

Modern Industrial Heritage in Romania: Extending the Boundaries to Protect the Recent Past

By Oana Tiganea¹

The term “Modern industrial heritage” is usually associated, in the Romanian context, directly with the 1920s–30s built legacy. This period is in fact commonly perceived as representative of the Romanian Modern Movement, in synchrony with the western Avant-garde. However, industrial traces even with Modern influences were left on the national territory mostly by the 1945–89 Communist “forced industrialization.” The manifestation of the Communist industrial architecture was analyzed through the case study of Hunedoara Steelworks. It was also possible to investigate its destiny in the present context, dominated by a general resentment directed towards “political labeled” built environment. This analysis highlighted the vulnerability of the Romanian industrial heritage in the present context.



under the push of forced industrialization, the industrial architecture represented a true leitmotiv of the state’s propaganda, in a more general context of direct political involvement in the architectural practice. For this reason, the industrial architecture dating 1945–89 started to be commonly perceived as one of the Socialist state’s ideological instruments. Despite this, during 2000–2005 some architects took a stance, declaring that it was possible to identify a sort of continuity between the Modern architecture of the 1920s–30s and the industrial architecture of the 1945–89 period. Architect Ion Mircea Enescu, who was educated in the Modern principles of the 1940s in Bucharest and was practicing throughout the entire period of Communism, repeatedly suggested that the 1945–89 industrial architecture embodied some of the ‘most radical modernist manifestations’ among the other architectures of the time.⁴

Starting from these premises, and driven by the belief that a thorough material understanding of these architectures analyzed in the context of their socio-political years would be fundamental in preparing the grounds for an actual step forward in their acceptance as a built legacy with patrimonial assets possibility, I have directed my attention towards the process of “forced industrialization” of the Communist period, with a critic attention towards its architectural manifestations. These aspects were analyzed through the case study of Hunedoara.⁵

Positioned in south-west Transylvania, and presenting already an iron and steel production from the late 19th century, Hunedoara became a ‘metallurgic icon’ for the Romanian context during Communism. In fact, the industrialization boom transformed the town completely, determining its tenfold increase in extension during the interval between 1947 and the mid-1970s [figure 3].⁶ This is one of the main reasons that made Hunedoara a paradigm of the Romanian industrialization during Communism.

Interestingly, some of the first pilot industrial projects in the post-war years were created in Hunedoara, thanks to its role of national investment priority. This phenomenon is even more striking when considering the national context of complete change and reorganization of the architectural practice under the pressure of Socialist centralization and political control. The complexity of an “integrated metallurgic site” such as the one developed in Hunedoara, resulted in a wide variety of industrial projects, from the large production plants of the steel and rolling mills to the smallest maintenance pavilions, all interconnected through the industrial production flow.

In a context when the architecture usually responded directly to the political ideology, the in-

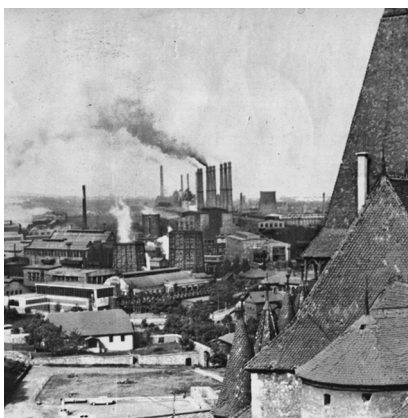
In the Romanian post-Socialist context, the 1920s and 1930s Modern architectures are generally considered as the peak of the 20th century architectural history, commonly perceived as disrupted in evolution by the Socialist transformations. The Modern architecture of those years was thus transformed into a connecting bridge between the pre- and post-Communist eras, soon after the fall of regime in December 1989, becoming also a constant reference point in the Romanian architectural battle for identity of the 1990s.² Starting from 2000–2001, the Modern architecture of the 1920s–30s found

its patrimonial recognition, as demonstrated by the listing as historic monuments of projects deemed emblematic for the Romanian interwar architectural culture [figure 1].³ Simultaneously, the built environment associated with the Communist period continued to be neglected and regarded with general resentment, being subject of brutal interventions under real estate speculations. In the last 20 years, the most affected from this “political labeled” built environment was the industry, especially in the case of the heavy industry [figure 2].

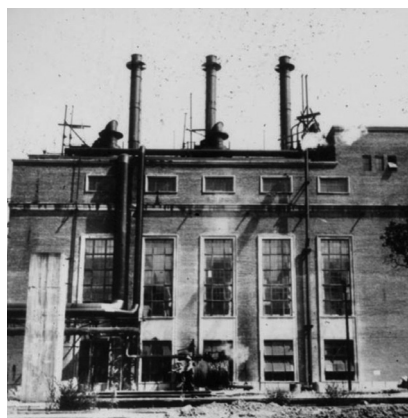
During the Communist years (1945–89), and



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dustrial architecture from Hunedoara appeared as following the general shifts from the 1950s Socialist Realism to the later on return to Modernity,⁷ but with a rather different 'aesthetical manifestation' than the civil architecture. During the Socialist Realism years (1952-55) the industry from Hunedoara was less bound by the Socialist 'aesthetical canon' in comparison with the civil architectural programs [figure 4]. Conversely, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the return to Modern principles brought the industrial projects becoming examples of the 'modernist monumental industrial architecture' in the national context [figure 5].⁸

The study of the industrial architecture from Hunedoara helped also defining the architectural models of influences adopted during the Cold War, in the context of the shifting of the political Romanian balance from eastern to western affiliations. Indeed, at Hunedoara Steelworks, projects were designed with both of Soviet and western models of influence. During those years, ideologically, the 'foreign' model of industrial architecture became a reference point in the Romanian architectural scene

By mid 1970s, Hunedoara metallurgic site arrived to its territorial and industrial peak, bearing a

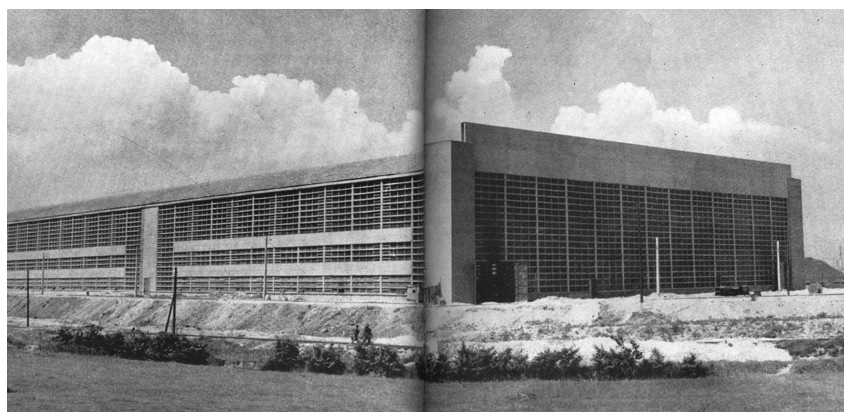
Figure 1. Malaxa Industries, Bucharest (1930-31), by architect **Horia Creanga**; listed as historic monument. Source: Machedon L., Scoffham E., *Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920 -1940*, MIT, 1999.

Figure 2. Hunedoara industrial ruins (2007). Source: Bonciocat S., *Kombinat. Industrial Ruins of the Golden Age*, Igloo Patrimoniui, Bucharest, 2007.

Figure 3. Hunedoara: general view towards the metallurgic site (1960s). Source: Hunedoara Steelworks Photographic Archives.

Figure 4. On the left the electric power plant of the steelworks (1951-50). On the right the collective housing from Hunedoara (1952-54). Source: Hunedoara Steelworks Photographic Archives.

Figure 5. Rolling mill built starting with 1959. Source: Adler L., *Arhitectura industrial in RPR*, Bucuresti, 1964.



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powerful impact on its surrounding. Moreover, the workers' town was constructed in parallel with the industrial site, giving birth and space to a local community based on the industrial culture.

After 1989, just like majority of the other Romanian metallurgic sites, Hunedoara started to go down on the path of deindustrialization, due to the globalization of the markets and the State decreasing direct financial support. Finally, during a general trend of transition and adaptation to capitalism, the production shut down in 1999.⁹ The obsolete industry from Hunedoara became an avoided and abandoned place, subject to material decay due both to weathering processes and to controlled demolitions in certain cases [figure 6] The disappearance of industry contributed to the inversions of the hierarchy

between the spatial elements: the industry, which was considered the driving factor of all transformations, bearing a central role both at local and territorial level, became the deprived periphery shortly after losing its main productive function. Conversely, the leading role shifted towards the town, where the life of the communities continued its course. Even at the present moment, this community represents one of the greatest sources of tangible and intangible traces of the industrial heritage.

The disappearance of the main production plants during the years 1999–2011 is associated with the loss of the industrial past in both the local and nation-wide contexts. Moreover, the remaining material traces that were once part of the complex metallurgic site, continue to be neglected.

This attitude towards derelict industries overlaps with the perception of 'patrimonial values' as associated with a certain antiquity. This is defined by the legislative tools officially as dating prior to 1945.¹⁰ Even more, a law directly focused on the industrial heritage was issued in 2008, structuring a clear and detailed definition of this patrimonial typology.¹¹ However important, this new law had no actual impact on changing the perception and acknowledgement of industrial heritage, especially in the case of legacies labeled as of 'Communist origins'.

Despite the loss of many of the industrial facilities, Hunedoaras' territory still presents material traces of its industrial past. However, to search for these physical evidences, it is fundamental to follow the logic of the metallurgic production flow, from the suppliers' territory to the production place itself, and finally to the urban built environment, generated by the industrial needs and connected with the production plant itself [figures 7, 8].

Such physical evidences are characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity, possibly deriving from the different industrialization phases of Hunedoara. This heterogeneity can be identified also in the architectural manifestations. In fact, by posing as an 'industrial architectural sample', it is possible to connect and integrate the specific history of Hunedoara with the entire Romanian 20th century architectural history. These conclusions are based on a thorough research analyzing the phases of the industrial reconstruction of Hunedoara, through the inclusion and critical analysis of all industrial architectures from here, considered as material results of the political, economic and socio-cultural intertwining nets. Such approach, directed towards the comprehension of the material culture, could hopefully pave the way for new and diverse preservation strategies in the future, especially when the national context provides legislative tools concerning the safeguarding of industrial heritage in all its complexity: from the preservation of industrial landscape, to urban areas, individual structures or buildings, technical equipment and documentary material.¹²

However, neither local nor regional strategies coordinated by the local authorities, and focused on the endorsement of its industrial past are pres-



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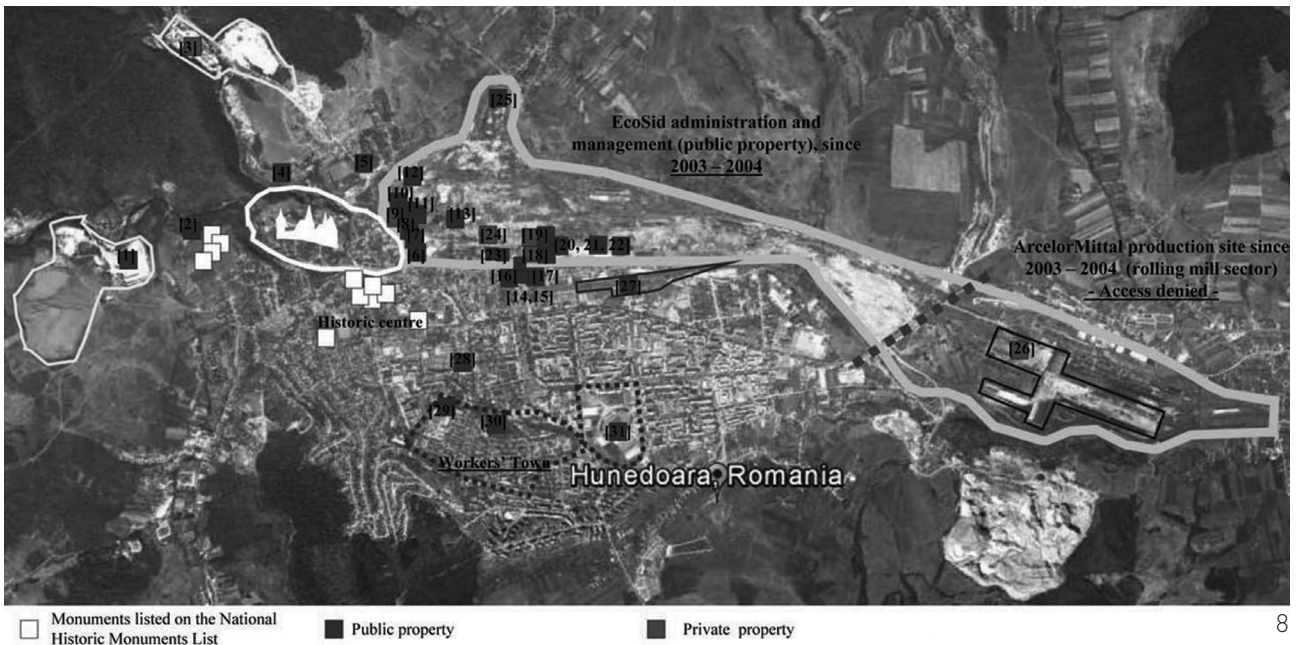


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Figure 6. Industrial ruins from the ex-industrial site (2007). Source: Mara Marginean.

Figure 7. Elements of the industrial traces at present moment (2013). Source: Paolo Mazzo.

Figure 8. 2013 mapping of the industrial remains in Hunedoara. Source: Oana Tiganea.



ently being applied in the case of Hunedoara, leaving the little physical traces still existing at risk of disappearance. Interestingly, some initiatives came directly from the steelworkers' descendent community, concerned with the issues of their industrial identity and giving an important contribution to the safeguarding of the ex-Steelworks' archival documentation. This initiative coincided with the demolition of important landmarks belonging to the metallurgic site in 2010-2011, such as the chimneys, which for decades represented the symbol of the rise of Hunedoara as a metallurgic icon. This archival documentation represents the main physical connection of the present with the recent past industrial architectures, especially in a general context of 're-interpretation' of the Romanian history of the second half of the 20th century.¹³

In conclusion, the case study of Hunedoara represents an important testimony of how vulnerable the industrial legacy can be in the Romanian context. The demolitions occurred in fact at an even faster pace than the evolution of the legal preservation framework, maybe even faster than the change in the general acknowledgement and endorsement of this built legacy. This study retraced the construction and destiny of Hunedoara through its material manifestations, and it can represent a starting point for the recent past reconsideration from a patrimonial perspective.

Notes

1. Dana Tiganea graduated in architecture at the Technical University of Cluj Napoca (Romania) in 2007. In 2010

she enrolled in the doctoral program in Preservation of Architectural Heritage at Politecnico di Milano (Italy), and in November 2013 defended the PhD "Industrial Architecture in Communist Romania. Hunedoara: Construction and Destiny of a Major Steel Plant, 1947 - 1999" under the supervision of Professor Carolina Di Biase.

2. During the early 1990s a variety of exhibitions focused on the interwar years resuscitated the scholarly interest in the Romanian Modern Movement. For more information, refer to: Luminita Machedon, Ernie Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940*, MIT 1999.
3. The "protected historic areas" law was issued in 2000, while in 2001 the first post-1989 historic monuments law was published. Both legislative acts were including in their safeguarding patrimonial list architectural works dating the years 1920s-40s.
4. Cosmin Goancea, "Interviu cu Ion Mircea Enescu - *Civili si industriali dupa al doilea razboi mondial*", *Arhitectura*, 2000; Ion Mircea Enescu, *Arhitect sub comunism*, Bucuresti, Paideia, 2006.
5. The research "Industrial Architecture in Communist Romania. Hunedoara: Construction and Destiny of a Major Steel Plant" was carried out during the period 2010-2013, in the doctoral program in Preservation of Architectural Heritage (DASTU-Politecnico di Milano, Italy), under the supervision of Professor Carolina Di Biase.
6. In 1947, at the beginning of the Communist industrialization process, Hunedoara was summing barely 7,000 inhabitants. By 1989, the town reached 80,000 inhabitants, mostly due to a direct effect of the metallurgic site's development.
7. In the Romanian architectural context, the Socialist Realism was proclaimed as the official accepted style only in 1952. The return to modernist principles, triggered during Khrushchev's Thaw, is considered to have been delayed to the end of the 1950s due to political divergences with the Soviet Union.
8. For more information, refer to: Ladislau Adler, *Arhitectura industriala in RPR*, Bucuresti, 1964.
9. Hunedoara Steelworks remained part of the State properties until 1999, when the primary production flow was shut down. After this date, the site became divided between productive and non-productive areas. While the first were privatized starting with 2003-2004, the latter became subject of several demolition phases under the coordination of the local administration.
10. The present methodology concerning the listing of historic monuments ensures priority on the basis of the antiquity value, excluding completely the post-1945 period. See: Normative no. 2260, published in 2008.
11. Law n° 6 from 2008 concerning the juridical administration of the industrial and technical heritage.
12. By the end of 2013, the variety of legislative acts from the field of architectural preservation as well as of urban development offer a variety of national and territorial tools directed towards preservation of all forms of industrial heritage, on the basis of its recognition as patrimonial value.
13. The matter of the recent Romanian past was started to be widely approached in the last 10 to 15 years at an academic level, from a multitude of interdisciplinary fields, with the desire to fill the major gaps left by the regime in the local history of the 20th century.

References

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