



Urban Development - Specific Aspects of the City of Suceava Driven by the Orthodox Churches

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Abstract

The present paper is part of the doctoral research on the places where monastic churches created urban structures that have been preserved to this day in Suceava municipality. The article briefly presents the period from which are dated the oldest churches that have been preserved over time, namely in the 14th to 17th centuries. Natural continuity in the urban space does not mean either the destruction or the indiscriminate preservation of everything that is old, but, on the contrary, an integration between what is created new and what is useful as a material or spiritual value from the historical existing. In the configuration of the medieval city, the church was a polarizing reference point. In this sense, the topological field, as the urbanistic meaning of all religious architecture projects (monuments that have been preserved to this day) constitutes a totality of connected areas configured. Due to the urban texture, these areas are in reciprocal relations with the civic center. It can therefore be stated, based on the topological analysis, that the medieval religious architecture also has an important urban dimension. The founding activity on the territory of the city of Suceava, during the Middle Ages, materialized through a remarkable series of art and architecture monuments, of which, those that have survived to this day, make up a distinct compartment of the dowry of the national cultural heritage, being formed from only 11 churches that still exist today, from the 24 definitely registered in the documents issued by the royal chancellery.

Keywords: urbanism, morphology, historicity, church

1. Introduction

The urban phenomenon is undoubtedly one of the characteristic features of contemporary civilisation. For the Middle Ages, it was considered that one could speak of the urban from the moment one began to move around easily. In this sense, Suceava was a spontaneous rural settlement born in a region of ancient urbanisation. The transformation of Suceava from a rural settlement into an urban settlement was a gradual and lengthy process, which can be placed at the end of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century.

The reconstruction of the stages of evolution of the city plan (urban texture) and its physiognomy was based on the correlation of historical and archaeological data with cartographic data, in order to identify elements of medieval and modern urbanism in the texture of the contemporary town, as well as to understand the logic of the composition and functioning of the old settlement.

An important contribution to the problem of the genesis of Suceava was made by the role of the foreign settlers who settled here. Another element whose implications can be found in the most diverse aspects of the realities of the genesis of Suceava is its geographical position in relation to the network of trade routes and their integration into the circuit of international trade.

The inner aspect of the town, before the second half of the 14th century, in relation to the space occupied by dwellings and the free space was in favour of the last one: the restriction of the living space in a certain area of the town (Mirăuți church), where the density increased in comparison with other spaces in the future town.

2. Urban Morphology

Although urban morphology as a discipline has been established relatively recently, it naturally has some theoretical roots in the past century. It became established as a systematic discipline in the second half of the 20th century, first in France and then in England. These two areas of polarisation of urban morphology concerns, in fact, develop two relatively differentiated directions of investigation. In England, one direction is particularly concerned with reconstructing the physiognomy of towns and cities and the way in which neighbourhoods are distributed and urban composition is historically multiplied (either horizontally or vertically). In the rest of Europe, especially in France, studies have focused primarily on reconstructing social structures in accordance with the texture and distribution of the population in neighbourhoods, streets and buildings (the material condition of the population is an essential criterion). At the same time, the importance of cadastral plans has not been neglected, but rather increased, in order to define the external form of the city, which is so closely linked to its geographical position. [1]

Gradually merging into a system of unitary, interdisciplinary forms, urban morphology has defined its subject not by what is identical or similar, but by what is different in the concerns of the two sciences: history and urban planning. If history is in its entirety a social science, urban planning with its support, the geographical environment (the study of society through space) is only partially a social science.

Seen in this light, but also as works of art, urban-historical complexes in general are not only valuable documents illustrating the past of a locality, but also the most precious ornament with which man has, over the centuries, embellished the place where he

has lived. The result and coexistence of all these architectures created over the past centuries is the very foundation of our modern cities and is the victory of the built, organised space over the prevailing geographical environment. In this sense, the urban ensemble appears to us today as a superior form of civilisation of certain countries, with a significant contribution to European culture.

As far as we are concerned, we consider that urban morphology studies the external configuration of an urban organism and the changes that this configuration undergoes, which has a certain specificity depending on its evolution over time, the area of civilisation of which it is part and the relations established between the natural and material environment, including the ones between man and buildings.

If we accept this starting point, things become simpler. Urban morphology takes 'space' from geography, the architectural profile from urban planning and the social framework from history. On the basis of this simple definition, it is possible to note a number of elements which are essential when drawing up such studies: the plans of the city in their various stages of development and organisation; the nature, number and appearance of buildings in general and of public, secular and religious monuments in particular; the existence of certain neighbourhoods or streets with either an ethnic character or a particular physiognomy; the spatial distribution of professional activities and the specific rendering of spaces occupied by fields, gardens and parks.

For many of the cases where we do not have a written record of the principles underlying the establishment of a town, some signs can be sought in the plan of the settlement. The main landmarks of Suceava's territorial development are provided in particular by the buildings of worship.

3. Geography of the city of Suceava

Suceava (German: Sutschawa, Suczawa or Sotschen, Old/Medieval German: Sedschopff) is the municipality of the county of the same name in Bucovina, northern Romania. (Figure 01) The town lies in the south of the historical region of Bucovina. The town is located in the Suceava Plateau, on the course of the river of the same name, 21 km away from the river Siret. (Figure 1.)



Fig. 1. Geographical map of the city of Suceava

Before analysing the urban-building factors on which the evolution of Suceava depended during the six centuries of its existence (1388-1988), it is necessary to define the geographical framework in a diachronic way and to reconstruct it as far as possible.

The Suceava plateau in which the city of Suceava is situated has varied physical and geographical conditions and natural resources which, in the past and present, have influenced its development. Situated on the plateau of a hill (Zamca), bounded by steep slopes to the east, north and west, the site has the appearance of an overturned amphitheatre, which grows in the form of terraces from east to west. [1] (Figure 2., Figure 3.)



Fig. 2. View of the city of Suceava from the 17th century



Fig.3. Topographical map of the city of Suceava

The gradual occupation, over time, of this land by the built environment of the settlement, represented in particular by dwellings and monuments, the plastic relations born from the mutual exploitation between the characteristics of the relief and the buildings it bears, have given the contact between the settlement and the environment a determining character for the shaping of the urban specificity in various historical stages, decisive in this respect being the accumulation of specific architectural features, which have shaped a specific urban profile that places it between the traditions of Eastern and Western urbanism. [1]

4. Urban development of Suceava

We believe that in Suceava we can also identify a *locatio*, in favour of which we have arguments also of topographical nature. [2] Modern plans confirm the existence of a central square in Suceava, bordered by narrow and long lots, neatly arranged, and later broken into two parts. A Catholic, two Armenian and one Orthodox church were built in or near the square. Emil Ioan Emandi's urban planning research showed that the layout and surface area of this square, approx. 20ha, as well as of the medieval town of ca. 100ha, bring Suceava closer to similar towns in Poland and Germany. [3] The settlement of the Saxons on the north-eastern side and the Armenians on the north-western side at the end of the 14th century contributed to the formation of the square. The relatively regular layout of the area, as well as the two parallel streets that developed in the continuation of the square, indicate a certain subdivision of the land. The late plans, viewed even with the caution given by the time they were erected, indicate a high density of lots, which were rectangular in shape. [4] This judicious use of the land is supported by archaeological research carried out around the manor court, which has identified cellars under the old medieval houses. [5] [6]

5. Historicity - the social framework of the city

Suceava developed on the site of an older settlement, which has been in the category of pre-urban settlements since the 13th century. In the eastern part of the town, in the Mirăuți - Șipot area, researches prove that settlement was extensive in the period before 1300, covering an area with a diameter of almost one kilometre. Although the density of settlement was low, surface

dwelling of wood and earth were found. Towards the end of the 12th century and at the beginning of the following century, the area occupied by this settlement shrank to approx. 3-4 hectares, forming a naturally fortified fortress to the south and east, with a defensive moat and wooden palisade to the west. The core of this fortress was located on the site where in ca. 1380-1390 the Mirăuți church was built. [7] [8] (Figure 4.)

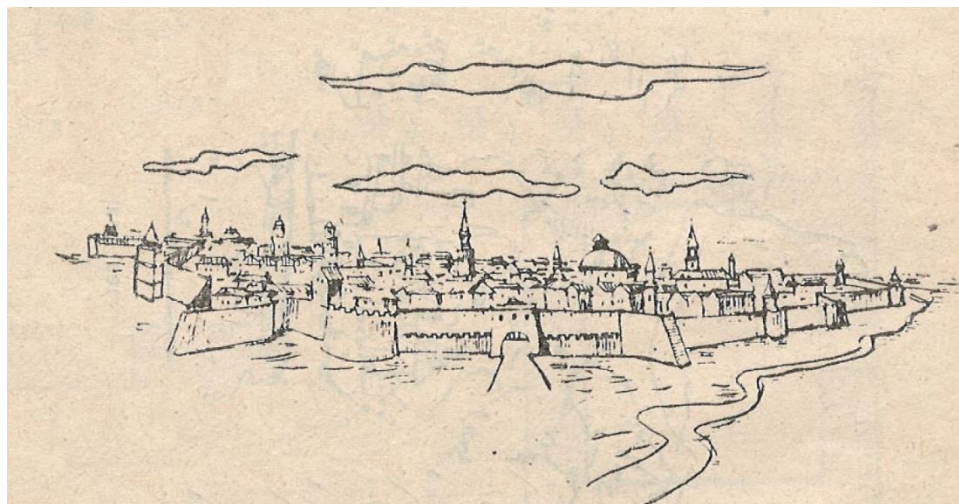


Fig. 4. View of the city of Suceava SECOLUL ?

In Suceava, archaeological excavations indicate a substantial increase in settlement space at the end of the 14th century, attributed to groups of settlers. The chronological reference of their arrival is given by the move here of the main residence of the country, in the time of Peter I. [2]



Fig. 5. Old central square of the city of Suceava (ANUL ?)

Easily identifiable is the site of the Armenian community in the north-western part of the city. Being mostly merchants, the Armenians took their commercial core, the market, as their landmark. (Figure 5.) Their number being quite large, they formed a special group within the city from the very beginning. Following the model of Poland, they were given the right to elect their own representative and 12 "pîrgari", [9] institutions that had authority only over their group, individualizing them within the community of townspeople. In contrast, the Saxons and Hungarians cannot be accurately placed, as none of the Catholic churches of that period survived. The presence of the Germans can be linked to the pottery in the courtyard and the two fortresses near the town. [10] The discussion of the Catholic community in Suceava becomes more complicated if it is admitted that they built a Catholic church near the court. Located a short distance away, this church, quite large in size, raises some questions, its purpose probably being to serve their spiritual needs. [11] Besides, the court had its own Catholic church inside (in the garden), the beginnings of which are not known. [12] Recently, it has been claimed that the building discovered near the courtyard was in fact an Orthodox monastery, attested in 1395 [13] [14], but it disappeared at the beginning of the 15th century.

In conclusion, in Suceava, the foundations of the city involved two different groups, the Saxons and the Armenians, whose settlement in the square area and near the court of the lord could only be made with his consent and support.

From the few documents preserved, an act from 1453 is illustrative: Alexander the Voivode confirms to the monastery of Iatco near Suceava the right to establish, by bringing in foreign settlers, a village near the monastery.[2]

6. Churches that shaped the urban structure

In the configuration of the medieval city, the church was a point of reference and relationship in all polarising directions. In this sense, the topological field, as the urban significance of all religious architectural projects (monuments that have been preserved to the present day) constitutes a totality of connected areas (slums) configured, which, thanks to the urban texture, are in mutual relations with the civic centre. It can therefore be stated on the basis of topological analysis that medieval religious architecture also has an important urban dimension.

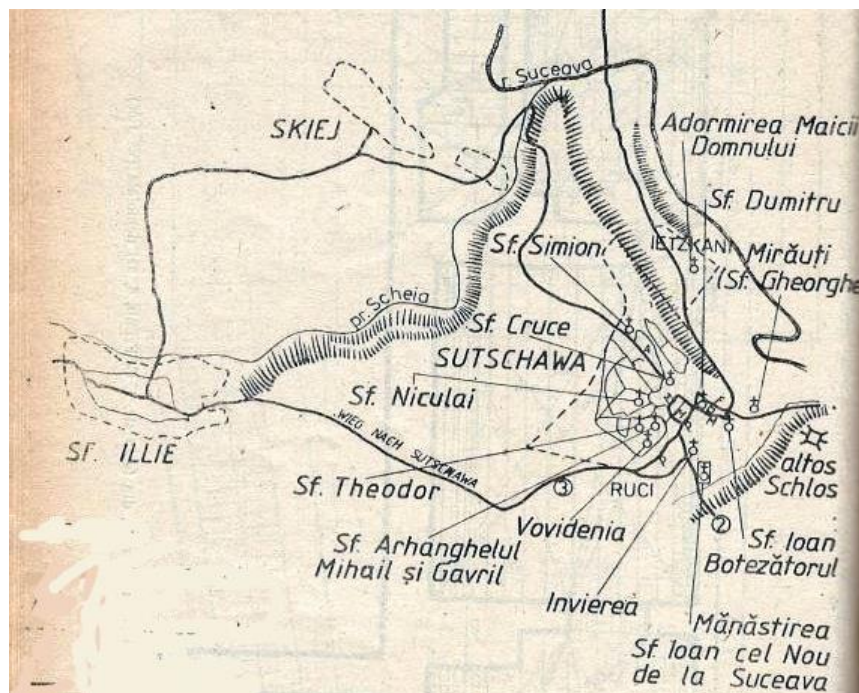


Fig. 6. Churches in Suceava in 17th century

Thus, the building activity on the territory of Suceava during the Middle Ages was materialized by a remarkable series of monuments of art and architecture, of which only 11 still exist today, out of the 24 churches recorded in the documents issued by the royal chancellery. (Figure 6.)

The person who first reported the total number of existing churches in the city of Suceava was an anonymous Italian Catholic who indicated that, in 1606, Suceava "a large and populous city, very old, which is the residence not only of the princes of Moldavia, but also of the metropolitan, who has his seat there today, there are more than 24 churches and monasteries of the Orthodox rite of the wall" ("fabricated from muro"). [15] The same number of churches is reached when we take into account the information of other foreign travellers: Bandini counted "17 churches of the Romanians, two stone Catholic churches and four of the Armenians"; Vito Piluzzi found in Suceava in 1671 only "13 churches of the Schismatics, two of the Armenians and a Catholic one made from stone, which in 1674 were devastated by the Turks". Revealing on the state of the monuments of Suceava, as a result of the Turkish-Polish wars, is also the observation of Giovanni Battista (1687), who saw "only the empty walls not only of the houses, but also of the churches". [15] The beginning of the 18th century found the city of Suceava "deserted" and "depopulated". In an anonymous description of the Solia by Rafael Leszczynski (1700) [15] it was stated that "the old town has deserted, but very beautiful churches, painted with frescoes...there are more than ten churches in the wall, among which one of the choir (St. Dumitru) painted inside and outside, a painting that is still preserved.

The 11 churches that have been preserved are the Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God in Ițcani, the Church of St. Simion, the Church of the Holy Cross in Suceava, the Monastery of St. John the New in Suceava, the Church of St. Dumitru in Suceava, the Church of the Resurrection of the Lord in Suceava, the Church of Mirăuți, the Monastery of Teodorenii, the Monastery of Zamca, the Church of St. Nicholas, the Church of the Cocoons (Domnițelor).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, from a topological point of view, the territorial evolution of Suceava is distinguished by a great complexity, starting from a simple, compact development, then moving towards a predominantly sprawling trend through the absorption of the surrounding villages, which in the contemporary period is replaced by a polynuclear and planned growth, driven by important investments.

The production and commercial centre of the medieval town, which, as we have seen, had no shortage of residential enclaves, was surrounded by housing estates grouped around parish churches with their own cemeteries. Many areas take their names from the names of the churches themselves, namely : The Corner of the Church of the Resurrection of Christ, St Nicholas' Slum, St Simon's Alley, St John's Alley, Cross Alley, Church Alley, Monastery Alley, Metropolitan's Alley. [1].

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