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DOI: 10.55159/tri.2023.0104.04



Ideological and Local Influences on the Urban Area in SSR Moldova (1944–1990)

Abstract

This article analyzed the post-World War Two reconstruction of the public spaces that had been devastated during the conflict. Mostly focused on the Chisinau urban area, we examined the ways in which the communist ideology and the socialist-modernist school of thinking influenced the reconstruction process. It has often been postulated that the main trait of the new political regime was the discrimination against the old conservative society by means of secularization and dismantling of the sacred. In the aftermath of the war, this trend was relatively limited, whereas during the Khrushchev's "thaw", it significantly gained momentum. As an example, the statue of Stephen the Great, representative for the Moldavian national spirit, was brought back to Chisinau, but the central positions had been already reserved for two symbols of the communist regime: the statue of Lenin and the Victory Square. During the 1970s and 1980s, other monuments representative for the party ideology and discourse continued to be unveiled, one such example being the equestrian statue of Gr. Kotovski. Except for

Tăriță M. (2023). Ideological and Local Influences on the Urban Area in SSR Moldova (1944-1990). *Trimarium. The History and Literature of Central and Eastern European Countries*, 4(4), 119–139.

DOI: 10.55159/tri.2023.0104.04

Submitted: 27.11.2023 / Accepted: 30.11.2023

the statues of Lenin, Marx and Engels, most of the communist additions to the public space in Chisinau still stand to this day. It was there that the first celebration of the victory over Nazi Germany occurred, in 1965. Ten years later, a majestic memorial complex honoring the same event was to be inaugurated. In line with this, most of the non-metropolitan towns or villages, no matter how marginal, erected a statue of a soldier or at least a commemorative plaque in memory of those who lost their lives against their will. The urban plan itself was altered without any consideration to the street outlines that appeared in the plans of A. Șciusev. This practice was pursued in parallel with a demolition campaign in which the old town buildings and narrow alleyways, influenced by the Oriental style, were pulled down. The top position in the list of monuments that were lost at the time is occupied by the St. Ilie church. However, a section of the pre-war Chisinau, along the upper central boulevard, survived. It consisted of original or reconstructed imperial Russian and interwar Romanian buildings. A change in style occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, when the downtown area witnessed the addition of modernist buildings, tightly clustered and in obvious conflict with the spirit of the old town. In addition to that, their functionality was disproportionate to the role of the small republic. It was after the independence that the process of urban space degradation gained momentum, and some neglected buildings were lost. Meanwhile, some other buildings went through the validation process without any consideration to their contextual harmony. Planned with very little concern for artistic and architectural value, these new additions contribute to the already eclectic and highly inharmonious spirit of the city.

Keywords

SSR Moldova, post-war period, architecture, town planning, secularization

The city of Chisinau suffered traumatic and extensive destruction during World War Two. In the immediate aftermath there was no consensus on a reconstruction project and no town planning initiatives were undertaken. The downtown area continued to be left in a dilapidated state, mainly due to the fact that the party leadership was unable to decide on a specific plan. Although Alexei Șciusev, a Moscow architect with ancestry in Bessarabia, had submitted a well-conceived and, in retrospect, feasible project, his proposal was rejected. According to his plan, the priority for reconstruction would have been represented by the metropolitan palace, reminiscent of the imperial Russian and inter-war style.

With this in mind, in this paper we will analyze the evolution of the architectural trends and the town planning undertakings that occurred in the territory between the Prut and Dniester rivers from 1944 to the end of the soviet era. This historic period may be divided in two or even four distinct stages. We consider that a milestone is represented by the first World War Two celebration in Chisinau, which happened in 1965. This event was followed by a campaign during which many military monuments and memorials were erected. Towards the end of this study we will focus on to the buildings which should have been listed as national heritage but were, willingly or not, left in ruins during the early 2000s, whereas some of them were outright demolished. The influences of ideology on the postwar town planning was of no interest for the academics studying the architecture of Chisinau. However, in the field of the history of architecture there are studies on the reconstruction of some buildings that survived the soviet era. This is the case of the research conducted by Alla Chastina (Chastina, 2022a and 2022b) and Tamara Nesterova (Nesterova, 2019 and 2020). Another relevant analysis of the postwar Chisinau town planning was signed by Tamara Nesterova and A. Vatamaniuc (2019), whereas two other studies that take a closer look at the official documents regarding architectural provisions belong to Alina Ostapov (2018, 2020). The larger domain of town planning was covered by studies written during the soviet times by A. Kolotovkin (1973) and E. Bognibov (1976). The latter was awarded a PhD in Moscow, but the thesis was never published. His work seems to have covered the characteristics

and architectural evolution of public institution buildings that have been erected between 1940s and mid-1970s. An extensive resource of images on the topic is to be found in the mass-media of the time. This is valid especially for the 1970s, when the Râșcani and the Botanica neighborhoods were being built or extended. In this paper we will focus especially on the secularization of public space, the destruction of Chisinau during World War Two, the reconstruction and town planning of Chisinau during the post-war era, the important communist monuments, the alley of the classical writers and the massive urban development undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s.

The Secularization of the public space during the soviet period

During the 1990s, there was a tendency to revert to the inter-war and to the soviet period with minimal interest or even without taking into account aspects related to the religious life. Before the times of the Soviet Union, religion played an essential role in everyday life, and this continued well into the post-war period. Inspired by the French Jacobins, the Bolsheviks imposed their own version of religious life, a pseudo-worship practice that failed to replace or even imitate its model. Numerous Christian Orthodox churches, as well as other places of worship, fewer in number, pertaining to the Catholic, Armenian or Lutheran religions, were closed. Those that had been damaged during the war were never reconstructed and gradually disappeared from the architectural landscape.

An early moment of symbolic importance is the relocation to Chisinau of the monument dedicated to Stephen the Great. Work of the sculptor Alexandru Plămădeală, it had been sent to Romania in 1944, where it was located by the representatives of the Soviet Union. In charge with the Propaganda and Agitation Department, V. Țaranov opened the negotiation process in a letter. A serious ideological obstacle, incompatible with the ideology of the times, was represented by the cross held by the voivod. It was even brought into discussion the option of relocating the statue of another voivod, Vasile Lupu, on a plot of land located in front of the city's public garden gates, but finally Stephen the Great's statue was chosen

instead. The expert consultant from the Propaganda and Agitation Department stated that the cross held by the voivod was inseparable from the rest of the monument, an inextricable and irreplaceable element of the sculpture. Consequently, because of a pro-Moldavian attitude of V. Țaranov, the monument was relocated, albeit a few meters towards the interior of the park, in a less visible position. The relocation to its original emplacement happened only in the early 1990s.

The second important work of architectural value from central Chisinau, still standing, was the triumphal arch known as the Imperial Gates. The monument dates back to 1841 and its function was to mark the entrance to the cathedral park and further on, along the alleyway that bypassed the belltower, to the cathedral entrance. The bell tower was blown up at night, in the 1960s, only to be restored approximately, using only pictures as inspiration, in 1997. During the times of the Soviet Union, the Imperial Gates were called "triumphal arch", an expression still used by the Chisinau people to this day. Because of the skepticism related to anything religious, an attitude that was prevalent especially in the Bessarabia elites during the Soviet Union, it is very unlikely that the "Imperial Gates" denomination would re-enter common usage. Right now, only the historians and the experts in connected fields, such as the library or museum staff, are familiar with the true name of the monument.

The dome of the Chisinau cathedral was bombed during the war. Following a prevalent trend imposed by the soviet regime, all religious activities within the building were prohibited, and the functionality of the building was changed. Such changes occurred especially during the second half of the 1950s, during the so-called Khrushchev's "thaw". Even in 1989, the only functioning Christian church in Chisinau was the Ciuflea monastery. The orthodox cathedral, located in the center of the city, had been used only as an exhibition venue to showcase breakthroughs in the field of agriculture and technology. Another case is the church adjacent to the former Ferdinand high school, a building which had been completely destroyed during the war, then rebuilt and used as a secret police headquarters. The function of that church was altered as well, and it became a planetarium. The St. Nicholas church, situated on the

main boulevard, towards the Sculeni district, was allotted to the School of Medicine. It was within the walls of this once sacred building that dissections on corpses were being conducted or student dancing parties were being held. The St. Theodora of Sihla church, likewise located on the Pushkin street, not far from Stephan the Great Boulevard, became a sports hall. The St. Patelimon church, also known as the Greek church, a monument dating back to the 1890s, was simply closed down until the 1980s, when it became a culinary arts sampling venue. Only in 1991 the building regained its original function, but its architectural beauty had suffered alterations and its wide perspective had been limited by soviet blocks of flats built in its vicinity. (see image 3 in the annex)

Two churches from the city's downtown were utterly demolished. In 1959, after being removed from the list of protected heritage buildings, the church of Sf. Elijah was hastily pulled down in order to make way for the Gogol street, nowadays known as the Bănulescu-Bodoni street. The catholic church of Chisinau, also located not far down to the the Stephen the Great Boulevard, was forcibly nationalized¹ in 1947. It shared the fate of many other religious monuments from the SSR Moldova, being razed from the urban landscape of Chisinau. In the town of Bălți, the orthodox church of St. Nicholas, dating back to the 1790s, was likewise used for other purposes than initially intended, and finally became a sports hall. Likewise, the church of St. Emperors Constantine and Helena, which had been built during the 1930s in Neo-Romanian style, was used as a warehouse and ethnographic museum.

The situation was quite different in the rural areas, where many churches were used in accordance with their initial purpose, in spite of the politically-motivated interference of the secret police officers. However, the symbolic photo of a damaged religious building from the rural area was published in the first magazine that adopted the Latin alphabet, "Glasul". It is a 1989 picture of the reclining dome belonging to the Tomai village church. The oldest churches

1 *Scurt istoric al Bisericii Catolice din Republica Moldova*, [Brief History of the Catholic Church in SSR Moldova] available on the Chisinau Romano-Catholic Church Bishopric webpage <https://catolicmold.md/page/scurt-istoric> (accessed on 28 November 2023).

in the vicinity of Chisinau were located beyond the Chisinau city limits, on opposite banks of the Bâc river. The Mazarache church was closer to Chisinau, whereas the St. Emperors Constantine and Helen occupied a plot of land adjacent to a cemetery. It was not far from these churches that a circus was constructed in soviet times, and both shared the same fate of being closed until the SSR Moldova gained its independence. Although the Mazarache church had been orthodox, it was allotted to the Lipovans' community. The contribution of the local community to the reinstatement of the religious role of these buildings is rarely mentioned in academic papers to the point where it is almost ignored and forgotten. The effort of these mostly anonymous persons who kept their religious convictions during the post-war period was of paramount importance for reinstatement of the Orthodox ritual in Chisinau and other cities from SSR Moldova after 1990.

It is impossible to reconstruct the architectural traits of the old city. However, Lică Sainciuc was still hoping that a partial reconstruction was possible. In his words:

For the moment, only two sections of the Old City still stand: one between the Pushkin house and the Annunciation church and a second one in the vicinity of the St. George, St. Haralamb and the Armenian churches. These are the very few surviving monuments that might be taken as reference for a gradual reconstruction of the old town (Sainciuc, 2000).

The Destruction of Chisinau during World War Two

The city of Chisinau was severely damaged during the armed conflict. The first wave was of natural origin, as a powerful earthquake struck in November 1940. Its impact on the architecture of the city has not been assessed scientifically (see image 1). In contrast, the Soviet historiography focuses more on the air raids that targeted Chisinau after June 22, 1941, when war broke out. However, there is no study on the destruction caused by artillery or air bombardments on the Alexandru the Good Boulevard, formerly known as Alexandrovskia Boulevard at the time of the Russian Empire. The

Romanian Army did not possess bombers in order to conduct such an operation. The involvement of the Luftwaffe in this operation needs to be confirmed by means of scientifically-reviewed research. The Red Army had initiated the retreat from Chisinau on the 30th of June. Towards the end of the operation, on the 15th and 16th of July, at least one battalion specialized in mining and demolition was active. Many public administration and landmark buildings were destroyed as a result of these operations². This event constitutes the subject of a short story published by Yuriy Kalugin in 1942 (Tăriță, 2014). At that time, the official discourse of the Soviets went towards the “no step back” directive, which was to peak in intensity during the defense of Stalingrad.

And the explosions that make the earth tremble, much like earthquakes, keep going all night long, much like a terrible thunder. [...] The city of Chisinau is wrapped in thick plumes of smoke... It is burning on all sides. The city would blow itself up if it were about to fall into the hands of the enemy (Tăriță, pp. 71–72).

Pantelimon Halippa emotionally describes the city that he found once back after the conflict: “the catastrophic effects of fire, demolition and so many more demented undertakings is so great that one cannot look at them without tears in the eyes” (*Halippa...*, p. 299). The lack of safety and multiplication of crimes on the street of the city of Chisinau happened under martial law and was recorded in the diary of Gala Galaction. At the time, while he was priest at a church situated at the corner of Bănulescu Bodoni and Cosmonauts Streets, not far from the Chisinau cathedral, the building was robbed twice.

2 The main area affected by these operations was located between the Sadovaia (Livezilor) Street, Moghilevskaia (Movilă) Street, Aleksandrovskaia (Alexandru cel Bun) Street and Frunze Street. In addition, some other buildings were listed, mainly because of their architectural style: the radio station building, the city sewerage system, the power station, the telephone exchange building, the telegraphy station, the post office, the “Pasaj” (City Hall) and the “Krasnaia Zvezda” (Steaua Roșie) hotel. Shortly after this operation, the city was engulfed by fire. The battalion in charge retreated towards the Visterniceni railway station, which was also affected by the outbreak. Finally, the troops went towards the Orheiului Boulevard.

This building was fated to be razed from the urban landscape once the communist party leaders decided to bring it down and reconstruct that part of the city. Once the Red Army entered Chisinau again, on the 23rd of August 1944, the city center was surrounded by NKVD squads, and proceeded to remove artefacts without allowing anybody, party members included, inside. As a result, at the end of World War Two, the central Chisinau was in a pitiful state, in urgent need of intensive reconstruction. Many buildings were left in a state of disrepair as time went by (see image 2). A lot of blame for the urban destruction after World War Two goes to the party apparatus. As early as 1945, the secretary of the Central Party Committee stated that:

The capital of Soviet Moldova (from 1940 onwards, the toponym Moldova was chosen by the Bolsheviks instead of Bessarabia, and it was kept as the name for the future Soviet Republic - M.T.), the city of Chisinau, was turned into a heap o rubble: 76 percent of the walls (buildings - M.T.) and houses were destroyed. Our ancestral cities (sic!) were turned into rubble and ruins. Bender (name used by the Bolsheviks for the town of Tighina - M.T.), for instance, was organically connected with the great people of the Russians from the times of the glorious triumphs of Suvorov (Salogor, 1945, p. 30).

More than 76% of the city of Chisinau had been destroyed, according to this source. Two other cities considered by the Bolsheviks as being most affected (unless the intent was purely rhetorical) were, according to the author, Tighina and Orhei. The Bolsheviks and their architects decided that such a great rate of destruction of Chisinau would result in a high improbability of any initiative towards the reconstruction of the public space being taken in the foreseeable future. The only authentic monument in addition to the ones that have been mentioned above is Livezilor Street (formerly known as Mateevici), and survived the war almost intact. Most of the Soviet public institutions occupied central positions, as well as the residences of the party leadership. For instance, workers in visual arts and other domains took up restored buildings on the Podolsk street, which was to be renamed Iskra, and is nowadays known as București (see images 8-12, pictures taken in 2017).

The reconstruction process and the revision of the town planning in Chisinau during the post-war period

The high degree of destruction suffered by the city of Chisinau was considered by the communist authorities a good opportunity to plan the reconstruction without taking into consideration the style characteristic for the inter-war period, a style that survived in some buildings throughout the city. Another factor that resulted in a slow reconstruction process after 1945 was an internal conflict that was taken into account by the party leadership decisions. The City Hall, built during the times of the Russian Empire, following the plans of A. Bernardazzi, was referred to as "Pasaj" (passage t.n.). It was reconstructed as late as 1949, five years after the conquest of Chisinau by the Red Army. By 1947, a wing of the building was still waiting to be built (see image 5).

From the point of view of town planning theory, the city of Chisinau looked at the time like two different cities combined. The section along the main boulevard, nowadays known as Stephen the Great, had been planned in accordance with the Imperial Russian architectural specifications. The downtown area, stretching as far as the Bâc river, was crisscrossed by twisted narrow roads, reminiscent of an Oriental town. The urban planning project of Alexei Șciusev³ took them into account and proved to be quite interesting. Another initiative, dated 1943, that is worth mentioning, belongs to Octav Doicescu. His approach was meant to correct the damage inflicted by the 1941 military operations. T. Nesterov was inspired by Octav Doicescu's differentiation of the old and new cities: "The city of Chisinau is composed of two urban areas that are quite distinct: the old town, along the banks of the Bâc river, ironically labelled «oriental labyrinth», with small squares that appear along access roads that are fit only for the use of cattle-drawn carts, and the new city, the «colonial» town, built according to a grid plan" (Nesterov, 2019, p. 80).

Doicescu suggested the replacement of the damaged buildings from the lower town with green spaces. It is interesting that Doicescu foresaw the transport problems that were to appear in Chisinau after

3 The depiction is on display at the Alexei Șciusev Memorial House in Chisinau.

a few decades. He considered that a belt of highways was necessary, and the point of reference taken as a center was the green areas mentioned above (Nesterov, 2019, p. 81). The Doicescu plan was analyzed in detail and compared with the 1947 project submitted by Șciusev-Curț in a recent study (Nesterov, 2019, p. 83–84). The conclusions are highly technical and less influenced by ideology:

Obviously, the intentions of the Romanian and Soviet architects were pragmatic, in the sense that their objective was to ensure a certain degree of urban life comfort. Both during the interwar period, as well as during the soviet times, the public administration was solving practical issues that overlapped because of the historical and geographical constraints of the city of Chisinau. Yet, architecture is a visual arts discipline. Therefore, it is focused on the external aspect of the solutions and less on the structural organization. The interwar and postwar reconstruction projects have nothing in common, each with their own personal touch. The only common element is the similar approach towards a ray-shaped streets outline. The other solutions adopted the urban planning style of the period: garden-cities, belt highway, a monumental city center (Nesterov, 2019, p. 84).

A necessary observation on Șciusev's plan would be that, although it was in tune with the requirements of the Soviet ideology, it took into consideration the historic heritage of Chisinau. It did not impose the demolition of any religious building, and the foreseeable traffic problems caused by bottlenecks in the central part of the town was solved by two roads that crossed the city diagonally. An illustration of these ideas was drawn by Șciusev himself and may be seen at the "Alexei Șciusev" Memorial House in Chisinau. These streets were meant to reach as far as the Bâc river. Ten years later, the Soviet architects from Chisinau chose to extend the Gogol Street, now known as Bănulescu Bodoni Street, and demolished the St. Elijah church in the process. This destruction could have been averted if the church was to be moved. Beyond the sacrilege, the entire undertaking was useless. For the last two decades, both the Bănulescu Bodoni Street and the Pușkin Street, which run in parallel, are always jammed during work days, and the chances to solve this problem are very slim.

Key monuments of the communist regime and the Classical Writers Alley

Ideologically speaking, the central symbol of Chisinau was the Lenin statue, which witnessed the party meetings and parades. Its position was near the Imperial Russian building of the metropolitan palace. At the time, the square was surrounded by the wings of this building. Later on, a Council of the Ministers building was erected behind the monument, which was to be a central reference for the city until the end of the soviet period. It also seems surrealist, as the statue of Lenin was represented while delivering a discourse in alignment with the Imperial Gates behind which stood the church bell tower and the cathedral with its dome and cross removed. For a perspective from the side of this post-war monument, refer to image 6.

An important place in the efforts of the communist regime towards self-legitimization is occupied by an illustration of the victory over Nazi Germany. A memorial complex was raised near the cemetery situated on the Armenian Street in order to commemorate this event. A series of soldier tombs had been located in the central parc, not far from the “Rodina” cinema. That was the preferred location for wreath ceremonies dedicated to the Unknown Soldier. These tombs were later moved to the new memorial, which was to play a prominent role for the next fifteen years, from 1975 to 1990. The idea for the memorial complex came up in 1965, when May 9th was declared Victory Day. Following the trend, similar monument and memorial plaques appeared in other villages and towns across the SSR Moldova. They represented either a soldier holding a child or a kneeling soldier. The name of the fallen soldiers was inscribed on a plaque or on slabs of stone positioned around the monument.

Once the Red Army advanced in Northern Bessarabia in March 1944, the Soviet authorities started to draft young men from Moldavian villages. Proportional to the total number of the population, the number of the enlisted young men was substantial. Very few of them returned home alive. Every village paid a huge price for the war effort. Although the communist regime intended these low quality monuments as glorification and legitimization symbols for the communist regime, they became places of memory for the local

soldiers who had lost their lives. After 1990, a few crosses were raised near these monuments, and the name of the Bessarabian soldiers who were sacrificed during the armed conflict were inscribed on them. This is the case of the Hâjdieni village in the Glodeni county. The May 9th celebrations were held a few days away from the Provody, a religious feast dedicated to the departed spirits. This altered the original interpretation of the Victory Day.

Each year on the 9th of May and 23rd of August party celebrations were being held within the Chisinau memorial, which had been inaugurated in 1975. Russian Red Army veterans attended the latter ceremony, which evoked the days of the 1944 liberation. The center of the memorial complex was occupied by a sculpture in red stone representing five rifles arranged in a pyramid shape and the eternal flame. The semicircular alley on the eastern side of the memorial was leading towards a few tombstones inscribed with the names of fallen soldiers. Beyond them there were a few bas-relief representations of the suffering that Soviet people went through during the war, the drafting, the sacrifices and the final victory. After 1991 the the memorial was kept intact, as it was considered free from any influence of the communist ideology. Later, the "Grieving Mother" monument was added, in memory of the soldiers and police officers who had fallen in the Transnistria conflict.

The interpretation of the Chisinau memorial changed somewhat after 2010, as the relations between the Russian Federation and the Western world was altered. For those who embraced the "Russian World" ideology, this monument stood for the Red Army Immortal Regiment. For the pro-European politicians, the 9th of May celebrations were replaced with the Day of Europe, held on the 8th of May each year. The only soldiers who nobody seemed to remember were the Bessarabians who, fighting for the Red Army, fell on duty. A memorial dedicated to them, as well as a day of remembrance and silence, are necessary. This could be done by adding a chapel or even a church in memory of the Bessarabian soldiers fallen during World War Two.

Another landmark of the communist regime, less important, yet relevant, was the memorial built on a lower terrace, in the vicinity of the Academy of Sciences and the railway station. Located in front of a twenty levels hotel, with a commanding view around, the

equestrian monument was dedicated to Grigore Kotovski, a controversial Communist Party activist. Similar statues are to be found in different cities across Europe, in memory of important generals or princes. Kotovski was neither. The plan of the monument was released to the press on October 26th 1971. The team who worked on the project hailed from Leningrad (before 1915 and after 1991 known as St. Petersburg) and were in charge on the much larger area around the Chisinau railway station. Their concept was orbiting around the idea of a “gateway towards the center of Chisinau” (*Moldova Socialistă*, 26 October 1971). Another monument dedicated to a Bolshevik activist, somewhat more modest, was placed in the Botanica district, at the entrance of a grand square, in the middle of an avenue that was climbing a hill from the railway station towards the Peace Boulevard, renamed the Dacia Boulevard after 1990. It was dedicated to Serghei Lazu, the son of boyars, who embraced the radical leftwing ideology and died under suspicious circumstances somewhere in the Far East, probably at the hand of the Japanese or a rival faction.

Two other important monuments raised by the communist regime were the monument of the August 23rd 1944 Soviet liberation, situated next to the Academy of Sciences, and the monument dedicated to the Communist-Leninist Youth Union, located on the Youth Boulevard, which was renamed the Rebirth Boulevard in 1991 and Vieru Boulevard later on, in 2009. The 1991–1994 economic crisis and the impoverishment of the population forced the local administration to abandon any renovation plans, which at the time could have been executed without the opposition of the nostalgic citizens. Apart from the Lenin statue, a monument that was linked to the communist ideology, there was another statue representing Marx and Engels sitting on a bench. This monument dating back to the 1980s was located in front of the Central Committee, nowadays the Parliament, and its removal was an operation secretly conducted during night-time. In the early 1990s, rumors circulated that the statue had been laid at the bottom of a lake, but it was discovered in the late 2010s, stored in the Parliament building garage.

Among the very few monuments that resonated with the local population of Chisinau was the Classical Writers Alley, inaugurated on April 29th, 1957. After debates, contradictory discussions

and hesitations, the 20th Congress decided to significantly release the ideological pressure over the cultural activities in the SSR Moldova. The result was the planning and construction in the center of Chisinau of an alley dedicated to classical writers. Although the tallest of all was the Russian writer Pushkin, who had spent his exile in Chisinau, the alley became a journey through the Romanian culture, with some statues added after 1990⁴. In the planning stage, the writers who were considered appropriate, although some had also been political activists, were: N. Milescu-Spătaru, D. Cantemir, Gh. Asachi, C. Stamati, C. Negruzzi, A. Donici, A. Hajdeu, A. Russo, V. Alecsandri, B.-P. Hasdeu, M. Eminescu, I. Creangă. The party discourse was attempting to connect these classical writers with either Lenin or the Moldavian heritage, but all the above were identity markers for all citizens of the Republic. B.Z. Tanasevski, president of the executive branch of the town committee made a few somehow anachronic remarks on the occasion of the Classical Writers' Alley inauguration: "Our gratitude and pride are greater as we come to realize that these writers managed to contribute, to a larger or smaller extent, to the present situation: the erection of grandiose buildings, the multi-disciplinary progress and enlightenment of our people due to the socialist culture" (*Moldova Socialistă*, 30 April 1957).

A much more emotional and reserved speech came from A. Lazarev, Minister of Culture at the time:

We wish that this modest homage to the founders of our culture, produced through the efforts of the Moldavian people, would become, for the youth, a symbol of love, pride and respect of the Moldavian people towards our classical writers. Likewise, it would also urge the young generation to advance towards a deeper understanding of their works, which is an endless stream of great ideas and artistry, the real origin of our contemporary literature (*Moldova Socialistă*, 30 April 1957).

4 Some of the statues that appeared after 1990 are somewhat debatable, especially in what the choices for the personalities they represented were justified. We will not delve into this topic here.

The monumental buildings constructed at the center of Chisinau 1970–1980

During the 1970s, the Central Committee Bureau of the Communist Party and the Administrative Section of the Central Committee operated serious changes in the center of Chisinau. The entire space beyond the Alecsandri, Lazo, București and Columna Streets were redone architecturally. The fact that the party leadership's role in society was exaggerated is represented by the disproportionate dimensions of buildings such as the Central Committee (nowadays the Parliament), the Marxist- Leninist University (later to become the "Ginta latina" theatre and Alliance Française), the Institute for the Study of Party History (right now the Ministry of Justice and until recently the Institute for History), the Republican Unions, the Town Party Committee (nowadays the Ministry for Foreign Affairs), the communist party hotel (which was situated in the vicinity of the park and was to become in the early 1990s "Seabeco", whereas now it is called "Jolly Alon"). All these constructions should, in our opinion, be considered part of a postmodern socialist trend. The owners of the houses and blocks of flats that were brought down in order to allow the construction of these communist party complex submitted a complaint to the Moscow party. The demolitions took place in 1974–1975 and among the buildings that were razed was a block of flats that had been built just a decade prior. There was also a planning error involved, with a price tag of over 200,000 rubles. At first, the digging took place too close to the Lenin Boulevard (known today as Stephen the Great). Then, they were resumed further away.⁵ Following a trend at the time, the complaint was re-sent to Chisinau, and the responsible of the cc replied in a formal manner. The voice of the Chisinau citizens was ignored once more. The citizens had invoked also the directives of the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where a tighter grip on expenses was recommended. We believe that, at the time, in the Soviet Union, the class of the new masters (called "new lords" by Kenneth Jowitt) had already been active. It was not the ideology that allowed them to

5 Direcția Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice, Fond 51, inv. 40, d. 33, f. 24.

reconfigure the public space on a whim, but the boundless power that these people possessed. Later on, in 1987, the Kojevnikova journalist, working at the time for “Literaturnaia Gazeta” had noticed the huge dimensions of the Ministry of Agriculture, much too big for a small republic as the SSR Moldova. In effect, these extensive buildings triggered a growth in the bureaucratic workforce. As an irony of fate, recent statistics indicate that in the first two decades of the new millennium, the bureaucratic workforce continued to grow after a period of relative stagnation in the 1990s.

The dimensions of the 1970–1980s buildings were, indeed, exaggerated. Another such example is the Railways Palace, a 20 level building (later known as Cosmos) and the Kotovski statue. All these were labelled “the railway station neighborhood complex” and were all disproportionately large. The plans were conceived at an even more grandiose scale. Taking these into account, N. Feldbrina, an architect, foresaw that:

Next in line is the reconstruction of the Chisinau railway station building. Actually, it will become part of the complex. On the Tiraspol street, a new building dedicated to the railways is about to be inaugurated. It is an enormous block of flats that will offer a lot of comfort to the residents. Nearby, a new bus terminal will be constructed. Further on, parking lots. The railway lines will be crossed via underground passages. It is worth mentioning that the passengers will be reaching the platforms via elevators.

The new building was never built, neither the underground escalators. Towards the last days of the Soviet Union, a few unfinished buildings still remained, to be finished as late as 2005.

Among the most important postmodern-ish building in Chisinau, the last to be built in accordance with the requirements of the socialist ideology, was the Supreme Soviet building, today the Presidential building and the National Palace.

Conclusions

The object of this study is complex. We had to limit ourselves to the particular case of Chisinau, excluding the rest of SSR Moldova. One of the obstacles we encountered was the emotional effect such a study has on a person who spent his childhood in the city during the 1980s. Although the signs of modern life are visible, the socialist postmodernism is quite easy to identify. Even more so, elements of the interwar architecture still survive, reinterpreted by the architects who have collaborated with the communists. There is as of yet no researcher of the demolitions and degradation suffered during the early 2000s. Yet the city still holds elements of a jubilant architecture that was inspired by the Russian imperial architecture or the Neo-Romanian school.

Regarding the districts located on a lower elevation, also known as the nucleus, built in the 18th and 19th centuries, all was lost, according to Lică Sainciuc. Witnesses of the interwar period are only the statue of Stephen the Great, the churches that survived the communist campaigns and a few isolated houses on Livezilor (nowadays Mateevici) and Bucharest Streets. Also there are four schools dating back to the interwar period. Right now, the city has its own architectural identity, kept alive by an eclectic and postmodern trend, visible throughout the cubist and minimalist buildings. Although some buildings were constructed after the 2000s in a modern style, they are positioned in according to the communist principle that the conditioning of the place and the attention to proportion are to be ignored.

There is no sign that the people of Chisinau will ever demand the reconstruction of the St. Elijah church, a monument which was ruthlessly demolished not far from the Academy of Economic Studies. There is uncertainty regarding the Herța House, a case of abandoned reconstruction dating back to 2009 (Munteanu, 2022) as well as the heritage building from across the street, which was demolished in 2007 without any protest from the civil society. The destruction suffered during World War Two and later during the reconstruction stages, as well as the disproportionately large projects of the 1970s and 1980s, coupled with the period of neglect

after the 2000s are already part of the history of Chisinau in the same manner as the Ilie Moromete courtyard, a powerful symbol from the well-known novel written by Marin Preda, has entered the history of literature. Beyond all these, praise should be given to the efforts of researchers who put a lot of effort in ample studies on the symbolic buildings and identity landmarks of Chisinau, like Tamara Nesterov and Alla Ceastina.

The city of Chisinau still holds many obsolete Soviet monuments, such as the equestrian statue of Kotovski, the monument situated near the Academy of Sciences, the monument dedicated to the Leninist youth and others. This is the result of the fact that they have not been demolished at the right time. Nowadays they hold no symbolic value for the people of Chisinau and will continue to be part of its eclectic landscape. As for the “Eternity” memorial complex, there is an urgent need for the construction of a chapel or church, not only the addition of the representation of a grieving mother.

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