



ROMANIAN SEASIDE

DREAMS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

**How can elements and qualities of Romanian socialist
leisure architecture be revived and reintroduced into the
current coastal scene?**

COURSE

AR2A011 - Architectural History Thesis 2022/23 Q3

STUDENT

Andrea Beznitchi - 5861683

TUTOR

Ivan Nevzgodin



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ABSTRACT

The architectural evolution of the Romanian coast after WWII saw brand new developments, fuelled by the need to create a profitable touristic industry, that is promoted locally and internationally, painting a picture of the progress and success of the socialist society. Tourists from all over Europe are known to have passed through these resorts. The initial development plan focused on health and treatment facilities, similar to other countries in the Soviet sphere, built on modernist urban principles, proposing a new relationship between public architecture and the natural environment. For most people, the bohemian resorts have lost their fascination and elegance, but still hold a dear place in their hearts, for others, they represent a communist reminder that needs to be erased.

The paper is reflecting upon the coastline's relationship to water, landscape and its surroundings. A critical evaluation of the coastline architecture is undertaken, initially from an ideological and political point of view, followed by an architectural one, discussing the solutions, concepts and overall contextual approach over the frontier area. The tourism-related establishments thoroughly encapsulate social and political success, as well as an architectural significance, justifying their resurrection and relevance on the Romanian coastline, even in contemporary times.

01/ INTRODUCTION

1. PREMISE / CONTEXT

The rise of communism in Romania manifested itself through a great number of changes in human existence. The country underwent an era of poverty and political oppression, in which any form of self-expression was condemned. It comes as no surprise that these changes affected the architect and the architectural profession, which followed the Communist Party's main concerns - mass production, glorified labour and dissolution of class divisions. All of these concerns can be uncovered when speaking of the seaside developments on the Romanian coastline. On the one hand, the ambitious master plan of the coast is considered to be an ideologically infused approach, a paradigmatic solution, and on the other hand, following a widespread success, it finds its place in the evolution of society, mass tourism and of European architecture.

2. FOCUS AND AIMS

The paper explores the birth of the socialist resort in Romania. In 1955, the Black Sea Coast became a blank canvas for a vast number of architectural developments, including but not limited to the construction of hotels, lavish restaurants and dining halls, theatres, as well as a generous amount of open public spaces such as terraces and promenades. The main objective of the developments was to meet the criteria imposed by the Communist Party, which demanded innovation at every level, concomitantly seeking aesthetic, sustainable, technical and economical solutions. (Popescu, 2015)

The paper proceeds to analyse as a case study the “Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere”

Hotel in the Olimp Resort, as an outstanding example of how littoral architecture and urban planning were approached in the communist period. The hotel was built in 1971 and had been allocated the most interesting and fruitful location on the coastline, the landscape becoming a key ingredient in the design process. Undergoing several changes over time - negligence, decay, and subsequent resurrection - the project is exposing an admirable attempt at preserving once-valuable architecture.

A comprehensive analysis of the case study through a period of 50 years, since its construction to the present day, will aim to provide a clear understanding of the architectural phenomenon that occurred on the Romanian coastline. The goal of the paper is to prove that the tourist area is a product of a qualitative vision of a period, a successful experiment of creating a public space that is considerate and accessible, and its revival into the current coastal scene is achievable.

3. STRUCTURE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The paper would start by describing the social and political context of Europe, and subsequently, Romania, after WWII. Society's deep concern with post-war reconstruction was the key factor behind modernisation, industrialisation, and urban reconfiguration. Looking at how other countries approached leisure architecture, in both the Western and Soviet spheres, would provide the appropriate backdrop for the analysis of the Romanian coastline. Thereby, extensive literature, such as *Designing the seaside: Architecture, society and nature* and *Happy: Cities and public happiness in post-war Europe* are consulted. Both encapsulate the evolution of the seaside resort, with a particular focus on Britain and France. Historically, France has been a great influence on the Romanian architectural environment, its ideas, and theories having been easily assimilated and adopted. As a result, a suitable

example for comparison is the Languedoc-Roussillon area in Southern France, notably La Grande-Motte's pyramids.

The following part of the thesis would explore matters closer to home, by examining countries in the Soviet bloc that underwent similar developments. *Holidays After The Fall* provides a well-researched and documented picture of the modern leisure resorts in Bulgaria and Croatia, and their journey through communism, discussing their partial, if not total, transformation. This investigation is still of great relevance, and it represents a crucial reference for studying the Romanian littoral.

The objective of the following chapter is to discuss the seaside developments in Romania that appeared during the communist period. Juliana Maxim's essay in *Coastal Architectures and Politics of Tourism: Leisurescapes in the Global Sunbelt*, "Emblems of Socialism", is analysing the Romanian coastline in its initial stage of development after the war. The period of the late 1950s saw the rise of universal paid holidays. In seaside towns, it was important to understand how holiday accommodations and year-round housing can coexist and be part of the same development plan.

Furthermore, *Enchanting views: Romanian Black Sea Tourism planning and architecture of the 1960s and 70s* offers one of the first critical and insightful investigations into the architectural projects built on the Romanian Black Sea coastline in the 1960s and 1970s. The collection of photographs and essays guides the reader through an in-depth and transdisciplinary analysis of modern developments, methodically studying their unique character. One of the authors that were brought together to discuss these topics is Carmen Popescu, an art and architectural historian of the 19th and 20th centuries. In her essay, she manages to draw a parallel between the first and the second stage of the architectural

development on the Romanian coast with other similar projects that were simultaneously built in the Western sphere.

Lastly, the case study of the “Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere” Hotel in the Olimp Resort is introduced. As a starting point, in-depth research on the different scales of the proposal, its relationship with the surroundings, and its place in the seascape are conducted, aiming to create a template of “exceptional” that fits perfectly on the Romanian coastline. Journals such as *Arhitectura* provide information about the project, through the words of the architects themselves, in the form of an interview. In 1972, Șerban Manolescu and Radu Mănăilă, the two architects in charge of the design and construction, answered questions regarding the overall approach for the project and the littoral, such as the design decisions concerning the landscape and public aspects of the proposal. The architects have also provided insight into the logistic and organisational side, discussing the hierarchy of the people involved and the course of the project from its incipient stages to its conclusion. The following subchapters allow the resort to travel to the present day. Under the unforgiving eyes of time, the analysis is highlighting the means through which the project has been rehabilitated, drawing a parallel between the old and the new. In contrast with the recent developments of the Romanian littoral, which happened under no coherent and adequate architectural visions, the value of the socialist resorts, and the importance of their preservation are evaluated.

02/ POST WAR HAPPINESS IN EUROPE

“Leisure today is a familiar reality in our advanced societies. Yet the concept of leisure has yet to gain full admittance into the systems of thought that guide the thinking of intellectuals and the action of activists, be they of the Left or Right, supporters or adversaries of capitalism and socialism. Some good minds reason about society as if the notion of leisure didn't exist at all. Some audacious intellectuals even deliberately omit it from their search for new systems that they hope will be a more faithful reflection of the reality of our day. ”

Dumazedier (1962:3)

1. THE BIRTH OF TOURISM

Throughout history, holidays were part of the elite lifestyle, practised in picturesque locations, at the seaside and in mountainside resorts. For the working class, however, the experience of holidays would become prevalent in the period between the world wars, when certain professional associations advocated for the working people's right to holidays, as well as the importance of administering the appropriate means for leisure. (Lankots and Ojari, 2020)

In the late 1920s, Soviet organisations were attempting to determine the suitable characteristics of holidays in the socialist realm. The five-year plans for the development of the national economy of the Soviet Union, implemented by Joseph Stalin in 1931, predicted the rise of sanatoria establishments on the Black Sea Coast, where the proletariat would be expected to spend leisure time in “health factories”. The socialist holiday was thus constructed specifically for individuals, not for families, whereas young people were provided with pioneer camps for holiday purposes. This new system saw a clear division of housing, work, and leisure areas into independent units, which was considered to be an ideal urban organisation format. (Lankots and Ojari, 2020)

By contrast, in a few Western European countries, laws that would support the working class's rights and accessibility of travel were still debated in the 1930s. However, several governments have financed leisure and holiday programmes: Fascist Italy had "Dopolavoro", translated as "After Work", "Kraft durch Freude", meaning "Strength through Joy", belonged to the National Socialist Germany, family holiday villages were constructed and promoted under the Front Populaire in France, Billy Butlin was designing Holiday Camps in Britain, and working class' union camps had become popular in social-democratic Sweden. (Löfgren, 2002) All of these programmes were advocating that "Patriotism would emerge from touring historical sites and meeting fellow countrymen in different regions and walks of life; popular sports and the return to nature would renew national energies; vacations would give 'dignity' and 'joy' to the worker". (Cross, 1989:599) Nevertheless, alluring and attractive campaigns had to be prepared to sell to the masses an activity that up until that point was considered a privileged activity. Figures 1, 2 show how holiday destinations were advertised in magazines and newspapers in both Western and Soviet spheres, alongside travel guides and brochures, in order to minimise the struggle of planning an excursion. Furthermore, tourism-related associations would have to ensure that holidays would be available to people with lower incomes. (Beyer et al., 2013)

Ultimately, paid holidays and the right to relax and rest were both agreed upon in the 1936 Soviet Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The leading societal systems of the 20th century - capitalism, communism, and fascism - despite their rivalry, would agree on encouraging their citizens to travel for leisure purposes. (Pedersen and Noack, 2021) On the Eastern Front, holidays, similar to other areas of one's life, were arranged and coordinated by the state. By contrast, capitalist societies made considerable investments in tourism-related areas, as leisure was considered to be a valuable sector, not to be left to the fate of economical factors. (Lankots and Ojari, 2020)



Figure 1. French poster promoting holidays on Cote d'Azur. (Unknown, 1955)



Figure 2. Poster promoted by Intourist, an organisation responsible for managing the foreigners' travel into and within the Soviet Union, during the Lenin Era. (Nesterova-Berzina, 1930s)

2. ARCHITECTURAL APPROACH OF THE “CIVILISATION DU LOISIR”¹

In 1937, aspects related to leisure were discussed at the 5th International Congress of Modern Architecture, in Paris. The French Front Populaire, which had been elected in 1936,

1. *Civilisation du Loisir*, translated as *Leisure Society/Civilisation*. The term is coined by Joffre Dumazedier, who explored its meaning and definitions. According to the French sociologist, ‘*Une civilisation du loisir*’ is a society characterised by leisure, in which individuals are seeking relaxation, entertainment and personal development. Dumazedier (1962:10)

had declared the paid holiday a constitutional right. In consequence, several architects, amongst whom Le Corbusier, have decided to address “the most urgent problem of our time: the dwelling [...which was] immediately linked to the “inseparable” issue of “leisure”. (Mumford, 2000:110). However, it wasn't until after World War II that specific areas for living, working, leisure, and culture appeared in urban settings, the topic discussed by CIAM architects. Furthermore, people would not only manage to secure holidays in leisure facilities located at the seaside or mountainside but also ways to reach these facilities. (Beyer et al., 2013) The 1950s economic growth saw the rise of affordable transportation for the masses in Europe.

The most obvious characteristic of worldwide tourism-related architecture after WWII is the creation of various basic types of structures that are reproduced in many countries, rarely modified. This aspect can also be noticed in the corporate areas - the rise of modernist office blocks coincided with the rise of the “International Style” leisure establishments. One of the initial types was the **high-rise structure**, taken from its usual urban setting, and moved to the seaside (the periphery), further demonstrating modernist principles. (Beyer et al., 2013)

On the Western Front, the first hotel belonging to the Hilton family, the Caribe Hilton, built in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1946-49, was an early precedent of such leisure facilities, a true example from the “pro-American capitalist sphere”. (Beyer et al., 2013) The complex's relationship to the site and surroundings is strongly emphasised in its shape, organisation and overall aesthetics. The two structures are made of precise, rectangular and repetitive shapes, as seen in Figure 3. Thus the facades provide rhythm and direction, creating a picture that dominates the coastline. (Marqués Mera, 2005)



Figure 3. Caribe Hilton Hotel (Lawson, 1964)

One other type of hotel arrangement was the **Y-shaped plan** structure, communicating with the landscape, opening its arms to the coastline, as seen in examples such as Hotel do Garbe (1959–64) built-in Algarve, Portugal. The architects themselves discussed their intention to comply with the “natural setting, the jagged and sinuous cliffs” through the shape of the complex, as well as explore the shadows that are cast by the numerous massing forms and surfaces. (Agarez, 2013:729) The terraced version of a project that is worthy of comparison is the La Grande-Motte pyramids in Languedoc-Roussillon in Southern France (Figure 4). The architect, Jean Balladur, attempted to break away from international models, thus introducing elliptical shapes, based on a strong personal philosophy that implied the need for a more harmonious relationship between humans and the sea. (Wagenaar, 2005)



Figure 4. One of La Grande Motte's pyramid's distinctive aesthetic. (Macou, 2015)

Looking closely at the Eastern Bloc, modernist towers were one of the preferred choices for leisure constructions in the 1960s. The Pitsunda Trade Union Holiday Houses (1962-67) (Figure 5), with its tall and thin towers, or the Yalta Intourist Hotel, are considered critical examples of sober modernist traditions, typical examples of socialist high-rise resorts. (Beyer et al., 2013) In Bulgaria, however, lies the renowned resort of Sunny Beach (1958). Tall towers intertwined with lower structures and holiday homes, in addition to entertainment and food-related facilities, ensured that the resort would demonstrate the highest quality of Bulgarian architecture at that time. "The late-modern leisure landscape of Sunny Beach was the result of a synthesis between the socialist ideology and western commercial tourist model." (Damyanov, 2015) Projects similar to Jean Balladur's white pyramids, can also be found on the Bulgarian coastline, Hotel Mura in Albena, or on the Romanian littoral, namely the Olimp Resort.



Figure 5. Pitsunda Trade Union Holiday Houses 1970 (Unknown, 1970)

03/ ROMANIAN TOURISM AND COASTLINE EVOLUTION

This chapter is closely following the rapid growth of the coastline (Figure 6) and the new architectural planning principles that have appeared and developed alongside, which have been divided into two phases. It is important to recognise how this building plan fully encompasses the architectural tendencies of Communist Romania - on one side, the interesting and elegant designs, and on the other side, the political stress that managed to hide (yet still make obvious) its intentions. Each of them in their way - the architect and the Communist Party - took advantage of the development of the coastline to promote improvements or to promote themselves. As Carmen Popescu, art and architectural historian, recalls, the Party aimed to apply the principles of a socialist administration to economical and social sectors. For architects, however, the project offered an immense opportunity to become emancipated from the constraints within the profession that were instilled alongside the reign of the communist regime. (Popescu, 2015) The author also notices a certain “optimistic modernism” related to the overall aesthetic of the areas, which encouraged the transformation of the coast - from a place of relaxation to a tourist attraction with international significance.

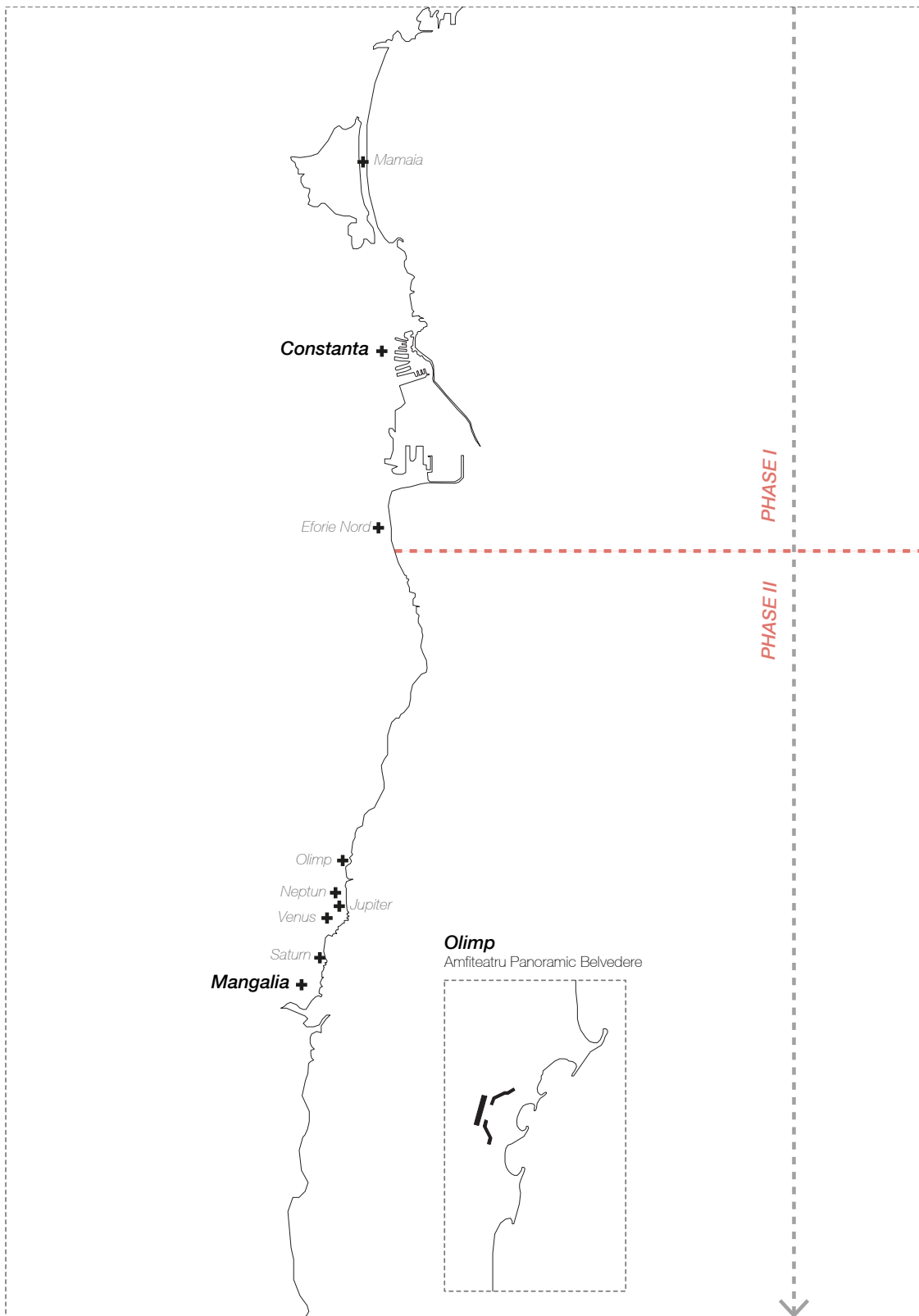


Figure 6. Romanian Coastline Diagram depicting the location of the resorts mentioned in this chapter, as part of their respective development phase.

1. Phase I - the new socialist experience

The plan for the Romanian Black Sea coast originated at ICSOR (Institutul central pentru sistematizarea oraselor si regiunilor = Central Institute for the Systematisation of Towns and Regions) and its focus was the rapid, functional and aesthetic development of the holiday resort. Juliana Maxim claims in her essay, "Emblems of Socialism", that initially, the discussions revolved around the concept that cities and resorts should seek differentiation in their design approach. However, the architectural solutions derived from coastal resorts have proven to be easily applicable to urban environments, giving birth to a brand new socialist lifestyle. (Maxim, 2022) The paid holiday for the working class was the driving force that shaped the lifestyle, and subsequently, the architecture.

The way in which leisure architecture interacted with buildings accommodating regular, day-to-day activities can be observed in the 1958 master plan of Mangalia town (Figure 7). Extracted from *Arhitectura RPR 6* magazine, published in 1959, the plan is showcasing both types of structures put together as one individual development proposal. Holiday accommodations (A, B, C, D, M), and planned sanatoria facilities (E) were placed in the proximity of the beach, facing the sea, whereas more permanent dwellings, restaurants, and cultural centres were located further into the city. Residents and tourists were able to share the streets, squares and markets, demonstrating how resorts have infiltrated into urban environments, allowing for the socialist attitude to form and flourish. Mangalia, albeit being one of the only towns that have straightforwardly and successfully managed to combine the two aspects of living, became a critical force in propagating the latest architectural and urbanistic concepts throughout Romania. (Maxim, 2022)



Figure 7. Mangalia development plan, 1959. Holiday accommodations indicated in red.

Further interventions are introduced by a young architect named Cezar Lazarescu and his team. Lazarescu would soon become one of the most prominent figures in Romanian post-war architecture. His accomplishments include a vast number of projects and systematisation plans for seaside towns such as Navodari, Constanta and Eforie Nord. Between 1955 and 1958, the architect and his team worked on an ambitious plan in the Mamaia region. On a smaller scale, in comparison to the town of Mangalia, the project's focus was to provide as many beds as possible, while incorporating facilities that would satisfy the basic needs of the visitors. It is important to acknowledge how the 10,000-bed comprehensive unit predicted the shift to residential ensembles, throughout the whole country. The microraion³,

3. According to Juliana Maxim, the term microraion emerged in the late 1950s. As a technique, it describes the architect's reorientation from small housing developments (named cvartals, Russian term) towards the arrangement of the territory of the city as a whole. (Maxim, 2011)

a term which describes these multi-use units, became the preferred choice of construction type in Romania, and the Eastern Bloc, by 1961. (Maxim, 2022) Similar in construction to the aforementioned Pitsunda Trade Union Holiday Houses, or the Yalta Intourist Hotel, the need to build these residential high-rise structures (and the ones to follow) required modern techniques and materials, thus poured concrete was used to satisfy both these aspects. It can be recognized that the speed of the construction and the efficiency of these units seemed to have addressed most of the Party's concerns. The ultimate goal was to convince tourists of the benefits and the quality of life in a high-rise, multi-unit ensemble.



Figure 8. Mamaia complex displaying political signage⁴. (Stasek, 1961)

4. TRAIASCA PMR = LONG LIVE PMR (abbreviation of Party name “Romanian Worker’s Party”, in translation). The written sign indicates the Party’s affiliation with this operation. The interpretation rests on two thoughts - the public’s fear of insubordination, which would have severe repercussions or genuine praise for the leadership of the Party.

2. Phase II

Following the success of the first phase, around the year 1965⁵, the development extends South of county capital Constanta. If previously, the driving force behind the development was the debut of the paid holiday, the Party's wishes would soon change, shifting towards mass tourism. During his opening speech at the Second Conference of the Union of Architects, Gh. Apostol, who was a member of the Political Office, emphasised the importance of leisure architecture on the Romanian coastline, particularly international importance, as cited by Ana-Maria Zahariade. In consequence, through a number of new projects, it is demonstrated that the standards of the hotel industry have risen considerably, alongside the investments, as designs have been approached in a more refined way. (Zahariade, 2011)

The second phase oversaw the debut of Olimp, Saturn, Neptun, Jupiter, Venus and Aurora in the Mangalia North region. (Figure 6). Each of these resorts had in common the fact that plots of vacant land were prepared ahead of planning, meaning that these new developments would enjoy the possibility of being built from scratch, with only nature to interact with. However, nature's involvement would fall under two categories - augmentation (artificial lakes created in Neptun resort) or enhancement (the stepped landscape in Olimp and Cap Aurora). (Popescu, 2015)

Inaugurated in 1967, the Neptun Resort permitted the opening of several new hotels, with no other than Neptun Hotel, which quickly became one of its emblems. The slender silhouette could be identified by the colourful decorative elements placed on its vertical axis. Similar

5. Events coincide with the change in the Romanian Worker's Party leadership. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, dies in 1965, and is followed by Nicolae Ceausescu as general secretary. Ceausescu decided to rename the party as Romanian Communist Party, and declare the state a Socialist Republic.



Figure 9. Neptun Hotel. (B.A.C.U., 2014)

to most of the details and construction elements from that period, prefabricated concrete was the material of choice adopted in manufacturing. Verticality is further enhanced by the repetition of the balustrades and the panels separating the terraces. The mural also seems to provide a curious symmetry to the project photographed from a certain angle. (Figure 9)

The resorts that were subsequently built followed along the lines of the natural landscape, embracing a **Y-shaped plan**, focused mainly on offering the tourists an attractive wide view of the sea. Taking advantage of a rich foundation comprised of both Eastern and Western European references, acknowledged in the previous chapter, Romanian architects have managed to design some of the most successful projects in the area. Cap Aurora, one of the smallest resorts on the coastline, offers a rather unique beachfront, defined by rocky bays. The two projects that dominate the area are Mera-Onix and Opal. The pair is reminiscent of the white pyramids of La Grande-Motte. The stepped nature facilitates the creation of terraces that offers visitors access to sunlight and spectacular views.

One of the guiding forces behind the changes in Romanian architecture is the emergence of the international style. (Zahariade, 2011) The style is dominated by clear, sharp outlines that are stripped of ornaments, enclosing open-plan spaces, and providing an overall light appearance, evident in the developments of both the first and second phases. The methodical organisation of the first phase created the ground for the creative liberties taken in the second phase, to a point where it almost resembles a stage set. The theatrical image is determined by the modernist glass panes that cover shopfronts, or colourful rhythmic panels that divide terraces, thus not only the landscape but also the architecture encourages looking at.

One of the most notable issues of the seaside architecture (and Romanian architecture generally) is the poor quality of the built fabric (rapid and cheap construction) and the materials used to create shapes that were much too complex to handle. The degradation is considered by many to be irreversible. In consequence, the projects are hopelessly discredited nowadays, nostalgia and young architects' and photographers' fascination with a period of time that they have not lived through are the only driving forces behind their relevance.

04/ AMFITEATRU-PANORAMIC-BELVEDERE

The case study chosen for in-depth analysis is the prestigious hotel located in Olimp Resort. The typology that the structure situates itself in is a renowned one by that point in time. The way in which the complex has enriched the area, contributed to a massive influx of local and international tourists, assisting the growth of economical, social and architectural sectors, is studied and celebrated in this chapter. The analysis follows the complex throughout a period of 50 years, in an attempt to discover its qualities and its (successful or otherwise) reintroduction into the current coastal scene. Not without constraints of its own, the project demonstrates notable efforts to employ as much creative freedom as possible, while still adhering to the Party's wishes and constraints.

1. General arrangement and qualitative features

The construction of the Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere began in 1971, and under the supervision of architect Aron Solari-Grimberg, it was erected in just nine short months. Even in the initial design stages and planning of the Amfiteatru complex, the aim was to harness the unique topography of the region. It can even be recognised that this aspect contributed to the name of the hotel, derived directly from its composition and integration into the landscape, translated as an *amphitheatre*. The proposal is presented for the first time in the 6th issue of the *Arhitectura* journal, in 1972, through an interview with architects Șerban Manolescu and Radu Mănăilă, which were part of the design and planning team.

The ensemble is comprised of three buildings (identifiable in the name), arranged on a separate fraction of the seafront, forming a generous artificial bay. The architects themselves describe the way in which the **Y-shaped plan** allows for the formation of a courtyard that

accommodates many of the amenities that are available to a wider public, not just the residents of the hotels. The border of the courtyard is marked by a lengthy portico that houses various food-related establishments and shops. (Manolescu and Mănăilă, 1973)

This aspect is validating one of the socialist design principles that were born in the first phase of the seaside developments - namely the comprehensive ensemble that can subsume all the activities of everyday life (elegantly so, in the case of the Amfiteatru complex).



Figure 10. Aerial View of the Amfiteatru ensemble. (Unknown, 2020)

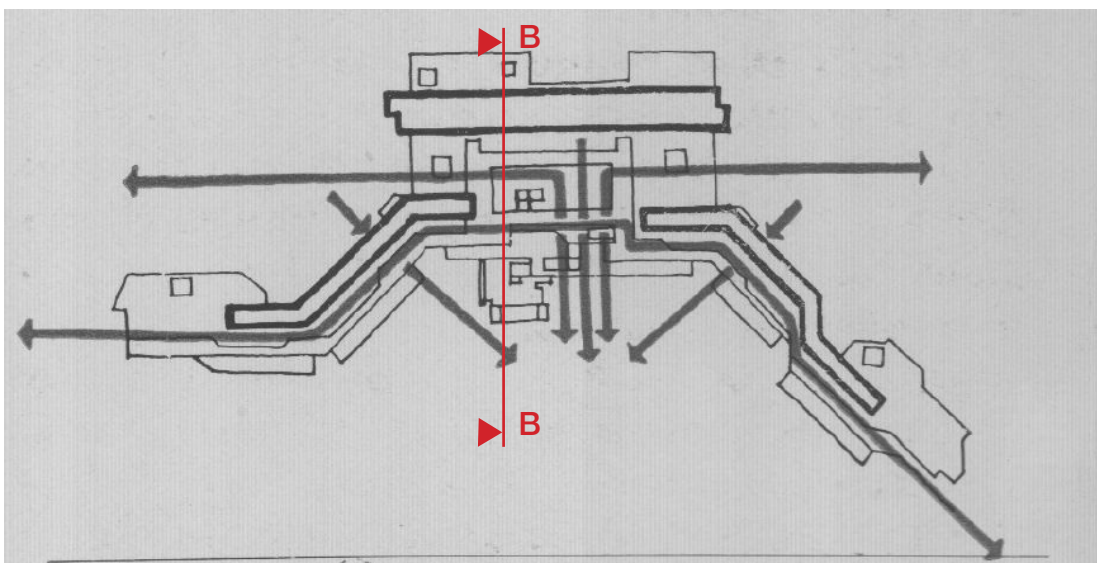


Figure 11. Diagrammatic plan of the proposal published in *Arhitectura* journal. (Unknown, 1972)

Furthermore, the stepped nature of the proposal allowed for the creation of 3 platforms. As can be observed in Figure 12, the first is wrapped around the first (lowest) row of accommodations. They were enclosed with vegetation, which offered a small garden to each individual room, the equivalent of a “green terrace”, as Șerban Manolescu describes during the interview. The next platform is considerably deeper and facilitates the circulation between the three buildings - its park-like arrangement creates an “in-house” promenade. The hexagonal pools located in front of Panoramic and Belvedere earned their place in the composition, contributing to the specific atmosphere of the “exposed salon”⁶ (Manolescu and Mănăilă, 1973:4) that the architects had in mind - a social hub, a place of gathering. Ultimately, the last platform is the beach itself, not without amenities of its own (of the sanitary kind).

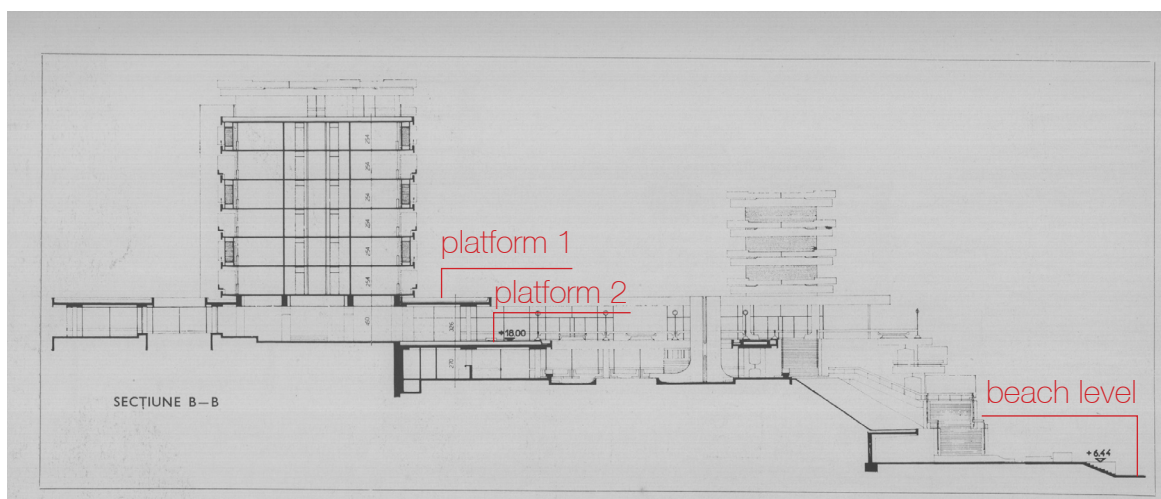


Figure 12. Annotated section B-B illustrating the change in levels in the stepped construction. Published in *Arhitectura* journal. (Unknown, 1972)

6. The term is translated from the article in the *Arhitectura* journal - “salon descoperit”, which refers to the external public areas that contribute to the social value of the project.

The third aspect that contributed to the success of the project was the aesthetic vision. The sculptural tendencies of certain structural elements (and actual sculptures) integrated into the design provided the necessary amount of elegance and delicacy to an otherwise large construction. The architects mention in their interview that an integral part of the design was the collaboration with the team of plastic artists from Constanta, which proved to be enlightening. One of the pieces that are assumed to be provided by the team can be observed in Figure 13. Furthermore, the support structure of the staircase in Figure 14 is beautifully fabricated using precast concrete shapes, lightly detailed on the sides to accentuate the verticality. A unique solution for a seating area is located in its vicinity, formed out of fixed cylinders. The overall appearance of these elements is deemed stylish, contributing to the atmosphere of the exterior spaces. In addition, the prefabricated components that were used to decorate the facade, as well as the colourful balustrades and dividing panels underline the “volumetric geometry” (Manolescu and Mănăilă, 1973:6), while maintaining the visual stability of the elevation.

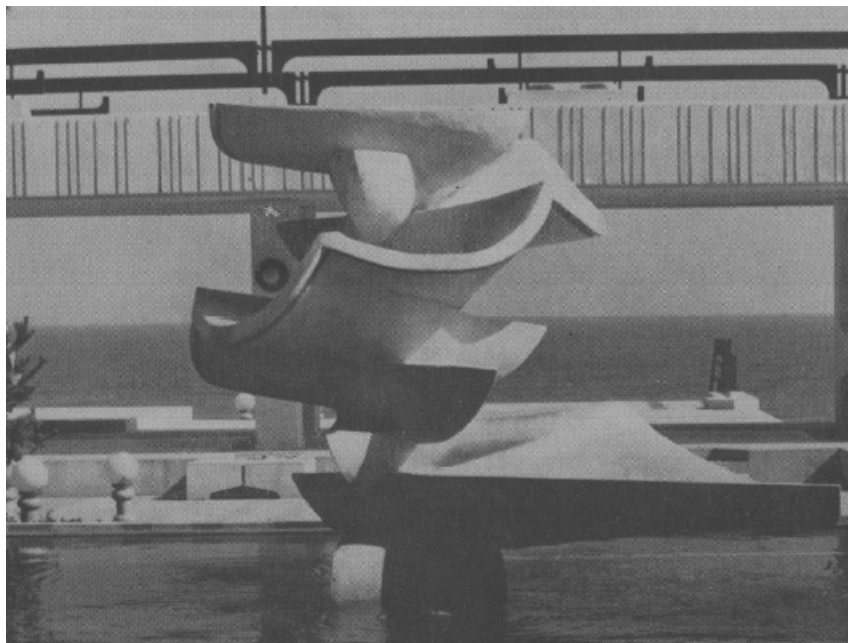


Figure 13. Sculpture. Published in *Arhitectura* journal alongside the interview. (Unknown, 1972)

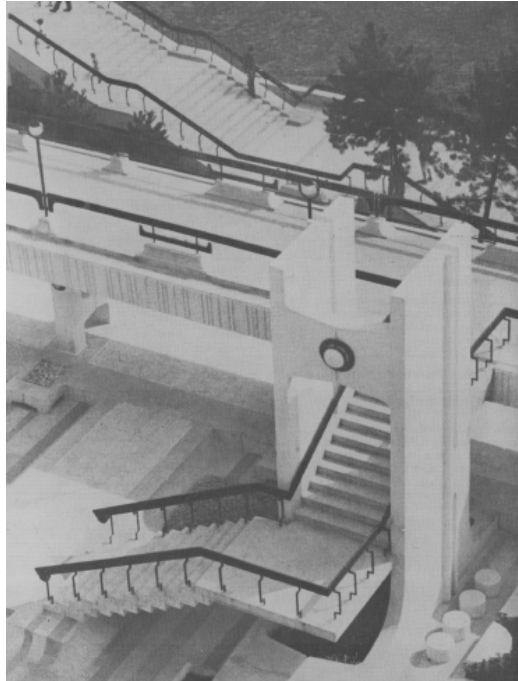


Figure 14. Staircase. Published in *Arhitectura* journal alongside the interview. (Unknown, 1972)

Part of the qualities of the project lie also in the internal spaces, that reflect the design tendencies of the period. The finishes that the architects opted for contribute to a natural and elegant atmosphere - timber boarding, ceramic tiles and brick cladding. Unique pieces of furniture and lighting fixtures have also been chosen to decorate the lobbies and other public areas. (Figure 15)



Figure 15. Lobby area. Published in *Arhitectura* journal alongside the interview. (Unknown, 1972)

2. Success & Praise

The Romanian seaside developments have been known to receive glorious reviews even following the first phase. The American architect and photographer G.E. Kidder Smith discussed Eastern European architecture in his book *The New Architecture of Europe*, published in 1962. When talking about the new constructions in Mamaia and Mangalia regions, he enthusiastically declares that “when Romanian architects with all their difficulties can turn out buildings such as the ones praised above, it is time to stand up and cheer.” (Kidder Smith, 1962:324)

Subsequently, the projects of the second phase were not short of praising themselves, particularly the Amfiteatru ensemble. In 1975, the 305th issue of the French publication *Techniques et Architecture*, notably mentioned the complex, with an abundance of images to complement it, placing it in relation to the aforementioned La Grande-Motte resort. Besides the Western press’s appreciation of the project, it benefitted from immeasurable success amongst the general public, which kept the hotel alive for a great period of time.

3. Decay

As previously mentioned, most of the buildings on the seafront have suffered in time due to poor execution of the construction. A visual study conducted in 2014, by B.A.C.U. (Birou pentru Artă și Cercetare Urbană = Bureau for Art and Urban Research) discusses in great detail the degradation that plagued the resort. It was noticed that the Amfiteatru building was the only one in an acceptable state. Panoramic and Belvedere, on the other hand, had visible traces of rainwater damage to the external layer of plaster, which in turn caused the disintegration of the concrete, to the point of exposure of the reinforcement. (Varenic, 2014)

Figures 16 and 17 uncover additional evidence of decay, particularly on the outdoor terraces. Due to lack of upkeep and maintenance, the pavement tiles are broken or missing, and the sculpture so carefully provided by the artists from Constanta is disrespectfully forgotten. The external staircases can also be seen in a state of disrepair, and according to B.A.C.U., the metal balustrades are corroded, all of which increase the risk of failure, potentially endangering visitors. (Varenic, 2014)



Figure 16. Internal courtyard. (Anghel, 2017)



Figure 17. (Anghel, 2017)

The Panoramic Hotel is considered to be in the worst shape compared to the other two buildings. Most of the building is shut and cannot accommodate visitors. (Varenic, 2014) As seen in Figure 18, some of the windows are broken and ironically, the “Ambiance Francaise” showcased a sign indicating a renovation state, which is a very little part of the whole ensemble that needed a serious makeover.



Figure 18. Panoramic Hotel. (B.A.C.U., 2014)

4. Ressurrection

“As a student, around the mid-80s, I would pass through the complex, without the opportunity of staying there, and I would admire it alongside other visitors from Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Germany. I could remark on their appreciation and respect for this gem. I would never have imagined that I would, one day, become the owner of this place. My goal is to reinstate the crown of the Romanian seaside and that the complex would become what it once was, and even more.”

Murad (2016, cited in Dinca, 2020)

One might argue that in order to recover the architectural, economical and social values that stood firmly upon the construction of this ensemble, and maintain its monumental status, a careful and intelligent restoration operation must occur. In the case of the Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere complex, rehabilitation began in 2019, and the hotel experienced a “renaissance”, under the new name of Phoenicia Blue View Resort.

The hotel benefitted from an unexpectedly enthusiastic success, immensely due to social media promotion. Curiously, the Instagram account of the resort provided sufficient evidence of the current state of the Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere buildings. Considerable repairs have ensued, and the buildings are in improved condition. Externally, the resort has kept most of its notable features - the pools are in pristine shape, and so is the repainted sculpture in the inner courtyard (Figure 19). In addition, a miniature version of a waterpark is installed on the second platform, for the children who visit the resort (Figure 20). Certain embellishments have been added in the form of lampposts and railings, but the pavement has been restored to its original look, integrating it within the new additions. The brick cladding seems to have maintained its aspect, assuming it has withstood the passing of time.



Figure 19. Internal courtyard marked by the portico, no longer housing food-related shops (Bazavan, 2021)



Figure 20. (Phoenicia Blue View, 2020)

Internally, however, none of the original pieces was kept, spaces having been developed chaotically, with no clear design direction. Bright colours and excessive displays of opulence have cursed the interior of the hotels. (Figures 21 and 22) The owner himself, Mohammad Murad, declared on his personal Facebook page, in 2020 “We did not have architects, designers or project managers, but we had something stronger: vision, will and perseverance.” (Murad, 2016, cited in Dinca, 2020) It is considered that in this case, unlike the exterior, the interior reflects the habits and demands of contemporary society. One might argue that the equivalent of using lower-quality materials for cheap and rapid construction is dismissing the importance of a qualified team of professionals that can deliver on certain aspects.



Figure 21. Reception area. (Phoenicia Blue View, 2022)

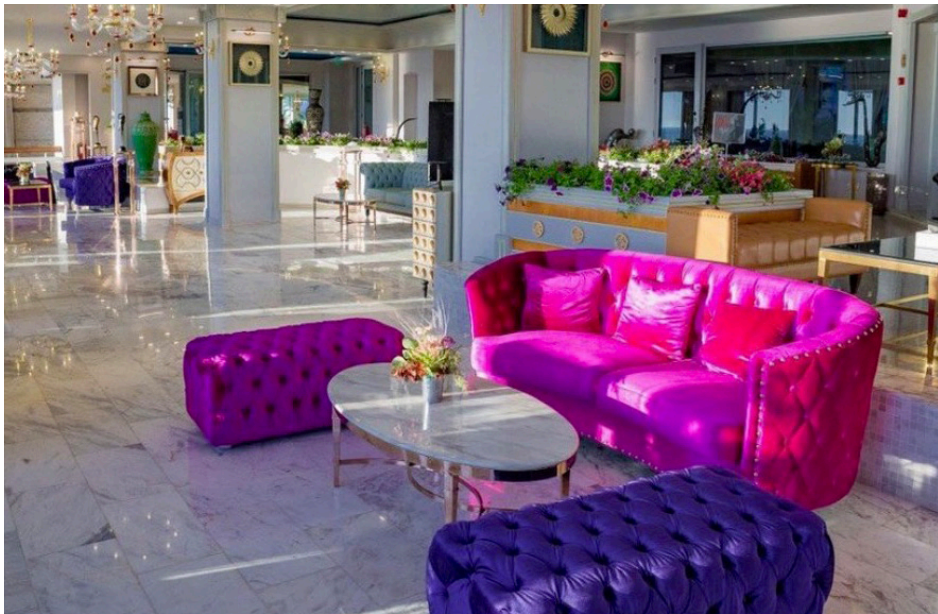


Figure 22. "Welcome place" (Phoenicia Blue View, 2022)

Similar attempts to recondition neglected seaside architecture have been made in Pula, Croatia, namely Hotel Brioni. The modernist silhouette that rose above the pines of the Adriatic Coast entertained guests such as the actress Sophia Loren, Boney M, ABBA and Josip Broz Tito, making it one of the most prominent luxurious hotels of the 1970s. (Moore, 2022) Nowadays, the establishment is taking advantage of similar success, having been refurbished as part of The Radisson Collection. As shown in Figure 23, the changes inflicted upon the hotel included its exterior as well, in comparison to Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere. The shared amenities have been improved - the promenade has been transformed into a pool, whereas the indoor swimming area has decreased in height to allow for a roof terrace. Internal refurbishments seem to have been dealt with more subtly and elegantly, compared to Amfiteatru (Figures 25 and 26 comparing old vs new). The colour palette is kept to a minimum, reminiscent of Brioni's earlier looks.



Figure 23. Hotel Brioni, Pula, Croatia. (Unknown, n.d.)



Figure 24. Hotel Brioni before development - indoor pool double height space. (Kurzyk, 2018)



Figure 26. Hotel Brioni former interior (Ptáček, 2018)



Figure 23. Hotel Brioni reception area. (Unknown, 2023)

05/ CONCLUSION

When talking about refurbishing certain spaces or pieces of architecture, especially those that exist as a result of political oppression, one must be very cautious in approaching the subject. On the one hand, "To interfere is to condescend, to infer a lack of understanding about the degree of trauma inflicted by an era still too fresh in the minds of many to be forgotten or forgiven." (Heathcote, 2014) However, from an architectural standpoint, societies should preserve valuable architecture that not only poses a positive aspect that stems from past traumas but also helps shape the identity of a nation. From a less categorical perspective, the quote invites a certain sensibility that needs to be applied when dealing with such developments. Just as the buildings were designed by architects in specific conditions that dictated the practice, characteristic to certain periods, to discard them would not only prove to be unfair but also disrespectful.

In the case of the Romanian seaside and the question that guided the thesis, what is considered to be valuable architecture and what needs to be discarded? Having analysed the phenomena of the second half of the 20th century, through Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere, certain qualities have been identified. Starting with the complex's position in the landscape, it is discovered that nature itself obeys the principles applied to the design. Even to the point of its refurbishment, the complex highlights homogenous and coherent spaces, all brought forward with a vibrant modernist attitude, regarding it as a monument, an edifice.

After careful consideration of internal and external attempts at refurbishment, one might consider the operation rather unsuccessful, due to the unjust treatment of interior spaces. However, to draw such a drastic conclusion would be unfair - taking into account similar efforts that have taken place in Croatia. The dynamic nature of interior spaces would

endlessly be dictated by current occupiers, and in the case of hotels, clientele (or owners). Forasmuch as the architectural shell, the general configuration of spaces and all aspects that have been intended by the architect should stay intact, the finishes can always be adapted and loose furnishings can always be moved.

Alongside private investments and developments, the aforementioned BACU association has been been involved in the protection, documentation and preservation of socialist modernist edifices. Dumitru Rusu states that they “aim to revitalise this heritage not only for symbolic reasons, but because we believe in these elements that managed to defy some of the ideological requirements, giving the urban space a certain flavour so characteristic of those times,” (Rusu, 2018, cited in Larsson, 2018). The movement would ensure that socialist gems, including but not limited to holiday accommodations, would find their way back on the current coastal scene. Reimagined or repurposed, the structures would continue to prove their value, in the future.

The thesis places the Amfiteatru-Panoramic-Belvedere complex at the centre of Romania's modernity. Alongside more intimate resorts such as Neptun, or Cap Aurora, which, perhaps, were not as far-reaching in the Western context, Amfiteatru was without doubt remarkable. Neither its scale nor its architectural features - intertwining layers of circulation, shared courtyards or individual terraces - were recognizable to the Romanian tourist. Carmen Popescu states that “The architecture of the Romanian Black Sea littoral was a niche carved into the very body of the Socialist system.” However, the experience created through this type of architecture and its sophistication was separated from the political restraints of everyday life. (Popescu, 2016) Its appeal is established by the visitor's wish to experience a better life, a timeless aspect, that fuels the desire to preserve such pieces of architecture.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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