

Georges Cristinel - The Architect of the Transition

Abstract of PhD Thesis

in the Field of Architecture

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1. Introduction

In recent years, attempts have been made to recover the post-1947 architecture. The initial subject of this thesis was the architecture production and the architects active in Transylvania and Banat in 1947-1965, after the Second World War.

The endeavour to create the image of the architecture production based on studies and field activities, undertaken in Central and South Transylvania and Banat/Arad, has led to a number of questions: who designed what and how, particularly what was designed in this area.

Between 1947 and 1965, the architecture production was carried out by three generations of architects of three different ages and with three different approaches, an element that was clearly described and structured throughout Romania: the architects raised before the First World War and matured in the inter-war period, the architects raised and trained in the inter-war period, and the very new generation of architects trained in the first years after the Second World War.

In the inter-war period, the Transylvania/Banat architecture was not thoroughly studied and not very accessible and there were no specific publications. However, from the historical point of view, in the Transylvania/Crișana/Banat area took place important events: the creation of Greater Romania, the emergence of universities, the consolidation of the Romanian State in the newly established Romanian territory. The new state organisation led to a program of promoting and reorganising the Romanian unitary state values in the *New Territories*.

For the sake of this thesis, the *New Territories* are the areas of Transylvania, Crișana and Banat. The stress is laid on the territories that were given to Romania after the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the Great Union at Alba-Iulia after the First World War, territories that had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

According to the studies published so far, in these areas nothing important happened from the architectural point of view. Nevertheless, the architecture production in these areas was quite impressive both after 1918 and after 1947. It was a specific production symbolizing the meeting of two cultures, Eastern and Western, in a blend of nationalities. All the larger cities like (Cluj, Sibiu, Brașov, Târgu-Mureș, Deva, Hunedoara, Timișoara, Arad, Oradea, Satu-Mare) displayed an impressive architecture production and the architects who raised buildings in them were among the most prominent ones.

A very interesting feature of the architecture production is the fact that two different kinds of mentalities co-existed in the mentioned area: the architect of Romanian or Hungarian origin who was raised in Transylvania and educated in Vienna or Budapest at the end of the 19th

century (Kós Károly, Pákey Lajos, Molnar Elemér or V. Salvanu in Cluj and Székely László, Victor Vlad in Timisoara and Arad), and the architect beyond the Carpathians, educated in Bucharest or Paris, with French cultural baggage (Georges Cristinel, Ion D. Trajanescu, Socolescu, N. Georgescu, V. Șmighelski etc.). In the 1920s, more and more architects from older Romania's territory were active on the market.

Our analysis follows two directions. The first concerns the architects and their personalities, their everyday life and the relationships established among them. It would be like the society page of a vintage newspaper. In those years, there were few architects and they all knew one other, as most of them worked for the technical services of the city halls, although some of them also worked in the private sector. For example, it seems that a friendly relationship developed between Kós Károly and Cristinel in the years 1925-1930-1935. I have discovered a letter written by Kós Károly to a beneficiary about a house the former built on Cetățuia Hill in Cluj. In this letter, Kós mentions Cristinel¹.

The second direction, more concrete and programmatically assumed, is that of the programmes developed at that time in the above-mentioned area.

The Romanian government's intention was to create an official image in the new area, in order to consolidate the new organisation. The ideas had been supported by King Ferdinand even before the First World War. The programmes were divided into two branches: secular and religious.

From the secular perspective, buildings of great visibility were raised:

- official buildings (county headquarters)
- educational buildings
- university buildings
- hospitals and sanatoria
- sport buildings
- commemorative military structures.

Religiously, the Romanian Government supported the Orthodox Church by building churches to promote the idea of a national church. To this end, it supported a construction programme through architectural competitions in the bigger cities: Cluj, Timisoara, Târgu-Mureș, Satu-Mare, Mediaș etc.

It is relevant and interesting that generally only the architects from Bucharest such as Cristinel, Trajanescu, Șmighelschi, Ivănescu, Antonescu, to mention just some of them, had access to major works, to the detriment of the regional architects who were already active on the Transylvanian architecture market. In the Banat and Transylvania area, Victor Vlad, an engineer architect, had the opportunity to design many important buildings including the Cathedral in Târgu-Mureș.

In the interwar period, an architect's profession was organised under the auspices of the Romanian Architects Society, which had few members from the *New Territories*. In a table from 1933, for example, only 17 architects active from Satu-Mare to Timisoara are mentioned.²

It seems that the impact of the Second World War II on the territory was not so dramatic, since the design and construction work continued. Surprisingly, as this war was being fought, a number of structures were finalised, such as the Mausoleum at Mărăști and the one at Mărășești, between 1941 and 1942, or "The House with Girls" in Timisoara, in 1944. Besides, there are files dating from that period that authorised the building of various edifices, especially private ones, in Timisoara, Cluj and Sibiu.

The years after the Second World War were marked first by attempts to build after the Soviet

¹ It is about sculptor Eugen (Jeno) Szervátiusz's house located at 61, Șerpuitoare Street in Cluj, designed by Kós Károly (according to an article in *Adevărul de Cluj* newspaper, 2011).

² Table of Architects, Ministry of Education, 1933, Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co SA, Bucharest.

system, based on Khrushchev's 1956 discourse up to a point, then to promote a specific programme. The specific approach and the attempts to promote a particular type of architecture, especially after 1955, are very interesting.

The idea of this thesis is to use architect Georges Cristinel as the guiding line of the concept *of the architect making the transition*. His production spanned almost 50 years, from 1912 to 1960. He went through three periods that were defining for a successful architect and the history of constructions all over Romania. Through his work and attitude, he managed to create the image of Romania and Romanian architecture of the above-mentioned period. The concept of transition implies at least two types of approach. The **first** is to look into various historical periods with specific but very different features, in which an architect survives professionally by adapting himself. Cristinel is like an Egyptian funerary urn in which the essence of an architect is collected and which passes from Transylvania to Bucharest, from clients like Queen Mary or Metropolitan Bishop Bălan to the communist government, from his own company and right of signature to a communist design institute (IPIU Bucharest). The **second** approach, more related to architecture, is to present the architectural product of a professional who adapted to times, currents, modernisation, technologies, various clients and diverse cultural concepts, who succeeded in being prolific throughout 40 years and produce great results. This approach also provides the opportunity to define the epochs and the architectural currents, revealing facts about the system of the professional life, organisations, legislation, financial systems and clients in a period of significant changes in Romania's existence.

In the light of the projects that Cristinel built, there are remarkable moments during the First World War on the Mărăști-Mărășești-Oituz front. The architect was involved in the Mărășești Mausoleum, a project that started with an architecture contest and continued with a scandal within the guild and a construction site that lasted about 15 years, for financial reasons that are as valid now as in the past.

At the same time, Cristinel was involved in the project of the Cluj Cathedral and several Transylvanian sites, like Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery Church or bank construction sites in Sibiu, Cluj, Brasov and Bucharest. He was also involved in public projects, such as the Food Halls in Călărași or the "Carol" Boys College in Sibiu.

His participation in large-scale and long-lasting projects was materialised in the design and urbanisation of Câmpia Turzii, where he took part in the development of the wire factory from the 1930s to the 1960s, when the factory became a plant. Cristinel built dwellings for workers, the town church or industrial rolling mills and buildings of less architectural relevance, like an aqueduct for the deviation of the Racoș River in 1950.

A graduate of École des Beaux-Arts Paris in 1911, Cristinel began to work as an architect for Ernest Doneaud and Stefan Burcuș. In the early 1920s, he associated with Constantin Pomponiu, who was 20 years older than he was but had numerous connections; the two worked together until 1927. After that, Cristinel worked on his own. He carried out many projects throughout the country until the Second World War. In 1948, he was on the site in Câmpia Turzii Plain, and from 1948 to 1952, he worked for IPIU³; from there he transferred to IPCMC⁴, where he was head of office until 1961. After the Second World War, he was involved in the socialist construction in the field of industrial architecture. Worth mentioning are the Institute of Textile Research in Bucharest or Electronica in Băneasa-Bucharest.

It is important to note that Cristinel, of classical formation, started working for a clientele with a certain type of culture. Then he actively participated in the First World War that marked him. Next, he approached styles such as Neo-Romanian, art déco and Modernism, sometimes Neoclassicism, and ended with industrial experiences.

³ Institute of Industrial Design

⁴ Institute of Design and Research in Construction and Building Materials

Equally important is his 1919-1927 participation, together with architects Florea Stănculescu and Ștefan Peternelli, in in-depth studies of the rural architecture — survey plans and drawings in rural Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina, which influenced his architectural discourse, especially his low-rise buildings.

1.2 Research objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to present the image of Cristinel's architecture production integrated into the space and time of each period. It also highlights the architect's manners of approach and interaction, drawing attention to some of the most publicized and known projects of the interwar period, but also to changes in his personal approach caused by the historical changes.

Architectural projects are carried out according to a typical method that is applied to this today, from the order and the design theme to the final object that undergoes complex processes from the architect's mind to the client's pocket.

I have tried to describe and explain each project with its evolutionary stages, explaining the final product through systematic approaches integrated into an analytic discourse.

1.3 Research method

In order to create the image of an architect's production in relation to the epoch and the realities of each period, I started with the presentation of the general theme.

The matrix of history is dealt with to establish the defining elements and features of the epoch in which an architect works, with its political, economic, and cultural characteristics. The definition of the context was given based on the existing studies.

The following archives were read: the national archives in Focșani, Brăila, Timișoara, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest, the archives of the Transylvanian Metropolitan Church and the Metropolitan Church of Vad, Feleac and Cluj; the IPIU and IPCMC archives in Bucharest, the "Arhitectura" periodical archives and the Union of Romanian Architects' archives.

The land surveys involved travelling to different places in the country, following Cristinel's production, which extends on the Oradea-Călărași diagonal. More than 5,500 km were covered during the research period in which I discovered and inventoried different "houses".

Unfortunately, I could not find a personal archive of Cristinel's architectural production. He had no children, so no direct followers, and all the spaces in which he had his office, some of them his property, were nationalized. His second-degree relatives are trying to recover the flat he owned in Bucharest, at 42, Calea Floreasca, where he lived between 1949 and 1961.

Based on Cristinel's professional resume, I have tried to complete the image of the already existing architectural production containing the known projects of the Cluj Cathedral, the Academic College in the same city, or the Prima Ardeleană in Sibiu, the Generala in Bucharest the Mărășești Mausoleum. I have searched the projects one by one, exemplifying them, discovering new constructions, bringing and developing arguments for the projects that are already known. Their analysis was performed by comparing the design and the construction, where information was available.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The information in this thesis is structured in three parts:

The first part (Chapter 1), with a general character, sets the theoretical framework of the research, presenting the context of the architectural production and investigating the architectural discourse from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1960s, with reference to the international context.

The second part, with a specific character (Chapter 2), is focused on the work of architect Georges Cristinel.

The third part (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) presents three case studies, a detailed examination of several major projects that Cristinel worked on.

Chapter 7 is the bibliography of the architect. I have tried to organise and corroborate the information I have discovered.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to personal conclusions and contributions.

The contents of the thesis is organised as follows:

- **Chapter one** — Introduction, theme presentation, arguments, objectives and research methods.
- **Chapter two** — The European and Romanian historical and stylistic context deals with the three great periods that marked Romania's architecture from 1900 to 1960. It focuses on the 60-years architectural works performed in 60 years, the definition of the national style, the inter-war period of a generalized art déco discourse with pure modernist accents, and the years after 1947, when work was reorganised under the Soviet influence.
- **Chapter three** describes the professional activity of Georges Cristinel. The architect's achievements are presented according to the type of operation, the list of projects he built in 40 years on the territory of Romania, from the inter-war period until after the two World Wars. The four subchapters deal with known and unknown buildings spread throughout Romania. Subchapters:
 - The First World War
 - Churches
 - Dwellings
 - Buildings for banks/education and public services
 - Industrial buildings after 1947.

The subchapter dedicated to the First World War deals with the line of mausoleums erected to the memory of our dead heroes, with a special focus on the Soveja Mausoleum designed by Cristinel.

The case study of the Mărășești Mausoleum completes this chapter.

The **subchapter dedicated to Churches** presents the 12 churches designed by Cristinel. I discussed and analyzed the projects and developments of the Cluj Cathedral, the St. Nicholas Orthodox Church of Cluj, the chapel of the Transylvanian Metropolitan Church of Sibiu, the Brâncoveanu Church of Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery, the Orthodox Church in Orăștie, the Orthodox Church in Blaj, the Lazaret Church in Sibiu and the Orthodox Church in Câmpia Turzii. These are illustrated with designs found in archives and old and contemporary photographs.

The **Dwelling** subchapter presents the low-rise and high-rise housing projects elaborated by the architect in the Transylvanian area and Bucharest. Several Neo-Romanian architecture houses in Bucharest and some villas in Cluj and Sibiu are presented.

High-rise buildings includes several buildings in Bucharest, Large, collective housing presents and details several buildings erected in Bucharest, Sibiu and Cluj, in the inter-war period for insurance companies.

The subchapter about **Bank/Education/Public buildings** describes Chrissoveloni Bank in Brăila, Albina Bank in Bucharest in the two editions of this project, 1929 and 1944. Five projects on the subject of education are treated, including Cluj University College and “Andrei Şaguna” School in Sibiu. I have discovered a very beautiful public project of a 1993 food hall in Călăraşi.

The first three chapters of the thesis create a clear picture of architect Cristinel’s work during the three great periods of political change and political discourse within Greater Romania’s perimeter.

The following three chapters are case studies.

- **Chapter four** — the case study of Mărăşti village, Vrancea County, is a detailed study of the projects and works carried out between 1918 and 1945. Mărăşti is a martyr village due to the situation on the front line in the summer of 1917. Here, in a short period, an entire village with its major objectives, all in the national style, was designed and organised. A total of 18 Neo-Romanian houses, a church, an inn, a school and a mausoleum were raised. The modernisation project included a water and electricity supply system, all executed in 1922-1927 and 1935-1938.

As a whole, Mărăşti village has no correspondent at national and international level in the architecture of the 1920s. It is a programmatic attempt, meant to generate a functional, regenerated community with all its elements, from school to church, preserving the original character of the traditional village.

- **Chapter five** is the case study of the evolution of the idea of the Mărăşeşti National Church, from the stage of a competition project to that an erected and inaugurated building. It is a 15-year effort with major architectural discourse changes that render its evolution from project to achievement. This may well be the most important and publicized achievement of the inter-war architecture.

I analysed the contest stage project, including the scandal that followed and the initial solution adopted in 1924. In 1935, the project was continued according to the new national promotion policies, in a modified manner, in an art déco style that highlighted the object and the promenade.

- **Chapter Six**, the case study of Câmpia Turzii, highlights Georges Cristinel’s 30-year work in relation to his friendship with Ionel Floaşiu and afterwards, after 1945, when the works on the industrial platform were continued. It was a prolonged effort, at the end of which, with the help of the Câmpia Turzii plant, a complete industrial platform and a functional city with social housing, polyclinic and other urban and sports facilities for the “multilateral” development of the workers’ community⁵ was finished.
- **Chapter seven** is Cristinel’s CV, found in the archives of the Union of Romanian Architects, and a presentation of his activity. His achievements and his manner of working before 1947 and after 1947 are also described.
- **Chapter eight** is dedicated to conclusions, final considerations on the discoveries of this thesis and persona contributions.

Conclusions

⁵ Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu’s speech at the 14th Congress.

The work of architect George Cristinel spans between 1912 and 1960, a career of nearly 50 years. His professional activity was carried out under the various forms of professional organisation mentioned in Chapter seven.

- 31 urban villas
- 17 collective dwellings
- 12 churches
- 6 education buildings
- 3 cultural buildings
- 1 food hall
- 3 sport arenas
- 15 industrial buildings in Câmpia Turzii
- 8 plants that he organises.

His elaborate projects are in Câmpia Turzii, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Beiuș, Brașov, Sibiu, Sâmbăta de Sus, Aiud, Vad (Brașov County), Bazna, Bucharest, Călărași, Mărăști, Mărășești, Soveja, Iași, Pui (Hunedoara County), Mediaș, Orăștie.

Stylistic integration

The 1920-1928 period is dedicated to the national style in terms of expression. Loggias, protruding towers, colonnades with classical spindles, detailed framing and windows.

The years 1928-1930 marked the transition to a modernist expression in which the defining elements of the national style, like the porch, the roof with several slopes or the tower begin to fade away as volumetric and detailed expression.

Starting with 1930, a modernist expression begins with a few houses but gains art déco details. The years 1933-1934 favour a clear art déco tendency defined by details, as well as small bas-reliefs, decorative pieces of hardware, surface details.

For the bank buildings the art déco language of classical expression, columns, typical compositions in three registers is used.

At the end of the 1930s, Cristinel tried to return to enriched details, by proportions and details specific to a Moorish-inspired art déco, thin-walled pillars, inclined lines. One can talk about a classicist style, a kind of purified art déco, with fuller, heavier proportions, used predominantly in villas.

The Mărășești mausoleum project is an example of transformations and style changes over nearly 20 years, where one can analyse the same volume treated in different styles, from neo-Romanian to art déco.

The industrial architecture is influenced by functionalism in the first place, but the industrial edifices of Câmpia Turzii support a modern discourse where volumes are expressed.

The pieces of industrial architecture that Cristinel designed after the 1950s are under influence of the classicist Soviet style.

Cristinel shifted from the national style to the art déco modernity and later to the Soviet realism. He was an architect who built his reputation on representative buildings for modern Romania, defined cities, raised typical buildings, underwent a period of intermediate work at the Câmpia Turzii (where in 1947 he was owed 250000 lei, but the sum does not appear in any document⁶) and who became the head of the industrial projects department at IPCMC and developed industrial architecture projects, yet with a position that acknowledged his prestige as the head of the department.

As a whole, Mărăști village has no correspondent at national and international level in

⁶ Cluj National Archives, File 1208, payment situation in 1947

the architecture of the 1920s. It is a programmatic attempt, meant to generate a functional, regenerated community with all its elements, from school to church, preserving the original character of the traditional village.

The Mărășești Mausoleum Church is a very good barometer of the official architecture production of the inter-war period, with the capacity to represent the government's official discourse within the definition of the national state, and the exemplification of the national style in its transition from the Neo-Romanian to the classicist style, art-déco with classic potential.

Personal contributions

The contributions to the field of history and the theory of architecture can be found throughout this thesis. They are related to bringing to light several projects and studies about a period of nearly 40 years of architecture linked to one of the most prolific architects of this epoch. The main contributions are:

- the study of Mărăști village, highlighting the efforts and projects developed to restore the Historical Field, unknown projects so far; highlighting a unique project in the history of Romanian architecture from the elaboration and development perspective
- the study of the Hunedoara House of Culture, architect Gipsy Porumbescu, an early project in his career, which completes the image of the architectural production in the early 1960s;
- revealing a project and its 17-year evolution — the Mărășești Mausoleum;
- creating the image of the birth of an industrial city, Câmpia Turzii;
- creating an overview of the works of architect Georges Cristinel's, a distinguished personality of the inter-war architectural production;
- revealing a number of important projects developed by Cristinel in the Transylvanian area, unknown so far;
- the contribution to creating the image of how Orthodox churches are designed in the Transylvanian area.

I believe that the elements presented in this thesis complete the image of the architectural production of the inter-war period. Moreover, this thesis may be the beginning of a history of architecture in the *New Territories* — Transylvania and Banat — that have been absent from the general discourse up to now.

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