

### Chapter 3. Public Space and the Material Legacies of Communism in Bucharest

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In this chapter we consider changes in the urban cultural landscape of Bucharest since 1989 with particular reference to those landscape elements reflecting the material and symbolic legacies of Romania's communist period. Through examining the manner in which public space has (and has not) been reshaped we draw attention to the highly complex nature of post-communist change in the urban landscape and the ways in which this is situated within broader processes of political, economic and social reform. The chapter focuses on how the changing approaches to public space reflect Romania's 25 years of post-communist transformation and the urban landscape of the capital expresses and mirrors the country's efforts to negotiate the exit from communism and the broader (re)engagement with Western (particularly European) values and agendas.

Urban public space, we argue, is far from being a neutral, apolitical or irrelevant backdrop to everyday life. Instead, urban landscapes constitute highly significant arenas in which political power can be "expressed, maintained and indeed, enhanced"<sup>1</sup> (a subject to which cultural geographers have dedicated considerable attention over the past two decades). Each political order produces its 'own' space,<sup>2</sup> which reflects its ideology, agenda and aspirations. In particular, "those with political power within a given society organize public space to convey (and thus teach the public) desired political lessons."<sup>3</sup> The intent is both to provide an ever-present reminder of the regime's presence or priorities and contribute to transforming the collective consciousness of the urban populace. This is achieved through a

range of strategies including erecting monuments, statues and memorials, raising monumental public buildings, and naming the urban landscape in particular ways. Through such practices, political orders create an “official public landscape” (or “official iconographic landscape”<sup>4</sup>) in which “official rhetoric is concretized and performed in public space.”<sup>5</sup> This project assumes particular importance in capital cities<sup>6</sup> so that “the entire layout and function of a capital city, its distribution of monuments and public buildings, can very often become an exercise in national ideology and power.”<sup>7</sup> Urban landscapes can, therefore, be interpreted as expressing wider discourses of power, identity and collective memory.

Given the importance that political orders attach to public space, any revolutionary political change (such as the collapse of communist regimes) is worked out in the urban landscape.<sup>8</sup> Through changing (or reconfiguring) public space a new political order seeks to both mark the demise of its predecessor and make a highly visible proclamative statement that a new order is in place.<sup>9</sup> A new round of shaping urban public space often results, as “during change and crisis, political actors employ monuments and memorials as vehicles to legitimate their claims on power and their visions of society. These symbols, in turn, declare publicly which groups and histories the official sphere recognizes as central to the state’s identity.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the urban landscape can be used as a lens through which to examine the nature of political change and as a barometer of the pace of such change.

However, this chapter shows that attempts by incoming regimes to remake urban public landscapes are rarely carried through to completion, or entirely successful. In a review of Central and Eastern European cases, Czepczyński argues that landscape elements inherited from the communist era undergo a range of fates during post-communist transformations<sup>11</sup>: removal or erasure; renaming to reflect new political values; rededication to the new political order; and reuse for other purposes entirely. Similarly, Forest and Johnson argue that

communist-era monuments that survive destruction and removal become the subject of various strategies – co-option, disavowal or contestation - in post-communism.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore this chapter considers both change and continuity in the urban landscape of Bucharest after 1989. After briefly outlining how Romania's communist regime reshaped urban public space to project its agenda and ideology, we focus on the ways in which post-communist governments have (and have not) attempted to address the urban landscape inherited from communism. We identify three stages in this project: post-revolution attempts to 'cleanse' the official communist-era public landscape through erasing and removing key symbols and replacing them with others; a period of neglect of the urban landscape in the 1990s which resulted in 'leftover' landscapes; and renewed attention to reshaping the urban landscape in the 2000s in view of European Union accession. The conclusion reflects on potential lessons for understanding post-communist transformations through the lens of landscape change.

### **Remaking Public Space in Bucharest After 1989**

Following established practice in the Soviet Union, communist Romania used urban planning to assert the regime's ideology and shape a distinctly socialist mentality. As Crowley and Reid argue, such regimes believed that in order to "change how a person thought and behaved one must change his or her material surroundings. Thus the architectural form of the city and planning of urban spaces were vested with a social-transformative role in the lives of its residents."<sup>13</sup> This project was part of the Communist Party's "broader goal of transforming consciousness, channelling thought in "correct" directions, cutting down alternative formulations."<sup>14</sup> The urban landscape therefore became an arena where ideology was made visual and public space was emphatically state territory that (in theory at least) was capable of being interpreted and understood in only one way.<sup>15</sup>

This, of course, was achieved through well-established practices such as the erection of monuments, memorials and statues which, along with the naming of the urban landscape, were intended to celebrate the heroes, events and agenda of Romanian communism. Throughout the city, buildings associated with the pre-communist regime were put to new uses (for example, the royal palace at Cotroceni was given over to the Pioneer movement and renamed *Palatul Pionierilor*). New monumental structures were also raised including *Casa Scînteii* and *Monumentul Eroilor Luptei pentru Libertatea Poporului și a Patriei, pentru Socialism* (Monument to the heroes of the struggle for the freedom of the people and of the motherland, for socialism), a vast mausoleum complex in *Parcul Libertății* (formerly *Parcul Carol I*). However, public space was also transformed through smaller-scale practices such as the erection of placards, banners, signs and public display boards emblazoned with ideological and revolutionary slogans.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the regime sought to shape the more mundane spaces of everyday life. As planned industrialisation introduced large factory complexes to the edges of the city, numerous new housing estates were constructed, characterised by regimented landscapes of apartment blocks in which the population could be collectively and efficiently housed (and more effectively monitored).

The most dramatic reshaping of the urban landscape in Bucharest was the *Centru Civic* (Civic Centre) constructed by Nicolae Ceaușescu in the 1980s. The story of Ceaușescu's draconian remodelling of the capital needs little introduction. Some five square kilometres of the historic city were demolished (and 40,000 people forcibly rehoused) to make way for a new monumental landscape. Its centrepiece was *Casa Poporului* (House of the People), a gigantic building covering an area of 6.3 hectares and intended to house all the institutions of state power.<sup>17</sup> The House was approached by a vast ceremonial boulevard lined with grand apartment blocks. These landscape elements were surrounded by a range of equally monumental civic buildings. Although frequently derided as the fantasy project of a

madman, the *Centru Civic* was entirely consistent with the way that authoritarian regimes use (public) space to instil docility and hierarchy among the urban population.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, then, communist Romania dedicated considerable effort to reshaping the urban landscape. To a large degree, it succeeded in creating an official public landscape in its own image. This is not to say that the regime entirely realised the transformative power of public space. Indeed, there is often a tendency to over-state the ways in which public space can transform collective consciousness since individual and everyday responses to public space can be diverse, and the meanings of particular symbols in the urban landscape can be contested or ignored. Nevertheless, the reshaping of public space was an important consideration for Romania's communist regime, and it left a significant (and problematic) legacy in the cultural landscape of the emerging post-communist city.

### **Early Attempts to 'Cleanse' the Official Public Landscape Created by Communism**

An early response to the events of 1989 was to erase the obvious symbolism of the communist era. During the violent events of the Romanian 'revolution' protesters attacked many of the public symbols of Ceauşescu's regime. In addition to removing the communist emblem from the flag (which was to become an iconic image of the revolution), protesters also attacked portraits of Ceauşescu. They also pulled down, painted over, or graffitied banners and posters containing communist slogans. Some statues and monuments (such as the bust of Alexandru Moghioroş in *Drumul Taberei*) were also attacked and overturned, and one bust of Ceauşescu (there were no statues of the former president in Bucharest) was hung from a tree.<sup>19</sup> These largely spontaneous acts of symbolic retribution against the public landscape of the communist regime were undertaken by ordinary protesters, with little involvement from the transitional authorities.

In 1990 the National Salvation Front (NSF, which derived its political legitimacy from its self-proclaimed status as the standard-bearer of the revolution<sup>20</sup>) was quick to announce measures to commemorate the events of December 1989. Legislation published on January 9 changed the name of Palace Square (*Piața Palatului*) to Revolution Square (*Piața Revoluției*) and called for the erection of a monument to those who had lost their lives in December 1989. However, the Front was slower to act in remaking the official public landscape created by the communist regime. For a start it had many other priorities in consolidating its hold on power and, later, preparing for the elections in May 1990. In addition, many of the Front leaders had deep roots in the Romanian Communist Party and were ambivalent about abandoning communism. Perhaps for this reason they were slow to recognise the importance of reshaping urban space to remove the symbols of communism and announce the presence of a new political order. Here the NSF was out of step with the popular will to construct a post-Ceaușescu Romania as quickly as possible. Consequently, much of the official public landscape of the communist era remained unchanged. A monumental statue of Lenin which stood on a major boulevard in Bucharest remained, unscathed, on its plinth. Similarly, numerous streets in Bucharest which commemorated the events, personalities and agenda of communism were left unchanged.

This situation was a marked contrast with the communist takeover of power in December 1947. The new regime was in a hurry to change society and, following the Soviet model, was fully aware of the importance of reshaping public space as part of this process. Consequently, the equestrian statue of King Carol I, which stood in *Piața Palatului* in the centre of the capital, was removed within hours of the declaration of the Romanian People's Republic on December 30, 1947.<sup>21</sup> Other statues of pre-communist political leaders were removed within months. Similarly, streets in Bucharest were swiftly renamed to decommemorate the former regime: 76 streets changed their names in early 1948.<sup>22</sup>

It took several months (and public protests) before the NSF leaders took action to ‘cleanse’ Bucharest of the public iconography of communism. In February 1990 crowds began to gather at the statue of Lenin calling for its removal and questioning if communism had really disappeared from Romania.<sup>23</sup> Belatedly, Ion Iliescu proposed that the statue should be removed<sup>24</sup> (here the Provisional Council of National Unity was hurriedly responding to events, rather than directing them). The statue was removed with considerable difficulty on March 5 and, along with a statue of Dr. Petru Groza from elsewhere in Bucharest, was unceremoniously dumped in the gardens of Mogoşoaia Palace on the edge of Ilfov district (where both remained for almost 20 years<sup>25</sup>).

These events spurred the transitional government into action. During the following year measures were introduced to reshape the symbolic legacy of communism. These followed the strategies of removal, renaming, rededication, and reuse.<sup>26</sup> A decree-law published in March 1990 established a mechanism for renaming streets and other public buildings (and devolved this responsibility to local authorities). Consequently, in 1990-95, Bucharest’s city hall renamed 267 streets. Most of these renamings were intended to decommemorate the communist regime and its personalities; to commemorate the victims and cities of the 1989 revolution; and to reinstate former names that the communists had changed after 1948.<sup>27</sup>

Other initiatives involved introducing new monuments into the urban landscape. The new regime was eager to establish *Piaţa Revoluţiei* as a space of remembrance of the events of December 1989. A small and sober monument was erected in 1990 in front of the former Communist Party headquarters where Ceauşescu had given his final speech. Various state institutions erected other monuments commemorating the victims of the revolution around the city (most notably at the television centre and at Otopeni Airport). Key buildings in Bucharest associated with the communist regime were also put to new uses that were

appropriate to the new order. Thus, the former headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in *Piața Revoluției* became the home for the re-established Senate following the elections of 1990, the nearby former Council of State building was returned to use as an art gallery, while the former Palace of the Grand National Assembly became the Palace of the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of the new parliament).

Legislation in 1991 also sought to reconfigure the communist-era mausoleum in *Parcul Libertății* (later renamed *Parcul Carol I*). This called for the removal of all communist symbols from the mausoleum, along with the removal of the bodies interred there. Subsequently some of the bodies of leading Romanian communists (such as Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Constantin Parhon) were removed from the structure and discretely reburied in nearby Bellu cemetery. In other cases, the families of those interred there made their own arrangements for the removal and reburial of the bodies.<sup>28</sup> However, many bodies were unclaimed and consequently remained in their graves at the mausoleum.

### **‘Leftover’ Landscapes: Continuity in Public Space**

However strong its determination, no political order can completely purge the urban landscape of the material legacy of its predecessors.<sup>29</sup> In Bucharest, some elements of the communist-era urban landscape were almost impossible to change. For example, the new regime could do little to physically reshape the huge apartment blocks. Thus, it elected to sell the apartments quickly to their tenants,<sup>30</sup> and this change of ownership from public to private also transformed the meanings attached to these districts. Similarly, there was no obvious way to physically reconfigure the huge communist-era industrial complexes beyond cosmetic changes such as removing communist slogans and banners or changing the names of factories.

In any case, efforts by both the central authorities and Bucharest's city hall to remove the symbolic legacies of communism quickly ran out of steam. By 1991 both groups had other priorities. The NSF government (and its successors) faced the challenge of reforming the hyper-centralised communist economy and securing public support at a time when most of the population was experiencing plummeting living standards. Given that many Front members were not unsympathetic to communism they were, perhaps, less concerned with eradicating its symbolic legacies. There was similarly a strong strand of nostalgia for the communist era among many of the ultra-nationalist parties that were part of the coalition government during 1992-1996.<sup>31</sup> Bucharest's city hall (also under the control of the NSF until 1992) was primarily concerned with assuring social services and modernising the city's ageing and decrepit infrastructure. In this context, concerns to reshape the official public landscape created by communism were of low importance.

As a result, outside the city centre, many communist symbols remained conspicuous in public space. They constitute what Czepczyński has termed "leftover landscapes,"<sup>32</sup> that is, landscape elements which have not been subject to post-communist strategies of removal, renaming, rededication and reuse.<sup>33</sup> They represent continuity with the former regime, not a conspicuous break from it. In Bucharest many elements of the official public landscape created by communism have persisted well into the post-communist period.

The best example is street names. While almost all streets in the city centre with obvious communist resonances were renamed, Bucharest's city hall did not complete this process in the more peripheral parts of the city. The reasons were largely economic: renaming streets and producing the new signage is an expensive process (particularly when a large number of streets is involved). Once the initial elation over Ceaușescu's overthrow had passed, changing street names ceased to be a priority for both the Bucharest city hall and the residents.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, the "toponymic cleansing"<sup>35</sup> of Bucharest has been less thorough

than in other post-communist capitals and, outside the city centre, there are still many street names with communist resonances. For example, names such as *Strada Muncitorului* (Street of the Worker), *Strada Reconstrucției* (Reconstruction Street), *Strada Betonului* (Street of Concrete), *Strada Betonierei* (Street of the Concrete Mixer) and *Strada Bauxitei* (Aluminium Street) prosaically reflect the communist agenda. A street and district of Bucharest retain the name of *16 Februarie* (after a 1933 strike which occupied a hallowed place in communist mythology). Even a street named after Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (a leading communist activist of the late 1940s) has remained unchanged (perhaps because, as an early victim of Gheorghiu-Dej's purges, Pătrășcanu is seen as an 'acceptable' communist).

Even when streets were formally renamed, Bucharest's city hall was often slow to affix signage containing the new names. Thus many streets continued to be marked by their communist-era names for up to a decade after being formally renamed. One conspicuous example was a communist-era name plate on *Bulevardul Republicii* (renamed *Bulevardul Elisabeta* in 1995), which survived until 2006 (when it was removed during the preparations for Romania's accession to the EU). Even today, surviving communist-era street name signage can still be found on apartment blocks in the suburbs (*I Mai* being one of many examples). To complicate the situation still further, there are many instances where a communist-era street name remains in widespread daily use, long after the name was officially changed. An example is *Piața Moghioroș* in the *Drumul Taberei* district: although formally renamed *Piața Drumul Taberei* most of the market's users (including many young people) continue to use its communist-era name.<sup>36</sup>

Street names are not the only toponymic legacy of communism. A number of Bucharest's metro stations retained their communist-era names. For example, *Armata Poporului* (People's Army) and *Industriașilor* (Industrial Workers) were renamed only in 2009. Other names with obviously communist resonances have survived unchanged, such as *Piața*

*Muncii* (Square of Labour) and *I Mai* (1 May), as have others - such as *Timpuri noi* (New Times) and *Păcii* (Peace) - whose meaning is more ambiguous and can be reinterpreted in a post-communist context.

Although communist-era statues and monuments have been removed from the city centre, they have survived in other parts of the city. By 2000, a large plaque in the *Grivița* district commemorating the 1933 strike in the nearby railway yard was still 'in place', whereas the communist mausoleum in *Parcul Carol I* remained almost entirely unchanged. Most of the bodies remained in the graves around the central structure so that, in form and function, the mausoleum continued to perform its original role in embodying the memory of leading Communist Party activists.<sup>37</sup> Some attempt was made to reconfigure the park when, in 1991, Romania's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (which had been transferred from the park to Mărășești in 1958) was returned to *Parcul Carol I*. While seeking to give the park a new meaning as a site of national (rather than Party) memory, the project was only partially successful since the mausoleum continued to dominate the park and overshadow the tomb.

The starkest example of continuity in the urban landscape is the *Centru Civic*. This project was incomplete in 1989 and the new government faced the problem of an urban landscape which was the defining symbol of totalitarianism and therefore the very antithesis of Romania's post-communist identity and aspirations. This would have challenged any post-communist government, but Romania's new politicians were unable to come up with a strategy for the district and consequently did very little to change it. Eventually the government decided to resume construction work at *Casa Poporului* – later renamed *Palatul Parlamentului* (The Parliament Palace) - with the intention of transforming the building into the new home for Romania's post-communist parliament. This was a logical attempt to reconfigure the building through giving it a new use appropriate to a post-communist democracy. However, the Communist Party background of many of Romania's post-

communist politicians may have meant that they were not unsympathetic to the building and the social order it represented. The Chamber of Deputies moved into the building in 1996, followed by the Senate in 2005 along with a range of other state institutions.

However, the wider landscape around *Palatul Parlamentului* remained little changed, and succumbed to looting and decay and, later, encroachment by vegetation. Eventually the government realised that it needed to act. In 1995 President Iliescu endorsed the launching of an international architectural competition – *Bucharest 2000* - to ‘heal’ the scarred landscape of the *Centru Civic*. At a time when Romania’s international image had been tarnished through stalled economic reforms, corruption and the presence of ultranationalists in government, this competition sought to present a positive image of the country abroad and demonstrate Romania’s openness to the wider world (particularly international architectural currents).<sup>38</sup> The winning design (announced in September 1996) proposed to create a new business district around *Palatul Parlamentului* and to blunt the building’s symbolic impact through constructing skyscrapers around it. It also proposed a dense network of new buildings on vacant land where building work was unfinished.

However, *Bucharest 2000* was swiftly overtaken by events. The coalition government elected in late 1996 made overdue economic restructuring its first priority (illustrating how symbolic changes to public space quickly take second place to broader processes of economic restructuring). Enabling legislation was passed for the *Bucharest 2000* project only in 1998, and private sector funding was not secured until 2000.<sup>39</sup> The Social Democrats who returned to power in late 2000 clearly disliked *Bucharest 2000* since within two days of taking power they suspended the project (and later formally revoked it). This was hardly unusual within post-communist Romanian politics where new governments have been quick to cancel projects initiated or supported by their predecessor.<sup>40</sup> But some of the Social Democrats

might have been unhappy with the proposal to neutralise the symbolic impact of *Palatul Parlamentului*.<sup>41</sup>

In 2004 the Social Democrats produced their own proposal – the ‘Esplanada’ project – to transform a large abandoned construction site east of *Piața Unirii*. *Esplanada* (a public-private partnership between Bucharest’s city hall and a Hungarian property development company) proposed the construction of skyscrapers and towers providing office space, hotels and a shopping mall. It was another development intended to signal Romania’s allegiance to international architectural styles and neoliberal urban governance.<sup>42</sup> Surprisingly, the centre-right government elected in November 2004 decided to continue with the project. However, former owners had reclaimed most of the land for the project and the city hall lacked the resources to purchase the site. As such, *Esplanada* (which was opposed by the then mayor of Bucharest) was abandoned in 2010 and the site is now buried under two decades’ worth of vegetation.

The *Centru Civic* is a communist landscape that is both contested and disavowed but, twenty-five years after the fall of Ceaușescu, little has been achieved to reconfigure it. *Palatul Parlamentului* still dominates the city in the way intended by Ceaușescu and there has been no attempt to manage its visual and symbolic impact. Warsaw in Poland has faced a similar problem with the monumental Palace of Science and Culture, but has dealt with it through allowing international firms to construct skyscrapers around the Palace which is, consequently, just one among a number of tall buildings in the capital.<sup>43</sup> While Ceaușescu’s House of the People may have been inscribed with new meanings as the centre of a post-communist democratic parliament, commentators have pointed out that the concentration of state power in one building is not so far removed from what Ceaușescu originally intended.

### **The Role of Non-State Actors in Reshaping the Urban Landscape**

While the central and local authorities quickly lost interest in reshaping the official public landscape of communism, state actors do not act in a vacuum.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, other actors (representing a range of interests) had a significant role in reshaping public space in the capital. During the mid-1990s Bucharest's fast-growing private sector rapidly transformed central Bucharest in the image of global capitalism. As international brands made their appearance, they quickly made their mark on public space through advertisements, posters, hoardings, neon lights, and new shop fronts. What had formerly been a rather drab city quickly became a riot of colour.<sup>45</sup> The influence of the private sector was particularly pronounced in the *Centru Civic*, particularly *Piața Unirii*. Various international corporations quickly established a presence in this area (such as McDonald's which opened its first Romanian restaurant in 1995) and the surrounding buildings were covered in illuminated advertising banners. The private sector transformed the *Centru Civic* in other ways: the eastern end of the central boulevard developed as an informal banking sector, while Marriot purchased an unfinished building behind *Palatul Parlamentului* and opened it as a hotel.

It was not just international capital which transformed public space. Throughout the city (and particularly in the communist-era housing estates) an explosion of street vending enlivened the public arena. Small metal kiosks were set up (usually without legal authority) on every street corner and piece of vacant land. Most were run as small-scale family businesses selling a wide range of imported consumer goods (such as chocolate, cigarettes, chewing gum, and washing powder). In this way ordinary people reclaimed public space that had formerly been state territory and many kiosks became informal meeting sites where people would gather, talk and, in the evenings, drink beer. Ultimately their presence was temporary as the authorities sought to reassert their control on public space so that, in 2000, almost all kiosks were removed from the Bucharest streetscape as part of mayor Traian Băsescu's efforts to 'clean up' the city.<sup>46</sup>

After the late 1990s private capital also transformed some of the monumental buildings created by the communist regime. The best example was the giant ‘agro-alimentary complexes’ (centres of collective food retailing), built in the 1980s and mockingly nicknamed “circuses of hunger” by Bucharesters. Almost all were unfinished at the time of Ceaușescu’s overthrow. As neither the central government nor the Bucharest city hall had any strategy for their reuse, they were simply abandoned and left to decay. However, as a market economy established itself these structures began to be reappraised for their real estate value. They were subsequently purchased by property developers, and rebuilt as shopping malls (the first being the complex in *Vitan* which opened in 1999).<sup>47</sup>

Other actors (both elites and publics) sought to reconfigure the urban landscape of Bucharest by sponsoring new monuments, statues and memorials.<sup>48</sup> Memorials were erected in and around *Piața Universității* (by individuals and non-state institutions) to commemorate the events of December 1989 and June 1990.<sup>49</sup> The National Christian Democratic Peasant Party sponsored a statue of Iuliu Maniu, which was erected in *Piața Revoluției* in 1998. The urban landscape was also the arena for competing conceptions of national identity reflected in graffiti which expressed a range of positions including opposition to communism, support for democracy and ‘Europeanisation’, and extreme nationalism and xenophobia. Most controversially, a bust of Ion Antonescu was erected in the grounds of a Bucharest church in 1999. Following international protests the Social Democrat government passed legislation in 2002 banning fascist and xenophobic symbols and the bust was eventually removed.

### **Renewed Attention to the Official Public Landscape in the 2000s**

During the 2000s both central and local authorities turned renewed attention to the urban landscape of Bucharest. The Social Democrat government elected in 2000 made membership of NATO and the EU its foreign policy priorities. In this context, it was

important that the official public landscape of Bucharest was an appropriate expression of Romania's post-communist identity and aspirations. This necessitated further efforts to remove or reconfigure the symbolic legacy of communism, along with the sponsoring of new monuments and memorials which conveyed the 'right' message about Romania to an external audience. In addition, economic stability and increasing prosperity created favourable conditions for the reshaping of public space which, until now, had been a lower priority.

Consequently, new statues and memorials were constructed in central Bucharest during the mid-2000s. In 2005 a second monument to the 1989 revolution was inaugurated in *Piața Revoluției*. This had been proposed in 2003 when the Social Democrats (the successors to the NSF) were in government and during Iliescu's third term as President. This decision can be interpreted as an attempt by a segment of the political elite to reinvigorate the narrative of the popular revolution which had brought about the downfall of communism. However, the resulting *Memorialul Renașterii* (Memorial of Rebirth) was widely derided by the press, architects and the wider Bucharest public (who nicknamed the structure the "impaled potato").

As EU accession in January 2007 drew closer, various practices of memorialisation sought to ensure that Bucharest's landscape demonstrated Romania's allegiance to European values, democracy and human rights. In May 2006 a *Monument to the Founding Fathers of the European Union* was unveiled in *Parcul Herăstrău* to affirm the political values to which Romania was now committed. Months afterwards a statue of Charles de Gaulle was unveiled (in the square which already carried his name), underlining Romania's long-standing historical and cultural ties with France. Also in 2006, work started on a Holocaust memorial (inaugurated in 2009), one element of a broader project initiated by President Iliescu (and continued by President Băsescu) to acknowledge and remember the Holocaust in Romania.

One new monument was specifically intended to replace one destroyed by the communist regime when it took power. Both the Ministry of Culture and the Bucharest city hall sought to install a replica of the equestrian statue of King Carol I that had stood in what is now *Piața Revoluției*.<sup>50</sup> This principle of reinstating what had previously existed had already been applied to street names commemorating Romania's monarchs. In 1995, a number of boulevards named after members of the Royal Family (which were swiftly renamed by the communist regime in 1948) returned to their original names.<sup>51</sup> The restoration of the statue was intended to redress the symbolic violence undertaken by the communist regime and to 'reconnect' with the pre-communist past<sup>52</sup> by reinstating what had been a major landmark in the capital. Significantly, the decision to reinstate the statue was announced in 2006 – declared *Anul Carol I* in commemoration of 100 years since the 1906 *Expoziție Generală Română*, held to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the King's reign. The new statue was unveiled (in its original location) in 2010.

Another initiative announced in 2006 was a proposal to finally put the communist mausoleum in *Parcul Carol I* to a new use. A campaign in 2004 by the Romanian Orthodox Church to demolish the mausoleum and build a massive cathedral in its place had been thwarted by widespread public opposition.<sup>53</sup> In particular, critics argued that the mausoleum had architectural merits in its own right, and that nothing was achieved by simply eliminating the traces of a difficult past. The new proposal envisaged leaving the complex intact but transforming it into a Memorial to the Heroes of the Nation (*Memorialul Eroilor Neamului*) to commemorate Romania's war dead.<sup>54</sup> The first stage involved moving the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier a second time to its original location (immediately alongside the mausoleum). The wider mausoleum complex was to be transformed into a series of new memorials to honour those who had died in war. This was intended as a decisive attempt to reconfigure the site so that it became an uncontroversial place of national memory. But this

process was protracted. The last bodies of the communist activists buried at the complex were not removed until 2009. Since then a lack of funding has prevented the completion of the memorial. Users of the park still widely refer to the structure as the “communist mausoleum,” again illustrating how, within popular imaginings, the meanings attached to the urban landscape show a degree of continuity with the communist era.

In the 2000s the city hall turned its attention to Bucharest’s long-neglected *Centru Istoric* (Historic Centre). This run-down area presented a stark contrast to the lively and reinvigorated historic cores of other post-communist cities such as Prague, Bratislava, Tallinn, and Kraków. Indeed, the *Centru istoric* was a source of embarrassment for the city and despair for the Romanian press. A combination of outdated communist-era planning legislation, uncertain property ownership, illegal ownership of many buildings, and a multitude of other demands on its resources prevented the city hall from addressing the problems of this area during the 1990s. Funding for a pilot project to rehabilitate the *Centru Istoric* was secured in 2003, but work started only in 2006 and even then the project was further delayed by the need to document archaeological findings and by contractual disputes between the city hall and the firm undertaking the work. When the rehabilitation work was complete in 2012 it led to the rapid development of a vibrant (but now privatised) leisure quarter of restaurants, cafes and bars which rivals the historic centres of other post-communist capitals. This project was underpinned by a desire to recreate the interwar spirit of Bucharest as the “little Paris” (again illustrating the relationship between urban space, memory and national identity). The ‘heritagisation’ of this district was reinforced through the addition of new street name plates featuring an old-looking script font.

Finally, a further attempt was made to (partially) reconfigure the landscape of the *Centru Civic*. The Romanian Orthodox Church had come up with its own proposals to ‘Christianize’ the *Centru Civic* through the construction of a monumental Cathedral of

National Salvation (*Catedrala Mântuirii Neamului*) in *Piața Unirii*. However, there were numerous difficulties in building such a large structure there so the Church had to look elsewhere. Following the failure of the *Parcul Carol I* proposal, a new location behind *Palatul Parlamentului* was chosen and approved by the parliament in 2005.<sup>55</sup> The foundation stone was laid in 2007 with building work expected to last at least six years<sup>56</sup> (at the time of writing in September 2014 the cathedral is unfinished). The new cathedral will have a surface area of four hectares and will be higher than *Palatul Parlamentului*. There is obvious symbolism in raising a Christian cathedral alongside a building which, despite housing the post-communist parliament, continues to be regarded as the defining symbol of totalitarianism, and therefore the antithesis of Christian values. The cathedral will also partially neutralise the visual dominance of *Palatul Parlamentului* (at least from some directions). However, much of the land in the *Centru Civic* (particularly the large area of wasteland to the east of *Piața Unirii*) remains vacant awaiting some form of resolution: it is a conspicuously “unfinished project”.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has overviewed progress since 1989 in reshaping Bucharest’s cultural landscape, specifically focusing on the fate of the public spaces and material remains that form the legacy of the communist regime. This regime had extensively manipulated urban public space and its materialities, its buildings, statues and monuments, creating an urban landscape which significantly altered that of previous eras of Romanian history. In this, Romania mirrored practices in other European communist regimes in a belief that reshaping the built environment and social space could reshape society towards socialist ideals.

Many academic studies have explored the ways in which the comprehensive reshaping of public space accompanies revolutionary political change, such as occurred

across Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989-91. This is frequently paralleled both in media representations and popular imaginations (certainly in the West) of the transformations marking the end of communist regimes. From the perspective of the West, what could be more logical than post-communist societies seeking to erase the material and symbolic legacy of communism that could remind citizens (and the international community) of their recent past? Consequently, tearing down statues and erasing the 'heritage' of the recent past provides an immediate (if simplistic) visual metaphor of the demise of communist regimes. 'Cleansing' public space enables a post-communist regime to demonstrate its rejection of the recent past and signifies its aspirations for a new future in Europe, the EU and global inter-relationships. This is, moreover, a project which can be shared by both elites and publics who wish to envision a new future for the nation-state.

However, as the above discussion has traced, the reality on the ground in Bucharest is that this reshaping of the urban landscape is less thorough than might at first be expected. Certainly the material and symbolic legacy of communism has been subject to the familiar strategies of removal, renaming, rededication, and reuse which are evident throughout the European post-communist states.<sup>58</sup> However, there are also many parts of the urban landscape created by communism which have remained 'in place' well into the post-communist period: they include abandoned, neglected and 'leftover' spaces; monumental buildings re-used as part of the post-communist government infrastructure; communist-era names attributed to streets and buildings; and privatised (and sometimes renovated) housing stock.

In seeking explanations for this situation we should focus on the specific political and economic circumstances of post-communist Romania. Different governments have adopted different approaches at different times towards reshaping the official public landscape inherited from the communist period. After a short-lived period of seeking to reshape the official public landscape created by communism in 1990-91 the matter was largely neglected

during the 1990s. For a political elite with deep roots in the communist regime the need to ‘address’ the material and symbolic legacy of communism was probably of little importance, particularly since Romania’s post-communist governments had more pressing matters to deal with. As Romania prepared for EU accession in the 2000s there was renewed attention to ‘producing’ an urban landscape that was an appropriate expression of Romania’s aspirations. Post-communist material realities also played their part: both the state and the city hall lacked the financial resources to address the communist past, even if the political will was present. Another important issue is that of scale: pulling down a statue takes limited effort and resources, but reshaping the *Centru Civic* was another matter altogether (in this case, Romania was unfortunate in being saddled with an unwanted and unfinished monumental landscape which other post-communist states did not have to deal with).

What are the wider lessons that can be gained from this case study of Bucharest’s changing urban landscape in the twenty-five years since the fall of communism? First, there is a need to reconsider academic perspectives on the ways that public space is reshaped following revolutionary political change. The reconfiguring of the urban landscape has been assumed to be an unproblematic, linear transition towards a normative and clearly-defined ‘end point’, but the case of Bucharest suggests that this process is protracted, fluid and dynamic, with no single (or simple) end point. Moreover, the nature and pace of change in the urban landscape is inextricably rooted in (and contingent upon) broader post-communist political, economic and social transformations so that there is a need for a fuller consideration of local specificities and local outcomes. Reshaping urban space also involves multiple actors, not just the state authorities: indeed, the meanings and significance of the urban cultural landscape have been contested between multiple elites and publics.

Second, twenty-five years after the overthrow of Ceaușescu, some of the most important questions are not about how the urban landscape has changed, but instead about

what persists from the communist era and the meanings attached to such remains. In some cases the material and symbolic legacy of communism has been reappraised and re-valued in unexpected ways. For example, planning and architectural professionals have come to appreciate and value (parts of) the built legacy of communism and have sought to defend it on this basis (the mausoleum in *Parcul Carol I* is one of the best examples). In other cases, segments of the urban population who have found the experience of post-communism to be profoundly unsettling have looked to the recent past for roots and stability and, in this context, the material legacies of the communist past can have a new significance in grounding personal identities and providing stable points of reference in a rapidly-changing world. This, in turn, points to a need for more academic attention to the changing meanings of, and emotional responses to, the communist past.

Third, there is a need for a greater engagement with the polysemic nature of post-communist urban landscapes (and the material legacy of communism in particular). The official public landscapes created by communist regimes did not have a single, unequivocal meaning, and neither do the post-communist landscapes that have replaced them. Instead, post-communist urban space is the subject of multiple interpretations and meanings. It is intertwined with simultaneous and contradictory processes of remembering and forgetting among political elites, non-state actors and individual citizens. It is also simultaneously interwoven with individual biographies, mundane everyday practices, and elite-led post-socialist identity politics. It is also an arena for the working out of socio-political projects such as the development of civil society; changing conceptions of collective memory; coming to terms (or not coming to terms) with difficult pasts; notions of transitional justice<sup>59</sup>; and ideas of heritage. As such, the complex intersection of urban space, memory, materiality and identity in post-communism is to be valued as a process rather than an end in itself.

Notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Hilary P.M. Winchester, Lily Kong and Kevin Dunn, *Landscapes: Ways of Imagining the World* (Harlow: Pearson, 2003), 67.
- <sup>2</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (London: Blackwell, 1991), 31.
- <sup>3</sup> Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 10.
- <sup>4</sup> James Bell, "Redefining National Identity in Uzbekistan: Symbolic Tensions in Tashkent's Official Public Landscape," *Ecumene*, 6 (1999): 196,186.
- <sup>5</sup> David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove, "Urban Rhetoric and Embodied Identities: City, Nation and Empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88 (1998): 46.
- <sup>6</sup> Herman van der Wusten, "Dictators and Their Capital Cities," *Geojournal*, 52 (2000): 339.
- <sup>7</sup> James D. Sidaway and Peter Mayell, "Monumental Geographies: Re-situating the State," *Cultural Geographies*, 14 (2007): 148.
- <sup>8</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 6, 40-1.
- <sup>9</sup> Maoz Azaryahu, "The Power of Commemorative Street Names," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14 (1996): 318.
- <sup>10</sup> Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Monumental Politics: Regime Type and Public Memory in Post-communist States," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27 (2011): 170.
- <sup>11</sup> Marius Czepczyński. *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities: Representations of Powers and Needs* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 115.
- <sup>12</sup> Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Unravelling the Threads of History: Soviet-era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92, (2002): 525.

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<sup>13</sup> David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, "Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc," in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 144.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Church, "Bucharest: Revolution in the Townscape Art," in *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy*, ed. Richard Anthony French and F.E. Ian Hamilton (Chichester: Wiley, 1979), 449, and Robert Argenbright, "Remaking Moscow: New Places, New Selves," *The Geographical Review*, 89 (1999): 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Church, "Bucharest," 503.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Cavalcanti, "Totalitarian States and Their Influence on City-Form: The Case of Bucharest," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 9 (2002): 281,283.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce O'Neill, "The Political Agency of Cityscapes: Spatializing Governance in Ceaușescu's Bucharest," *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 9 (2009): 96-8.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Behr, *'Kiss the Hand you Cannot Bite': The Rise and Fall of the Ceausescus* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), no pagination.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 171.

<sup>21</sup> Anca Benera, "Monumentul Regelui Carol I," in *București: Materie și Istorie. Monumentul public și distopiile lui*, ed. Anca Benera and Alina Șerban (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2010), 128.

<sup>22</sup> Primăria Bucureștiului, *Monitorul Comunal LXXIV*, Nr 5 (22 Feb 1948), 5-6; *Monitorul Comunal LXXIV*, Nr 18, (30 May 1948), 11-12; *Monitorul Comunal LXXXIV*, Nr 20 (20 June 1948), 7.

<sup>23</sup> *România Liberă*, February 27, 1990, 2.

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<sup>24</sup> “Ultima ora,” *România Liberă*, March 3, 1990, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Duncan Light and Craig Young, “Socialist Statuary as Post-socialist Hybrids: Following the Statues of Dr Petru Groza in Romania,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 37 (2011): 497-8.

<sup>26</sup> Czepczyński, “Cultural Landscapes,” 115.

<sup>27</sup> Duncan Light, “Street Names in Bucharest 1990-1997: Exploring the Modern Historical Geographies of Post-socialist Change,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2004): 159-64.

<sup>28</sup> Duncan Light and Craig Young, “Political Identity, Public Memory and Urban Space: A Case Study of Parcul Carol I, Bucharest from 1906 to the Present,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62 (2010): 1468-9, and Craig Young and Duncan Light, “Corpses, Dead Body Politics and Agency in Human Geography: Following the Corpse of Dr Petru Groza,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38 (2013): 143.

<sup>29</sup> Czepczyński, “Cultural Landscapes,” 110.

<sup>30</sup> Lavinia Stan, “The Roof over Our Heads: Property Restitution in Romania,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 22 (2006): 186.

<sup>31</sup> Tom Gallagher, *Theft of a Nation: Romania since Communism* (London: Hurst, 2005), 120, 269.

<sup>32</sup> Czepczyński, “Cultural Landscapes,” 110.

<sup>33</sup> Czepczyński, “Cultural Landscapes,” 115.

<sup>34</sup> Duncan Light, “Political Change and Official Public Landscapes: Renaming Streets in Bucharest after 1989,” *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, 3 (2003): 118-9.

<sup>35</sup> Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman and Maoz Azaryahu, “Geographies of Toponymic Inscription: New Directions in Critical Place-name Studies,” *Progress in Human Geography*, 34 (2010): 460.

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<sup>36</sup> Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Habit, Memory and the Persistence of Socialist-era Street Names in Post-socialist Bucharest, Romania," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104 (2014): 673.

<sup>37</sup> Light and Young, "Political Identity," 1468.

<sup>38</sup> Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Urban Space, Political Identity and the Unwanted Legacies of State Socialism: Bucharest's Problematic *Centru Civic* in the Post-socialist Era," *Nationalities Papers*, 41 (2013): 525-7.

<sup>39</sup> Augustin Ioan, "The History of Nothing: Contemporary Architecture and Public Space in Romania," *ArtMargins*, December 3, 2006, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/archive/156-the-history-of-nothing-contemporary-architecture-and-public-space-in-romania>.

<sup>40</sup> Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "Politics, National Symbols and the Romanian Orthodox Church," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58 (2006): 1130.

<sup>41</sup> Ioan, "History."

<sup>42</sup> Light and Young, "Urban Space," 530-1.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew H. Dawson, "From Glittering Icon to...", *Geographical Journal*, 165 (1999): 157.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Forest and Johnson, Juliet, "Monumental Politics: Regime Type and Public Memory in Post-communist States," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27 (2011): 270.

<sup>45</sup> See also Argenbright, "Remaking Moscow," 10.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce O'Neill, "Down and Out in Bucharest: Urban Politics, Governance and the Politics of Place in the Postsocialist City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28 (2010): 260.

<sup>47</sup> Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Reconfiguring Socialist Urban Landscapes: The 'Left-over' Spaces of State-socialism in Bucharest," *Human Geographies*, 4 (2010): 8; Mirela Nae

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and David Turnock, "The New Bucharest: Two Decades of Restructuring," *Cities*, 28 (2011): 214.

<sup>48</sup> Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 208.

<sup>49</sup> In June 1990 there were violent clashes in University Square between young people protesting against the presence of former Communist Party members in the new government and miners brought to Bucharest by the government to 'restore' public order. Six protesters were killed (although the actual number is believed to be in the hundreds) and many more were injured.

<sup>50</sup> "Două statui ale lui Carol I în București", *Gândul*, July 2, 2007, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://www.gandul.info/magazin/doua-statui-ale-lui-carol-i-in-bucuresti-842903>.

<sup>51</sup> Light, "Street Names," 164.

<sup>52</sup> Verdery, "Political Lives," 116-7.

<sup>53</sup> Stan and Turcescu, "Politics," 1134-6.

<sup>54</sup> Light and Young, "Political Identity," 1470-2.

<sup>55</sup> Stan and Turcescu, "Politics," 1129-1131, 1137.

<sup>56</sup> "Punerea pietrei de temelie a Catedralei Neamului," BBC Romanian Service, November 28 2007, accessed September 9, 2014,

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2007/11/071128\\_catedrala\\_neamului.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2007/11/071128_catedrala_neamului.shtml).

<sup>57</sup> Augustin Ioan, *Modern Architecture and the Totalitarian Project* (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2009), 130.

<sup>58</sup> Czepczyński, "Cultural Landscapes," 115.

<sup>59</sup> Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Public Memory, Commemoration and Transitional Justice: Reconfiguring the Past in Public Space," in *Post-Communist Transitional Justice:*

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*Lessons from 25 Years of Experience*, ed. Lavinia Stan and Nadya Nedelsky (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 233-251.