

Commercial Spaces on Display. City Centers on Display

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to address local and to provide an insight of Cluj-Napoca's trade market, a quality indicator of the public market goods and also a lead purpose regarding local commercial spaces. The key-commercial areas from Cluj-Napoca were substituted by low standard stores; therefore luxury trade has gone missing in the past ten years. Downtown luxury trades faded because of the new shopping centers that were taking over the city's trade market and due the costly rents of commercial spaces located in downtown Cluj-Napoca. With no further ado, we can highlight two potential solutions to the problem: administrative and economic procedures led by the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca, also other procedures in order to draw attention towards civil society. Academia can also play a role in emphasizing high-end commercial decay in Cluj-Napoca by approaching current problems such as rediscovering the lost value of the historic cities. Therefore the curricula of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Cluj-Napoca through the subject of Specialized Design – Furniture Design Discipline (the 3rd year of study) suggested a commercial spaces related theme named: "Commercial Space Furniture Design" in order students to rediscover lost values of historic city centers.

Rezumat

Premiza articolului pune în discuție spațiile comerciale din centrele istorice, respectiv din cadrul orașului Cluj-Napoca, specificul comercial în relație cu imaginea pe care o reflectă și standardul calitativ al obiectelor comercializate, inițiative care pot fi luate sau conștientizate vis à vis de această situație. Spațiile comerciale din centrul orașului au fost înlocuite cu alte funcțiuni, iar cele care încă mai există comercializează produse cu un standard calitativ scăzut. În consecință – unul din segmentele de comerț – cel de lux- a dispărut în ultimii zece ani, fenomen datorat atât construirii unor centre comerciale mari (mall-uri) în periferie, cât și costurilor de închiriere ridicate a spațiilor comerciale rămase în zona centrală. Fără a detalia prea mult situația existentă, se pot evidenția două măsuri posibile: măsuri cu caracter economic și administrativ propuse din perspectiva Primăriei, dar și acțiuni menite să atragă atenția societății civile. În acest sens, în cadrul sistemului educativ din care facem parte, prin inițierea temei „Mobilier pentru un spațiu comercial” din cadrul disciplinei Proiectare Specializată Mobilier a Facultății de Arhitectură și Urbanism Cluj-Napoca se propune un exercițiu cu rol educativ în scopul redescoperirii valorilor centrelor istorice.

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1. Introduction. General view on Cluj-Napoca`s trade market

This column's first part sets up a pin-point urban analysis towards Cluj-Napoca's commercial spaces, ending with a larger approach of Eastern Europe's commercial spaces among main shopping streets. The commercial space analysis offers a substantive perceiving on local economic and administrative laws against commercial decay. A different range of view is paid to existing and former shopping stores in downtown district of the 20th century of Cluj-Napoca. The accomplished urban analysis will draw attention towards a commercial-space overhaul in historic district and it will also take into account the current need that the new-consumer has.

The second part of this column reveals Furniture Design Projects initiated by the Furniture Design Curricula of Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Cluj-Napoca. Here, academia can raise awareness of commercial spaces decline among young buyers.

A first sight into Cluj-Napoca's trade market is offered in the Local Development Action Guide of Cluj-Napoca 2014 to 2020. This economic inquiry highlights that service supply is an important economic activity. Local trade market makes up to 53 percent of the whole fiscal value of Cluj-Napoca's companies all together. The local development guide also underlines that trade development is currently increasing. [1, 179]

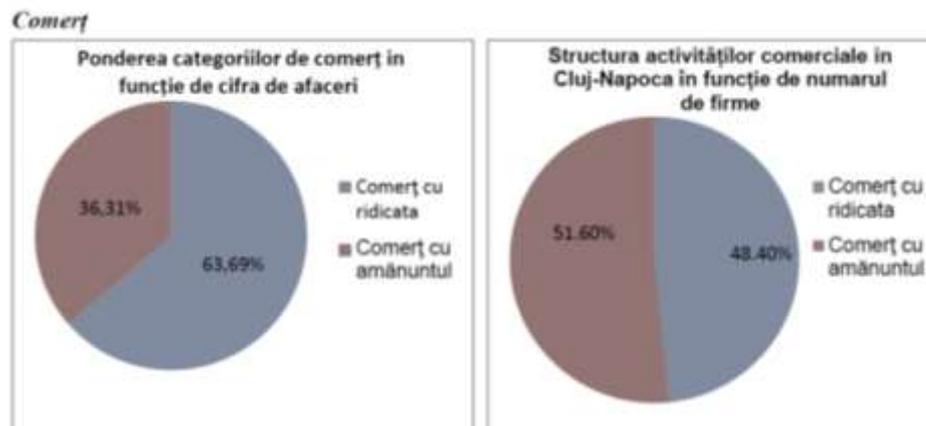


Figure 1. Trade market analysis in Cluj-Napoca. *En gross and en detail trade comparison* (dark red – *en detail trade* ; light blue – *en gross trade*)

According to the first figure, we can notice that *en detail trade* market is slightly higher in size than *en gross trade* market, yet it has a lower fiscal value. *En detail trade* market is customer-oriented in Cluj-Napoca represented by the following shopping centers such as Iulius Mall (first opened in 2007) and Vivo Center. Iulius Mall is contributing significantly to the local economy by being part of a large multi-purpose development project including many department stores, a hypermarket, many restaurants, a Starbucks coffee shop, ten movie theater rooms in Cinema City, a food court and an open-air rink in winter time. Iulius Shopping Center attracts over 13 million buyers every year. Vivo Center is another main shopping center in Cluj-Napoca also opened in 2007, entertaining over 10 million customers with departments stores and stand-alone stores. Another district shopping center is Central Shopping Center offering local brands department stores. Sora Shopping Center, located in the historic district has been one of the well-known commercial centers of Cluj-Napoca's trade market. Winkmart Someș is a neighborhood shopping center located in Mănăștur district. Is

has been first opened in 1989 and nowadays it offers a supermarket, apparel stores and drug-stores. [1, 646] The current concern regarding commercial spaces study (such as shopping centers) can involve sociological and cultural approaches [2]; these large shopping centers can be perceived as ideal small-scale urban objects.

The previous commercial spaces paragraph noticed that the opening of two shopping centers in Cluj-Napoca in late 2007 has led to an economic fall in downtown district. Meanwhile, in the city center, low-standard stores and gambling rooms emerge – the Cultural Analysis note. [1, 557]. This issue was highly addressed by the public opinion. Media was also trying to raise awareness about commercial decay in downtown since 2008. The first columns addressing this commercial space issue have been fair-minded [3], yet late articles are sharper and classify Cluj-Napoca as a vintage trade city. [4]

1.1 Urban planning prospects in downtown Cluj-Napoca

Previous media columns, from the late ten years, were claiming an official City Hall reaction or response to the addressed issue. The lack of urban regulation will not empower the City Hall to take any measure regarding commercial spaces decay. [5]

Consulting the Local Urban Planning Regulation of Downtown District we find out that only the accessibility towards commercial spaces is regulated, without any qualitative restriction regarding trade matter. Local Urban Planning Regulation is following the next rules concerning a commercial space urban proposal: “urban interventions will take into account the historic matter and will be debated by the Local Heritage Committee; urban proposals will stay clear of historic city walls and their original layout (referred to the following streets Emil Isac, Avram Iancu, George Barițiu, Regele Ferdinand Avenue, Victor Fulicea st). Advertising banners are strictly forbidden; brands can only announce a commercial activity; some buildings cannot withstand façade advertising; only cultural or community related events can use public advertising.”[6]

The first Side Note of the Local Urban Planning Regulation is coping only with the specific function matter in downtown commercial spaces neglecting past cultural customs, such as: “*en detail trade*: food trade covering an area of maximum 500 square meters, convenience store covering an area less than 1500 square meters; [...] work tools.”[7] On the first sight Local Urban Planning prospects ignore the cultural aspect of Cluj-Napoca’s trade market and choose not to regulate the standard of downtown commercial spaces. For a better comprehension of trade market – we will use as a point of reference downtown trade markets before The First World War and the Interwar period.

1.2 The historic matter. Trade market of the 20th century. Local commercial spaces in Cluj-Napoca

After year 1918, Transylvania became an important industrial region in Romania. Cluj-Napoca’s trade market was growing on the strength of being located on a main commercial road. The Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Cluj and General Yearbook of Great Romania in 1920 offered information about 445 *en detail trade* companies. Although there has been a severe economic crisis within 1923 and 1933, trade prospered and by the late 1930, 2500 business have been involved into the local trade market. Interwar times have experienced a raise of trade goods on the strength of demographic growth therefore trade market is beginning to take shape. [8]

The current research has led to the conclusion that Interwar pictures can establish main commercial areas of Cluj-Napoca. Old pictures from Mihai Viteazu Square show the area as a meaningful place for trade market on the strength of the link between the rail station and the city center. Figure 4.a.

pictures a fashion department store in Unirii Square and an apparel store from Regele Ferdinand Avenue (figure 5). Eroilor Avenue (pictured in figure 3), offers uninterrupted trade since pre-war times, but its qualitative norm has been changed.



Figure 2. Mihai Viteazu Square, early 20th century



Figure 3. Eroilor Avenue, late 19th century

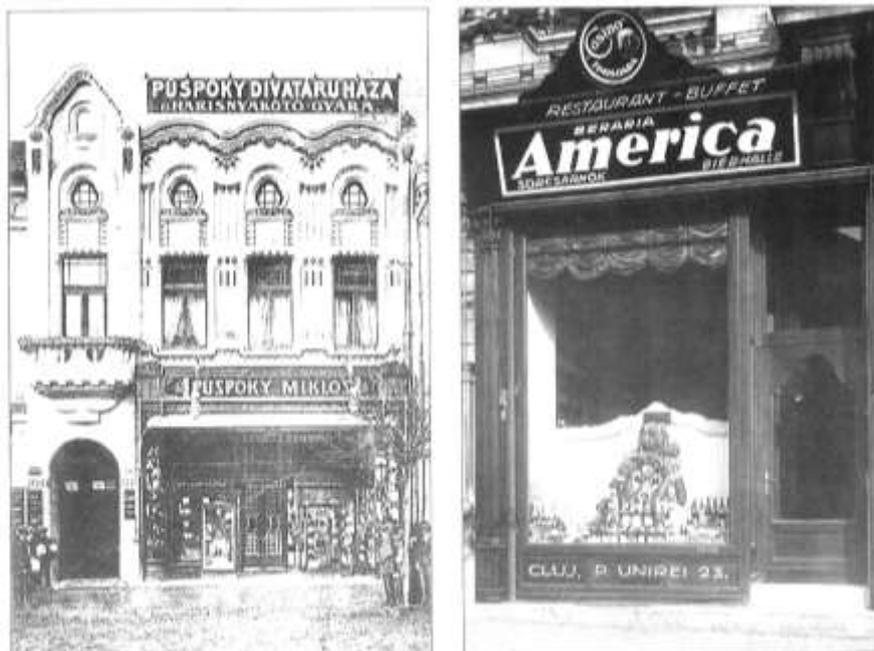


Figure 4. Unirii Square (north side), early 20th century (4.a.), the Interwar period (4.b.)



Figure 5. Regele Ferdinand Avenue, early 20th century



Figure 6.a. Eroilor Avenue-pedestrian area, 2017, 6.b. Low-standard stores - Eroilor Avenue



Figure 7. Commercial spaces ground floors – Napoca Street, 2017

The previous picture comparison serves the purpose of debate regarding commercial spaces in city centers. The following part attempts to discuss multi-purpose commercial spaces within historic centers, in this case commercial spaces in downtown Cluj-Napoca. The link between function and purpose and their qualitative norm will be disputed here and also particular initiative regarding the improvement of commercial areas will be taken into account. Commercial spaces in the center of the city have been replaced by several different functions hence not long ago, low standard commercial spaces rule downtown commercial area of Cluj-Napoca. The outcome was downtown luxury trade perishing in 2007 due to the suburb-build of several shopping centers and also due to expensive rental costs in downtown Cluj-Napoca.

On a larger scale, an urban comparison will mark various commercial streets from Romania and Eastern Europe.

2. Main concern regarding local commercial spaces

2.1 High-end commercial spaces analysis throughout Romania

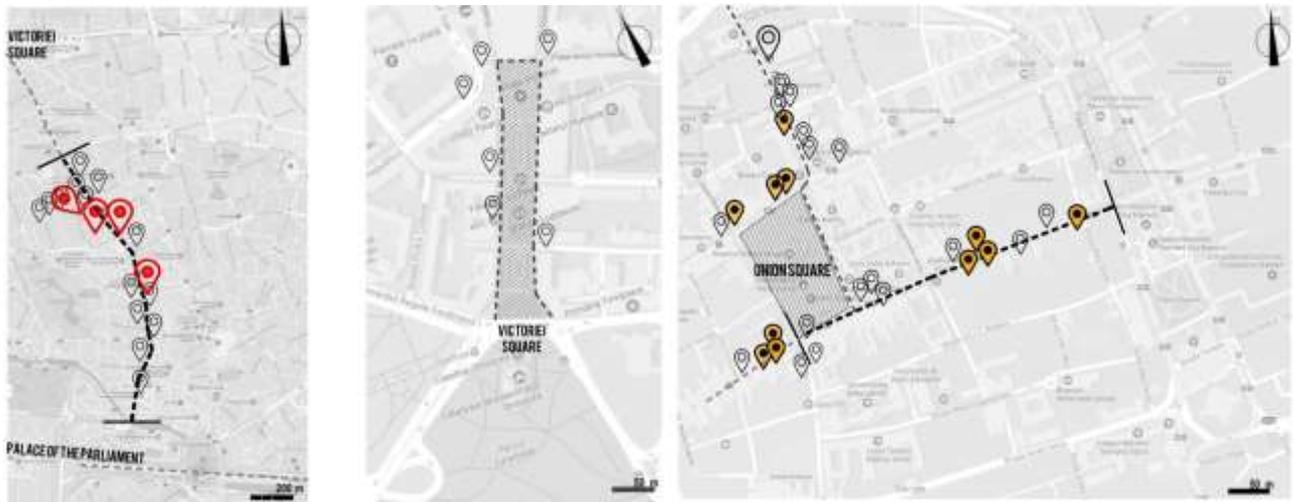


Figure 8. Urban Analysis - Commercial spaces comparison in Bucharest, Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca. Red pins mark the high-end retailers throughout main shopping streets

Three Romanian commercial areas are pictured above (Bucharest, Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca). Red pins mark high-end retailers among commercial streets in city centers such as Victoria Avenue in Bucharest, while black pins mark low standard stores. In Cluj-Napoca, Eroilor Avenue, Regele Ferdinand Avenue and Napoca Street, main shopping area of the city is overruled by low standard department stores (outlet stores marked as orange pins) near exquisite coffee shops. Comparing Victoriei Square from Timișoara to commercial spaces from Cluj-Napoca we can notice that low standard stores from Timișoara are not located in the city center. The outcome of luxury commercial trade decay is generated by limitation of the Local Urban Planning Regulation, rental procedures in downtown area, shopping centers customer absorption and due to a deterioration of cultural and social customer standard.

2.2 High-end commercial spaces in Eastern Europe



Figure 9. Commercial streets in Budapest and Belgrade

Figure 9 follows the same comparison method as above –Váci Útca, Andrásy Útca in Budapest and Kneza Mihaila (Prince Michael Street) in Belgrade offer a comprehensive case study for Eastern Europe trade market. In spite of low quantity, luxury stores in Budapest and Belgrade are represented only by *flagship* stores, defined as: “a retailer's primary location, a store in a prominent location, a chain's largest store, the store that holds or sells the highest volume of merchandise, a retailer's most well-known location, a chain's first retail outlet, a store location with decor or merchandise mix that is distinctly different from the rest of the chain, or the store location in a chain which carries the most high-priced merchandise catering to the most upscale customers.”[9]

3. The commercial matter in Europe

3.1 Price alignment in Eastern- Europe

A recent research conducted in Eastern Europe regarding price alignment of international luxury branded goods [10] has reported that prices have been aligned in different markets in Europe. The research included Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic and Russia in comparison with Italy and France. This inquiry was focused on mono-brand luxury market and the outcome was that prices in Eastern Europe were aligned with *flagship* stores of the same brands in Paris or Milan as well as with *e-commerce* websites of the same luxury brand. The lowest price for a luxury good is regulated by franchise market always competing with online commerce.

The myth according higher prices of a luxury brand can be found in *flagship* stores whereas multi-brands or franchise retailers offer lower prices for the same good is starting to fade. This ongoing price alignment is more relevant observing pricing on shopping streets in Paris or Milan that are trying to improve the customer experience in relation with luxury trade. In direct competition with *e-commerce*, *flagship* retail gains new customers who used to buy mostly from online commerce.

Romania and Poland lead in the "pricing alignment". Prices of premium goods such as high-end accessories or leather goods are no higher than 5 percent in comparison with the same good at a *flagship* store of the same brand. At the opposite side, Czech Republic's *flagship* stores are now up to 15 percent higher than same goods from shopping streets from Milan or Paris.

3.2 Commercial-oriented historic city centers

The following case study in Eindhoven [11] is relevant in order to illustrate how architecture can influence trade market in the city center. On a smaller scale, Eindhoven is one of the most technical-advanced cities from Netherlands. In order to profit from this aspect, the municipality of Eindhoven required a new city center to attract businesses, international inhabitants, and realty development. A smart city approach will need a new city center; even more technology-related products and design were needed in order become more visual in the city.

In 1999 Studio Fuksas started to re-design city center area, named Septembersquare. The challenge here was to incorporate the modernist Bijenkorf building, designed by Gio Ponti into the new city design. The aim of the new intervention was to design a building that convinced the new consumer to buy goods from this shopping center despite the fact that same products were being sold in other stores in Eindhoven. The commerce-oriented masterplan included the whole part of city center, including Septembersquare. Hence a new urban inconsistency starts to occur: the opaque modern building designed by Gio Ponti is connected to a parametric glass intervention submitted by Fuksas – a contrasting structure, inform architecture objects (named blobs) and an enormous glass canopy were placed on Septembersquare in order to establish an iconic and attractive new city center – a smaller scale Bilbao effect.

The outcome of this contemporary urban intervention is that architecture can be used to take part in consumerism sprawl on a smaller scale. The project was administrative-conducted by the municipality of Eindhoven in order to produce an iconic urban design. Following this initiative, premium brands such as Prada, hire acclaimed architects (like Rem Koolhaas) to design their stores as a part of globalizing their label.



Figure 10. Urban design in Eindhoven by Massimiliano Fuksas

Figure 11. Consumerist design

3.3 Late commerce habits in European context

Nowadays, luxury retailers cope with a pitfall drop of customers due to *e-commerce* expansion, meanwhile shopping centers promoting luxury brands is fading – the places of commerce constantly change in order to conform to the needs of the new customer. The recent habit is promoted by *e-commerce* so trade becomes digital. Internet leads to the fact that shopping malls are not needed

anymore; they promote an outdated plan of business. Daniel Herman [12] outlines that malls should be abandoned and trade should return to the city center. "Kill the mall: this is the mantra of trade experts".[12]

Shopping malls were built poorly, requiring a high level of maintenance, the aftermath is that they are no longer sustainable"many cavernous shopping malls are dinosaurs that cannot compete with the convenience of large specialized stores found in retail parks where discount centers". [12] The concept of the modern shopping mall was introduced in the 1950's by Austrian architect Victor Gruen, who wanted to recreate the European commerce character in the United States of America. The first shopping center was built in a vast suburban sprawl, a large commercial gallery surrounded by parking lots and pedestrian areas. Mall-vanishing was not part of the conceptual shopping center from the 1950's but department stores are constantly under change. The mall has fulfilled its original promise, so its reconversion should be feasible only if trade will return to the city center. In Romania, mall decline is not yet certain, although a specific trade market in historic centers remains a ruling issue.

Regarding a specific trade market in historic cities we can highlight two potential solutions to the problem:

- administrative and economic procedures led by the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca;
- actions designed to draw attention towards civil society (no age/employment status restriction) in order to raise awareness and indeed funds to support commercial spaces in downtown Cluj-Napoca. Academia can also play a role in emphasizing high-end commercial decay in the city by approaching current problems such as rediscovering lost value of historic centers. Therefore the curricula of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Cluj-Napoca through the subject of Specialized Design – Furniture Design Discipline (the 3rd year of study) initiated a commercial spaces-related project task named: "Commercial Space Furniture Design" in order to give an answer to the problem. Students (part of civil society) on behalf of Cluj-Napoca citizens can give an answer to this modern issue by small scale designing the new commercial area in the city.

4. Academia and its role in emphasizing the problem of high-end commercial decay

"Commercial Space Furniture Design" project task is aiming to re-purpose a small or medium existing commercial space within the city center yet the proposed furniture pieces were supposed to be incorporated into the whole interior design process. This furniture design task aimed to provide students defined acquaintance to object-oriented design. Regarding the Commercial space-themed design, students were able to express their interior design skills by choosing an idealistic space or an existing commercial space in Cluj-Napoca where to locate their proposal.

"Commercial Space Furniture Design" project task was interior-scenography oriented, therefore proposed furniture pieces were thought as offering a fresh look to an existing brand or they were adding an iconic value to the brand yet to the commercial space concept. There were also student projects where the whole design process was following the second scenario (the method where the furniture pieces were linked to an all-round interior design concept)

Hence we can emphasize two different scenarios to this matter:

A first scenario where interior design is sketched, yet the exhibit good dominate the shape of the design by all means.

A second scenario where interior space is thoroughly designed, therefore all the goods surpass the interior design concept.

”Commercial Space Furniture Design” assignment was oriented towards the second scenario, where the selling goods surpass an interior design concept.

Yet, there were also student projects that presented an art gallery-like interior design. This new trend emphasizes on the iconic good to be sold, the intangible exhibit in an art gallery more than just a selling product from a store.

4.1 Furniture Design Project Assignment

In order to support the interior design concept students were supposed to create their own brand or to choose an existing one to focus on their interior design skills. This given option should have been discussed with the project supervisor.

The given project task allowed students to determine their prospective commercial space by choosing from a variety of functional options such as: apparel commercial space, shoes and leather store, perfume and cosmetics commercial spaces, jewelry, wrist-watches, trinkets store, bookstore, sports apparel and hat store.

There was also a high-end store option where students could focus on avant-garde furniture design. Depending on the products ought to be sold students could also conceive different furniture pieces, such as: display furniture/storage (on this section the customer service to the selling product could be restricted or not), fitting room furniture, waiting room/ reading furniture (bookstore – related), clothing display / cash register counter / store service feature, fitting room mirror, other contemporary furniture pieces (according to the design concept).

The first step of the project task in order to achieve downright furniture design was documentary surveying. In this step students could consider two similar size interior design projects where good custom, exterior design, client-figure, the functional diagram of a store, inadequate or proper furniture design was taken into account. Students also surveyed assembly details and asked for technical support in order to reach the best furniture design. Although luxury department stores were the outset of the design project, the final project submission described common department stores. Hence we can witness that young students have poor acknowledgement concerning high-end retail.

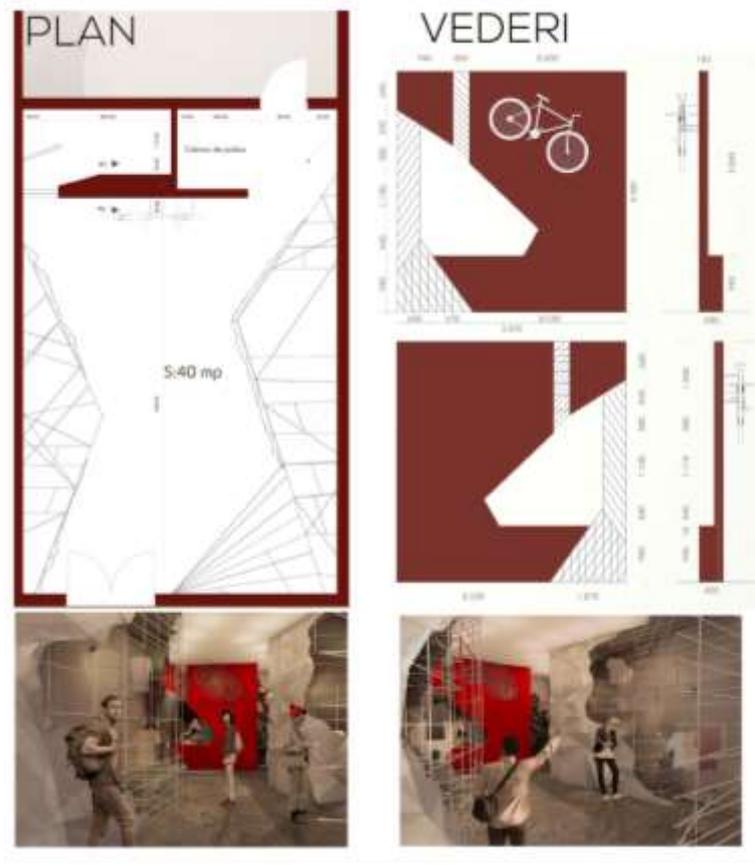


Figure 12. Proposed sports apparel furniture design project in an imaginary site. - 2017
Students: Barzog Ștefana, Căținaș Paula, Nagy Kristina – third year of study
Teaching Staff: Assoc. prof. PhD. Arch. Dorina Vlad; arch. Lucian Simu, T. Assist. PhD Arch. Andreea Moțu, Arch. Raluca Grapa; PhD student Arch. Fabian Luca

This furniture design project embodies hiking and mountain biking activity using a rock-like surface wall in order to recreate the ridged surface of a mountain.



Figure 13. Proposed Shoe store furniture design project in an imaginary site. - 2017
Students: Boca Ștefania, Pop Cătălin, Niculaș Andrei – third year of study

Figure 13 reveals the iconic image promoted by Camper sport shoe brand in their advertisements. The interior design emphasizes the selling good by exposing it on a sculptural piece of furniture

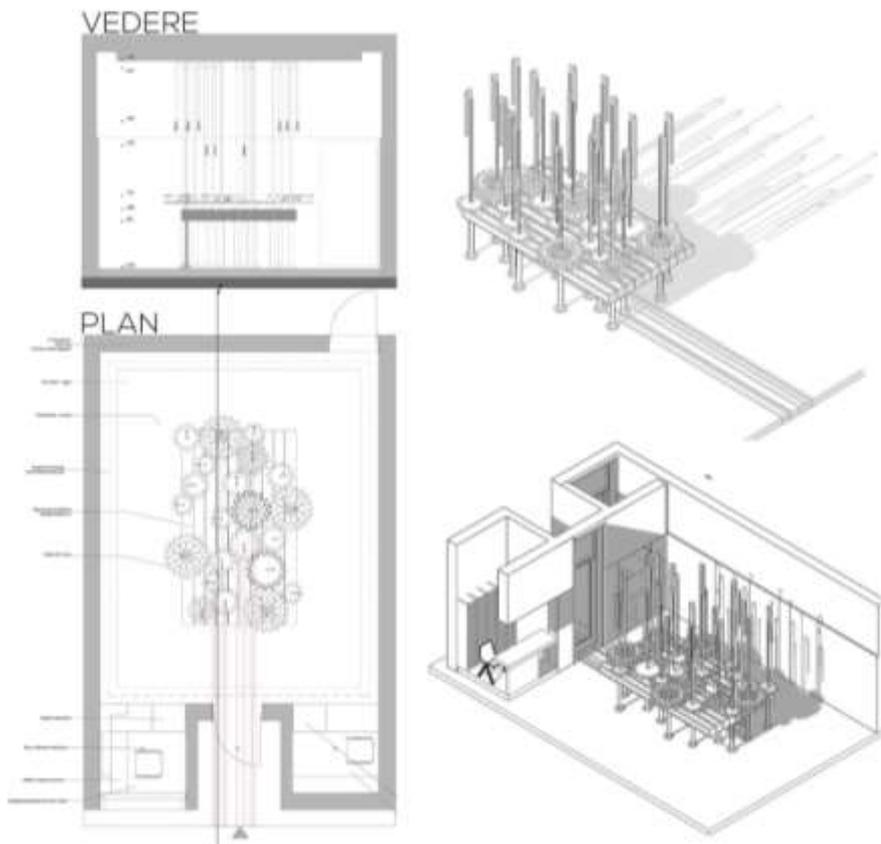


Figure 14. Proposed watch store furniture design project in an imaginary site - 2017
Students: Benea Romana, Marincea Tudor, Ștef Vanesa – third year of study

The following project uses a small technical mechanism from the inside of the watch as a concept of human scale interior design. This project also tries to remake the feeling of entering a small watch repair shop.

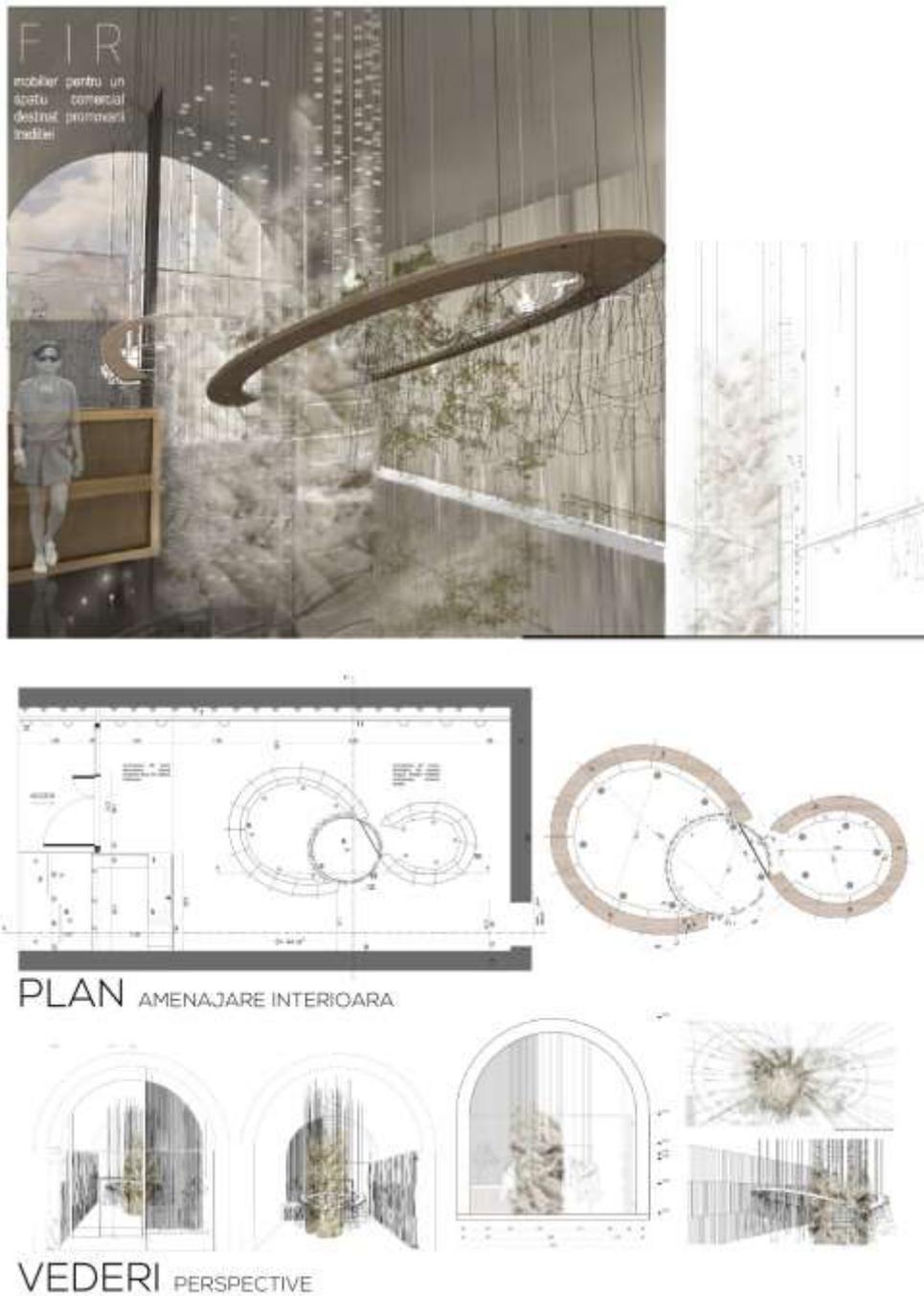


Figure 15. Traditional store furniture design project in an imaginary site. – 2017
Students: Căntă Diana, Oltean Ioana, Udrea Mădălina – third year of study

”Thread” (”Fir”) design project accustoms potential buyers to local a culture regarding handmade hemp-textiles. Here, the ground floor uses the concept of hemp processing path towards turning into fabric. An imaginative vision rules the whole interior design concept by following the simple steps of hemp processing such as collecting the plant, washing it, weaving it and wearing the final product.



Figure 16. Aesop store furniture design project in Cluj - Napoca. - 2017
Students: Avram Mara, Sămărtinean Andreea, Rusu Mihai – third year of study

Here, students choose to re-purpose an existing commercial space in Cluj-Napoca, near the National Opera Hall - as Aesop a cosmetic oriented store. This nearby setup became the concept of this cosmetic department store by using chairs as exhibit pieces for the selling products.

5. Conclusions

Student opinion was an important part in improving the didactic act for the following year of study. Therefore, at the end of the second semester students were asked to answer a written opinion poll regarding furniture design curricula. The question list included several points of view concerning their work method. Sixty percent of the overall numbers of student have filled the following opinion poll.

1. Furniture design task - Give opinion on the project task "Commercial Space Furniture Design" regarding the general view of object oriented design.

Student assessments: - the project task was interesting and up to date
- compelling yet certain commercial spaces were preferred as given location for the project task
- useful
- "constraints-free project where we can use our imagination"
- excellent use of furniture /object-oriented design where you can always reinvent the ordinary
- "fascinating, we could invent any possible design"

2. Timing - Give opinion on time management related to the given task.

Student assessments: - some assessments on adequate time management
- few assessments on little time given for this project task
- one assessment on the fact that three or four weeks would have been enough to complete the task

3. Work method - Give opinion on most used work resources (web sources, printed information, hardcover catalogue, architectural models).

Student assessments: the internet was the most-used tool for the given task

4. Project application - Give opinion on how this project might help you in the following years.

Student assessment: this project task gave students "a new gateway to interior design or small scale architecture design, a good project task to assign".

Ending Statistics: Positive assessments: 86 percent; negative assessments: 14 percent.

Judging by the final result of furniture design projects, students complied to the given project assignment and they managed to fulfill all the given tasks until due date. Students providing a negative assessment were less interested in furniture design and they thought the subject was time-consuming and they had little or no desire of improvement.

Future prospects

The given project assignment remains up to date; therefore it can be used as a civil society mindset in order for academia to enlighten young students. This new-built mindset will help the young professional perceive the living city in a different way.

Teaching staff have also given some guidelines in order to improve future project assignments. An empirical written research should give students a better view on the specific commercial matter. Also a longer period of time given for the project research could improve their project outcome.

The project emphasizes on the link between interior design, object design and the public audience by awakening the hidden artistic vision students have. The project task gives an answer to a real life situation.

Modern mobility can be noted though the continuous reconversions of exterior and interior spaces. The change taking place nowadays uses new materials and experimental building structures. From the urban life point of view, technology and trade can affect commercial spaces by attempting a new approach such as antiquity revival or state of the art furniture design. As a sequel, commercial spaces are frequently changing their design in order to adapt to the current needs. In addition, commercial spaces also can be perceived as a surprise ambiance in meeting the expectations of new customers.

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Figure 3. Eroilor Avenue, late 19th century. Image source: Sas P. *Mesélő Képeslapok, Kolozsvár 1867 - 1919*. Budapesta: Noran, p.161.

Figure 4. Unirii Square (north side) early 20th century. Image source: Fodor A. *Idem*, p. 26.

Figure 5. Regele Ferdinand Avenue, early 20th century. Image source: Fodor A. *Idem*, p. 143.

Figure 6.a,b Eroilor Avenue, 2017. Image source: author`s image.

Figure 7. Commercial spaces ground floors – Napoca Street, 2017. Image source: author`s image.

Figure 8. Urban Analysis - Commercial spaces comparison in Bucharest, Timisoara and Cluj-Napoca. Image source: author`s image (base plan Google Maps).

Figure 9. Commercial streets in Budapest and Belgrade. Image source: author`s image (base plan Google Maps).

Figure 10. Urban design in Eindhoven by Massimiliano Fuksas. Image source: <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/massimiliano-fuksas-de-blob-at-september-18-square/>, accessed sept. 2017.

Figure 11. Consumerist design. Image source: <https://marloesdijkink.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/I-shop-therefore-I-am-af-e1439235351559.jpg>, accessed sept. 2017.

Figure 12. Proposed sports apparel furniture design project in an imaginary site. 2017. Image authors - students: Barzog Ștefana, Căținaș Paula, Nagy Kristina – third year of study.

Figure 13. Proposed Shoe store furniture design project in an imaginary site. 2017. Image authors - students: Boca Ștefania, Pop Cățalin, Niculaș Andrei – third year of study.

Figure 14. Proposed watch store furniture design project in an imaginary site. 2017. Image authors - students: Benea Romana, Mărincaș Tudor, Ștef Vanesa – third year of study.

Figure 15. Traditional store furniture design project in an imaginary site.2017. Image authors - students: Căținaș Diana, Oltean Ioana, Udrea Mădălina – third year of study.

Figure 16. Aesop store furniture design project in Cluj - Napoca. 2017. Image authors - students: Avram Mara, Sămărtinean Andreea, Rusu Mihai – third year of study.