MATER_the Materials Library
Bucharest (Romania), 2017

Description
This project is a conversion of an entire floor in the former spinning mill in the Cotton Factory. The floor has been divided into three functional areas: 1. The Materials Library (South-East), 2. The Multipurpose Hall (in the middle), 3. The Co-Working (North West).

The Material Library exhibits a constantly-renewed collection of 10,000 material samples that can be touched, felt, smelled and compared to other samples. Technical information and producer contacts are available for each material in the library. The collection is organized in the following categories: wood, metal, stone, ceramics, textiles, concrete, glass, plastic, coatings, other naturals, sustainable materials and experimental. The Multipurpose Hall hosts conferences, products and new material launches, while the Co-Working area includes private and open space studios, meeting rooms, a cafeteria and a “nap room”.

The design highlights some of the original industrial features such as the exposed concrete columns and industrial ceramic tiles. The initial openness of the building is amplified by contemporary materials, such as glass and the polycarbonate partitions, painted concrete floors and a lot of vegetation. The color palette is inspired by ceramic tiles on the original walls of the building. Missing pieces were replaced with 3D printed or CNC milled tiles made of various materials: ceramics, concrete, wood, cork or plastic.

Assessment
The project functions as a hub for experimental knowledge, it connects students with practical experiences, professionals with producers and makers with new materials, in a friendly environment. It is a resource for creative minds in an urban environment that is becoming more and more automated and disconnected from practical experience.

Like most bottom-up initiatives, the design had to be changed and updated constantly in order to deal with unreliable cash flow. Also, the conversion costs, initially estimated at €75,000, would rise by 25% at the end of the project, due to hidden vices of the old, derelict building. Funding for the project came from partnerships with major material producers, grants, private sponsors, but most importantly, from the public.

Thanks to an enthusiastic public support, the Materials Library has successfully completed the biggest crowd-funding campaign in Romania.

In the larger context of the Cotton Factory’s urban renewal, the Materials Library functions as a flagship public venue that introduces the emerging local creative industries scene to a wider audience.