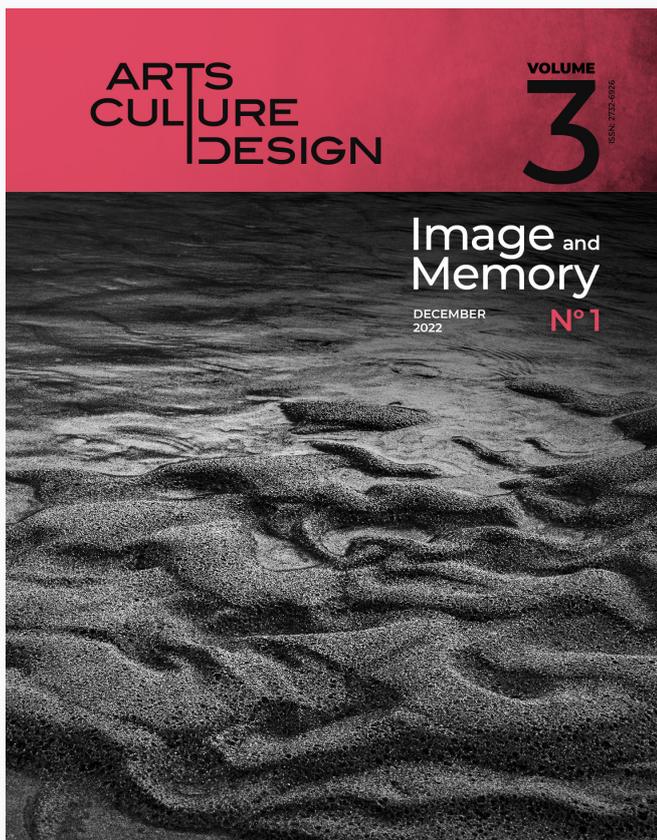


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Image and Memory



PHOTOGRAPHY OF TIME

Nicolae Coşnicheru

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PHOTOGRAPHY OF TIME

Nicolae Coșniceru



Nicolae Coșniceru

PhD Candidate, Doctoral Studies, National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania

MA – Visual Arts, National University of Arts, Bucharest

BSC – Computer Science, Faculty of Science, Polytechnic Institute, Bucharest

contact@artstudio.ro

Nicolae Coșniceru is a visual artist who lives and works in Bucharest, Romania. He has been working in commercial photography for about 20 years, and quitted to be completely free to involve in his own projects. He holds a Master's degree in Fine Arts, and is attending a PhD in Visual Arts and his focus is on Staged Photography based on anthropological, historical and social studies and personal research.

He attended international photography workshops in Great Britain, Germany and Austria, and international art workshops in Holland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey. Nicolae had personal exhibitions of conceptual photography, fine art photography, and new media and participated in group exhibitions in the country and abroad, such as in Austria, Poland, Sardinia and Turkey.

He worked on an album with portraits of Romanian artists and cultural personalities called Inner Light and collaborated with the artist Ioan Nemițoi for his exhibitions in Bucharest, London and Bassano del Grappa.

He also gave lectures on different topics on photography at conferences in the country and abroad, and his public recognition is proven by numerous nominations and awards at high-ranking competitions, such as "The International Colour Awards Photography Master Cup" or "Black and White Spider Awards".

He became a member of the Artist Photographers Association of Romania before 1989 and had two personal exhibitions in the foyer of "The Very Small Theater" in Bucharest. The first exhibition took place in the summer of 1986 and consisted of black and white photographs with a political message, illustrating subtly the protest against the restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by the communist regime. It was closed down earlier due to the censorship of the communist regime. The second one took place in the fall of 1989 and featured photography and visual installations.

PHOTOGRAPHY OF TIME

Abstract

Seeing the configuration of a place firsthand, we can believe that it has always been like that and we don't ask ourselves questions about how it looked five years ago or 20 years ago and what processes and changes have taken place. It is possible that it was an unhealthy place and became a point of attraction where the community could spend time and carry out cultural or recreational activities, or it was a protected natural site and interventions beyond the limit of the law would have transformed it into an industrial, residential or commercial area, which led to overcrowding and pollution. Documentaries of the respective place taken at different times can help preserve local history and bring the community awareness of the recent history and the changes that have taken place. They will claim a lost inheritance if this is the case and if social promoters will campaign in this sense. But above all, they need to know the context in which they are.

Keywords

time

memory

Black Sea

Costinești

Mamaia

Bucharest

sprawl

Because they were the object of my study or because I accidentally encountered places that had undergone significant changes and had previous documentation, I proposed to provide documents of organic changes or actions that must be under the lens of criticism. I am motivated by the need to draw attention to the worrying aspects of everyday life, before being too late for public reactions. In a country with a fragile democracy where the authorities do not hear the voice of civil society, I want to bring to the public conscience the negative aspects that are happening here and now, which can have significant implications for the present and future of the population.



Figure 1. Seashore in Costinești, beginning of the 1990s

I am a visual artist that uses photography as a means of expression, and I am interested in the participatory dimension of photographic art, which is perceived as the art involved in the social aspects of everyday life. As an indisputable witness of the changes that Time in its irreversible passage leaves on the natural and social environment, photography becomes an instrument of personal and collective Memory. It helps to reconstruct the course of a place and/or a community. I am interested in the changes that occur due to human intervention, both through action that causes transformation and the lack of action that leads to degradation. In this sense, I present a few examples, two of them from the shores of the Black Sea.

During the communist period, Costinești, a small village on the shores of the Black Sea, was the „Youth Resort”. It was mainly full of students coming on vacation, and many festivals used to take place here. Film, theatre, jazz festivals etc., sea celebrations and many other events kept young people from all over the country connected to cultural and recreational activities. Beyond the resort was an area with an aspect of unexplored space. It was primarily intended for walkers and was frequented by a tiny number of tourists who wanted to be far from the uproar of civilization.

There were no facilities of any kind. The area consisted of a high bank around 6-10 metres high, cut in a vertical plane, the colour of the soil varying from a dark brown at the base, to yellow in the upper part. From this bank to the water, various mounds of earth were very ‘photogenic’ due to their shape and the fact that they had the same colour variation as the high bank. There were no buildings on that high bank and there were no people who were affected by the fact that, from time to time, portions of the bank were dislodged due to water erosion, and no one took care of the protection and conservation of the bank. The process of corrosion and modelling perpetuates slowly and surely over time. After the fall of communism, film and theatre festivals, sea celebrations etc., continued for only a few years, then they stopped and that bohemian atmosphere disappeared. Costinești was no longer the “Youth Resort”.

The resort, essentially inheriting an endowment for cheap tourism, massively attracted the population segment with low-income wages. It became very crowded, which led to new accommodation developments. The high bank got polluted by the over-expansion of the buildings crossing the past limits. Nature could no longer be left to take its course, the soil was reshaped according to the needs of people, it acquired a particular inclination, a concrete alley appeared at its base, dams were made with stone and concrete to prevent the erosion process, and the narrow line left of the beach was invaded by tourists. The resort has expanded.



Figure 2. Seashore in Costinești, 2022

Finding a landmark that remained unchanged, I managed this year to take a photo of the place I had photographed at the beginning of the 90s. We thus have pictures of the same place on the shore of the Black Sea, approximately 30 years apart.

Another example is the transformations that took place in the northern part of the coast. The Mamaia resort had the most extensive beach on the Romanian coast, but an even wider beach was desired. During the widening operation, given beaches were not accessible and tourists turned to others, such as Eforie Nord or Năvodari.

In 2022, when everything returned to 'normal', hotels and restaurants were occupied in a small proportion. Some of the regular tourists of the resort did not return. Now we have a resort with a much wider beach and far fewer tourists.

The beaches are solitary and uncared for, and the vegetation is starting to populate them. You could never have imagined that in the middle of the season, in August, in perfect weather conditions for a vacation at the seaside, you could see such a deserted beach in the Mamaia resort.



Figure 3.
Extended beach in
Mamaia, 2021

Photos taken in the same place show us an extensive beach, designed to offer outstanding tourist potential, versus a deserted and unkempt beach just one year apart. By comparing it with a photo taken in 2015, we can understand the considerable effort that was made, considering that the added layer of sand is approximately 2 meters thick and the shore is prolonged by about 250 meters. This extension marks a massive waste of resources.



Figure 4. Extended beach, Ola harbour, Mamaia, 2021



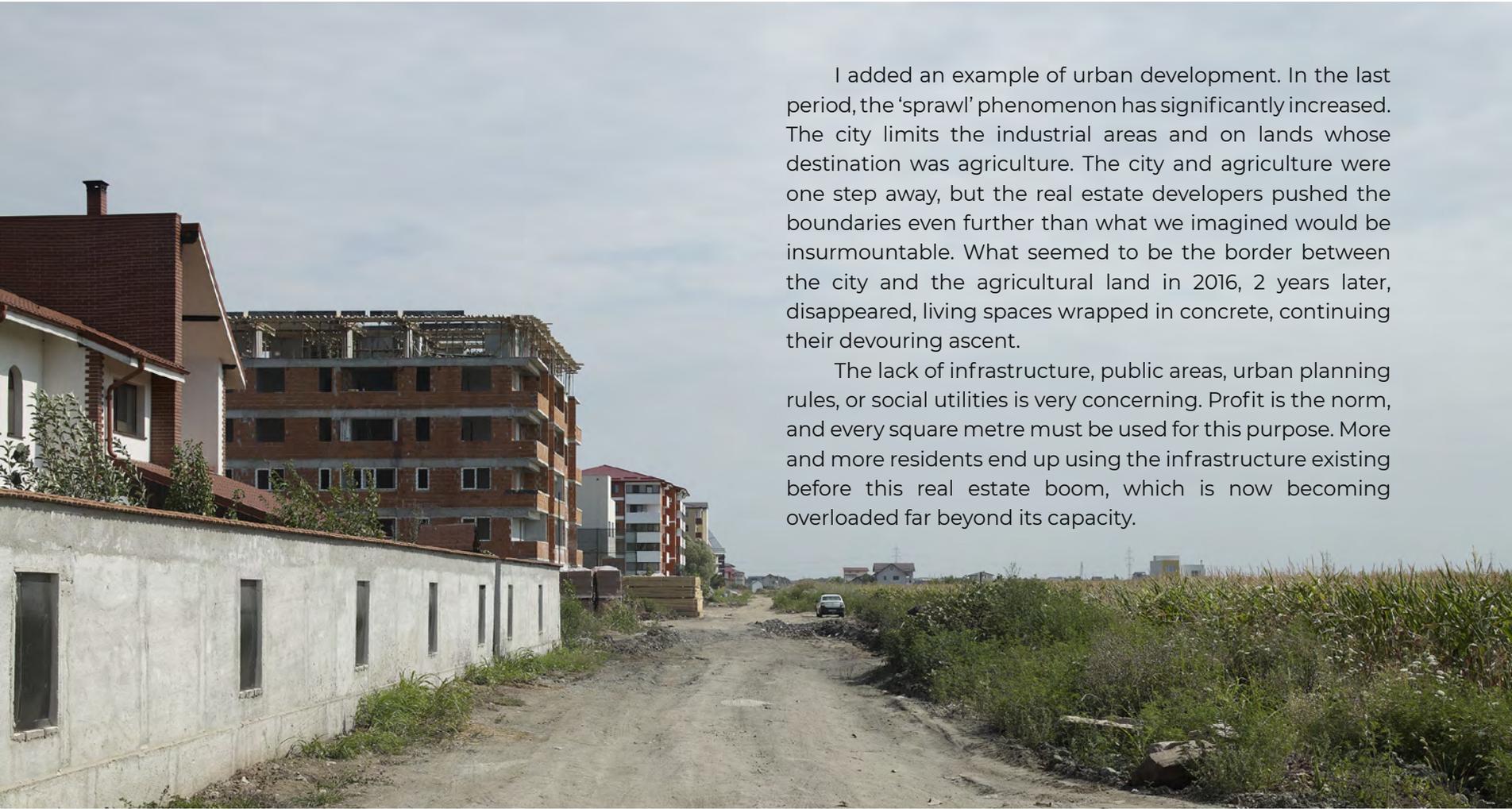
Figure 5. Extended beach, Ola harbour, Mamaia, 2022



Figure 6. Uncared extended beach, Ola harbour, Mamaia, 2022



Figure 7. Former beach, Ola harbour in Mamaia, 2015



I added an example of urban development. In the last period, the 'sprawl' phenomenon has significantly increased. The city limits the industrial areas and on lands whose destination was agriculture. The city and agriculture were one step away, but the real estate developers pushed the boundaries even further than what we imagined would be insurmountable. What seemed to be the border between the city and the agricultural land in 2016, 2 years later, disappeared, living spaces wrapped in concrete, continuing their devouring ascent.

The lack of infrastructure, public areas, urban planning rules, or social utilities is very concerning. Profit is the norm, and every square metre must be used for this purpose. More and more residents end up using the infrastructure existing before this real estate boom, which is now becoming overloaded far beyond its capacity.

Figure 8.
Sprawl
Bucharest, 2016



Figure 9.
Sprawl
Bucharest, 2018

I use photography as a Memory tool because, through my art, I want to provide documents of organic changes or actions that must be under the lens of criticism. I am motivated by the need to draw attention to the worrying aspects of everyday life before being too late for public reactions. In a country with a fragile democracy where the authorities do not hear the voice of civil society, I want to bring to the public conscience the negative aspects that are happening here and now, which can have significant implications for the present and future of the population.