

Historical background

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Based on rich documentary testimonials dated 730 years ago, Timisoara City, the current administrative capital of Timis County, is located in a former marsh but fertile plane, referred to as the Timisului Field, crossed over by Bega and Timis rivers; such rivers have influenced to a great extent the development of this settlement, from the fortified city, with large walls, towers, water collecting ditches and ramparts.

Known as the Fortress (since 1212) - *Castrum Temesiense*

- located at the commercial and military cross-roads, becoming thus the major objective aimed to by the battle between the Turks and Austrians and then, longed by the Hungarian bourgeoisie and aristocracy - Timisoara City has developed, from the town-planning perspectives, around the fortified nucleus, starting from the 18th century.

From 1315 to 1323, King Charles Robert of Anjou settles his royal residence in Timisoara Fortress.

In 1342, Timisoara is attested in documents as Civitas (city), and up to the mid of the 16th century, it became an important center of the struggle against the Ottoman empire, from where, in 1396, the European Crusaders started their dramatic Christian expedition that was unfortunately crushed at Nicopole; Timisoara is the same center where, in 1443, the brave Iancu de Hunedoara concentrated the military forces and set out on his victory campaign.

The escalation of the feudal exploitation brought about both the riot from 1382 - 1390 and the peasants fight led by Gheorghe Doja (1514), who, after conquering several fortified strategic points and the siege of Timisoara Fortress, was defeated and brutally punished.

In spite of the fact that, for several years, Timisoara Fortress and its bordering area represented a significant bastion for defending the Christian civilization, in 1551, after numerous attacks, it was conquered by the Turks who turned the fortress into an Ottoman pashalik which acted as a crucial pivot for the strategy of maintaining the domination upon the Hungarian steppe and the Romanian Countries. As a consequence of the battles between the Ottoman Empire and the Hapsburg Empire, in 1716, Prince Eugen the Savoya freed Timisoara and the Banat region from the ottoman occupation, transforming it into the domain of the Hapsburg crown. The domain was ruled by a military administration whose governor was the Count Claudius Florimund Mercy, cavalry commander. Count Mercy's role was essential in reconstruction of the new fortress of Timisoara; during his rule, there were built some of the most important edifices in Timisoara: the governor's residence palace, the Transylvania barracks (with an overall length of 483 m, this military unit was the longest building in Europe, at that time), several schools, hospitals, churches and monuments. At the same time, the construction and rapid development of industry and factories and the organization of villages were initiated. The colonization of the villages in Banat, by means of a substantial number of svabi (Romanian naturalized Germans), Slovaks and Italians who overlapped / were assimilated by the already existing inhabitants (e.g. Romanians, Serbians, Hungarians, Greeks and Jewish), brought on, in time, a phenomena which was probably unique in the world, respectively the fact that the population used to speak more languages based on a climate

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of mutual understanding, tolerance, respect and cooperation, with no discrimination, which were transmitted from generation to generation.

Once with the increased consideration granted by The Court of Vienna, Timisoara, as the economic and political center of the Banat region, faced, after 1718 - 1734, a favourable period, characterized by the double development related to the rehabilitation works designed for the Fortress (based on the new rehabilitation plan, from 1723) and the initiation of the water drainage works performed in the marshy fields. Several bridges and public buildings were raised, so that, around 1765, the fortification of the Fortress was successfully completed and in 1774, the aqueduct intended for the water supply of the Fabric District as well as the underground drainage system near 'Cazarma ardeleana' and from the site of St. Gheorghe Square were also successfully built. However, the issue related to the water ditches and marshes affecting the Fortress was hardly solved; although the Bega Channel (whose building was initiated in 1728) became navigable, it took over, to a great extent, the role of an insalubrious collecting canal of the area.

From 1781 (when Timisoara Fortress was granted the privilege of a Free Royal City) to 1848, the fortress underwent a period characterized by the construction of several social and cultural establishments and the building of numerous residential complexes. The fortification board provided the activity of design and execution works for military buildings, especially for the huge fortification system (maintenance, modernization).

The 'Cameral Construction Division' designed and supervised the execution of the civil and public interest buildings, raised by the private building constructors, as well as their compliance with the urban standards for constructions.

The full inventories of the residences, owners, the drainage system and the water evicition pipe networks, the wells, the superposing works and any other new structures that complete the existing building complexes, as well as a summary - short list that included the destructions caused by the bombardment launched by the Hungarian army in July 1849 were registered in the 'Plan of the interior of the Fortress - 1812' drawn up by Tutz (M.G.97), 'the Plan indicating the plots within the Fortress - 1828' drawn up by Louant (M.G. 155), the 'Plan of the interior of the Fortress - 1831' drawn up by Chavanne and Eichenkren - 1836 (T.II.28) and in other maps, drawings and other similar documents kept by The Archives of Timisoara State, as well as in the 'Monograph of Timisoara' drawn up by the city mayor, Mr. Preyer (1849 - 1853).

During the first years of the military government (1849 - 1860) and then, when Voivodina had its administrative capital in Timisoara, new establishments were built, using domical vaults for the basements and ground floors wooden ceilings for the upper floors and attics.

The picturesque vocabulary afferent to the Baroque period was gradually replaced by the elements of the Empire and Neoclassic styles and the influence of the Romantic and Eclectic trends was also reflected in the language.

If, up to 1817, almost ¼ of the Fortress area was covered by canals which drained into the open basin of the fortification ditches, in 1827 both the basin and its outlet channel (on the course of the older secondary

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channel built in 1729), along the current Republicii Blvd., were deepened, being thus developed the so called 'Sanitary Channel'. Over 25 private residences in the Fortress were connected to that sewerage net. The sanitation works as well as the construction of new such sanitary channels continued after 1849, also involving the rehabilitation of several damaged water supply pipes and the digging of public wells whose 'water quality was improved' once with the drain of the marshes and the filling in of the ditches (including those in the site).

The author of the first monograph dedicated to Timisoara, acting at the same time as the mayor, Mr. Johann Nepomuk Preyer (1844 - 1858) wrote about the Fortress Area: '...The Fortress streets are paved and have excellent sidewalks. We see one, two or three-story buildings... All the buildings are tile roofed, and, on the ground floor, almost all have commercial spaces with elegant shop windows ..., and, with a view to the streets lighting and cleaning, it is definitely acknowledged that there is no other location in the whole country able to compete with our services.'

After 1865, a new construction standard allowed the building of new structures at a distance of 569 m beyond the fortress walls, towards the suburban quarters / neighborhood / area. After 1892, such restriction was cancelled, and therefore, there were initiated the works for leveling the ditches and ramparts around the Fortress.

1895 was the year when the architect Ybl drew up the first Town Planning according to which the Fortress became the city center, linked by means of large boulevards - the current Tineretii Blvd. and Revolutiei din 1989 Blvd. - to the Iosefin and Fabric Residential Quarters, and by means of a traffic ring around the Fortress. Therefore, the dense rectangular street networks that characterized the infrastructure of the Fortress, was translated into the actual radial - ring-shaped structure of the street structure, which is particular for Timisoara City.

In 1913, the town technical division elaborated a new Town Planning based on the principles of the architect Ybl. At that moment, the population living in Timisoara counted almost 69.000 inhabitants and the authorities planned the development of the town over 1800 ha. The town planning was not designed based on the principle of the functional areas, but it underlined the street structure between the Fortress and the suburban quarters, such as Iosefin, Fabric and Mehala. The lands between the streets were divided into plots and then sold or leased to the new owners. The plot division was kept until today, being cancelled where the collective residences were built (apartment buildings).

The first topographic surveys based on modern mathematical methods were performed between 1901 - 1903 for Cetate and Iosefin Quarters, and in 1911, for Mehala Quarter. The results were carefully processed from 1942 to 1946 for all the residential quarters (cadastral plan, with no contour lines, the author being Eng. I. Sarmes).

The participation of Romania to the World War II (June 1941) Romaniei in Razboiul Mondial (iunie 1941) brought about, for the population of Timisoara and the inhabitants of the entire county, major shortcomings and deficiencies increased by the fact that the people had to undergo a tremendous sacrifice for helping the massive waves of refugees from Basarabia, Bucovina and Moldova. Starting with June 1944, the war directly affected the county and Timisoara City, which tried to heroically resist to the attacks of the German and Hungarian military units. The heroic sacrifices of Divizia 9 Cavalerie Romana (9th Division of Romanian

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Cavalry) and Regimentul 13 Calarasi (13th Regiment of Calarasi) must be underlined.

In 1943, the City technical Division, by arch. Silvestru Rafiroiu and Eng. Otto Bodoscher, initiated a documentation for a new town planning, which is currently considered to have been lost from the Archives. In 1943, Timisoara recorded 115.839 inhabitants, a city occupancy area of 3.200 ha, and 312 km streets from which 52 % were paved, 46 % were provided with current water supply and 31% were provided with drainage system connections.

Starting with September 1944, the course of the national history, respectively the history of Timis County and Timisoara City, was changed for about 4 decades. Under the protection of the governing soviet army, the communist party gained the political power causing material shortcomings associated with the physical and psychic terror applied upon the population, the humiliation, cheating and permanent threat of the citizens' rights. The major anti-communist movement triggered by the students of Timisoara, in October - November 1956 was developed on a hostile background regarding the soviet army, the injustices, abuses and poverty caused by a political regime fully coordinated for the benefits of the foreign interests.

After the Second World War, the City Technical Division initiated (in 1947) a documentation for the Town Planning for buildings design - authors T. Evolceanu and arch. G. Stork - with a new version in 1951 - authors arch. M. Silianu and arch. G. Stork, known as 'The draft of the major systematization plan'. The plan included several provisions regarding the city zoning and circulation, but the authorities failed again to predict the profile, the industrial development and the locative funds.

In 1955, the systematization studies were resumed by means of a 'Preliminary systematization study' - author arch. M. Silianu, which estimated the growth of the population from 140.000 inhabitants in 1955 to 180.000 inhabitants in 1975, with subsequent growth opportunities up to almost 200.000 inhabitants, depending on the dynamics of the economic factors.

In 1959 the authorities proceeded to draw up the 'Systematization Plan of Timisoara City', based on the standards recommended by CSCAS. The population of the city gathered 148.600 inhabitants and Timisoara City expanded over an overall area of 4100 ha. With no real elements for estimating the city functions' development, the authorities estimated, for 1980, a population of 250.000 inhabitants, who, according to some specialists, was considered a number too high. In 1980, 287.543 inhabitants were recorded in Timisoara, and in 1990, the number increased to 354.345.

'Schita de sistematizare' a fost finalizata in anul 1964, avand ca sef de proiect pe arh. L. Vostinaru.

It was then brought again into attention, in 1978, by the architect N. Ionescu, acting as the project manager. The functional areas were clearly organized; the industry developed on industrial areas, the residential complexes faced a powerful development by means of the apartment buildings, which brought several urban disadvantages for the city, e.g. the destruction / demolition of several areas characterized by mono-family residences. The major conception imposed by the political regime consisting in the increase of the built-up densities, the strict economy of land which was reflected in continuous reductions of structural perimeter in contrast to the industrial development and the massive growth of the population. In 1989 the structural

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perimeter included 4558,0 ha in comparison to the built-up area from January 1st 1990, respectively 4974,32 ha.

The collapse of the communist system in 1989 occurred in the Central and Eastern Europe, excepting Romania, was received by the people of Timisoara as a historical opportunity to eliminate the communist totalitarian system. From November to December 1989, the state of mind of most of the population was explosive, and given this background characterized by an accumulated tension, the attempt, which was made publicly known by the 'illegal' broadcasters such as 'Europa Libera' and 'Vocea Americii', to evict the Pastor Laszlo Tokes was translated into a new injustice and an abuse of the communist authorities, representing thus the appropriate opportunity for the popular riot in Timisoara, which was lately transformed into a national revolution.

December 15th was the day when many parishioners gathered before the Presbytery willing to restraint the eviction of the Pastor. On the following day, December 16th the number of persons increased to 400 people belonging to different ethnic groups or religions. They blocked the traffic in the area and unanimously yelled: 'Ceausescu deposed' and 'no more communism'.

During the next following days, the resistance did not stop, but more over, on December 19th the employees of 'Elba' Factory came out on strike, and on December 20th the general strike was declared by all the factories in Timisoara and hundreds of people marched to the center of Timisoara and caused the retreat of the army back to the military units. The leaders of the revolutionaries of Timisoara submitted to the communist authorities a list of claims from the population, a list that would soon become an essential revolutionary program. On the same date, December 20th 1989, Timisoara was declared the First Free City of Romania, by the representatives of the Romanian Democrat Front, the first democratic political organization set up on the blooded streets of the city. Then, December 22nd 1989 was declared the day of The Victory of the Romanian Revolution.