

Argumentation for the realization of the project of

Urban regeneration of the central area of Tulcea Municipality

(Mircea cel Batran Square, Unirii street, Trei Fantani area and adjacent historical areas)

Head arch. - dr. arch. Andreea Matache

1. General context:

The municipality of Tulcea, located in the Dobrogea region, Romania, consists of the component localities of Tudor Vladimirescu and Tulcea (county seat). It is located on 7 hills of the Tulcei Hills, on a continuously populated hearth starting from the period of the Gumelnita culture (2900 - 2200 BC), continuing with the Greek settlement of Aegyssus (8th century B.C.), with the port and the Roman city from the 1st - 2nd centuries A.D., with the city called Tulcea from the time of Mircea cel Batran. Under the Ottoman rule, the city declines, a revival being registered with the opening of the Sulina canal. The city was documented in 1506. It was under Ottoman rule between 1420 and 1877. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, with the participation of Romania, it received Northern Dobrogea together with international recognition through the Berlin Treaty of independence, Tulcea becoming part of the Romanian state from then on. In the period 1840-1859, the town was populated with settlers of German origin, known as Dobrogean Germans. Most of them would leave the town in 1940, being forcibly displaced in Nazi Germany, under the slogan Heim ins Reich (Home in the Reich). Until the administrative reform in 1950, Tulcea was the seat of Tulcea County (interwar). After the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, Tulcea became the seat of a district in the Dobrogea Region. After the Second World War, the city expanded and modernized. Currently, the hearth of the city reaches an area of 115sqm and a population of 68,608 inhabitants (in 2011). Tulcea is an industrial city, a port for passenger ships, as well as for those transporting industrial products, especially raw materials. Therefore, it is possible to observe the multitude of ethnicities and civilizations that have been present throughout history on this territory, an aspect that will be deepened in the preparation of the future General Urbanistic Plan of the municipality of Tulcea, multiculturalism being a defining element that can determine the way of organization and functional zoning of the territory.

Throughout the urban evolutionary history, the central area of the city was organized in the area close to the banks of the Danube as a plateau area, bordered by hills and developed as a commercial area specific to Balkan cities. From this area, the street layout and partially a series of historical buildings are still preserved, most of them being between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The pre-established urbanism insertions of the communist regime, which canceled the particular way of spontaneous development of the central area, determined that a valuable part of the historical core of Tulcea municipality was lost. The inappropriate changes of the transition years from the 90s to the 2000s followed, whereby the dismantling of old buildings continued, being replaced by buildings totally lacking in adaptation to the context, which caused the urban space to become depersonalized. In addition to the existing urban disagreements, there are other factors that determine that the central area is not perceived as an urban space catalyzing public space, namely: the lack of urban functions of general interest, the lack of quality of public space, the lack of urban attractiveness, the lack of perception in the mind public of a dominant space at the level of the city scale, the lack of immediate relationship with other characteristic urban spaces (Danube embankment, historical proximity areas, city neighborhoods, etc.). In this sense, a morphological re-approach of the central area is urgently needed, through an urban regeneration process that will influence the urban reorganization of the entire city, by raising the quality of public space, reorganizing pedestrian and road traffic, reorganizing functions and activities, raising public awareness on the identity and history of the central area.

2. Technical-descriptive elements:

The central area of Tulcea Municipality was included between the area formed on the east side by Pacii street, on the south it was bordered by Danube embankment, on the north by Mahmudiei street and the area nicknamed "Km Zero" and on the west by Victoriei street and the adjacent streets. A series of historical buildings with heritage value are still preserved in the perimeter area of Mircea cel Batran Square, Unirii Street and the Trei Fantani area, buildings that can be reintegrated into an appropriate urban context.

Mircea cel Batran Square (Civic Square) represents the maximum urban reference area of the city, intended since the beginning of its development for public impact activities such as commercial, cultural activities and other public events. Ever since its evolutionary history, a fact that also determined its transformation into an urban market, the area partially coincided with the old Turkish bazaar built in the Ottoman period as a space for the interference of the main commercial connections and demolished at the beginning of the 60's. Currently, the Civic Square is mainly used as a transit area and does not offer permanent urban attractiveness functions, with the exception of public events, organized for a specific period. Although it is partially bordered by a commercial complex and other commercial spaces on the ground floor of the Belvedere building (collective housing building in the immediate vicinity), the market does not offer landmark elements to determine the residents' parking, leisure time or the creation of social interactions. One can observe the use of the market space by a large number of young people who interact in a creative way with the market space, through games, the use of bicycles or skateboards. In this sense, we want to raise the level of attractiveness and comfort of the area for a wider range of the public, as a polarizing space for activities with a certain urban specificity, which will enliven the city center and encourage new activities characteristic of European cities and particularly of cities with a multi-ethnic identity such as Tulcea Municipality. The lack of green spaces, with the exception of the space arranged in the vicinity of the Belvedere building and which would allow a shaded area during the hot season, is another problem of the Civic Square, which can be solved by expanding the tree plantation. Other highlighted urban dysfunctions are: functionally destructured space, incoherent, imperceptible zoning, used periodically during routine public events; the inaccessible and blocking artesian fountain for the continuity of the urban space due to its inadequate positioning. ***The intervention area is of 13,887 sqm.***



Fig 1 - Yesterday and today: the intersection of Unirii street (formerly Regina Elisabeta street) and Progresului street (formerly Sf. Nicolae street)

Unirii Street partially represents an old important route from the morphology of the city, namely the former Regina Elisabeta street, along which there was an important urban core configured

by buildings with an architectural value specific to the beginning of the 20th century and which outlined the central housing of the city, alongside the commercial one. The area was totally destroyed by the urban systematization started in the 1960s, being totally replaced by rows of flat buildings, with commercial floors. Being an integral part of the central area, in direct connection with the seafront and designed as a carriageway belt, the street is supplemented from a traffic point of view by the continuity of Babadag Street and Isacsei Street, without presenting a traffic path of the utmost necessity. From the old configuration of the central area, fragments of some groups of buildings are still preserved, marked as the perimeter of the protected area and located along another old street, Progresului str. (formerly Sf. Nicolae street) which intersects Unirii street in the middle. The connectivity with the historical areas can also be seen through the two pedestrian passages located on the ground floor of the chain of flat buildings. The street presents a potential for urban regeneration also through the way the public space is structured, through the presence of the wide sidewalk in the area of the flat buildings with columns, the green space separating the traffic directions and the commercial function on the ground floor. The transformation of the eastern shoulder of Unirii street into a pedestrian alley is being pursued, in direct connection with the area called "under the columns" and the commercial floors of the flat buildings, with the incorporation of the median green space, in the idea of transforming a generous space, with a new approach to public space, space connection between the Civic Square and the Ivan Patzaichin waterfront. A traffic lane will be kept on the western side of the street that will serve the supply of commercial spaces or as an intervention lane. It is desired that in the future all the spaces on the ground floor will have public food as their destination and that terraces will be arranged in the space between the facade of the collective housing building and the alignment of the columns. In the interspace of the closed carriageway, other short-term activities can be organized, as part of large-scale urban events or occasionally, through temporary arrangements of the parklet type or other types of urban furniture. Other urban dysfunctions are: narrow sidewalks, insufficient space for commercial development; inaccessible green space located in the middle of traffic lanes; blocking the accessibility and continuity of the urban space for the areas on the second floor, behind the flat buildings. ***The intervention area is of 7,198 sqm.***

The Trei Fantani (Tree Fountains) area represents part of the former central park of the city, Carol I Park, partially canceled by the construction of the Delta Hotel in 1972 and the subsequent expansion in the 2000s. At the same time, it was part of the last segment of Regina Elisabeta street that connected with the Danube bank, in the area of the first developed port of the city. Currently, the area has a pedestrian urban design with vegetation inserts and groups of urban furniture that mark the area of maximum visibility from the city towards the Danube, but it is defragmented by the road traffic of Isacsei Street and does not have an immediate pedestrian continuity with the rest of the areas mentioned above. ***The intervention area is of 6,182 square meters.***

Tulcea City Hall initiated in 2022 an urban planning documentation of the Zonal Urban Plan type called "PUZ Urban Regeneration Mircea cel Batran Square" which includes all three areas, with a total area of 34073 sqm (including the road surface between Isacsei and Babadag streets), documentation approved by the Local Council of Tulcea Municipality by decision no. 150/2024. The approved documentation did not propose a change in urban functional regulation, but proposed a reorganization of the use of public space, as the first stage of the process of spatial reconfiguration and the increase of urban value, all of which generate the theme of the future contest for solutions.

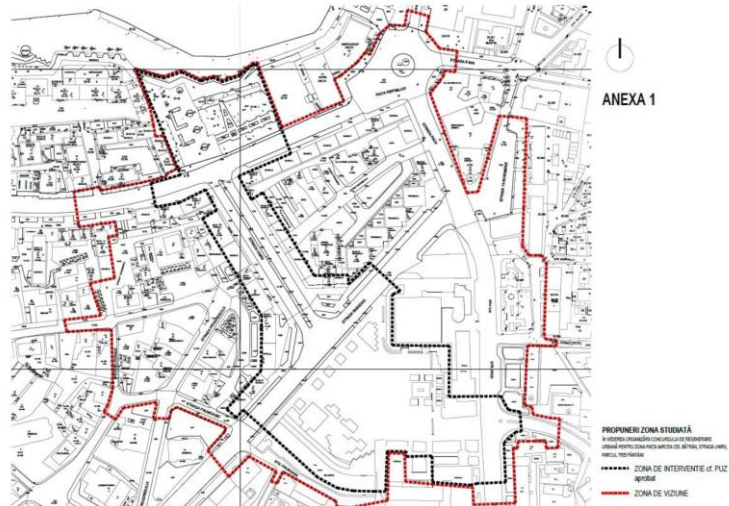


Fig. 2 - the proposed areas for the solutions competition

3. General objectives and specific objectives:

Tulcea City Hall, through the Chief Architect Directorate, in partnership with the Romanian Order of Architects, started the organization of the solutions competition regarding the "Urban regeneration of the Civic Square (Mircea cel Batran Square), Unirii street and Trei Fantani area", being considered the constituent elements of the urban area, with the **general objective of restoring the urban space of the central area**. The competition is followed by the **specific objectives** composed of: through landscaping elements, through the expansion of the existing green areas, through the transformation of Unirii street into a pedestrian space and thus the organization of a promenade that starts from Mircea cel Batran Square and connects with the Danube embankment (Ivan Patzaichin embankment), through the development of occasional road surfaces, the development of areas with appropriate public destinations (from the practice of street trade activities, areas events, playgrounds, aquatic elements, urban furniture), the implementation of an adequate lighting system, the reorganization of the functions for the ground floors of the existing flat buildings on Unirii street, up to recommendations for their refurbishment and signage. For this area, which constitutes the general objective of the intervention, the solutions expected from the future contestants of the contest will be objective, applicable and corresponding to the launched theme, based on the needs and expectations of the general public from Tulcea. The competition thus pursues technical solutions developed in the specialties of architecture, urban planning and landscaping, which the municipality will adopt and implement immediately. In support of the above, considering that a series of streets and immediately neighboring areas still preserve a valuable architectural-urban heritage, in addition to the area of immediate intervention, the competition also seeks to identify vision elements for these areas that gives solutions for connection with the central area regarding the quality and continuity of the urban space.

Tulcea City Hall also started and approved other urban planning documents related to the regeneration of some urban areas adjacent to the central area, such as "Urban regeneration of the Union House area, Summer Garden and Personalities Park" and "Urban regeneration of Old Square", all these projects being in a continuum and having as objective the qualitative reconversion of the urban standard of the city. Also, the area of the Danube embankment is currently perceived by the city's residents as the most attractive, both through the tradition of urban activities carried out there and following its consolidation and repair works, a project completed in 2023. Thus, the central area, the adjacent areas and the cleavage areas that do not yet have an approach in the sense of urban regeneration should be in an urban harmonization from the perspective of functions, arrangements as a unitary space containing and highlighting the characteristic diversity elements. From this perspective, the Tulcea City Hall is running a project to restore and rehabilitate the old building of the former Ottoman Gendarmerie, a building located in the vicinity of the Danube, in an area made up of heritage buildings such as the Art Museum (the former Palace of the Pasha), Azizie Mosque, Fishermen's

Palace, Spiru Haret High School and a series of houses located on 14 Noiembrie Street, belonging to the old neighborhoods Turks and Tatars and recently adjacent to the Ivan Patzaichin Memorial located on the seafront. In addition to the restoration of the building and its conversion into a cultural hub, we also want an immediate connection with the Danube embankment by creating a network of pedestrian walkways that will connect all the historical buildings to the central area and the embankment. In support of the possibility of organizing a continuous public space comes the private investment that will take place within the former canning factory "Tulco", a project that aims to open new public spaces in the continuity of the waterfront and restore the central building of the former factory and build other buildings with attractive functions for the city.

The new vision of the municipality about the evolution of the urban space of the city of Tulcea starts from the reconsideration of the valuable elements of the past that give it identity and particularity in the context of the southern Danube cities, specific from the point of view of multi-antique and multiculturalism.

4. Details about the history of the central area:

The story of a street...from Regina Elisabeta street to Unirii street...how a street, a city, an urban mentality transforms. Evolution, involution or retro evolution? Is the city of Tulcea flexible to change or not? How do we want the urban space to look? I am launching here a series of topics for thinking about the city, as a functional, aesthetic and identity public space...we start with Unirii street, soon the topic of an international competition for solutions. What would you like to be here?



Fig.3. - Yesterday and today: Regina Elisabeta street, now Unirii street

On the left side of Regina Elisabeta street (Today's Unirii), at the intersection with Sf. Nicolae (Progresului) there is a newspaper kiosk, with origins probably somewhere at the beginning of the 20th century. In the context of the era in which Tulcea had many printing houses, bookstores and newspaper offices, the written press was the only means of information at the time, probably of a different journalistic nature compared to the current moment. There, in the circulated area, the shoe-blackers often appeared, characters who animated the street landscape and maintained the "dress code" of the passers-by. We find its extended existence towards the beginning of the 70s, slightly modified by the vicissitudes of history, but still a strong landmark in the area.

In the past, Regina Elisabeta Street was flanked by motley shops that lined up descending from the current Civic Square towards the Danube. The small shops, of all kinds according to the

needs of the people of Tulcea, formed a continuous front in front of the somewhat narrower street than today's (Unirii) which still keeps the old alignment only on the left side. The other front of the buildings approached the current position of the lawn with roses. The history of these shops starts somewhere after the rehabilitation of the old Danube estuary that pierced the city up to the New Square area, during the Ottoman occupation and the old Turkish cair. One of them, "Drogueria Emil Popp", founded by a "cultured and friendly man", as Constantin Gavenea characterizes him in his monograph about Tulcea, is possibly one of the oldest bars in the city. The historical testimonies are disparate and we cannot accurately assess the year of its foundation. In a small building on the ground floor, covered with shingles and having a small triangular skylight on the roof, the city's only pharmacy opened its doors daily, "Crucea alba - White cross ", then renamed until the beginning of the 40s. From the photographic evidence, we find the building with a company which indicates another destination, that of a textile store, possibly transformed with its nationalization and attached to the activities of the star cooperative uncertified, shows the last image of the old drug store transformed into the "Zefirul" store at the beginning of the 70s before demolition. Regina Elisabeta street was not inferior to other commercial streets such as Lipscanii Bucurestiului or Regala Street in Braila, if we refer to the Balkan-Ottoman influence of the city.

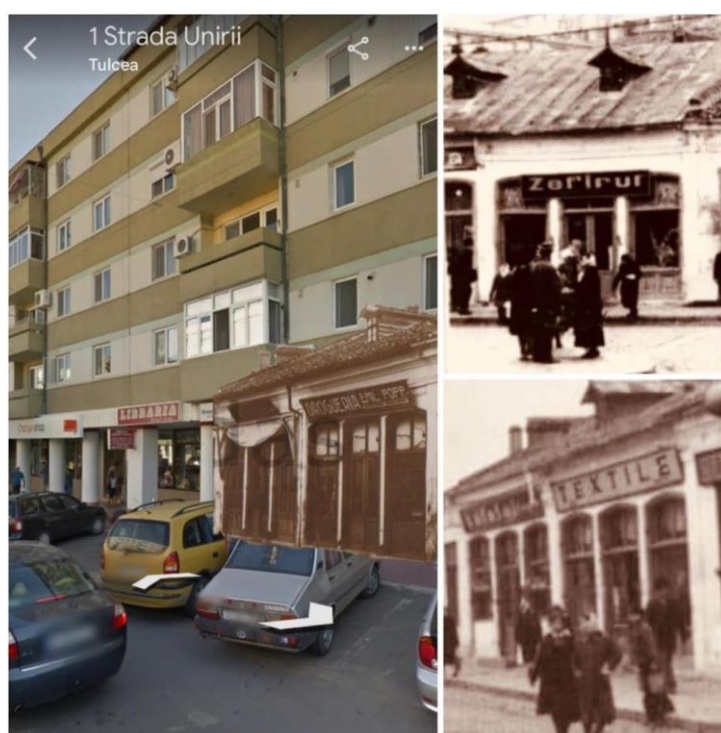


Fig.4. - Yesterday and today: Regina Elisabeta street, now Unirii street

A forgotten street, Stefan cel Mare street...

... from the Tulcea city plan drawn up in 1909 by the engineer V. Teodorescu and the only evolutionary reference plan, it is easy to understand that the old center was not exactly a territory devoid of urban planning rigors and organized randomly, according to the possibilities of the era. The perimeter determined on the NE limits by Regina Elisabeta (Unirii), Basarabilor (Pacii) streets and on the NS limits by Carol I streets (extension of Garii str.), Grivitei (Civic Square), forms a compact area, with an almost rectangular street area, lots approximately equal in surface area and continuous building fronts. Each island cut off by the streets had organized its buildings according to inner courtyards possibly common to all lots, so that visibility from the street to the bottom of the courtyard was impossible. One of the disappeared streets is Stefan cel Mare street, which crosses the middle of the old center, starting from the bank of the Danube to the old hall from the Grivitei street area (approx. the place of the current Prefecture). From the stereotomy of a fragment of the street covered with cheap asphalt, you can still see the marble sidewalks and the old cubic stone paving that reveals the real scale of the old urban space. The fragment is visible between the Fainblat and Scultety houses, after which it is lost under the imprint of the flat buildings from the 60s that border Isaccei and

Babadag streets. What else we know about Stefan cel Mare street is the fact that its southern segment continues with "Coloanelor Street", a street inside the old bazaar, marked on one side and the other by the robust columns of the porticos that evoked the noise of the city in the past.

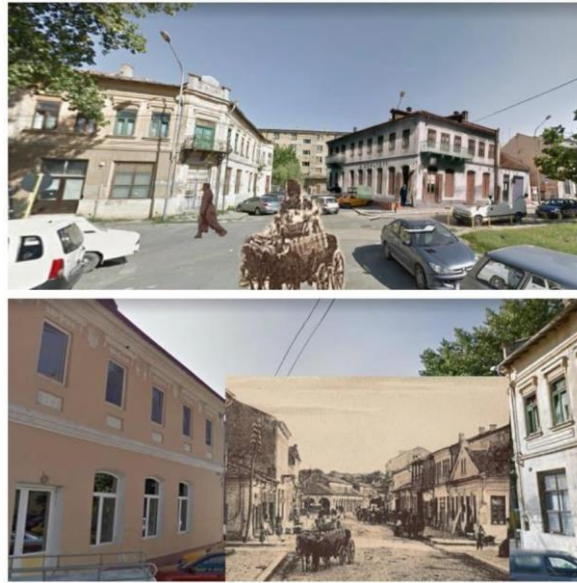


Fig.5.- Yesterday and today: Stefan cel Mare street, today partially disappeared

It is hard to imagine how a street that had more than ten taverns, if we include bodegas, small restaurants and taverns, was left today without any. On Regina Elisabeta Street and its collateral streets, it was impossible not to see, at a street corner, tables crowded on the sidewalks waiting for their customers under flying awnings, guarded by waiters in their impeccably white suits. There, elegant men, with straw boaters and a pocket watch chain each, stood discreetly out of their suit vests. Time flowed differently in a state of "la belle époque" that the people of that time tried to create for Tulcea. And they had pubs with Western names such as "Bristol", "La Maxim" combined with unpleasant names such as "La bodega noastra", "La carul cu bere" or "Pui de lup". Others excelled not by name but by the services offered to clients, being associated even with their owner... to the Greek Iani Caravelas, to the Bulgarian Gheorghe Surumanescu, to Orcula and how many times they were, maintainers of good taste, cheerfulness and free spirit for the Tulcea inhabitants. The concept of the tavern, especially in the more emancipated Tulcea of the interwar years, was difficult to differentiate. In addition, the dynamics of changing spaces was quite alert, after how successful a business was. Some worked, others didn't, and you could observe how in a relatively short interval, a pub became a shop or workshop and vice versa. The pubs were not large and did not conquer people with luxury, but they were feverish socializing places, especially in hot weather where a breeze coming from the Danube made them feel better.



Fig.6.- Yesterday and today: Sf. Nicolae, today Progresului street

A store of millions... So far, no one has heard of "Taica Lazar" in Tulcea, but the contemporaries of the early 20th century have heard of the "La milion" store. Difficult to locate among the few existing imaging sources, the famous shop of the beginning of the century would have been located at the intersection of Regina Elisabeta and Sf. Nicolae, on the left side, as you start from the Danube. Some rudimentary trends of urbanization marked the intersections of the streets with corners cut at 45 degrees so that an additional facade of the building and a better access could be obtained. This is how the construction of the store was presented to us in 1910, from where we have the first photographic evidence. The image shows us a small building, on the ground floor, but at the same time monumental due to the presence of decorative elements on the upper part of the cornice, consisting of arches supported by slightly baroque colonnades, the most imposing of which marked the main entrance and had either the year of construction or the initials the owner. It seems that it was a decorative leitmotif of important buildings in Tulcea, either as the fashion of the time, or from the desire to make them look more urban. The store "La Milion" exposed its three facades to the street through large windows, bordered by painted wooden boards on which the products for sale were marked. And they knew at that time that advertising is the soul of commerce and they turned the storefront into a kind of "Lafayette Galleries" locally but on a much smaller scale. The decay was profiled on clothes and canvases and survived until 1971 when, together with the whole old center, it fell prey to the bulldozers. Referring to its origins, we do not know its promoter, but through a coincidence of names, we discover two other shops with similar titles and having almost the same profile. In Constanta, the Armenian Diradurian brothers inaugurated their manufacture and "hainaria" on Stefan cel Mare street, and in Bucharest, on Lipscani street, the Jews Osias Nachmansohn and Solomon Rotenberg opened their manufacturing shop "La milion" in 1931, then expanded with one clothes for "ladies and children". In Tulcea we find the shop completely modified in the 1920s from which we deduce that it did not have a very long life and we learn that it was either transformed into confectionary, either in a hat shop, a cafe and after nationalization in the Delta restaurant and later Egreta. On the verge of demolition we find the old building with a completely modified bohemian air, with simple facades of straight lines and completely stripped of ornamentation.



Fig.7. - Yesterday and today: Regina Elisabeta street, now Unirii street, view towards Civic Square

Did the people of Tulcea read in the old days? The history of printing began in Tulcea with the year 1900, when the Polish Maloskitschi opened the "Nationala" printing house in one of the Lichiardopgol houses on Regina Elisabeta street. Here, the first school textbooks were printed, which took the path of education through all the schools of the city and beyond. The name of the Pole also appears on the firmament of a bookstore, around the year 1925, also on the same street, positioned somewhere after the third Sf. Nicolae street, approximately on the site of the current bookstore "Panait Cerna". From the archives of the time, there are also other printing houses located on Regina Elisabeta street, associated with local political newspapers, known in the interwar period as "Curierul Tulcei" or "Oglinda Tulcei". If only the journalists of that time could see what was chosen by the local press. Of all the known printing houses, it seems that the longest-lived was that of the Donceff family of Bulgarians. A brief information mentions it since 1888 as the printing house with bookstore "Dobrogea", founded by Sava Donceff and transformed in 1910 into the printing house "Tipografia Romaneasca". Later, in 1920, the printing house became the headquarters of the publication "Progresul Tulcei", founded by Sava Donceff. The Donceff family was not only in the interest of the people of Tulcea who loved to read, but also in the attention of the secret services. The famous spy Mihail Morozov launched an extensive investigation on Crum Donceff, until 1940 when the Bulgarians repatriated. The name of Donceff also appears in the foundation of the church in Telita, as architect, author of the project, around the beginning of the 20th century. The later period of the War of Independence left several church buildings by the author, such as those designed by the architect Toma Dobrescu at the Monastery of Cocos or Celic-Dere.

From the number of approximately six printing houses and bookstores that coexisted on Regina Elisabeta street, we conclude that the people of Tulcea were book and press lovers and that their desire for emancipation was obvious. Today, the city still has two bookstores and an association of world poets that still gathers for holidays and memorials. The desire for books exists and many people from Tulcea would spend their moments of relaxation in reading spaces, redefined as bookstores.

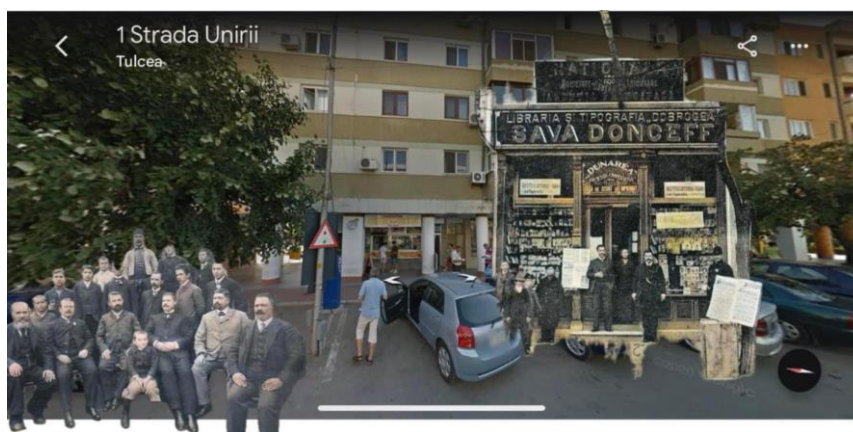


Fig.8. - Yesterday and today: Regina Elisabeta street