

## DEMALLISHABLE MALLS – RESILIENCE IN COMMERCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

### PhD thesis – Summary

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

*„Architecture’s professional-academic establishment has failed twice with shopping. High architecture bungled first by denying shopping’s presence, then by accepting it blindly. The refusal of architecture’s elite to engage retail has, as a result, disqualified designers from participating in the twentieth century’s biggest contribution to urbanism.” [1, p. 391]*

The paper *Demallishable Malls – Resilience<sup>1</sup> in commercial environments*, follows up on a highly rejected subject both by the professional and academic milieu, as shopping malls seem to be a much too trivial program for “any self-respecting architect”. [2] [1] And yet, numbers illustrate a clear prevailing of commercially purposed built surface, pinpointing its importance in the contemporary city: in the United States “shopping accounts for the majority-25 % of the built nonresidential construction, followed by 15% percent for education and 14 percent for offices”, in the United Kingdom, there are “8.7 more shops than churches and 2174 times more than universities”, whereas Romania has been undergoing a growth of over 3 000 000 sqm of commercial surface between 1990 and 2011. [3] . This research is aiming thus to fill out a gap identified in the state of the art literature, by addressing the typology from an evolutionary perspective and raising awareness for the importance of time as a variable in planning commercial developments.

The commercial revolution, that has been producing and replicating the regional shopping mall for more than 50 years both in America and Western Europe, has taken a totally different turn within these mature economic environments since the 90s, provoking a crisis of the typology, as a result of complex urban and social mutations, doubled by an overmallings of the market. Constant growth and evolution of newer formats, through their cannibalistic effect [1, p. 223], enhanced by a strong development of e-commerce market shares, have been the major causes for hundreds of dying malls across the USA, incapable of facing the increasing competition. Those which survive the race, are undergoing a process of re-urbanization, of opening up towards the existing city fabric, through important interventions upon the built environment and the dissolution of the “box”: a set of procedures that suggestively has been

<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the working definition for commercial resilience established by the research group Replacis – Retail Planning for Cities Sustainability, “as the ability of different types of retailing, on different scales, to adapt to changes, crises or shocks, challenging the system’s equilibrium, without failing to perform its functions sustainably”. [15] The cited paper argues a linear approach of the concept, in which change is perceived as a constant and resilience is rather understood as a transformative process of adaptation, than a need of returning to an initial state of equilibrium.

named demalling.<sup>2</sup> [4, 5]. These demalling strategies follow a clear tendency to densification and a closer integration in the surroundings, deconstructing the suburban<sup>3</sup> features of the typology.

While the enclosed shopping mall has long proven both its negative impact on the vitality of historical city centers causing urban sprawl [2, 6, 7, 8] and its internal deficiencies, the contemporary expansion and multiplication of this very typology in countries, that only recently have taken on a capitalist economy, such as Romania, might seem as absurd. However, the reiteration of the same urban and social conditions common to Western society 50 years ago as: the rise of automobile use, segregated urban development, degraded public infrastructure and rapid economic growth trigger a continuous exponential increase of shopping malls in its classical monofunctional and introverted form.

The starting hypothesis of this research therefore is the fact that the process of malling<sup>4</sup> is a natural, and somehow inevitable, stage of the neoliberal city, conditional upon the evolutionary phase of the market and of „homo consumericus” and directly linked to the democratization of mass consumption. Translating the differences between east and west as a generation gap, as two phases of the same evolutionary process, this study aims to profit from this lagging behind, by both highlighting the deficiencies of the typology and predicting possible development scenarios to improve and strengthen local shopping formats. Using empirical deduction, reflecting critically on the past experiences of both failures and successes depicted in the context of mature economies, the current paper investigates informed development strategies directly applicable in commercial architectural design, by answering the following question:

**Which are the key factors in defining a resilient local typology, capable of absorbing and adapting to predicted mutations and dynamic changing conditions?**

The thesis is structured into 7 distinct chapters, one introductory chapter that starts the discourse by clarifying the central theme, the literature review and research methodology, followed up by a main body of 5 chapters and a final one summarizes the research findings and the personal contributions of the author. The inquiry concentrates at first on stating and proving the central arguments of the hypothesis: underlying the dynamic nature of commercial architecture, capturing and describing the malling phenomenon and recognizing the typological “generation gap”, throughout a historical study (Chapter 2. Historical Evolution), doubled by a comparative critical analysis, that puts face to face current trends (Chapter 3. The Mall’s Camouflages in the Digital Age) and a radiography of local formats. (Chapter 4. Evolution and characteristics of the mall in Romania). Once the replication of an „outdated” program is acknowledged, an interdisciplinary pursuit explores the contextual lag, justifying why Romania is still “behind” and presenting its possible evolving directions. (Chapter 5. The Coordinates of Change). The answer to the main question of the research is synthesized through the identification and discussion of five basic organization principles of commercial centres,

<sup>2</sup> A relatively new concept, defining a set of strategies and interventions aimed to revitalize and regenerate dying malls. By using the prefix de, there is a clear opposition to the term malling. Thus the actions of demalling have as a main objective “replacing less sustainable development patterns with more valuable, sustainable places.” [4], namely rehabilitating an underperforming site and restoring its viability.

<sup>3</sup> “The typical suburban form is low-density, segregated by use, auto-dependent, with a discontinuous, dendritic street network and poorly defined public spaces. Urban form is characterized by higher density, mixed-use, walkable blocks of buildings supported by a continuous street network with well defined public spaces.” [6, p. XXV]

<sup>4</sup> It refers to the process of expansion of mall constructions in a certain geographical territory. The term was coined by journalist William Severini Kowinski, who published in 1978 an extensive article entitled „Malling of America”, describing the profound cultural and social mutations triggered by the emergence of a new life style around these new “cathedrals of consumption”. The malling phenomenon marks the reorientation of urban public activity towards these commercial centres, doubled by turning consumption into a purpose of living. Severini Kowinski notes that “everything that was happening was happening on the (new) mall.” and that shopping had become the central cultural activity in the “united states of shopping.” [20]

delineated as determinants in constructing sustainable strategies. They are depicted through a dialectical discourse of coupled antithetic concepts that address the anticipated structural mutations of the format and its consequences on the built form, offering at the same time a guideline of tactical strategies directly implementable in the professional practice. (Chapter 6. Strategies of Resilience).

## 2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

*„Architecture is built upon the idea of precedents, and the close examination of earlier works. This approach research seeks to understand the qualities of a piece of architecture, how it came about in terms of design and commissioning, and how people used it once built.” [9, p. 35]*

Objectives by chapter:

- Analyzing the historical evolution of the typology, framing its key design issues
- Defining the dynamic nature of commercial architecture and its dependence on external conditions
- Illustrating the phenomenon of malling of the Western territories and presenting its evolutionary stages

Chapter 2 consists of a historical study based on an extensive literature review and a critical analysis of the theoretical framework [10, 11, 12, 8, 13, 14] concerning the historical unfolding of the commercial program. Besides addressing the contextual factors that influence the configuration of commercial spaces and pinpointing the typological features, that are common to such an approach, the originality of this paper lies within its evolutionary perspective regarding the case studies chosen to back up the theoretical discourse. Thus, the investigation confirms the dynamic character of these developments, highlighting also their vulnerabilities over time, by exploring the best practice examples along their entire lifeline and not just focused on the single moment of their opening. While some of these examples, being typologically defining cases, have already been subjected to previous studies [8, 10], this research aims to complete the literature, by revealing updated information on their current state and development over the years.

The subchapter *Spaces of Consumption, Prototypes before the Mall* begins the approach with a general history of commercial formats, revealing the basic principles that govern this type of architecture. The study points out that, even though there is a constant succession of new organizational models, determined by different waves of change (socio- cultural, economical or urbanistical), the older formats do not disappear, they coexist and reinvent themselves according to the new needs of the consumers and the degree of saturation of the market. The longevity of certain examples, such as the Grand Bazar in Istanbul or the Bon Marche in Paris, prove that the central inquiry of this thesis, of finding durable types of commercial architecture is justified. At the same time, the ability of older typologies to face the competition generated by newer forms of consumption, by providing a constantly renewed response to the changing circumstances is identified as core competency in order to achieve persistence.

The following three subchapters concentrate on explicating the intensive growth of mall building that had taken place both in America and Western Europe, by looking into its causes, contextual characteristics and development phases. The proliferation of the enclosed mall<sup>5</sup>, with

<sup>5</sup> A type of commercial centre, invented in postwar America, that is related to the democratization of mass consumption and characterized by a suburban architectural expression: car dependent accessibility, monofunctional structure, isolated disposition of the building on the parcel surrounded by parking, low density, it creates a major discontinuity in the traditional



its idle isolated out of human scale form, its blind facades and huge selling surfaces, is a phenomenon that has been closely related to both the appropriation of consumerist lifestyle and urban sprawl caused by functional segregation principles and the adoption of the automobile as main means transportation. As a result of these conditions Western societies (America and Western Europe) have both undergone a massive commercial construction frenzy with profound effects on the urban landscape, which only recently came to a halt.

Whereas in the beginnings a demand that is higher than the supply ensures the success of a very functional mall – a selling machine, despite its architectural quality, the need for differentiation as the market matures pushes the formats to a consequent growth and functional diversity, namely a reorientation towards a fun mall, while in the final stage the oversaturation and homogeneity causes a demise of the typology and the necessity of camouflaging it into newer more urban forms. Through a detailed analysis, that investigates their entire life cycle, namely their development phases and the contextual conditions that triggered them, examples such as V. Gruen's Northland Center or J.Jerde's Horton Plaza, demonstrate that even such emblematic models, known for raising the bar and setting up new standards in commercial architecture, are exposed to failure, due to their incapacity to respond to contextual mutations. The thesis thus shows that resilience, seen "as the ability of different types of retailing, on different scales, to adapt to changes, crises or shocks, challenging the system's equilibrium, without failing to perform its functions sustainably" [15] is an inherent characteristic of a durable format.

### 3. THE MALL'S CAMOUFLAGES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*„While Victor Gruen's formula for the enclosed mall has been a novelty compared with the traditional commercial typologies back in the 50s, knowing exactly how to respond to the needs of its customers, it seems natural, that at a distance of 70 years, a sort of déjà vu appeared, that transformed the enclosed mall into a less attractive option when faced the newer commercial typologies.” [5]*

Objectives by chapter:

- Synthesizing current typological trends in commercial development within mature markets
- Explicating the transformative process that impacts older generation malls in order to “stay in the game”
- Highlighting the weaknesses of the enclosed shopping mall, by analyzing the demise of the typology and the demalling strategies applied to regenerate dying malls

Chapter 3 aims to create a comprehensive image of current tendencies in commercial design within the mature markets, through a theoretical investigation of existing literature, backed up by examples of best practice. The investigation delineates the major directions that the mall has taken in order to camouflage itself, whilst the classical typology is entering a serious crisis. The “dead mall” phenomenon is analyzed and explained, but also the strategies designed to resurrect them. This inventory aims both to define future possible scenarios for local commercial development and to raise awareness for possible risks and opportunities.

Considering the current trends, the research reveals five major directions that have been identified as direct result of the recent social, economical and urban mutations that characterize the contemporary affluent society. Thus, sites within the existing city fabric are preferred to

surrounding city fabric (in case there is any) through its superblock type of architecture, blind facades and its introvert character, that focuses only on its internal environment.

greenfield locations, well connected to the public transportation network and independent of car use. Shopping exploits the natural agglomerations of persons created by major interchange nodes like train stations and airports, instead of relying on people traveling by car to reach it. Functional complexity is favored, over monofunctionality, in order to create a dense and varied urban fabric, but also to achieve a stable catchment area through proximity. Uniqueness is preferred over the standard, authenticity over the copy. The urgency to differentiation from a homogeneous mass, as an inevitable result of globalization, pushes the commercial environments to a stronger connection with the context and its cultural particularities.

The same conditions have also brought about the demise of the enclosed mall in these mature markets. Besides the fact that the city has been reorienting towards densification and ecomobility, to counteract the disadvantages of urban sprawl, there is certainly an excess of commercial surface, especially in America but also in Europe as a consequence of rising competition. Newer formats (whether real or virtual), that manage to give a more versatile and a prompt answer to the requests of an ever more pretentious and sophisticated consumer, are endangering older shopping centres, who are forced to reinvent themselves under these pressures.

Meanwhile, dead mall epidemic starts to rise outside its original American context, as e-commerce is gradually taking more and more market shares, but also as consumer society leaps into its experience economy phase. If usually the death of a building is seen as an opportunity for a new construction, the death of a mall, with its gigantic scale, has a much stronger impact on its surrounding community, both from an urban point of view and a social and economical one, through a general state of blight emanating from these sites. [6] As a reaction to these underperforming developments, demalling strategies are applied, namely a set of actions that are guided by New Urbanist principles and whose final purpose is the reintegration of these greyfields in the neighboring city fabric and its community. Even though these interventions are extremely divers, being contextual approaches guided by different actors, previous studies identified four different categories:

- Reuse –adapting the building to a new function
- Integration- the introduction of complementary use either by addition or subtraction
- Redevelopment- that comes along with a radical approach of partial or total demolition in order to accommodate a more dense urban fabric
- Substitution – demolition followed by greening of the surfaces

Demalling comes thus as final phase in the timeline of enclosed malls, while the ability of the commercial structures of seamlessly going through this urbanizing process is what can increase the resilience of the system, by consequently creating coherence and durable connections within the urban tissue.

#### 4. EVOLUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MALL IN ROMANIA

*„Constantin Hostiuc: Every epoch has its temples. At the end of the 19 th century , all the churches, literally, in Bucharest have been replaced by Banks. And then it was the first scandal with the temples of the money. Now its the temples of consumption.*

*Radu Mihăilescu: That's the ultimate religion: consumption. Sundays, people are not coming to mass, but to the mall.” [16]*

Objectives by chapter:

- Identifying local typology characteristics, through a radiography of the built environment

- Highlighting the typological lag and explicating its background
- Illustrating the internal dynamic and the evolutionary degree of local formats

Chapter 4 presents the results of a qualitative and quantitative study carried out on a selection of 26 commercial complexes built in Bucharest and in the four primary cities of Romania : Cluj, Timișoara, Iași and Constanța. Whereas there is a gap considering the literature about shopping centre design in Romania, these findings are one of the most important personal contributions of this thesis, through the delivery of this synthetic material that captures the evolution and the character of the program within the local parameters. It is also important to note the fact that, the outcomes presented in this paper are not just a consequence of a strictly theoretical approach, but are endorsed by more than 12 years of practical professional experience in shopping centre design along the architect Radu Mihăilescu for the local developer Iulius Group<sup>6</sup>. A part of the projects from the author's personal portfolio has been included in this research as case studies. Therefore the discourse is driven by a critical reflective position towards the planning process and reveals a side of it that has been largely ignored, particularly the constant urgency to renewal and revision of the configuration and architecture of commercial development.

The study identifies three different types of malls according to their relation to the existing urban fabric: those who have an existing structure as a starting point, edge of town commercial centres and urban ones. The findings show that, even if from a functional point of view the local mall is quite evolved, having entertainment anchors as the multiplex, the food court and fitness areas, its association with the hypermarkets, that has been entering the Romanian market with 15000 sqm formats, has determined a widely suburban response, regardless of its position in the city. At the same time contextual conditions as: degraded historical city fabric and centers (in some cases profoundly affected by the communist demolitions), the concentration of the population in "bedroom" neighborhoods and a chaotic urban sprawl based on a car driven society and neoliberal approach of land use, have all provided an ideal setting for the proliferation of the enclosed shopping mall, which deepen the disruptions and imbalances within the city fabric.

Romania's adherence to the European Union in 2007, has triggered a strong influx of international chain stores, which through their expansion of policies have been supporting the development and growth of the commercial industry, resulting with ever bigger formats and a subsequent increase in size of older commercial centres. The outcomes of these aggressive territorial dispersion is a uniform image, with the prevalence of international brands, which have been favored by the local consumer over the indigenous ones. Even though the profitability per square meter is still one of the lowest in Europe, due too low levels of purchasing power and income levels, the potential evolution of the market is predictable under the assumption that European standards are to be reached.

While to this point consumer society is still in its incipient phase, the abundance of products and low prices trigger a highly efficient format with large selling surfaces and less consideration to in store atmosphere. At the same time, the research shows that as markets become more saturated and competition rises, the gap to occidental formats tends to close in, through a greater attention both to the architectural features of the interior space and the connections to the outside and to the surrounding public space. The recent introduction of mixed used developments, suggests that there is a tendency of adopting more complex concepts and that the introverted format, which continues to be reproduced in parallel, will not enjoy the same longevity as it once had in the Western world. In Bucharest City Mall has already

<sup>6</sup> The Iulius Group Company is one of the most important local developer and operator of commercial centres and mix-used projects in Romania. Having more than 260000 sqm of retail and 80000 sqm of A class office in their portfolio, Iulius has been implementing innovative concepts throughout the country, as the first shopping mall built outside of Bucharest (Iulius Mall Iași) and the first mixed/use urban regeneration project. (Palas Iași) [21]

demanded itself into an office building, Plaza Mall is going to a processes of transforming its vacant commercial surface into office use and in Arad after a confrontation of three shopping malls built on the same circulation artery, two of them are in expectation of revitalization solutions.

The case study of Iulius Mall Timișoara, concentrated on the dynamics of commercial design, show that local developments tend to follow the same path as those in mature economies, but going through these phases in an accelerated mode. At the same time the research reveals a constant growth of commercially leasable area that finds its reflection both in the suburban form of the building volumes and the need to rise the efficiency factors of the built surface. Even if recent commercial developments are incorporating contemporary elements, the typological gap is still considerable as a result of a superblock approach triggered out by the contextual conditions and the preference for a suburban type of architecture.

## 5. THE COORDINATES OF CHANGE

*„System resilience cannot be considered without an awareness of the context in which a system exists and the kinds of change that is likely to deal with.” [17]*

Objectives by chapter:

- Identifying the contextual lag, defining its causes and its primary development directions
- Finding the contextual changes that define the typological phases in shopping spaces
- Illustrating the anticipated contextual changes and their impact on the built environment

Looking at commercial architectural through the lens of its dependency on external factors, the ability of these structures to undergo a permanent process of transformation and assimilation is an essential characteristic to ensure the sustainability. However the discussion about resilience automatically also brings up also the question: “Resilience to what?” Chapter 6, rooted in a cross-disciplinary examination, selects three central issues as being decisive in the evolution of commercial developments and concludes that on all of these three levels: the evolutionary stage of consumer society, the type of urban development and the adoption e-commerce, there is a sensible gap between the local and the Western context, that explains thus the typological differences highlighted before.

The research aims to discover the links between these external conditions and the evolutionary phase of the building format. Looking at the mall in its occidental trajectory, it reveals a three stage evolution: the first – the extremely functional suburban type constructed by the principle “If you build it, they will come”, the second one when the mall starts to grow and to functionally diversify and the third one when it is urbanizing itself, dissolving into the city. All of these stages are connected to the stages of consumer society illustrated by the sociological investigation, to important changes in city development policies and governance and to a continuous increase of competition coming from newer formats.

The current level of local economic development reflect the emergence and expansion of mass consumption in its incipient form, guided by quantitative reasons over qualitative ones, unlike the mature markets that have already unfolded into an experience economy. As affluent societies are oversaturated by things, they turn to a more immersive type of consumption whose scope is changing from acquiring products to acquiring memorable experiences. In Romania the massive construction of introverted shopping malls, anchored by huge hypermarkets, positioned on low prices and large volume, is thus justified and sustained by the hypnotic effect of the abundance of goods, still exerted upon the local consumer, while its Western bored counterpart is reorienting towards more sophisticated forms of consumption. However, the



rapid pace of development, especially in the more saturated markets like Bucharest, suggest that lifecycles in the local context tend to be shorter and prove the necessity of informing the typology with long term strategies of resilience. If consumerism in Western society had 150 years to roll out its four evolutionary stages, Romania, in its 30 years of capitalism, under the pressures of the digital age, has been rapidly catching up, being already half way through.

From an urban point of view, if the enclosed mall is a product of a neoliberal urban development, based on functional segregation and car use, the demalling processes come as the consequence of adopting a more sustainable approach to city planning, rooted in the New Urbanist ideology and the reorientation to ecomobility. While Romania still lags behind, regarding the legal instruments and sustainable planning policies, entering the European Union and adhering to its strategic programs, will force the appropriation of contemporary principles. Considering the fact the stores are essential urban components, which through their presence or absence can decide whether an area is “alive” or not [18, p. 48], a major responsibility of the public actor is to create through legal devices a balanced system that addresses issues of sustainability of the commercial developments and their impact on the surrounding environment, equitable spatial distribution and the unlimited access of the population to the distribution network. The current research points out that the lack of these administrative measures and a “free for all” approach, raises the vulnerabilities of the malls, despite the tremendous opportunities it holds, through the increased risk of cannibalization by newer and bigger formats.

At the same time the emergence of new retail formats and especially e-commerce, introducing a new pattern of consumption, is one of the major causes of the contractions of selling floor area in Western Europe and America. Whereas Romania is still showing considerable low market shares in this domain, in comparison to U.K. or Germany, the annual rate of growth indicates great future potential, as society is getting more and more technologized. The development of this sector that turned out to be deadly for any competition positioned on low price and quantity, is to be forcibly reconfiguring the local “brick and mortar” commerce and its new role in the digital age.

In conclusion, this part of the investigations demonstrates that the east-west generation gap can be interpreted as successive stages of the same process and that the Western evolutionary pattern of the mall can be used as past experience to inform future strategies for a resilient local typology.

## 6. STRATEGIES OF RESILIENCE

*„ Most institutions have played a historically stable role within the city, whether because of their general acceptance as indispensable organizations or because of the civic apparatuses that ensured their existence. Shopping on the other hand, is continually reinvented, reformulated, and reshaped to keep up with the most subtle changes in society. No other program has seen so many new concepts and new configurations designed to follow the shifts in cultural tastes and in urban and social patterns.” [1, p. 131]*

Objectives by chapter:

- Identifying the key issues that have to be addressed in order to ensure the resilience of the commercial centres as contextual conditions evolve
- Identifying predictable typological mutations and strategic response tactics to anticipated contextual changes
- Pointing out the importance of considering time as a valuable parameter in building sustainable commercial developments



If to this point the research has been concentrating on the theoretical and practical verification of the main components of the hypothesis, the most important part of it in regard to personal contributions of the author is the answer to its central inquiry, which is synthesized in this chapter in the form of guidelines conceived to direct the process of design in finding resilient strategies for commercial developments. Five major themes presented in form of antithetic concepts have been identified as typological mutations to be expected, triggered by anticipated changing conditions. The list has been critically evaluated in order to ensure the uniqueness of the criteria, through testing against the practical examples and the theoretical background, and reduced systematically to these fundamental transformations of the format:

- Mutations in mobility: Automobile vs. Ecomobility
- Mutations in the relationship with the context: Introvert vs. Extrovert
- Mutations in the functional organization: Mono- vs. Mixed- use
- Mutations within the role of the common infrastructure: Leasable vs. Common space
- Mutations in the tenant mix: Global vs. Local

In order to obtain a clarity of the discourse these concepts have been split into different subchapters, however the above mentioned mutations are strongly interrelated one to another, both because of the causes that trigger them and of the responses reflected in the built environment.

The shortcomings of the enclosed mall are due to its suburban form and to its predictability of a mid-range offer. Therefore local malls should be equipped with “surviving techniques”, depicted in this study through strategic tactics, empirically deducted by understanding future development directions, synthesized from the Western experience, from both demalling strategies and contemporary tendencies.

The research shows the importance of configuring a plan B towards which the development can evolve, having as a main objective the adoption of New Urbanist principles over time, the transformation of an isolated characterless building block into an urban integrated development. While the final result should be a unique and innovative answer to specific contextual circumstances in contrast to the repeatable pattern of the suburban enclosed mall, the author’s intentions are not prescribe universally valid solutions, but to discuss basic organizational principles to serve as guidelines in finding long term strategies in commercial design. Creating future scenarios to deal with the predicted typological mutations are to inform the built environment, preparing it for controlled change and help maintain a clear developing direction throughout the exploitation of the commercial centre. Special care has to be given to the most sensible points of a shopping mall, namely the big surface anchors, whose failure can have a great impact on their health. Thus the possibility of reconfiguring and reusing these big surfaces is essential in creating a long term strategy. However the spatial planning process has to be doubled by a viable economical scenario, calibrated both on the catchment area and its target consumer and the urban dynamics.

Considering the complexity of the phenomenon, the results of the study are open ended and offer a selection of strategic tactics deducted from the typological investigation backed up by case studies. The scope is not to give a complete answer or recipes, but to explicate the complex dynamics, that lies within commercial development and to raise the awareness with all the actors evolved in the design and planning process over the importance of understanding time and transformation as a variable, in creating a long term vision that is able to anticipate future contextual needs. Listed below is a set of tactical guidelines - responses directly applicable in the professional practice grouped according to the five basic typological mutations and the proposed solution the right.

## Strategies of resilience – briefing chart

Mutation	Strategic tactic
<b>from automobile to ecomobility</b>	Choosing an urban site instead of greenfield development
	Integration in the multimodal public transportation network of the city, with the possibility of developing into an interchange node.
	Equipping the structure with the ability to accommodate all kinds of mobility options, with an emphasis on developing a traditional relation to the city fabric by enhancing walkability
<b>from introvert to extrovert</b>	Establishing strong connections to the existing urban fabric and the human scale through configuration of the built volumes and the facade
	Planning a phased densification scenario, through a structural configuration that enables a latter fragmenting and opening of the box.
	A building envelope that permits the reorganization and increase of openings, with a special emphasis on the ground floor porosity
	The possibility of integrating the principles of an active facade – by increasing the detailing and formal variety over time
<b>from mono- to mixed- use</b>	Structural adaptability to different uses, without affecting the functionality of the whole
	Planning a backup reconfiguration scenario for big anchor surfaces
	Establishing potential areas on the site for densification and vertical growth, respectively areas for built area contraction
	Defining the structural joint and volumes, starting from dimensions that enable natural lighting of the interiors
	Creating a breakdown scenario of the box doubled by a functional informing strategy in time, that will integrate the commercial centre in a full work-live-play circuit
<b>From leasable to common surface</b>	The mall has to become attractive through its strategic attribute of becoming a „third place”, that facilitates social contact and communication
	Integration of social and cultural functions
	Development of public infrastructure (both interior and exterior common spaces) and its programmability with communal experiences
	The possibility of increasing common area by shrinking leasable space
	Development of dining and cafe areas
<b>from global to local</b>	Differentiation through embedding authentic local and cultural values
	Unique and unexpected tenant mix
	Promoting and developing creative concepts, that employ

	existing human and physical resources, found within the surrounding community
	Sustaining commercial biodiversity
	Flexibility and variety in scale and organization of commercial units

## 7. PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

*„It is likely to be provocative and self-defeating to suggest that no one individual person actually fully understands all the issues and considerations in the formulation and design, from start to finish, of a typical shopping centre. [...] Shopping centres are big, complex developments involving the skills of a large team of designers and specialist consultants who contribute at particular stages throughout the project. [...] Invariably, those best placed to understand all the issues in the process of making a shopping centre are likely to be a combined team consisting of the client, architect and retail team.” [10]*

To ensure a fluent reading of the thesis, the last closing chapter reports on the most important personal contributions of the author. These can be identified along the whole thesis in shape of bibliographical synthesis, comparative investigations and descriptive analyses of case studies. Regarding the theme, the originality factor of the discourse lies in the evolutionary approach of the typology, by understanding commercial architecture as a dynamic mechanism, dependent on external factors, rather than as an immutable object. The mall is explicated in terms of a transformative process, in which resilience to contextual conditions is identified as key feature of its sustainability.

Considering the entire body of the research, the following list singles out the main findings and personal contributions per chapters:

- defining the dynamic nature of shopping developments and highlighting their vulnerabilities over time by following the case studies along their entire lifeline and not just focused on a specific moment ( Chapter. 2, Chapter 4)
- synthesizing an “up to date” material concerning contemporary directions and trends in designing commercial environments, backed up by best practice examples ( Chapter. 3)
- constructing a comprehensive material that documents the malling of Romania through a descriptive and analytic investigation of locally applied typologies (Chapter 4.)
- a cross disciplinary examination of the external conditions, that explicates the identified typological lag between local and Western context (Chapter 5.)
- developing a set of tactical strategies that guide the design process to enhance the resilience of commercial development, by identifying anticipated typological mutations (Chapter. 6)

Another key feature of this study is the fact that it is not solely the result of a theoretical and bibliographical approach, being sustained by an extensive professional experience of the author. Thus, the findings revealed by the thesis are also a direct consequence of a critical reflection over the designing process, selected through the “trial and error” nature of architectural practice. This direct implication in the planning of commercial developments, that has had widely appreciated results such as the Iulius Mall Timișoara, has happened both before and during the elaboration of this research, stating the forehand interest of the author for this program, but also offering a testing ground for its theoretical concepts. The conclusions of this paper are therefore strongly embedded in reality and applicable in the professional practice, as they are aiming to guide and enhance the creation and planning process of commercial centers.

Findings contained in Chapter 4 of this investigation, regarding local typological issues,



have already been partially disseminated in 2014 through the article written in collaboration with Camil Milincu, „*Dynamics in Shopping Mall Design – Case Study on Iulius Mall Timișoara*” published in the *SGEM 2014 International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences and Arts* conference proceedings. [19] At the same time, the author, through her didactic enrollment as teaching assistant at the Faculty of Architecture in Timișoara, has contributed to raising awareness of the issues concerning the commercial program in the academic setting. The design studios carried out with students, have shown the importance of addressing this theme in a highly innovative and experimental environment, in order to enable a complex understanding of retail planning concepts, applicable later on in practice. Besides elaborating and coordinating the studio brief embedded in the third year curriculum of furniture and interior design studies during 2012-2013, 2014-2015, the author has tutored the *Complex design - Mixed-use Developments* diploma unit in 2015 that involved final year architecture students. Partial results of these teaching experiments have been presented in 2015 at the 7th World Conference on Educational Sciences through the paper coauthored with Camil Milincu, „Redefining identity in shopping environments –3rd year interior design studio” [20], but also on facebook page created to illustrate the 3rd year students’ work ([https://www.facebook.com/pg/MAi-3-565939826764541/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/MAi-3-565939826764541/photos/?ref=page_internal)).

Considering the limitations of the study, the expanse of the subject and its implications in various domains as economy, sociology or urbanism, makes the delivery of complete answers impossible. From this point of view, the recommendations for further research would be the promotion of a cross disciplinary complex investigation, in order to provide integrated strategies for the development of shopping environments, sustained by common working terminology and a holistic value system.

At the same time, the difficulty in finding valid data and up to date information on commercial centres in Romania is also suggesting the need of both a real time database of such investments and the elaboration of an evaluation method, in correlation with European norms. Whereas at this point, there is no consensus over definitions, classification or measuring standards of areas, it is difficult to establish quality standards in this field. These tools could enable a common language in the creation of legal instruments, which could provide transparent decision making and minimal quality requirements in the planning of future development.

Another inevitable obstacle of the investigation, lies within the changing nature of commercial typologies, and the rapid pace in which a successful format turns obsolete. From this point of view literature and research that examines this program needs to be permanently reconsidered, as the risk of finding outdated information or errors is high even in the case of official sources. These regard both quantitative aspects as gross built area values and qualitative ones, like functional distribution, architectural form or conceptual layout. From this point of view, the major limitation of this paper is its lack of accuracy on the long run, and the necessity of constantly renewing it, as:

„The next big thing is always on its way. If you don’t like this one, just wait until the next one. And then the next one, always bigger, faster, fresher. Architecture was never so lively and never so crude. This is architecture of shopping.” [1, p. 528]

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