

“Knowing Bucharest”

2. Background of Metropolitan Area

2.1 Urban Development History

The name of Bucharest appeared for the first time in history in the 15th century. They say that Bucharest was founded as the capital of Wallachia by Lord Vlad. Bucharest was always in the front line against the Ottoman Turks. Bucharest began to be built as a modern city in the middle of the last century when Romania became an independent country. In 1861, gaslights on the streets were introduced earlier than Paris and Berlin. In 1871 a tram system began operation. Many large-scale buildings along Victoria Street were constructed in those years. At that time Bucharest was called Little Paris in the Balkans and now the memory of that name can be seen in part of the central area of Bucharest. The built up area in 1930s encompassed a 5-km radius, corresponding well with the principal part of the present built up area. This compact city feature is one of the main characteristics of Bucharest.

After 1947 during the era of the communist party regime, in the eastern, southern and western parts of the city, many high rise residential buildings were constructed and large-scale industrial estates were developed in extended directions. In the 1980s, a mammoth building called People's Palace was constructed after the demolition of many historical buildings (Figure 2.1).

2.2 Geographical Position

Bucharest is located at the crossing point of two axes. One is the East-West axis which extends from Constanta to West Europe via Hungary and Austria, and another, the North-South axis which extends from Istanbul and Athens of Mediterranean sea to Russia via Ukraine. These circumstances from ancient times to modern times located among large empires such as the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Austrian, Russian and German have had an influence on Bucharest. Although Bucharest might not yet have used its geographical advantage, it has high potential of development as an international nodal point for people and goods.

2.3 Natural Conditions

The topography of Bucharest is flat so there is no obstacle for development of the urban formation and transport network. This is one reason why Bucharest features a typical radial and ring network pattern. The existence of the Dambovitza River flowing through Bucharest and several lakes on the northern side of the city indicates that the land in and around Bucharest is covered with sediments from the river. The fact that Bucharest suffered from several large earthquakes suggests that seismic design considerations are required for urban planning and building construction.

2.4 Transition Economy

Romania stands on the path of transition from a planned economy to a market economy. The progress of transition of Romania has not advanced as much as Hungary and the Czech Republic. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased constantly from 1993 to 1996, but then it started to decrease.

In particular, the state-owned heavy industries which were the mainstay of the Romanian economy in the past, are rapidly declining because of the market economy. Many urgent issues remain to be solved, including the privatization of these state-owned companies, fostering of high-tech industry, and institutional reform for the restoration of the Romanian economy. In the course of the transition, a difference in income has appeared in the society where it did not exist and the uneven distribution of wealth due to the underground economy has caused social unrest to increase.

2.5 Population Size and Density

The population of Bucharest metropolitan area is 2.15 million and this figure means Bucharest stands higher by population size compared with Budapest (2 million), Warsaw (1.7 million), Sofia (1.4 million), Prague (1.2 million) exempting London and Paris. The population density of Bucharest is 3,600 person/km², higher than Warsaw (3,400 person/Km²), Prague (2,400 person/Km²), Budapest (1,200 person/Km²). The characteristics of the Study Area are that farm lands or industrial estates appear suddenly where high density residential areas end. In other words, Bucharest is a compact and high density city. However low density residential developments on the premise of using vehicles along the Outer Ring Road have appeared and signs of urban sprawl can be observed (Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3).



Historical buildings

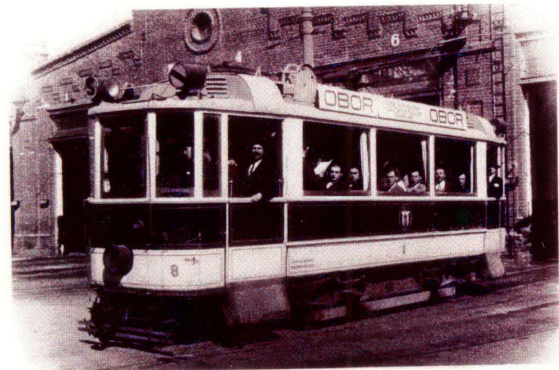


Photo of Vintage Tram



Green spaces near Triumph Arc



Dambovitza River in the central area



Piata Unirii



Tall residential buildings

Figure 2.1 Old and Modern City of Bucharest

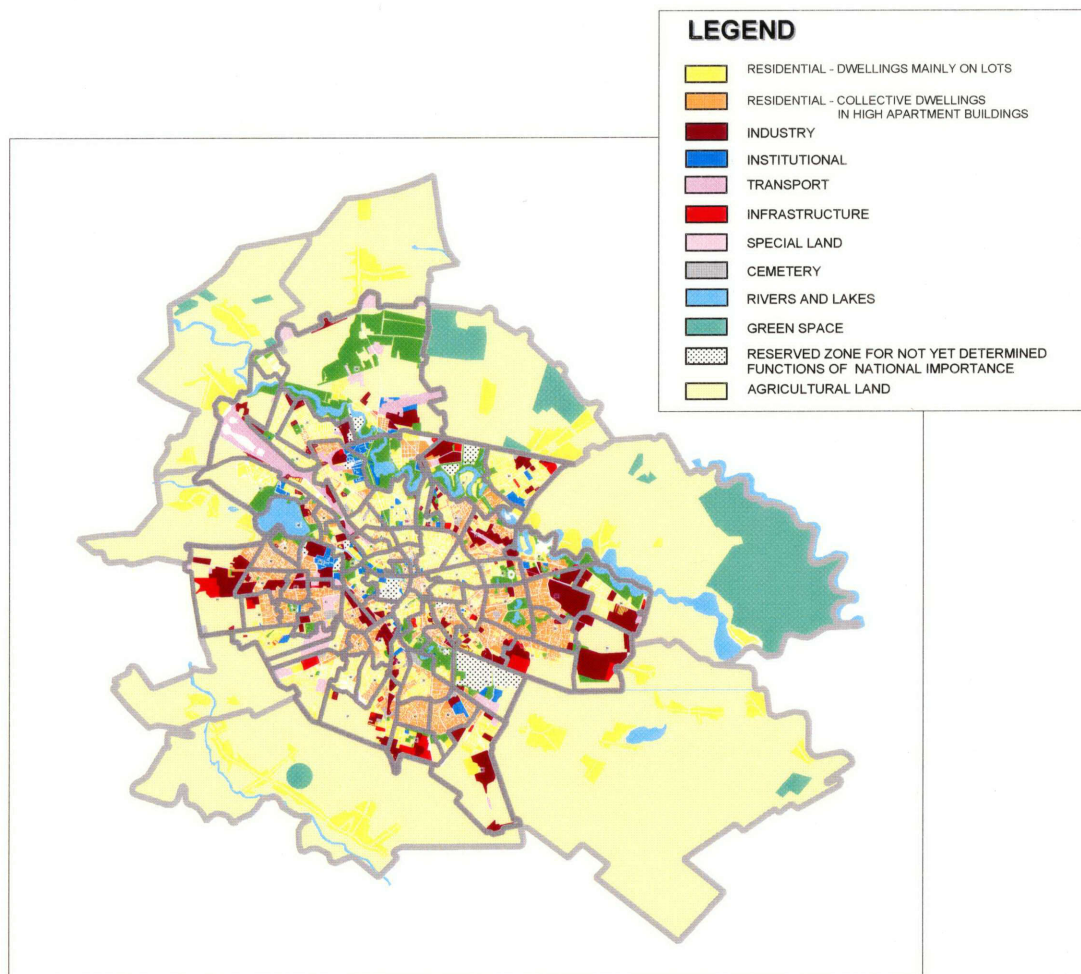


Figure 2.2 Current State of Land Use

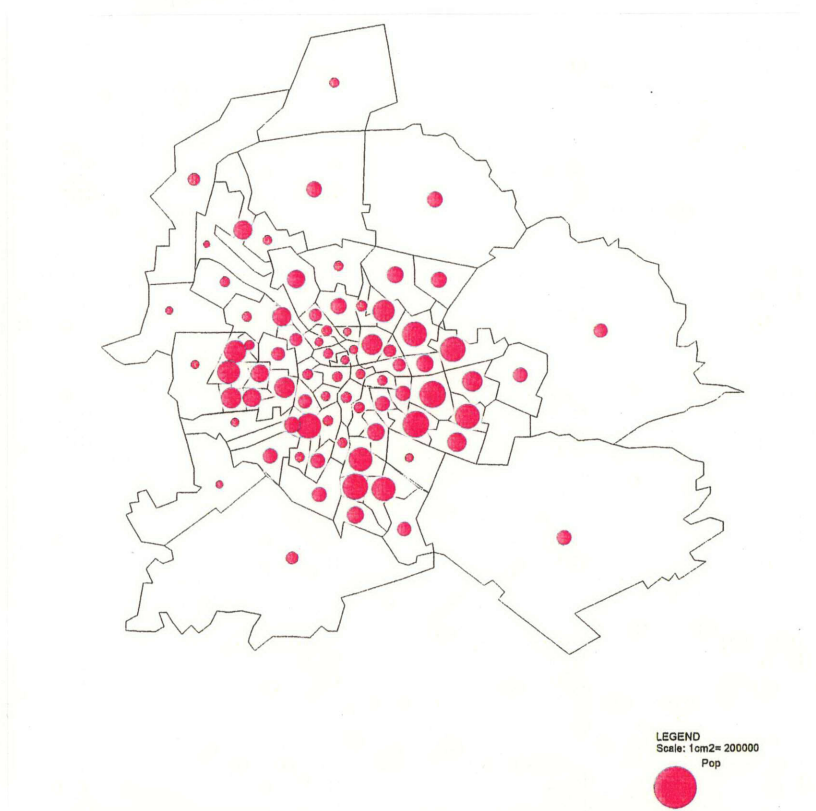


Figure 2.3 Population in Each Zone