

# Bucharest: Engaging with history in a smart city

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## Abstract

The **objective** of this paper is to look at ways in which Bucharest maintains connections with its past through technology. A smart city engages with its audience of all ages in raising awareness to its history. **Prior work** includes research based on the definition of the smart city as related to the future, as well as to digital knowledge and smart urbanism. The history of a city remains connected to its present identity. The **approach** relies on social media studies, smart cities definition, and environmental psychology. Digital technology can offer us insight into the way we can connect the past and present identity of Bucharest. Facebook pages and groups about old Bucharest, together with a project of students from the Faculty of Architecture relying on panels and QR codes with information, placed in the areas concerned, about the Uranus-Izvor neighbourhood which is now largely gone, rely on technology to make us aware of the history of our own city. Ceausescu's building the Palace of Parliament meant demolishing an entire neighbourhood. The **Results** show that there is a large impact on users of all ages, when social media such as Facebook pages and groups promote historical aspects of everyday life in Bucharest. This is a genuine impact, as we can connect emotionally with people having lived in the past, through their stories. The cultural heritage policy of the European Union is emphasized through these digital practices. Among the **Implications**, we can see how we do not need to see technology as negative and as stopping us from looking at the world around us and walking in our city, as well as connecting to the other people. The **value** of the paper consists in showing how technology and history complete each other, in the case of Bucharest.

**Keywords:** environmental psychology, social media, cultural heritage.

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1. The Context: Reactions to a highly technologized world in the smart city*

Nowadays, we live in a highly technologized world. This world allows us to explore our past in a very vivid and interactive way. As we are walking throughout the city of Bucharest, we can discover and interact with history at every step, through reminders of what has been in a certain place and can no longer be found, as we can not only read on panels and inscriptions on buildings and statues information, but we can also scan for it from QR codes included in some panels. In addition, we can always search online for information about the past and access it on social media as well. The past is not considered an aspect that can be set aside, but a part of our process of personal development through being aware of our identity related to the city where we were born.

When we think about smart cities, we tend to think about cities equipped with the latest technology [1] [2], which is used both by its government and institutions, and for citizens' everyday use, for entertainment, for public transport, for tax payment, for education and research. In a smart city, technology is integrated "into urban infrastructure to enhance the quality of life, efficiency of urban operations" [1] [3]. Citizen participation is also part of a smart city [1] [2], which can be prompted through interactive technology.

We tend associate smart cities with their most modernized, futuristic form, and with their past. However, Bucharest - which is just one such example - proves to use technology both

to create a modern lifestyle and to make its history alive for its inhabitants, as well as for those visiting it.

Throughout the ages, there have been fears related to the highly advanced technology and its fast development, next to a fascination for it. It has all started with the age of industrialization, when cities began to offer better living conditions, as well as high possibilities for employment, in workplaces in factories. However, together with these advantages, and with the move of the population more and more frequently from rural to urban areas came the longing for nature, since contact with it was reduced in the city, and isolation, since the community ties were not as strong as in small rural communities.

The loss of human contact was associated with technology, as we as loss of contact with nature. A feeling of dehumanization is associated with highly developed technology, as well as loss of the joy to socialize and genuine communicate, in the case of the smartphone. For the smartphone, we can see, from various cartoons circulating on social media, images where family members gather around the table during holidays, but do not talk to each other. Instead, each of them uses their smartphone, likely to spend time on social media or to browse through various sites. Other images present crowds of people walking in the city, not looking around, and only scrolling and texting messages on their smartphones, and falling into a sewage hole, or a people in a cafe setting where there is a sign that there is no wifi and that clients could pretend they are living in the 90s and talk to each other.

We can consider as reactions to the technologizing of the city and rise of the smart city the creation and interaction on Facebook groups and pages related to the old city of Bucharest, such as: Bucureștiul de Altădată (Bucharest of Yesteryear), Reclame vechi românești (1860-1990) (Old Romanian advertisements from 1860-1990), Monumente și case vechi din București (Monuments and Old Houses in Bucharest), Cartierul Uranus - o istorie pierdută (Uranus Neighbourhood – a Lost Story), Bucureștii Vechi și Noi (Old and New Bucharest), Istории din București (Bucharest's Stories), Bucureștiul meu drag (My Dear Bucharest), and Fotografii vechi ale Bucureștiului (Old Photos of Bucharest). These images can be from the 1970s-1990s, when the city of Bucharest was an entirely different world regarding both aspect of the city and lifestyle, and which some users remember nostalgically, or from even earlier times, about which users can only daydream, as they had not even been born back then. They find the past very elegant and refined, compared to the present time, when watching old photographs. All of these are part of a city and way of life they may have lost and which also have associations with their personal lives, or of a city and way of life they have read about or just seen in films.

Another reaction to the high development of technology and a response, as well as an attempt to offer a solution to the fears about the highly technologized lifestyle of the present times, as we as to the influences coming from consumerist cultures and globalization, and an attempt to respond to the nostalgia of those having lived through those times, is a project about an entire neighbourhood, called Uranus, in Bucharest that is now gone. The Uranus neighbourhood was demolished during Communist times by Ceaușescu's decision and order to build the Palace of Parliament, which is so called the Palace of the People. This is the largest building in the world and it is renowned worldwide, attracting a large number

of tourists. The project, called *Uranus Acum (Uranus Nowadays)* was created by the students of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism Ion Mincu, with the support offered by their collaboration with organizations such as Zeppelin and Ideilagram. The informative panels placed in the respective areas in the city where remains of the neighbourhood can be found include access to the digital archive of images of the neighbourhood when it existed, as well as interviews with those people who had actually lived there and 3D reconstructions of this area. The main activities within the project occurred during October 17, 2019 and January 12, 2020. Part of these activities included interactive events and installations, together with an exhibition hosted by the National Museum of Contemporary Art.

The online social media groups and pages about old Bucharest, together with the reactions from some users creating blog posts or their own social media pages about their walks through old Bucharest, which is visible in the architecture of remaining old buildings, can be considered as examples of the democratization of technology and information through the wide availability of access to the Internet and gadgets. We can claim the same about the project of the students from the Faculty of Architecture, including panels with information and a map of the now demolished Uranus neighbourhood, together with QR codes, which we can come across during our walks in the respective area of the city. This project in turn has managed to spark reactions of online social media users and bloggers to post photographs of the remaining buildings and areas of the disappeared Uranus neighbourhood. The lost areas and buildings of Bucharest are present not just in talks and in the imagination of some knowledgeable inhabitants, but also on social media and in museum exhibitions, which are made known through social media. As an example, we can mention the Museum of the Ages (Muzeul Varstelor) exhibition held by Casa Filipescu-Cesianu, including rooms with objects from the historical past, together with specific furniture and objects. The exhibition is completed by smart TV videoclips and documentaries. Visitors post about them and continue to spark the interest of the others for this topic.

### ***1.2. Purpose of the study and research question***

The purpose of this paper is to look at ways in which technology provides, in the smart city, solutions for having its citizens maintain the connection and engage with their city's past. The paper focuses on the way in which online social media can be used in a constructive way to offer citizens access to their city's cultural heritage. Online social media can be used for a variety of personal interests, and one research question is how can online social media manage to integrate personal interests within public concerns? Additional research questions are the following: How can technology make us connect with our personal identity, as well as with our identity as part of a community? How can technology be used to create for us a human connection with our culture from the past?

In this case, the smart city is a modern form and one adapted to the structure of today's people for gaining their interest in order to present them not only with the highest technology used as tools for their everyday life, but also to connect with the past of their city. In today's world, it is, as we have been taught by supranational organizations such as the European Union, through our cultural heritage that we manage to differentiate ourselves from other cultures.

Through the use of technology, history is no longer perceived as a reality that has been long gone, and which would make us consider that it is an outdated matter. On the contrary, technology makes us see how the past matters for our identity as inhabitants of a city, in the case analysed in this paper, of Bucharest.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1. The two dimensions of the city: the physical place and the social imaginary***

The city can be viewed not just as a physical place, with its streets and houses, parks and neighbourhoods, monuments and, museums, and institutions, as well as stores and cinemas, that we can visualize. It can also be seen “as a socially constructed set of activities, practices and organisations” [4]. Such a view of the city can offer the way towards a “holistic and citizen-centred understanding of how technology shapes urban change through the way it is imagined, used, implemented and developed in a societal context” [4].

The city is as much a real place, with what we see before our eyes, as it is a place of the social imaginary. The social imaginary can be defined as “a common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” [5], since “it refers to the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things transpire between them and their fellow citizens, their expectations, and the normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” [5]; [6]. The institutions which are central to the function of society in the city, as well as various representations and practices are based on imagination, which in turn is based on commonly understood symbols [5]. The smart city, especially, can be defined as “an imaginary city” [5], since it “is assembled and held together by different social imaginaries, which are created and maintained through the production, circulation and reception of images and symbols, fictions and representations” [5]. As an example, the smart city is imagined as the solution to providing security, ensuring lowering of crime rates, and preventing democratic failure, as well as preventing risks such as pollution and unemployment, and even traffic problems [5]. The providing of these solutions are considered to be part of the definition, which is in fact vague and debatable, of smart cities [5]. The smart cities have many facets, and technology for ensuring good functioning and offering solutions to basic life issues and needs is just one side.

The social imaginary could be identified as also forming and accounting for the atmosphere of the place during its various historical ages. It is also the social imaginary that nostalgics about old Bucharest have in mind. The social imaginary may have been experienced by them directly or imagined by them in their turn, once they have read fiction, historical accounts, or once they have heard someone else's stories about the old times, or seen films and pictures of the people and places in the past. The smart city uses high technology to create this social imaginary of the city from the past before our eyes, offering the solution to the issues regarding some persons feeling that it is unjust for certain places and parts of the history of the city, which could coincide with episodes in their own past lives, to be forgotten and to see how the city changes its aspect and grows, for them, more and more unfamiliar each day. Facebook groups and pages, as well as the project on Uranus Nowadays, offer comfort for people who are confronted with so many changes in their

lives, echoed by the changing aspect of their own city. Fear of technology can be caused by anxiety in front of change. Fear of technology in the smart city has been related to the surveillance systems [5]; [7], which had previously been associated with totalitarian regimes practices. However, surveillance cameras in smart cities are used to ensure security. Another fear with respect to smart cities was that high technology could also mean no human presence [7].

## **2.2. *Environmental psychology***

All these reactions of the inhabitants of the smart city are explained by environmental psychology. According to environmental psychology [8], we human beings always have an emotional reaction towards our surroundings. Our surroundings can be the cityscape or nature, or even an interior place, which is why interior designers take into consideration ways in which colours and patterns can stimulate our focus or make us relaxed. We should mention that, for the smart city, “The goal is to create a city that is not only technologically advanced but also environmentally friendly” [1] [9]. The concept of environment can be extended to the physical place of the city, as well as to its social imaginary. It should not be restricted to designating a natural space only.

## **2.3. *Online social media***

One solution to keep in touch with the old city of Bucharest and with the respective part of their identity for those nostalgic inhabitants is through online social media. Online social media becomes a way to keep engaged in the realities of the city we live in and to keep in touch with the others, preoccupied by their own identity which is related to the old city. Social network sites ensure a sense of community and identity, as well as access to culture [10], [11]

Online social media has been used for understanding the ways in which people living in various areas “engage in daily activities,” which can offer the information needed by “smart city planners and strategic partners,” in order to have some guidelines for “their decision-making processes” [12]. If we look at the online Facebook groups and pages about old Bucharest, we can get insights into what cultural activities could be of interest to these users. Additionally, content shared with respect to cultural events related to the history of Bucharest on any online social media platform can offer additional clues.

The majority of online social media posts being “related to information about events,” smart cities can benefit from the “possibilities offered by social media” [13]. The smart city is not just about the “technologies leading to sustainable economic development and improved quality of life [14]” [13], around which the traditional definitions center [13], but also about culture, history, and identity. The comfortable way of life does not rely only on the equivalent of basic needs for survival in a world that is highly technologized, but also on psychological comfort related to the connection with the past of the city and with it, the past identity of some citizens. Indeed, due to their being smart, “cities are becoming more and more attractive to people seeking safety, work, stability and some comfort in mobility” [15]. At the same time, the city remains “a form of urban cultural expression,” due to the “buildings and all the urban design which reveals the evolution of the city and the historical past” [15]. From [15], we infer that technology becomes a tool used creatively by human

beings in a smart city to engage with the past. According to [15], “The city’s culture and memory can now be preserved by using the most modern technologies, such as video mapping.” What is more, “UNESCO has vigorously promoted digital protection intangible cultural heritage (ICH)” [15]. This serves to prove what a high place technology occupies not only in our everyday lives, and entertainment activities, but also with respect to preserving cultural heritage.

### **3. Materials and methods**

#### ***3.1. Methodology and data collection***

The methodology relies on cultural analysis combined with an analysis based on smart cities definition and their relationship with technology, online social media studies, identity studies, environmental psychology, and understanding the city as both a geographical, visual place, as well as a place of the social imaginary. The data collected is composed of online social media Facebook groups and pages, whose topic is old Bucharest, as well as a project advertised online based on a reconstruction of the disappeared Uranus neighbourhood. For the analysis of the data, the larger theoretical framework is made up of netnographic research, meaning researching the practices of online social media communities based on personal observations of the connections between online social media and real-life practices.

#### ***3.2. Analysis of the data***

##### ***3.2.1. Connecting past and present places, as well as personal identities***

If we claim that technology is the future, and that we cannot stop technological progress, then how can we accommodate our needs to preserve the past while we move on along the path towards progress? The smart city comes with the solution to integrate our need to preserve the past within today's contemporary lifestyle by using technology as a tool, in a creative way. Like this, the smart city does not confirm the anxieties related to a city where technology erases the human face of the city. The smart city does not mean it provides an artificial environment for us to live in every day. On the contrary, as it accommodates green spaces and parks within it, it also accommodates the past.

We can have the following image and understanding of the city: “The city of today does not exist because the city of today is the city of the future, the city lives between the past and the future between a collective memory and an historical memory” [15]. The historical memory is preserved with the help of technology, which leads us to think that “Technological changes are [...] conditioned by social needs” [15].

What are these social needs? In the case of historical, old places in Bucharest, the needs can be those of an entire generation who has lived during a certain time when they spent their childhood and youth in a certain neighbourhood, as we can see in the Facebook groups and pages dedicated to the old Bucharest. Among these, additional shared posts from additional Facebook groups and pages dedicated to certain neighbourhoods in Bucarest, such as Floreasca, Drumul Taberei, Militari, and others can be found. Some users can even post photographs of themselves from those past times in certain areas of Bucharest and other users take the opportunity to reminisce together about the respective times and places, where they have all spent their childhood and youth.

In these cases, we can speak about personal identity that is related not only to a certain time, but, especially, to a certain place. In the case of old Bucharest, place and time merge in the memories of these users sharing their experiences, becoming one single whole. The phenomenon noticed in online social media discussions related to old Bucharest can be explained by the theory of place-identity, which is “defined as those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment” [16].

### ***3.2.2. Reactions to change. change and loss***

Psychological issues related to personal identity can arise from the changing aspect of the city. Nostalgia appears, together with a sense of loss, not only of the times of the past, not only of the way the city used to look like, but also of a past self. The dilemmas we face when we try to connect present and past identities, once the change becomes, looking back, truly significant, and we may have the impression that we are completely different persons, and that there is no connection between the person we are now and the person we were, are reflected in the way we see the changes in the city. These changes in the city reflect the changes we are trying to deal with when it comes to dilemmas we experience about our personal identity. Our reaction to change can go as far as to make us experience psychological crises, once the changes in our lives become radical, due to a difficult transition from one age to another, or due to changes related in our lives such as having to change places, get separated from loved ones, or places themselves changing, or even having to leave a certain neighbourhood once it is demolished, such as in the case of Uranus neighbourhood. Since our identity tied to a place can be in such a strong relationship, being displaced outside our own will and control can be a traumatic experience. We can experience loss and feel lost ourselves. All we have of places of the past that are no longer there or that are no longer the same are memories, and technology can help maintain them alive. In the case of the project Uranus Nowadays, a three-dimensional reconstruction of the neighbourhood was available on an online platform, which clearly literally served to bring the past alive. The project wanted to raise awareness about the changes that can be brought to the city and to the way in which these changes can affect emotionally the inhabitants of those areas. It is well-known that, during old age especially, people have a very strong attachment to place, and they find it difficult and even refuse altogether to leave their home and their neighbourhood [17].

The impact of the Uranus Nowadays project can be seen since it has sparked interest in online social media platforms, having a Facebook online community dedicated to it, under the name Cartierul Uranus - o istorie pierdută, where there are both images of and accounts about this neighbourhood that is now gone. Additionally, blogs and online articles in mass media have also appeared, and this allows those curious about this neighbourhood to find out more about it. Public awareness is raised about this happening from the past, which shows it was not a simple place, but it was a place having meaning attached to it especially by those who had lived there. Memories of streets from that neighbourhood are recalled watching photographs of certain streets, one of the most frequent image being one showing Ecoului street.

The new technology, which consists of digital resources such as photographs, as well as accessibility of smartphones and internet connection for everyone, offers the possibility to psychologically bridge the gap between past and present of the city we live in and the way we relate to the past. While online social media has been accused of making us live in an unreal, fantasy world, and growing more and more isolated, using it with respect to connect to groups and pages related to the old city of Bucharest, and to users sharing the same thoughts, feelings and memories can actually prove to be extremely beneficial. These online social media practices are equivalent to the practice of storytelling in a usual, face-to-face, social setting. There is nothing alienating and isolating about such online media social groups; on the contrary.

The buildings may or may not change, yet there is much more than the physical aspect of the city that can change. There are many sides to a city, which is why it has been defined as “A mosaic of social worlds [18]” [15]. The social worlds make reference to the way in which the persons living in the city behaved, the interests they shared, the way lifestyle was possible back then in the past as compared to the way it looks like now, the way discussions went on and the way people related, the films they all watched and the books they all read, the places where they went for a walk and where they enjoyed spending time together, all of which created a certain specific universe of people living in the past.

### ***3.2.3. The visual aspect of the city: its architecture***

Another definition underlines these two aspects of the city, the place, with its visual aspect and social organization, and the significance attached to the place, since it can be defined “as a geographical network, an economic organization, a theatre of social action and an aesthetic symbol of a collective unity when referring to architecture [19]” [15].

Architecture becomes, therefore, the main element when starting discussions about the past and present-day city, and the main element prompting memories about the past. It is a visual element, drawing immediately our attention towards changes, and it is also an element ensuring the visible identity of a city. In the past, the differences among cities in various countries and cultures were more pronounced, while nowadays architecture has become more standard, making the new parts of the cities of the world look similar. It is also through architecture that we can visually connect the past and present aspects of the city: “Architecture emerges as a key element that links tradition and culture, is a kind of reflection of the city itself and people who lives in the city” [15].

With the passage of time, old historical buildings were abandoned, and standard buildings started to be built in cities all over the world. The attitude was divided into interest in the new technology and nostalgia for the past, and this can be seen as a constant reaction.

Old buildings are associated with beauty, while new buildings are associated with utility [20]. However, in order to feel that our lives are worthwhile, we need beauty in our lives [20], and in our surroundings. Indeed, “Before the industrial revolution, buildings had very ornamented facades, which reflected in some way an aristocratic or bourgeois taste” [15]. The aspect of the old buildings and the tastes they reflected were associated with and were the product of a certain mentality and way of social life “in the urban context of those



times” [15]. The changes in lifestyle and society are reflected in the way the focus moves from the exterior to the interior of the houses: “[...] after the industrial revolution, the internal design of houses became more important. The way in which the house was structured inside rather than the façades which turned to be simpler and less ornamented” [15]. This change could be related to the shift from a collectivist to an individualistic society, where the private space becomes important, since the needs of the individual become prominent [21], and are no longer subsumed to those of the entire collectivity.

The architecture is translated into photographs in the Facebook communities, and they are the prompting element for reflection and connection with the past. The practices in the online communities reflect the meanings attached to the old Bucharest, with its specific rituals, practices and traditions [22]. The buildings become symbols of a way of life of the past.

### ***3.2.4. Practices in online communities related to the old city of Bucharest***

The specific practices in the online Facebook communities are related to the purpose of the group presented in their description, as follows: Bucureștiul de Altădată is a group for sharing images and stories about the history of the city; Reclame vechi românești (1860-1990) focuses on advertisements and stories related to them from the interwar and communist periods; Monumente și case vechi din București focuses on houses and monuments in the city's patrimony; Cartierul Uranus - o istorie pierdută offers images and accounts about the lost neighbourhood; Bucureștii Vechi și Noi is a community where members share photographs and stories on buildings that are now gone, events, changes the city has gone through, as well as documents from the history of the city; Istории din București focuses on exploring the old city architecture and neighbourhoods; Bucureștiul meu drag focuses on old photos, personal stories of users, and articles about Bucharest; and Fotografii vechi ale Bucureștiului is a group where users share images from the past of the city.

The online Facebook communities frequently focus on places and buildings that are either gone, or that are now abandoned buildings, or, in other cases, serve other purposes. Lost places of Bucharest can be classified according to the way in which users of online social media perceive them [23]:

- “Losses of cultural heritage: Simu Museum and Văcărești monastery;
- Losses of the beauty of a certain period of time in the city: cinemas, marketplaces, sweet shops, clothing stores (such as Eva);
- Losses related to entire areas in or neighbourhoods in their totality: Uranus neighbourhood, areas in the Jewish neighbourhood;
- Losses related to the freedom of citizens in Bucharest regarding faith, since Communist rule banned it through the moving or demolishing of sites of worship, but also, at the same time, sites of cultural heritage, due to their link with Romanian national identity” [23].

This classification shows, literally, how certain places are only places of memory. While, according to [24], “personal memory [...] is always constructed and located in the social environments of the present,” for Freud, “personal memory is [...] ‘stored’ in the unconscious” [25]. The opinion of the author of the present paper is that the physical places

are symbolic images which trigger associations of personal memories related to them in the case of those users having experienced these realities and who can tie them to events and periods in their own lives. For the others, these places symbolize public history landmarks.

### ***3.2.5. From online communities to face-to-face communities and practices***

These online groups have had a strong impact on users, as there have appeared other online communities or individual users' pages which focus on taking walks in the city in historical areas, or simply on streets with old buildings having an unknown history. Some of the old buildings have been bought and the owners have taken care of them and renovated them. There are also projects to renovate and preserve historical buildings in Bucharest that are in very bad shape.

The interest in the old Bucharest is not restricted to the nostalgics who are old-aged. One of the examples of the interest of the young generation in the history of Bucharest is the project Uranus Nowadays, where students at the Faculty of Architecture became very much involved. For young generations, history is presented very efficiently using technology, which presents it before their eyes, in a visual and interactive way. An example can be given by the way museums are organized using technology nowadays, which is so much different from the traditional museums where there were only simple exhibits. Direct experience with a reality, even if it is simulated with the help of technology, is the most efficient to present history to those who have not lived it.

In a smart city, technology is used both in public institutions and personally, due to its wide availability, or democratization. Public technology includes the use of gadgets in institutions such as museums and places hosting exhibitions, where informative clips on smart TV screens are present, documentaries, as well as tablets and touch-screen devices where visitors can look for information. Visitors are, therefore, invited to interact with the information, and the entire experience does not consist only in watching passively, but actually having control over the exhibits. The experience is similar to the one available to us in the online media, where we can control with one click what we want to do and where we want to go.

These museums and exhibitions are popularized through social media by individual users. The impact of social media is beyond dispute in all areas of our lives, including culture and education. In turn, culture and education can also become entertaining activities, through the possibilities given by technology for us to have an interactive experience of the past. History becomes alive before our eyes with the use of advanced technology, as well as a part of our everyday lives, with online social media, in the case of old Bucharest. We can see the high impact of visual culture here as well. After all, we human beings receive most of the information through our visual sense.

Museums such as the Museum of Ages at Casa Filipescu-Cesianu allow visitors to enter rooms from old times, and wander about them. The same concept can be found at Muzeul Micul Paris (Little Paris Museum) in the Old Center of Bucharest. The name Little Paris refers to the way Bucharest has been called in the past due to its architecture. At Muzeul Micul Paris, visitors can find an entire room decorated with clothes and furniture, as well

as with other objects, including toys and jewelry from the interwar years. The museum also includes a room with props from the past days where those visitors wanting it can be dressed up in the style of those times and then a photographer takes pictures of them. This allows for a very strong connection with the past, making visitors wonder what if they had lived during those times and what their lives may have been like back then. The museum also hosts events such as parties in the setting and atmosphere of those times, which makes the experience of history all the more authentic.

Interest in the old Bucharest is also sparked by visits to museums such as Palatul Sutu, when on one occasion, during July 29 and September 27, 2020, there were art objects such as paintings, documents, and sculptures which had belonged to the Simu family, who were art collectors and who had created the Simu Muzeum, which was demolished by the Communists due to its aspect reminding of Masonic style. There, visitors could find out about this lost museum. Smart TV screens built a visual reconstruction of the museum and the place where it had once stood in the city. This museum was also present in online Facebook communities.

Preoccupation with old Bucharest can be considered from an anthropological perspective [26], [27] of contemporary life in Bucharest, which allows us opportunities to consider episodes in the past of our city. Recently, Fictiunea writers' group has focused, during summer and autumn 2024, during their meetings at Casa Filipescu-Cesianu, on writing and reading stories about old Bucharest. In addition, during autumn 2024, writer Doina Ruști, a member of Fictiunea group, has published a novel related to old Bucharest, about singer Zavaidoc, called *Zavaidoc în anul iubirii (Zavaidoc's Time for Romance)*, and which has been launched on September 21, 2024, in Bucharest, at Humanitas Cismigiu bookshop.

The present paper has relied on netnographic research, based on participant observation [28], since the examples were given from the experience of the author of the present paper. The examples of events and museums related to the old Bucharest were also given based on the author of the present paper's personal experience when taking walks in Bucharest during the time when the events were on, and visiting the museums mentioned. Preoccupation with the old Bucharest has become part of the life of the inhabitants of Bucharest, as they have come to personally relate to the past of their own city due to all these events and available online communities and resources.

#### **4. Results**

An equivalent to storytelling in the face to face medium is visible when users engage in online social media Facebook groups and communities. The engagement is a genuine one, since users reminisce about their own memories, or hear about the memories of the others related to various areas of their own city. The image of our own city can be completed through these stories, to the point where we become aware of an entirely different city which we have not experienced personally, through direct contact with it.

Our picture of our own city can be completed by projects such as Uranus Now, where through various events we become directly engaged with the stories of witnesses to the changes this neighbourhood has gone through.

At the same time, our memory of the city we have not directly experienced is refreshed through museums' temporary and permanent exhibits. Especially those exhibits showing us rooms arranged according to the historical periods and interaction prompted by organizing photo sessions and parties in such settings have the highest impact.

The practice of storytelling about old Bucharest is taken over by fiction groups' meetings, such as the Fictiunea Association, where at Casa Filipescu-Cesianu, in open air, participants could share their own views and stories about old and contemporary Bucharest. What is more, works of fiction such as *Zavaioloc în anul iubirii* by Doina Ruști have been published, drawing attention to the old Bucharest. The literary meetings and book launch event about old Bucharest have a clear parallel with face-to-face discussions and stories about the topic, and are meant to create connections among inhabitants of Bucharest, offering them a sense of belonging to a community and a sense of identity.

The role of online social media and other platforms provided by the smart city to its citizens have an uncontested role in maintaining cohesion for the inhabitants of Bucharest based on their shared values. The past becomes a clear element in our present, everyday lives, in a similar way in which we stumble on QR codes in places where Uranus neighbourhood used to begin.

## **5. Discussion and conclusions**

We should not underestimate or demonize online social media, as well as other online social platforms with respect not only to their roles in our everyday lives, but also with respect to their role in helping us maintain a vivid connection with the past.

From the analysis done in the present paper, we have noticed the role of the visual culture we live in today, since photographs offer us, in online social media groups and pages, a sense of reality before our eyes. History is no longer considered an abstract notion, or a series of historical events listed to be remembered, but a complete part of the everyday life reality of people living during those times.

The smart city uses its technology component in the case of old Bucharest in an attempt to help the inhabitants of this city to connect to the past of their city, as well as to the everyday lives of those inhabitants who have witnessed the changes the city of Bucharest has gone through. The interaction and interactive component of technology, based on gadgets, online social media tags and communities, as well as QR codes and websites, and on smart TV screens with information placed in museums and exhibits focusing on the theme of old Bucharest help create for us a vivid sense of history, where everything from the past becomes so visual and easy to picture, or imagine.

Through all these tools using technology, the smart city offers for its inhabitants the possibility to truly engage with the past. Technology is not one-sided, good or evil; it depends on how we use it. In the case of keeping contact with our past identity, technology has a highly beneficial role, in fact helping and not hindering human contact.

The old Bucharest becomes nowadays, during our present time, part of our everyday practices. It is present through online social media communities, where we can connect with other users, just as much as it can be present in communities related to our personal interests and hobbies, e.g. the fiction writers' group Fictiunea, as well as part of our occasional walks in the city, e.g. as far as the project Uranus Now is concerned, and the occasional exhibits or the permanent exhibits of museums in Bucharest on the topic. The idea of engagement with the historical Bucharest can be achieved through technology, which is an advantage the smart city has in promoting culture.

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