

THE REFURBISHMENT OF THE CENTRAL PUBLIC SPACE IN THE CITY OF RÂMNICU-VÂLCEA: From a totalitarian park to a democratic plaza



2012 COMPETITION SCHEMES: 60's to 80's TABULA RASA



Identifying the areas to intervene on and those to keep as such



"Making space"

Aerial photo before the intervention



Râmnicu Vâlcea is a small-to-medium size city, the head of one of Romania's 42 counties. It's located in the centre of the country, at the foothills of the Carpathian mountains.

When we engaged in the 2012 national public competition to refurbish the city centre of Râmnicu Vâlcea, that we eventually won, our first impression was that main problem of the site was just that it had an obsolete design and understanding of the public space.

The centre had previously suffered a rather brutal intervention in the 60's to 80's, most of the old houses and streets being replaced with blocks of flats and larger avenues. One central island, with a diagonal street, had been converted into the city's central public space, having a park-like design, with alleys, sloping greenspace and small paved platforms at different heights.

The post war totalitarian regime in Romania had always feared large spontaneous gatherings of people, that's why a common feature of public space design in communist Romania was the park-type organization: alleys between greenspaces, the best response to a "Keep walking, comrades, and keep off the grass!" formula. This type of spaces contributed to social alienation and the destruction of the concept of community. With our proposal, we wanted to recreate a democratic space that would help to re-enable a sense of local community, the civic and participatory spirit. We sought not to redesign and erase almost everything, as the previous intervention had done, but to identify and keep the valuable features and update the area to a contemporary understanding and use of the public space, which we basically considered to be a larger flat open space. The initial gradin-like platforms, as well as the entire park-like organization, were not friendly to large crowds of people. We had to "make space", keeping it horizontal and mineralise the green areas, replacing the grass with pavement and grid protections for the trees.



Before



After