



Fundamental field: Engineering Sciences
Field of expertise: Architecture

HABILITATION THESIS

URBAN MEMORY: FROM CRITICAL READING TO REGENERATION AND REACTIVATION THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

SUMMARY

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The habilitation thesis presents a direction of research and professional action in the field of architecture and urban planning, centered on investigating urban memory as a critical resource for contemporary interventions in the urban space. The proposed theme—urban memory—is approached as an essential dimension for understanding urban structures and for grounding processes of regeneration, reactivation, and adaptive reuse, especially in the context of post-socialist cities undergoing accelerated transformation.

Rationale for the Topic

The starting point of the thesis is the need to rethink how contemporary urban design responds to the pressures of modernization, public space fragmentation, and the loss of local identity. The work proposes that this rethinking should be grounded in the critical reading of the city—an analytical, contextual, and narrative method that recovers the historical, morphological, social, and cultural layers of the built environment and transforms them into support for coherent and sustainable design.

Urban memory is understood not merely as a collection of remnants or past events, but as a symbolic and functional infrastructure of the city—one that can be activated regeneratively. This approach is reflected in the author's scientific, professional, and pedagogical activity, as well as in the proposed future directions of development.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into four main chapters:

Introduction defines the thematic and methodological framework of the research, presents the author's personal and professional motivations, research objectives, and the relevance of the theme within the current context of urban research and practice.

Chapter 2 – Scientific, Professional and Academic Achievements provides a systematic review of the candidate's research and design activity, illustrating the coherence between the themes addressed, the applied methods, and the results obtained. This chapter documents:

- the teaching and educational activities;
- the theoretical research activity, through authored volumes and scientific articles;



- the architectural and urban planning projects with significant impact;
- the involvement in technical committees, professional juries, and design competitions;
- the institutional collaborations and recognitions received.

Chapter 3 – The section on Research Evolution and Development Plans outlines future research directions around key themes such as: the regeneration of collective housing neighborhoods, the development of participatory and narrative methodologies for reading the city, comparative studies in Eastern European cities, and the integration of research into professional education through a future study program. In this context, the theoretical foundation of the new professional master's program in *Urban Design*, coordinated by the candidate, is also presented.

Chapter 4 – Final Conclusions synthesizes the candidate's relevant contributions and supports the capacity to contribute to a doctoral school in urban planning and architecture.

Scientific and Methodological Contributions

The candidate's theoretical contributions are reflected in:

- the morphological and historical analysis of the city of Cluj-Napoca, as developed in the volumes *The Urban Evolution of Interwar Cluj* and *Family Housing in Cluj (1920–1975)*, which document the relationship between urban form, spatial policies, and housing typologies;
- the deepening of these investigations in the collective volume *Beyond Norms*, where postwar residential typologies are analyzed from a new perspective and within a broader national context;
- the definition and application of the critical reading of the city method, as an interdisciplinary research tool and decision-making support for urban interventions.

The thesis develops a methodological approach that integrates:

- historical and narrative research of the urban space;
- critical analysis of morphological stratification;
- mapping of natural landscape elements and their latent potential;



- assessment of public space quality and its regenerative capacity.

Applied Projects and Professional Impact

The candidate's professional activity is structured around three major directions:

Strategic Urban Planning: coordinating or contributing to large-scale Zonal Urban Plans (PUZ), such as the *Sopor Neighborhood Masterplan (Cluj-Napoca)*—a model of compact and ecological urban development.

Urban Regeneration and Public Space: award-winning or implemented projects (e.g., *Feroviarilor Park*, *I.L. Caragiale Square*, *Regele Ferdinand Street*), which valorize historical, natural, and cultural elements through contemporary design strategies.

Heritage Revitalization: sensitive interventions in historic buildings and ensembles (e.g., *Firemen's Tower in Cluj-Napoca*, *Palace of Culture in Blaj*, *Hotel Traian in Băile Herculane*), nationally and internationally recognized.

The candidate's participation in international consultancy projects with the World Bank (in Bucharest, Constanța, and Cluj-Napoca), as well as involvement in the *NetZeroCities* initiative, demonstrates a clear contribution to the formulation of contemporary urban policies oriented toward green transition, spatial equity, and social cohesion.

Research and Educational Perspectives

The research directions proposed for future development include:

- the role of collective memory in the design of contemporary public spaces;
- participatory regeneration of collective housing neighborhoods;
- critical cartographies of urban memory as pedagogical tools;
- the socio-spatial potential of interstitial public spaces in Romania and Eastern European cities;
- adaptive reuse practices of industrial and modernist heritage;
- the influence of urban branding strategies on narratives of memory and identity.

In educational terms, the candidate proposes the integration of research into innovative didactic formats—especially within the framework of the new



professional master's program in *Urban Design*—and aims to develop a doctoral direction in urban regeneration and transformation of the built environment.

In this vision, *urban memory* is not merely a subject of historical investigation, but an active tool for critical reflection and project-based action—a catalyst for cities that are more sensitive, more sustainable, and more deeply rooted in their identity.

The thesis aims to demonstrate the author's scientific autonomy, capacity to lead advanced research and doctoral formation, and a strong commitment to the responsible and participatory transformation of the contemporary urban environment.