

RECONFIGURING THE MACRO URBAN LANDSCAPE OF BUCHAREST BASED ON ITS NATIVE TRAITS

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Abstract

The Bucharest's urban landscape is hardly to qualify and often is considered a contradictory, multi-layered, diverse and uneven landscape. Looking back on the history of its formation, Bucharest's landscape has been cristalyzed over centuries by assimilating few major features. One of them is the "water heritage" on which this article focuses, presenting a synthetic perspective of Bucharest, as a landscape between two founding rivers – Dâmbovița and Colentina, acting as native traits for this landscape.

The paper shows Bucharest's scenic urban and architectural space, in the mirror of the water landscape, as a potential of the city re-configuration. Starting from this, the future development of Bucharest is discussed in terms of a landscape becoming, embracing the historical evolution of urban form, imprinted by the main spatial traces.

The study uses comparative and analytical investigation of the essential structure of the city, and the case-study method, applied to Bucharest. The tools are observational and interpretive, aiming to put in connection spatial analyzes with those related to urban history.

Keywords: landscape, rivers, heritage, Dâmbovița, Colentina, projects

1. THE NATIVE MATRIX OF BUCHAREST'S LANDSCAPE

From the beginning, in the oldest documents, Vlad Țepeș was talking about Bucharest as a «citadel on the banks of Dâmbovița River» (1368, 1397, 1458). The genetic connection of the city with the water not only dictated the settlement structure, but has shaped its entire landscape and offered to the city a position at the same time advantageous and dangerous.

From the geographical point of view, Dâmbovița dug a true "defile" in the territory of Bucharest, with differences of up to 15 meters and slopes stretch on both sides[1]. The "socket" of this territory was the tabulated plain Vlăsiei, formed in the geological past by clogging with sediments of a lake which was a "rest" Sarmatian Sea. This plain is characterized by inter-relief flat plains and terraces, a relief that we meet in the capital, which was formed by erosion, transport and accumulation of the two rivers running through: Colentina and Dâmbovița.

This territory with a rich hydrography was generous for its inhabitants. The main dominance of the landscape of the ancient Bucharest and its surroundings were Vlăsiei Forests, a thick forests used by Romanians as a retreat during the age of migrations, because they were not easy to cross on horseback. This forest was also useful in the middle Ages, being used by several voivods to defeat other armies. In 1456, Vlad Țepeș defeated his rival Vladislav Dan at Târgșor at the edge of Codrii Vlăsiei. This was also the place where Vlad defeated the Ottoman army that came to depose him. It is also thought that Vlad was assassinated there following a plot of the boyars. The forests were later a hideout for highwaymen, haiducs and other outlaws[2].

Bucharest is not just a city between the two rivers Colentina and Dambovița (affluents of Argeș river), but also the core of a region - Valahia- which had always a difficult position in front of the main powers at that time: The Ottoman Empire coming from South of the Danube, the Austro-Hungarian Empire dominating the West part of the country (Ardeal) and the Russian Empire, pressing from the East. Besides the disadvantages of this position in terms of political and geo-strategic flows, there were certainly cultural and economic advantages. Bucharest is placed at the intersection of important commercial roads connecting the North of Europe with the Black Sea and Istanbul. So, it has evolved as a city-fair, probably with a unique combination of Western, Slavic and Eastern traits, sedimenting in its river banks a civilization of tolerance, of wisdom and hope.



Figure 1. Wallachia during stolnic Constantin Cantacuzino (1716).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallachia#mediaviewer/File:Cantacuzino_Wallachia.png

1.1. Dâmbovița River in Bucharest

Concerning the main written and cartographic testimonies, from the very beginning, the water represents a matrix of Bucharest's urban landscape; Dâmbovița river appears in many written records of scholars or visitors of Romania and also in many artistic engravings as the locus for a typical representative image of the city. The classical 18th century image of the city is inextricably linked to this river image - with its merchant's houses, people and very active urban life on its banks. For centuries, Dâmbovița was the main source of drinking water for the Bucharest residents, and the distribution of water in the city was done by *water-carriers* ("sacagii", trad.rom) [3], this occupation being an important-one, joining in consequence others (water-tanners, fishers, etc.). Water-carriers were also useful during different fires which devastated parts of Bucharest, and helped to build the University of Bucharest, between 1857-1864[4].

Many watermills were built on Dâmbovița, most of them owned by the prince, the monasteries or boyars. At that time, Bucharest's landscape was dominated by their silhouette, as well as by church steeples, on the background of the large green courts laied until water. The presence of so many constructions close to the rivers shores, and also the natural capricious character of this river, had produced flooding many times in the history of Bucharest. In spring and autumn, Dâmbovița waters were destroying bridges, trees, walls, houses, all taked by the flood. Even Slavs called it "oak sheet", as the waters brought with it thousands of chestnut bronze leaves from the forests, still existed in the north part of the city.

Bucharest folklore mentions that the waters of Dâmbovița was "sweet", and even at the beginning of the 18th century, Anton Maria del Chiaro considered it "light and clean". However, toward the end of the 18th century, as the population of Bucharest increased, the river ceased to be as clean and hence the need of the aqueducts. The earliest aqueducts with public fountains ("*cișmele*" - trad.rom.) were built during the rule of Prince Alexander Ypsilantis, and from that moment we can say that Dâmbovița became a factor in the technological development of the city, in terms of municipal water system.

So, the role of Dâmbovița water in the evolution of Bucharest is multiple rich: besides its obvious commercial role (the water has been valued and sold to the city inhabitants), the social role (water related occupations that structured the society and the urban tissue in "mahalale" [5]), and the security role (as the water is used for fire extinguishing), we notice that Dâmbovița have also an important implication in term of the urban tissue morphology. Due to the terrain orientation, all plots from the streets near Dâmbovița had followed the geometry of the water banks. It had been born a water-oriented urban tissue, with quasi-perpendicular plots to the shore line and with an uneven balance of built and unbuilt spaces, with intensities, voids and attractiveness areas (fig.2). Some of these points of attractiveness were the bridges over Dâmbovița, useful not only for crossings and transport of goods from one shore of the river to the other, but over time, they became landmark places intimately related to cultural, religious and social life of the city. Between churches of monasteries and bridges over Dâmbovița have been established an invisible network of spirituality and consequently, the streets structure has become tributary to the need of connecting these points. This is the case of Calea Victoriei, the city's most cultural and important axis, which comes from the extension of a bridge – Mogoșoaiei Bridge - "a bridge of beams over the marsh of Dâmbovița" [6]. But the street itself was created by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, which in 1692 "had cut a road linking his estate on the banks of Dâmbovița, to the other estate of him, at Mogoșoaia, where he had built a beautiful palace in 1702" [7].



Figure 2. Early 18th century woodcut (1717)- a general view of Bucharest, source>public archives

1.2. Urban morphology of Dâmbovița landscape

For the urban tissue morphology, the water of Dâmbovița was also an agent of change: after every flood, Dâmbovița course lead to changes in the field properties and roads geometry. In order to complete qualifying the water landscape of Bucharest, it would not be ignored the crucial role of the water in local/urban agriculture, practiced on the parcels opened to Dâmbovița - a fertile land cultivated with fruit trees, vegetables, vineyard. Moreover, the large number of lakes accompanying Dâmbovița on the right bank (almost all disappeared time ago, during different systematization operations) was elements of attraction for large

houses and private gardens of boyars, and later, they become points of centrality, coagulating the landscape composition of some public gardens, as Cismigiu. Another important relationship is the one between water and the public urban space. In an unusual way, the old Dâmbovița "turn its back to the city, not being support of some public circulation or squares, but flowing through private gardens bottoms (...), being source of water and bathing space" [8].(trad.n). Dâmbovița was at that time a popular space dedicated to leisure in an affordable way, close to nature, unconstrained by any urban rule - thus being able to set up a special local identity. Here, Bucharest is a special case, perhaps just due to the mixture of Eastern and Western traits. Water in Bucharest urban space does not mean representativeness or monumentality, but rather a form of intimacy and an informal appropriation.

2. COLENTINA CHAIN OF LAKES IN BUCHAREST

Colentina and its chain of lakes had appeared later in the city's landscape, in the early twentieth century, with the first comprehensive urban modernization operations. If until 1900, Colentina swampy valley was only a sporadic genuine recreation place for villagers from settlements situated in the rural areas of the north of capital (fig.6) not having a very close relationship with Bucharest, since 1933, along Colentina valley was created a chain of anthropogenic lakes, which later formed an important area of attractiveness and a vector for city development.

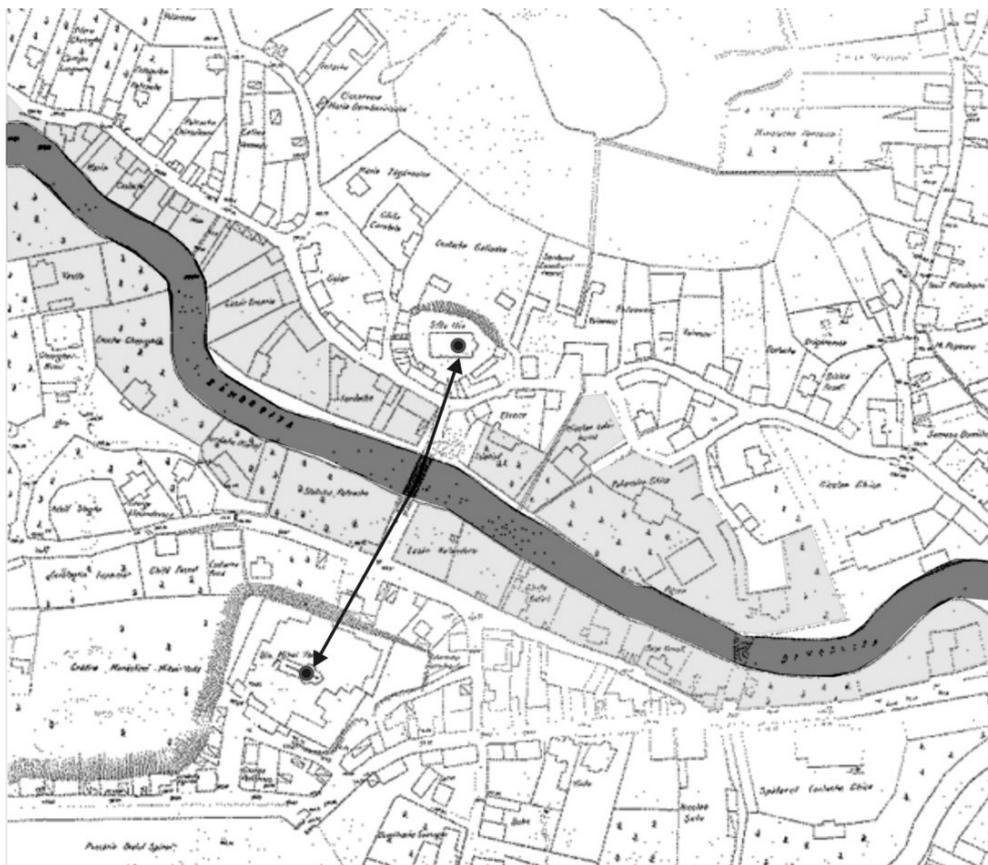


Figure 3. The relationship between the morphology of urban tissue and the geometry of water banks. The importance of bridges for the entire old urban structure relating not only

the two banks of the river, but also churches of monasteries, sometimes situated on hills. Source of support map: public archives, Boroczyin Plan, 1850.

There will be further concentrated Bucharest's main recreational areas, rich residential neighborhoods and prestigious buildings. In 1933 work began for the reservoir on Buftea Lake, necessary to bring water during the drought period of the year in this region (August – October) from Ialomita River (north of Colentina) to Buftea, and so to assure water flow for the entire Colentina River. The biggest and the most representative lake – Herăstrău - was completed in 1936, when, in order to compensate Colentina river flow, were started important work on dam Bilciurești (on Ialomita River) and the adduction channel Ghimpati. The same year it began construction for Floreasca and Baneasa lakes. In 1970 has finished landscaped lakes throughout the river Colentina as currently exists.



Figure 4. Radu Vodă Bridge, in 1875, source:public archives

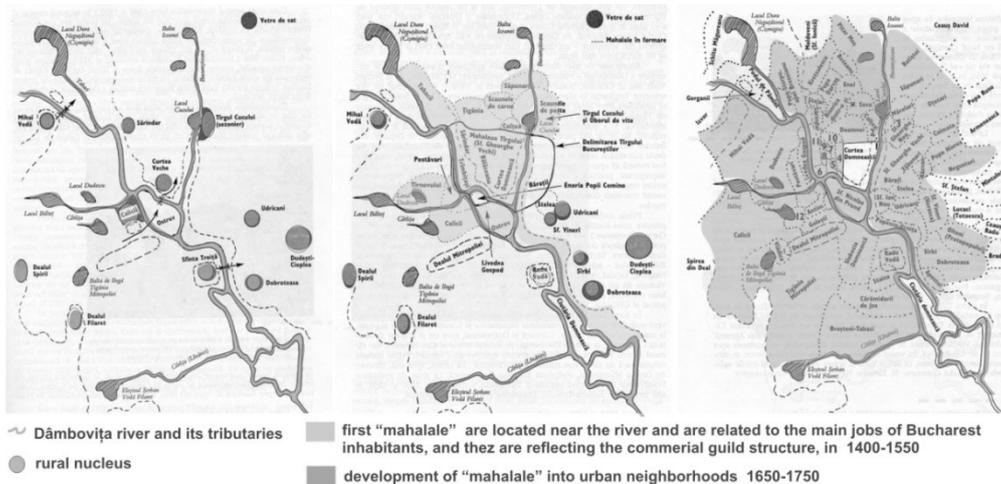


Figure 5. Bucharest evolution in distinct three phases (1250-1440, 1440- 1550, 1650-1750) marked by the strong relation between Dâmbovița (and its system of tributaries and lakes) and the beginning of the city structures, which favored the development of the first "mahalale", named after the type of water-related occupations of the inhabitants ("Butchers", Selari - Saddlers, "Blacksmiths", "Calyxs", "Tanners"). Source: Processing after Harhoiu, D., 1997, "Bucuresti, intre Orient si Occident", Simetria< Bucuresti

The landscape of the 12 lakes of Colentina (10 lakes on Bucharest administrative territory and 2 in adjacent communes) radically changed once their drainage and creating the recreational and sports areas as Herastrau, Baneasa, Straulesti, Grivita, some of them likened by strong planted axes (as Kisellef Boulevard, Dorobanti Path, Floreasca Path, Tei Lake Boulevard) with the downtown. A new green sistem was born by the potential of the city to encompass the entire territory between the two rivers, and it had been created and sustained by the new urban plans of the time [9].

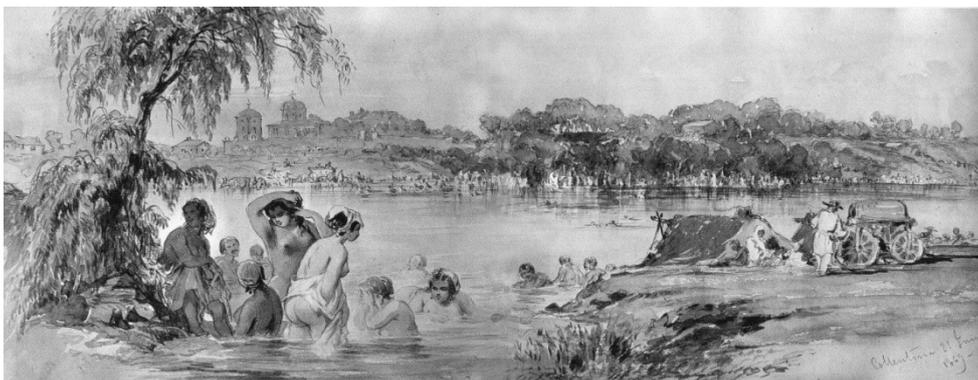


Figure 6. Bathers in the Colentina river, 1869 watercolor by Amedeo Preziosi, source> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colentina_River#mediaviewer/File:Preziosi - Colentina 1.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colentina_River#mediaviewer/File:Preziosi_-_Colentina_1.jpg)

In the years of communism, partly because of the centralization of power and construction, was partly Colentina area, away from the excesses and destruction, and even, in the period until 1975 received several interventions that have enriched the landscape of this area. It was built Floreasca district, a residential district with two parks, built by taking into account "a landscape design concept which transforms it into the vector of a major area of plantations extended

towards the city center" [10]. No less than 15 beaches and sports facilities were built during communism (until 1965- 1970) on the banks of lakes Baneasa, Straulesti, Grivita and Floreasca (all abandoned now).

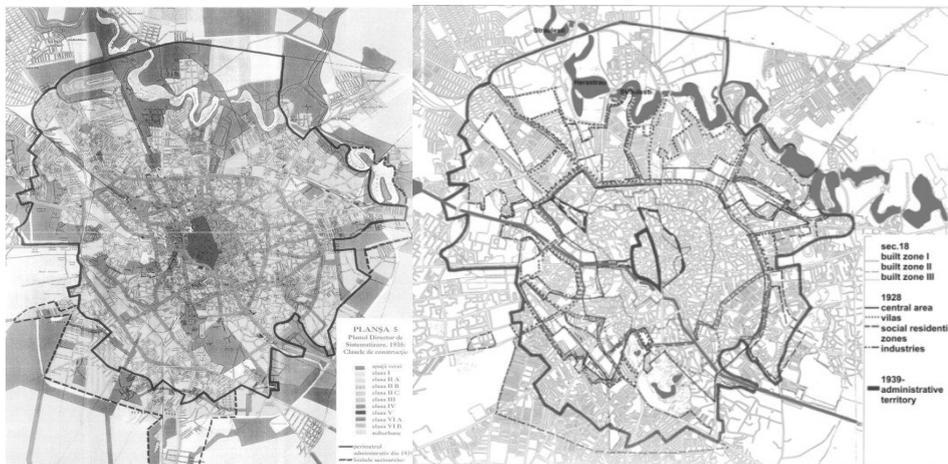


Figure 7. Left: The first "systematisation plan" (masterplan) of Bucharest -1935- the map showing the zoning principle and the coherent green sistem conceived by including the zone of Colentina lakes, as well as the south side of Dâmbovița (the unbuilt corniche as a chain of parks). Right: The map showing the evolution of built urban area and the strong development to the north. Source> public archives.

Looking back we can say that Colentina chain of lakes has stimulated the development of the city to north, taking advantage of the modernizing interventions of the interwar years and continuing during the communist period.



Figure 8. Străulești beach and landscape in 1966 (left) and Floreasca former beach, today (right). Source> <https://arhivadegeografie.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/tei-a-2.jpg>

Unfortunately, after 1989, the landscape of Colentina chain of lakes changes in the negative sense, sometimes invalidating the potential of the site and the huge effort made in previous years to offer this resource to the city. Multiple cases of land restitution sometimes located up to the lip of lakes, dispersed building without a coherent coordinator plan, especially on former sports base, abandoned by the state and handed over to private property, the damage by water pollution due to spills from newly built areas, unequipped properly, minimizing the equipments for leisure and sport activities, vegetation damage through lack of maintenance, all

this led to the downfall of this landscape and its transformation into a ruin of what once was.

[1] Although this territory has always been a peripheral area, in a topological sense, in the last 30 years it has become a periphery in a qualitative sense, losing those attributes of attractiveness and representativeness that, in the years before 1990, have associated this beneficial position to a potential alternative solution to the recreational landscape of central areas. The Colentina lakes project was designed as a project for the general public, while the adjacent territory became lakes for years of private and inaccessible to the public. Of those 73.3 km of banks, only 53.8 are available (73.3%) and a much smaller number of miles is arranged for walks - 19.2 or 26% of the total [11].

From the ecological point of view, the city expansion to the territories adjacent to Colentina lakes, produced important changes in the structure of these ecosystems, being that arable lands, meadows, water surfaces, or forests. After 1950, following the change in the type of property, there was a modification of the expansion of arable areas, and a relatively reduced increase of the arable surfaces was noted. Many works of land improvement, carried out especially after 1970, had the purpose of extending the arable areas by means of "recovering" certain unproductive fields or fields with low return. The influence of the city of Bucharest, through its ever growing need of fresh products, the increasing of irrigated areas and industrialization led to the changing of the agriculturally occupied areas and their structure. There is also a diversification in the types of crops used, a high share of them being industrial plants (their production almost doubled between 1938 and 1970), vegetables – placed in the vicinity of the settlements in the Colentina meadow, and fodder plants for the great complexes for raising animals near Bucharest (Jordan, 1973) [12].

Somewhat paradoxically, by 2008, few areas remaining unbuilt on the banks of lakes and regained their natural traits, but losing any urban character related to public accessibility. And what from a strictly environmental point of view can be a win, in terms of urban life is a waste.

The anthropogenic pressure on the area and the abandon of the real estate property after the economic crisis 2008-2010, coupled a the constant lack of attention of the authorities for the management of this resource is likely to transform the banks of Colentina in wild places, unattractive for the public and without any identity.

3. TWO RIVERS - TWO WAYS OF CONCEIVING THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF BUCHAREST

Once formed, the vector of city development acting from the south (Dambovita) to the north (Colentina) had functioned for centuries as the main force for the city expansion. But on the other hand, although they are founding elements of the same landscape, the two rivers were never been designed together, and city planning done in different phases, never followed the direct relationship between them. As a macro-landscape, Bucharest had developed paradoxically, not following the direction given by the blue "diagonals" (north-west / south-east) of the two water courses, but in concentric rings that had started from a center and amplify the vector direction from south to north /north- est.

One of the main causes of this dynamic was the decizion of Bucharest administration for removal of Dambovita mills and, related to this, the law for

quays creation on the two banks of the river within the inner city, in 1865. As a result, the course of the Dambovita landscape was dramatically modified and geometrised, the swamps were drained, and the river was transformed in a narrow channel. This also has an impact on the evolution of the urban fabric on the north side of Dambovita - as it started to change by rapid successive subdivisions and intensive building on smaller and smaller plots.

In this configuration, which became obvious and assumed during 1930-1935, when the first modern development scheme had clarified, the south urban part of Dambovita had remained a "forgotten" townscape, somewhat neglected, although still containing many architectural and urban values. At this situation has contributed not only laws and regulations that have encouraged the development toward north of the city, but the landscape itself, by the very structure of its land. The southern part of the Dambovita river bed had a more powerful cornice with steep slopes which make more difficult the building process.

Until the 1980s, the north-south development gap Bucharest was seen not as a structural imbalance, but as a reflection of the city evolution in relation to its natural resources. The South was picturesque, while the North was cosmopolite and thus, the urban landscape have not really suffered from this contrast. Demolition in the years 1980- 1989 of the Uranus district and the area situated at south of Dambovita (in order to make room for a total stranger spindle for Bucharest morphology and landscape) have changed this intimate relationship and complementarities between north and south. The North continued to develop even to its depletion, based on the attractiveness of the turistic areas (Snagov, Ploiesti, Sinaia, Brasov), while the south remained isolated and neglected. The landscape of the south became from picturesque and rural scenery, a sick, quasi ghettoized and abandoned to disorder.

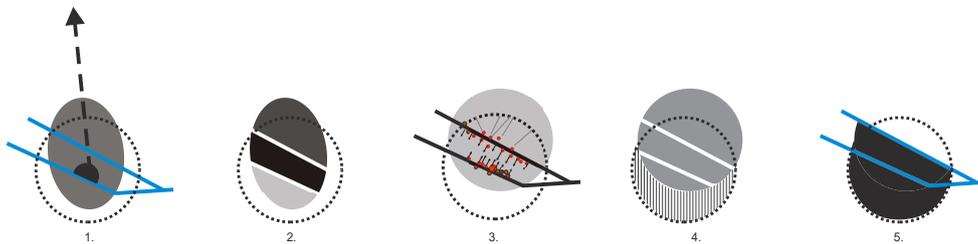


Figure 9. The Bucharest urban structure development in relation with the 2 rivers: **1/** the north vector starting from the joint area of Dambovita and historical urban fabric, **2/** the three parts of the main urban morphology until 1989, **3/** the cluster- attractors on the two river-axis and the city development towards north-est after 1990, **4/** the new partition of Bucharest urban fabric and the abandonment of the south periphery, **5/** the new chance of the south periphery and the main urban fabric between the 2 rivers to act as an entire. Source: author

But through this quasi-abandonment of the southern part of Bucharest, the city has preserved its opportunities for further development and re-balancing the urban structure within this territory. Much less occupied and affected as isolated from the rest of the city by the demolitions during communist period, (the construction of the east-west axis - Blvd Unirii), the urban territory situated at south of Dambovita may have a chance if they it is regarded as part of the same "body" located between the two rivers. The "fertility" of such area should be re-loaded in urban and landscape terms, and the urban landscape of Bucharest can re-define itself starting from this space shaped by the two "blue axes ".

3.1. Dâmbovița – a project for a coherent structural axis

Between the two ends of its trajectory into the urbanized territory of Bucharest – at west, Dâmbovița Lake and at south-east the garbage dump Glina, the Dâmbovița River tries to recompose its identity. Demolitions during the 1980s, with the construction of a pharaonic Ceausescu's civic center unbalanced the importance of southern cornices of the river in the city profile. Currently, Dâmbovița is treated as a simple channel with concrete sides, crossing with indifference the disparate landscapes, urban spaces and architecture of all styles, all in mirrored in the water gloss, without any coherence, without even the suport of an accompanying plantations.

But from the urban point of view, Dâmbovița is a much broader area, a territory between the two cornices - the north one – intensively built and transformed into an urban fabric, and the south, remained partially free and wearing a series of green spaces - Carol Park Tineretului Park, The "Lake" Vacarești. A substantiation urban study realized in 2000 years ("Zone Urban Plan – Dâmbovița, a structural axis of Bucharest") assumed the importance of this Dâmbovița "urban basin" for re-gaining an identity of water presence in the city, and made proposals for re-insertion of these fragments of tissue tangent to watercourse in a coherent and representative figure, so defining "The Dâmbovița Landscape".

3.2. Colentina chain of lakes – in search for a vision

The chain of lakes of Colentina is not yet outlined in the form of a program or a coherent landscape / urban project, although many workshops took this territory as study theme and many conferences have been held on this topic.



Figure 10. The strategic proposal of "Zone Urban Plan – Dâmbovița, a structural axis of Bucharest", realized in 2000, by a team of architects from UAUIM- Bucharest, including the author, coordinator: Prof.PhD Arch. Angela Filipeanu. Source> UAUIM archive

In 2005-2006 was developed by the command of Bucharest municipality a project for re-greening of the Colentina lakes, project which led to some - unfortunately minor- cleaning actions of the lakes banks and re-putting into public some fragments of the promenade circuit. The chain of lakes of current Colentina became already a dull speech about the urban potential depletion, about the aggressiveness of investment that destroyed a part of this landscape, about their in-availability for public activities, about the mess, about abandonment, about pollution, about urban/ architectural heritage ignored, about the lost identity, about places that linger alive in the memory of people, but they are now ruins, about the lack of public investment, of vision and averall strategy development of this territory. It is what the 2015's edition of *Le: Notre Landscape Forum* are trying to promote, through the prism of interdisciplinary emulation around the

theme of this very complex landscape and urban situation- a re-discovering of a lost treasure, the emerald necklace of Bucharest.

3.3. An integrated vision for Bucharest urban landscape

As conclusion following the aforesaid it became clear the need for an unified vision of the urban landscape, but not as space "unification" at the urban-architectural scale (which would be a serious mistake), but at the macro scale of its landscape which "melts" in its textures the essence of the native features of this territory, and it's considered as pivotal the character given by the directions of the two rivers- Dambovită and Colentina. The analyzes done previously [13] indicates that the specific archipelago-structure of this macro-landscape in which the "gaps" are dominating. We now add with the observation that these gaps are spread especially in the valleys spaces of the two waters and the direction created by them imposes to the general texture a spatial composition of the major planted areas. Also, this previous studies have shown that the watercourses landscape is threatened by the contact with urban growth areas or with with the transit landscapes, asociated to the main entrances. This makes even more necessary the integrated macro landscape development vision starting from the structural unit of the hydrographic network of Bucharest's territory.

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