

CAROL I AVENUE – A WALK THROUGH GARDENS AND HISTORY

BULEVARDUL CAROL I – UN PARCURS PRINTRE GRĂDINI ȘI ISTORIE

ANDREI Cristina¹, ANDREI R.¹
e-mail: cristina_and3@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Carol I Avenue in Iași is one of the most popular promenade areas of the city. Although it was developed as part of a nineteenth century neighborhood, as the axis of a new aristocratic residential district, it is one of the areas which preserved its heritage. Beyond its undoubted historical value, Carol I Avenue is a place where the city blends with nature. The entire pathway represents a genuine garden with slow and quick rhythms, with different visual layers in which historical buildings are found. A journey in history through the old maps of Iași uncovers the anatomy of this green axis, of this genuine landscape pathway of the city.*

Key-words: *Carol I Avenue, green axis, history of city planning, landscape design, public gardens*

Rezumat: *Bulevardul Carol I din Iași este unul din cele mai apreciate locuri de promenadă din orașul Iași. Deși face parte din străzile zonei istorice structurate abia în secolul al XIX-lea, construită ca axă urbană a unui nou cartier boieresc, este una din zonele care au păstrat patrimoniul inițial. Pe lângă indiscutabila valoare istorică, Bulevardul Carol I este o zonă în care orașul se desfășoară în strânsă legătură cu natura. Întregul parcurs este o adevărată grădină cu o mare varietate de configurații, cu ritmuri alerte sau potolite, cu diverse registre de profunzime în care sunt amplasate clădirile, în cea mai mare parte monumente istorice. O călătorie în istorie pe hărțile vechi ale orașului Iași relevă mecanismul formării axei verzi a acestui autentic parcurs peisajer al orașului.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Bulevardul Carol I, axă verde, istoria urbanismului, peisagistică, grădini publice*

INTRODUCTION

Carol I Avenue, an important axis of Iasi, raises particular interest not only from the historical, town-planning and architectural point of view, but it is also a remarkable example of landscape design. The study of the area is of major importance in the urban history research of Iasi, being essential in understanding the position of the city in the larger context of the civilization of the period.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The purpose of the present paper is to analyse the Carol I Avenue area, focusing mainly on the research of historical plans and the written documents,

¹”Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași, Romania

highlighting the unique character of **the avenue as a green axis of the city** in the historical context. The area has a complex structure with several important components.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Position of Carol I Avenue in the city-planning of Iasi

Carol I Avenue is a major traffic axis with urban and historical value.

Historically, it appeared as a continuation on the same direction of the main development axis of the city of Iasi, called the Great Street (Ulița Mare), which started from the initial core of the city – the princely court.

A comparative study of the historical plans shows that, until the 20th century, the development of the street network of the town was almost entirely spontaneous, resulting in an organic reticular configuration.

From written documents until the 19th century, we can reconfigure an approximate image of the old town. In history, the trades and crafts nucleus, which by nature required concentration, synchronicity and simultaneity, was characterised by urban density. It is also obvious that most of the historical part of Iasi preserved the old medieval street network, with a major axis that determines an exemplary linear development, standing out as the backbone of the city through all its historical stages. This axis is the old Great Street, in constant development to the present day, always keeping an orthogonal perspective on the princely court. At first it appeared spontaneously, and it was later continued during the 19th century by "cutting" the so-called "Green Bridge" in the Copou area: "in the autumn of 1834, the Department of Internal Affairs started the building of 'a road that passes through the Green Bridge area'" (Mitican, 2009).

The structuring force of this axis can be perceived in the grid pattern town plan project from 1943, made by architect Von Bedeus, who proposed to extend the avenue beyond the Palace of Culture towards the southern limit of the town. The new street becomes an important promenade area of the town, so that the Department of Public Works, initiates planting tree rows along the whole avenue, after the model of the great European capital cities. These tree rows remain the most prominent feature of the avenue.

2. The configuration and specific characteristics of the properties boarding the avenue

The Copou area started to develop from the end of the 17th century as a residential area adjacent to the medieval town. In the 18th century, it included former villages known as Highlands / Muntenimi (Lower, Middle, Upper). Its northernmost area developed as a town only later, from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century.

In the absence of historical maps, historians suppose that Carol I Avenue, in its present form, started to take shape around the 17th-18th century, as a passage area between the cemeteries of the churches Lady Prapa and St Nicholas the Poor, as it provided easier access from the city centre to the northern Upper

Highlands, as the other access road, Sărărie ("the road of the salt"), was situated more periferically.

The mild, sunny slope of Copou hill, with a wide perspective on the town and the spectacular southern hills, appealed to the city boyards (noblemen). Documents from the 17th – 19th centuries include information related to the purchase of lands in the area.

After the great fire from 1827, the Upper Highlands and newly built road called "the Green Bridge" witnessed the creation of an elite residential district, as most of the boyards left the houses traditionally situated around the princely court in a high-density area which was permanently threatened by fire.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the whole axis of the Green Bridge, starting from the present Eminescu Square up to the Copou Gardens, was bordered on both sides by a spectacular line of boyard houses.

On the right, at the foot of the hill, lay the imposing the Palace of Elena Cuza (before 1812), later known as the Jockey Club, then demolished for the roundabout construction in Eminescu Square and the building of the Youth House; the Cantacuzino – Pașcanu House (1840), today's The Children's Palace; Luca House (before 1811) situated at the crossing between Coroi Street (Pogor Street) and the Green Bridge, demolished in 1968 to widen the avenue; Costache Sturza House (before 1811) situated in the yard of the present Military Hospital, and later demolished. At the intersection between the avenue and 40 Saints Street there was the house on the Sturza property, next to the Mârzescu house, which is nowadays property of the "Al. I. Cuza" University. In the same neighbourhood, to the north, there was architect Iulius Reinicke's house. In the area of the park in front of the Politechnics building, the Prăjescu family houses were situated; these were later destroyed by the bombings from the Second World War. Along the Gh. Asachi Street, there remains the Costin Catargiu House, which now also belongs to the "Al. I. Cuza" University, and Sigurov House, today in the property of the National Insurance County Office. Next is Racovita House, today hosting the French Institute. The old houses in the area between Racovita House and Oastei Street were mostly destroyed by the bombings at the end of the Second World War: Panait Bals House, Vasile Adamachi House, Pavli, M.D. Sturza, Matei Cantacuzino Houses. The only ones remaining are the Bogdan House and the Frey House (Bădărău and Caproșu, 1974).

Further up on the left side we find the M. Mavrogheni House which currently hosts the Institute of Hygiene, with its newly added upper floor dating from the 20th century. Upper north are the houses belonging to the Carp family, spread over large area between the avenue, the G. Ibrăileanu street and the Pacurari Street. Some of the buildings were pulled down in order to build the Rail Road Company Hospital. Next to it there was the Alecu Sturza House, now company headquarters, the Cimara House, later turned into The Army House, and the Canta House – The University House of today. The site of the "Al. I. Cuza" University was also initially occupied by boyard houses, starting with the house of Ana and Constantin Bals, situated at the cross roads between the avenue

and the Toma Cozma street, and demolished after the war. Right on the site of the University, there used to be the Copou Theatre, formerly a house built by Ionita Sturza and later owned by Teodor Bals, and the Teodor Ghica House, later turned into the Fine Arts School and Painting Museum. Between the university and the Titu Maiorescu street of today there were the Krupenschi houses, later organised as the Tzaicu Rest Home, and the Cazimir House - both disappeared, then the Steege House, also known as the Antiquity Museum of Professor Orest Trafalli, a one-storey building later turned into the German Centre of today; the Vălescu-Juvara House, which was actually the first German Cultural Centre; the Jora House, still existent, at the crossing with Titu Maiorescu Street. Between the Jora House and the Copou Gardens there were later built a series of houses of which the Diaconescu House and Pavli House still remain; the latter went through radical changes when turned into the Commerce Chamber.

As historical maps and written documents show, in the 19th century, the Green Bridge Street was bordered by properties and boyard houses. In the romantic fashion of the 19th century, the boyards used to buy large pieces of land where they built houses and designed parks with various tree species. As a result, the architectural facade plane was doubled by a continuous line of private gardens. Those who still remember this part of Iasi speak about the picturesque or exquisite gardens surrounding the houses at the time.

The Cantacuzino-Pascanu House had "in front of it a flower garden with secular trees" (Mitican, 2009), on the large Carp property there was "a forest of walnut trees, apple trees and oaks" (Mitican, 2009); the great park on Costache Sturza's property was well-known by the people in Iasi - "a forest of secular trees in a garden crossed by paths in dense shade which was open to the public on Thursdays and Sundays" (Mitican, 2009). The Cimara House "had a beautiful garden with a marble fountain facing the Green Bridge" (Mitican, 2009)

At the end of the 19th century, the district witnesses the emergence of several higher education schools. The first university in the United Principalities, in the early stages of modern-time Romania, was built on the Carol I Avenue, formerly known as the Green Bridge Street. The expansive domains of the Sturza family were turned into the premises of the School for the Sons of Military Officers (the Military Hospital of today). During the 1950s, on the location devastated by bombings right opposite the University, the Politechnical Institute was built. All these institutions followed the initial line of the avenue, and were provided with large green areas, real picturesque gardens.

3. Placement of the most important public gardens in Iasi on the side axis of the avenue

The area was the site of the first attempts of modern town planning, focused on the way in which the "Green Bridge" Street and the areas in the neighbourhood were organised and on the placement of public gardens.

The Copou Park was founded in 1834 by Prince Grigore Sturza and was later developed by Prince Mihail Sturza. In 1834 the Obelisk of the Lions,

designed by Gh. Asachi, was erected. This has been the most renowned park in Iasi, famous especially for Eminescu's linden tree (Cantacuzino, 1977).

Designed in 1852 near the northern end of the Green Bridge, Ghica Voda Alleys represented a walking area with 50m wide green areas on both sides, with roundabouts for carriages, widened parts and paths. The green areas were preserved to the present day, though much simplified, left without any special design details.

The Botanical Garden was founded in 1921, on a site situated in the north of the "Al. I. Cuza" University. Rare plant species were brought here from the former botanical gardens in Iasi. In 1965 a great part of these were transferred to the new Botanical Garden and part of the site was occupied by the student campus.

The Exhibition Park was founded in 1922 in the northern part of the Copou district, with the purpose to host agricultural exhibitions. It was designed by the landscape design architect F. Rebhun, just as the Copou Park.

The Botanical Garden, in its current form, was founded in 1965, on a considerably large site on the western side of Copou hill. It is one of the largest in the country, impressive not only through size, but also through the variety of plant species and landscape design details, as well as through the beauty of the perspective opening from the hills towards the north-west part of the town.

The Copou area is thus especially rich in gardens, remarkable not only for their beauty, but also for their memorial and cultural heritage.

4. The visual relationship between the avenue and the rest of the town; the position of the area in the town landscape

Unlike the central area, situated on a perfectly flat plateau, the Copou area is situated on a hill and it takes benefit from the favourable effect of the ascending views. Designed against the green of the rich vegetation of the hill, the buildings in the area offer a complex view, of great richness and beauty.

The buildings which visually stand out are the larger, monumental ones: the imposing building of the University, the Negruzzi High School, the Copou Military School, the Central University Library. Apart from these, there are still to be seen the newer buildings of the Politechnical Institute, the Institute of Economy and the Iasi branch of the Romanian Academy.

The town offers panoramic views towards the Copou hill, opening it to the viewers from Bahlui valley, particularly from the Stone Bridge area, from the car drive in Alexandru cel Bun, from Pacurari Street, from Princes' Square and Dacia District. A climb uphill along the Carol I Avenue offers short, gradual views on the monuments placed on both sides of the street.

When facing the town center direction, the viewers's eye can hardly perceive the other areas behind the buildings and the trees. Nevertheless, we can mention a few places in the background which can be seen along the whole walk down Carol I Avenue towards the Palace of Culture, which stands against the silhouette of the Repedea Hill. The original and spectacular views towards the

town are visible from the town buildings on Copou Hill (The Institute of Design, The Academy, the Parhon Hospital and the University). The views from the hill are suitable for designing viewing terraces on the roofs of tall buildings.

This status of green axis of the city makes the Carol I Avenue an attractive area, with positive features as the ones discussed above, which define one of the oldest and most appealing areas of "loisir": the whole walk along the avenue, the series of gardens, the Copou Park, the Exhibition Park, the Botanical Garden. The old boyard houses – many turned into public institutions, next to which the old parks still remain, now open to the public – all these special features attract a great number of visitors from Iasi and away.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis uncovers a series of aspects which define the specific character of the area around the Carol I Avenue. These aspects have been analysed and ranked into four categories, important in defining the distinctiveness of the area. An aspect of particular interest is the fact that, parallel to the changes in the existence of this place, the defining particular features have been preserved and developed. This fact makes us further respect these values, keeping the same responsible attitude of preserving and promoting historical tradition.

REFERENCES

1. **Bădărău D., Caproșu I., 1974** - *Iașii vechilor zidiri. Până la 1821*, Editura Junimea
2. **Cantacuzino G. M., 1977** - *Izvoare și popasuri*, Editura Eminescu
3. **Mitican I., 2009** - *Urcând Copoul cu gândul la Podul Verde* Editura Tehnopres