Edible Infrastructure for Cluj-Napoca

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Abstract

Society today is dominated by two seemingly contradictory characteristics. On one hand it is completely connected via internet and social media but on the other hand the drive towards globalization has slowed down. As we've seen at this year's Biennale the focus has shifted towards local, intelligent and customized solutions dealing with the issues of particular cities or geographical areas with limited economic and skilled labor resources. In the case of Eastern Europe and other developing areas the society is divided between the connected elite belonging to the network society and the localized traditional communities belonging to specific rural or urban places. But it's the network elite which is consciously orienting itself towards the local and the resilient. The challenge is to find a contemporary infrastructure for the modern society.

Rezumat

Societatea in ziua de azi este dominata de două caracteristici aparent contradictorii. Pe de o parte este conectată via media, dar pe de altă parte globalizarea s-a încetinit. După cum am văzut la ultima Bienală de Ahritectură de la Veneția, atenția s-a mutat spre local, spre soluții inteligente și customizate pentru probleme locale cu resurse economice limitate și personal calificat redus. În cazul Europei de Est și a altor zone în curs de dezvotare, societatea este compusă din atât din aceeași elită conectată la rețeaua lumii cât și din comunități localizate și tradiționale care aparțin doar de anumite zone urbane sau rurale. Dar elita este cea care se reorientează spre local și rezilient. Provocarea este de a găsi o infrastructură contemporană pentru societatea modernă.

Keywords: urban agriculture, urbanism, slow infrastructure, productive landscape, *hostezeni*, network society

1. The need of implementing an edible infrastructure in Cluj-Napoca

Cluj-Napoca has historically fed itself from its surrounding territory by evolving a kind of urban agriculture. The *hostezeni* was a community of urban farmers which provided the city with fresh produce from the XVI century to the second half of the XX century. They were not an isolated case, other surrounding cities like Turda, Zalau, Aiud, Dej, had similar types of communities functioning in the same way[1].

During the communist era the blocks of flats have been in some instances surrounded by urban gardens some being preserved and used to this day, such is the case with the *La Terenuri Zone* in the Manastur neighbourhood.

Currently the city is seeking through the new Masterpan to vector the urban development towards reaching a harmony with the natural landscape, protecting the waterways and the amplification of green urban spaces.[2] These objectives can be achieved through the injection of urban agriculture in unused spaces, making them more approachable by the local community and NGOs.[3]

The biggest stake in creating an edible infrastructure for Cluj-Napoca would be the creation of a kind of social awareness in the urban society regarding the importance of food. This would lead to better levels of social health, an activation of the surrounding territory and more prosperous communities of farmers in the surrounding villages.

2. Theoretical implementation of the Edible Infrastructure

The only current theory which sees urban agriculture as a component of contemporary urbanism is CPUL - Continuous Productive Urban Landscape. The long term goal of this system is the transformation of public space into productive space, the creation of a future where food production becomes second nature to society and the creation by various specialists of a resilient food production system which at the same time improves public space.[4]
These are ambitions objectives, but Cluj-Napoca has the undeclared goal of becoming a hub in today's network of modern cities, theorised by Manuel Castells in his book *Rise of the network Society.* We are a culture of immediacy, of instant communication, of multitasking, so the question arises: what is the contemporary infrastructure for today's society?

One possible answer comes from the slow infrastructure theory. The notion was coined by prof. Mario Gandelsonas at Princeton University in 2008 and proposes a new kind of infrastructure that accommodates today's society's lifestyle.[5] He argues that the typical infrastructure for the second half of the XX Century is the motorway. Back then, the society

belonged to heavy modernity as theorised by Zygmunt Bauman[6] with the heavy industry as its main feature. People had a homogeneous and orderly lifestyle, a normal day was divided between work, the way home, and the free time spent in the household. Socialising occurred at home or at work and the media means were usually fixed: the television set or the landline phone. The connection between the two was a passive one, the person usually just drove their car or waited on public transportation.

In contemporary times society has no stable rhythm, it is much more fluid and at the same time more connected. The time to just stand behind the steering wheel is long past. The private vehicle driven by a single person commuting to work is somewhat incompatible with today's society. Thus the new infrastructure imagined by Mario Gandelsonas is one of public spaces connected to all possible terminals: airport, bus stop, tram stop, subway and contemporary media means. These public spaces can be of different types but are all interconnected through light circulations: pedestrian, bike and public transport. Furthermore he argues that green spaces are right for the new infrastructure because they can be easily restructured in such a way as to accommodate the new lifestyle and articulate the slow infrastructure.[7]

This type of infrastructure can be implemented together with the concept of CPUL to synchronize the undeclared ambitions of the city with the benefits of having urban agriculture embedded in the city's structure. One can imagine for Cluj-Napoca a spine of bike and pedestrian circulation bringing together public spaces injected with urban agriculture, the entire system being connected to transportation hubs. This would accommodate the network society which has also appeared in Cluj-Napoca and could give the city a new image of modernity. It would be a hybrid between CPUL and slow infrastructure adapted to the conditions of the east-european city.

3. Localising criteria for the edible infrastructure

The location for the edible infrastructure must be chosen in such a way as to attract the life of the entire city, contribute to its wellbeing and create a new identity. CPUL has no exact implementation methodology, leaving each city to find its way of creating it. For Cluj-Napoca I've proposed a few criteria to help find the new infrastructure's route.

3.1 The relation to the existing infrastructure

In order to create the new infrastructure one must analyse all the existing types of infrastructure and understand their role in the functioning of the city. The city's dominant direction given by the Somes river brings together all the man-made types of infrastructure:

main roads, railway, green spaces, pedestrian circulations and airport. It is therefore natural that the new infrastructure follows the same dominant direction.

The relation with the main car infrastructure must be made only at certain points creating the connections necessary for the slow infrastructure while at the same time avoiding a continuous connection with cars. Other connection points can be made with the railway and green spaces. This is also preferable for the CPUL because one can find unused and green spaces to inject with urban agriculture. The new map will be drawn by waterways, green spaces of all kinds, existing public spaces and transportation hubs.

3.2 Urban Landscape

The notion of urban landscape is important for the CPUL because it can make the difference between its acceptance or rejection by society. For a population that has never come in contact with urban agriculture, the idea of growing food in the city can be hard to accept.[8] Ex-communist societies are reluctant to accept the idea of a productive urban landscape. It can prove hard to imagine such a landscape can be ornamental and functional at the same time. Working the land is sometimes related to poverty in the collective imagination.[9]
This matter makes the choice of urban landscape a very important one. The diversity of images can curve preconceptions about agriculture in the city.

For the slow infrastructure concept it is important to have a varied landscape so that the travel experience doesn't become monotonous and consequently tiring.

In conclusion the new infrastructure must have a varied offer of space for an attractive circulation and for easing its acceptance by the city dwellers.

3.3 Opportunities for refunctioning

Urban agriculture has proven in numerous occasions a good method of revitalising problematic zones for the city such as brown fields, low income residential areas and neighbourhoods with social problems.[10]
The new infrastructure can connect the attractive areas of the city with the problematic ones allowing the city to make better use of the latter ones.

3.4 Continuity/connectivity

The continuity of the new infrastructure is essential because only that way it can become the new image of the city. Events related to urban agriculture keep happening, the city already has a serie of attractive public spaces and the potential for revitalising brownfields exists but if all of these are not forming a complete whole they cannot become more attractive or

function better than they already are. The connection is the quantum leap necessary to make these spaces the new identity of modern Cluj-Napoca.

4. General presentation of the infrastructure's map

By taking into account the mentioned criteria the edible infrastructure is going to follow this trajectory [Fig1]. It would begin at the *La Terenuri* Zone in the Manastur Neighbourhood because this is a t-minus place for activities retalted to urban agriculture and artistic manifestations. The community is already accustomed to this kind of events and land use and always seems to embrace them.[Fig 2]

The infrastructure continues through the divers urban landscape along the Calvaria stream reaching the green space from *Izlazului* street and *Dacia* Theater. Afterwards it crosses *Izlazului* street into *Ion Mester* grocery market. The market is a formal one although the image is quite informal. It gathers all the layers of society inhabiting the neighbourhood and it is one of the main socialising places in *Manastur.*[Fig. 3]
The next connection is *Primaverii* Park and the *Calvaria* Church. Together they form the neighbourhood's formal green spaces but they are not totally formalised, leaving room for urban agriculture to be practiced.[Fig. 4]

After connecting various spaces through *Manastur* neighbourhood the infrastructure leaves the socialist urban environment and begins its way towards the city center through *Rozelor* Park. Although it has been partially formalized, one third of its entire area is unused and in close proximity to social housing. Here one can see the potential for implementing CPUL because there already exists a society prone to accepting urban agriculture much like at *La Terenuri.*[Fig. 5]

Next the infrastructure connects with the city center by following the Somes River all the way to the Central Park. The zone is almost entirely formal and used by the public in various means, but there is an initiative to restructure the waterway through an architectural competition. The new infrastructure should be part of the design brief for the architects taking part in the competition. [Fig. 6]

After the city center the infrastructure follows the *Somes* River to connect with *Feroviarilor* Park. It is a natural choice because the park is in much need of refurbishment and it could be made accessible to the city center's public. [Fig. 7]

The next areas of interest are the brownfields of the city's former industrial platform. Although a small part has been functionalized by converting the former *Libertatea* furniture factory into a trendy technology hub much of it is still in desperate need of refurbishment and reuse. Urban agriculture can be a crucial first step towards reclaiming these spaces by the

surrounding communities. One of these is the historical *hostezeni* community, the city's former grocery producers. By connecting them to the city center with the new infrastructure they would be again in touch with their traditional customers: the city center's inhabitants.[Fig. 8] The end point of the new infrastructure would be the city's exhibition place *Expotransilvania.* Although some pavilions exist they are not adequate for the city's needs and hopefully, if the new infrastructure makes them accessible, a revamping of the Expo zone can become a possibility. [Fig. 9]

5. Conclusions

The implementation of the edible infrastructure would have to be a top down and a bottom up approach at the same time. The municipality would have to work with NGOs to find the right way of compiling the brief for such a project. The reason it would have to come from both directions is because it is not a completely formal type of infrastructure.

The bike and pedestrian spine is formal, but the spaces it connects can be used both formally and informally. It should be seen as a way to heal some of the city's urban problems and make it more interconnected more friendly to the general public, more approachable.

It would be a case of learning by doing, no such infrastructure has ever been proposed but if successful it would benefit the city from multiple points of view: socially, economically and culturally. The city would be more integrated a more harmonious whole. It would allow for all its hidden local riches to be visible and shared with the flow elite of the network society. In a world where the value of each network hub is given by its own character and originality, the infrastructure could be a way for the city to participate actively and purposefully in the new network society of the world's cities.

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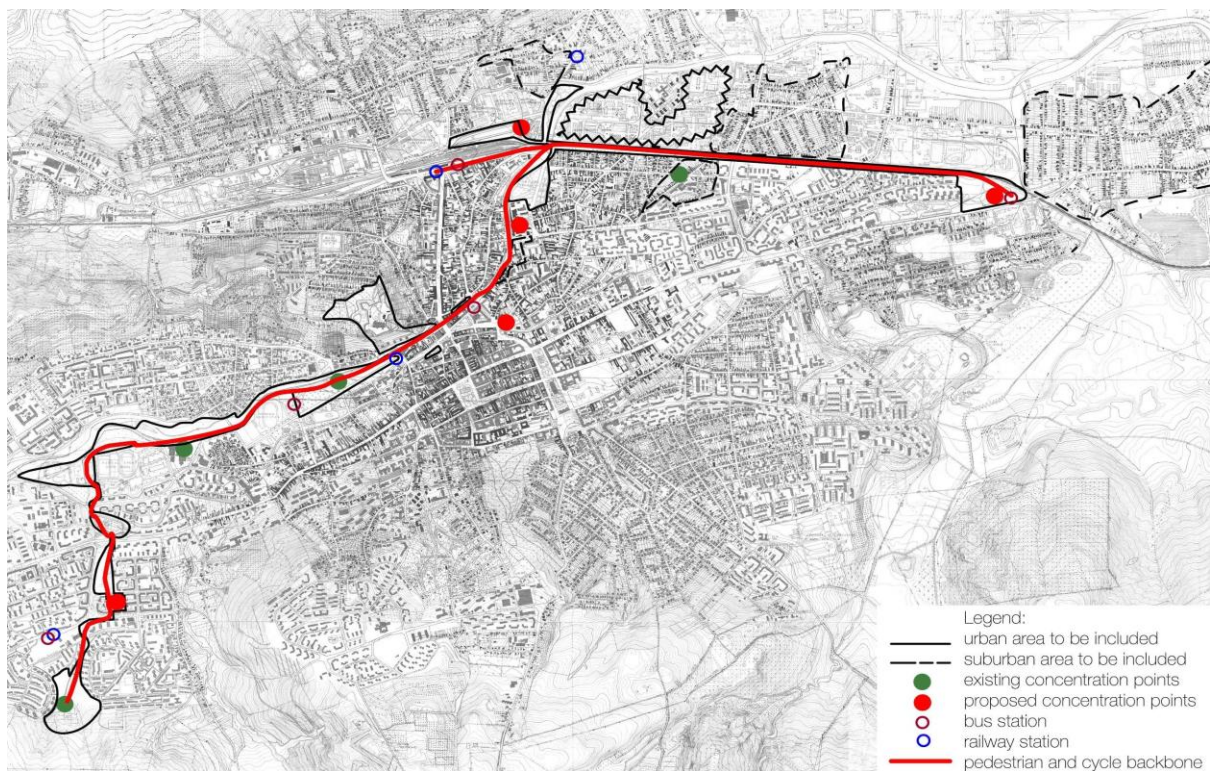[10] Mark Gorgolewski, June Komisar, Joe Nasr *Carrot City* , The Monacelli Press 2011, p. 74-77

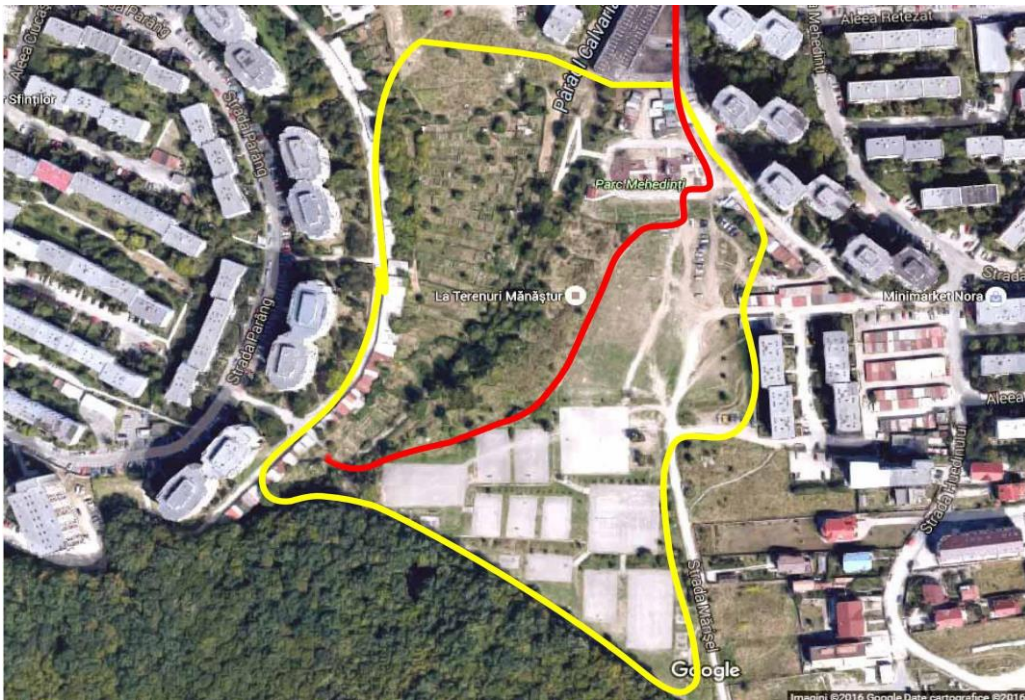Figure 1. Plan for the Edible Infrastructure for Cluj-Napoca by Fleseriu Alexandru

Figure 2. by Fleseriu Alexandru
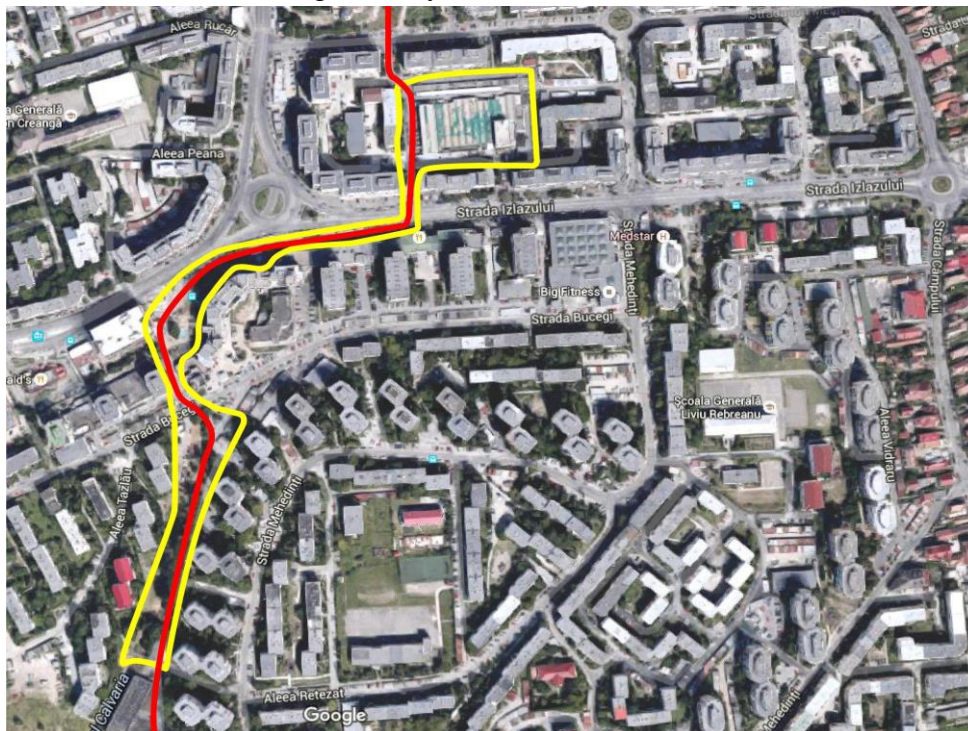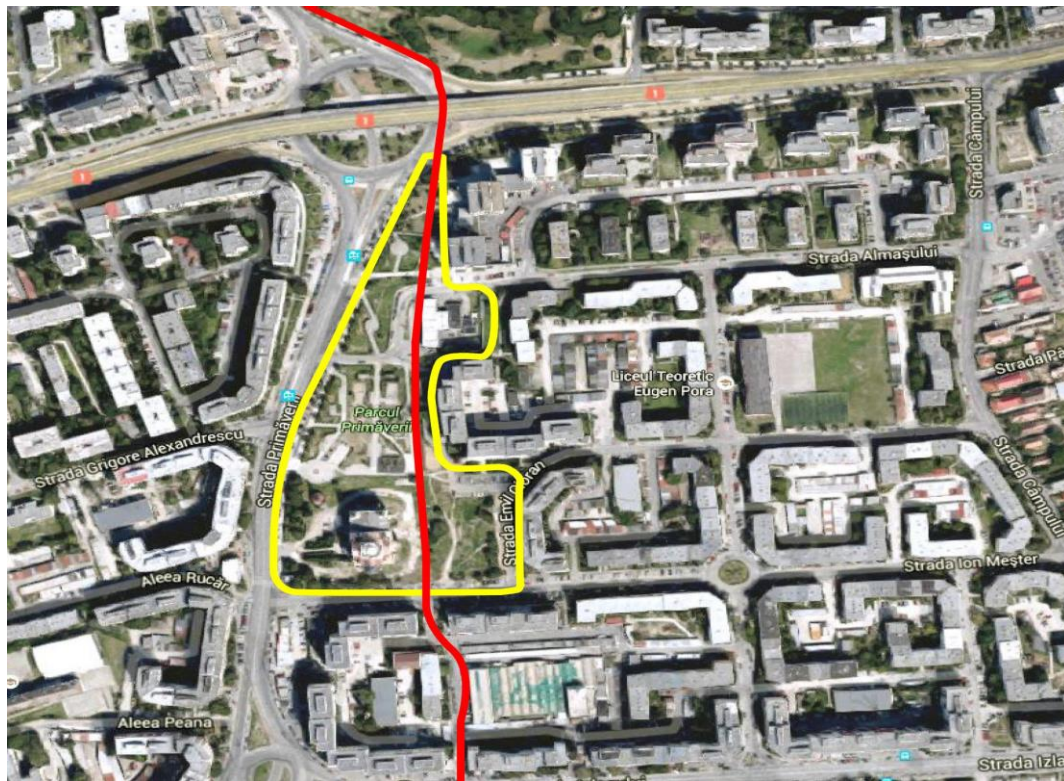

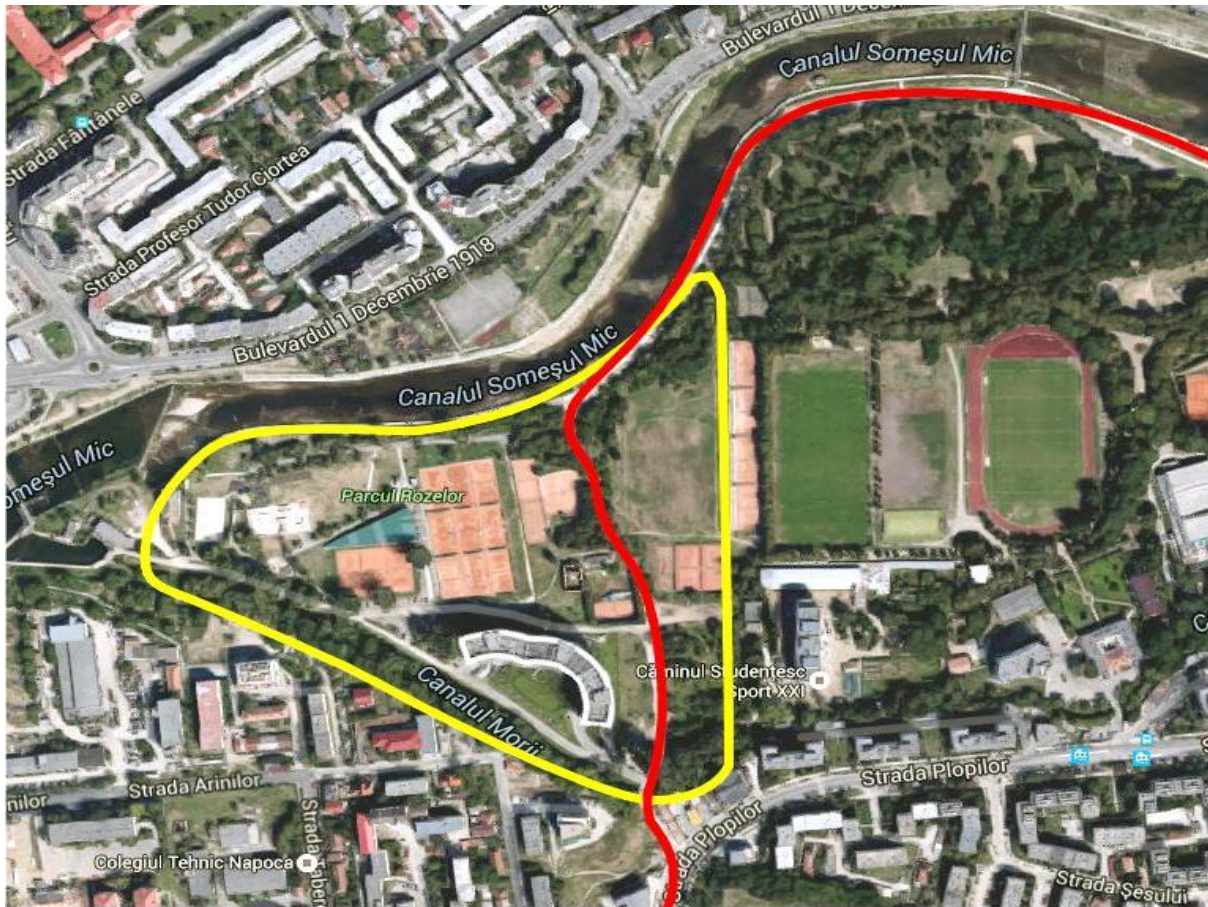Figure 3. by Fleseriu Alexandru

Figure 4. by Fleseriu Alexandru

Figure 5. by Fleseriu Alexandu

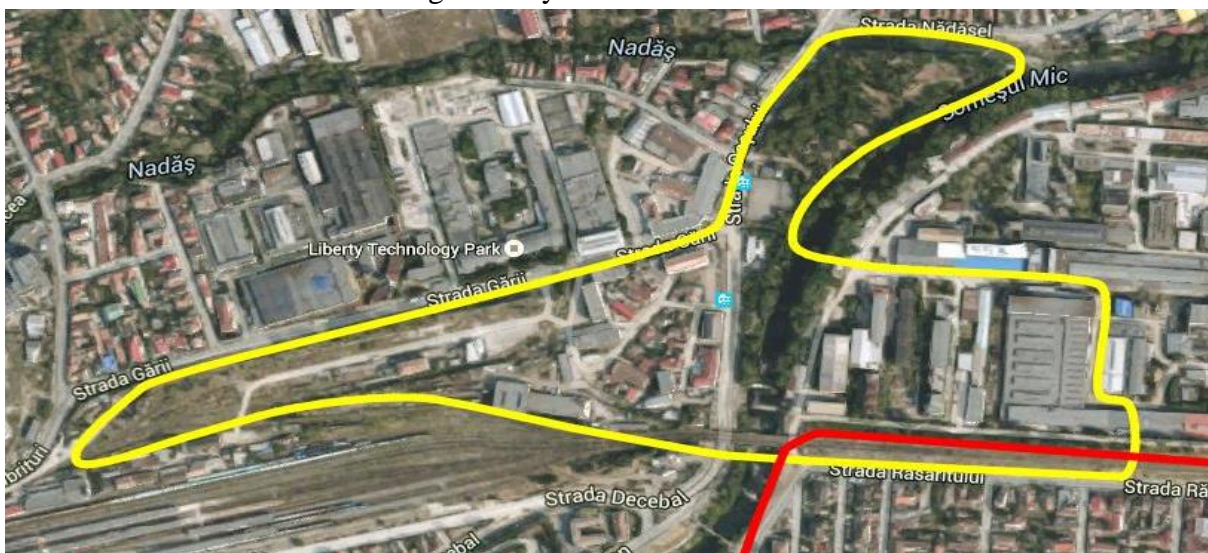Figure 6. by Fleseriu Alexandru

Figure 7. by Fleseriu Alexandru

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Figure 9. by Fleseriu Alexandru