

## The Development and Evolution of the Built Environment in the City of Zalău

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(Published online 14 March 2017)

### Abstract

*By making a study of the urban built environment of the city of Zalău throughout its evolution, I aim to determine its structure as a result of the development during time while highlighting the overall development trends and defining elements. Despite having a respectable age, Zalău's heritage is not one of a typical Transylvanian preserved city. A main feature which led to the destruction of most of its built heritage is the geographical position, being a strategic point at the confluence of commercial and military roads since Roman times. Thanks to the privileges acquired from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, residents received rights and freedoms which led to a flourishing craftsmanship and trade, making the city attractive to new residents. Smiths and craftsmen have left their mark on the image of the built heritage. It's essential to understand the elements of urban morphology that determined the evolution of the built environment. Over time, the city has undergone a continuous metamorphosis, without necessarily maintaining a consistency. Often architecture and urbanism projects ignore the historical context, making interventions that affect negatively the functionality and the aesthetics of the urban built space and also the urban life. Therefore we need to identify the main directions of development and a clearer understanding of the analysed space, which is a mandatory basis in formulating proposals for further development.*

### Rezumat

*Studiul de istorie și devenire a spațiului urban construit al orașului Zalău urmărește determinarea structurii spațiului studiat ca rezultat al evoluțiilor în timp, evidențiind tendințele generale de dezvoltare și elementele definitorii. Deși are o vechime respectabilă, patrimoniul municipiului Zalău nu este cel al unui oraș transilvan conservat. O caracteristică principală care a dus la distrugerea patrimoniului imobiliar din Zalău este poziția geografică fiind descris ca un punct strategic, la confluența unor drumuri militare și comerciale, încă din perioada Romană. Datorită privilegiilor dobândite începând cu secolul XV, locuitorii au primit drepturi și libertăți care au determinat înflorirea meșteșugurilor și comerțului făcând din Zalău un oraș atractiv pentru noii locuitori. Meșterii și-au pus amprenta pe imaginea patrimoniului construit din Zalău. Înainte de a interveni asupra imaginii orașului, este esențială înțelegerea elementelor de morfologie urbană și cauzele care au determinat evoluția spațiului construit. Orașul a fost supus de-a lungul timpului*

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*unei continue metamorfoze, fără a păstra în mod necesar o coerență. Nu de puține ori proiectele de arhitectură sau de urbanism ignoră trecutul istoric al localității, realizându-se intervenții care pot afecta spațiul construit și viața urbană în mod negativ atât din punct de vedere estetic cât și din punct de vedere funcțional. Așadar se cere identificarea principalelor direcții de dezvoltare și o înțelegere mai clară a spațiului analizat, acesta fiind în mod normal baza obligatorie în formularea propunerilor ulterioare de dezvoltare.*

**Keywords:** built environment, historical study, evolution, development, heritage, urban life, identity, urban morphology.

## 1. Introduction

By making a study of the urban built environment of the city of Zalău throughout its evolution, I aim to determine its structure as a result of the development during time while highlighting the overall development trends and defining elements. Residence of the Sălaj County, the city of Zalău is located in the north-west of Romania, on the river valley bearing the same name. The first written record about Zalău as a inhabited location is made by Anonymus, King Bela IV's notary in his paper, Gesta Hungarorum written in the second half of the twelfth century, but there are arguments that a human settlement existed there around year 900. The first documentary attestation of the city dates back from 1220 where it was named Ziloc villa.[1]

## 2. The territory

Residence of the Sălaj County Zalău is located in the north-west of Romania, on the valley of the river bearing the same name, at the contact strip of the Transylvania depression, Western Hills and the Western Plain.

Zalău is situated in the region we call today Sălaj, Sylvania or the country of Sylvania. Sălaj County name derives from the word "silva" therefore is also called Sylvania, meaning "wooded place" and Transylvania separated by mountain Meseș which means mountain in Latin inscriptions being called Meches.[2]

At 1808 Zalău was certified as Waltenberg vel Zillenmarkt; Waltenberg meaning the wooded mountain; markt meaning market. Following privilege granted by King Matthias Corvinus from 1 August 1473 to take fair at this location on certain days of the year. "The whole phrase, vel Waltenberg Zillen-markt can be understood as the market of Zalău next to the wooded mountain." [3]

On the current territory of the city were discovered traces of habitation since the Middle Neolithic (4000-2700 BC), from the Late Neolithic (2300-1800 BC) and of the late Bronze Age represented by various settlements, tools and vessels. From the Iron Age were discovered Dacian traces.

In Roman times, Dacian territories were merged into the Roman province of Dacia. This area proved very important in strategic terms, being transformed into the independent Dacia Porolissensis province, with its capital at Porolissum, located 8 km away from Zalău.

There were also found traces dating back from the early Middle Ages (housing, hearths, annexes, fireplaces, household pits).

A main feature which led to the destruction of the heritage property is the geographical position of Zalău. Documents mentioning the city dated back from the sixteenth century describe it as a

strategic point at the confluence of commercial and military roads, therefore the population is reduced and it used to have a low economic potential. Because of the privileges acquired later, residents received rights and freedoms which led to flourishing handicrafts and trade, making Zalău a city attractive to new residents [4]. Despite having a respectable age, Zalău's heritage is not the typical Transylvanian preserved city.

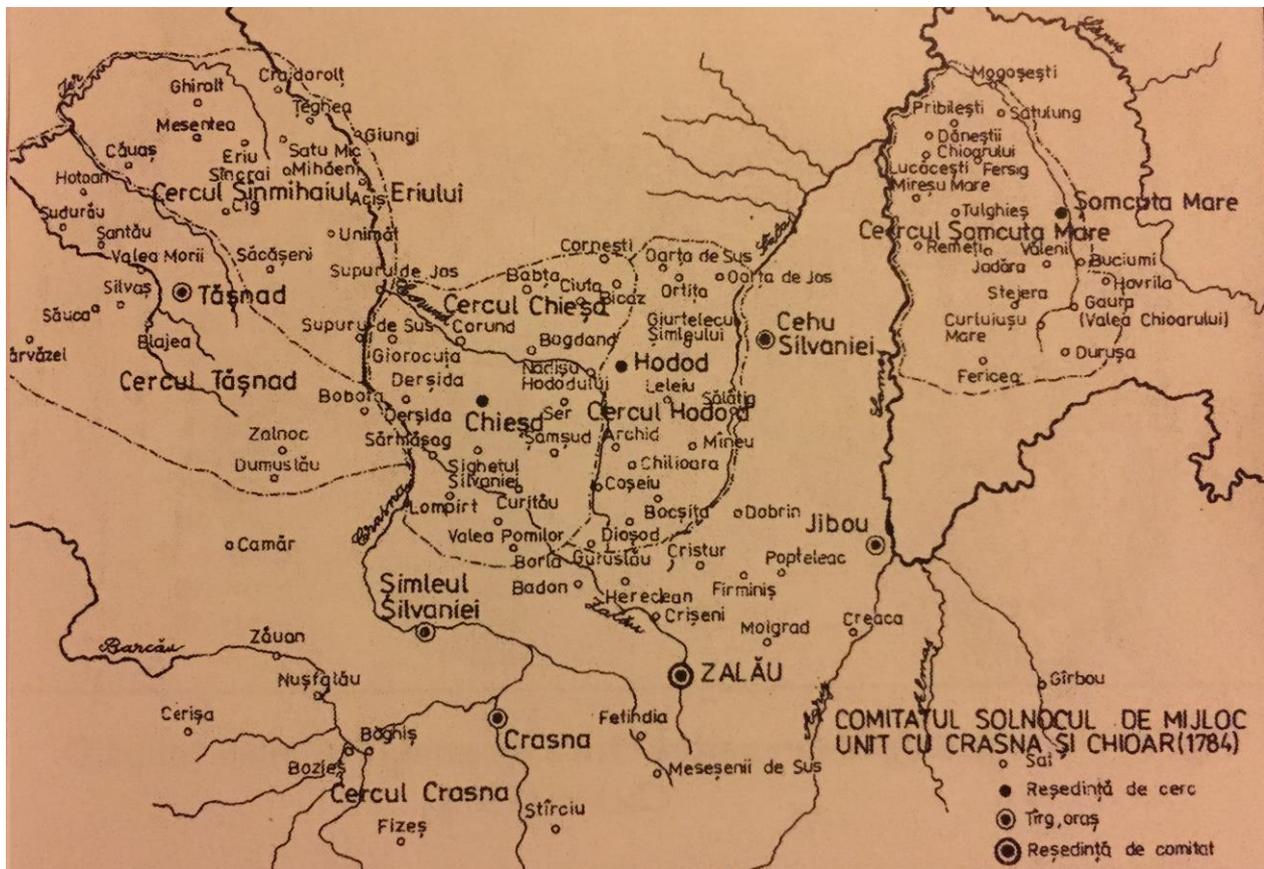


Figure 1. The map of the middle Solnoc county with capital in Zalău – 1784 (E. Edroiu – Gyemant, Acta MP VIII, p.432, fig.1)

### 3. The city

#### 3.1 In the past

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Matthias Corvinus, King of Bohemia and Hungary declared Zalău “market town” on the 1st August 1473 offering its citizens the right to free trade with and economic independence. Documents from the 16<sup>th</sup> century that mention the city describe it as a strategic point at the confluence of commercial and military roads, therefore the population was reduced and it had a low economic potential. Thanks to the privileges acquired later, residents received rights and freedoms which led to a flourishing craftsmanship and trade, making the city attractive to new residents. By the end of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century it belonged to Transylvania and possessed an autonomous leadership. After Mihai Viteazu's victory in Guraslău, the town regained the real autonomy that offered its citizens administrative, fiscal and military laws. In 1601, the town regained the real autonomy, with administrative, legal, tax, economic and military attributions.

Occupations of the city residents are mentioned in chronicles of the eighteenth century, some of those are: harness makers, potters, wheelwrights, shoemakers, butchers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, hatters and dealers. From the writings of Leontin Ghergariu in 1926, we find out that that at that time the city had an electricity grid, was illuminated entirely, had a total of 30 streets, 6

of which were paved and had a side walk. All the main streets start from "Michael the Brave" square, which is where the main market was located. The second is the Union Square market where the fair took place. "In terms of cleanliness, the city is on a high level, especially compared to other cities. Regarding the external arrangement, Zalău meets all the conditions of a city." [5]

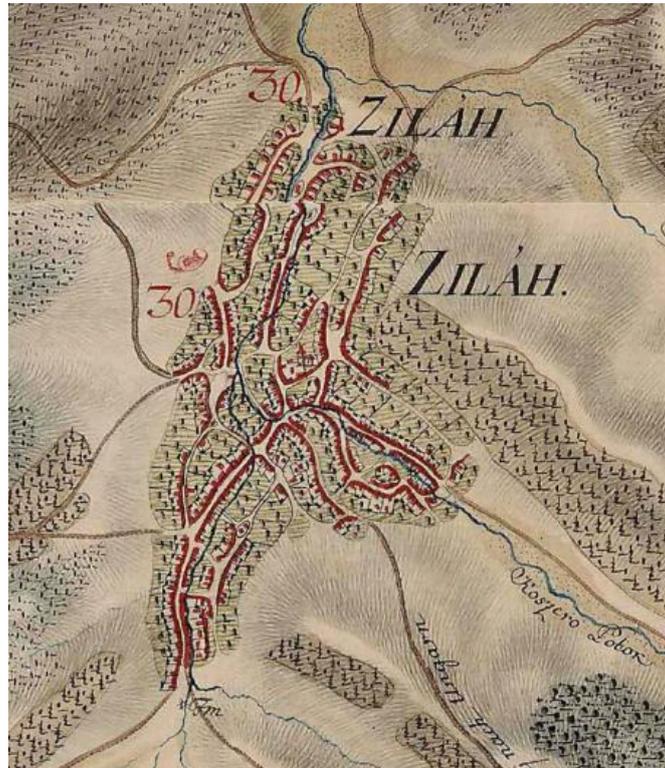


Figure 2. Zalău - Josephinian Land Survey, 1769-1773

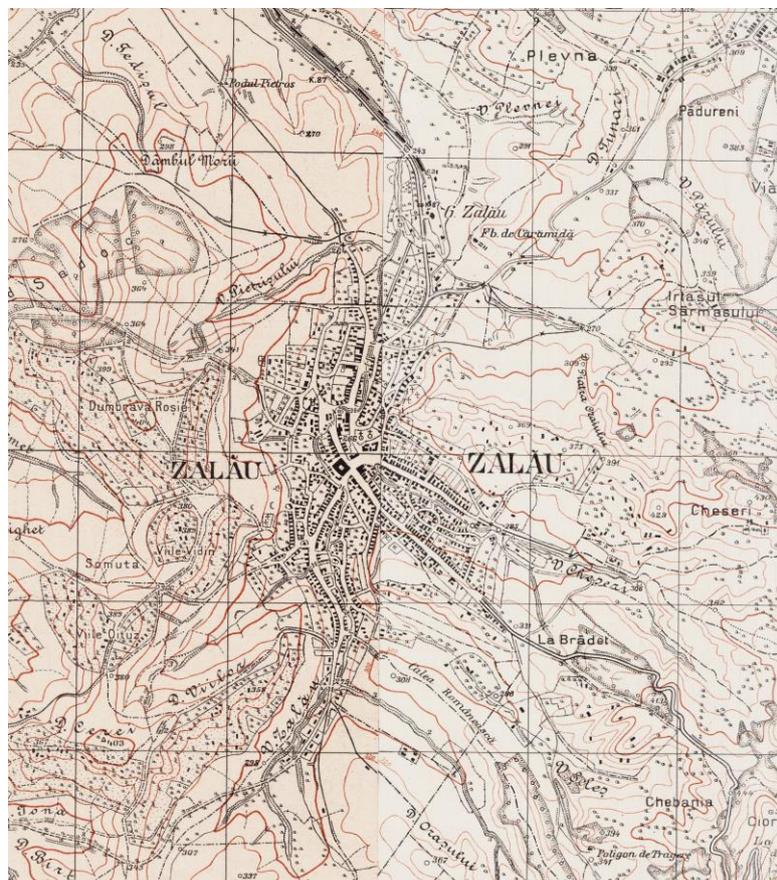


Figure 3. Zalău – map made by The Military Geographical Institute, 1939

Many of the works fittings and the tinsmith were made by craftsmen in Zalău. Smiths and craftsmen have left their mark on the image of the buildings built in that period. A dramatic change in the image of the city was caused by the industrialization. In 1968 new factories are built, new social-cultural buildings and new residential areas. Thus they were built: the pedagogical high school, an industrial high school, crafts and commercial complexes, a community centre, electrical wire factory, and many more. [6]

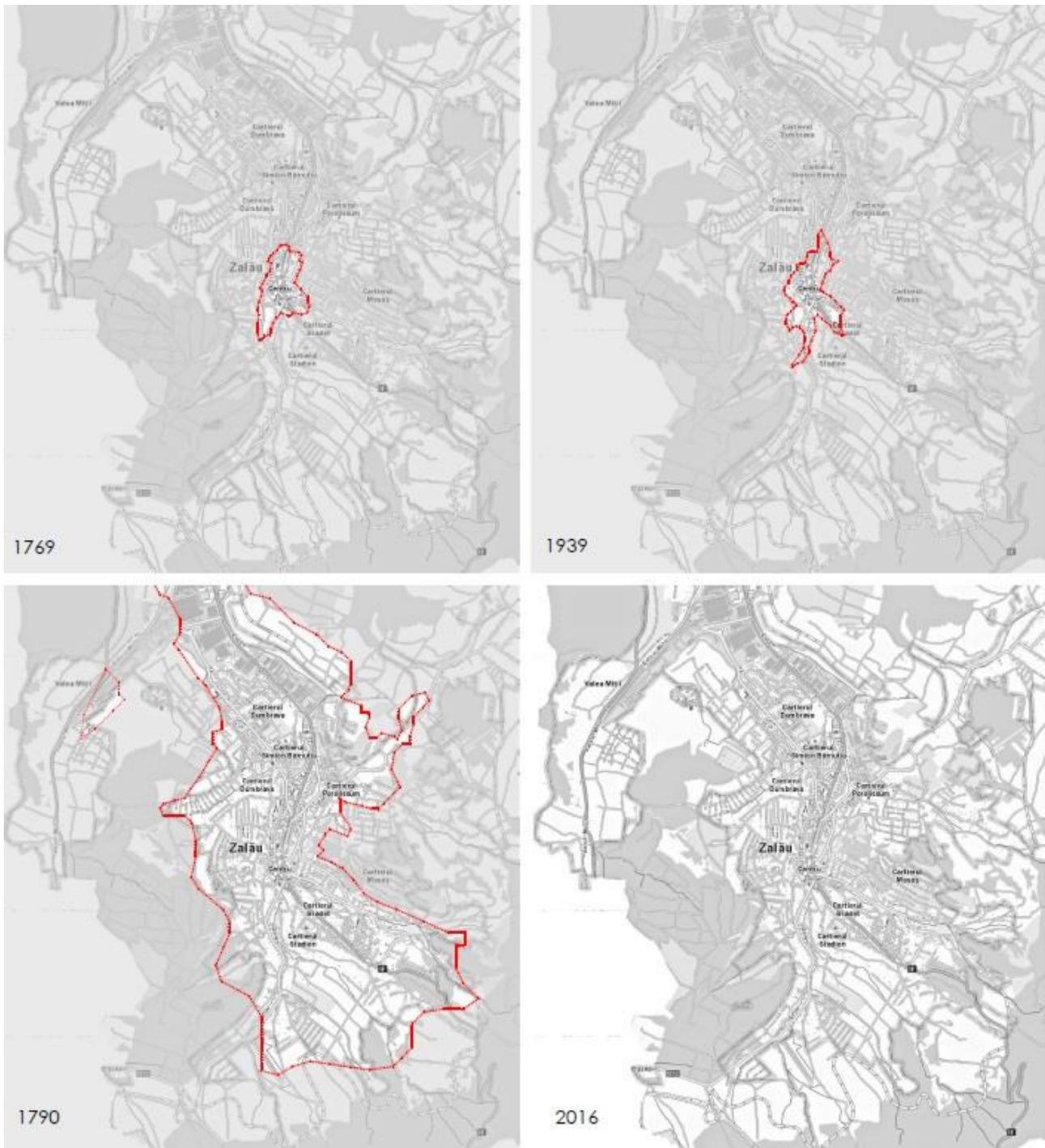


Figure 4. Zalău – area evolution

### 3.1 In the present

The municipality wants to remodel the down town area, through a financing project on the axis of "urban regeneration". In the coming years, the plan is to remodel the town centre, rehabilitate the historic buildings, create more parking and green spaces and upgrading the main streets in the city. The centre will get another look, more pedestrian friendly, giving that an important old street (Unirii street) will be transformed into a pedestrian street. The image of this street was recently changed by building a mall and a food market hall. Because of the lack of green space, the forest situated at the periphery of the city was turned into a park, equipped with walkways, recreational areas and bicycle lanes.

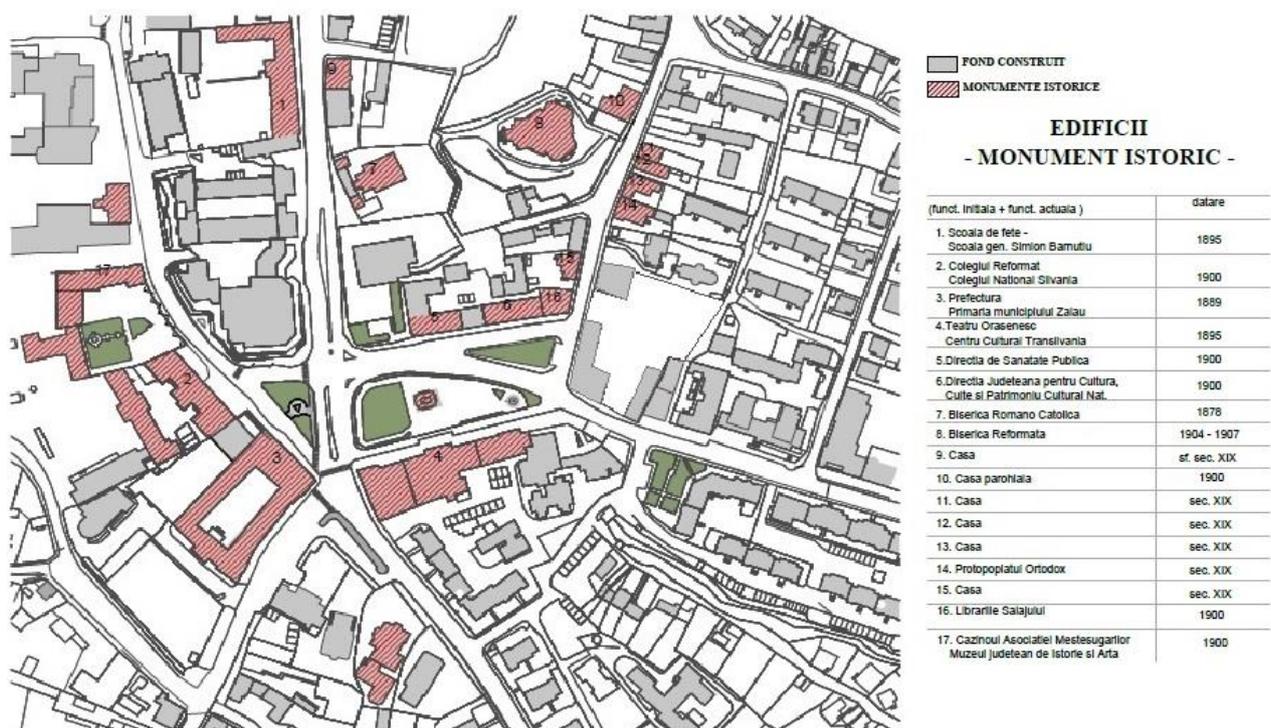


Figure 5. Zalau – city historic center – historical monument buildings

## 4. The districts

Since the '90s, Zalau has experienced a major development, with 11 new districts. Orchards lining the city turned into neighbourhoods and the main direction is the development of neighbourhoods with houses, while the number of built apartment buildings decreased.

Zalau city development was strongly influenced by topography, the settlement extending along the valley of Zalau River and the direction of the main streets, thus resulting in a longitudinal form with few ramifications. There were added gradually new urban spaces, without being able to avoid remoteness from the center.

## 5. Conclusions

Giving the new development direction of the built space in the city of Zalău, it's essential to understand the elements of urban morphology that determined the evolution of the built space. Over time, the city has undergone a continuous metamorphosis, without necessarily maintaining a consistency. Often architecture and urbanism projects ignore the historical context, making interventions that affect negatively the functionality and the aesthetics of the urban built space and the urban life. Therefore we need to identify the main directions of development and to have a clearer understanding of the analysed space, which is a mandatory basis in formulating proposals for further development.

As Aldo Rossi said in *L'architettura della città* "*The city's architecture not only understand the visible image of the city and its architectural ensemble. I understand architecture as a building: wanna talk of the town while building.*" Thus, to understand the present and to address future, we need to know our past.

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