

15 Years of Urban Education in Romania

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1 ABSTRACT

Traditionally, urban education in Romania has been part of architectural education. A first distinctive planning department has been created in the early '40s in the Faculty of Architecture. Planning education developed later on within the Institute of Architecture and Systematization "Ion Mincu" in Bucharest, as an important component of the syllabus. A significant change occurred, after the fall of the communist regime, in 1997, when a Faculty of Urbanism was set up in the same Institute of Architecture - which became later on the University of Architecture and Urbanism. Setting up of a separate faculty represented a step forward towards a more profound specialisation and diversification of education in urban planning. However, strong connections with architectural education were preserved through a number of common classes, projects and methodological approaches. Since 2005 the Faculty of Urbanism shifted to Bologna system, by developing distinctive bachelor (1st cycle) and master (2nd cycle) programmes. Recently, there have been established a number of 6 professional competencies for 1st cycle programmes among which urban and landscape design. The paper is aiming to presenting the evolution urban education in Romania, with a clear focus on the new system established 15 years ago, analysing its main characteristics and investigating its connections with the architectural education and connected fields.

2 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, urban design and urban planning education have been connected in Romania to architectural education. The public school of architecture was set up by the end of the 19th century, in 1892, but a private activity in the field has started even two decades before. It has been much influenced initially by the French model of *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, but later on, during the inter-war period the influence of the Bauhaus "*school of architecture and applied art*" (Argan, 1976) became much more important. It was during the first decades of the 20th century, when spatial planning began to be taught in the Academy of Architecture and in the Polytechnique School in Bucharest. Among its main promoter was a civil engineer, Cincinat Sfințescu, who was educated in several Western schools, in Germany and France and taught urbanism for more than two decades (1923 – 1949) in the Academy of Architecture (Derer, 2008). His approach, rather technical, comprehensive and multidisciplinary, has influenced his successors who lead the chair of urban planning during the following decades. Besides him, architects like Al. Davidescu², Duiliu Marcu³, Radu Laurian or the civil engineer Virgil Ioanid, should be mentioned among the precursors of the planning education in Romania.

During the communist period, education in planning developed in both schools of architecture and civil engineering in Bucharest following different patterns: whether the former was more opened to spatial relations, history and aesthetics the latter was more oriented to the technical aspects of urban planning. However neither one nor the other did evolved as independent schools but remained parts of the formation of architects and civil engineers. Urban planner as such was not a recognized profession before 1990 and had no particular identity. Planners used to work in large public institutions as part of multidisciplinary teams. Their background was diverse: architects, engineers, geographers, economists or sociologists. It was only after 1990, that the problem of a new profession and of a planning education system was discussed and concrete

¹ The School of Bauhaus was set up in Germany, by Walter Gropius, in 1919 in Weimar and then in Dessau, where it was functional between 1925 and 1932 and finally in Berlin where it was closed by the Nazis in 1933. It should be noticed that its syllabus had two cycles – similar to the present Bologna system – of 3 and 2 years long. The graduates of the 1st cycle were called "craftsmen" and those of the 2nd one were 'master specialists'.

² Alexandru Davidescu (1858 – 1936) is considered one of the first Romanian urban planners, who is supposed to have lectured for the first time a planning course.

³ Duiliu Marcu (1885 – 1966), important Romanian architect and planner who led the first Urban Planning Chair of the Faculty of Architecture in 1943.

actions were taken, aiming to set up a new framework for the field in general. The turning point was in 1997 when a Faculty of Urbanism was set up in the Institute of Architecture in Bucharest - which became later on, in 2000 the University of Architecture and Urbanism "Ion Mincu". It is mainly about these last 15 years of specific planning education that the present paper is talking about, aiming to presenting its short evolution since it has been established, analysing its main characteristic and investigating its connections with the architectural education as well as its strengths and weaknesses in relation to market demands and European context.

3 THE 1ST DECADE OF THE TRANSITION

Planning education developed during the communist age within the Institute of Architecture and Systematization "Ion Mincu" as an important component of the syllabus. It was also taught in the University of Civil Engineering in Bucharest, but there, its weight in the formation of the student was much smaller. After December 1989, Romania shifted from a centralised and authoritarian regime to democracy and free market economy. Systematization was perceived by the Romanian society but also by the Western ones as one of the most powerful symbols of the communist regime, responsible for the destruction of a large part of the built-up heritage of towns and villages and for the brutal reshaping of the urban environment. For this reasons in December 1989 "*Systematization Law*" (58/1974) was abolished and systematization becomes overnight urbanism or territorial and town planning⁴. There was a time for rebirth and reconstruction in many fields and areas. Urban planning had a chance to get a new identity. Aware of the new challenges of territorial and urban development a group of professionals decided to take actions in this direction⁵.

The post-Decembrist evolution of urban planning education actually began with a first experimental stage by setting up of a short time higher education – college – which was functional from 1993 to 2005, with a branch set up later on in the city of Craiova for urbanism and administration in 2003. Although it was seen as a first stage only of higher education, it was a first step forward towards a distinct formation. It was also an experimental "laboratory" for developing the new curricula for the future educational programmes. Courses on urban geography, ecology, landscape, demography, urban traffic, on urban law and others were introduced. It was also a trampoline for some students, especially in the late '90s and early 2000s towards the future school of planning that was to be created. The experience of the "college" period proved to be useful later on when the Bologna process⁶ began.

It must be also mentioned that during the first half of the '90s, the interest for education in spatial planning grew, due to the need to adapt quickly to the demands of the new society and European integration. A number of post-graduate courses were organised in "Ion Mincu", but also in the School of Civil Engineering. On the other hand urban and territorial planning was included in the syllabuses of the newly developed faculties of architecture set up in other 3 important Romanian cities: Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Timișoara as well as in some private architectural faculties that were also developed (in Bucharest first and much later in Oradea).

The raising interest for planning education developed in parallel with the attempts of getting a distinctive identity of the profession of urban planner. In this respect it has to be mentioned the setting up of the Association of Professional Urban Planners in Romania (APUR) in 1991. The association developed new relationships and contacts with similar professional associations from France, UK (RTPI), and Italy and also with the European Council of Town Planners (ECTP). The latter was an important source of inspiration by its Charter of Amsterdam⁷, which was promoting at European scale the profession of town planner and was defining its nature and educational and training needs.

⁴ Mostly inspired by the French model "aménagement du territoire et urbanisme" and also close to the Italian form "pianificazione urbanistica e territoriale".

⁵ Must be mentioned prof. arch. Al. Sandu, who was Rector of the Institute of Architecture from 1992 to 2000 and arch. Șerban Popescu-Criveanu was a Minister for Spatial Planning in the early '90s, both spiritual descendents of Cincinat Sfințescu's heritage.

⁶ A new educational system essentially based on two main cycles adopted by the EU countries on the basis of the declaration signed in Bologna in June 1999 "On the European Space for Higher Education".

⁷ The Act of birth of the organisation, adopted in Amsterdam in 1985, which stated the field and nature of the professional town planner's activities, the educational and training criteria and professional and conduct requirements.

The decision to set up a new Faculty of Urban Planning in the former Institute of Architecture "Ion Mincu", 1997, was a major one and an important step towards a more profound specialisation and diversification of education in urban planning. It was thought in one single cycle with duration of 5 years and a half, the last semester being reserved for the elaboration of the graduation project. Until 2010, 8 series of students, around 400 in total, have graduated bearing the title of urban planner.

Although the basic characteristic of the new faculty remained the strong connections with the architectural field, which was achieved by a common part of the syllabus during the first educational years and by existence of common topics, projects and methodological approaches in general, it enabled a large diversification of the syllabus during the terminal years and an opening to connected fields as: geography, sociology, urban economy, urban ecology, administrative sciences a.o. It is also important to mention that the educational process was also aimed to develop specific skills to the new professionals such as: team working, communication and negotiation. Strategic planning and urban management were also introduced and more room was reserved to territorial planning and regional development.

It may be said that the first decade of the transition period was significant for the evolution of the planning education and can be characterised by the reconnection to the European values but also to the Romanian past, mainly to the inter-war period, when Romania was quite advanced in the field in both theoretical and practical aspects. It can be seen as the decade which tried to fill in and heal the fractures created by the communist age.

4 THE 2ND DECADE OF THE TRANSITION

The evolution of the educational system in planning cannot be discussed outside the general evolution of the Romanian society and most of all of the planning system as a whole. The 2nd decade of the transition is characterised by the consolidation of the legal framework in the field and by the recognition of the urban planner as a distinctive occupation. The setting up of the Romanian Register of Urban Planners in 2005 as a public autonomous body under the supervision of the in-line Ministry was a milestone in defining the identity of the profession. The new institution became responsible for managing the right of professionals to sign territorial and urban planning documents, or parts / chapters of them and by that to ensure the quality of the planning activity. As a token of the multi- and inter-disciplinarily features of planning the register was opened to various professions, besides planners: architects, landscape engineers, geographers, civil engineers, economists, sociologist, ecologists, historians a.o. By the end of 2011 the registered number of professionals was above 1,850, of which still the majority - 1,400 - were architects. The Register was also empowered to recognise the professional qualifications in the field of spatial planning and as a competent authority and user of the European Internal Market Information System (IMI)⁸.

The recognition of the profession of urban planner and its inclusion in the Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR) was a follow up of the evolution and development of the planning education system at the same time. During the 2000s the educational system got more diversified. At the beginning of the interval a new branch of landscape planning was developed in "Ion Mincu" Faculty of Urban Planning. It must be said that although the "Ion Mincu" Faculty remained the only planning one in the field, different sections and curricula were also set up and developed in academic institutions from connected areas such as geography, civil engineering, horticulture (related to landscape design).

The progress of the educational system could be also seen in the increased participation of its students and teachers to European educational programmes such as SOCRATES and ERASMUS as well as in national research programmes. The Faculty became also a member of the Association of Educational Schools of Planning (AESOP). Due to the multi-disciplinarity of the educational programme, the Faculty had to invite as associated professors, representatives from other academic areas. This was beneficial for establishing a larger cooperation among academic and research institutions from connected areas. In parallel to the 5.5 years graduating programme, a number of post-graduate programmes have also been developed in specialised areas such as urban management, integrated urban planning, territorial planning and regional development, which became also attractive for professionals from public administration aiming to improve

⁸ Law 200 / 2004 for recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications for regulated professions and the Gov. Emergency Ordinance 49 /2009 concerning the freedom of settling down of service providers and liberty to provide services in Romania, modified and completed by Law 68 /2010.

their knowledge in the field. It became a significant fact, that planning education was an open system accessible for graduates from various fields of activity.

During the 2nd half of the interval the major challenge for the faculty was related to the implementation of the Bologna system, based on the two learning cycles. Since 2005 the Faculty of Urbanism shifted to Bologna system, by developing distinctive bachelor (1st cycle - undergraduates) and master (2nd cycle - graduates) programmes. For the 1st cycle two programmes have been developed: urban design and planning and landscape design and planning. The 2nd cycle has been set up as an opened one, students from connected fields being admitted (geography, sociology, engineering, economics but also fine arts or journalism), in order to achieve multi-disciplinarity. The master programmes are more diversified: urban design, landscape, urban management, regional planning and development, mobility. They have been gradually introduced starting with 2009 and were fully operational in 2011. The present structure of the planning educational system in "Ion Mincu" university can be seen in the scheme below.

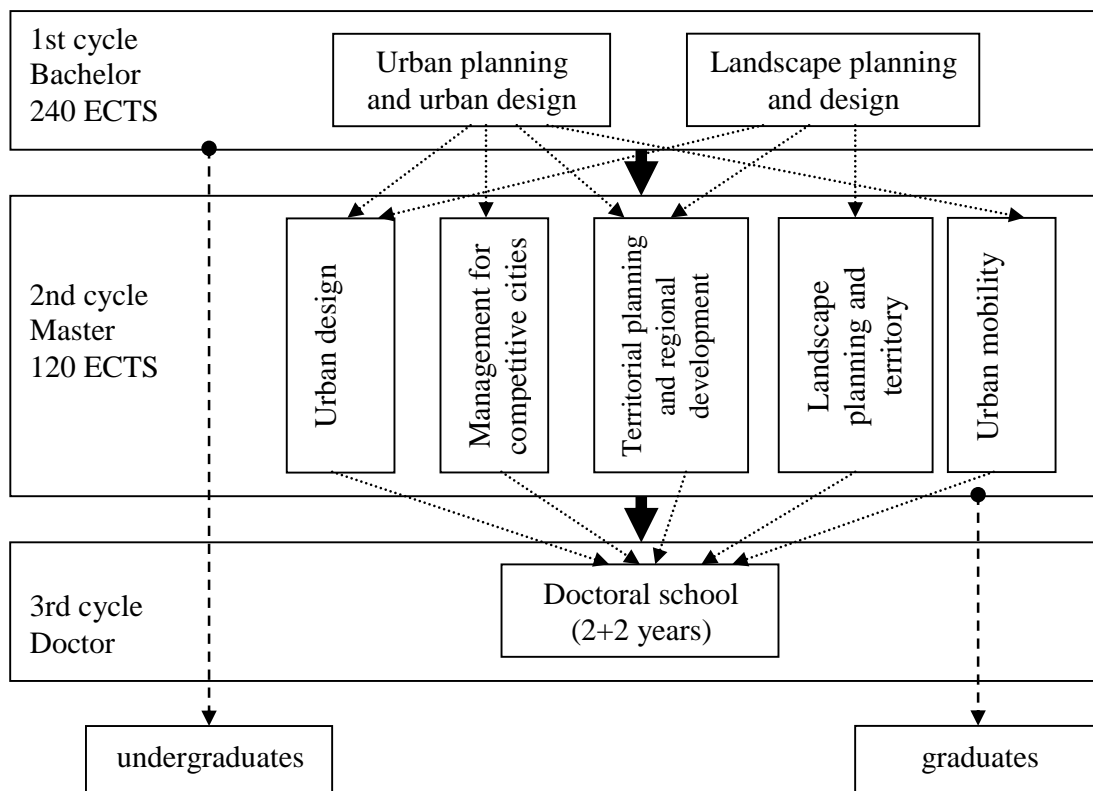


Figure 1: The present educational system in planning at the University "Ion Mincu"

It is worth to notice that the first Bologna generation of urban planners graduated in 2010⁹ simultaneously with the last generation of the previous 5.5 years integrated system. Compared to this one the new system, allowed planning education system to become more diverse and more specialised at the level of the 2nd cycle.

One basic characteristic of the planning education syllabus is the modular structure and the balanced weight of theoretical and practical activities. The latter ones represent about 40% of the total during the 1st cycle and less than 30% during the 2nd one, which is more focused on theory and development on research skills. The main modules of the bachelor programmes refer to: history of urbanism and architecture, environment, sciences, statistics, urban theory and practice, engineering and traffic, law and administration, landscape and territorial planning, urban regeneration.

Lately, there have been established a number of 6 professional competencies for the 1st cycle programmes: urban design, urbanism and administration and landscape design. These competences are of two kinds: professional and relational (horizontal). The professional ones are aiming to develop the following capacities:

⁹ Due to the fact that the 1st series of the Bologna system had a 1st cycle of 3 years only.

- interpretation of the historic evolution of human settlements and the relation with the territory,
- description and analysis of the functional structure of the territory and human settlements,
- designing of simple buildings,
- applying the specific legislation and explaining the institutional relationship,
- making use of the specific methods and techniques of planning and design,
- integrated approach to economic, social, cultural, environmental dimensions of the territory and human settlements.

The horizontal ones refer to communication and negotiation skills, team working and participation to multi- and trans-disciplinary teams, to adequate use of information means and of a language of international relevance. These competencies have been included into The National Register of Qualifications for Higher Education (NRQHE) and represent a reference point for any other educational programme to be further developed in the Romanian environment.

5 PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUSIONS

As the figure below is showing, during the two decades of transition, the planning educational system, developed by the "Ion Mincu" university, went through a continuous and dynamic transformation process, evolving from primary forms of higher education to more complex ones. Since the Faculty of Urban Planning was created, 15 years ago, the profession of urban planner got an identity and his formation became more diversified and specific, getting more independent from the architectural area where it came from.

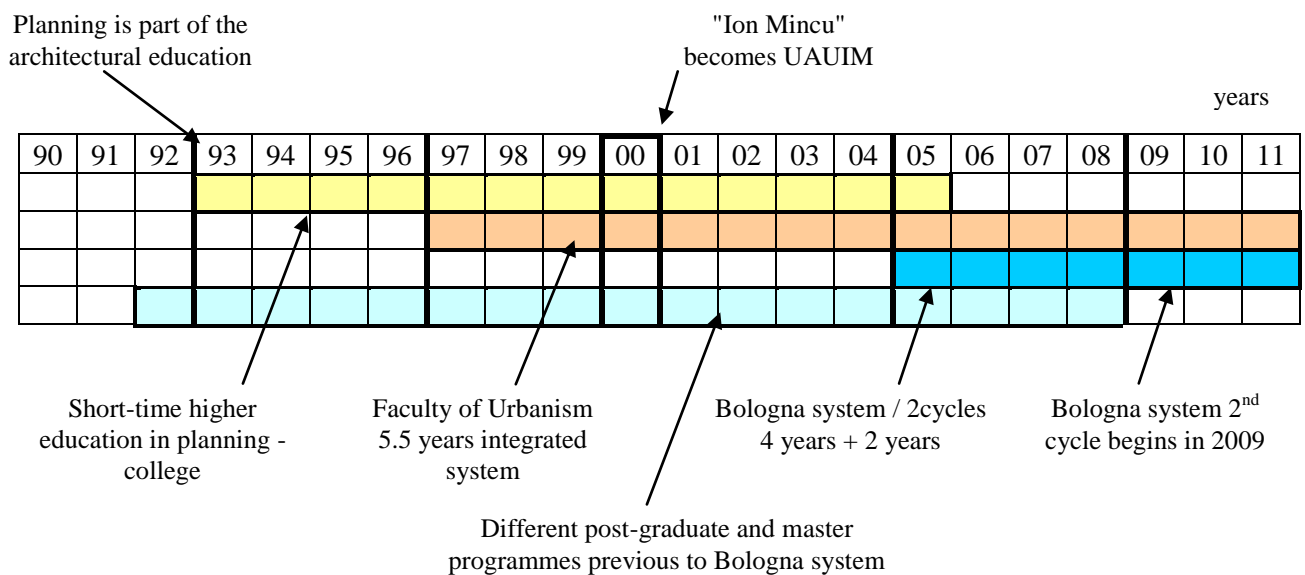


Figure 2: The post-communist evolution of the educational planning system of the "Ion Mincu" university

At present urban education is also developing in other Faculties of Architecture in Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Oradea or Timișoara. Specialisations are also developing for master programmes too. However, within the new system, the basic core of the educational system remains the "Ion Mincu" Faculty of Urban Planning, which provides the basic formation of the 1st cycle and a larger number of master programmes for the 2nd cycle. The secondary formation gets ever more diversified and develops in other academic institutions in engineering, geography, horticulture besides architectural schools as is shown in figure 3.

The development of the planning education was a response to market demands. Whereas there are around 60-70 undergraduates each year there is a growing number of graduates up to 100 and more. Their integration in the labour market is quite satisfactory. Although no special inquiries were done, from the informal discussions with the former alumni, it came out that they can easily find a job either in the private or public sector, in administration or development agencies. One difficulty remains however the low attractiveness of the public sector, due to the low revenues. Because of this, most of the young graduates are looking for jobs in the private sector or are aiming for post-graduate or doctoral studies abroad where they are usually successful.

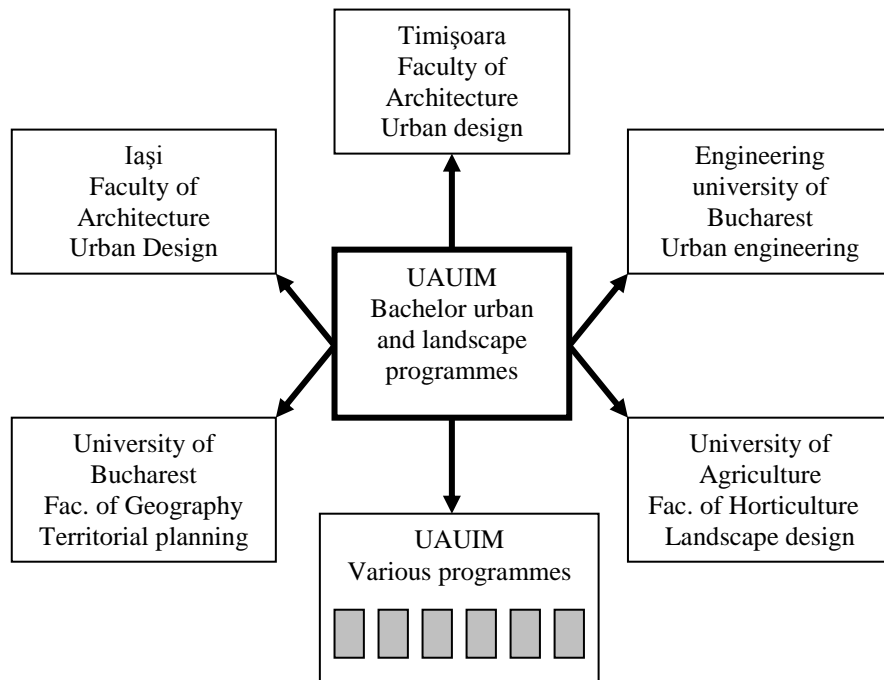


Figure 3: The present system of bachelor and master programmes in planning education in Romania

Among the future major challenges of the educational planning system is its continuous consolidation and diversification. It is foreseen that some new programmes for both 1st and secondary cycle to be developed especially in relation to urban planning and public administration. Another challenge is related to an improved structure and coherence of the master programmes in order to meet higher standards required by the Register of Romanian Planners. A step forward will also be related to the setting up of an independent doctoral school of planning and developing research activities in the field. In this respect a dedicated research centre is to be set up at the level of the university. A number of actions are also foreseen to improving the knowledge about planning education in schools, in order to increase the area of selection.

It can be said, that although a lot of things have been done there is still a lot to do in order to set up a long term sustainable educational system in spatial planning, to develop strong connections to related areas, to get a national and international recognition and to contribute to improvement of the spatial planning framework in general, at the level of the Romanian society.

6 REFERENCES

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