The "Scânteia House" in Bucharest – a Proposal for Nomination to the World Heritage List

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The "Soviet city" is visible in any previously communist city in the Eastern Bloc by means of key interventions conditioning each other: a first sector consisting of the emblematic buildings of the state power, a second sector meant for the residential areas (necessarily collective ones), the "block of flats", and a third built by delineating urban roads, "highways – the new Soviet street". They were urban structures in relation to permanent interrelatedness, meant to make the city a "demonstration, a physically built political discourse". Between these three areas social and cultural buildings (theatres, clubs, canteens, and stadiums) were inserted, constructions meant to mark the presence of the "working class in the city, genuine signposts of the Soviet power".

High Moscovian buildings known as "the Seven Sisters" appeared in the dark climate of Stalin's last years. They were intended to act as an answer of Soviet architecture to the tall buildings of American capitalism and to generate copies in the satellite states of the communist block, including Romania. Each building would have a central tower with a metallic spire, to be distinctive from the Empire State Building and other American skyscrapers.

Among them, the building of the State University in Moscow, the Lomonosov University, occupies the largest area of all the accomplished skyscrapers, even if the sizes of the other buildings are similar. The building, designed in 1948 by architects Lev Vladimirovich Rudnev and others, built between 1949–1953 in Southern Moscow on Stalin Hill and on the bank of the Moskva River turned into a Moscovian landmark and model.

The House of the Free Press in Bucharest is a perfect example of Stalinist architecture. Started in 1950, it was inspired by the building of the Lomonosov University on

Fig. 1: "Scânteia" House in Bucharest, October 2009
Abb. 1: Das „Scânteia"-Haus in Bukarest, Oktober 2009





Fig. 2: "Scânteia" House in Bucharest, January 2011
Abb. 2: Das „Scânteia"-Haus in Bukarest, Januar 2011

Stalin Hill in Moscow. It was built on the section of a plot where the historical buildings of the Velodrome and Băneasa Hippodrome, Bucharest used to be. It is the first building completed following the "realism of socialism" doctrine, unique in its volumetry and most typical for that era, carrying a truly ideological message.

Initially, the Stalinist building was named "I. V. Stalin Casa Scânteii Printing House", then Casa Scânteii, and after 1989 the House of the Free Press.[1] Casa Scânteii is actually a compound of buildings of 136 000 square metres and it is made of a central building with 13 floors and 85 m height, four lateral buildings of a lower scale. The central building is 91.6 m high, without the TV antenna measuring 12.4 m, and used to be the tallest building in Bucharest until 2007. The actual construction of Casa Scânteii started in 1950, but the decision to raise "a modern printing centre" was taken a few months earlier, on 25 July 1949, by the Political Bureau of the Central Council of the Working Romanian Party. A mammoth-building was needed to host "Scânteia" and all other publications and publishing houses in Romania (later on, the State Committee for Culture and Art as well).

"Casa Scânteii" was meant to host three functions in three distinct buildings: 1. the Production; 2. the Administration; 3. the Main Building. Those buildings were different from each other in terms of number of floors, openings of poles and weights to carry. Thus, the Production had four to five floors, with 5–8 m pole openings and heavy weights given to the machinery, the workshops and the paper storage. The Administration had five floors and lower openings and weights. The Main Building meant for offices and editorial work had a height of 65 m, plus the tower with the arrow, up to 100 m in total. It was erected in five years (1952–57), meant for publishing the state media, mainly Scânteia, the media channel of the Central Committee of the Romanian Working Party. For a while, starting in 1956 the antenna on that building supported, the transmitter of Romanian Television. Casa Scânteii was designed by a team headed by architect Horia Maicu and engineer Panaite Mazilu. A couple of visits to Moscow, then the composition of the team was set and the execution could start.

The central body was the last element built, 103 m in height, to which two U-shaped bodies were added and which was linked at the back by a square-shaped building, the first built in this ensemble. In the initial project, the two U-shaped wings were closed by buildings meant for social-cultural functions, a theatre and a building of the trade unions, but they were not executed. The overall plan included a colony of residential blocks which also remained a project.

One of the requirements for the ground floor of the building was to be functional for publishing houses and printing



Fig. 3: The position of the skyscraper close to water, Herastrau Lake, October 2009
Abb. 3: Die Lage des Wolkenkratzers nahe am Ufer des Herastrau-Sees, Oktober 2009

houses and for that purpose numerous halls were included as well as offices. Also, Casa Scanteii was the first Romanian work where construction engineers included the calculation of resistance to a potential earthquake – adopting older Italian regulations from Mussolini's time!

"For finishings, the following were used: 8,600 m³ stone for façades, 1,200 m³ marble from Romanian quarries, 14,000 m² tiles, 50,000 m² floor tiles, 20,000 m² inlets, 25,000 m² linoleum or rubber for office floors".[2]

The position of the skyscraper close to the water, Herastrau Lake, as well as the perception of the silhouette of this building together with the park and the lake, from the opposite side of the water, is evocative of the "Seven Sisters" placed on the shore of the Moskva River. The towers as such do not serve any practical purpose; they stand for simple architectural artifice, following the model of the Moscovian Stalinist buildings.

On each of the four façades of the main tower the most interesting exterior ornaments of the building are found, on a reddish marble background, animated by the arms of the Romanian Working Party (RWP), afterwards the Romanian Communist Party. The towers of the side buildings are decorated with fretwork and window framing similar to the old Romanian churches and monasteries, inspired mostly by the floral decorations seen at Hurezi Monastery.

On 28 October 1951, Scanteia Newspaper would record the address of their editorial office and administration in Piata Scanteii, and the printing was executed by Casa Scanteii Printing House. According to information presented in the History of Journalism and Advertising in Romania, the rotary printing press produced in USSR was 8 m wide and 6 m high, 62 m long and weighed 750,000 kg. The press would work with 12 paper rolls and had an average production capacity of 860,000 newspapers in four pages per hour.[3]

On 21 April 1960, a huge statue of V. I. Lenin by sculptor Boris Caragea was placed in front of the building. The removal of that statue on 3 March 1990 was part of the healing process for the people of Bucharest, following what they had endured under the communist regime. Currently, Casa "Scanteii" is the object of a national classification procedure together with five other objects from the "realism socialism" time, placed in Bucharest.

The five large-size objects under the administrative protection procedure were built in Bucharest in 1950–53, after the construction of Casa Scanteii started.[4] They are expression of an urban reconstruction programme, especially in the areas of the exterior historical centre of the capital, a programme aiming to accomplish the "typical Soviet city" made of a network of grand boulevards, sided by monumental buildings in the "socialist realism" architectural style.



Fig. 4: Interior of "Scânteia" House, decorative paintings of the vaults, April 2013
Abb. 4: Inneres des „Scânteia"-Hauses, dekorative Gewölbeausmalung, April 2013

Fig. 5: Interior of "Scânteia" House, January 2011
Abb. 5: Inneres des „Scânteia"-Hauses, Januar 2011



Fig. 6: "Scânteia" House, entrance, January 2011
Abb. 6: Das „Scânteia"-Haus, Eingang, Januar 2011



The ensembles erected in Bucharest at that time are: the "23 August" residential area, Floreasca quarter, the ensembles on Bucurestii Noi Boulevard and Vatra Luminoasa (Luminous Home). They are part of an ample construction programme initiated at the Bucharest Design Institute in 1953. The residential areas were designed as an integral part of the urban monumental composition of the Romanian capital, including parks, cinema-clubs, outdoor cinemas and even a stadium.

"23 August" Stadium, "Nicolae Balcescu" outdoor cinema, and "Infratirea intre popoare" (Peoples Brotherhood) cinema are social and cultural hubs of the near neighbourhoods.

All of them display an affinity to the shapes and the compositional language of Stalinist classicism, the construction executed on this occasion being a relevant example of Romanian architecture in the researched period. They represent, beyond the negative connotations connected to the ideological substratum of the discourse, undeniable values of the Romanian cultural heritage, witnesses of a historical period which needs to be re-evaluated in terms of architectural production.

Zusammenfassung

Die „Casa Scânteii" in Bukarest – ein Vorschlag zur Nominierung für die Welterbeliste

Das Haus der freien Presse in Bukarest ist ein mustergültiges Beispiel für stalinistische Architektur. Errichtet ab 1950, wurde es durch das Gebäude der Lomonossow Universität auf dem Stalinhügel in Moskau angeregt. Es handelt sich um das erste Gebäude, das nach der Doktrin des sozialistischen Realismus fertiggestellt wurde, einzigartig in seinem Volumen und ausgesprochen repräsentativ für diese Zeit, indem es eine wahrhaft ideologische Botschaft transportiert.

Am Anfang hatte das stalinistische Gebäude den Namen „I. V. Stalin Casa Scânteii Printing House", dann Casa Scânteii und nach 1989 Haus der freien Presse. Casa Scânteii ist tatsächlich eine Anlage von mehreren Gebäuden auf 136 000 Quadratmetern, und es besteht aus einem zentralen Bau mit 13 Geschossen und 85 m Höhe sowie vier seitlichen Gebäuden von niedrigerem Ausmaß. Das zentrale Gebäude ist 91,6 m hoch, ohne die TV-Antenne, die 12,4 m misst. Bis 2007 war es das höchste Gebäude in Bukarest. Die eigentliche Errichtung der Casa Scânteii begann 1950, aber die Entscheidung, ein „modernes Druckzentrum" zu errichten, war schon einige Monate zuvor, am 25. Juli 1949, durch das Politbüro des Zentralrats der rumänischen Arbeiterpartei gefallen.

Es wurde ein Riesengebäude benötigt, um „Scânteia" und alle anderen Publikationen und Verlagshäuser in Rumänien unterzubringen (später auch das Staatskomitee für Kultur und Kunst). Casa Scânteii sollte drei Funktionen erfüllen in drei unterschiedlichen Gebäuden:

1. die Produktion,
2. die Verwaltung,
3. das Hauptgebäude.

Diese Gebäudeeinheiten unterschieden sich voneinander hinsichtlich der Anzahl der Geschosse, der Öffnungen und der zu tragenden Lasten.

So hatte die Produktion vier bis fünf Geschosse mit fünf bis acht Meter großen Öffnungen für die Leitungsmasten und einer besonderen Verstärkung für die Gewichte der Maschinen, der Werkstätten und der Papierlagerung. Die Verwaltung hatte fünf Geschosse und kleinere Öffnungen und eine geringere Traglast. Das Hauptgebäude für Büros und Redaktionsarbeit hat eine durchschnittliche Höhe von 65 m; wenn man den Turm mit Antenne hinzurechnet, erreicht es eine Gesamthöhe von 100 m. Es wurde in fünf Jahren (1952–1957) mit der Absicht errichtet, dort die staatlichen Medien herauszugeben, hauptsächlich Scânteia, den Medienkanal des Zentralkomitees der rumänischen Arbeiterpartei. Eine Zeit lang ab 1956 unterstützte die Antenne auf diesem Gebäude die Sendeanlage des rumänischen Fernsehens. Casa Scânteii wurde von einem Team unter der Leitung des Architekten Horia Maicu und des Ingenieurs Panaite Mazilu entworfen. Nach einigen Besuchen in Moskau stand die Zusammensetzung des Teams fest und die Ausführung konnte beginnen (Horia Maicu, Niculaie Bădescu, Marcel Locar, Mircea Alifanti etc.). Am 21. April 1960 wurde ein riesiges Standbild Lenins vom Bildhauer Boris Caragea vor dem Gebäude errichtet. Die Entfernung dieses Standbilds am 3. März 1990 war Teil des Heilungsprozesses für die Menschen in Bukarest nach dem, was sie unter dem Kommunismus erdulden mussten. Derzeit wird Casa Scânteii einem nationalen Klassifizierungsprozess unterzogen, zusammen mit fünf weiteren baulichen Objekten in Bukarest aus der Ära des sozialistischen Realismus.

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[1] Current address: 1, Piata Presei Libere, Sector 1.

[2] See architect engineer Horia Maicu, "About the design of Casa Scanteii", *"Architectura"* nr. I, ANUL II, January 1951, Technical Publishing House, p. 3–13.

[3] Romulus Căplescu, former journalist at "Agerpres" and "Scânteia", in 1950.

[4] The administrative protection procedure was financed by the Romanian Order of Architects to the initiative of specialist group Inforom Cultural Foundation, led by cultural manager Monica Lotreanu, program coordinator, Ruxandra Nemteanu. Coautors: Ruxandra Nemteanu for Casa Scanteii, Mihaela Criticos for ensemble "23 August", Ana Maria Hariton for open-air theatre "Bazilescu", Miruna Stroe and Irina Tulbure for Theater and district "Nicolae Balcescu", all of them situated in Bucharest, and Adriana Stroe for Theater "Fantazio", Constanta.