mare	49,24%	7,62%	18,23%	18,43%	3,14%	0,61%	0,26%
Sălaj	64,04%	2,68%	2,51%	19,52%	4,82%	3,81%	0,37%
Bistriţa-N.	82,30%	1,98%	1,08%	4,26%	7,41%	0,85%	0,59%
TOTAL	**67,53%**	**3,88%**	**6,53%**	**11,99%**	**4,75%**	**1,77%**	**0,49%**

3. County distribution of worship places per denominations in the studied area as of 2011

County	Ortod.	G-Cat.	R-Cat.	Reform.	Luther.	Unit.	Pentec.	Bapt.	Advent.
Cluj	462	30	34	146	2	18	20	74	39
Bihor	446	7	74	86	1	1	7	180	11
Maramureş	368	77	33	17	2	-	9	28	3
Satu Mare	192	49	106	85	2	-	4	22	10
Sălaj	326	14	9	62	-	2	3	79	3
Bistriţa-N.	292	17	10	44	15	-	41	36	31
TOTAL	**2086**	**194**	**266**	**440**	**22**	**21**	**84**	**419**	**97**

In the Interwar years, for example, the proportion of the main denominations in Transylvania was 31,1% Greek Catholics, 27,8% Orthodox and 41,1% others, with a high weight of Roman Catholics, Reformed and Lutherans [5:13]. Therefore the religions where more or less equal in power and nobody could claim undisputed religious hegemony over the area. This also meant that the dialogue between different religious groups was more open, natural and democratic nonetheless.

Similarly, the number of Orthodox churches was far fewer than that of the other denominations combined. Unfortunately the data regarding the total number of churches and their status from that period has been lost. Not even the current number is not official as most Churches don't care to acknowledge the ever increasing number or don't care to make it public. The data in the table above has been compiled from different sources and serves only as a photograph of a very dynamic process, as of 2011. Furthermore, following the Communist Regime, many Greek Catholic, Reformed and even Lutheran churches were taken over by the Orthodox Church and are nowadays subject for litigations.

It is also interesting to note the old Cathedral of Arad and the Moon Church (Biserica cu Lună) from Oradea, both built in clear Baroque style, or perhaps the Metropolitan Cathedral of Sibiu, built between 1902 and 1906, that derives its aesthetic inspiration from the imperial Hagia Sofia, not from the smaller scale Byzantine of the Balkans or from the Neo-Romanian style. The latter seems to resemble more the Dohany Utca Synagogue from Budapest rather than other Balkan cathedrals.

This is the reason why many Orthodox churches built during the Interwar period show a

remarkable sensitivity towards the local architectural context, as opposed to just mindlessly copying a model from outside the Carpathian arch. It is true that of the few masonry Orthodox churches that were built and survived until 1918, most had adopted a mimetic attitude towards their Catholic counterparts, from the desire to blend in as Orthodoxy was only tolerated as opposed to the other denominations, but that doesn't mean that the wooden churches of Maramureş or any of these baroque churches fail to comply with the Orthodox dogma as compared to the ones in Moldavia or Wallachia.

This local difference has been in fact carefully considered and adopted by Romanian architects in the Interwar period, which is easily visible when analyzing their works. Orthodoxy did not feel threatened back then by the cultural diversity of Transylvania or the influences of the Baroque style just as it had accepted a neo-classical Metropolitan Cathedral in Iaşi a hundred years earlier. The Church leaders back then had the wisdom to understand that the Holy Tradition meant more than opting for one architectural style regardless of the context, somewhat similar to present day Catholic tendencies to encourage oriental rites in Greek Catholic churches all around the world.

The Interwar years were most auspicious for the Romanians in Transylvania, following the Great Union in 1918 and the elevation of the former Metropolitan of Romania to the rang of Patriarch in 1925. It was during this period that the Romanian Orthodox Church came to be the second largest in the world after the Russian one. To glorify this growing importance, the need for symbolic manifestoes of Orthodoxy was needed in all Transylvanian cities and new cathedrals emerged. But it is interesting to note how these cathedrals were built, as compared to nowadays.

The technique of building enormous cathedrals was not yet perfected as the churches built in the Old Romanian Kingdom rarely felt the need for extravagant sizes. That changed in Transylvania as the need for manifesto buildings that mirrored the size and importance of Catholic and Reformed churches in Transylvania meant that the Orthodox had to step it up. As such, the most important cathedrals of the Interwar years were built in Transylvania, notably in Alba Iulia, Cluj, Timişoara and Târgu Mureş. Though more anchored in the Neo-Romanian style than their rural counterparts, these cathedrals experimented with great success the import of western style elements, specifically in order to avoid a rupture with the local context and the crystallized urban tissue where they implemented themselves in. It is this reverence that was shown to the fabric of these cities that is of particular importance to us nowadays as that seems to hold less and less value for new church builders.

The Interwar period was however short-lived and after less than 30 years, church building in the cities was halted, this time not only for Orthodox believers but for everybody else as well. Churches were demolished in Bucharest and others were only saved by moving them shamefully behind the new blocks of flats that emerged over night.

Today, the context of these six counties differs greatly from the period prior to World War Two. The cultural diversity that was so specific back then begins to fade almost entirely, and, as we can see from the most recent census of 2011, over 76% of the inhabitants are Romanian and 19% are Hungarian, leaving less than 5% for all others combined.

The numbers are a little more varied when it comes to the religions of the inhabitants, although Orthodoxy now holds 67,53% as compared to the Reformed Church on second place that holds just 11,99%. As such the percentage of Orthodox believers more than doubled from 80 years ago. In this context we bear witness to a natural revival in church building, the Orthodox being the first in this regard also, only the Pentecostal keeping up with the ratio of new places of worship per number of believers.

The Orthodox Church continues to enjoy a high degree of trust among the population, although than tends to slowly decrease, just as the need for more and more worship sites decreases, especially when building a new church means giving up the final green space or playground in residential areas. Furthermore it seems the degree of trust that the Church enjoys is not met by a similar trust in clergymen (65% of the populace still trust in the Church though only 40% think the same about the clergy [6:13]). Therefore the problem of whether more places of worship are needed is evermore present and different authorities have somewhat conflicted points of view on this topic.

3. The Perception of Orthodoxy in Romanian Society

From a dogmatic point of view, Orthodoxy differs from Catholicism by not considering Adam's sin as a stigma that perpetuates itself from generation to generation. Thus Orthodox optimism reflects itself in the notion of synergism, which underlines the reflection of God's Image in every man and affirms the existence of free will: "as opposed to *the non posse non pecare* of Saint Augustine, the East affirms the absolute freedom of will, beyond all constraints and causality, the capacity to form that « *fiat* »: the will for redemption and healing". [7:111]

Nicolae Cabasila popularizes the monastic method of the early patriarchs of the Church and teaches in favour of a direct communion with God (Palade 2009: 32), a vision shared by Berdiaev who "envisions the primordial sin as an externalization, an objectification of existence" whereas "eschatologism means returning within, to the essence of spirit" [8: 42].

For the Orthodox, God seems to be more forgiving than for Catholics, his main attribute is redemption, not punishment. As such the relation between Him and the congregation, achieved through the descent of grace from the Holy Spirit is more crucial than the need for affirming and fearing the Glory of God as it is done in the Western Church.
This aspect is present in traditional Orthodox church architecture. Whereas the Gothic is an expression of God's manifest glory on Earth, meant to seed awe and admiration, the Byzantine originated as a style where the presence of God is more intimately felt. To this extent we might notice that most Orthodox churches of old, with some notable exceptions, where closer to human scale than western churches.

Also one can ascertain that, although in some cases the size of the cathedral itself might need to be larger, the entrance is always closer to the size of the individual that passes through it. As such, humility is preferred to fear, closeness to distance.

The church is meant to be a refuge from everyday profane life, an oasis of peace and quiet. The exterior of the church is just as important from this point of view as the interior. The sacred role transcends the physical boundaries of the church and floods the surrounding square or courtyard, which can be fully witnessed when the church is encircled three times in procession for the Easter ceremony (possibly a reminiscence from ancient Greek processions).

Last but not least, churches have always been places where the sacred manifests itself in the surrounding environment, acting as landmark and hierarchical centre of the surrounding neighbourhood. In the past village churches were built on higher ground to watch over the settlement below just as the Acropolis was for ancient Greek cities. In the cities they always occupied the centre of the parishes that formed around them.

A notable study on the topic of parishes as structural backbone for the communities in Bucharest belongs to Dana Hărhoiu [9]. She started from the configuration of Bucharest and noted that most neighbourhoods where clustered around parish churches, forming introvert communities. We can

thus conclude that Bucharest, although an ever-growing urban centre hides within its past the rural essence of Romanian culture and can be catalogued, without condescendence, as a sum of autonomous villages. For obvious reasons this aspect has been systematically destroyed during the communist regime and might be one of the causes for Bucharest's current heterogenic aspect and feel.

Sanda Voiculescu explained this atypical tendency for a city as the effect of Bucharest belonging legally to the institution of the Voievode, that did with it as he pleased, leasing parts to nobles or town folk, following the model of Constantinople which was the attribute of the Byzantine Emperor [10: 148].

Further specifications might be made, comparing it to western cities which boasted a united and emerging bourgeoisie as found in the extrovert character of their cities. Bucharest is more tributary to Mediterranean cities (Byzantine, Persian and later Turk and Arabic) with introvert houses, private gardens and well determined parishes/neighbourhoods. The ideal in these cities is the peacefulness of the back garden - a reiteration of the lost Paradise. Just in this manner, parishes centred their eyes on the church and turned their back to the hostile world outside, sometimes even locking themselves for the night. There can be no clearer example of a worship site that orders the neighbourhood from centre to margins.

Whereas in the West the community of the city was united against outsiders and claimed the right of self-government, Romanian towns were divided and it was often more important to belong to a parish or guild (like Gabroveni, Lipscani, etc) than to name yourself as a "citizen" of Bucharest as a whole. Hence the drama that Bucharest experiences today: through the demolition or dislocation of these crucial points of interest the sense of these communities has been forever lost in the communist era. The problem is that these mutations are not limited to the urban tissue but, as always, affect the livelihood of the inhabitants as well.

Thus if initially there was no community without a church or church without a community of parishioners, nowadays the main criteria in erecting a new church is not the community but the presence of an empty "buildable" plot of land, even if that means building on the last patch of green between two blocks of flats. In other words, the drama that the communists brought by moving the churches behind the blocks is nowadays continued as new churches are built behind them as well.

Whereas in the past the small square that always preceded the church entrance was a place of respite and congregation or contemplation, nowadays the emphasis falls on visibility from the distance, even to the point of ridicule. We often find new churches in the most incredible places, lower than the surroundings, next to some of the most profane elements in the city like the garbage containers or parking lots. Sometimes we find them squeezed in next to the main road that goes through the settlement, with total disregard for the exterior public space that should always accompany them and without which they are all but impractical.

We might say that large Transylvanian cities, having been somewhat crystallized by World War Two were more or less luckier than those in Moldavia and Wallachia, having better structured centres up until today. But as long as you leave the city centre, the drama remains the same as new neighbourhoods look alike in Cluj, Iaşi, and Craiova. And even these centres offer little space for new Orthodox Churches.

Therefore it is a true problem to insert new churches in already developed neighbourhoods, particularly because that coordinating role they should have was denied them from the start, but that doesn't justify an unnatural need for affirmation through gigantic scale and sometimes ridiculous gestures of luxury like gilded roofs as those in Cugir or Făgăraş. From a beneficial presence to an

indifferent and sometimes even destructive show of force, the Church seems willing to reaffirm itself no matter the cost, sometimes even reaching ridiculous levels.

Another essential problem is that new churches don't see the congregation as their primary target but turn out to be a mere reflection of the need for appraisal of clergymen, an architecture lacking in human scale and a form without meaning.

We cannot withhold to ask if, as Vintilă Mihăilescu says that recent grand scale rural architecture is not a "culture of ostentatiousness" as much as a "taste of freedom" against the old ways, then why does the Orthodox Church, that clearly adheres to the same principles this time in church architecture, why does it claim to follow the very tradition of our forefathers? And if that tradition was to be respected as claimed than why this atypical lack of human scale in Orthodoxy?

For example, the first Romanian cathedral to house 5000 believers was built in Timişoara (architect I. Traianescu, 1936-1941). Leaving aside the Moldavian inspired aesthetic that was Traianescu's signature, this cathedral is nowadays given as an example for all new churches built in either urban or rural context. However what is always neglected is why is the cathedral in Timişoara so large. The reason is that it was built in Piața Operei, directly opposite the Opera House, among historical buildings four stories high. In this particular context, building a smaller cathedral would be ridiculous and, as such, Traianescu had no choice in the matter. Thus it can be concluded that the vicinities dictated the scale of the monument, not the extravagance of the Church back then.

4. From Urban catalyst to Urban Dystopia. Some examples.

Since we mentioned the Interwar years, a period in which church building was at least as necessary as nowadays, it would only be fair to quote from George Cristinel's memoir for a cathedral in Oradea. He was the lead architect at Cluj Cathedral along with Constantin Pomponiu and was commissioned for a study to justify a future cathedral in Oradea that was unfortunately never built because of lack of funds.

In his memoir, found in the National Archives of Bihor County, Cristinel chose to analize a potential site and wrote: *singurul (loc n.n.) care ar corespunde aproape tuturor condiţiunilor de interes obştesc, naţional, urbanistic, estetic, etc şi ar avea următoarele avantaje: a) are cu o foarte mică deviaţie orientarea cerută; b) este în centrul oraşului pe artera principală; c) se poate crea un mediu estetic corespunzător, fiind înconjurat de clădiri publice cu caracter monumental; d) s-ar putea crea o piaţă monumentală în faţa Catedralei care ar avea dimensiunea de 661 x 61 m, deschizând o perspectivă largă şi a monumentelor publice actuale şi viitoare; e) această piaţă prin amplasarea şi dimensiunile ei ar putea servi tuturor manifestaţiilor cu caracter patriotic, ca defilări, procesiuni, etc.* [11:317]

By contrast the actual site of the new cathedral in Oradea is between two major traffic routes, some blocks of flats and a parking lot, the only major plus being the possibility to build a huge cathedral at the expense of the square in front of it. Its capacity is again 5000 people although they can never leave all at once for lack of space in front of the cathedral and a very narrow sidewalk.

Another case that claims to be very traditional in nature is to be found in Baia Mare where a cathedral rivalling in size the one planned in Bucharest (The Cathedral of the People's Redemption) is a continuous black hole in the local Church's budget, diverting precious funds from works of restoration in Maramureş. It is most inauspiciously built next to an empty strip of land and turns its back towards the only entrance point, a major transit street with heavy traffic. Its size is going to dwarf everything in the vicinity, boasting almost 100 m in height and length with the cross alone as

high as a three story building.

Many of the less important newly built parish churches appeared as mentioned before on former public spaces like parks or playgrounds and have even been the object of people suing the local authorities and the Church. Other cases see the church so close to the national road that it is almost impracticable without fear of being run over by transiting cars and cannot be encircled for Easter ceremonies.

Things are more or less the same in rural areas. All Saints Church in Negrești Oaș completely occupies the lot and is adjacent to the national road, making it a very risky point for both believers and drivers, especially during weddings or funerals. The effort of building such a huge monument might have been alleviated if the need for a public square would have been taken into consideration.

Other hallucinating examples include those in Săucani and Surduc where the local churches are surrounded by fences but the entry in the courtyard and church door don't correspond, compelling visitors to surround the church on a narrow path in order to locate the entrance on the other side.

But maybe the most bizarre tendency in religious architecture is to be found in the buildings of two theological seminaries in Cluj and Alba Iulia respectively. For the most part they cannot be told apart from most of the surrounding blocks but for one key ingredient - the presence of a church right on top of the block itself. The project thus intends to make the church more visible by raising it at the fourth floor and it looks like the church literally landed on a helipad. Leaving the ridiculous of the image aside, this clearly indicates the total lack of understanding of the real purpose a place of worship should have in the city landscape as well as within the community.

This example isn't however original as there have been other places where a misplaced sense of tradition led to the ambiguous combination of contemporary and vernacular architecture. One such example can be found at Balairung Hotel in Jakarta where a traditional Minankabau roof mimicking two bull horns was used to cover a ten-story building. The ridiculous aspect in both cases is particularly the combination of an otherwise plain high-rise with a traditional piece of architecture, usually one story high and very integrated with its surrounding environment such as a church in the first or a single family traditional home as in the second example.

The legitimacy of this endeavour is just as unlikely as it would be to build a copy of Cozia Monastery on top of the House of the ... of the real source of the object itself.
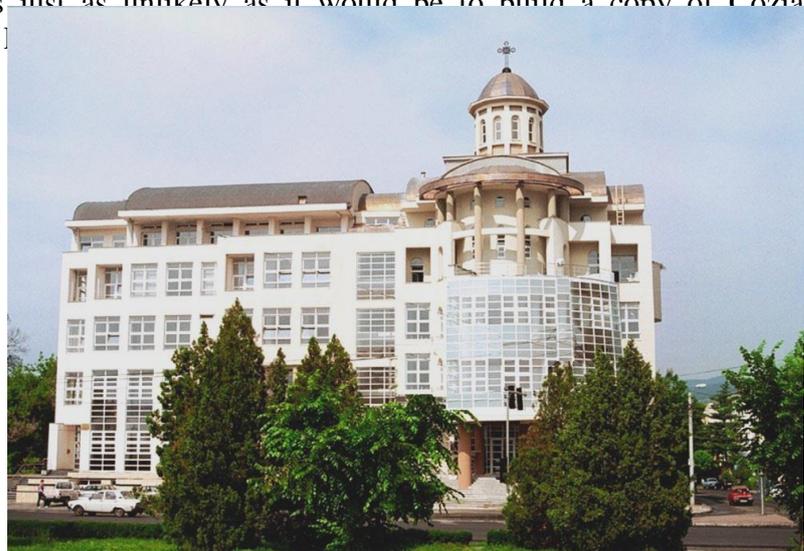
Figures 1, 2. Traditional architecture mutated on top of a modern building: Balairung Hotel, Jakarta and Theological Seminary, Alba Iulia.

Examples might surely continue but the most important issue is to find a cause to this interesting although alienating social phenomenon. The purpose would not be to point fingers or find people to blame but to find a solution.

If Catholic and Protestant West become less and less interested in church building, Eastern Orthodoxy seems evermore frenzy about opening new worship places, even if it means neglecting the old ones that end up in ruin. However, from an economical point of view, this medieval-like effort seems very hard to understand on the background of a still lingering economical crisis. As such it might be interesting to know who takes part in the activity of church building.

5. Main Actors in Church Building

We are surely facing an important turning point as far as worship buildings are concerned. They are obviously meant to satisfy the immediate needs of believers that have been deprived of their right to worship for more than five decades but what is more important is that they are built to stay with concrete and brick and they will be the emblem of our society for many decades or even centuries to come. The importance of an adequate form that corresponds to both liturgical needs and contemporary architecture tendencies as well as the needs of the city and its inhabitants is thus greatly understated.

The relationship between the church and its physical form can be related to three main persons that are responsible and have a crucial role in its appearance.

1.The believer. The first person involved is also the one that should benefit mostly by its construction and presence in the city. Generally the parishioners regard the form and symbolic message of the church as something secondary, more emphasis being put for them on the functional role of the church, mainly the possibility to attend to mass (in the case of the Orthodox faith) and the safety that its material presence instils on them.

Some believers consider the church an important urban landmark, a place of gathering, a meeting point as we have seen. Although they will be unable to tell you beyond the epithets of "ugly" or "huge" it is quite obvious for many of them that a poorly designed church, badly inserted in the urban tissue, will be avoided and eventually forgotten. One such unfortunate example, this time from Italy is the first *duomo* of Como, built in the Romanesque style, in the 12th century. Though not inappropriate *per se* and a remarkable monument of architecture, it was abandoned because the industrial area developed around it, the railway has appeared right in front of the main entrance, making its use and access very problematic. The only way to notice it from a relative distance is to be lucky enough to spot it from a moving train that passes it by.

2. The clergy. A second point of view, somewhat different is the standing point of the Church. They regard the church as a House of God (again, as far as the Orthodox are concerned as this does not apply to Protestant denominations). The problem is that in Romania they often think of themselves as the beneficiaries, sort of like the owners of a house. The main role of the church for them is to respond to the needs of the divine service and to be as present in the surrounding environment as possible. Often sounding equipment is added so that the mass is heard for many yards away and we have already seen the size that is predominant, regardless of the actual importance of the church or parish itself.

To understand the point of view of Orthodox clergy, we must understand that the Holy Tradition is almost as important for them as the Holy Liturgy. In their opinion, the Church evolved for many centuries and reached its apex around the Great Schism in the Byzantine Empire, materializing

itself in the form of Byzantine religious architecture, with the cupola as main stray. If the Catholic Church is more open to new architectural experiments, as dictated by the Second Vatican Council in 1962, the Orthodox are considered to be more traditionalistic which is, however, a myth as many traditional values in church building are, as we have stated before, forgotten or deliberately overlooked in favour of the megalomaniac representation.

3. The architect (and urban planner). As a third person that has a major role in church building (or used to have, as nowadays a handful of "court" architects are favoured by the Church and are more like lawyers than independent freelancers), architects are generally more preoccupied by the way the object is perceived spatially, as a landmark in the territory. From their point of view, the religious programme is way outdated in the form the Orthodox Church dictates and they point out the way it stands out (not necessarily in a good way) against the urban fabric surrounding it. Most try to innovate on the church form (if given the chance) but some unfortunately go as far as to lose contact with the symbolic message of the denomination, creating a building that is somewhat indifferent to the precepts of the religion itself. As such some of them tend to replace symbolic with sculptural and are prone to deprive the church of its richness through oversimplification.

The dialogue between these three mentalities should be stimulated in order to achieve a better result, especially in the case of conservative societies such as ours. It is strange how building a house like in the 15th century is considered a pastiche but building a poor copy of a 15th century church, deprived of context, architectural details and scale might be considered a viable alternative by some. Our state, a young democracy as we like to call it, sees our civil society in its infancy and the practice of both architectural contests and public consultation hold little to no weight as compared to western European countries.

These three actors mentioned before should always have a mediator as they speak rather different languages, an essential role being played by local authorities - through special expert commissions, who eventually have the final word as to what goes and what does not. However the main role of authority, that is not exercised enough, is to protect against abuses and to see for the wellbeing of the community. Thus the common practice of auctioning for a project is not always the best, as cheaper doesn't necessarily mean better, especially in the long run and is sometimes a major cause for poor, flawed and superficial architecture.

It is said that the poor cannot afford to buy cheap things as they, being of poor quality, are bound to be replaced more often. This is especially true when it comes to building permanent places of worship that alter forever the face of our cities. Lack of funds means compromises and compromises mean doubtful objects of poor quality. And where else is quality space more essential than in the case of the House of God?

6. Conclusions

The issue of church building has been actual for more than two decades and a half. Countless architectural contests have marked the beginning of this period. The initial enthusiasm felt has slowly but steadily diminished to a point where it has turned into total indifference. More recently, the architects seem to have abandoned altogether the idea of implication in this crucial domain as they felt completely ignored by the clergy. Construction goes on without them however, peaking with the abominable project for the People's Redemption Cathedral.

With the rupture in church building evolution back in the communist years it seems the understanding of the crucial role these worship places hold/held within the communities has also been lost. The horrors of a totalitarian regime saw countless historical monuments stashed

shamefully behind blocks of flats but nowadays this insidious practice is taken to a whole new level as new churches spring in quiet residential areas or even on top of blocks, totally ignoring the sacred quality these places should always be invested with.

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