

In search of urban cohesion – the City of Zalău case study

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Abstract

Today's cities bear the footprint of life-styles specific to earlier times. Old buildings preserve the silent memory of these existences, sometimes, through architectural quality, they become identity symbols and tourist attractions, sometimes they are forgotten, abandoned and replaced. Each city has its own character due to the social and cultural relations that have influenced its development. The built space is reflecting the spirit of the place with a very important role in the city's coherence and the quality of life. There are many features of urban life that we appreciate today, which we consider valuable and necessary to convey to future generations. Physical growth in space requires coherence with the old urban organism. The paper will address the development of the public space in the city of Zalău over the past two centuries in order to highlight its specific character. As new elements of the urban framework, the new public space environment preserves the architectural heritage in order to achieve the necessary coherence to ensure the quality of life.

Rezumat

Orașele de azi poartă amprenta unor moduri de viață specifice timpurilor anterioare. Vechile clădiri păstrează memoria tăcută a acestor existențe devenind uneori, prin calitatea arhitecturală, simboluri identitare și atracții turistice, alteori au fost uitate, abandonate și înlocuite. Fiecare oraș are propriul caracter ca urmare a raporturilor sociale și culturale care i-au influențat dezvoltarea, spațiul construit reflectând spiritul locului cu rol deosebit de important în coerența orașului și în asigurarea calității vieții. Există multe caracteristici ale vieții urbane pe care azi le apreciem, le considerăm valoroase și pe care considerăm necesar a le transmite generațiilor viitoare. Creșterea fizică în spațiu presupune o coerență, nu doar teritorială, cu vechiul organism urban. Vom aborda dezvoltarea spațiului public zălăuan în ultimele două secole, în vederea evidențierii caracterului său specific. Transformarea acestuia de-a lungul timpului, opțiunile diferite în aprecierea valorilor arhitecturale, restructurarea lui ca loc și semnificație au creat o nouă valorizare a vechilor străzi și piețe. Ca elemente ale cadrului urban nou propus, noile ambianțe ale spațiului public conservă patrimoniul arhitectural în vederea realizării coerenței atât de necesare asigurării calității vieții.

Key words: identity, coherence, continuity, evolution over time, built space.

1. Introduction

Today's cities bear the footprint of life-styles specific to earlier times. Old buildings preserve the silent memory of these existences, sometimes, through architectural quality, they become identity

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symbols and tourist attractions, sometimes they are forgotten, abandoned and replaced. The paper presents in a sequence from the global to the local, elements of the urban framework we considered to be characteristic for the downtown of Zalău.

2. Urban form

Through its urban development, as well as its location in a special natural setting, the city has gained a spatial configuration whose expression is summed up by some powerful elements - Fig. 1:

- the course of the Zalău River Stream – which is insufficiently capitalized, but it is a distinctive element of the physical configuration;
- Mihai Viteazu boulevard - the main street of the city;
- the city centre – the core – which keeps its old character by conforming parcels, fronts, volumes and streets;
- streets converging towards the central core, generally following historical trails:
 - 22 December 1989 street, which is attested at the end of the 16th century
 - Corneliu Coposu Street (formerly Tykol Street, formerly Kiraly Street, former St Ivan Stalin Street, formerly the Republic Street) is present in documents dating back to 1642
 - Mihai Viteazu Street (formerly Alszag Street, formerly Ghe. Doja Street), certified since 1684
 - Gheorghe Doja Street (formerly Nagy Szekely Street, former Ilie Pintilie Street, formerly Cluj Street) – certified since 1848.

Simultaneously with the longitudinal extension, the city has developed important residential areas on the hills lining the valley of river Zalău, which led to the appearance of stepped blocks, aspects reflected in the increase of the value of investments. Summing up, we have several distinct stages in the city's evolution, namely:

- the nucleus of the 12th-15th centuries settlement with its old centre;
- development specific to the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, given by the current civic centre;
- the nineteenth-century expansion, with housing blocks;
- Specific development between 1900-1960;
- the development of the period 1961-1995, industrialization etc., stages that define an area of $\approx 77 \text{ km}^2$.

The current Iuliu Maniu square is attested at the end of the 16th century. Probably in its initial form the settlement consisted of the following 4 streets grouped around the square alongside the town hall [1].

In 1831 each of the four main streets (the ones mentioned above) extended about 400 m in length. The street development in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century is an extension of the previous one, with similar traits, taking previous trails, without the presence of predetermined axes or marked structured axes.

In 1926, there were 6 main streets in Zalău - Fig. 2:

- the 4 original streets: - 22 December 1989
 - Corneliu Coposu Street
 - Mihai Viteazu Street
 - Gheorghe Doja Street
- to which are added: - Tudor Vladimirescu Street, Simion Bărnuțiu Street
- The Market's street, is being attested in the 17th century, but reaching main street status only during the 1920s [2].

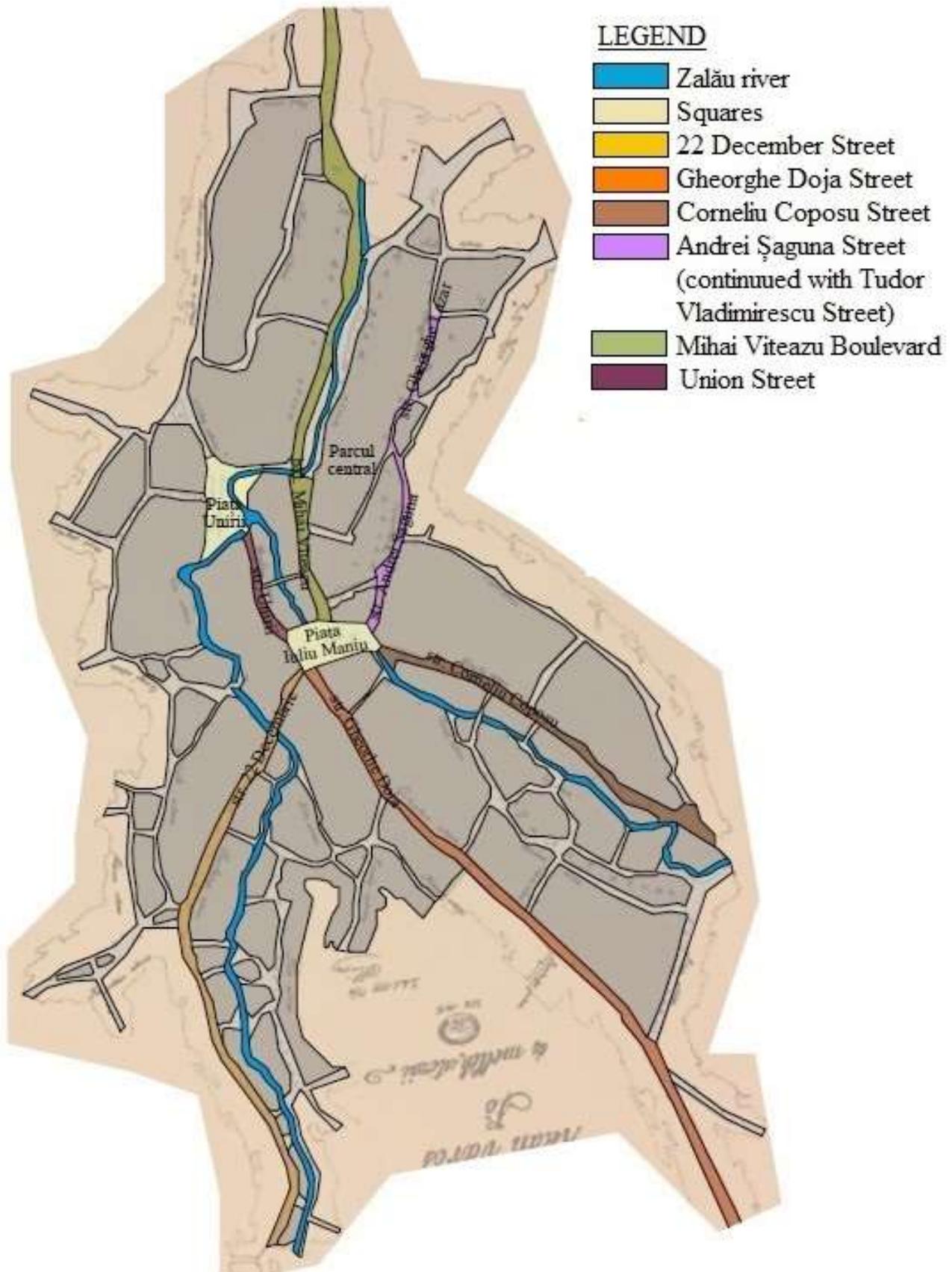


Figure. 1. 1789 street configuration

Source: general street map of Zalău 1789, by Hoppe Lipot, processed by the author

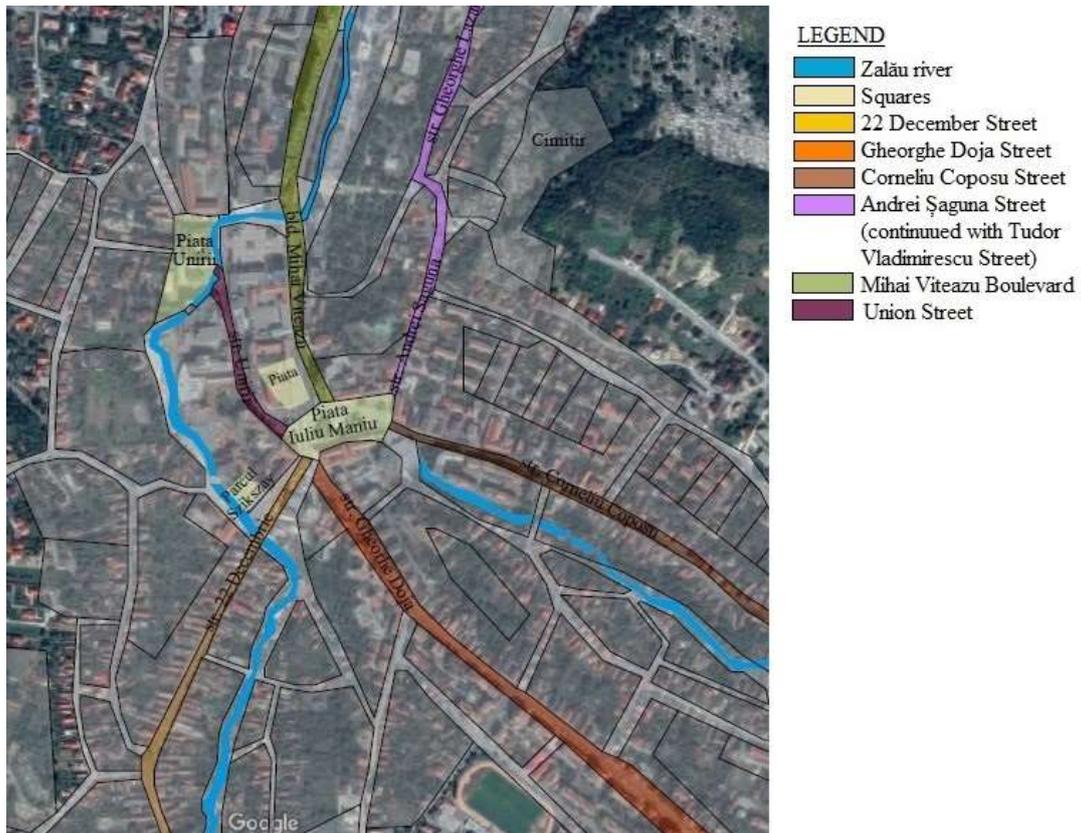


Figure 2. 1926 street configuration
 Source: maps.google.com processed by the author

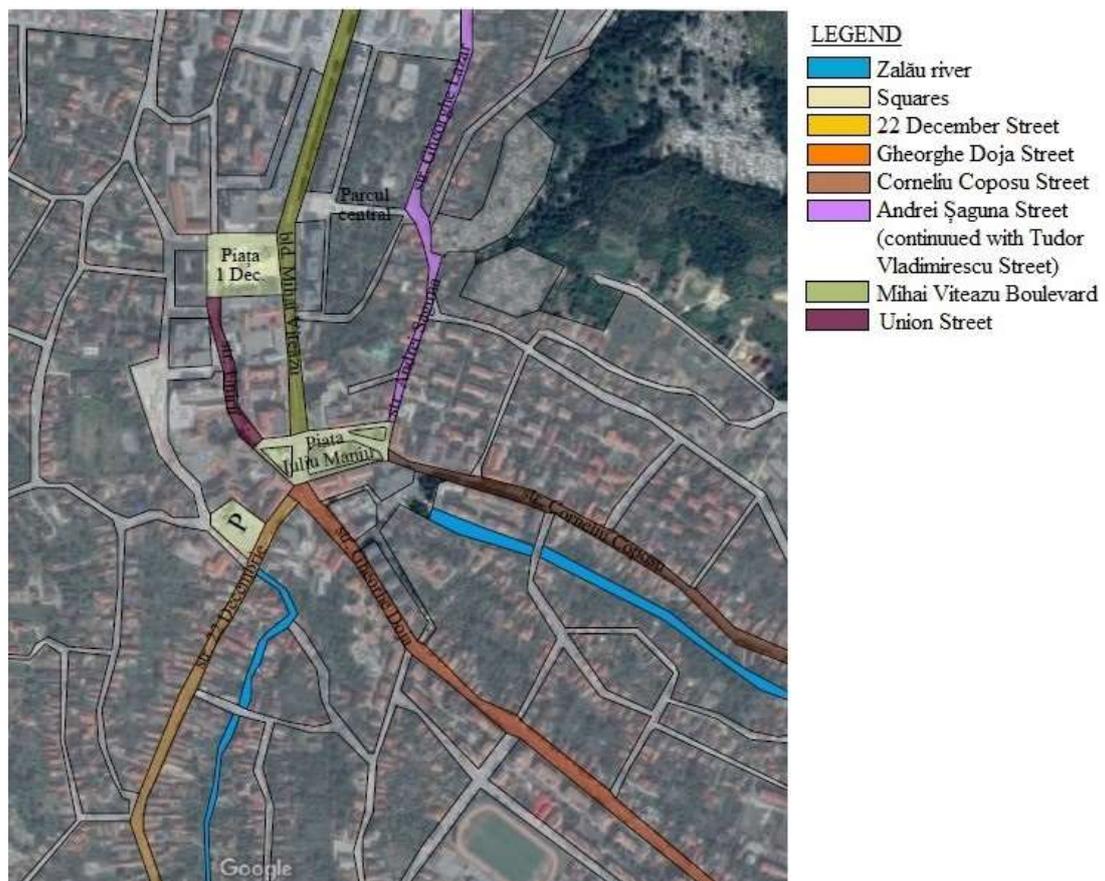


Figure 3. Current street configuration

Source: maps.google.com processed by the author

The elements that characterize the evolution of the settlement until the Second World War have changed since the 1960s, when the construction of new residential neighbourhoods, designed to solve the problem of the growing number of inhabitants of a city that turns into an industrial centre and which becomes a county capital in 1968, begins. Thus, there are new areas whose configuration is determined either by an orthogonal street network or by rigors imposed by the lands in steep slopes - Fig. 2.

In a few areas built during this period, a non-orthogonal street layout was preserved - old streets, with some rectifications and regularizations, so the settlement preserves significant portions of the historical urban fabric, where they kept some architectural and urban values. This patrimony is now complemented by the values represented by the rural architecture of the former village of Ortelec, which has been included as part of the city in 1945.

Since the 90s, Zalău has witnessed again a major development, with 11 new neighborhoods with more than 2000 homes. The vineyards that bordered the city turned into neighborhoods and it is worth mentioning that the main direction is the development of the neighborhoods, the number of built blocks decreasing.

3. Public spaces

Existing public spaces:

- The historical nucleus is Iuliu Maniu Square, where 6 important arteries converge into a triangular market. This is the oldest square in the city - in 1808 Zalău was certified as Waltenberg vel Zillenmarkt [3]. As a result of the privilege granted by King Matei Corvin on 1 August 1973, which meant the rights to hold a trade fair in that location on certain days of the year. The fair was held in the current Iuliu Maniu Square, the central square of the city – Fig. 4.



Figure 4. Iuliu Maniu Square - 1940

Source: www.cladireatransilvania.ro

- Prefectural Square (Square Market - Main Market) located between 2 important traffic

routes - Fig. 5.



Figure 5. Prefectural Square - 2010
Source: www.zalauj.ro – Zalău City Hall

Disbanded public spaces:

- Union Square - which was located in front of the General Dragalina Barrage, on which the Prefecture building is now located - Fig. 6.



Figure 6. Union Square – early 20th century
Source: www.bjs.ro – County Library of Sălaj

- The Szikszay Park - which was located behind the current building of the Town Hall, then

servicing the prefect's institution (on the site of the current parking lot). On the north-west side of the park was the prison (mentioned since 1787 in a document), which in the communist period functioned as a special prison where dissidents and psychiatrists were detained. In this park was also located the monument of Tuhutum – Fig. 7.



Figure 7. The Szikszay Park - early 20th century
Source: old postcard

4. Historical Buildings

Iuliu Maniu Square, No. 3-6, 10-13

A complex of buildings that had close ties to the craftsmen associations is situated the northern front of the Iuliu Maniu Square, and had shops on the ground floor, a casino and a bench upstairs. Now it serves as the headquarters of the Directorate for Culture, the County Library, the Public Health Department and as an office building (former bank) – Fig. 8.

The buildings date back to the 1890s and 1910s and are one-storey buildings realized in the characteristic eclectic style of that period. The architect is not known precisely, probably Orbán, who also designed the Transylvania building.

The northern part of the central square of the city, which was the place where the fairs were held, is compact. The ensemble of buildings is related to the activity of the craftsmen by the original ground floor, which was that of shop, having designed places in the existing arcades for the showcases of each store.

Over time, the ground floor underwent substantial changes, especially at the façade. Only some ornaments, the balcony from the first building, the fasteners on the facades remained intact. The last building, which was the headquarters of the Sălaj Bookstores, but was originally a bank, kept the window stucco decoration as well as the anti-decorations with antique inspirational decorations.



Figure 8. North side buildings in Iuliu Maniu Square – 1940s
Source: www.bjs.ro – County Library of Sălaj

Transylvania Building, an important historical monument situated in Iuliu Maniu Square, the City Hall, the Sylvania National College, the County Department of Culture and the square – central green space with existing urban furniture, form together a personalized, expressive and extremely valuable urban and architectural ensemble - Fig. 9.

This historical monument is a characteristic example of eclectic style construction existing in Transylvania at the end of the 19th century and represents the purpose and desire of the local community to adapt to the changes of the respective era. Therefore, the windows have geometric struts in the central part, the façade has entablaments characteristic of the period, the inner courtyard has upstairs open corridor with columns – Fig 10. The building is equipped with a showroom, noting the secession-style ceiling painting and statuary groups in the corners of the showroom [4] – Fig. 11.



Figure 9. Transylvania Building -1940s
Source: www.cladireatransilvania.ro



Figure 10. Transylvania Building – courtyard
Source: www.cladireatransilvania.ro



Figure 11. Transylvania Building events room - secession-style ceiling painting
Source: www.cladireatransilvania.ro

Wesselényi Reformed Highschool (Actual Sylvania National College.) – the main building, with three-storey and an underground level, was built in the secessionist style, fashionable at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century [5] – Fig 12. It was built at the beginning of the 20th century and it was the pride of the Zalău inhabitants, given the splendid façade with vegetal motifs (sunflowers), Christian and Protestant symbols.



Figure 12. Wesselényi Reformed Highschool – 1910s

Source: www.cnszalau.ro – Silvania National College

Zaláu City Hall

This building is also an architectural monument, it is an administrative building built in 1836 – Fig. 13.

The main façade has a portal entrance, and it is decorated with stucco, the windows are decorated with geometric frames, wooden roof structure with wooden cover. Inside, there are monumental stairs, massive wooden carpentry, the floors in the central rooms are mosaic with different coloured floral scenes.



Figure 13. Zaláu City Hall

Source: www.zalausj.ro – Zaláu City Hall

Reformed Church

The church, as we know it today, was inaugurated on October 28, 1906, when the first service was held in the new 1,500-seat space. The Reformed Church in Zaláu, which survived the passing of years, was declared a historic monument – Fig. 14.

The architectural project of the new baroque church was made by two architects from Budapest, Papp Gyula and Szabolcs Ferenc.



Figure 14. Reformed Church
Source: www.cladireatransilvania.ro

The Roman Catholic Church

Located in an area of interference with religious cultures, it was natural that, with the counter-reform launched by the Catholic Church in Rome, Zalău would benefit from a Roman Catholic church. Considering the fact that Catholics lost control over their church in Zalău at the beginning of the 18th century, which became a reformed one, it was required the emergence of this place of worship of Roman Catholic confession – Fig. 15.



Figure 15. The Roman Catholic Church
Source: www.wikimapia.org

5. Landmarks and monuments

Wesselenyi statuery group

Situated in a privileged position from an architectural and urban point of view, certainly in the most representative space of Zalău, the monument of Baron Wesselényi is imposed by its greatness and its significance – Fig. 16. A grandiose statue of bronze on a pedestal of grey granite, plated with white marble slabs, shows us the legendary baron standing on his legs, emphasising his social position, dressed in a Hungarian national suit with his left hand placed on the shoulder of a serf peasant, whose clothing is an amalgam of Romanian and Hungarian clothing elements, wishing to emphasize the fact that he is a master with more democratic orientations, without discrimination of origin. In some ways, the monument symbolizes liberation from serfdom.



Figure 16. Wesselenyi statuery group – situated in Iuliu Maniu Square – 1940s
Source: old postcard

The fountain with angels

Established after 1854, the "fountain with angels", as known by the inhabitants of Zalău, is one of the most important landmarks for generations of pilgrims – Fig 17.

Over the years, the "fountain with angels" has undergone changes in appearance and placement.



Figure 17. The fountain with angels – beginning of the 20th century
Source: old postcard

6. Conclusions

As the Leipzig Charter on sustainable European cities mentions, the spirit of the place and its culture plays a particularly important role in the coherence of the city and the quality of life [6].

In the following years, the city center's remodeling, historic building rehabilitation, parking and green spaces, and modernization of the main streets of the city are planned. The center will get another look, the Union Street linking the City Hall and the Prefecture will be pedestrianized. The architectural solutions contest was organized for the remodeling of the central area of the city, with a project of financing on the axis of "urban regeneration".

We consider that the main landmarks which were presented above - buildings, monuments and historical urban spaces must have a special place, an identity. In the future, the urban and architectural approaches regarding the development of the central space in the city of Zalau must have a certain coherence because this is the main factor of the quality of life for the inhabitants of a city.

7. References

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