

VICTORIA



Case study of “Magazinul Victoria”
Analysis of an interbellum monument, its decay and decline

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Abstract

This study investigates the interwar development of a new typology of building- the department store, focusing on the case study of “Mgazinul Victoria”, first of its kind in the city of Bucharest, Romania. Rising to fame during the first half of the 20th century, surviving Second World War, and thriving during the Communist period (1947-1989), earning the title of protected monument from the Patrimony of Romania, today the building shows clear signs of economic decline and architectural decay. In this paper I explain and contextualize the important role that the store had in society, how the attitudes changed and how this change is reflected in the architecture of the store. Furthermore, by analyzing the architecture of the building I classify it within the Art Deco movement and argument that this classification together with its location within the city support the premise that the addition of the department store typology is representative for the public wish of alignment with the Western European countries, its cultures, formal urban structures, and architectural aesthetics. Additionally, the thesis illustrates the extensive decay and attempts to understand why is it present.

Introduction

Every “respectable” city has or had at least one well renowned department store. For example, in New York this is “Macy’s” (fig.1), in London there are “Selfridges” (fig.2)v and “Harrods”, Barcelona with its “El Corte Inglés” (fig.3), Paris with “Galleries Lafayette” (fig.4). Likewise, Bucharest once had “Magazinul Victoria”¹ (fig.5). While the building still stands at the same intersection, it lost most of its glory, remaining just a shell. In the 19th century the development of this typology of stores was closely linked to urban developments such as densification of population, improvements in infrastructure and a well-established connection to power grids. These department stores quickly raised to popularity, becoming social landmarks and architectural icons, through the innovation of housing all kinds of goods in one place as well as by offering flexible retail space that exuded elegance. Naturally, these landmarks had to have an architecture of their own - one that would be grand enough to be attractive the customers and yet have all the hidden spaces that would conceal the offices and the vast storage. The circulation ought to be impeccable to allow for the flow of people to move seamlessly and to offer a wide perspective on the abundance of the store at the same time. The arrangement of the window display was and still is an art in itself, and the interior decoration delicately tatters in a balance between prop and commandeering. Consequently, the need for such special qualities generated a particular type of architecture.

Most of the previous research on the topic of department stores has been conducted on case studies located either in United Kingdom, France, Germany, or North America, but there are places such as Romania where this research is scarce or lacking altogether. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain in their book “Cathedrals of Consumption” note that the research conducted focuses on topics such as business and economics, „culture, consumption, gender, modernity and social anxiety”² in France, Germany, Belgium and Northern America. It is conspicuous that department stores all over the world shaped, to an extent, the consumer culture by making mass consumption available to the large public. Dr. Vicky Howard, historian specialized in the study of retail, comments:

*“They [department stores] also spread a consumer ethos through mass advertising and branding, new merchandising and sales methods, lavish interiors and attractive amenities. In Alan Trachtenberg’s words, they ‘stood as a prime urban artifact of the age, a place of learning as well as buying: a pedagogy of modernity.’”*³

The term “consumerist culture” is widely used to describe the recent social behavior that a vast majority of global population displays towards the purchase, use and discarding of everyday objects. If this collective behavior is remarkable enough to earn the status of “culture”, then an argument can be built in favor of the establishment of a category of monuments dedicated to this culture. The building of the department store would then have not only monumental value, but rather become a cultural monument, that “celebrates” this behavior. “Cathedrals of consumptions” term coined by George Ritzer, is what is used to describe these monuments. Moreover, for a long time the department store was considered a ”feminine universe”, a meeting place and a surprising element that may have contributed to emancipation.⁴

This thesis will explain why “Magazinul Victoria”, the first department store in Bucharest, can be considered a monument and analyze how the existence of a department store helped with the goal of aligning the Romanian culture with the with the Western values during the 20th century. The arguments will be developed in the first two chapters, first one outlining the historic context and symbolism of the intersection “Magazinul Victoria” can be found at, the second one building the argument for the architectural and social importance. The last chapter will set the parameters question why such a considerable decay of the building is present. Up until now, no comprehensive study of the store was compiled, a gap that this paper tries to fill. But this thesis presents many limitations. The information that is available is scattered across many short articles and blog posts, that sometimes contain erroneous and contradictory affirmations such as when the store was built and renovated. Despite it being listed as a protected monument, the architectural drawings of the building cannot be found in archives or at the Municipality, the building belonging to a private investor. For the scope of this research the plans and elevations presented in this thesis have been made by the author based on available documents, site visits and educated assumptions. They shall be considered schematic. The outlines

¹ To avoid any confusion, this document will always mention the store under the name of “Magazinul Victoria”, although when it was first opened the name was “Aux Galleries Lafayette” as it was a branch of the French department store.

² Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999).

³Vicki Howards, “History Of Department Stores: Introduction”, *History Of Retailing And Consumption* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1-8, doi:10.1080/2373518x.2021.1980285.

⁴Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), p. 2.



Fig 1- The flagship Macy’s store, on New York’s Herald



Fig 2- Lasting legacy: Selfridges in 1947



Fig 3- El Corte Ingles



Fig 4- Les Galeries Lafayette ddecorated for the visit of George V

of the context of the store are based on historic documents, city maps and literature. The economic activity of “Socec & Co. S. A. R. Aux Galeries Lafayette” society, the one the opened the department store and ran it until nationalization in 1948, is mentioned in Ioan Massof’s biography “Stradania a cinci generatii”⁵. The activity and architecture of the store are only briefly described. Since the bibliography is written to celebrate the success of the family it is likely that only the most flattering information and data has been included. A passage that can highlights the way the author over praises the success of the society and its contribution to the country is:

“Other than the increase production determined by the existence of the store, it [the store] brings to the “State and Township” a great material contribution, directly and indirectly, that values 100 million lei⁶ yearly represented by the custom taxes, “State and Township” taxes, as well as all taxation on salary of the workers, all that, because of the firm, go to the public revenue.”⁷

There isn’t any other document that could be used to compare the claims made in Ioan Masof’s biographic work. The information about the architect of the building, Herman Clejan is also limited, possibly due to involvement with a controversial leader during a strenuous historical period for the country. The role of the store for society between 30s and 80s has been recomposed based on interviews, articles and advertisements, and the parameters of decay and decline were established through site visits, observation as well and interviews of two long time employees. Arguably some of the information may be speculative, but this thesis creates a foundation for future research for other department store in the city that share a similar destiny with “Magazinul Victoria” such as “Magazinul Bucuresti”, “Cocor”, “Magazinul Unirea”, research that can fill a gap in the general documentation of department stores worldwide.



Fig 5- Reclama la Magazinul Victoria

⁵Ioan Massof, Strădania A Cinci Generații: Monogografia Familiei Saraga (Bucuresti: Biblioteca Evreiasca, 1941),p. 114-120.

⁶ Romanian currency

⁷Original text translated by author:” In afara de miscarea de productie pe care o determina insusi existenta ei aceasta intreprindere, ea aduce Statului si Comunei o insemnata contributie materiala, directa si indirect, care se cifreaza la 100 milioane de lei pe an si reprezinta taxele de vama, impozitele catre Stat si Comuna, precum si impozitele functionarilor si lucratorilor, care tot prin mijlocirea firmei se scurg spre vistieriile publice.”

Ioan Massof, Strădania A Cinci Generații: Monogografia Familiei Saraga (Bucuresti: Biblioteca Evreiasca, 1941).

Chapter I

“The essence of life is on the street, more than in any other parts of the continent, where the population keep hidden the secret of personality between walls”Tudor Arghezi, poet

At the intersection of East and West

At a first glance any onlooker would observe that all the department stores mentioned in the introduction can be located at the intersection of important streets. It is seemingly an imperative characteristic of the successful department store. While this thesis will not detail all the intersections, it will explain in depth the historic context of the two roads that border “Magazinul Victoria”. To understand the value of the store, it is necessary to stress that it is located within the central urban fabric of Bucharest at the intersection of two renowned streets, each with a strong character and a long history within the city. “Magazinul Victoria” is still located today where the “boulevard of victory”, “Calea Victoriei”, crosses the old streets of merchants, “Lipscani”street. This chapter investigates the historic and cultural background, that helps explaining the complexity and highlights the value of the department store.

The history of Victory Boulevard (the West)

“One does not have to understand the importance of a thing in order to love it and take it as a symbol representing one’s interest. All Romanians have an interest in Calea Victoriei although few are prepared to define this interest.”⁸

The “Victory Boulevard” or “Calea Victoriei“ is an almost three kilometers long street that winds down through the central part of the city (fig 6). Unlike other European boulevards such as the “Champs-Élysées” in Paris, “Passeig de Gràcia” in Barcelona or “Andrássy út”, Budapest, its course does not run straight through the urban fabric, but rather meanders. Emperor Franz Joseph, who was visiting Bucharest in 1896 was fascinated by this typology as he commented:

“Not being straight, but rather bending at every 20-30 steps, it presents another perspective, another look, keeping my eyes under the spell of a new view, meanwhile the Parisian boulevards, once you set foot on them, you have seen them entirely. They have no variations, becoming monotonous and uninteresting.”⁹

While the street has kept its shape as it originally was in the 17th century, it suffered many interventions due to numerous historical events and atrocities, such as wars, plagues, fires, two earthquakes and bombing during the Second World War.

Under the name of the “Podul Mogosoaiei”¹⁰ (“Bridge of Mogosoaia”), the street was constructed and appeared in documents already in 1692 to facilitate logistic operations of Brancoveanu, ruler of that time, between Bucharest and Targovise, two key markets of the country. Some historic documents refer to the street under the name of “Drumul Targovistei cel Nou” (“The New Road to Targoviste”¹¹). Gradually, it become the first promenade of the city, for both the rich and the poor alike.

Another layer of importance was added with the infrastructure of the drinking water well in 1779, founded by Alexander Ypsilanti. The water that the well provided was sourced from reservoirs outside the city and brought to this central area. The need for such infrastructure was determined by the numerous plague outbreaks in

⁸Tudor Octavian and Mihai Petru Georgescu, *Calea Victoriei - Bucureștiul Interbelic* (Bucureștii Noi Media Print, 2006).

⁹Ion Bulei, *Bucuresti Materiale De Istorie Si Muzeografie Xxiv*, ebook (Bucuresti: Muzeul Municipiului Bucuresti, 2010), http://bmim.muzeulbucurestiului.ro/fisiere/24-Bucuresti-Materiale-de-Istorie-si-Muzeografie-XXIV-2010_031.pdf, p. 33.

¹⁰The word “bridge” (original “pod”) used to have both the meaning of a bridge over something (still in use today), but it was also used to be a way to describe important streets that were paved with wood planks. The paving was the most modern solution to prevent the streets form becoming muddy during spring and autumn.

¹¹Constantin Rezachevici et al., *Bucuresti 550 De Ani De La Prima Atestare Documentara 1459-2009* (Bucuresti: ArCUB, 2009), p. 104.



Fig 6- In black, location of Calea Victoriei today

the beginning of the 18th century that rendered the river of Dambovita¹² unsafe for drinking. During the same century many important inns were built on either side of the street, as well as the houses and large properties of the noblemen or monasteries. The inns provided crucial shelter during armed conflicts and riots, but were destroyed along the course of history, only a few still functioning today. It is important to note that the 18th century was shaped by the many Phanariotes princes that had the power, as well as the rule of the Ottoman Empire over the country¹³. Their oriental customs affected the culture and architecture of the time and for many years that followed.

The revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu in 1821 rids the country of Phanariotes, but the Ottoman Empire still exert influence. This revolution marks another vital step of modernization for the city of Bucharest, that must be understood as another step towards a more westernize culture. In 1826 Dinicu Golescu opens on this Calea Victoriei “The Romanian Literary Society”, a strong politic organization whose aims was to reform the culture by printing books and associating with intellectuals from Germany, France, Switzerland.

All these goals and ambitions were reflected in the architecture of the time, yet cultural change is a slow process, during which the city had many faces. In 1828, Fredrik Nyberg observed:

*“Next to a beautiful house built in a European style, stood an Asian one and this change towards the architectural and urban expression of the West would still be noticeable until the first half of the 20th century. The rich would start asking for their houses to be designed by architects educated in the west.”*¹⁴

During those long years the boulevard underwent numerous changes and started imitating the aesthetics of French boulevards by replacing the wood beams with paving stone bought from Scotland, the inns with restaurants, building hotels, culminating by becoming the most popular and well-seen artery of the city. In 1878 after obtaining the independence the Romanian troops entered the city marching on the “Podul Mogosoaiei” and since then it became “Calea¹⁵ Victoriei” (fig 7). The change of name marks the political independence from the Ottoman Empire, and hence a vital advance in the social change from the eastern culture, towards the western. The French influences become even more prominent during the 20th century and the city earns the nickname of “Little Paris”, copying the atmosphere of the French capital almost perfectly. Today, it is still believed that *“Calea Victoriei is a unique fact of implied urban personality: this is how the whole Bucharest would look like if we had been allowed to, if we had the means, if the builders had been clever enough to make Calea Victoriei the unit of measure for a city to be called a city.”*¹⁶

Lipscani street (the East)

“Lipscani” Street runs perpendicular on “Calea Victoriei” and presents vastly different qualities than those of the boulevard (fig 8). They both date back from the same century, 17th, and its name comes from the merchants that were importing goods from Leipzig. The street itself came to be paved much later than Calea Victoriei. You could still see the wood paving in some areas even in 1912-1914. It was the vital connection between the commercial center “buricul targului”¹⁷ and “Podul Mogosoaiei”. It belonged and it was ruled by merchants, that ran their shops in a bazaar manner.

There were no fixed prices, rendering the art of negotiation as fundamental. The merchants of the time, especially in the 19th century, played an important role in the development of the industry, the commerce, culture, influenced the press and even the urban planning of the country according to an article written on

¹²River that crosses the city

¹³This text talks about the Country of Romania (“Tara Romaneasca”) before unification with Transylvania and Moldova, not as the country

¹⁴Original text: “Langa o casa frumoasa cladita in stil European, se ridica o locuinta asiatica’, relata in 1828 Ofiterul Fredrik Nyberg, iar aceasta trecere catre expresia arhitecturala si urbanistica de esenta apuseana isi va prelungi existenta pana in mijlocul secolului XX, intrucat preluarea limbajului in care se exprimau acum arhitectii formati in bune scolide pe intinusul Europei va eveni familiara si acceptata la cladirile comandate de bucurestenii ce constituiai majoritatea orasenilor negustori, meseriasi, oameni de profesii liberale”

¹⁵ Although the contextual translation of “Calea Victoriei” is “Victory Boulevard”, “cale” can also be translated as “way”, “Way to Victory”

¹⁶Tudor Octavian and Mihai Petru Georgescu, *Calea Victoriei - Bucureștiul Interbelic* (Bucureștii Noi Media Print, 2006).

¹⁷“Buric” bears the meaning of “navel”. “Buricul targului” can be explained as the centermost of all commerce. This renders Lipscani as



Fig 7-Calea Victoriei

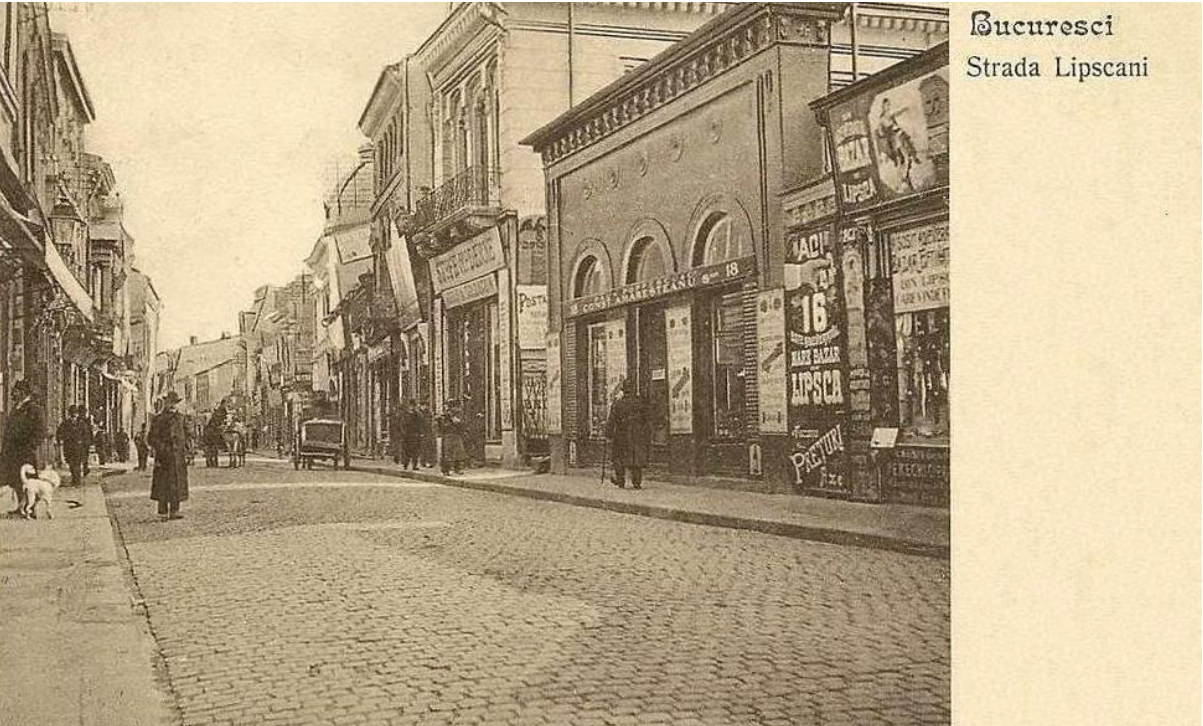


Fig 8-Strada Lipscani

Historia¹⁸. The street itself presented us with a very defined architectural style.

After the “Great Fire” of 1847, that burned down most of the commercial center of the city, a strict set of rules was imposed in order to structure the city and became even stricter after 1862 when the capital was moved from Iasi to Bucharest. The commercial area, including Lipscani kept, was characterized by a simple architecture with narrow houses. Some of them were long enough to reach the other street. After the fire the wood structure of these dwellings was replaced with a more modern one made out of bricks, with a tin roof. The buildings were built blind wall to blind wall, aligned to the edge of the street, with a corridor that led to the yard. The dwellings were 2 story high, with the ground level dedicated to the economic activity, and the upper floor was reserved for living. The decoration of the façade would change depending on the” fashion” of the time, but most of them were decorated in an eclectic manner, being designed by foreign architects. The volatility of the current allowed for a great range of decoration¹⁹.

The street has a much less informal character than “Calea Victoriei”, being defined by the user rather than formal settlements of certain institution. It is so strong that not even when the Palace of The National Bank was built on the street (1883, finished in 1900) managed to disrupt the bustling life of the road. Rather the works of the bank had to adapt to the existing habits of “Lipscani”.

To sum up the findings, understanding the location of the store is crucial for deciphering the added social value that its existence brings during the modern era. “Calea Victoriei” is the embodiment of all efforts to bring the capital of Romania at the level of other European cities. It has been a crucial artery of the city since the beginning, it became an everchanging architectural display that showcased the caprices of the rich and powerful, it was also lined by the cafes where the intellectuals of the time came to discuss politics, philosophy, matters of the heart and the latest gossip. It was the central line of the social life in Bucharest. While the boulevard has an elegant demeanor, “Lipscani Street” is more honest in its attitude. Undeniably, the most important characteristic of it is the economic aspect, the presence of all the boutiques in the center of the city, a street like a market. The store borrowed from both and developed a typology in its own right- it establishes itself as a direct competition of the boutiques on “Lipscan”, changing the practice of selling and buying and reeducating the consumer by introducing him to more refined goods, better quality, fixed prices, and the possibility to find it all in one place.

The store

The store was originally a library that was opened in 1856, by Ioan V. Socec an influential librarian, book editor and politician²⁰. The establishment named after its patron, “Socec Library” is generally considered by historians to be the most important library and book printing center of the of the 19th and 20th century.

It was a rather odd time for literature because there wasn’t yet a well-established set of grammatic rules or even alphabet, texts being written in a mix of Cyrillic and Latin letters. Over the years it proliferated and expanded, in 1905-1907 building the “Palace of the Library” ²¹ and expanding the business beyond selling books, by opening a graphic center and selling art, music disks, bags, some furniture. After the First World War, in 1919, a time of crisis, the library is bought from the heir of „Socec” by Iancu Sarga²² and S. Schwarz, two renowned businessmen with a vast experience in the field. Many considered them foolish for buying during such a critical economic moment, yet they managed to acquire numerous recognitions for the business that they have built and from the three stores that they had,²³ they opened eight more, in various cities. For a long time,” Socec” Libray, contributed greatly to the supply of schools with books and manuals. Because of their outstanding success they decide to branch out and include other departments within their store (fig 9). As mentioned before, the department store was an effort of reeducating the consumer and changing his habits. The concept of a department store was new in the country where that had a long history of doing business in the market,

¹⁸“Istoria Străzii Lipscani, Una Dintre Cele Mai Importante Artere Din Bucureștii De Altădată”, Historia, accessed 13 April 2022, https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/istoria-strazii-lipscani-una-dintre-cele-mai-importante-artere-din-bucurestii-de-altadata#-google_vignette.

¹⁹ Constantin Rezachevici et al., *Bucuresti 550 De Ani De La Prima Atestare Documentara 1459-2009 (Bucuresti: ArCUB, 2009)*, pp. 106-110.

²⁰ He was a member and for a while presidents (1887-1890) Chamber of Commerce.

²¹ Where the department store can be found today

²² They became partners in 1914, both coming from a very long line of merchants. Sarga and his family made a name for themselves in the whole country. Additionally, the partners were quite famous for their connections, both in the country as well as in the West. Their ability to do business during the hard years of the war was also very well known. Buying the store in 1919, during a crisis was considered a foolish act.

²³ Such as the “Honorific Diploma” and commemorative medal during 1927’s “Exposition of Fair” – “Expozitiei de Targ” organized by The Union of Romanian Commerce and another one in 1935 during the “Industrial Exhibition” – “Expozitiei Industriale”



Fig 9-Aux Galeries Lafayette Bucharest

negotiating, and bargaining for everything. The market was an entity in itself, a city within the city, usually located centrally within the urban fabric. Replacing it meant reorganizing part of the commercial structure. Naturally this attracted criticism of small business owners, most of them coming from “Lipscani”, but it also had the support of the bourgeoisie. G. Crossick and S. Jaumain mention a similar attitude in Belgium:

*“The department stores found articulate voices to defend them stressing their role in the democratization of fashion and consumption, the introduction of a new moral order in retailing through fixed and ticketed prices, and the incentives to national industry and trade”*²⁴

In 1929 they open, with the help of Parisian, “Aux Galleries Lafayette” the Romanian subsidiary. I. Saraga and S. Schwarz decided that architecture of the library did not fit the scope of this new store and there was a need to build a new one that would meet the requirements, both aesthetic and practical, of housing new utilities and purposes. They systematically started tearing apart the existing block, without ceasing the economic activity of the library²⁵. The library that in 1919 had but two floors, now stood taller, in the shape of a “palace” with six floors and three underground levels, measuring 1800 square meters, decorated in an Art Deco manner, designed by the architect Herman Clejan. For the purpose of this essay, we will always refer to the store as “Magazinul Victoria”, although it only changed to that name during the Communist period, after its nationalization (1948).

This marks the beginning of a western enterprise in a city still torn between the East and the West, but with the highest aspirations to align to capitals such as Paris and Vienna. Architecturally, these efforts will be described by outlining the characteristics of the Art Deco style, the consumers’ behavior during the interwar and postwar period with a special focus on society’s attitude on “Magazinul Victoria”. Through its architecture and location, the store set up an example and a framework for future stores that would open in the biggest cities of the country and became a social landmark.

²⁴ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), p. 7.

²⁵ Ioan Massof, *Strădania A Cinci Generații: Monografia Familiei Saraga* (București: Biblioteca evrească, 1941), pp 114-120.

Chapter II

“Is it possible to define the department store? Its most striking manifestation was architectural, although the notion of purpose-built grand edifice fails to capture the piecemeal development which which characterized most stores.”²⁶

Introduction

To further explain the affiliation to modernism and a westernized culture this chapter will look into the classification of the department store building under Art Deco style and explain the impact of this architecture movement in a newly unified and recognized Kingdom of Romania. Furthermore, it will identify the Art Deco elements that can be beheld in the architecture of the building as it was before nationalization. The process of nationalization took place in 1948, when the communist regime took over the country, but there are no sources that mention the exact moment of the renovation or the change of name to “Magazinul Victoria”. There are archive pictures that show the old entrance of the store up until 1947, and the next ones that show the one we can still see today starting with 1968. Additionally, this chapter will explain the social space that the store occupied between the 1930s and the 1970s and what did it represent for the general public.

Classification

“In 1911, a young Le Corbusier, in his Oriental travels, was charmed by Bucharest [...] – a city where every day is Sunday, and architecture, as life itself, is not taken too seriously.”²⁷

The quote highlights two important traits of the city in the beginning of the 20th century, namely the fact that the foreigner, and especially one educated in the field of architecture perceives it as mainly Oriental and that there is yet not an established architecture of the time (fig 10). In the book “Bucharest – Art Deco City” the author comments:

“It may appear to foreigners as an atypical city, a space of contrasting proximities, oscillating between the condition of a Levantine market town and the ambition of becoming a Western metropolis”²⁸

The Art Deco is universally attached to the ideas of renewal with its playful, hedonistic forms and dynamic geometries. After the First World War it was perceived as an appropriate style that ought to be adopted by the newly established and recognized capital, the city of Bucharest²⁹. Its modern and monumental expression in art and architecture was in perfect harmony with the social aims of the time, an alignment with the West, as it has been explained in the previous chapter.

It is noteworthy that during this period another significant current was emerging, the Neo-Romanian or Romanian Revival³⁰. The style was an attempt at finding authentic Romanian style in response to the French inspired Classicism Eclecticisms that has been dominating the built environment - resulting in the “Little Paris” labelling of the city. The Romanian Revival borrows most of its forms and decorations from traditional houses such as bay widows, overhangs, roof shape, sculptural wood elements for banisters and windows. In the magazine “Architectura” 1931-1933 prof. Ioan D. Trajanescu, an adept of the Neo-Romanian, harshly criticizes the “cold and rigid, industrially produced, standardize buildings”³¹, of modern architecture that suffocates the few beautiful traditional houses in the city, referring the houses built more traditionally. This article explains

²⁶ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), p. 9.

²⁷ Mihaela Criticos et al., *București - Oras Art Deco = Bucharest - Art Deco City* (Bucharest: Igloomedia, 2020), p. 13.

²⁸ Mihaela Criticos et al., *București - Oraș Art Deco = Bucharest - Art Deco City* (Bucharest: Igloomedia, 2020), p. 13.

²⁹ The “Great Union of 1918” allowed the Kingdom of Romania to achieve the greatest unified surface it ever had. Moreover, this is the moment when the state was truly recognized worldwide, hence the need of architectural affirmation and alignment.

³⁰ With its main supporters Ion Mincu and Ion N. Socolescu.

³¹ Ioan D. Trajanescu, “Arhitectura Romaneasca In Fata Curentelor Moderniste”, *Arhitectura*, 1931-1933, 16, <https://www.uauim.ro/informare-documentare/biblioteca/virtuala/revista-arhitectura/>.



Fig 10-City of Contrasts- Women selling flowers on Blv Bratianu

some attitudes of various opposing architects towards modernism and the efforts to “westernize” the city and enforces the fore mentioned idea that there is not a single established architectural style, but rather an overlap of many, sometimes contradicting attitudes that influence the built environment. This explains the complications of classifying certain buildings under a single style. Mihaela Criticos notes in another of her paper that:

*“The plurality of modern trends is further augmented by an astonishing diversity of marginal manifestations that are constantly ignored by the great histories of modern architecture, but nevertheless introduce a rich palette of shades and nuances to the universe of architectural modernity. This is the case of countries such as Romania, by virtue of the values of their local traditions, and also due to an eclectic tradition characterizing their 19th century formation as national states. The case of Romania is even more interesting because, it is situated at a crossroads of influences and models, both East and West.”*³²

She goes on by supporting the idea that Modernism in Romanian architecture is more “well-tempered”, and never fully contradicts the values of traditions and other institution, while still promoting creativity. It is seen by Sorin Alexandrescu, academic, literary critic and linguist, as a triple paradox: the paradox of “belonging”, the paradox of “simultaneity” and the paradox of “continuity/discontinuity”. All in all, certain clear classifications are hard to make.

The categorization of “Magazinul Victoria” building under the Art Deco style is debatable. Sources³³ mention that Herman Clejan’s refurbishment of 1928-1931 for the building is Art Deco, but in a private conversation with Mihaela Criticos, professor at the Architecture and Urbanism University of Bucharest, she supported the hypothesis that the store should be classified under Late Eclecticism. This is a style that synchronized with the rest of Europe, used mainly in the period between 1910 and 1930. In Romanian architecture it presented strong French influences and was infuse with Art Nouveau elements such as organic forms and vertical partitions. The Art Deco style overlapped with the Late Eclecticism (1925-1930), and even derives from it with a stylized, more geometric decoration, and decorative ironmongery.

For the purpose of this paper, the store building will be considered Art Deco and will support the idea that the architecture of the time was strongly oriented towards the Western culture. Although Late Eclecticism would highlight a similar belief, it will be limited to a focus on French influences. While they are important and conspicuous, through the old name of the store, and the localization next the “Hotel du France”³⁴ the interwar period widens the scope for the architecture of the city, its influences reaching as far as the United States. One argument that supports the importance of the department store building is constituted by the effect on the organization and representation of urban space.” *The architectural drama of the new stores was inescapable, both as urban presence, with the building itself serving as an advertisement, and through their often startling new interiors.”*³⁵ “Magazinul Victoria” is perciev similarly, the attitudes towards this edifice being mentioned in the second part of this chapter.

The store building can be split into 2 parts (fig 11). The sources mention Part A, as the one refurbished by Herman Clejan. Part B only as an extension added to the store sometime after 1931, and based on the archive picture, before 1941. Studying the maps of the city, dating back from 1914 we can outline the shape of the building and we can hypothesize that Part B was not demolished together with Part A during the refurbishment, and it was where “Socec” library moved its activity during the renovation. Ioan Massof mentions that *“the [restoration] work was quick and well executed, without preventing the current activity of the enterprise”*³⁶. In support of the hypothesis there are bird eye view pictures taken 1940s from a plane that show in top, middle the back of the store before anything was built next to it (fig 12). The outline of the roof of the store, both Part A and B can be observed and it appears that Part B was only measuring 3 floors, and the roof shape looks similar to the one seen in the “Socec” Library post card (fig 14). The hypothesis could be challenge by assuming that part of the rooftop presumed of “Magazinul Victoria”, belonged to “Hotel du France”. Since the quality of the image is quite low, and to observe the roof shape you would need to zoom in considerably, certain details blur together. The establishment that was right next to the store was still unaffected by the earthquake in the first half of the 40s and displayed a similarly shaped roof profile. Since we cannot determine the exact moment Part B was constructed or renovated, the classification analysis will focus on Part A.

On the façade of the store we discern both the vertical partition, determined by flattened columns with geometric

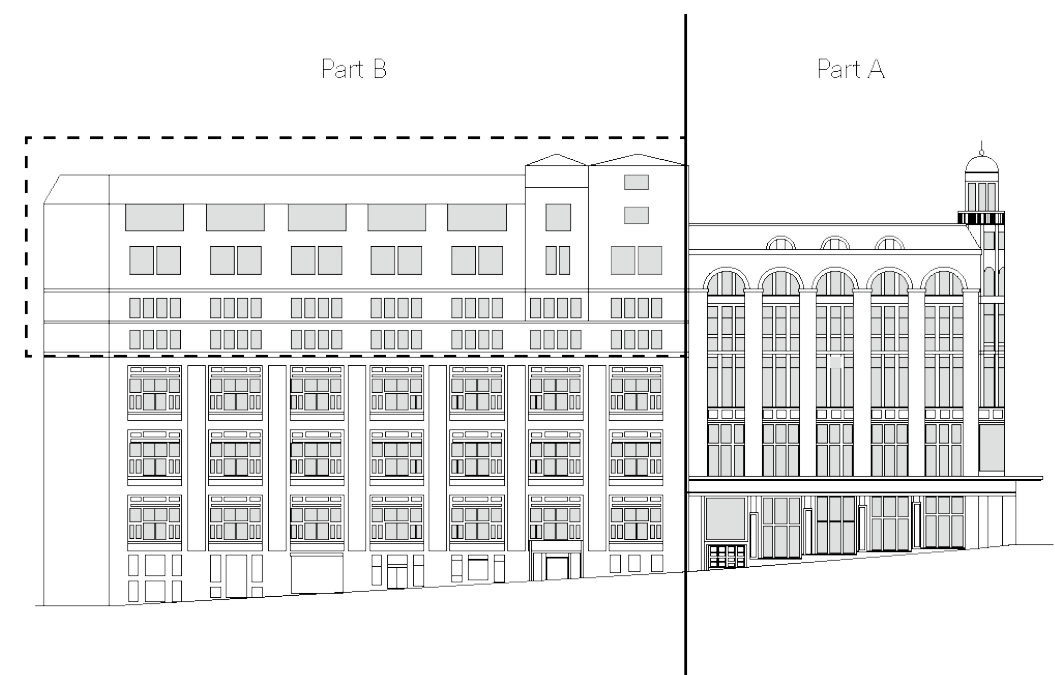


Fig 11-Partition of the store

³² Mihaela Criticos, “Well-Tempered Romanian Modernism Of The Interwar Period”, (Lecture, Univeristy of Architecture and Urbanism “Ion Mincu”, 2014).

³³ Birgitta Gabriela Hannover Moser, *Bukarest* (Berlin: Trescher Verlag GmbH, 2012), p. 97.

³⁴ The hotel was affected in 77’ during the earthquake that destroyed the city, and authorities chose to demolish it.

³⁵ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), p. 21.

³⁶ Original text translated by the author: “S’a lucrat repede si temeinic, fara a stanjeni activitatea curenta a intreprinderii” Ioan Massof,- *Stradania A Cinci Generatii: Monografia Familiei Saraga* (Bucuresti: Biblioteca evreească, 1941), p 118.

capital stone as well as horizontal ones, described by decorative bands, most noticeable on ground floor level and under second floor windows. The corner accent of the cant highlighted by the stepped decorative attic is another important element of the Art Deco style. The arch above the main entrance of the store has not been preserved, nor the decoration on the ground level, but they both support the presumption that the store can be Art Deco.

After the renovation of the building, both parts A and B covered a surface of 1800 square meters and six floors. It displayed itself as a “vast occidental enterprise, with 80 departments, huge display cases, that change their temptations weekly, thousands of shoppers that wander on the monumental stairs [...] and the four elevators that are in continuous movement.”³⁷The plans of the building are unavailable to the public. To study the layout, I conducted the analysis by means of drawing (fig 15). The drawing was made by stitching together a partial plan made by “Living Cities” studio in Bucharest and the evacuation plan in case of an emergency, the picture of which was taken by the author during a site visit. The plan resulted was layered on top of a map of the city to scale it (fig 16). The schematic plan locates the main structural elements, staircases and escalator and help understand changes that building underwent. In terms of structure of the building there is no information available for part A. Judging by the time it was built and the resources available the exterior walls of the store are made out of bricks and the interior columns of reinforced concrete. When it comes to Part B, due to the recent transformation of first floor into a jazz bar, the structure was left uncovered (fig 17). As can be seen the walls are made of structural brick and the ceiling displays steel beams. Probably, these structural system spans throughout the entire building and they were employed to achieve a larger span, that would also support the weight of the brick walls. It passed indeed the test of time, by withstanding two major earthquakes that destroyed the rest of the city. All the other restoration of the building was always focused on the interior appearance therefore we could make educated assumption that this is the original structure of the store that was built in the 20th century.

Most significant change in the interior design of the store is the current absence of the opening that used to be in the middle, spanning from ground floor to third floor (fig 18-19). Its main roles were to highlight the height and vastness of the building, together with the wish to bring light in and display all goods at first glance, mimicking the atmosphere found in the Parisian counterpart. The opening could span as far as the fourth floor, but we only know for certainty that it was present on the first and second floor. The vertical circulation was done both a big elevator with an operator, the change of the elevator remaining unchanged today (fig 20) and through the escalator, a mean of most modernity at the time, and first of its kind in the country. Judging by the displacement of columns and the perfective of space, as well as by the width of the store the location of this opening ought to be as shown in fig 21. Moreover, in fig 18-19 we can see the original marble floor, the art deco railing, and the original light fixtures, that are still preserved today. Interestingly, the display space is maximized by covering the structural columns in display cases as well, surrounding the visitor with a plenitude of goods, which marks the beginning of a new consumer culture based of visual shopping³⁸. This innovation was made possible by the existence of hidden storage spaces that were no longer occupying the floor plan of the store, forcing the customer to make a request for each item that they wished to examine, as would be seen in smaller individual stores. Visual enticements served as an incredible marketing tool, first to attract the customers in the department store, then to tempt them. The visitor would be kept at a distance separated from the goods by a glass pane, but close enough to inspect the items for themselves.

In conclusion the architecture of the store is unpretentious, yet elegant and attractive, flexibles in terms of spatial qualities and was of the highest standard for the time. Such remarkable qualities are what also help building up the prestige of the establishment and act as advertisement. The architecture of the monument of department stores was designed to fit the status of the audience it wished to attract³⁹. In the case of “Magazinul Victoria”, due to its location at the intersection of a very important artery of the city and a simple commercial street the building had to look approachable for people of all walks of life, meanwhile incorporating as many stylistic and spatial modern elements that would highlight the innovative nature of the typology. The spatial

³⁷ Original text translated by the author: “Astazi, Galerile Lafayette se infatiseaza ca o vasta intreprindere occidentala, cu 80 de raioane, cu immense vitrine ce-si schimba ispitele in fiecare spataman, cu mii de cumparatori ce se perinda, pe scarile monumentale care duc dela un etaj la altul si in cele patru ascensoare in continua miscare.”

³⁸ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ash-

³⁹ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ash-



Fig 12-Birdeyevview of city center

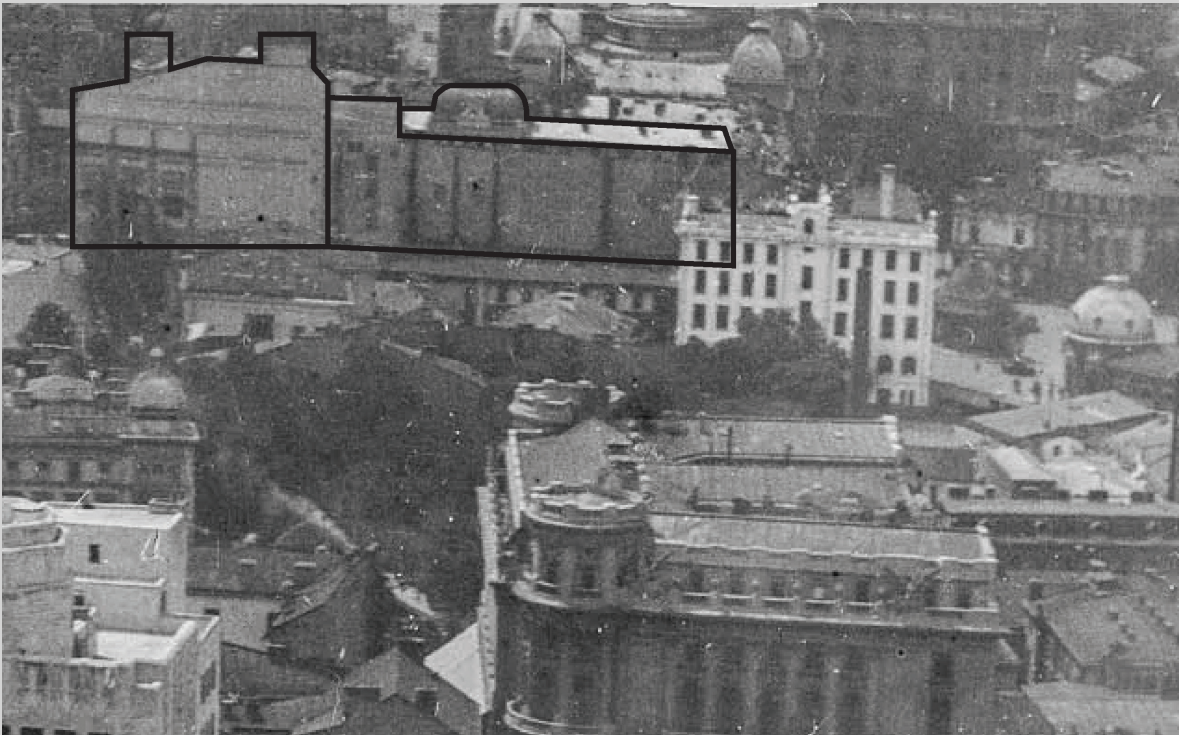


Fig 13 -Zoom in edited by author

result of the combination of all these constitutes an interesting solution for the typology of department store.

Social standards

*“The city absorbed the spirit of its citizens the sharp-witted, and jovial sprit, typically meridional, of the Bucharest citizen, an avid party goer, nonchalant and ironic, but with a natural affinity for conviviality and tolerance [...]”*⁴⁰

In his book “The Bon Marche – Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869- 1920”, Michael Miller distinguished a few important attitudes towards the department store that he notices in the French culture, but that can also be recognized as typical in the Romanian context as well. Since the store began as a branch of the famous Galleries Lafayette, the owners borrowed the formal physical structure of the building and imposed a similar organizational system of the store and a hierarchy between employees. The employees were not only merchants, but rather hand-picked individuals, educated to serve the customers and transform their shopping experience from running an errand to a pleasant pass time activity. Therefore, the attitudes describe by Miller can be translated and transposed in the context of “Magazinul Victoria”.

*“In its inspiration it captured that culture’s entrepreneurial drive to master and organize the material world to its advantage. In its architecture it brought together the culture’s commitment to functionalize its environment and the culture’s irrepressible need to secure solidity and respectability for its works. [...]The department store was the bourgeoisie’s world.”*⁴¹

Ioan Massof illustrates the relationship rapport established within the hierarchy of the store, between the 750 employees, as well as the attitude towards the client. He describes the advantages that the store offers to its client, ranging from the time saving, the quality of the items, but most importantly the fixed prices, making a point in calling the custom of negotiation a “oriental vestige”⁴² that is always in the detriment of the customer. A similar attitude is again present in Miller’s book:

*“In my effort to reconstruct the social history of the Bon Marche, I have placed the store’s very rich and deeply imbedded paternalistic relationships at the center of my analysis because I have come to believe that these relationships provide the key to understanding how the Bon Marche, as a bourgeois institution, approached the problem of adaptation to the basic changes of its age.”*⁴³

In “Magazinul Victoria” this paternalistic relationship is not only expressed through the formal training- education, that the store offers, but by also selecting most of its personnel from Romanian families, young hardworking people, and through a series of advantages offered these employees would have⁴⁴. The advantages offered attracted eager employees to work and learn and this reflected in their willing attitude towards the clients. Unfortunately, the adaptability mentioned by Miller was not enough to save the department store in the modern age of shopping. Initially, the services provided, paired with the spatial novelties of the store, turned this location into a landmark important enough to become an attraction point for remarkable foreign visitors such as Miss Universe, Miss Lisl Goldarbeitr in 1929⁴⁵. She was toured around some of the most important attractions of the country, such as palaces and thermal baths, together with the store⁴⁶ as could be read in “Ralitatea Ilustrata”, 1929. Another important moment in the history of the establishment is in 1932 opera and theater performers organized a fund raiser for a new artist accommodation. Some of the biggest names in the industry were present, each playing the role of the clerk in the store. Lastly, the store was used as a filming site for one of the most beloved film series of the 70’s: “Brigada Diversa”- “Miscellaneous brigade”. This offers us the most extensive collection of pictures from inside the store and highlights modern features such as the escalator. Although these singular, somewhat dispersed events may principally not necessarily be regarded as important,

⁴⁰ Mihaela Criticos et al., *București - Oraș Art Deco = Bucharest - Art Deco City* (Bucharest: Igloomedia, 2020), p. 13.

⁴¹ Michael B Miller, *The Bon Marche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p 3.

⁴² Ioan Massof, *Stradania A Cinci Generatii: Monografia Familiei Saraga* (Bucuresti: Biblioteca evreească, 1941), p 116.

⁴³ Michael B Miller, *The Bon Marche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p 9.

⁴⁴ The leadership established a bank that would allow the personnel to take loans with low interests, a medical team that would consult the clerks and their family for free and supported local factories and production trading mostly with Romanian producers.

⁴⁵ “Miss Universe Si Miss Romania Viziteaza Magazinul “Universel””, *Realitatea Ilustrata [Sau Lucrurile Așa Cum Le Vedem Cu Ochii]*, 1929, 12, <http://dspace.bcucluj.ro/handle/123456789/47223>.

⁴⁶ In the article is mentioned the “universal” store, rather than naming it as “Aux Glaries Lafayette”, but on the same page there is a picture of the crowd that occupies that step of the building of The National Museum of History (today), that is across the street from the building of the store.



Fig 14-Postcard of “Socec” Lbrary

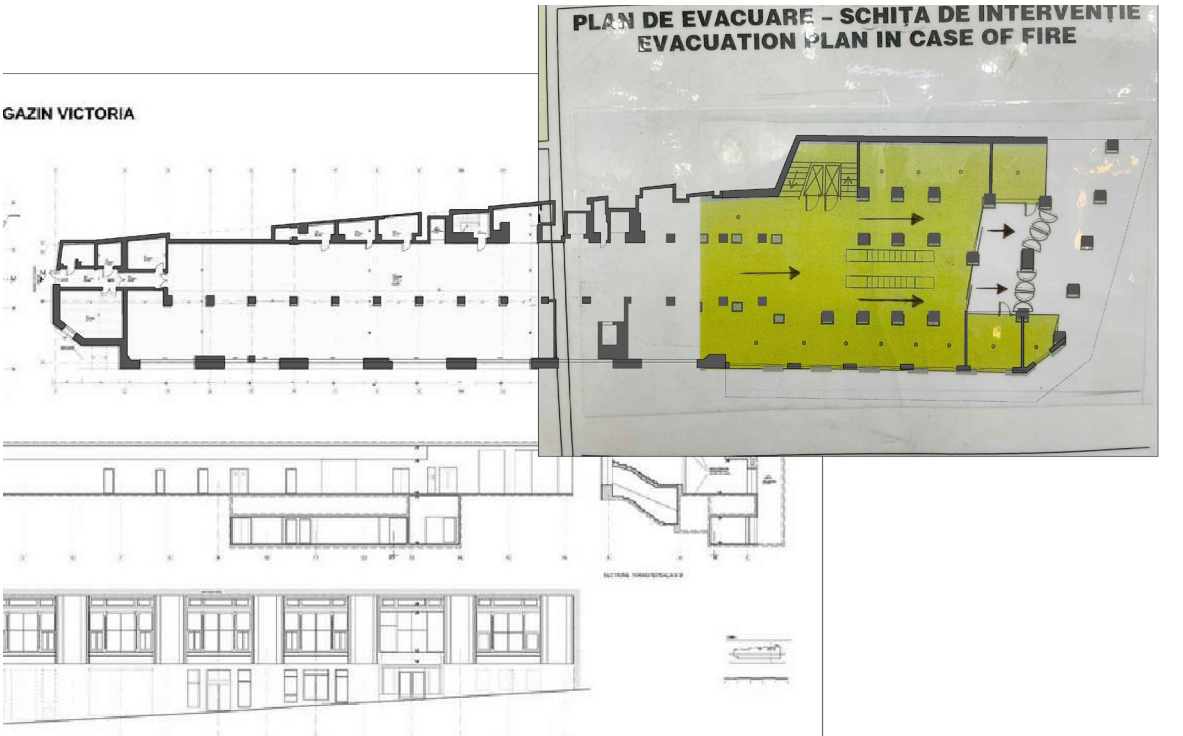


Fig 15-Plan Ground Floor

they are evidences of how the store was perceived by the society - a perspective framed by the interests and preferences of those times. It confirms the assumption that for more than 50 years, the store played an important role in shaping the experience of shopping in Bucharest.

In conclusion, the arguments brought forward in this chapter explain the reason for which the department store was considered a novel typology in the built environment, supports the premise that its architecture is representative for the popular wish to align to western culture, and position it in the interests of the society from the 40s throughout the 90s. The image created will serve as comparison in the next chapter that explores the current decay and decline and paints the picture of the situation of “Magazinul Victoria”. It is important to understand that the store maintained the status of a landmark despite the change in regime and the economic instability. Its success was predominantly due to its spatial qualities and its location in the city.



Fig 16- Plan with location in the city



Fig 17- View of Interbelic bar



Fig 18-Ground floor of the store



Fig 19-Ground floor of the store



Fig 21 - Plan of opening



Fig 20- Elevator



Fig 22 - Artists selling goods to raise money



Fig 24 - Filming of "Miscelaneous Brigade"

Chapter III

A recent article in Financial Times⁴⁷ recognizes that the department stores all over the world are dying. They became anachronical. After outlining the history and the importance of the store in the previous chapter, together with the events and qualities that built it up to the status of monument, this chapter will investigate the causes of its decline. Today the store is not visited by many, and those who visit it are “the old clients or the children of old clients. The average age group is in their 40s”⁴⁸ – a fact that indicates its passing glory, some inter-generational shift and the beginning of new consumer patterns.

Decline and decay

There are two parameters important when we speak of the problem of the shop’s passing glory: decline and decay. Decline refers to the failure in terms social aspects while decay points the spatial deterioration. It is important to mention that the initial aim of the paper what to criticize the political changes in the country for the failure of “Magazinul Victoria” by arguing that the collective trauma of the Communist regime forced the population to try and erase every piece of history that reminded them of hardship faced. “Magazinul Victoria” stood as a gateway to the rich West during a time when the people could only dream of it, and few afforded the luxury goods found in the department store. The reasons behind the degradation are more complex.

According to the 2018 article in the Guardian⁴⁹, one of the reasons for the general decline lays in the relationship between the shopper and the brand. The shoppers became much more faithful to certain brands, relationship established through means of social media, rather than through a physical space. The modern shopper also prefers a hands-off approach, opting for online shopping rather than going to the store. The pandemic exacerbated this behavior, Diana Florea and Stefan Alexandra, both working in the store for more than 15 years, mention during the interview that they notice a decline long before the pandemic⁵⁰. They point out that it started sometime after 2005, coinciding with the appearance of malls. These sanctuaries for consumerism introduced new entertainment spaces such as a cinema, a food court, grocery stores, and most important, extensive parking spaces. They pushed the idea of finding everything under one roof a step further than the department store. This proved more convenient, enhancing the experience of shopping, making it more comfortable⁵¹. There is a noticeable pattern. Firstly, the consumer chose the department store in detriment of the small boutiques because of fixed prices and the convenience of finding everything in one place, a modern outlook on the shopping experience for the 19th and 20th century. Once something better was introduced, that served all the needs, adapting to the modern consumer of the 21st century, the shopper opted for that, for the mall. Further research could be conducted on what would be the next pattern of the consumer and on what will happen to the architecture that housed these shopping centers.

The declines is defined by the decrease in the number of visitors and the lack of interest for these spaces, that can be blamed on societal changes. The decline determines the decay. Since there is little interest for the younger generations to spend time here, there are no investments made to improve the architecture of “Magazinul Victoria”. The decay goes further than the absence of “trendy new spaces”, three floors of the store having already closed, the escalator not functioning. On top of these downgrades, there is also a noticeable negligence. The once marble floors are covered by cheap tiles, that are painted over and the display cases have not been change in months. The façade of the store is littered with the air conditioning units, despite the listing of the building as patrimony. The once spacious store is crowded by the many retailers who have all been concentrated on the space of the last three functional floors. Additionally, the storage space has been closed, therefore the forementioned innovation in the art of window placement was replaced by a haphazard arrangement of merchandise.

Fortunately, the building does not lie empty. Some parts of the store have been repurposed, part of first floor becoming the jazz bar mentioned in chapter II, and the sixth floor becoming a restaurant. There is a lot of potential for the repurpose of the building and the creation of an adaptable useful space that would benefit the

⁴⁷ Edwin Heathcote, “What Does The Future Hold For Department Stores?”, *Financial Times*, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/6371a3b3-7138-457d-80be-11e996906be9>.

⁴⁸ Diana Florea, About Magazinul Victoria, interview by Iulia Popescu, in person (Bucharest, 2022).

⁴⁹ Jess Cartner-Morley, “The Death Of The Department Store, A Place Out Of Time”, *The Guardian*, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jun/22/the-death-of-the-department-store-a-place-out-of-time>.

⁵⁰ Diana Florea & Stefan Alexandra, About Magazinul Victoria, interview by Iulia Popescu, in person (Bucharest, 2022).

⁵¹ Cristina Popescu, About Magazinul Victoria, interview by Iulia Popescu, in person (Bucharest, 2022).



Fig 24 - The store today

city and its dwellers.

To sum up, the decay of the monuments is tightly linked to its decline, and I believe that it is too extensive for the store to be restored to its original glory. Firstly, this restoration is not in alignment with the current interests of the society, therefore even if the investment would be made to refurbish it there is a very slim chance that “Magazinul Victoria” would be a profitable establishment. This approach has already been implemented in another department store, with similar conditions, “Magazinul Bucuresti”. It proved to be a failure. The modern consumer is more interested in “fast fashion”, goods that can be bought often and cheap to keep up with the changing trends⁵². This reoccurring need to buy renders the repetitive shopping experience strenuous and useless, the low quality of goods promising the need for a new trip to the store in the near future, online shopping being more visual and comfortable.



Fig 25 - The store today



Fig 26 - Entrance of the store



Fig 27 - The escalator

⁵² Jess Cartner-Morley, “The Death Of The Department Store, A Place Out Of Time”, The Guardian, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com>.

Conclusion

“Magazinul Victoria” should be regarded as a monument - a statement supported by discussion in this paper. Next to the architectural, the establishment has had a profound social and cultural impact that shaped the shopping experience and the consumerist culture, as well as supported the local production of goods and the economy.

The building of the store is a crystallization of all wishes to align with the Western cultures and mimic the aesthetic of cities such as Paris. This is represented through its location in the central area of Bucharest, position economically profitable and easily accessible for the customers. Moreover, it is the first of its typology in the city of Bucharest. Generally, throughout multiple historic researches, department stores have been associated with innovation and with an impactful change for commercial practices⁵³. Stylistically, the use of playful, dynamic, and accessible Art Deco, conveys the forementioned idea of novelty and modernity, whilst keeping the store approachable for all who chose “Calea Victoriei” as a promenade spot through the city. It is important to reiterate that this boulevard has been the cradle of social life and commerce during the first half of the 20th century. The unpretentious nature of the building decoration is what kept it alive and functional despite the economic and politic changes that took place in the second half of 20th century and the beginning of 21st.

There are plenty of reasons for the decay and decline of this department store. Firstly, we witnessed the death of department stores on a global scale, many permanently closing their doors for good, leaving behind a huge structural shell in the middle of the city that ought to be repurposed. The decline has deep economic roots and can be blamed on the change of consumers behavior. Simply put, the department stores are not a modern novelty anymore and they don’t posses the same glamour. They were unable to adapt to the fast-paced requirements of the consumer. Since I believe that there isn’t a silver lining for this typology, the physical spaces of the store should be repurposed into something useful that fits the societal requirements for wellbeing and can adapt to future changes.

⁵³ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals Of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), p. 3.

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Anex 1

Transcript 1- Conversations with two ladies who have been working in the store for a long time

I: Puteti sa imi mai spuneti o data cum va numiti?

I:Can you please tell me your name?

D.F: Diana Florea

I:De cat timp lucrati aici?

I:How long have you worked here

D.F: De, sa spune 15 ani.

D.F: Around 15 years

I: Ok. Sunteti din Bucuresti?

I: Are you from Bucharest?

D.F: da

D.F: Yes

I: Care este prima amintire a dumneavoastra in legatura cu magazinul?

I: What is your first memory of the store?

D.F.: Prima amintire nu e de cand lucrez aici. Era din timpurile copilariei, in scoala primara. Nu am crescut in Bucuresti, am crescut in Ardeal. Cand veneam cu parintii, bunicii la cumparaturi. Era cu totul altceva atunci, fata de acum

D.F: My first memory is not from the time that I work here, it precedes that. I didn't grow up in the city, I grew up with my grandparents in Ardeal. Whenever I came to the city, my grandparents would take me here for shopping. It was something completely different then.

I: era un loc in care veneai...

I:It was a place you also came just to visit...

D.F:Magazinul Victoria era ceva deosebit.

D.F: The store was something unique.

I: In ce sens era ceva deosebit?

I:In what way unique?

D.F.: In primul rand, am senzatia, ca este primul magazine din Romania cu scara rulanta.

D.F: Firstly, it was the first store of its kind with an escalator

Short pause to assist customer

I: Imi povestetati de magazine in vremurile lui bune.

I: You were telling me about the store in its glory days.

D.F.: Era un magazine destul de aglomerat, un punct de atractie in Bucuresti. Inainte sa apara magazinul Unirea. Era unul din cele mai frumoase magazine. Extrem de aglomerat si foarte bine aprovizionat. E clar, la vremurile alea, vorbim de anii 80', sa zicem.

D.F: It was a very busy store, an attraction point for the city. Before the “Unirea Shopping Center”. It was one of the most beautiful stores. Extremely busy and very well established. It was clear, we are talking about the 80’s.

I: Decai magazinul Unirea a aparut concurenta magazinului Victoria?

I: So “Unirea” appeared as a direct competition of Victoria?

D.F: Da. Magazinul Unirea a aparut prin anii 80. Dupa care , ce sa va spun... Magazinul a fost... dupa ce s-a privatizat a fost o periaoda f buna

D.F.: Yes. Unirea opened in the 80'. Victoria had a very good period after it was privatized.

I: in ce perioada s-a privatizat?

I:When was that?

D.F.: In anii 90 si.. dupa anii 90. Nu sunt de la inceput aici. Dupa aceea a fost un incendiu. S-a redeschis in anii... o intrebam imediat pe colega mea, va spune ea despre incendiu. Prin anii 92-93. Dupa care a fost in renovare, s-a redeschis, s-a privatizat. Au fost niste ani foarte buni. Degradarea a inceput acum vreo 5-6 ani. Magazinul nu mai merge normal, de multi ani. Cred ca de 10 ani nu mai merge scara rulanta. Poate 12 ani. Nici asta nu a fost foarte deranjant la un anumit moment. Sunt cele doua lifturi care functioneaza cu liftiere. Pe care nu le-au schimbat tocmai din cauza asta. Cred ca sunt singurele lifturi in Bucuresti cu liftiera. Adica sigur. Ce sa va mai spun, e o degradare fantastica acum. Se vede.

D.F.: In the 90s... mayb a bit after the 90’s. I have not been here from the beginning. After privatization there was a fire. It was opened in... I'll ask my colleague in a min more about the fire. Maybe 92/93. After that it was refurbished, privatized, and reopened. There were some very good years. The decay started 5-6 years ago. The store doesn't work as it used to, it hasn't for years. I believe it has been 10 years since the escalator closed down, maybe 12. That was not a problem. There are the two elevators operated by the operator, that were not changed because the escalator stopped working. I believe there are the last two elevators in the city with an operator. An incredible decay, you can clearly see it.

I: Spuneti ca in ultimii 5 ani e cel mai evident.

I: You said that the last 5 years were the worst.

D.F.: Da, da, categoric. Fara vreo legatura cu pandemia.

D.F.: Yes, clearly. Without any connection to the pandemic

I: Puteti sa imi spuneti care este media de varsta apersoanelor care viziteaza magazinul in present?

I:Can you tell me what is the average age group?

D.F.: Media de varsta, e undeva intre 50- 55.Pentru ca gasesc articolele si confectiile si pentru ca veneau inainte.Marea majoritate a clientilor acestui magazine. In proportie de 80% sunt vechii client sau f putin din copiii clientilor, dar si

copiii clientilor se invart in jurul vartei de 45-50. Deci nu este un magazine de tineret. Desi l-a inecput s-a incercat. S-au incercat cateva raioane de tineret. Nu a functionat pentru ca magazinul in sine nu are nicun punct de atractie o cafenea, ceva.

D.F.:The average age is 50-55. Because they find articles and materials and because they used to come here before. Around 80% of the clients are old clients or some of the children of the old clients, but they are also 45-50. It is not dedicated to the young. Although they have tried with a few aisles. It didn't work because the store has no other point of attraction.

I: Sunt cafenele de jur imprejur care sunt puncta de atractie pentru cei tineri .

I: There are coffestores around that are attractive to the younger generation.

D.F.: Sunt, dar daca pot isa iti imaginezi acest magazine chiar si turistii intra foarte putin pentru ca nu e foarte bine semnalizat magazinul.

D.F.: There are, but if you can imagine not even the tourists come in. It is not well signaled.

I: Considerati ca e o problema si de semnalizare?

I: You consider it a signaling problem?

D.F: Da, da evident si de publicitate. Cred ca ar mai avea o oarecare sansa, desi e clar inghitit de malluri si pt tineret nu are nimic

D.F. Yes of course, also advertisement. I believe it would still stand a chance, although it is clear that the competition coming from the malls overpowers it.

I:Magazinul tine braduri romaesti...

I: The store always housed Romanian brands...

D.F: e foarte multa marfa romneasca si avem o industrie textile foarte bine dezvoltata, doar ca marfa romaneasca e purin cam scumpa si devine din ce in ce mai scumpa. Lumea si-a schimbat si gustul si tactica de a cumpara, totul s-a schimbat. Foarte putin s-ar mai adapta unui comert, foarte greu .

D.F: There is a lot of Romanian merchandise, and we still have a very well established textile industry, only the good s are getting more and more expensive due to the increase cost of production. The customers changed their preferences as well, everything changed. Very few will still adapt to the market.

I: Nici textilele?

I: Not even textiles?

D.F.: In primavera anului trecut s-a inchis etajul trei. Si functioneaza doar pana la etajul 2 unde sunt confectii de barbati. Tot ce a fost la etajul trei s-a mutat la parter sau la etajul 1. Mai sunt decoratiuni de casa, dar alea merg sim ai prost din cauza lipsei locurilor de parcare. Desi in niciun oras mare acest tip de magazine nu are parcare, nu se parcheaza nicaieri. La noi chiar mai gasesti cate un loc de parcare pe stradutele din jur. A cazut foarte mult si calea Victoriei. CLadirile in jurul nostru. Cand era banca langa noi mai venea lumea in pauza de pranz.

D.F: In the spring of last year, they closed down third floor. The store only works up to the second floor, where you

can find the man department. All the departments that yoy could find on thirs floor, now moved to ground floor or first floor. There are still some interior decoration objects that you can find, but those are not going vey well, because of the inexistence of parking spaces. Although, not of the big department stores in the rest of the world have parking space, at least here you can find some on the neighboring streets. It lost a lot of its clients when the bank next door closed down. The employees used to come here during their lunch break.

Aplicele si lampile si oglinzile unt originale. Gresia de pe jos a fost schimbata

In terms of architecture, the only original pieces left are the light applienecs and some mirrors. The tiles were changed during the renovation.

Adina (A): Asta e pus a dupa renovarea din 2001/2002. In 2002 in februarie s-a redeschis.

A: Th tiles were changed in 2001/2002, during the last big renovation. We reopened in February 2002.

I: De atunci nu a mai existat nimic facut pentru magazin?

I: Since then there was nothing else done for the store?

D.F: De atunci a mai fost o zugraveala. Dar nicio mare renovare

D.F: Since then they repainted the walls, but nothing else.

A: Au schimbat geamurile la parter si la etjul 1. Jos mai erau depozitele pe vremuri, unde e clubul acum. Sub tot parterul erau depozite

A: They changed the windows on ground floor and first floor. And they opened the club where the warehouses were.

D.F: Acum e doar interbelicul in spate si mai e doar ghena si au ramas 2-3 depozite.

D.F: Yes, the club took up the space of the warehouses, and now there are only 2 or 3 left.

A: Pe vremuri se primea marfa la depozit si de acolo se ducea la diferite raioane. Iti semnez nu e o problema.

A: During the old days, we used to get the merchandise there and only then it was passed to each of the respective aisles. I can sign your papers.

A: Magazinul nu a fost asa fragmentat. Etajul 5 era cu sticlurie si menaj. Etajul 4 confectii dama. Etajul 3 copii, etajul 2 brabatii, etajul 1 era impartit intre stofe, sport, covoare. Parter electrice elctricasnice, electrotehnice, maraochinarie, bijuterii, cosmetica, parfumerie, foto.

A: The store wasn't so fragmented before. 5th floor was glass work, 4th floor ladyes, 3rd floor kids, 2nd floor men, 1st was ivied between fabrics, sport and rugs, ground floor was electronics, perfumes, jewelry and cosmetics, photography

A: Lucrez aici din 83' si am facut si practica aici. Deci chiar de mai bine de atat.

A: I have been working here since 83', also did my practice here.

I:Cand a mers cel mai bine?

I:When was the best time of the store

A: Inainte de revolurtie a fost varful magazinului, undeva pana in anii 2000 a fost bine. Renovate a inceput pt ca dupa revolutie raioanele erau o asociere intre sat si firma/ raion. In 2000 a fost vandut si de atunci e privat. Alexandru Munteanu, fost fotbalist. Despre cladire nu stiu multe sa ti spun, date oficiale.

A: Before the revolution, before 2000. The renovation started because when it was privatized, the partnership with the state of dissolved and they needed to reorganize the store. Now it belongs to a retired football player. I don't know much about the building. But we used to have a decorator that had the office of 6th floor, that would arrange the windows. We don't have one anymore.

Last part of the interviews are thank you and goodbye.

Transcript 2- Conversations with two different generation

I: Puteti sa imi spuneti cum va numiti?

I:Can you tell me your name?

CP: Cristina Popescu

I:Cum va aduceti aminte de magazin?

I:How do you rembeber the store?

CP: Imi aduc aminte ca treceam pe langa el si ma uitam in vitrine ca la muzeu. Nu ne permiteam pe atunci sa ne cumparam lucruri. Erau lucruri de calitate de import. Imi mai aduc aminte decoratiuniile de Craciun. Din interior nu pot sa iti povestesc prea multe pentru ca nu mai stiu. Dar nu mai exista mezaninul.

CP: I remember that I used to walk and look at the window displays. WE couldn't afford the goods. It was imported merchandise. I also remember the Christmas decorations. From the interior I can't tell you much, I don't remember. But there wasn't a mezanin.

I: De ce consideri ca a decazut?

I:Why did the store fail?

CP: A fost inlocuit de malluri. Nu exista nicio alta atractie cum ar fi o cafenea sau un cinema, nu ai loc de parcare, iar marfa e inechita, nu gasesti nimic care sa se poarte acum.

CP: It was replaced by malls. There is no attraction such as a cafe or a cinema, you can't find a place to park, and the goods don't keep up with the trends. You can't find something that could be worn today.