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# Landscape Consumerism vs Social Sustainability

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Recovering social connection within the urban landscape. A DANUrb Initiative

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## Synopsis

The social networks, the digital photo and the smartphone are, no doubt, essential tools of the beginning of the 21st century. Their effects on the society's structure are more and more complex, while superficiality becomes the main feature of the individual. The ease of swapping from one frame to the next, the slalom between virtual social networks and screens, the excessive accessibility and the duality of the two complementary and partially overlapping worlds have now visibly impacted social connections and even the individual's capacity of recognizing the physical space he spends time in - working, moving around.

The landscape has been gradually losing its transformative and multidimensional role in becoming a commodity. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter are the go to places to prove oneself, to live, to connect, all the while floating randomly within a space lacking both dimension and identity.

This paper aims to explore the way in which the landscape metamorphosis can determine social cohesion, in a vision of temporal, spatial and identity continuity. In this context, DANURB Project is an experimental approach, regarding the landscape heritage and its potential for a more responsive society. Consuming the landscape as cultural and identity space could be an instrument to bring people together, to encourage the social interaction and re-activate lost or forgotten places.

**Key words:** Landscape, society, identity, globalization, sustainability.

## 1. Introduction. About Landscape and Society

The paper explores the current development of landscape perception and its actual use of space nowadays. Interaction between men and its environment tends to be shallow, stripping away the landscape's role to create and shape the society. The background for this relationship is basic survival, with echoes of aesthetic and economic values.

The 21st century landscape incorporates multilayered structures of the physical context, complex in its diversity of shape, resources and space – befitting of a consumerism driven society. This socially fragile landscape is a mix of structural multiplication, variety and discontinuity that has amplified the sense of estrangement brought by the explosive urban development.

*As Hărmănescu&Enache say, a smart landscape brings a sustainable answer to the anthropogenic demands. (...) The actual context requires solutions which integrate in a sustainable and resilient approach, but in the same time belonging to the 21st century. The natural – anthropogenic dialogue should become a technological adaptation of the traditional solutions.*

*Lefebvre introduces the social dimension of space by concluding “social space is a social product. Each mode of production has its own relationship with space and it produces its own kind of space “. Kevin Lynch explores the needs of cities to be legible, he defines the structure of a landscape as being its core identity and meaning.*

As Norberg-Schulz puts it, “space is a necessary part of our existence” and it is composed of objects with individual meaning and a larger context of multiple spaces and links.

The modern way of living has inflicted aggressive changes in the social DNA, modifying its nature and structure. The contemporary city enables us to connect to a limited number of individuals on a daily basis, throughout one's life, using a variety of communication channels and ensuring increasingly fragile and randomly shallow connections.

## 2. The consumption of space in the Information Era

While describing the ways of environment interaction within modern society, Paul Andreu argues that *“figuratively speaking, we use things and then throw them away. We are witnessing with our own eyes how space is losing its meaning to man's life. (...) it has become a mental isomorphic structure, a world of pieces, incomprehensible”.*

We often talk about the variety of ways of communication. We devour virtual space. We live our lives through an interface for reality provided by our smartphones. We are so concerned with being present in the virtual space that we've lost all interest in the real one. The very personal experience of the space is reduced to the tap it takes to snap the picture.

Weather it is a natural or an urban landscape, the emotional perception has changed dramatically in promoting virtual space. We are on the verge of a

social crises generated by the lack of connection with real, physical space and its tangible values.

As Enache&Căplescu say - in the context of informational era the place becomes more than a space containing specificity and identity; it is necessary to adapt to the new dual structure, where the virtual adds a new dimension to the physical space.

### **3. Linking the landscape and the society – a sustainable approach. A case study of the DANurB initiative**

Exploring different tools to strengthen the ties between regions, communities and users is a challenge for all of us, one the EU has welcomed by providing the proper channels and resources to research and implement (pilot) projects throughout its territory. One such initiative currently taking shape is DANurB, a joint venture of the seven Danube countries to create a stronger, common brand and transcultural connection along the rivers promenade.

The seven partners - Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria – are working together to find proper, specific solutions for each segment of the river landscape.

The aim is to create a comprehensive spatial-cultural network that links offline and online communities along the river and successfully define a common strategy to build a strong multicultural identity, with local, specific variations. The local vision on the use of the space and perception of the promenade will give communities that sense of belonging that ensures emotional ownership of the project.

Each of these unique approaches adds to the landscape's diversity and is a valuable resource in itself for any other top-bottom or bottom-up initiatives.

The study addresses the relationship between Landscape and Society at different levels and scales – from territorial landscape to local urban landscape. Starting from the macro-landscape of Danube river, are developed local initiatives having the role – both to analyze the natural and built heritage, and to visualize solutions of revitalizing and making or strengthening identities. Danube would become a route of cultural identities, which aim would be to integrate the communities into unity of diversities.

Giurgiu – one of the Romanian cities integrated in the DANurB Project - considering the recent history of this city developed as an industrial center - both in terms of location on Danube river and as a border town - offers a vast heritage of mostly nonfunctional and abandoned sites and buildings that can become an important potential and also shaping a new identity. During one of the workshops, it was investigated the typological and morphological variety of the built heritage - especially architectural and postindustrial by looking at the layers that time left in the city's structure. Looking at a transversal section through the history – postwar/ postindustrial/ contemporary this workshop analyzed cases/ examples of good practices and also proposed new solution for compatible integration of modern activities into existing culture and landscape. The focus was to bring to front the built heritage that can be re-activated on the

Danube river and revealed the hidden architectural and postindustrial sites by putting them to another level in the city's history.

#### 4. Conclusions

The concept of continuity starts from the idea of sustainability, preserving existing resources, by revitalizing some architectural elements and emphasizing social infrastructure.

The vision of regional sustainable development aims to highline the possibility of further evolution by connecting postindustrial areas or unfinished structures in the cultural, social and leisure network. Correlation of functional levels of the urban organism – like mobility (pedestrian, cyclable, railway, naval), natural and urban landscape is crucial. Any such initiative will also act as a social binder, becoming a dynamic network activity, and at the same time capitalizing on the cultural valence of the city as part of the process of creating a new regional identity.

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## Biography

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