

MAZZOCCHIO

Hidden Gardens of Bucharest
autumn studios of 2022 and 2023

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Bucharest's Urban Gardens

In a slow evolution throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, the urban blocks of Bucharest have acquired particular, unexpected forms and features, in close complicity with the winding streets that delineate them and the maidans that gathered the city's life around them. The depth of the plots derives from their placement within the urban block, a depth often visible from the street thanks to the houses that develop lengthwise and the gardens that accompany them. To the face perceived from the street, there is often an added hidden part of the city, which you discover when you move away from the street, approaching the core of the urban block. The encounter of these back lots produces a special place in the city, with a particular atmosphere: the sound of the street becomes distant, the summer temperature is more bearable here, the urban scale is replaced by that of the trees and plants, and by the fragmentation that is more typical of life in the middle of nature than of the fronts and alignments of the city.

The present project speculatively proposes imagining the opening of these hidden places to the city, transforming them into common gardens accessible to the entire neighborhood.

The aim is to make the most of the contemporary city by rediscovering the latent qualities of its internal urban structure, rather than through the expansion and occupation of its peripheral territories. These urban block cores can allow for nuanced densification in terms of producing new built spaces, but also in the spirit of multiple uses of the same territory: public and common, as a place to retreat where you can read

a book, as an alternative work space, or as a meeting place.

This network of potential common gardens could constitute a new impetus in the contemporary initiative to re-naturalize the city, in an attempt to transform it into a healthier, more ecological, more livable environment. These urban gardens could be proposed as a new family of proximity urban spaces, on a friendlier scale, suitable for the individual and the immediate community. Ultimately, these apparently hidden gardens could take the form of a new urban program for Bucharest.

INTRAREA ACVILA



The *Intrarea Acvila* Project represented the first stage of the architectural studio research concerning the structuring relationship between the dimensions of Bucharest's urban blocks and the existence of green spaces within the depths of the urban fabric. The urban block defined by Sabinelor, Acvila, Sirenelor, and Uranus streets was analyzed by second-year students in the fall of 2022 as part of the studio project.

Several reasons motivated the choice of this block as a model for an urban intervention. Firstly, this fragment of urban fabric is documented in pre-modern city plans, developed by Major Borroczyński between 1844-1852. At the beginning of the 20th century, the 1911 plan shows that the block had a configuration similar to its current one. This layout was primarily due to the considerable width between Sabinelor and Sirenelor streets, resulting in extremely deep plots with buildings aligned to the street and green spaces towards the block's core. Agricultural uses in the courtyards were common in the 19th century, as evidenced by the orchards marked on Borroczyński's plan and by the multiple accounts from that period.

Another reason for selecting this example was the opportunity for students to visit the still-green core of the block. The site visit was conducted with landscape architect Mihai Culescu, who could explain to the students concepts of a new approach in landscape design: using local plants, which are best adapted to the local climate, choosing perennial plants that do not require successive plantings, using plants that do not need much water for maintenance, and, not least, accepting a new aesthetic that values the image of naturally grown local vegetation in the context of Bucharest, in accordance with the theories of the landscaper, gardener and author Gilles Clément. From this

perspective, Intrarea Acvila was a relevant example, as the land in the core of the urban block had been abandoned for some time, with plants growing naturally without human intervention, thus demonstrating the validity of this new way of understanding the landscape.

Building on this, the studio project asked students to imagine how the interior of this block could become a new type of urban garden accessible to neighborhood residents. Defining this place involved reaching a conclusion regarding the use and management of this space, the nature and form of its enclosure (whether by fence, planted volume, or even not at all), the type of vegetation planted, and the materiality of the ground finishes. The studio also discussed urban furniture and nighttime lighting, as well as the pertinence of introducing a built space that would invite residents to use the garden collectively. Thus, places such as a communal kitchen, a tea house or café, or small greenhouses for local production were imagined.

The students' projects thus explored the possibility of intermediate spaces, different in nature from both the modern public park, designed at the city scale, and the private courtyard, a space once intended for domestic production that has since become merely a showcase for aesthetic contemplation. According to the studio study, such gardens could offer all neighbors places to sit in the shade or sun, places to rest or garden together, spaces to gather, sports grounds, or green lawns where any game becomes possible. This type of intermediate space, lying between public and private, and between planned and spontaneous, could be managed in common. By pooling space resources, it would create a different scale and quality of places for spending time together in the city. The students discovered all these qualities, whether functional or aesthetic, resulting in a drawing-based demonstration of the effective potential of using the block core to create urban gardens accessible to all neighborhood residents.

STUDENTS' PROJECTS





1852



1911

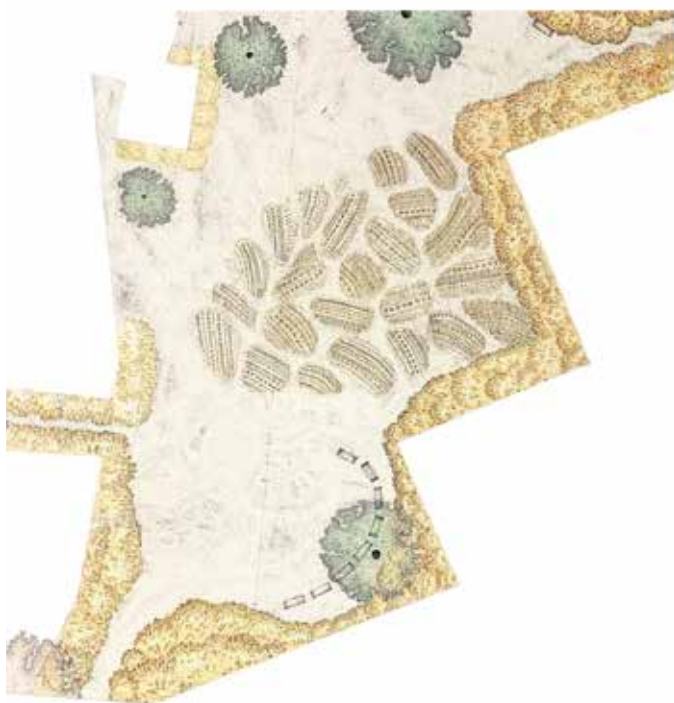


2023



Andra Apostolescu, Andra Frusina





Alexandra Băjan, Sonia Drăgănescu





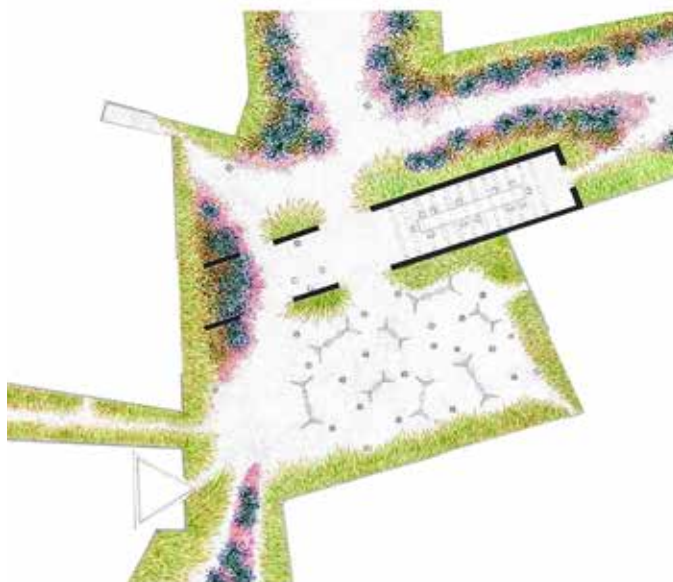
Robert Craveț, Ana-Maria Cochinescu





Emil Badea, Andrei Bonciu





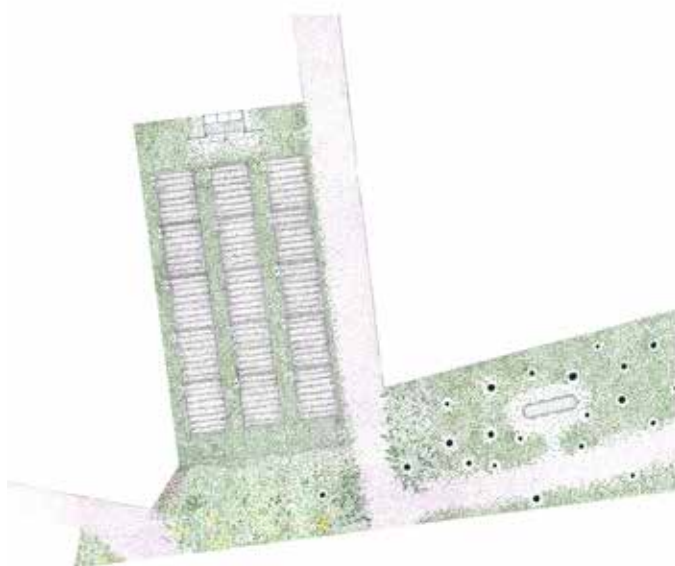
Bianca Florea, Alexandra Stoica





Ana Guşoia, Alexia Olteanu





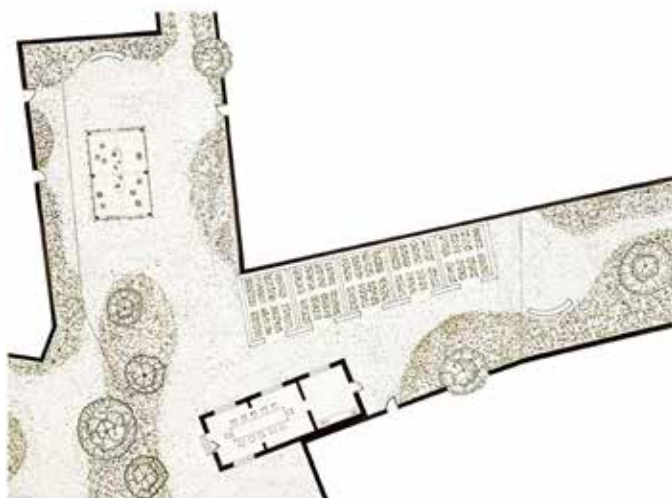
Mirela Ilie, Ionela Tertiş





Andrada Moțășăianu, Andra Tudor





Mirela Raicu, Codruța Ungureanu



A DISCUSSION WITH
IOANA TUDORA

Ioana Tudora is an architect with a master degree in Urban Form (Bucharest) and in Urban Socio-anthropology (Brussels) and a PhD in Sociology (Brussels-Bucharest). Since 1998 she is teaching at the Landscape Architecture Department of University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Bucharest (USAMV). In 2016 she was counsellor of the State Secretary on Heritage – Ministry of Culture, being in charge of cultural landscape politics. She was also a member of National Heritage Commission for Bucharest Area (2016-2018) and member of the Urban and Spatial Planning Technical Commission of Bucharest (since 2017). Ioana is also working at RPR_birou de studii contemporane as architect and landscape architect. She was equally involved in research projects and had numerous theoretical contributions concerning the vernacular urban landscape of Bucharest, being author or coauthor of numerous articles. Ioana is member of the Romanian Landscape Architects Association (AsoP) and permanent delegate at IFLA.

EB: I'm holding this book in my hand just to show you that within the Mazzocchi magazine, which is an initiative started by Ștefan Simion and Irina Meliță, there are some issues where we publish what we do together with the students in the studio at school. And with the last generation of students, we were inspired by your book, "In the Courtyard - Garden, Neighborhood, and Urban Landscape in Bucharest" (Curtea Veche: 2009), based on your doctoral research, and we developed two consecutive projects regarding the value of courtyards and gardens in Bucharest. We had two such projects with the students. At UAUIM, we have the opportunity to initiate a few projects in the studios at the beginning of the second and third years. I mention this because the structure of the magazine we want to publish, the latest issue to which you're also contributing with this discussion, revolves around these two exercises. For the first exercise in the second year, when we had to design a project in a peri-urban environment, we found the urban block around Intrarea Acvila near the Palace of the Parliament, in the Uranus area. Here, given the low density and green spaces, we considered that we could study this type of sparse built environment. We took advantage of this low density and the gentle scale of the constructions, and what we proposed was to imagine a hypothetical scenario where all the surrounding properties could benefit from a common, green space.

IT: That's my urbanism project from the third year. I had a project developed along Vasile Lascăr Street, and I did a sort of... well, starting from these long constructions, the "wagon"-type houses, I proposed a

kind of expropriation of the backyards, pooling them together... a way of creating Ioanid-style parks. And connecting these Ioanid-style parks with each other. It was a project for which I got a grade of nine with a medal. I never understood what that (with a medal) meant. And one day, I wanted to go back to the department to get the project, and it had disappeared. It's one of the few projects I didn't recover from school. And when I asked about it, Professor Machedon asked me, "What grade did you get? Nine with a medal! Well, no, because medals are only given for tens." I don't know, but mine said nine with a medal. Anyway, I didn't receive the medal, and the grade of nine appeared in the record. But now, to be honest, I did that in the third year, and I thought I was very smart. Apparently, the department thought the same. Now I'm not so sure.

CB: Well, that's what we're going to talk about.

IT: I wanted to show you, by comparison, my site from the third year. It was along Vasile Lascăr Street. I'm talking about 1994, so the area has densified enormously since then. It was something completely different. Dichiu Church was part of the system... the project was an elongated area and was connected to Viitorului Street... and I even created a system of small parks... that crossed over to Ioanid Park, which was the conceptual core of the project.

EB: So that was our first exercise in the second year, and somehow we continued the research in the third year by having the students search for such urban blocks. And we did a kind of mapping of Bucharest, identifying which of these urban blocks had the potential to have common spaces in their center.

IT: Recently, I did an exercise with the students that was the exact opposite. We started from Borroczyń plan again, but this time we

began with wastelands and tried to see how they've been transformed. I worked with Maria Alexandrescu on a topic related to the processual analysis of public space. And at one point, some students stumbled upon something in Cazzavillan Park, where there was a garbage dump, next to a wasteland that later became a private courtyard. Starting from the premise that it was public domain, the students proposed opening up the courtyard... And I was thinking I could do something similar.

EB: Similarly, we had the second-year project to study Intrarea Acvila. It was continued in the third year and was an extrapolation of the idea to the level of central Bucharest, with the study of urban blocks that could support different types of arrangements for common spaces. Like a kind of pocket parks in the heart of urban blocks. That's basically what we did with the students. The magazine only includes six projects as examples.

CB: It's also important to mention that in the second-year project, we invited Mihai Culescu, a landscape architect, to tell us about plants and trees, right on the spot. In the third year, ten urban blocks were studied by teams of three students each. They tried to enter the heart of the urban blocks, to talk to the people as much as they could. But you know how it is... the students are a bit shy, and the context is increasingly closed. The students proposed various things, focusing on small leisure pavilions, but they also had proposals for urban gardening, for example.

IT: This is my main issue with this type of exercise. I've encountered the exact same problem... that it falls into this kind of embarrassing hipsterism. Honestly. I mean, besides a café or something, can't we imagine anything else? Not that I haven't been there too [with the students].

EB: We also started from the ideas in your book. That's why we consider this discussion with you important, not necessarily because of what we've done. We had some questions regarding the book, your study, and your conclusions.

CB: The book was very important to us when we were writing the project's theme. Obviously, we also gave it to the students as part of their bibliography. Unfortunately, the book is no longer available.

EB: From what you've just said and from your book, a question arises about a certain type of authenticity of the vernacular. Or to what extent it's still possible to have this authenticity. You talk about the structure of the city, the structure of the medieval city with low density, which made a certain type of urban agriculture possible in the premodern period. And this was not just a landscape sought for contemplation but rather a way of living, a way of inhabiting. And why do I say it connects with what we were discussing earlier? It ties in with this agricultural history, this convivial history, and your research on the types of gardens and courtyards. At one point in your book, you also mention that Bucharest is a summer city in this sense, that there was a kind of joyfulness, a kind of casual use of outdoor spaces. We wanted to ask you, how did this evolution occur?

CB: Could you tell us how this transition happened from utilitarian gardens, or those with a utilitarian character, to today's gardens, which have completely lost this aspect? If you could briefly explain how it transformed and why this transformation occurred?

IT: I consider the Borroczyn plan to be the zero moment. It's the last image of the traditional city, and with that, it ends, marking the moment we enter the modernization process. My working hypothesis has always been, and it's increasingly being confirmed, that this very low density

in Bucharest didn't arise from a kind of awareness of the quality of this type of urban living but rather from an intrinsic laziness of the Romanian people to live in apartment blocks. When you don't have any form of fortification, you have no reason to crowd together with someone else in a courtyard. Because there's more space nearby. So, the city spread out because, fundamentally, we never had the pressure to crowd. If you look at cities like Sheffield, for example... the plan from 1220 is easy to find: 80% of the territory was agricultural. In the Middle Ages, all cities tended to produce their food within their walls, especially since sieges were fashionable. And it's cooler to have cucumbers in the city than cucumbers outside the city. Of course, during sieges, everyone wanted to be behind the wall. We didn't have walls; we just kept the cucumbers, so to speak, and spread out across the territory. The densification and loss of urban agriculture were political projects. This is evident from the huge number of legislative projects from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, when it was forbidden to grow food in the courtyard, to have trees because they made a mess, to have animals, and it was mandatory to pave over everything. It was one of the effects of the modernization project. In general, we tend to understand poorly and slowly what we're doing because we're somehow lagging. Well, the result was densification. Of course, it's pointless to force me to pave my courtyard because I won't do it, and if I do, I'll still plant onions, even in pots. We don't give up. That was, so to speak, the political wave of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Afterward, things slipped smoothly into the communist period, with onions on the balcony, with onions in the courtyard. Different types of gardens never really excluded each other. There were always both the flower garden and the beautiful contemplative garden; they came as a package deal. You had the front yard with cosmos flowers, fuchsias, and geraniums, and the back yard with onions and whatever else. Or not. As proof, the last garden that was continuously tended by an old lady was, of course, with onions on the side of Polonă Street. It was the

last one, but it's gone now. It's no longer there.

CB: Is this a political process present at the European level? What is characteristic of Bucharest in this political modernization project?

IT: I think in Western Europe, urbanization or modernization was a process much more influenced by their vernacular, so to speak. Not so for us, because we had to be “like Paris”, to join the ranks of the civilized world, and stop living like in Istanbul. We needed to pave our courtyards because it wasn't proper to have onions there. Over time, during the communist period, this became a form of resilience: I have nothing to eat, so I'll grow onions on the balcony, potatoes in the backyard. And after the 1990s, we encountered a new wave of modernization that completely denies this structure. And particularly what seems very specific to me — and I think it comes across in the book — is that les nouveaux arrivés try to demonstrate their urbanity by denying my rurality. I mean, if I've noticed something, it's that the more recently someone has arrived in Bucharest, the greater their aggression toward Bucharest's plant life. And, generally, interviews reveal that this is actually a cover for a kind of ancestral shame: the fear of being seen as a “peasant.” I even have colleagues or friends who, for example, when I walked barefoot on the street, looked at me in shock. “But how can you walk barefoot on the street? What's wrong with it? It's nice; it's summer.” It was raining. And they said, “Aren't you worried people will think you're a peasant?” And I'd reply, “But I like walking barefoot in the rain. What's the problem?” Those who are new to Bucharest are afraid of being mistaken for country folk. So, what's happening? Where does this shame of being rural in Romania come from? It's harder for me to discuss that because I haven't done enough research on the subject, but it's certainly something we're facing. We're very ashamed of being peasants, probably because we are. If we weren't, we probably wouldn't be ashamed of it. And then

there's this refusal of vegetation as a form of rurality. I've encountered this many times. And over this wave comes a second wave... and now we have the legitimization through gardens. This comes along with the SUV. So, Dacia (the "national" car of Romania) goes out with the vegetables, and after that, "we have a garden with...", and if you mention anything, it must be something in Latin, and in any case, it shouldn't have existed in Romania until five years ago. It has to be newly imported, "found only in...", and heaven forbid you have to take care of it yourself. If you don't have a gardener, it's bad. And that's the battle with all these people making gardens: trying to explain why it's not good to put in a lawn, for example. If you don't have a lawn, you've lived in vain. It's a shame. So, there are many waves. There are all sorts of waves, attempts at modernization, but each modernization has a different discourse behind it. There are all kinds of modernizations coming, but I don't know why all modernizations in our country seem to turn against vegetation. And now the latest modernization, this European one, which is supposed to be about ecology and resilience... it seems we don't like it. This modernization doesn't catch on here.

CB: You mention in the book that this ecological wave doesn't catch on here because the image is almost rural.

IT: Yes. Because it overlaps with a memory. Speaking of university exchange experiences. This often happens when landscape architecture professors from abroad come to Bucharest. Once, I was with two German women, and we were walking on the wasteland by the Academy, and they were excited... one of them was supposed to do field research on the new trends in Romanian landscape architecture. And I took her right there. She was stunned by how avant-garde Bucharest was compared to Berlin. She thought it was incredible how Gilles Clément's theories had caught on so quickly here, while they were still fighting for it. Why don't we catch on to this ecological

trend here? That's why the new ecological image doesn't catch on—because it looks too much like either the wasteland or that old, peasant garden that doesn't sit well with us culturally. We were so backward that we were at the forefront of global ecology, but we didn't know it. If at that time we had had an intelligent government, which we didn't in the '90s, we would have placed ourselves with organic farming from the countryside and been at the forefront of the world. Easily. Unfortunately, I think that's one of our dramas. We want to modernize, but we don't know where Modernity is. We want to modernize based on a model that passed a hundred years ago. And that's been happening since Borroczyn, since we started modernizing. We always copy what's out of fashion. It's as if all the clothes and ideas we take are second-hand. Whatever ideas they throw out as second-hand, we quickly adopt... "Wow, they're from Germany." That's how we are with ideas too. We take what's no longer valid, what's no longer in fashion in Germany... "we'll make it work."

EB: I was surprised, in this regard, that you found in your doctoral research that Eugene Pinard said in 1917 that Bucharest was "a vast garden city."

IT: Yes, well, it was.

EB: Yes. Meaning, not having the problems generated by the metropolitan density of the 19th century in Western Europe, problems related to industrialization...

IT: Ebenezer Howard hadn't applied it, which made it wrong.

EB: You explain very well that the landscape or, well, the landscape, the city, and our lives in general have these two components: one of political will, expressed through technocrats who produce ordering

models; and the other of the lived city, of the citizen, of everyday use.

IT: And these two struggle within two models. Speaking of commissions [unrecorded discussion]. I won't name names, but a respected figure, a star in our field in Romania, came and explained to me at some project, where we were all paralyzed by a POT (percentage of land occupation) of 100% and a CUT (land use coefficient) of 20, whatever, we didn't understand anything... and it was explained to me that in China, it's possible. Yes, okay... I'm referring to this thing with the truncated model. In some urban planning commission meetings, there were discussions like: "Why can't I build a skyscraper? Look, they do it in New York." Yes, but in New York, to build a skyscraper, there was that law where you were required to create public space in front of the building. "I gave you a high CUT because you made a POT of 40% and gave me 60% of urban square." But we only look at the height of the building, not at the square in front, which was ceded to the city.

EB: You mention at one point that there's this theory from professionals, which I've heard from Vladimir Arsene, who looked at the towers of Warsaw and possibly at the church spires in Bucharest. This theory proposes that the city can be punctuated by vertical landmarks, just like medieval towers, and that these new vertical landmarks should be office buildings.

IT: Sure, there's also a theory put forth by Augustin Ioan that says Bucharest is a collage city, and therefore, anything can be pasted onto a collage because it can integrate everything. So the issue is this: we can justify and theorize anything we feel like and even make it sound convincing. Yes, I can have a tower, but I still need to understand where. And speaking of towers, I remember going crazy when I saw the first General Urban Plan (PUG) of Iași, made after the 1990s. What

I loved about Iași, what I found absolutely sensational, was that due to the topography, with the old neighborhoods always up on the hills, you had these open perspectives that gave you the feeling you could see all the way to Moscow. So, your gaze would travel far beyond the city. And all the communist blocks were somehow in the valley, so when you were in the city center, in the historic center, you felt like you could see Chișinău from your window. But the first PUG after 1990 said that all boulevards must have a focal point at the end. Why? It's a different type of city. It was a city without focal points. It was a city that had a landscape. That's what I'm saying. We can find theories to support any of our ideas, our sensibilities, or our need to make money. And it's here that I believe a qualitative distinction should be made. Why do I argue for one idea or another? Because, ultimately, we can have genuinely different human opinions. What bothers me is when the only thing driving my opinion is my need to make money from the client, rather than a personal belief as someone who has studied the city. That's when I start getting annoyed. Otherwise, we are certainly professionals with different dreams. We have different sensibilities toward Bucharest. I love it because I've lived here; others don't love it because they've lived here; others hate it because they've lived here and didn't like it because they had a sad, unhappy childhood.

EB: I wanted to touch on another point related to the lack of an aesthetic model for green spaces. We talked about political visions and shared mentalities. There's also this new aesthetic of nature as nature, of weeds or perennials that survive best in a particular place. And from the beginning of our discussion, we touched on this topic. I was going to tell you about a lawn in front of the Opera House in Sector 5. A spontaneous meadow grew there, with grasses reaching a meter high, adorned with pink, blue, and yellow flowers. It was truly a wonder. But I saw people who were extremely upset, saying, "Look at that, they're not mowing the grass." So the question is, how can you promote an

aesthetic model?

IT: Unfortunately, I think we do have an aesthetic model. It's the model of the lawn, the thuja trees, and the flower beds. That's the problem. We have a model that's very hard to get out of people's heads. Slowly, things are changing, particularly in private areas. Even among landscape architects, some have specialized in working with perennials. You know, it might be helpful to have more joint conferences because we tend to ignore each other professionally. I think things are changing. And the rejection of "weeds" happens because they're seen as a sign of disorder, a sign of abandonment or lack of investment. If, in one way or another, you include weeds and understand that this has been deliberately maintained... this ties into Vintilă Mihăilescu's concept of care. Care as the ultimate form of investment, not necessarily financial, but emotional. Care as a form of ownership. If it's cared for, it's mine. If it's not, it's not mine. And how do you transfer that care from the plant to another element? A bench, a fence. But when you remove the fence and the bench and also add "weeds," indeed, it might... that's called a "maidan". Well, I like maidans. I've always felt good on a maidan. I appreciated Gilles Clément before Gilles Clément existed, so to speak.

EB: Through the research in *MZCH#6* on schools, we discovered that modern state institutions were invented and implemented. Modernity was an organizing framework imposed on society, which began to enforce rules. It seems to me that we are now at a point where we are the children of modernity, yet we are losing it. Modernity involved the creation of oppressive institutions, such as the school system, which is an oppressive institution but one that produced a type of society based on knowledge. That was the question related to the aesthetic model.

IT: Why do I need a single aesthetic model? Why can't we have

multiple aesthetic models? In landscape architecture, no one can stand the minimalist approach anymore. We've had enough! You see the same square in Oslo as in Greece. We're bored. I'm tired of seeing the same landscape everywhere. All projects have become Marc Augé's non-places. They all look like airports. Why must we follow one aesthetic model? I'm fed up with centuries of rigid aesthetic models. I've had enough. Aesthetic quality is one thing; a model is something else — a model is something forced upon you. Why can't I have free aesthetic thinking? Besides, the current aesthetic output personally disappoints me deeply, both in architecture and landscape architecture, especially in Romania. When foreigners visit and want to see architecture in Bucharest, I take them to Balta Albă, the Cățelu housing area, and the Gloria clinic... I take them to see Communist architecture. That's where Romanian architecture was made. That's where there was still quality. Look at the construction details.

EB: I just wanted to note that I found this response very interesting, that we don't need an aesthetic model. And I also wanted to mention that in your book, you suggest that this local spontaneity is a type of authenticity in Bucharest's history.

IT: Yes, and I believe that bricolage, vernacular practices, and improvisation are the reasons why we don't have real ghettos in Bucharest. We have a balanced society because we've been able to improvise and adapt. This is something increasingly evident in French research on ghettos, where restricting hands-on involvement and relying solely on professionals is actually one of the driving forces behind ghettoization.

EB: I want to go back to an idea that interests me: at one point, you said there was a patriarchal, peaceful Bucharest that was modernizing gradually. You also mention in your book that it was modernizing,

but slowly. Building heights were increasing, density was higher, the number of floors increased, and courtyards got smaller. But it was somehow progressive and peaceful. There were still flower gardens in front, and there was the “salon courtyard” versus the “house courtyard”: people no longer lived there with pigs or cows but had plants, a garden with a table and chairs. And then, during today’s interview, you spoke about this frustration we have about being “peasants” or that the number of generations between our peasant ancestors and us is relatively small, and that this frustration becomes vehemently directed against green spaces. So here’s my question: to what extent did this patriarchal universe had some stability? That’s how it seemed from the descriptions. Now, there are architects who somehow base their studies on an idealized version of that world and try to reconstruct it spatially — not necessarily in terms of functions but in terms of spatial qualities, of courtyards, of vine-covered metal vaults that could again become places for dining, outdoor dining rooms.

IT: These spaces do exist; this city exists, it still exists. There are still people who live like that. Look, in my neighborhood, there are still people who sit at tables, either under the balcony on the ground floor or in the courtyard. There are people who sit in the evening and socialize in front of the window.

EB: But you mentioned earlier that there’s also a type of aggression stemming from our inferiority complex about being “peasants,” and that the modernization we desire is...

IT: It’s an aggression. Speaking of this, here’s an experience with the Vatra Luminoasă neighborhood organization, where historian Răzvan Voinea was also invited. We met with a gentleman who was very adamant that we had to do something because, look, this beautiful stone pavement was done in the parking lot, and we want the same thing, but

also to bring cars into the courtyard. He was very determined. There was another guy who was quiet and asked me what I thought. I said, "Okay, but I want to ask you: you seem new to the neighborhood? It's obvious that you're not originally from here, right?" "But why are you asking me?" I said, "Because I want to ask why you chose to move to this neighborhood? I mean, you didn't come here by accident and now you're fighting with what you've inherited. You seem to have chosen to live here; you like that it's green. Let's step outside, and I'll show you that the green is only in the courtyards. Outside, there's not a single tree on any street. The sidewalks are very narrow, there's no room, the sidewalks are 60 cm wide. Plus, they added gas connections on the sidewalk: there's no more sidewalk! The green is in the courtyards. If you want to park your car in the courtyard, well, you'll have to cut down the cherry tree, the hibiscus, and maybe the vine can stay along the fence. Second, if you have a Skoda, you'll have to sell it because the courtyard is three meters wide, the Skoda is four and a half meters, so you'll have to buy a Nissan Juke or a Smart. You have kids, right? If you have a Smart, you can pull the kid with a skateboard because it won't fit otherwise, so it's fine, we'll manage." Everyone looked at me, not realizing I was making fun of him. The other guy was listening very carefully and began to realize that something wasn't adding up. And I said, "Sir, there's also this: what do we want?" And then I said, "... let's look at it this way: if I park my car on the sidewalk, which bothers you when you enter Vatra Luminoasă, the car drives at a maximum of 10 km/h because there's nowhere else to go, and it's a cul-de-sac neighborhood, you can't pass through it, so there's no rush. You're two minutes from home; you don't feel the need to speed up. If you make a wide street with sidewalks, I'll drive at 70 km/h. If I hit your child at 10 km/h, he might get slightly hurt; we'll take them to the hospital, put a bandage on, they'll stay in bed for two days, and then we'll let them go back to play. If I hit him at 70 km/h, I suggest we make a big table here for the wake. Together, since you want community.

Let's build a community for wakes, funerals, and memorial services. On a 60 cm sidewalk, a child on a bike will dart out of the courtyard just as quickly; you won't have time to see him. If he dash out of the courtyard on a bike, he's gone! Let's see the advantages. You want a civilized sidewalk, but what do you lose? Well, you lose kids on bikes, you lose trees, you even lose 4 seats in the car because you'll only have 2." At that moment, things somehow calmed down. They understood that it was absurd just because it seemed civilized to have a sidewalk. In fact, we're always looking for some recipes. Again, as far as I know, sidewalks — maybe I'm wrong — but sidewalks appeared at the end of the Baroque period, which means there were hundreds of years when cities didn't have sidewalks, and people still managed to live. And now that street layouts like shared space are fashionable, we don't like shared space. And now they've made sidewalks that fit half the number of cars that used to fit on the street, and I still don't walk on the sidewalk because there's no room. The sidewalk is one meter wide, and last summer, I spent the entire season walking my mother with Parkinson's in the street, holding her hand. We didn't fit, so we still walked in the middle of the street. I liked walking in the middle of the street, and I still do. And I think the coolest solution for residential neighborhoods in Bucharest is shared space and tacit negotiation. What I've noticed from the 1990s until now, when they started forcing sidewalks on us, is that people didn't even honk anymore. I mean, over the years, there was an understanding that if I hear a car, I step aside. I'm talking about neighborhoods, strictly in residential areas, small streets. And I think that's always been there, speaking of the vernacular, that there's a vernacular society born out of tacit negotiation. You can't honk at me every time. It's clear I have nowhere to walk, so you look too. What's the point of honking at me? I understand that if I hear you behind me... it's tough with electric cars!, I'll slowly step aside, you wait, then you pass, we negotiate. We can coexist very well together without written rules, without fighting over every square centimeter

of rights and sidewalk. It seems to me that very often regularization and civilization are carried out completely insensitively and without any analysis, and more often than not, a recipe is copied that may or may not fit. I think what we really lack is the patience for a constant analysis. I look at projects: when they're done... the analysis part is always formal, never from the grassroots, and no one ever takes it seriously. Otherwise, we do studies until we're bored. It's a subject; we study everything. And then we come up with that solution to do whatever. And if we come up with something, we always come with the argument: "This is how it's done in the West." What's happening now is a catastrophe, even financially. With the money we're using to build sidewalks, we could have built schools, swimming pools, since we're bragging about the Olympics, and it's nice to boast about David Popovici, but Bucharest has three Olympic pools, and Budapest has 400. But we'll have sidewalks, which I'm sure we'll give up in 10 years because it will be trendy to have shared space. I bet in 10-15 years, we'll tear them down again because shared space will be in vogue.

CB: But speaking of this gap concerning gardens, how do you see the future of gardens, let's say, in the center of Bucharest, within the central ring? You mention in your book, and now and in other interviews, about this gap we're always trying to catch up on. In fact, we are lagging behind, but we always want to be ahead and end up missing out on the good delay.

IT: Anyway, a few such gardens still exist, though increasingly fewer. I think the trend will slowly return, but through completely different mechanisms. In the sense that, at some point, those who wanted lawns and thuja began to gradually give up. Because it financially drains them... to replace them every year, because they got tired of mowing that lawn, because it's not working anymore, because the new hipster

trend with ecology is starting to expand, and they've started hearing about it too since it's also on TV... So, slowly, this will change too. So I think you'll always have all the models, all together. The old one with the new one, with the future one. I think soon we'll be allowed to have at most two hens in the yard, because probably more than that won't be allowed for sanitary reasons.

CB: From what you're saying, it's exactly what happened over the last 200 years.

IT: Yes, stages and people coexist. No, I don't think all will disappear, because it seems to me that we are in a sort of limbo, meaning that the real estate aggression has decreased quite a bit concerning the center, because it has become inefficient. We've moved on to much bigger games. That type of project where a house was demolished to build a four-story block is no longer an important game. We are heading toward the level of investors like One [a local real estate company]. I mean, in one way or another, we are reaching the big real estate capitalism, which has much bigger stakes than demolishing a "wagon"-type house. I think the small real estate trick where they turn a ground-floor "wagon"-type house into a ground floor plus two stories will continue, but this already calms things down. I mean, if I look over my neighborhood from my block, I don't think we'll see P+7 (ground floor + 7 stories) instead of just ground floor, but we might see P+3, which is already better.

CB: Maybe somehow the salvation of the of the small gardens in central Bucharest will come from this greed and maybe also from what you mentioned earlier, from our intrinsic laziness?

IT: I think a new class is emerging, meaning a new world, a new group, a new generation that has begun to understand that it was nice before,

the way it was. I'm looking at something very simple, for example, with my students: in the last five years, fewer and fewer of them want to come to school by car. Many of them say they don't want to get a driver's license. Never! Neither now nor ever. Now it seems to me that this thing has expanded. Students who came by car in their first year, in their second year are coming by metro because, well, "let's go out for a beer like normal people afterward." It seems to me that it's a generation that is already calming things down, that doesn't even want to emigrate.

CB: And do you think this is somehow a trend, a direction that can come from the bottom up and change things at the policy level, for example? Because now you're also involved in various commissions where you can have a broader, more strategic vision. Do you think urban strategies related to courtyards, gardens, or green spaces can be influenced from the bottom up?

IT: They are influenced from the bottom up. From the top down, they can only be influenced in one way: to disappear. I don't see any policy in Romania, anytime soon, to save anything green in Bucharest. And not just politically, but politically coupled with legally. Now we have a lot of laws, and a judge comes and says that property overrides the law. So, it seems to me that we are in a legal obtuseness where we don't understand fundamental legal values. The Supreme Court of Justice... The Constitutional Court is in a mental obtuseness.

CB: The right to property overrides the right to "urbanity"...

IT: It is said that property is sacred. I have only one problem. I want someone to tell me what the legal consequence of the word "sacred" is because being protected by the state means that the state has a duty to me. But concerning sanctity, I don't know who is responsible. So,

should a priest come to defend my rights? I don't understand the word sacred in the law, it doesn't make sense to me. I see that there are now all sorts of urban planning documents in the works, but we don't understand a very simple thing that, in "communist" countries like Switzerland, exists as a common-sense matter: the territorial reserves of the city, which are not decided upon now because in fifty years, I still need to have the ability to decide then. There, people buy land in anticipation because it's a long-term investment.

EB: In the conclusions of your book, you criticize the fact that there is no political vision, given that the city is built from this political vision, implemented by technocrats, intertwined with its everyday use.

IT: Well, I was just about to say, speaking of "long-term": if there's something I've noticed since I was a child, so before the 1990s and after the 1990s, it's that the Romanian mind doesn't have a concept of the long term. Thinking extends to at most one generation. I've never heard anyone in my life say, "Hey, I was thinking that maybe if I have great-grandchildren, this will happen..." Or at least grandchildren. So, apart from one's own child, the thinking never goes one generation further.

EB: But in terms of Bucharest's recent history, there was a political vision for modernization from the 19th century, which was a common vision for society.

IT: But still a hasty vision: "let's quickly pave the courtyard so we can be urban too."

EB: The other major political vision, which was communism, produced industrialization, produced the neighborhoods, produced...

IT: It produced urbanization. Like it or not, we became urbanized during communism.

EB: Let me rephrase. To what extent can we build here, if we were to set out to create a political party at this table, to what extent can we construct a political vision related to the city and its green spaces? Or how could this problem be addressed? Because simply noting that there's no vision shouldn't satisfy us. You said in your book that by the mere fact that there isn't such a vision, there's actually a disarray, because everyone negotiates their own interests, including architects, who have to negotiate their fees. And then the city suffers.

IT: For these courtyards? I would like a political vision, for example, for the banks of the Colentina River. If we're seriously discussing a big stake, I would want a political decision. Let's see Mayor Ciucu do what he says he will do [Ciprian Ciucu is the mayor of Bucharest's Sector 6]. For example, saving the tree nursery in Militari neighbourhood, which is the largest informal green lung, meaning it's not a park, but it's full of trees, and you can't imagine its ecological impact already. So the tree nursery is of immense ecological importance. If you cut it down, I don't want to know what happens. It holds back all the southwest winds that bring heat in the city. I don't want to know what happens if that little patch of forest disappears, as scrappy as it is. About the courtyards in the city center? It seems to me that we're already talking about luxury items. We have significant resources that we're trampling on and destroying.

CB: So you're not advocating for a political vision that we're lacking.

IT: I see myself more as an observer of the present situation. In the book, my aim was primarily to document the decline of the city. I wanted to ensure there was a record of how things once were.

CB: It's been almost 15 years since your book and your doctoral research. Does such research remain only at this level, of observation?

IT: That was indeed the intention. The research was conducted within the field of sociology. In sociology, you don't come up with proposals; you just try to understand the mechanisms. Now, on the other hand, regarding your project and what you showed me [excerpts from student projects published in the magazine]... They're really cool, but to me, they seem exactly like I was when I wrote this book: naive! And I was older than your students. For example, we discussed a courtyard we all knew, where someone else we all know admired how "cool these communal courtyards are." And the moment he became one of the owners of that communal courtyard, the first thing he did was to put up a fence. That's exactly how it happened: "Wow, what a cool communal courtyard! I'll move in with you all." Bam! And they slammed up a fence, effectively ruining a courtyard that had existed that way for hundreds of years. Because a professional moves in with the desire to live in a communal space, everything goes to hell, because the communal professional puts up a fence. But there's another thing that drives me crazy. I was talking with a friend from Paris. In Paris, the "community" thing is also very trendy. I attended a workshop with Alex Axinte in Évry, and the French were constantly talking about "community, communal..." But when you talk to people, nobody wants to be communal or in a community. Everyone just wants to be at home, with their door closed. And it's paradoxical that all the professional regulatory processes in France, like urban planning documents, somehow include communities, with the idea of creating some kind of community farm around which the community gathers. They have a ton of projects, a city hall that funds people to have a farm in the middle of the city, so kids can have food and environmental education, and so on, but no one actually wants to be there. Everyone's like, "Wow, it's cool we have a farm in the city, but I don't want to

go there because it smells, and I don't want it near me: Not In My Back Yard.” So, what I mean is that even if there is a political level, let's assume we have visionary mayors like Nicușor Dan [Mayor of Bucharest] or maybe Ciprian Ciucu with the tree nursery, who is already convincing me that he can see beyond petty issues like lawns between blocks, but fundamentally, when the citizen goes home, they are still in a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) mindset. And I don't know if that will change anytime soon. And if we're honest with ourselves, we're very communal when we talk at school, but when we go home, we're as NIMBY as it gets with ourselves. Honestly. And this thing with the community, like, “Look how nice, we're opening up our homes...” I did a project exactly like what you did there, with the same kind of discourse, and it was just as naive. Who's actually going to use those spaces?

CB: Ioana, I want to challenge you to discuss the role of professionals. What is, after all, the role of professionals like architects, urban planners and landscapers architects?

IT: Speaking from field observations: a plot of land near my home, I live near a small square. I live about 30 meters from it. In theory, it's absolutely wonderful to live 30 meters from a green space, right? But when your wake-up call in the summer starts at five in the morning, when two of my neighbors come to walk their dogs and lift weights, but the equipment squeaks: five in the morning, every day, all summer long. It's unbearable. I don't have air conditioning, I refuse to install it: I do practice what I preach. Speaking of ecology, I sleep with the window open for airflow. I wake up every day at five. This happened two years ago. I ended up going out myself to oil the equipment so it wouldn't squeak anymore. The two macho guys who were grinding on it to build muscle, because they're so strong, couldn't bring a drop of olive oil or anything with them, because that's beneath their dignity.

After they leave, the little kids come and start screaming, and the night ends at three with teenagers shouting. Meanwhile, Nicușor Dan hosts go-kart festivals, raves, and so on. So yeah, it's a summer city, but I have to leave during the summer. More or less, I move to Floreasca in the summer because at least it's quiet. But there, for example, recently was Aviation Day. It was great; I thought the roof was going to fall on my head with the helicopters flying overhead. It's wonderful. I'm starting to like Bucharest more and more. But I'm thinking about where to move. Sure, I somewhat like what's happening in the square in Vatra Luminoasă; I think it's really cool that it's ultra-utilized. This is actually an argument for the need for many more small spaces like this. What happens is that with just one square for a huge area and a massive population, it's overcrowded, and you who live nearby, literally don't get a second of peace.

CB: The role of anthropologists, for example, is to understand why these things happen.

IT: One of the things that happen, for example... Regarding Radu Mihailescu [former mayor of Bucharest's Sector 2], I have to admit I'm sincerely glad he lost the election after he told us he didn't care about 700 votes from Vatra Luminoasă. He, for example, decided to close the park between the stadium, Basarabia Boulevard, which has no houses around it, but it's closed at night. So, of course, the young people are driven to the promenade and the immediately adjacent squares, which are the only ones open. This is another madness, closing parks at night for safety reasons instead of ensuring safety in the park.

CB: Speaking of my earlier question, maybe this is the role of professionals, to understand why these things happen and make proposals, just as you did when you were a student.

IT: But my question is, why did this mayor [Radu Mihailescu] decide to close the park? I mean, I would have liked to see a report from the Romanian Police saying that in the last five years, five rapes occurred every night in that park, so we have to do something. Well, even then, I think you could add some extra lights and pay for five guards, not close the park. There are other solutions, but I haven't seen a report like that. So again, it's like in Paris; because they close parks in Paris, we close parks here too. The immediate effect is that living in the adjacent neighborhoods becomes unbearable.

CB: And speaking of the design process and your third-year project, but also our students' projects using the middle of the urban blocks. They use the centers of the blocks to create an intermediate space between public and private, which indeed comes with issues of privacy and proximity...

IT: And this idea clearly comes from the cul-de-sacs in the Garden City movement. I mean, if you look at all of Park's and Howard's projects, Newtown Act, and so on... there was this idea in the center of the neighborhood where only residents would come. Ioanid Park was ahead of its time in this sense. They were very smart in Romania.

CB: But you said you're no longer so naive and that you no longer believe in this type of project to restore what you beautifully call in your book, "Bucureștenitate" (Bucharest-ness). You say that the disappearance of gardens in at least the area you studied, Polonă, and the central area leads to the loss of Bucharest-ness in Bucharest. And now you say you were naive and no longer believe in such an endeavor?

IT: Yes. Because when I said that, I believed for a moment that people could do it by themselves. And I really don't think an architect will

be able to do it. I believe more that something like this can't be born from an idea but rather from some sort of associative process, like the French have, where an NGO — whether made up of anthropologists, sociologists, possibly architects, landscapers, it's irrelevant... it could actually be anyone, even two workers from APACA [a famous clothing factory in Bucharest during the communist era] who lost their jobs and start promoting this idea, and then people apply it themselves. I don't think this type of project can be approached top-down. For the city hall to come and say, "We'll do it for you!" If I see a future for this idea, it's more about raising awareness in everyone and making peace with the first neighbor. I think it can only come from the people. You can't say it's bad that this is happening, but now Bucharest is constantly flooded with a massive influx of people who keep coming. Almost every day, more people move in. I don't want to say it spoils the city because it doesn't. You have no idea how happy I am about all the Pakistanis who have appeared in Bucharest. My quality of life has massively improved since they arrived. But on the other hand, what is it? It's a population that is very unstable in terms of housing, so to speak. And this is a paradox in a country with 90% homeowners. And again, why do we think it's an advantage to be a homeowner? I mean, doesn't it strike anyone that the poorest in Europe are also the most likely to be homeowners, and no one sees a correlation between these aspects? Anyway, let's move past that, but the housing environment is very fluid. "Bucureștenitate" (Bucharest-ness) probably disappears because it's a type of city that I don't think can exist anymore, and I don't believe it will be able to exist again. The Bucharest I knew, inherited from my grandmother, so to speak, a direct inheritance. I mean, it was passed down to me. I lost the papers, but I can't recover them anymore.

EB: I'm chiming in here with perhaps a bit of naivety. Earlier, I used the term from your book, "political vision." My question then wasn't about a political vision in the sense of how a policy is implemented or

election-related politicking, but rather about a common mentality we may or may not have for Bucharest. I think that it's probably our role to work on transforming such mentalities, including at the conceptual level.

IT: I propose a project: A User's Guide to Bucharest.

EB: Why do I say this? I'm using a notion from Ștefan Ghenciu's habilitation thesis defense: I don't believe that we, as professionals, should only "midwife" what people are already capable of doing on their own.

IT: But why not? Because, at least in our architecture school, we don't understand that the architect's ego has become harmful over the past 200 years or so. And that maybe the role of a midwife... and this isn't just me saying it; I believe Șerban Țigănaș mentioned it at some point after attending the UIA Congress, where there was more and more discussion about the architect's role as a moderator rather than a creator. And this isn't just in architecture. For example, I attended a conference where the Germans were very excited because Templehof had just been saved. You know the story — protests, blah blah, and Templehof was saved. Then the landscape architects came in and said, "Now let's design a beautiful park." And the local community that saved it said, "But it's already beautiful!" / "Yes, but we should landscape it..." / "It's already landscaped." / "Let's do something..." / "But we like it as it is." And the professionals were like, "Wow, it's amazing when a bottom-up movement is so strong, and they defend it and have made it great and organized it themselves..." / "So, what do we do for a living now?" And I think we're in a position where maybe we should learn to earn our living differently and definitely not force design down people's throats.

EB: But it's not about design. In your book, you bring to light a sort of magic, you conduct research that reveals all kinds of wonders existing here in Bucharest, you present them... and in the end, we conclude: yes, but these things are going to disappear because of the way the common mentality functions today.

IT: Yes, a lot of great things have disappeared. But new great things have also emerged.

EB: What I'm saying is that through a top-down strategy, you could hope to formulate preservation policies. In fact, such strategies cannot be "midwived." You, as the professional from above, could establish which values transcend anyone's understanding and impose them on everyone? The functioning of any commission for monument protection, for preservation, is a form of imposition.

IT: Yes, but I can impose something formally spatial. What I can't impose is that the person living in that courtyard drinks their coffee there. You see? I can impose: don't cut down the willow. I've done that in a commission, in a debate with Dan Marin. It wasn't about whether it was a willow or a poplar or something else; it was in a monuments commission... And I said, "I'm not talking about the tree or the vegetables here. Let's stick our heads out the window and look down the street: house, greenery, house, tree, house, tree. This front yard needs a tree. This is the logic of this space; the value of this neighborhood is this rhythm of building, tree, building, tree. They can plant any tree; I don't care. What matters to me is that there isn't a 'missing tooth.'" So, I can impose that you keep the willow or plant a cherry plum or something else. What I can't impose is that you drink your coffee in the yard and greet your neighbor when they pass by. That I can't impose.

CB: Maybe that's where your dislike for the student projects we showed you comes from.

IT: It's not a dislike. I thought exactly the same way when I was a student. My only issue expressed earlier was with the word "café," because that immediately throws me into a hipster vibe that has started to tire me. Yes, I like drinking beer at a pub, not coffee at a café. The café has become a kind of all-purpose function. When I don't know what to do or can't imagine anything, I put in a café.

CB: You mentioned earlier that we architects, especially, lack the research component, aside from the formal spatial aspect. We lack the research done by us or by anthropologists, grassroots research to understand why people use spaces the way they do. Due to reasons including the limited time of such a project and the local architectural pedagogy, our project lacked this research component, so the student teams could understand the details of each block, why people built two-and-a-half-meter fences, why they don't use the large central courtyard. In this sense, the discussion balances between a bright, visionary project by professionals and everyday use...

EB: But it's also about discovering potential that's there, which no one sees.

IT: For example, regarding the fence controversy, I had a project. I got involved in a sort of partnership with Sector 6, and, well, there was a huge uproar in Drumul Taberei when Mayor Ciucu started tearing down the fences. I went in and proposed something like: "Let's map it out and see, because there are fences that need to come down because they don't add value, but there are also fences that, if removed, will cause damage." As mayor — and I fully agree here — you can't go into every neighborhood and work at the grassroots level. But you

can have a team of professionals behind you: of course, Alex Axinte was involved in this Drumul Taberei thing. We were on the other side with the school, Vera Dobrescu also worked with the students on some parts, more on design, on the boulevard side, and I got involved with the younger students to research between the blocks, to actually try to go and map fence by fence by fence. To try to understand the logic of the fences. Why did each fence appear? In fact, if you talk to people, most of the fences appeared because cars were driving onto the green spaces. Now the fences have been removed, and the cars have returned. So the conflict has reignited, and the fences will probably reappear. This is another thing that drives me crazy in Romania, in general, that people in leadership positions are action men. So far, I've had at least three such boss types who have told me they don't have time for my analyses and criticisms because they're men of action. By the time I come up with the results, the train has left the station. Okay... I estimate that after another term of Ciucu, the fences will be back. What you've done in the meantime is destroy people's attachment to the place, generate animosity, and waste a horrendous amount of public money in an absolutely useless way.

CB: The “civilizing” efforts touted by some of the new sector mayors in Bucharest, especially in block neighborhoods, lead to escalating conflicts.

IT: It's much sadder; it has even led to a few deaths. And I'm not joking at all. The grandmother of a colleague had a heart attack when they cut down the cherry plum tree she planted when her first child was born. These aren't jokes... At some point, you're trampling on people. I mean, people have died because of this. Sure, not on a large scale, but I know of three cases: heart attack, hospitalization, death because they ruined their front garden. It sounds ridiculous, but it's not. These are people who had a certain level of attachment that's hard to imagine.

EB: What you're saying is that the danger of political vision and implementing concepts can actually lead to major deviations.

IT: Because you don't understand the content. Because architects, by the nature of their profession, tend to only look at forms, but they don't really understand the content. The content is the people.

EB: But we, as architects, only create the framework. The framework should be adaptable enough to be lived in, to be filled with life.

IT: When Ceaușescu built Balta Albă, there was nothing there. He created a framework, and people moved into it and started organizing it. But now, with the project you're imagining in the studio, you want to come into an area where people already exist and impose a framework? Some of the pillars of that framework might crush people and fall where they shouldn't. You're coming into a life that already exists.

EB: Is it possible to have an intermediate model where this vision from the professional can exist without causing major harm?

IT: It's what Romania lacks, namely the associative phenomenon. For example, perhaps the closest was Alex Axinte with his research in Drumul Taberei, doing fieldwork for so many years and living there, moving to Drumul Taberei to enter a neighborhood network where he could get to know the residents. I've tried to do this myself, but it doesn't work because no one has the patience: not in school, because the projects are very structured, the teaching has to be done a certain way, and not the city hall, because they don't listen to you. I also tried in Floreasca because I know the people from the Local Initiative Group and had some projects with the students, and it worked. We did surveys in the park with the residents, who all gathered from the neighborhood

to do interviews with them. But there's no time to follow up; everything is very rushed, when in fact, a lot of patience is needed. The politician wants to be re-elected, and they need quick, visible results. Although that's another Romanian illness. Everyone gets results fever in the last year of their political mandate. But if they had started the study, if they had funded it from the first year of their term, by the fourth year, implementation could have happened. If they only want results in the fourth year of their term, why didn't they ask in the first three years? It could have been done for free, together with the students. The only funding would have been for organizing an exhibition where a negotiation with the residents could take place through panels.

CB: There's also the issue of scale. The scale of everyday life is micro, focused on neighborhood and long-term timeframes. The scale that politics demands is one of large and quick projects.

EB: And the academic scale is tied to studio projects that last six weeks and are worth five or six credits [as is the case with the two second- and third-year projects presented in the magazine]. How do you handle this at your University in landscape architecture?

IT: ...and if possible, with 40 presentation boards. I also do something else. I've given this project several times. The project is: "Place a bench." Here's the area, put a bench, that's the entire project. "I'll put it here..." It's one of the toughest decisions you can make in life. It's a very challenging project in any site, for example in Floreasca. I've assigned it there repeatedly because there are these micro pocket parks, 10x10 meters along Ceaikovski Street. And, of course, everyone's like, "Wow, let's put benches here." Fine. I've mentioned that I have access to the neighbors there, to the local community, and I can easily gather them through the Local Initiative Group. I also know the neighborhood very well because I live there in the summer. And I

tell them, “There used to be a bench here; take a look at Google Street View from three years ago when there was a bench.” / “Why isn’t it there anymore?” / “Because the neighbors called the police to have it removed since it attracted drunks who were urinating under their windows.” The bench’s removal solved a conflict. When I start my course on landscape design, urbanism, and urban design, I often show them photos from Brussels with all the mess on the streets. I lived in Brussels for five years, and I still go there frequently and stay right in the city center, near the Stock Exchange. So, in the evening, at 11 or 12, I walk home through a bunch of trash. But by the next morning, everything smells like perfume and shampoo, everything is wonderful. Ultimately, for me, filth is a sign of a happy city. Those people feel good. If you’re urinating on the street, it means you’ve reached a level of intoxication that makes you satisfied with your life.

EB: Let me try to rephrase and ask another question. What you’re saying, Ioana, is that purely conceptual professional work is very far from understanding real life, from the grassroots level. So the question I’m asking is, how can we, in academia, whether in landscape architecture or architecture, encourage this kind of curiosity in students? Do we just tell them to do analyses and take them to take photos? How can we stimulate a deeper understanding of the place? It seems like you’re critiquing the purely conceptual education we have and pass on, which might be out of sync with the values embedded in everyday life.

IT: With a purely quantitative result. What I mean by this is: Have you ever had a student who did a fantastic analysis, only to conclude that nothing should be done in that area? And the answer was genuinely honest, beyond criticism? It’s not about laziness or anything else. I had a student who worked like a slave, conducted extensive analyses, and the only real result was that nothing should be touched there. And the

student was honest. And as a professor, you end up believing in them and accepting this result. But if it were a diploma project, what would the committee say? And then the chaos begins... In the studio, they'd get a 10, fantastic! But if it were for a diploma? Let's say the student expresses themselves so well and does such good work that even the committee is convinced and approves it. Then you go to the mayor to do a project, and you say, "Nothing needs to be done." Using public money? And the mayor says, "I think it was worth it; it's just as you say. We won't do anything. You're right." Then the Auditors comes in: "What did you spend that money on?" Our problem is that people always expect us to force our hand, and when you honestly understand that nothing should be done, you're somehow forced to do something. That's why I say, in school, I would also focus on this: allowing the result to stay in a theoretical or guideline zone. As Alex Axinte said, "Let's write guides." At some point, it becomes terrifying that you always need plans, sections, to create something big. A small project isn't good enough for a diploma. There was once a diploma project that I thought was impeccable. A student designed a kindergarten and received a terrible grade because the project was too small. She had an agreement with the Jewish community; they requested that project because they needed a kindergarten. And this applies to my school as well, to be clear. Or, for example, in a partnership with the city hall, instead of doing urban plans or other highly applied things, you could do grassroots field research, which you can afford to do with students. It seems to me that the student has a different curve and learning experience, as I did with them in Drumul Taberei. It ended in total failure because Mayor Ciucu didn't want to see what we had done since it didn't align with his vision of demolishing all the fences. But I'm saying this method would be great. As a mayor, I can't analyze from the grassroots level. And no architecture firm can study for six months. It's not financially sustainable... but the university has plenty of students. Other universities can also come in to study, like

Bogdan Iancu with his anthropology students. It happened, with an interdisciplinary team studying from the grassroots level. For example, one of the controversies, speaking of bottom-up and nature. One of the findings in Drumul Taberei was a place where they had put up fences between blocks to keep people out. But in interviews, a woman said, “Well, yes, my neighbor from block D and I put it up in 1964 because we wanted a forest to grow in the back.” And a forest did grow in the back. We even brought in an assistant from Agronomy, an ornithology expert, and counted about 16 bird species in Drumul Taberei, but only between those two blocks because no one had set foot there since the 1960s, and something ecological had happened. Some spaces have different values — some social, some monetary, and others ecological. After mapping, you might find that those fences should stay because they protect a valuable ecosystem. But other fences can be removed to allow children to walk to school. But patience is required because there are no recipes. Speaking of your projects... Again, I did a project identical in concept, so I’m not criticizing the idea. But the principle invented through the project might work in one area and not at all on the next urban block. That’s why I think the associative aspect is important. And I believe we need to become moderators more than designers.

CB: I’d like to add something here, about architecture schools, that in my view is problematic. Research, especially in architecture and probably in landscape architecture as well, is research related to space. Unfortunately, social-anthropological research isn’t considered something that validates future architectural solutions because it’s seen as outside our field. It’s assumed that we need to create something for the future, so we’re not concerned with the present or past. Moreover, architecture is a discipline that isn’t considered to advance through research, but through what you create, what you build, what you propose. Designers and designing are seen as the ones who advance

the discipline.

IT: And this leads to a logical disconnect, where, for example, I can't have a bachelor's project that ends in a guide or a theoretical conclusion. But at the doctoral level, you can't do research by design. So I can't do design by research, nor research by design. The disconnect is total at both levels. So we either draw without thinking, or we think without drawing. And it's the same at Agronomy University where I teach. So, for a bachelor's, the student has to come up with a landscape design project, and for a doctorate, they have to count plants but not draw two lines. From my point of view, this is and always will be the universities' fault because universities can go to the Ministry of Education and explain that the standards are bad, the current ideas are bad, and they need to be changed.

EB: I want to say, in conclusion, that our work in the studio with these free projects, however grandiose it may sound, is a type of research, research by design, which contains theoretical notions even though it's conducted with students. And that's exactly what we're trying to do with this magazine, without necessarily seeking formal recognition: to publish the research conducted in the studio.

HIDDEN GARDENS
OF BUCHAREST



Anatomy of a City: Hidden Gardens of Bucharest

The research, which began in 2022 by studying the urban block of Intrarea Acvila and proposing urban gardens for neighbourhood residents, continued in the fall of 2023 with the third-year student group. The *Hidden Gardens of Bucharest* project aimed to capture the diffuse nature of the built fabric of historic Bucharest, an urban palimpsest where some qualities generated by the city's medieval history and structure can still be discovered. This type of research aligns with previous efforts in the *MZCH design studio* to decipher the diffuse nature and structure of the city, inspired by the methodical studies conducted by Dana Harhoiu in her book "Bucharest – A City Between East and West" (Simetria, 2001). Thus, starting from the qualities discovered in the example studied in the second year, we tried to identify urban blocks with sufficient depth to allow for convenient cutouts for creating small gardens managed collectively by the area's residents. Together with the students, we studied a significant number of urban blocks within the historic city's perimeter, both to understand their geometric configuration correlated with historical evolution and, more importantly, to discover the potential of using the urban block core by opening it to the city or at least to nearby residents.

The historical analysis involved overlaying the configuration of each urban block as they appeared in the pre-modern period in Borroczyń's plan (1852), during the city's modernization process (1911 plan), and in the current urban situation. These planimetric comparisons reveal how the sparse structure of the medieval city, which was prohibited by the Ottoman Empire from building fortifications and whose outer limit could grow uncontrolled, generated an urban fabric interspersed with green spaces in the middle of the urban blocks, largely used for gardening and agriculture. Starting in the mid-19th century, the city

progressively densified as the winding street layouts were gradually regularized and building heights increased. The authentic “wagon houses,” ground-floor rooms oriented towards the sun and aligned in a long enfilade towards the back of the yard, were gradually replaced by multi-story buildings predominantly oriented towards the street. Despite this, the imposition of regulatory measures over the loose matrix of the medieval city could not erase the very special quality of the gardens and utility spaces within the depths of private yards.

Speculatively from a legal standpoint, and more to highlight an untapped spatial potential, the *Hidden Gardens of Bucharest* project proposed pertinent cutouts to imagine the development of these intermediate spaces, situated between public and private, common places with a discreet spatial scale, fundamentally different from both the private yard and the city’s large public parks.

To demonstrate the principle’s validity, some of these arrangements were detailed in teams of three students. Similar to the study conducted a year earlier for the urban block in the Uranus area, the students exemplified through their projects the urban potential of using urban block cores to configure different types of common places, green areas that could support the ecological and psychological needs of Bucharest’s central area densification. Firstly, the projects needed to establish how to construct the boundary between public and private, ensuring that the possibility of privacy was not entirely abandoned in the process. Additionally, they specified important aspects for defining a semi-public place: the type of vegetation, the materiality of the pavement finishes, urban furniture, and nighttime lighting, as well as the possibility of constructing small pavilions to animate the use of spaces and interactions among neighbours. Some projects focused more on the spatial qualities of the arrangement, offering residents a different kind of leisure in the city centre, while others were more attentive to the communal vocation of these arrangements or the ways

they could support small-scale food production practices.

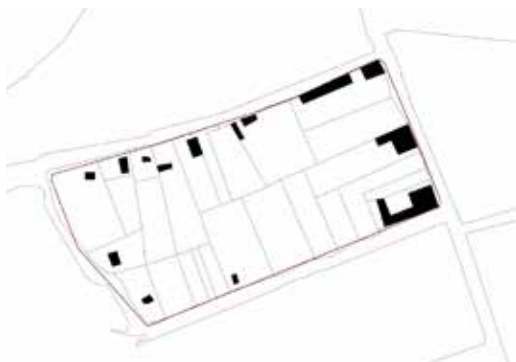
Detailing extremely different urban blocks, such as Romulus, Icoanei, Polonă, Hiramului, Plevnei, or Anton Pann, was done with great care, involving not only the proposal of a spatial or constructive configuration but also attention to the types of vegetation chosen. The students created various types of Herbaria, both real and digital, to try to imagine the spaces and their uses in all their complexity. From the city scale, with its multiple historical declinations, to the most perishable detail, this project highlighted a latent potential in the urban structure of Bucharest, which was the subject of the exhibition *Anatomy of a City: Hidden Gardens of Bucharest*, organized in the foyer of the Small Hall of the Royal Palace, on the occasion of the *Mazzocchio Talks #9* conference.

Without specifying in detail the legal means by which such places can be established, we believe that this research by design could inspire various urban actors, from the residents themselves to local administration representatives and NGO-type associative structures, to continue it to make it feasible, thus activating the potential of Bucharest's hidden gardens.

atelier Mazzocchio

Emil Badea
Alexandra Băjan
Monica Berbecilă
Raluca Bob
Andrei Bonciu
Anda Căuia
Elena Cercel
Ana Ciulei
Ana-Maria Cochinescu
Anastasia Crețu
Sonia Drăgănescu
Emanuel Ehsichian
Bianca Florea
Andra Frusina
Cosmina Georgescu
Mirela Ilie
Emilia Mincea
Andrada Moțățaiianu
Alexandru Natu
Jacqueline Neacșu
Alexia Olteanu
Alexandra Radu
Ana-Maria Rujoiu
Selena Simioana
Maria Simion
Mihaela Sîrbu
Alexandra Stoica
Edith Șalgău
Andra Tudor
Denisa Turcu

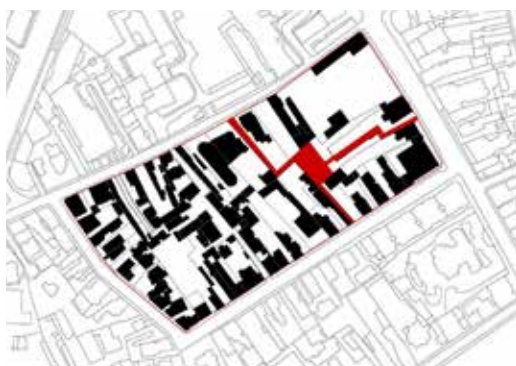




1852



1911



2023





1852



1911



2023





1852



1911



2023





1852



1911



2023





1852



1911



2023





1852



1911

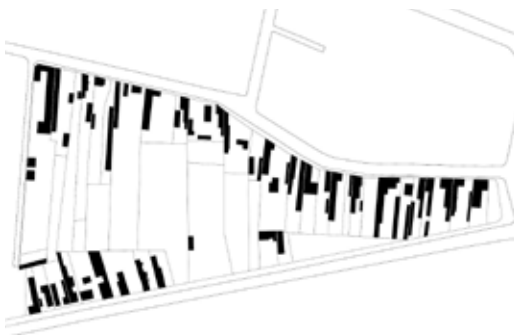


2023





1852

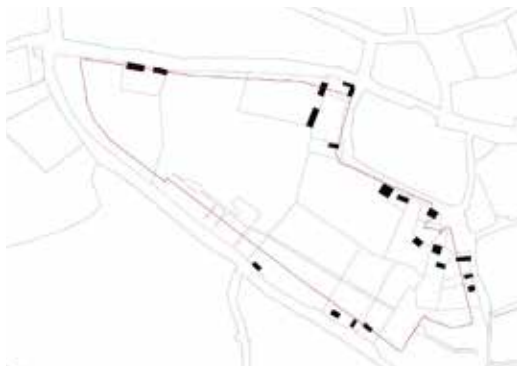


1911



2023





1852

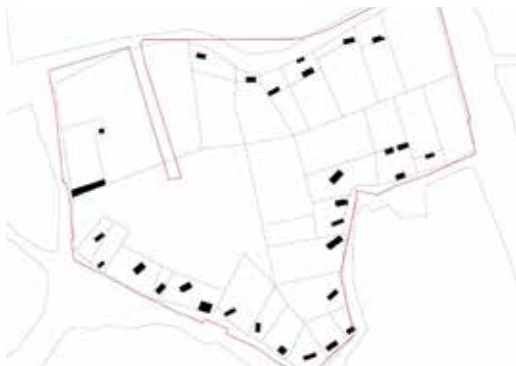


1911



2023





1852



1911



2023





1852



1911



2023





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1911



2023





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1911



2023

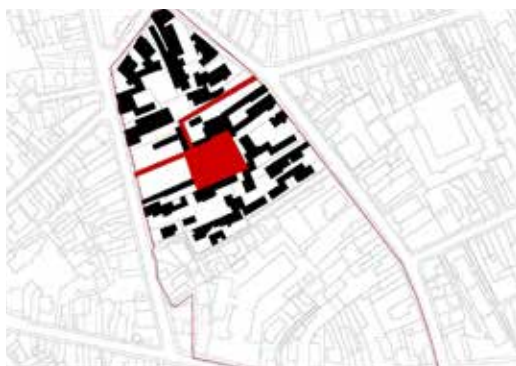




1852



1911



2023





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1911



2023





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1911



2023





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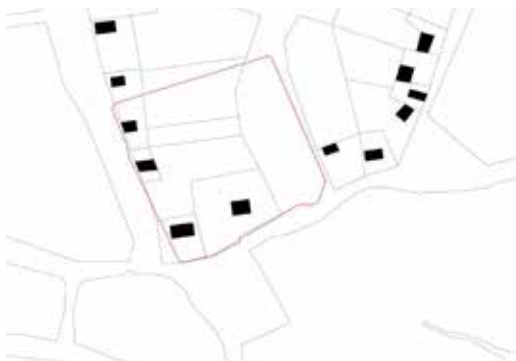


1911



2023





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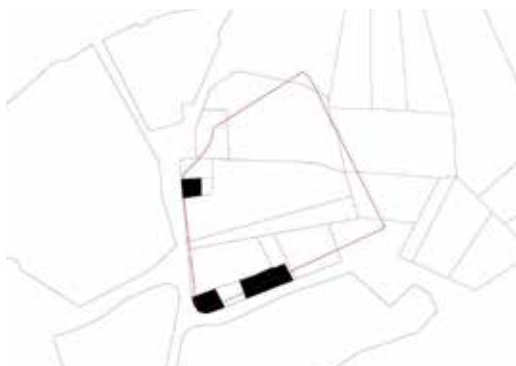


1911



2023





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1911



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1911



2023





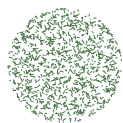
1852



1911



2023



CLOVER
(*Trifolium*)



FORGET-ME-NOT
(*Mysotis*)



ICE DANCE SEDGE
(*Carex morrowii*)



CHAMOMILE
(*Matricaria chamomilla*)



DANDELION
(*Taraxacum Officinale*)



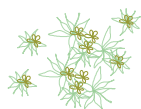
GARDEN COSMOS
(*Cosmos bipinnatus*)



GREEN BRISTLEGRASS
(*Setaria*)



ANEMONE
(*Anemone*)



TOAD FLAX
(*Linaria Vulgaris*)



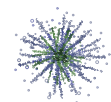
WHITE MUGWORT
(*Artemisia lactiflora*)



COTTON LAVENDER
(*Santolina chamaecyparissus*)



CARNATION
(*Dianthus caryophyllus*)



CATMINT
(*Nepeta*)



BRONZE PEACOCK
(*Rodgersia*)



SOFT SHIELD FERN
(*Polystichum setiferum*)



ORANGE MULLEIN
(*Verbascum phlomoides*)



LESSER POND SEDGE
(*Carex acutiformis*)



WILD INDIGO
(*Baptisia*)



MINT
(*Mentha spicata*)



THYME
(*Thymus*)



ONION
(*Allium cepa*)



BIRD'S-FOOT TREFOIL
(*Lotus corniculatus*)



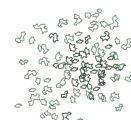
CHICORY
(*Cichorium*)



IRIS
(*Iris latifolia*)



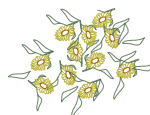
SPADE-LEAF SWORD
(*Echinodorus cordifolius*)



WILD ROSE
(*Rosa acicularis*)



CHRYSANTHEMUM
(*Chrysanthemum*)



BROWN-EYED SUSAN
(*Rudbeckia*)



RASPBERRY
(*Rubus idaeus*)



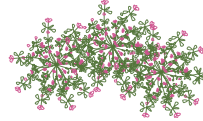
MELICA
(*Melica Alba*)



LINDHEIMER'S BEEBLOSSOM
(*Oenothera lindheimeri*)



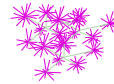
ORPINE
(*Hylotelephium telephium*)



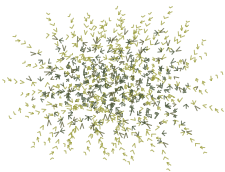
HONEYSUCKLE
(*Lonicera pileata*)



CARDOON
(*Cynara cardunculus*)



FOXTAIL FOUNTAIN GRASS
(*Pennisetum alopecuroides*)

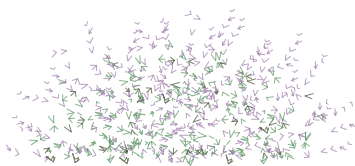


WILD CARROT
(*Daucus carota*)





HEATHER
(*Calluna vulgaris*)



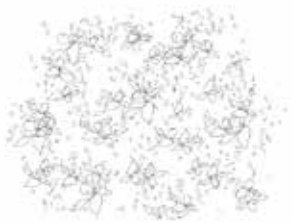
LAVANDER
(*Lavandula*)



NORTHERN WOOD-OATS
(*Chasmanthium latifolium*)



YARROW
(*Achillea millefolium*)



HYDRANGEA
(*Hydrangea*)



IVY
(*Hedera helix*)



WISTERIA
(*Wisteria*)



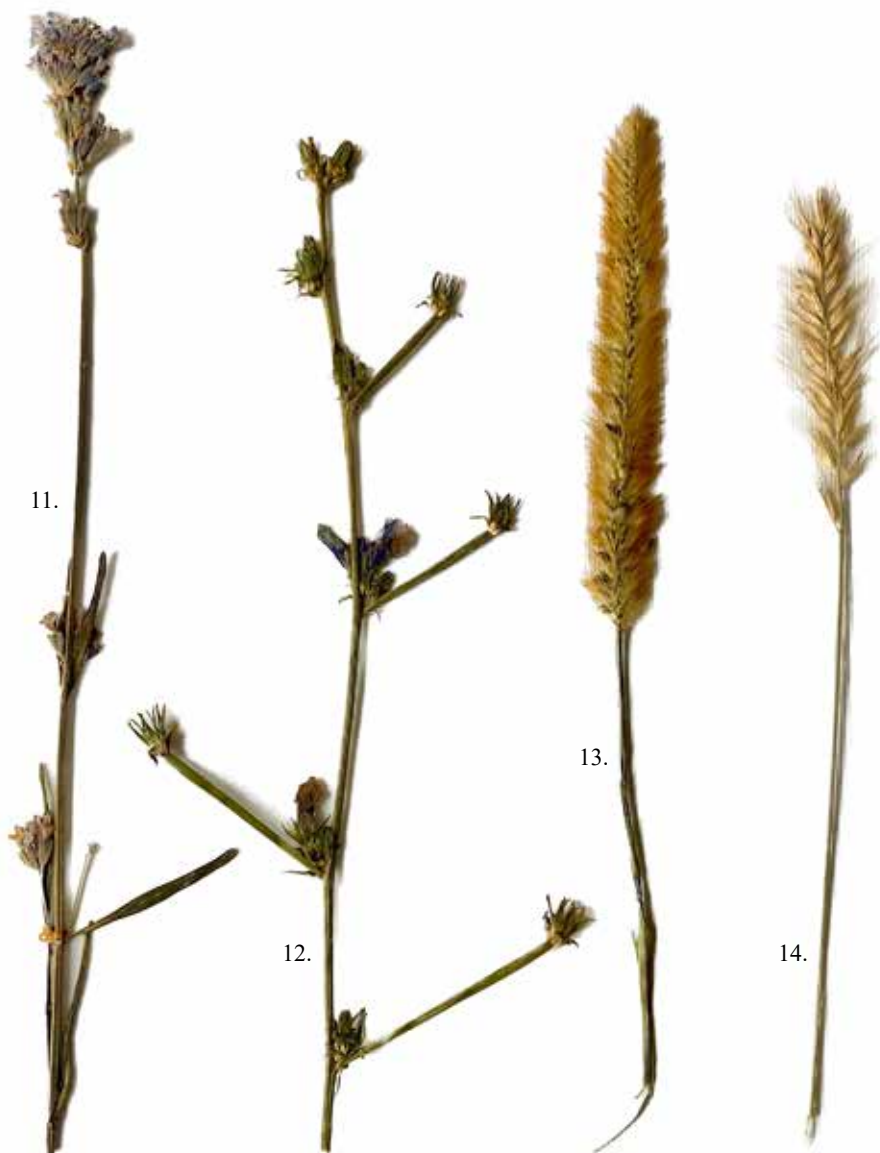
1. ANEMONE (*Eriocapitella hupehensis*)
2. COMMON HEATHER (*Calluna vulgaris*)
3. NORTHERN WOOD - OATS (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)
4. CHAMOMILLE (*Matricaria chamomilla*)
5. COMMON TOADFLAX (*Linaria vulgaris*)



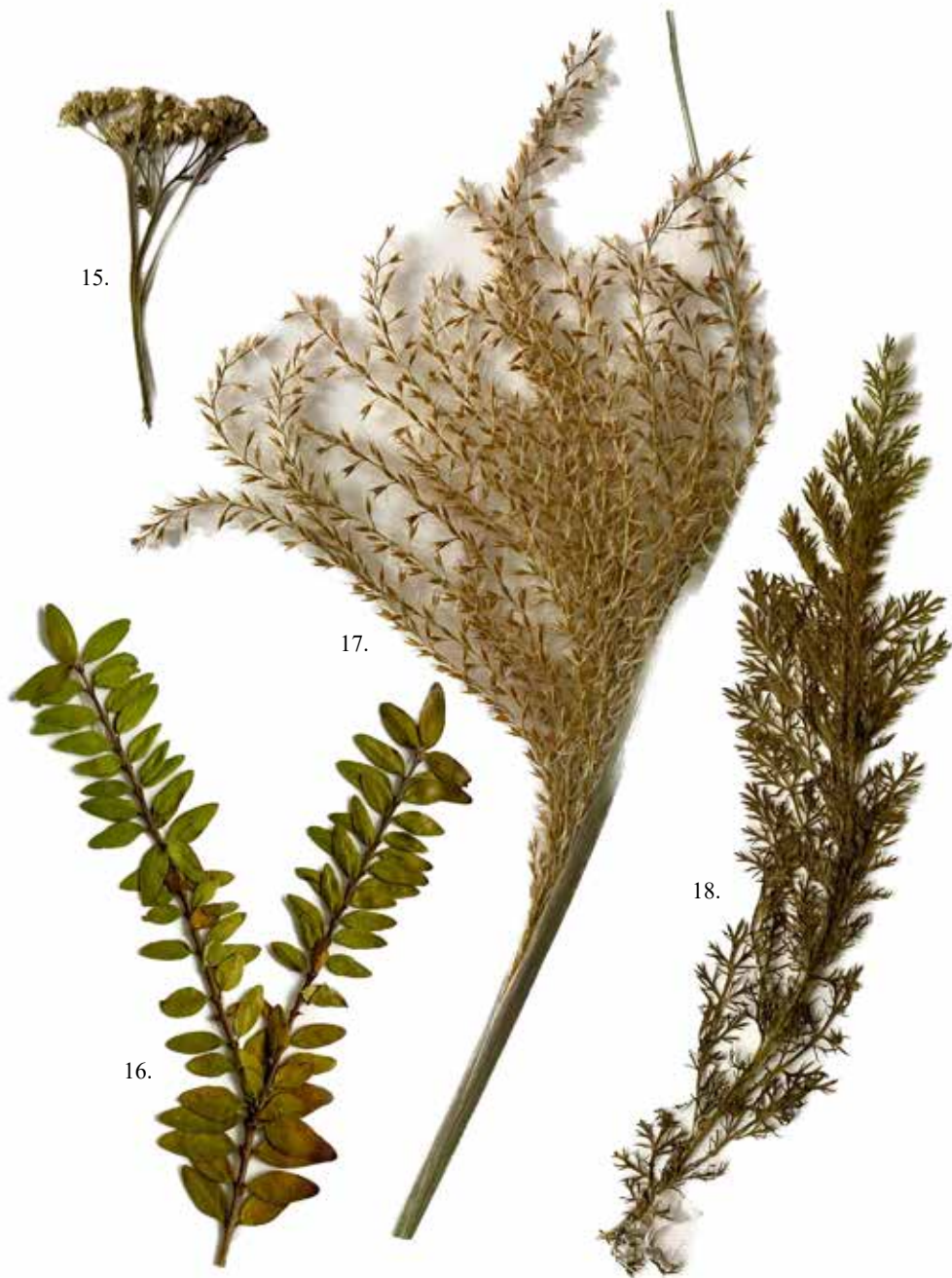
6. ORPINE (*Sedum telephium*)
7. HYDRANGEA (*Hydrangea*)
8. LINDHEIMER'S BEEBLOSSOM (*Oenothera*)



9. DANDELION (*Taraxacum officinale*)
10. WISTERIA (*Wisteria*)



11. LAVANDER (*Lavandula*)
12. CHICORY (*Cichorium*)
13. CHINESE FOUNTAINGRASS (*Cenchrus alopecuroides*)
14. GREEN BRISTLEGRASS (*Setaria viridis*)



15. YARROW (*Achillea millefolium*)
16. HONEYSUCKLE (*Lonicera pileata*)
17. CHINESE SILVER GRASS (*Miscanthus sinensis*)
18. WILD CARROT (*Daucus carota*)



19.



21.



20.



22.

19. IVY (*Hedera helix*)
20. PLUM (*Prunus domestica*)
21. LINDEN (*Tilia tomentosa*)
22. FIG (*Ficus carica*)



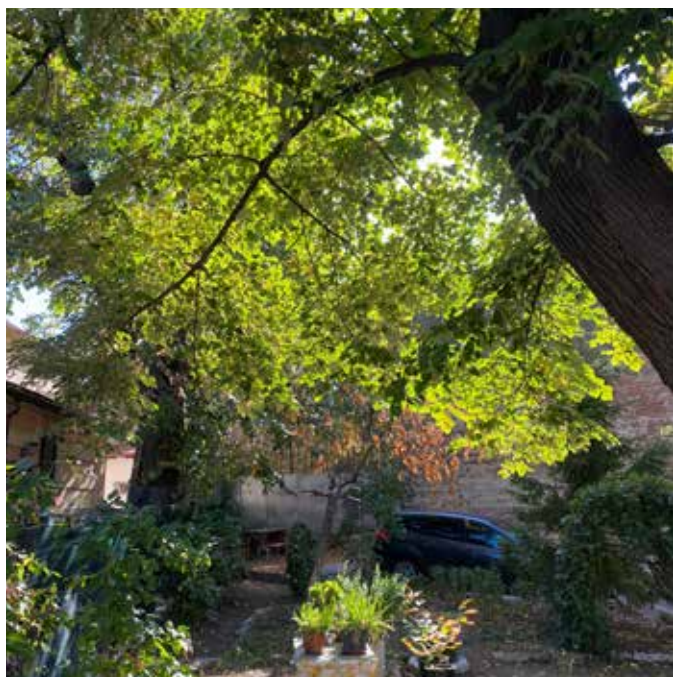
23.



24.

23. TREE OF HEAVEN (*Ailanthus altissima*)
24. BLACK-EYED-SUSANS (*Rudbeckia*)

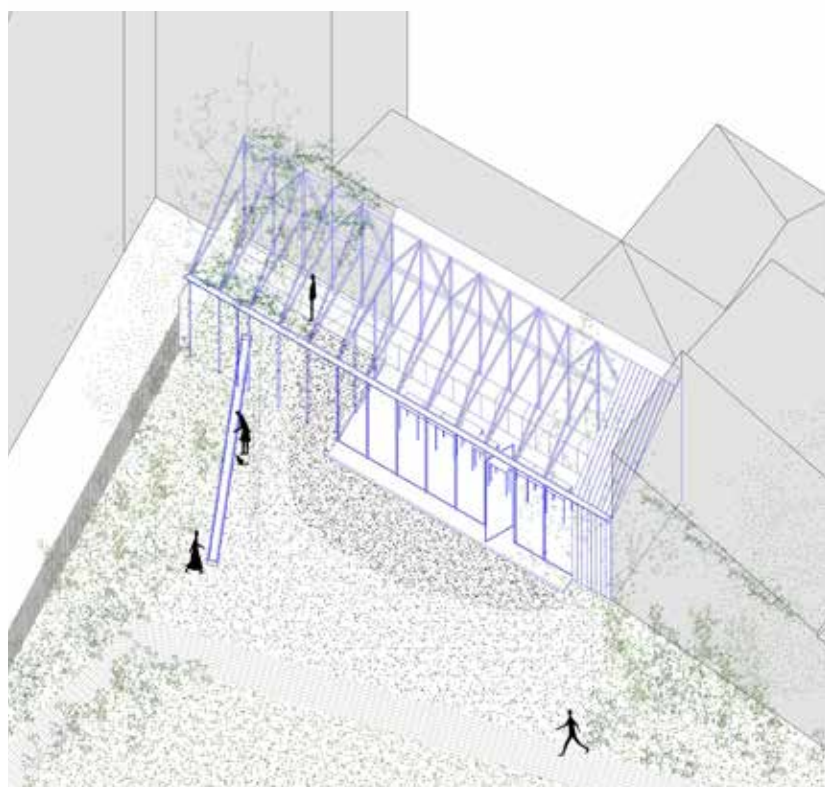
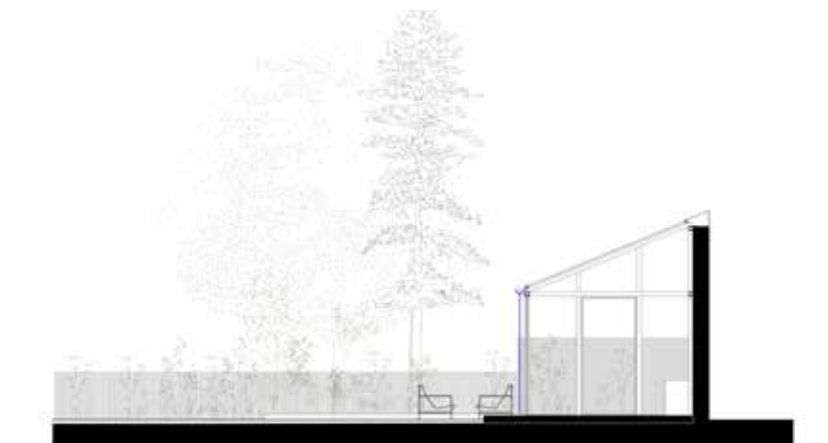
STUDENTS' PROJECTS

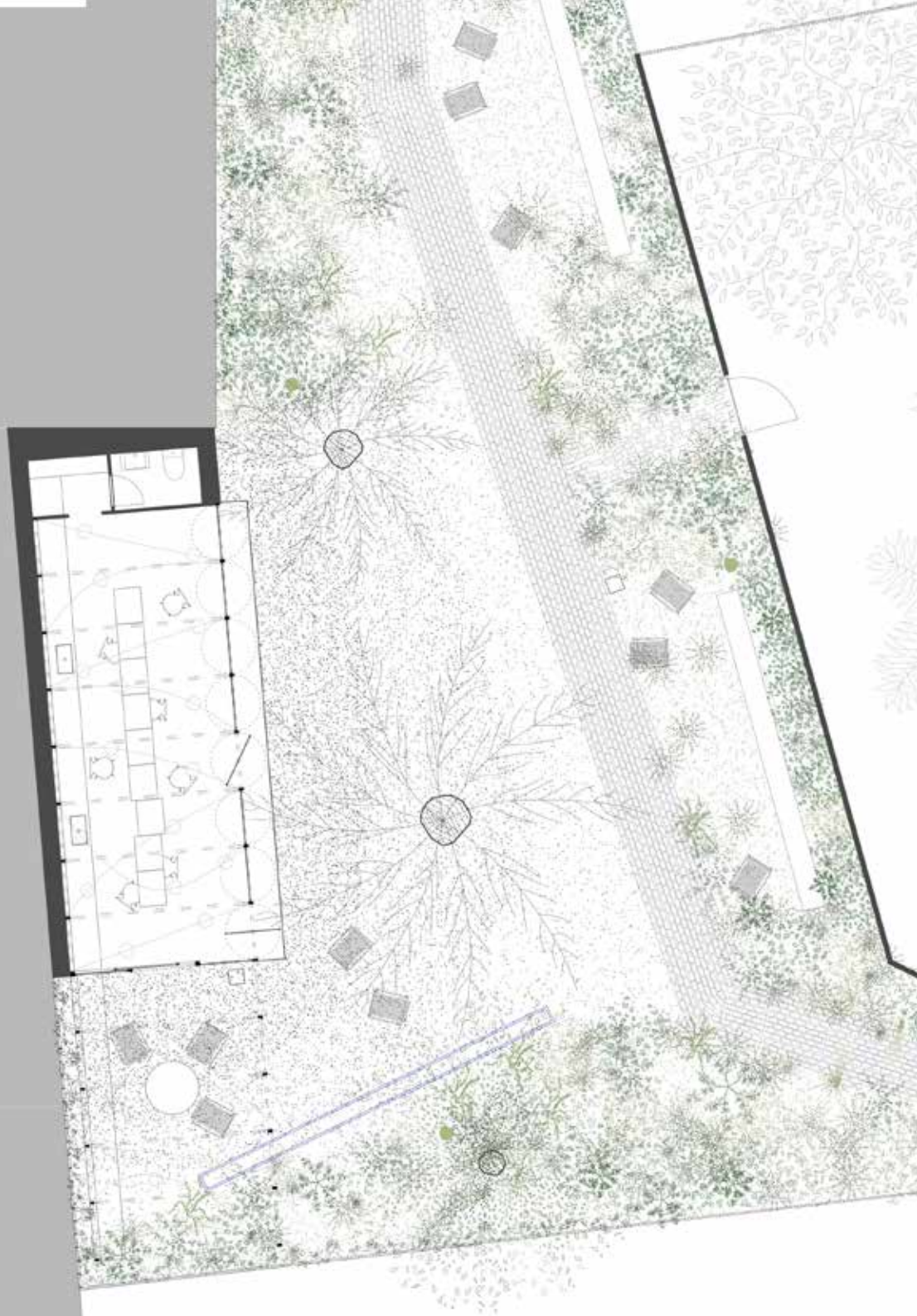


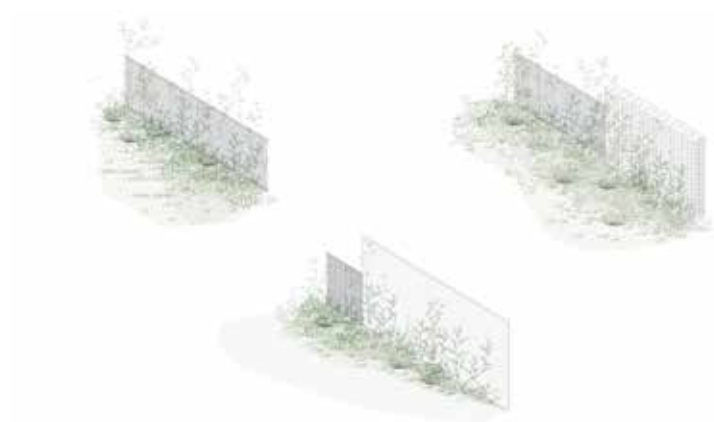
ROMULUS Urban Block
Andrada Moțățianu, Maria Simion, Andra Tudor











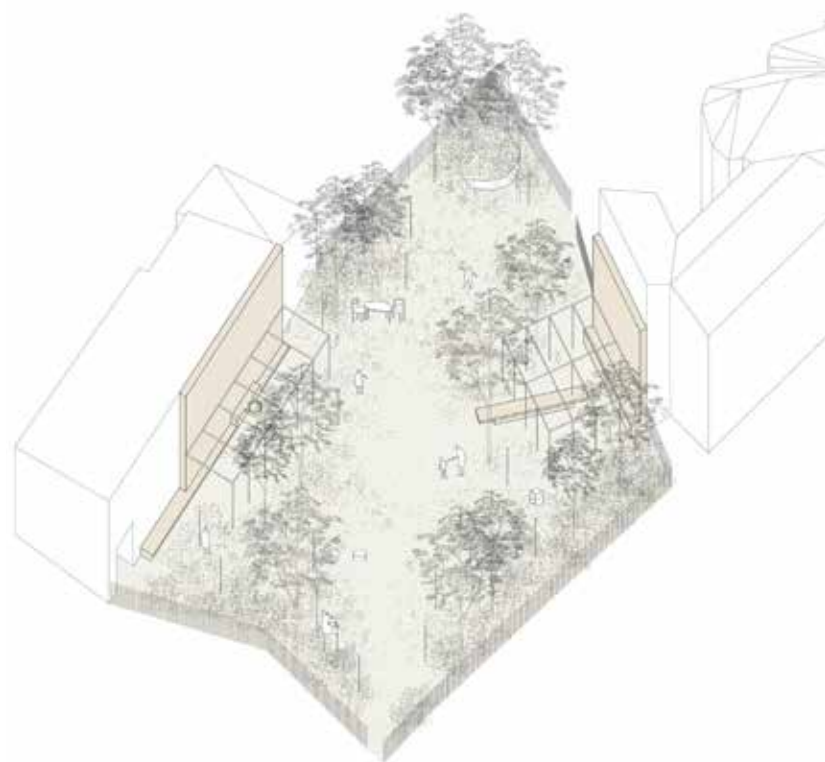


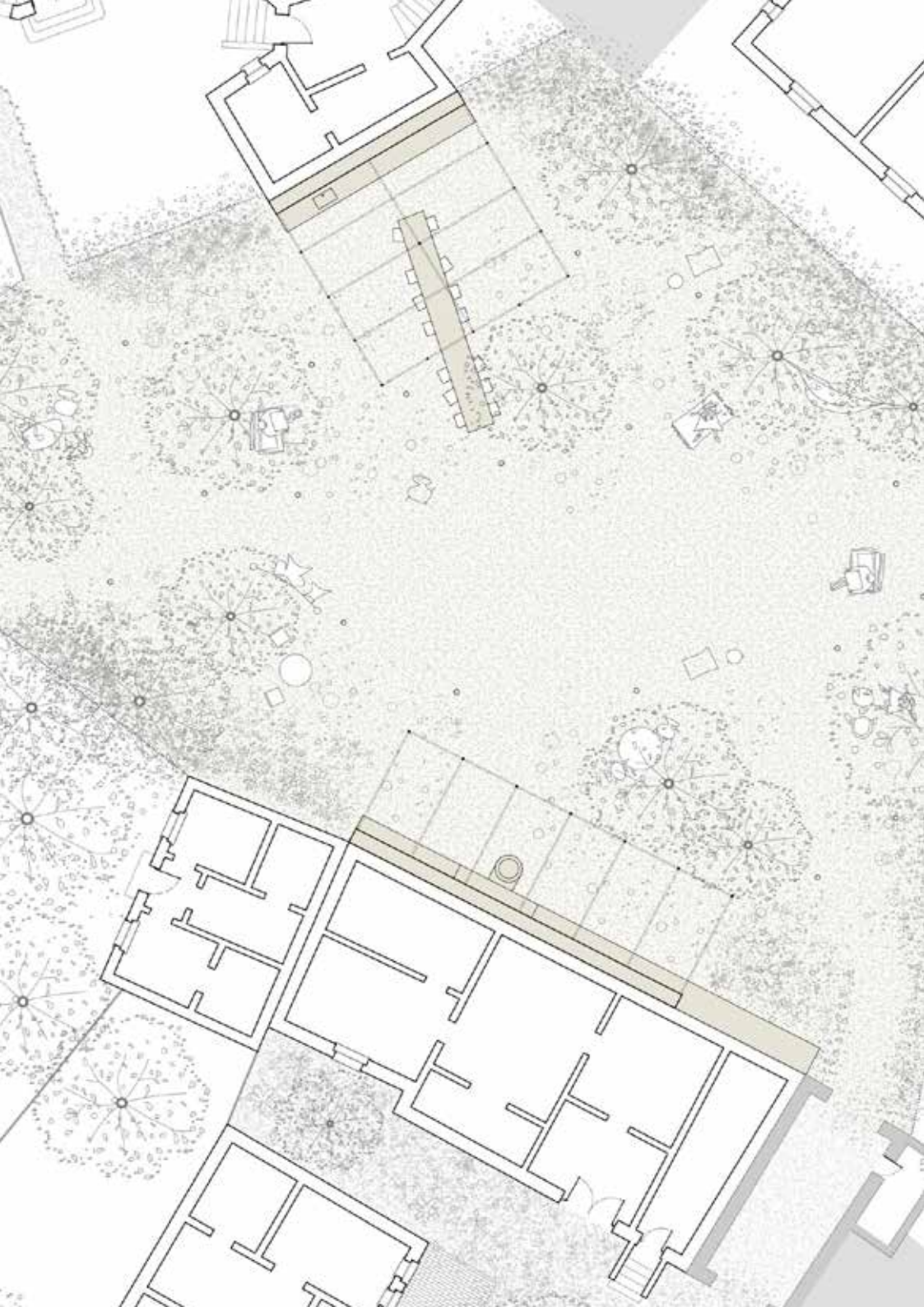


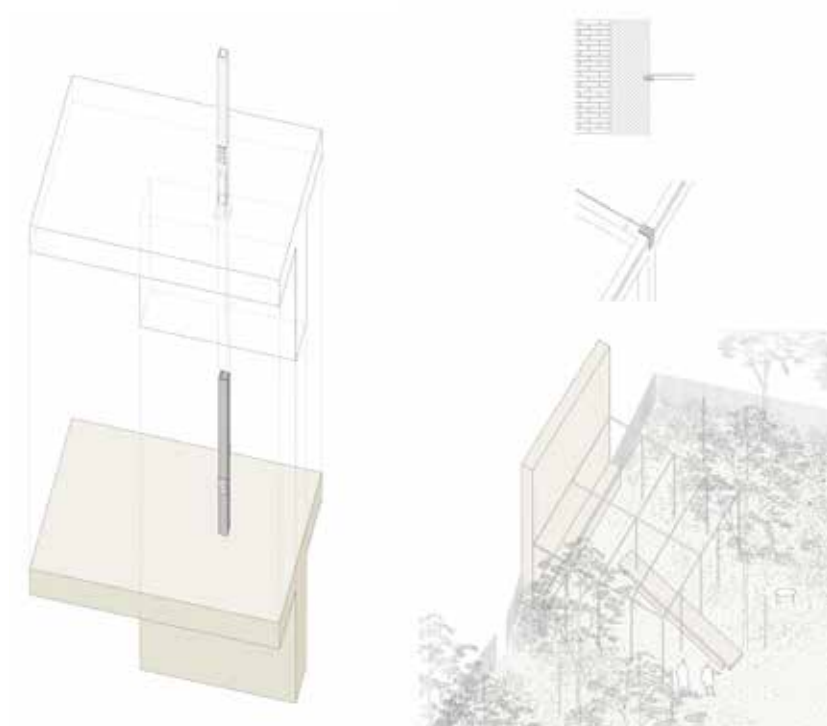
ICOANEI Urban Block
Raluca Bob, Denisa Turcu, Alexandra Radu

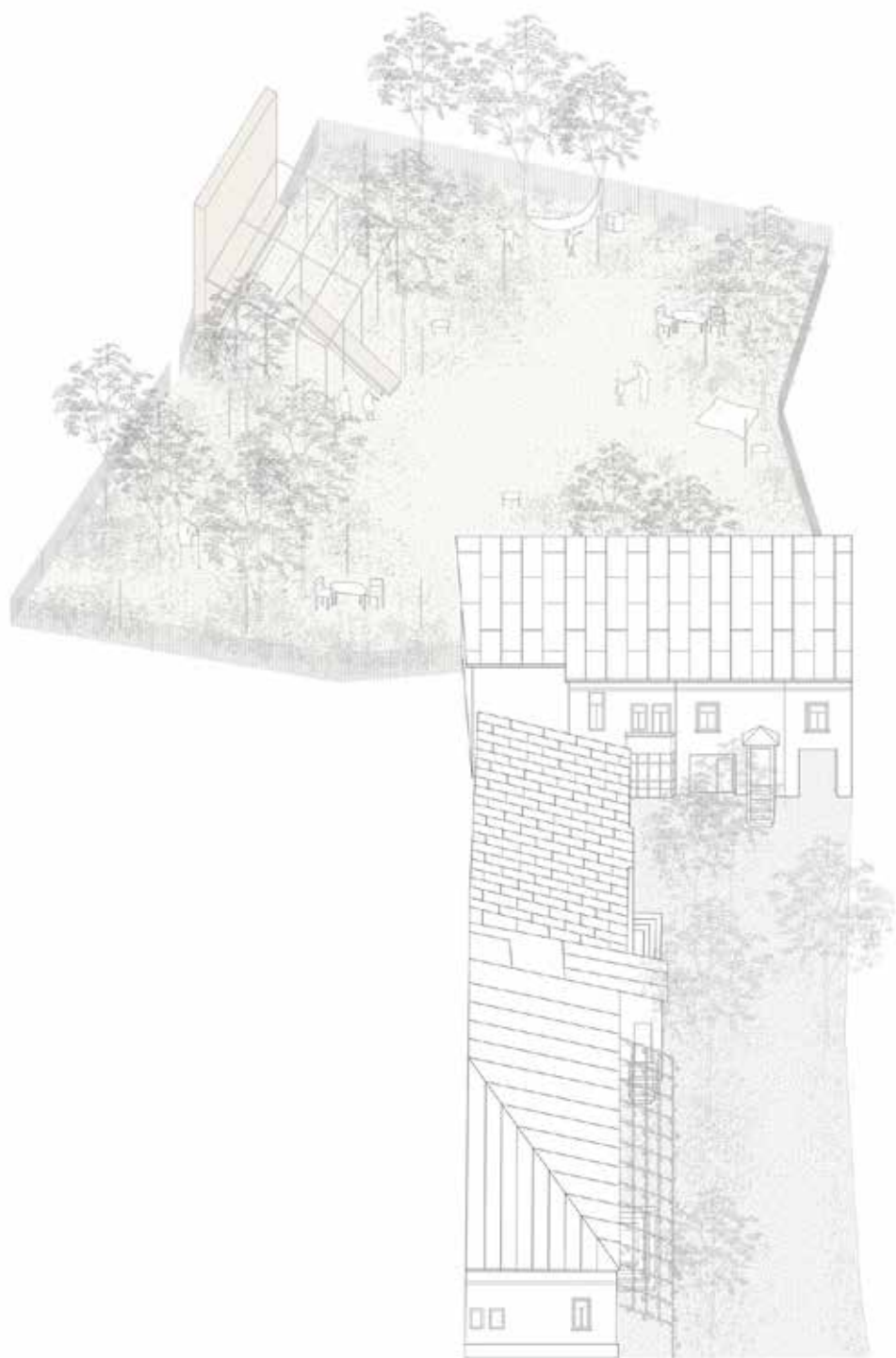


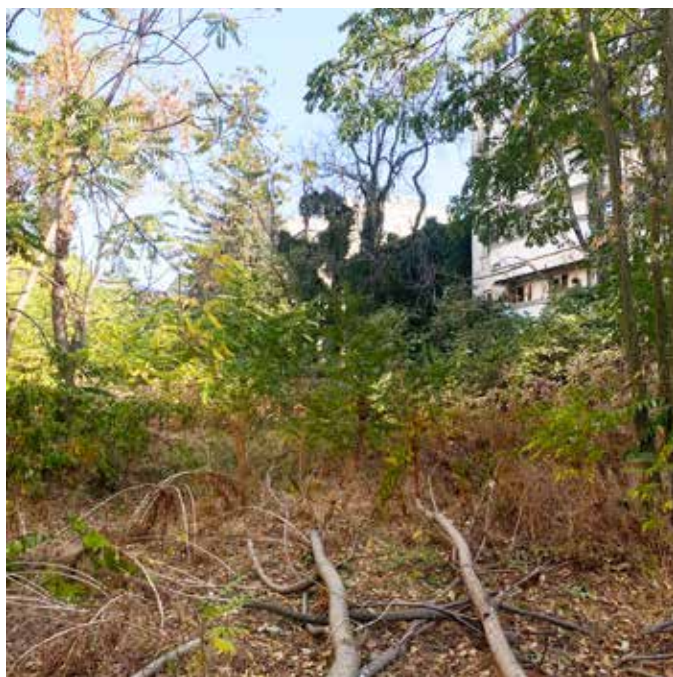








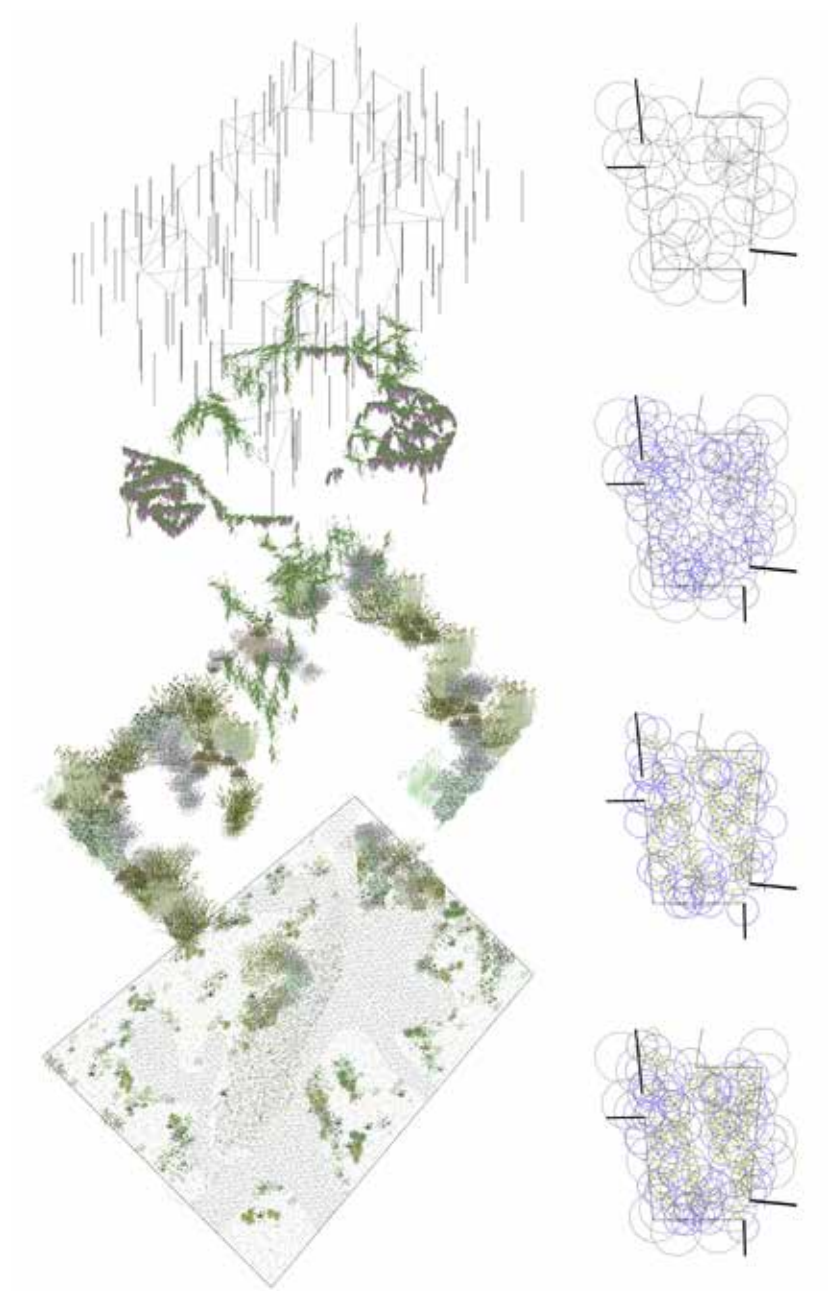


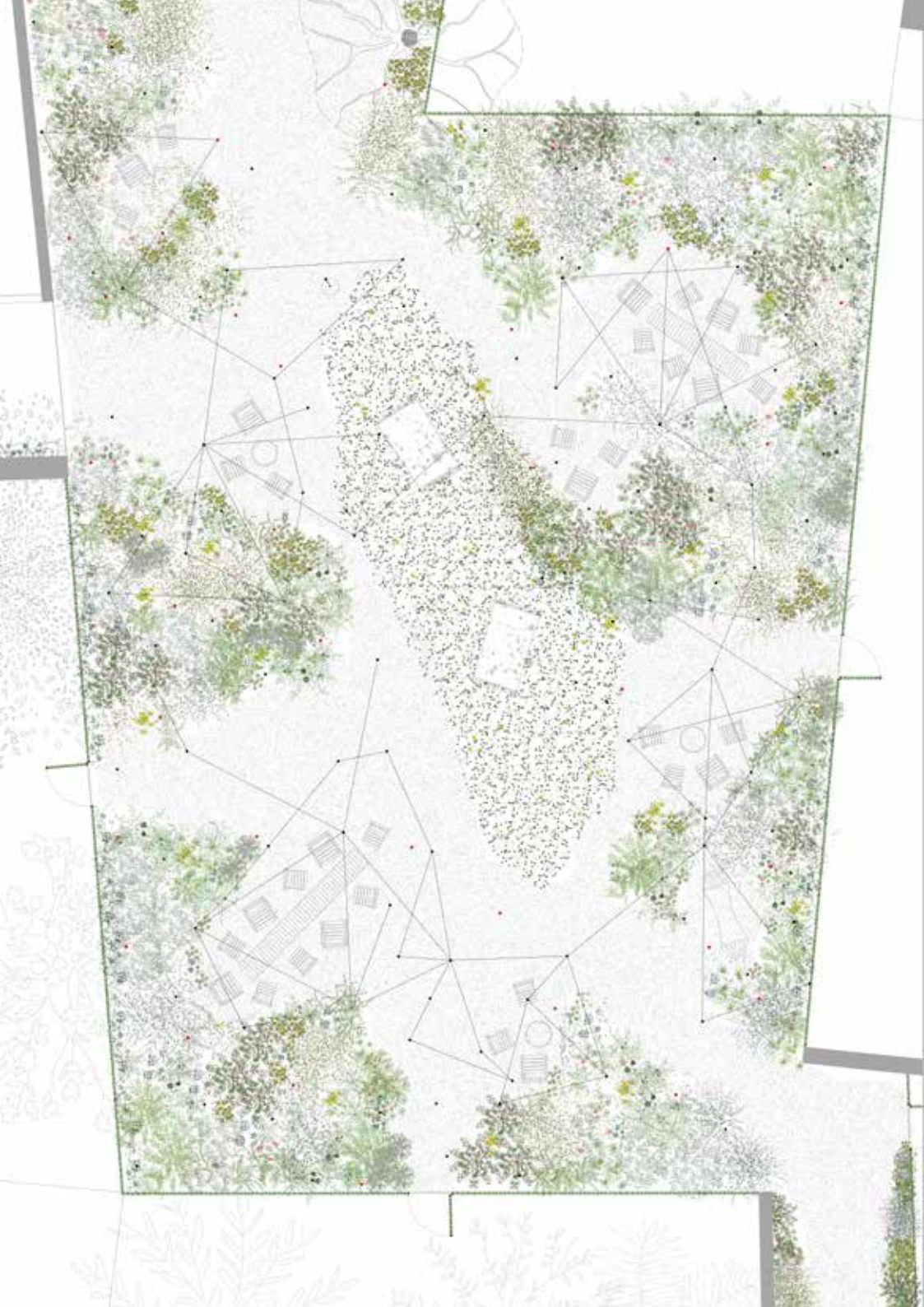


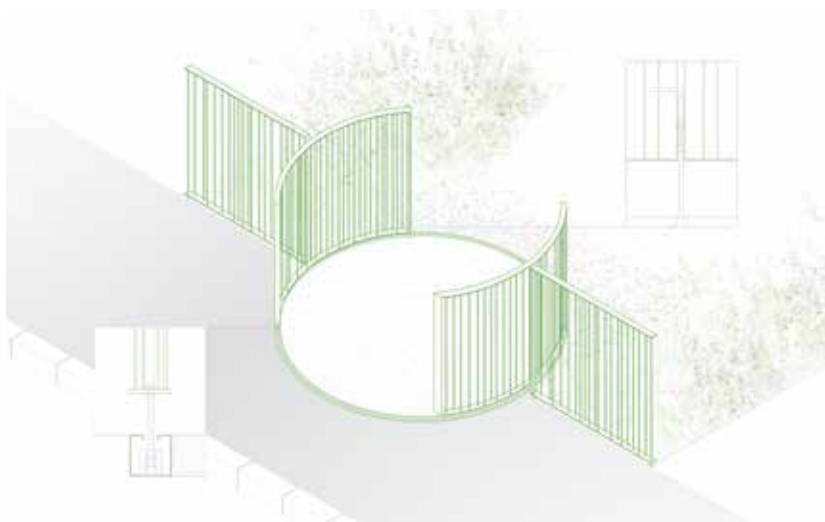
POLONĂ Urban Block
Anda Căuia, Elena Cercel, Ana-Mirela Ilie















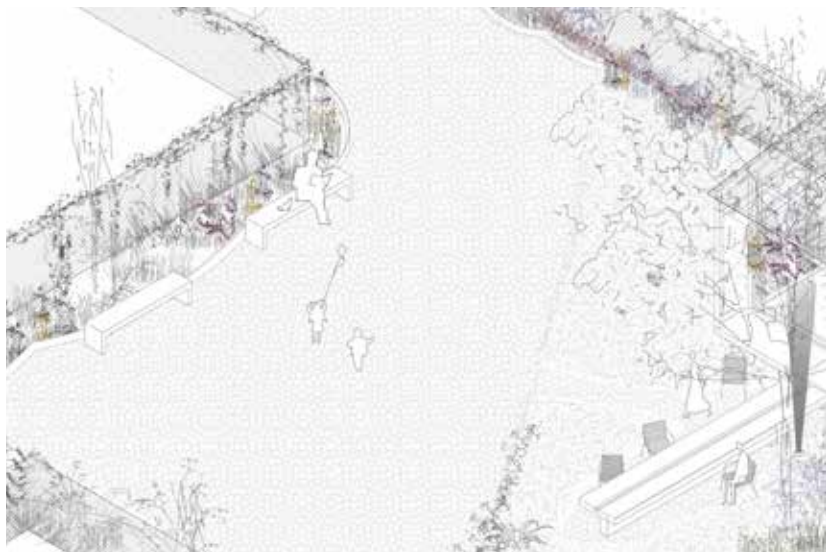
HIRAMULUI Urban Block
Ana-Maria Cochinescu, Alexandra Stoica, Edith Şalgău















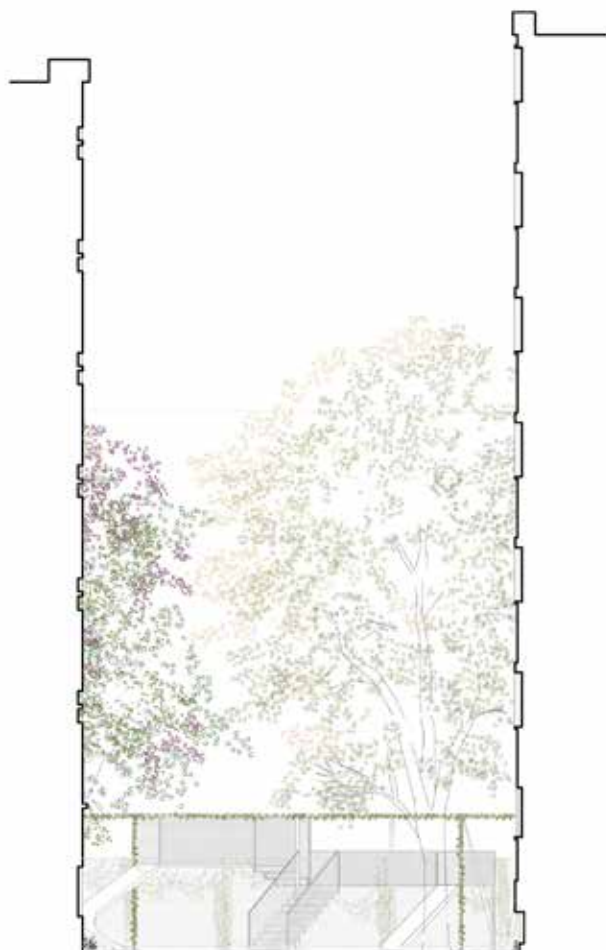
PLEVNEI Urban Block
Emil Badea, Monica Berbecilă, Andra Frusina















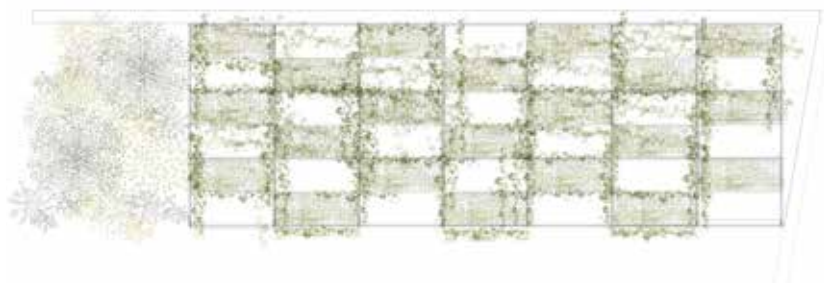
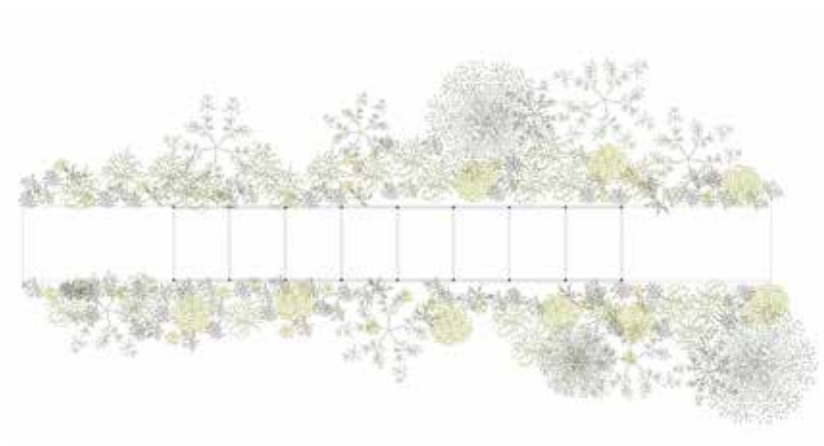
ANTON PANN Urban Block
Andrei Bonciu, Alexandru Natu, Jacqueline Neacșu













NEVEN FUCHS

Neven Mikac Fuchs is an architect based in Oslo, professor emeritus at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design. He is a graduate of FA University of Zagreb. Last ten years Neven Mikac Fuchs was leading the master studio in architecture 'Space & Technique' at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, concerned with the exploring ideas about architectonic space. He practiced at Aalto's office in Helsinki and was a member of International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design under the direction of Gian Carlo de Carlo and Team 10, in Urbino and Siena. In 1983 he moved to Oslo, as teaching assistant to Prof Sverre Fehn at The Oslo School of Architecture. After the 1st prize in Japanese LIXIL competition in 2015, he built Inverted House with Raphael Zuber and AHO team.

BUCHAREST ARCHIPELAGO. Toward an Ecological and Sustainable Contemporary City

A collaborative educational project¹

“Bucharest Archipelago, Toward an Ecological and Sustainable Contemporary City” is a collaborative academic research project with a highly relevant theme: How to make our cities more attractive and ecological places to live? Is it possible to imagine an alternative, more liveable and healthier architectural program for the city? The idea is to focus on urban environment, where design of living spaces, sustainability and architectural implications of Covid-19 conditions are indissociably related.

Cities have to change. The stopped present could be a good place from which to reflect on urban past and future. The project we propose is a design-reflection on how to bring landscape to the city. We think, the salvation of the urban future is not in expanding into the landscape, but in bringing nature into the city. We would propose the architectural division of large urban territories into smaller complex neighbourhoods, campuses, clusters, and monastery-like archipelago typologies. The goal of the project study is to redefine urban limits and to propose the neighbourhood borders in a new way.

¹ This project was conceived in 2021 as a joint educational endeavor between our studio at UAUM and the one led by Neven Mikac Fuchs at AHO. At that time, the Covid-19 pandemic had gripped the world, but across various fields there were individuals striving to seize the moment and embrace the optimistic lessons that could enhance the ongoing flow of life. This text aims to make this mindset visible, particularly in relation to architecture and the city.

The essence of a city is about density and living closely together. There lies its beauty and its tragedy. In our study, we propose that the city should maintain the concept of density, closeness, and the juxtaposition of diverse lifestyles. We aim to continue densifying the city, but in a different way, with more intense green divisions and new urban pockets that, like islands, create specific urban archipelagos. We envision urbanization to be planned and designed in such a radical way that nature — including people, plants, animals, and associated organisms — can co-evolve within the city. New architectural typologies offering more attractive and healthier living options are imagined to be ecologically sustainable, featuring new urban parks, green pockets, village greens, and artificial lakes, even in unconventional places like roofs and disused railway tracks and roads. This approach offers a different scale of living, with light, air, smell, and spontaneous, unplanned situations. Buildings and places should be beautiful, yet still determined by these sensual moments.

Bucharest's centre is a rich repository of diverse and interesting organization of urban life, shaped by specific socio-political and economic developments in the 19th and 20th centuries. Extrapolated from its original context, the city could become a global model, like Berlin, Oslo, Tokyo, and London, where dense green courtyard-islands will serve as speculative case studies. These studies will explore the new relationship between archipelago living and the surrounding metropolitan forces. Through a thorough study of the city, Bucharest's islands and archipelago spaces could become a model for a new type of urbanity and new ways of dense living. Contrary to modernist extensions, they would promote alternative forms of connectivity through the precise demarcation of borders. Characterized by hard boundaries, limited access points, and checkpoints, island and archipelago organizations would create a "soft" spatial segregation taken to the extreme. The definition of borders instead of blurring the

borders would become an argument for the new urban forms, focusing on destinations, instead of modernist nomadism. This approach would allow the development of new housing communities and new interesting non-monofunctional typologies of living, like campus, monastery and hospital were in the past. While seemingly isolationist, these new typologies would foster forms of distanced connectivity and togetherness through the introduction of new urban elements, borders, pockets, and hard boundaries. This would imply the reinventing architectural language of the city, imagined as fragments, with nice, intelligent spaces, water and green environments, that bring nature into the city.



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