

MOLDOVA

Chisinau – A Historic City in the Process of Disappearing

Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, was formed as an urban entity in the middle of the 17th century. At the beginning of the 19th century it became the biggest urban settlement in the eastern part of the Moldavian Principality. In the 19th century Chisinau was enlarged by a new planned quarter, which was added to the organically developed medieval town. After the Second World War, a new master plan for the city was prepared. It envisaged placing the city's new administrative quarter in the centre of the 19th century city. This, coupled with the construction of a major new road in the city centre, resulted in the destruction of the core of the medieval part of town and in the demolition of a significant number of historic buildings. The policy of not preserving the historic built heritage also dates from that time.

Shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Chisinau was declared a historic city, a monument of urbanism. However, a special planning system for the implementation of this new status was not created because of the political instability at that time.

From the last years of the 20th century until now, aspects of the country's economic development have determined changes in the city's policies but not, however, in the policy of architectural heritage preservation.

The problems of Chisinau epitomise the problems of the whole country in the field of built heritage protection. In 1993, the historic central part of the city was officially declared an architectural and historic monument of national importance together with a great number of other architectural monuments, which were the most interesting constructions in the architectural and historical sense. Although they were inscribed in the *Register of Monuments of the Republic of Moldova Protected by the State*, to the present day a local service for the protection, conservation and presentation of monuments does not exist, neither in Chisinau nor in other localities. Also, the lack of a municipal archaeological service is one of the reasons why no excavations have been carried out in recent decades in the historic city centre.

There are many other threats to the historic centre of Chisinau in the not-too-distant future:

- 1) The continuous deterioration, day by day, of the historic buildings. It occurs in different ways, including:
 - Leaving the buildings without roofs, floors and inside walls for some years, until the natural destruction of the structure begins;
 - Demolition followed by replacement with new buildings, usually without any linkage to the historic built environment;
 - Keeping only the main façade and including it in the structure of a new building, together with adding new storeys above the historic buildings;
 - Partial or total replacement of the decorative and constructive elements of the historical exterior and interior; and
 - Destruction of their historic-surroundings.

All these ways are usually connected with the replacement of historic sashes and door cases; with the removal of historic plasters and decorations and with covering facades and interiors with a metallic net (armature) and cement plasters; and with the replacement of the historic load-bearing structures.

- 2) The following important aspects also have a negative impact:
 - The absence of necessary maintenance programmes for the historic buildings and corresponding municipal programmes;



Central historic part of Chisinau (with planned enlargement of the streets and the new road through the historic centre)

- The absence in the city of any kind of management of historic buildings which would correspond to their declared status as monuments. This also explains the absence of any restored buildings. Here it should be noted that what in Moldova is accepted as “restoration” does not usually match the internationally accepted meaning of this term. Usually it means an almost total reconstruction with the extensive use of new materials and techniques;
- The absence in the country of an institution in charge of implementing and developing methods and techniques of conservation/restoration which will assure the use of scientific and technological advances for the protection of the architectural heritage. The absence in the country of an educational institution training professionals in restoration and traditional crafts for the needs of heritage preservation also has a negative impact;
- The absence of “passports” containing the principal and detailed historical, architectural and urban data for architectural monuments. In the absence of such documentation the protection is inefficient and only affords a declarative status; and
- The absence of any clear and legally protected boundaries of the historic centre (i.e. a protection and buffer zone).

Today, the newly developed urban plan for Chisinau envisages the construction of a new 70-metre-wide street through the historical centre and the considerable enlargement of several other streets, all involving the very extensive demolition of historic buildings.

These problems are based on a misunderstanding of the value of our built heritage – a constituent part of European and World Heritage – for the culture and history of the country, coupled with



A street which will disappear after the construction of the new 70-metre-wide road



19th century former Hotel Petersburg



19th century synagogue



19th century gymnasium for girls

a misunderstanding of the methods which make the corresponding presentation of this heritage possible.

Changing the rules and practices in the field of architectural heritage in harmony with internationally accepted built heritage protection documents is the only way to create the necessary conditions for our heritage preservation. Otherwise, in a very few years, the historic centre of Chisinau will have disappeared.

Notes:

1. Chisinau population: about 700,000 inhabitants.
2. In 1993, the national *Law for the Protection of the Monuments* was adopted.
3. In 2001, ratification of the *CE Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe* and *CE Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* by Moldova.
4. In 2002, ratification of the *UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* by Moldova.

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Changing the historic architectural environment

