

EROILOR BOULEVARD, CLUJ-NAPOCA – BETWEEN MAIN STREET AND CLONE STREET

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Abstract: - Anthropology and Earth sciences demonstrated that the city is the maximum „local” expression of any human society. All historical ages are expressions of frontier phenomena, while the city in general is a „frontier construction”. Within the Romanian space, Cluj-Napoca is the *perfect example* when it comes to constructing urban geosystems. As an expression of frontier phenomena in synthesis with „the spirit of place”, one of the frontiers that shaped it is the European frontier. The evolution and expansion of this universal frontier, in different forms and syntheses, manifest themselves today through „processes”, like the ones we call the *cloning process*, process of clone towns and process of ghost towns. These processes are increasingly present at macroreferential as well as microreferential level, through *clone streets*, which lost their personality and local spirit and were replaced by different imported forms. Whether Eroilor Boulevard, Cluj-Napoca, is attacked by this process of clone streets or whether it is a Main Street, is the object of this article’s approach. In order to analyze the microgeography of this street, its state as well as the reaction to the cloning process, we built an epistemological „construction” in which we introduced: the localisation and the definition of this boulevard, through historical attributes, urbanistic attributes and its urban functions in the geosystem of Cluj-Napoca (urbanistic; retail; touristic; transit) and the present day status and the systemic reaction to the cloning and ghost street processes. The second part of the analysis was built around the *technique of comparing the sums* of the street’s elements, states and relations between elements and states in three historical periods: 1960-1989; 1990-2005 and 2005-2011. The last period is the one of maximum aggression from the cloning process, when Eroilor Boulevard went through obvious systemic changes and when its physiognomy and trump cards as Main Street, with historical, touristic, retail and urbanistic personalities, had a reaction. As a result, for now, Eroilor Boulevard, Main Street ever since 1405, is losing ground. An answer to the above mentioned aporetic question cannot be found, but the future will most definitely bring that equilibrium between the trumps of the reaction frontier and the universal frontiers.

Key-Words: - frontier phenomenon, clone street, ghost street, Eroilor Boulevard, Cluj-Napoca, attributes, reaction.

1 Introduction. European Cities and the Frontier Phenomena

The entire history of mankind is profoundly marked by the „frontier phenomenon” [1]. Cities, as an expression of the synthesis between the frontier phenomenon and the spirit of the place, are, basically, benchmarks for the evolution of the anthropic space generated, built and developed by the frontier phenomenon.

The frontiers, depending on the “conquered” geographic space, are classified into local frontiers and universal frontiers. The first frontier that attained the status of universal frontier is the European frontier [1]. Even though it is the one that

inherits the Judaic-Christian frontier, it is the first frontier to emerge in the European space after the devastating “Christian revolution” [2] and to generate and “build” all the cities of today’s Europe. One can find, within this phenomenon of the European frontier, the urban “root” of the Cluj-Napoca geosystem, a city which, on the Dacian anthropological foundation, is exclusively “a construction of the frontiers” [3]. With the exception of the Dacian-Romanian ethno-local frontiers, the frontier with the greatest influence on the evolution of the city of Cluj-Napoca is the European frontier, whose philosophy encompasses progress as its main vector. However, it took mankind 2000 years, to

understand that “development” means something completely different from what was so stubbornly “advertised” by the frontiers’ (European / Euroatlantic / world) philosophy.

The concrete manifestation forms of frontiers within the conquered space are the „frontier processes” [1]. These can also be universal, but also local. Among the processes of the European frontier, geographers have taken notice, in the last two decades, of a process that tends to become universal, a process that we call *urban cloning*. This process was put into view in 2002, when NEF (New Economics Foundation), a British economics and public policy think tank, started to publish a series of reports entitled “Ghost Town Britain” [4]. In 2004, the same NEF launched the concept of “Clone Town”, a process that manifests itself on main streets (high streets) that are still active from a systemic-urban point of view (economically, socially, culturally, etc.). Real local shops have been replaced by identikit shops that seem to spread like economic weeds, making main streets virtually indistinguishable from one another. Retail spaces once filled with a thriving mix of independent butchers, newsagents, tobacconists, bookshops, and family-owned general stores are becoming filled with faceless supermarkets, fast-food establishments and fashion outlets (mainly second-hand). Many town centres that have undergone regeneration have lost their sense of place and the distinctive facades of their main streets under the march of glass, steel and concrete blandness of franchises built for the demands of inflexible business models [5].

A clone town (or in our case a clone street) is a place that has had the individuality of its main streets shops replaced by a monochrome strip of global and national chains that means the city’s / town’s retail heart could be easily mistaken for other bland town centres [5].

The same approaches emphasize a fact that is fundamental and essential for this frontier process: the loss of sense of place in the main streets of the cities and towns “attacked” by this process or / and the degradation of the feeling of belonging to a certain *place* or our representation through that *place*. This mainly happens through loss of diversity, loss of local spirit, and of the *place’s individuality*. In the spirit of this geographic perspective, we intend to analyze whether Eroilor Boulevard from the City of Cluj-Napoca goes through this *cloning process*. We will therefore analyze the elements, the elements’ states and the relations between elements and their states in this

geourban micro system – the Main Street of Cluj-Napoca.

2 Eroilor Boulevard, Cluj-Napoca – Main Street or Clone Street

2.1 The Localisation and Definition of Eroilor Boulevard

The historical attributes of today’s street (Eroilor Boulevard), from a historical and identity point of view, are strong and representative. Urbogenetically and identity wise, it belongs to the second period of the city’s expansion, when, on the basis of the king’s privilege of 1405, it encompassed the southern and eastern suburbs (the eastern suburb dominated by Romanians, the southern by Hungarians, while the German Saxons occupied the town centre and the northern part). The new street texture gained „the Middle Street” (the Climbing Middle Street), which was connected to the main city gate, „the Middle Gate”, defended by „the Tower of the Middle Gate”, built in 1449, and managed and defended by the butchers guild. Acting as a middle point between the urbanistic phase of medieval cities with a central square and the development of commercial and trade relations with the outside, the street will eventually take the function of trade thoroughfare and also of local-frontier space between the rural and urban civilizations. Having to ensure the traffic flow between the intramuros and the outside, it will escape from the future real estate aggression of the nobility, who, across the years, built palaces within the city walls, remaining a main street, which connected the the town’s „agora” and the extramuros and which, until the late 20th century, will sustain weekly and monthly fairs.

From 1405 until now, it will remain a predominantly retail and craftsmen street (in 1605-1606, out of the 11 Romanian butcher shops in the city, four were situated in the Middle Street Quarter) [6].

After the demolition of the city’s walls, the street became the main axis between the two great urban squares of the city, Unirii Square and Avram Iancu Square, a function whose importance will increase and gain new urbanistic, historical, social and economic valences. Basically, its identity within the urban space will gain strength through its exclusively civic functionalities (circulation, trade,

tourism, services, crafts) and by avoiding frontier aggressions (ethno-gentrification, *ethnocentrifugation* or other political, urbanistic issues).

The contemporary patrimonial architecture preserves a urban, late medieval particularity, but, within its present day „landscape”, a historical architectural register comes forth, which is representative through: Baroque architecture – 20 buildings; Neobaroque – five; Neoclassic – six; Classic – seven; Neo Renaissance - two; Bauhaus – three, continuing with some other outstanding buildings, with the following styles: Art Nouveau; Art Deco; eclectic, etc. The street has fewer, but still representative monumental buildings, for the Baroque period (at number 7 and 32 – The Small Banfi House and the Minorite Church, today the Greek Catholic Church), for the Neo Renaissance (the Old City Hall and the City’s Casino), for Art Nouveau (the building at no. 40), Neo Byzantine (The Orthodox Church), etc., its axis being dominated by the Memorandist Monument and the Lupa Capitolina Statue, donated by the Italian State.

The street also has buildings with commemorative slabs (all set up by the Hungarian State) at no. 1 and 9. It also preserves some interesting and picturesque „traces” of the 20th century burg, like the ones that gave it the name „Ashtray Street” (along the side walks, set on building walls, there were small ashtrays so that passersby could throw their cigarette buds and matches – today, there are only a couple of them, relics of a forgotten age, at number 4, 21, 27 and 40.

The urbanistic evolution of Eroilor Boulevard comes from the documentary reconstruction (maps, plans, drawings, pictures, photographs, films), but their analysis, as well as the analysis of the contemporary urban landscape reveals the specific urbanistic evolution of a street with a major role in the structure of Cluj-Napoca’s urban geosystem, from its construction (as entrance to the city) to the present day, when it represents, at the same time, a urban historical calendar, and a systemic element with present and future, as we shall see in the following pages.

In terms of the present day *urbanistic attributes* of Eroilor Boulevard, we can say that Cluj-Napoca has many „streets” with well established valences. In general, Eroilor Boulevard shows at least two types of valences: functional and symbolic. These valences are generated by the toposystemic position in the urban architecture on one hand, and by the frontier functions within the local social and cultural

synthesis on the other. Within this context, Eroilor Boulevard appears as a complex element on the city’s map which results from the planimetric association of the map with other architectural-urban elements (buildings, public institutions, public squares, cultural institutions, traffic flows – pedestrian, commercial, etc.).

If for the street’s tracing (in 1405), „the place’s spirit” definitely had something to say, being the same spirit found in Dacian, Etruscan and Roman architecture, in which this thoroughfare was the main entrance axis in the city, the modern and contemporary periods show us a complex street, a bivalence between *east-west axis* and *urban „lever”*. If the role of central axis comes from the city’s pattern, we put forward the concept of *urban lever*, which, in the case of Eroilor Boulevard, is obvious between the two main urban public spaces, that is Unirii Square and Avram Iancu Square.



Fig. 1 The location of Eroilor Boulevard (in red) between the two main squares of Cluj-Napoca

Therefore, the central functional area [7], dominated by the two squares, one overlooked by the Romanian Matei Corvin, the King of Hungary and one by the uncrowned king of Transylvanian Romanians, Avram Iancu, is architecturally balanced in such a way that the entire urbanistic equilibrium of Cluj-Napoca (historical, vehiculatory, symbolic, commercial, cultural, etc.) depends on it. These urbanistic attributes give Eroilor Boulevard „the geosocial semnification” that results from its toposystemic position and from the behaviour of the community. Right now, this boulevard ensures a complex functionalism: transit; access to buildings and institutions; connection between open spaces; retail; tourism; culture; etc.

The urban functions of Eroilor Boulevard. The consecrated elements of this Main Street, that are used for analysis, conclude that its functions are the following: retail; touristic; urbogenetic

(architectural); cultural and transitory, which are all tertiary functions.

The systemic elements, which sustain these tertiary functions, can be presented in the following manner:

- the predominantly epoche architecture: 48 buildings situated on the two fronts, comprising several styles characteristic for the 15th-20th century period;

- buildings that are historical and architectural monuments at numbers 5, 7, 12-21, 27, 29, 31, 32 and 33;

- its specificity as retail Main Street: before the threshold moment of 1989-1990, the street had 51 distinctive retail spaces; today, it has 131 retail and services spaces;

- the boulevard's physiognomy is dominated on the east-west axis by the Memorandist Monument;

- it is a lever street between the two main squares of the city, each with its own set of monuments, buildings, institutions, hotels, restaurants, churches / cathedrals, etc.;

- it sustains the east-west transit axis of the city and ensures the across connection between the blocks of the central functional area (north-south) through two cross intersections [7].

- it is partially a pedestrian area and to a degree ensures the east-west road traffic on two lanes, with the possibility to turn south in two places;

- it hosts two monumental churches (Orthodox and Greek-Catholic);

- it also hosts the tourism information office of the city, managed by the Cluj-Napoca City Hall, the Victoria Cinema, the Military Roundtable, etc.

2.2 The Present Day State of the Boulevard and its Reaction to the Cloning and Ghost-Street Processes

Our endeavour, after completing the geoanalytical steps, must come up with the answer to the question: Eroilor Boulevard, Main Street or clone street? If we fell in the trap of epistemological modeling, put forth by the General System Theory, the analytic answer would be blank, framework like, statistic and superficial. Without falling prey to the psychoses of geography, we believe that any endeavour of this kind must be guided by the complexity sciences, whose philosophy makes use of transdiferences that, in our case, are extremely important in order to prevent schematization. It is the only way through which geography can attain the status of *philosophy for measurable sciences*, a

philosophy that must be used to present the status and prospective situation of this boulevard. We will therefore choose a technique of framework vehiculation, in order to compare three historical periods that are representative for the street in question: 1960-1990; 1990-2005 and after 2005, when the processes of clone street and ghost street became more obvious in the geosystem of Cluj-Napoca. Between the first period (that we like to call the romantic-modern Cluj) and the last two, we emphasize the threshold moment of 1989-1990.

What can be considered remarkable and representative for Eroilor Boulevard (then Dr. Petru Groza Street), as Main Street, during the romantic-modern period?

The boulevard of that time presented itself (urbanistically and architecturally) as a historical melange between the old medieval street (through its buildings) and the modernity of the 20th century burg: large sidewalks (2-3 metre wide) on both sides; a carriageway with two lanes for each direction; a 5 metre wide center walking footway with trees and several uses (benches to rest and take shelter, parking spaces for vehicles, spaces for Christmas decorations, etc.).

The retail street had a rich and interesting offer: restaurants with specific foods - cabbage, pasta or potato based dishes; Zahana, with Romanian specialities, etc., the „Aperitiv” Restaurant, with menus prepared in plain view; fine dining („Bulevard”) or taverns / beerhouses; fast casual shops like „Gospodina”; famous confectioneries like „Opera” and „Carpați” (at the two ends of the street); a famous teahouse, „Plafar”, in which the customer or the tourist could serve a hot tea in a pleasant and intimate atmosphere; coffeshops („Mamaia”, „Aperitiv”), with its famous sand heated coffee and which had, from 6 to 8 am, loyal customers on their way to work, from 8-11 am – pensioners, the local bohemian crowd, tourists, while from 11 to noon – local clerks, and in the afternoon – a mix of tourists, students, locals on a casual walk on Main Street, etc.

The street filled up from 10 am to 6 pm with scores of shoppers that flooded the footwear, clothing, jewelry, porcelain shops („Iris” and „Porțelanul”), bookshops, flower, vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat products shops, butchers, tailor shops, hair salons and cafes.

The touristic street was welcoming, easily accessible from all areas and adjacent points, fully connected with the above mentioned squares and to the neighbouring streets. It attracted, in a

subconscious manner, the business tourist, the event consumer from the two squares, the medical tourist, the transit tourist, etc. It was also welcoming for the pedestrian tourist, for the one who arrived by car (there were possibilities to park right in front of the shop), for the local people that transited the area. Basically, the boulevard of this period had all the elements characteristic of urban tourism: primary; secondary and, additional elements [8].

After the threshold moment of 1989-1990, in the transience period, the boulevard becomes extremely dynamic from a retail point of view, but still manages to maintain a balance (until 2000) between its classic look and the pressures of change. „Brand” fashion outlets begin to appear, the retail spaces become more „primitive”, they often change their occupants, and step by step start to lose their retail specificity and individuality. The aggressiveness of an increasing traffic forces the local authorities to restructure the street by enlarging the carriageways, removing the possibility to park along the middle footway, thus transforming it in a greenway for shoppers, tourists, pupils and students and ensuring an ecological balance for the changing street.

The holarchy of an oversystem, attacked by the aggressive processes of the Euroatlantic frontier (peripheralization, the banking raid, the devastation of the productive patrimony, etc.), processes that the reaction frontiers cannot cope with, is also transferred to the Eroilor Boulevard microsystem, which in 2000 seems „confused” and „disoriented”, partially losing its identity, searching for new states of balance and evolution.

The last decade created a certain microgeography within Eroilor Bld., that has been criticized by specialists. What does someone with a trained eye critically observe in comparison to the period of *romantic-modernism*? One can clearly see the disappearance of specialized restaurants, of classic coffeeshops, of shops selling local products (clothing, footwear, porcelain, etc.), of leather and tailor workshops, of local market shops (with fresh, local products), of haberdasheries and of candy shops. Basically, from the 51 shops and workshops that occupied the retail spaces of the „old Main Street”, only four still remain today („Plafar”; the jewelry shop at number 4; the „Luciana” Restaurant – the former „Bulevard” and one of the three halls of the „Vărzărie-Păstăioase-Cartofărie” Restaurant.

However, in 2011, the retail units of this boulevard can be classified as follows:

Table 1 The distribution of retail on Eroilor Boulevard in 2011

No.	Type of retail unit	Number of units
1.	Bars, cafes and coffee shops	9
2.	Mobile phone repair shops	9
3.	Translation offices	7
4.	Travel agencies	6
5.	Notary and lawyers	6
6.	Banks	5
7.	Beauty shops / salons	4
8.	Insurance companies	4
9.	Clothing and textiles	4
10.	Restaurants	4
11.	Trinket and jewelry shops	4
12.	Pastry shops	3
13.	Pawnbrokers	3
14.	Currency exchange	3
15.	Fast food	2
16.	Hairdressers	2
17.	Pharmacies	2
18.	Flower shops	2
19.	Book shops	2
20.	General stores	1
21.	Hotels	1
22.	Couriers	1
23.	Gambling establishments	1
24.	Antique shops	1
25.	Music shops	1
26.	Pet shops	1
27.	Other	13
28.	“Ghost” or empty spaces	8

There are several worrying phenomena concerning the special geography of this street, such as:

- empty spaces (elements of *ghost-streets*), that started to appear after 2008;
- the appearance of *clone shops* (second-hand fashion outlets; fast-food establishments; trinket shops; mobile phone shops; pawnbrokers, etc.)
- worryingly rapid changes in the specificity of shops;
- the takeover of old retail spaces by banks, most of them being branches of foreign institutions (ING; Piraeus Bank; Volksbank; Garanti Bank, and BCR, subsidiary of Erste Group Bank AG);
- aggressive interventions and alterations to building facades.

Urbanistically, commercially, touristically and connectively, the street starts to look more and more

like “something else”. The new landscape architecture of the street, due to an urbanistic interventionism oriented towards the attainment of certain purposes with social significance, is increasingly more criticized by specialists (mainly architects) and did not manage to achieve the revival desired by the local authorities. The result is the boulevard’s relativity and uncertainty in terms of convergence and transit (longitudinal and across) to and from the neighbouring functional micro-zones or urban squares, which already affects the population’s behavior. From our point of view, this street nowadays contains some striking inconsistencies within its structure, which create the phenomenon of rejection or at least of unattractiveness:

- having a heavy road traffic flow breaks the two street fronts; between the two sidewalks there is only one zebra crossing, which is extremely discouraging for pedestrians, a situation further aggravated by the long waiting time (approximately 1 minute 30 seconds);

- the construction of a large pedestrian zone using granite (an impersonal construction material) [9], poorly built and maintained, creates a feeling of repulsion, thus inducing the sense of hurry and not attraction towards the shop;

- “fitting” the boulevard with fountains, kiosks and huge advertising pillars does not suit the architecture of the surrounding buildings.

3 Conclusions

From a functional-urbanistic point of view, Eroilor Boulevard, starting from around 2008-2009, lost its battle with malls and the large hypermarkets and supermarkets (which can be considered *intraurban cities* in Cluj-Napoca).

This meant that the retail space of the street began to decay and fall prey to kitsch. As a conclusion to the issue at hand, we have to briefly compare the three periods in the evolution of the street in the following manner: Eroilor Boulevard, Cluj-Napoca, begins to resemble „something else”, it loses its originality and functionality, and if today it cannot be considered a clone street, a careful observer might see that it is increasingly a kitsch

street, with „modified” and „blind” windows, lacking charm and attractivity, useful only if you need to shorten your walk between two areas and maybe for hosting beer festivals.

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