

# Rediscovering the former city through digital archives. A case study of Bucharest in Dutch language newspapers

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## Abstract

*Open access digital archives are nowadays a valuable tool for diachronic analyses of a multitude of phenomena. The degree in which newspaper archives have been digitalized and made openly available still differs greatly across the EU countries. There are several online digitalized Romanian language archives based on which studies about Bucharest can be conducted, but in the present article I look at this object of study from a less researched angle, namely the presence of the city of Bucharest in Dutch language newspapers made available online through digital archives. In its quest to affirm his identity, a smart city can also include in its digitalized history these foreign representations of his own past, which could prove useful, among others, for educational, research and marketing purposes.*

*Several Dutch language digital archives are openly available online and they contain millions of digitalized texts with a word search possibility. Some of the Dutch language digital archives contain texts about Bucharest that go back as far as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the present article I look at articles about Bucharest published up to the mid 1990's and starting as early as possibly available. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods I try to answer the following questions: What can we learn about Bucharest through a search in the Dutch language digital archives? What kind of information about Bucharest reached the foreign press? What news about Bucharest from the communist period is present in the Dutch language media? What can we see in the pictures associated with the news from Bucharest?*

*As other researchers have shown, the data contained at the moment in these digital archives is by no means exhaustive or equal to the data found in analogue archives. Digital archives are constantly being updated, therefore replication of this study at a later date could bring new insight.*

**Keywords:** online tools, cross-cultural perspective, diachronic analysis.

## 1. Introduction

The digitalization of newspapers and the development of open access online tools and archives of newspapers have facilitated the use of quantitative approaches for different discourse studies. Open access digital archives are nowadays a valuable tool for diachronic analyses of a multitude of phenomena. There are numerous initiatives in this sense all across Europe. Researchers all over the world can now easily browse through millions of pages of historical documents that in the past were locked up in place bound libraries and archives.

The degree in which newspaper archives have been digitalized and made openly available still differs greatly across the EU countries. There are several online digitalized Romanian language archives based on which studies about Bucharest can be conducted, but in the present article I look at this object of study from a less researched angle, namely the presence of the city of Bucharest in Dutch language newspapers made available online through digital archives. The Netherlands is a leader in the European movement for open access academic publishing (Butler, 2016) and it also has numerous newspaper digital archives openly available online, covering different time spans and geographical areas. These archives contain millions of digitalized texts with a word search possibility.

## 2. Case study results

What can we learn about Bucharest through a search in the Dutch language digital archives? What kind of information about Bucharest reached the foreign press? What news about Bucharest from the communist period is present in the Dutch language media? What can we see in the pictures associated with the news from Bucharest? These are the general questions that stood as starting point for this case study.

In the present article I look at articles about Bucharest published up to the mid 1990's and starting as early as possibly available. For this analysis I decided to rely on the information found in the Delpher archive, the digital archive developed by the National library of The Netherlands (KB) and containing articles from Dutch sources (Belgian newspapers in Dutch language are thus not included). The Delpher digital archive contains materials published until 1995. There are several other similar Dutch digital newspaper archives but they either cover a shorter time period, with only more recent coverage of newspapers or they only have a limited (regional) geographical coverage. Delpher is very user friendly, has useful filter options, returns results quickly, has specific buttons for citing an article, saving it in the form of a pdf. document, a jpeg. or even as text.

Because in the Dutch language one can find two spellings for the name of Romania's capital: *Boekarest*, the standard accepted version, and *Bukarest*, the German language version, I used both versions as search keywords in the Delpher archive. All search results presented in the following, in content, numbers and percentages are valid for November 2016.

The search menu of Delpher has 5 different source categories for search results. These are: books, Google books, newspapers (*kranten*), periodicals/journals (*tijdschriften*) and radio bulletins (in transcribed form). In the present article I only look at results found in the newspapers category, this also being the largest category of results. However, a very interesting category which would deserve a separate case study is that of the radio bulletins. Here, my search turned about 1769 results of transcribed Dutch language radio bulletins referring to Bucharest, the earliest from 1937 and the most recent from 1984.

## 2.1. Quantitative results

If we combine the two spellings of the name Bucharest we get approximately 180.000 results (articles) in the Delpher archive, in the newspapers (*kranten*) section. For Boekarest we get 172.701 results, starting from the year 1782 up to 1995. For Bukarest we get 9283 results, starting from 1771 up to 1995. I divided the search results in 4 time period categories, in order to better observe existing trends: 1771-1899, 1900-1945, 1946-1989, 1990-1995. Results are presented in Table 1 here below in absolute numbers.

Table 1. Search results for the keywords *Boekarest* and *Bukarest* divided in 4 time periods

Time series /Keyword	1771-1899	1900-1945	1946-1989	1990-1995	Total
Boekarest	1220	148116	20045	3320	172701
Bukarest	835	5252	1284	1912	9283
Total	2055	153368	21329	5232	181984

Source: Data from Delpher digital archive, newspapers (*kranten*) category, November 2016

If we compare the use of the two spellings, there is an obvious precedence of the standard, academic Dutch language word of *Boekarest*. Both keywords have peak results in the same time frame - 1900-1945, when in newspapers we find 148116 results for Boekarest and 5252 results for Bukarest (Figure 1 here below).

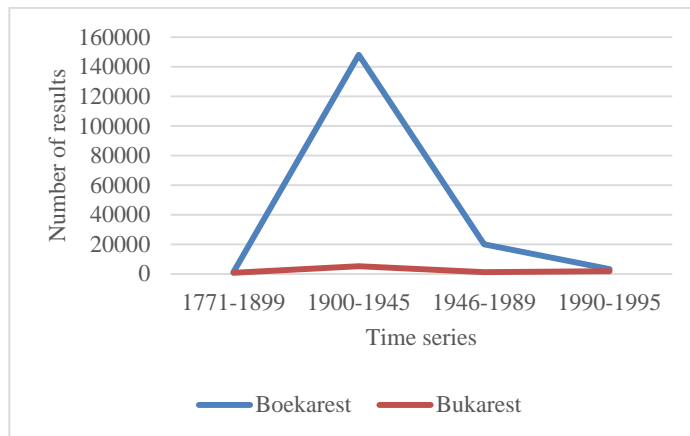


Fig. 1. Comparative trends for the keywords Boekarest and Bukarest in search results

Source: Data from Delpher digital archive, newspapers (*kranten*) category, November 2016

If we combine the search results for *Boekarest* and *Bukarest* in newspapers from 1771 up to 1995 we can see a uniform small interest about Bucharest in the Dutch language newspapers up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 2). The peak year for this combined search is also in the 1900-1945 time frame, more specifically the year 1940, when we find 16453 digitalized newsarticles about Bucharest in the Delpher archive.

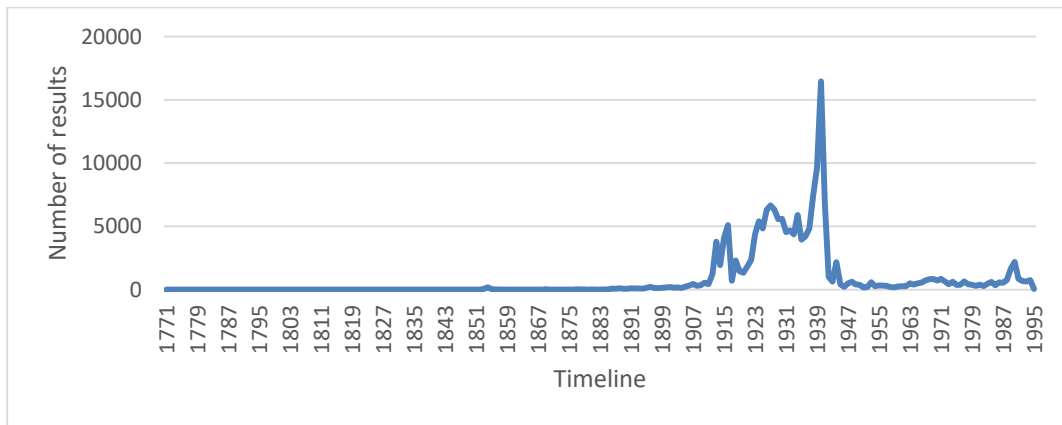


Fig. 2. Trend for the combined keywords Boekarest and Bukarest in search results  
 Source: Data from Delpher digital archive, newspapers (kranten) category, November 2016

In order to have a better view of the trend and of smaller peaks, a shorter period of time should be selected. Delpher offers a helpful additional function for viewing search results in the form of a graph. In figure 3 for example, I selected the time period 1900-1995 for viewing search results for Bucharest.

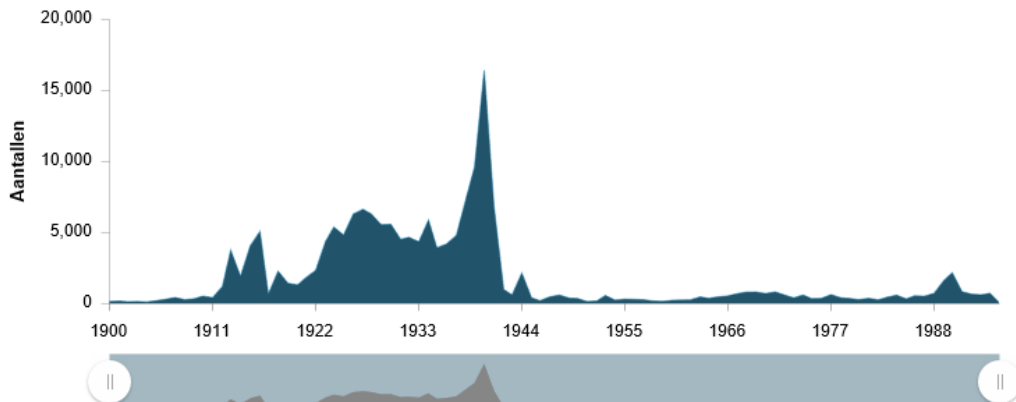


Fig. 3. Combined search results for Boekarest and Bukarest expressed in numbers in the time period 1900-1995 obtained with the graphic function of Delpher  
 Source: <http://www.delpher.nl/>

Delpher offers additional filters for the general search category newspapers: the possibility to arrange the search results in 4 different sub-categories: advertisements, articles, personal announcements (births, deaths, marriage etc.) and illustrations with explanations. Out of these 4 sub-categories, the search results for Bucharest give the most results in the article section (about 97% of results). In the personal announcements section, the oldest mentioning of Bucharest comes from 1903, relating to a marriage announcement and the oldest illustration is from 1913. The illustrations with text section is a very interesting one, and I present some remarks about the information found here in the following.

## 2.2. Qualitative results

A qualitative analysis of more than 180.000 news articles is very time consuming without using qualitative data analysis software or data mining tools. In the following I present some interesting selective observations based on the search results, but this is not by far an exhaustive qualitative analysis of the search results. This is why for future research I recommend a more targeted approach, either by choosing a shorter, specific time frame or combining more specific keywords.

The first mentioning of Boekarest comes from 31/01/1782, in the newspaper *Hollandsche historische courant*, printed in Delft. Bucharest is mentioned only one time in an article entitled “Turkey”, in what we would now call the foreign news section. On the same page we find 3 other articles, entitled Nord America, Scotland and France (the last being the longest of the 4 articles on the page). The article mentioning Bucharest (the smallest in size on that page, of 139 words) is about the naming of Lascarov (Lascaroff) as Russian consul of Moldavia and Wallachia and the refusal of the Turks to recognize him as such (*Hollandsche historische courant*, 1782).

There are about 1700 illustrations with explanations (short texts under the picture) mentioning Bucharest, ranging from 1913 up to 1995. The oldest one found in Delpher is an image of the Domnița Bălașa church from Bucharest, mentioned in the context of the 1913 peace conference (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 1913). Also from 1913, in the same newspaper there is a picture entitled “In the vicinity of Bucharest” (*In de buurt van Boekarest*) where many derricks, oil pumps and oil tanks can be seen. Beneath the picture, we find the mentioning that there is a lot of oil in Romania (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 1913). From the 1913-1916 period we find pictures of maps including Bucharest. The 1924 arsenal explosion from Bucharest is also covered by several news journals, together with photos.

From 1925 we find an article entitled “Sights from Bucharest” containing two pictures of the Stavropoleos monastery and the C.E.C. Palace (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 1925). The text under states “Our Romanian colleague sent us a few pictures from Bucharest and we reproduce here two of them”. Also from 1925, in several newspapers we find pictures with a religious procession on the streets of Bucharest, with the Romanian Patriarch, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Antioch of Constantinople and the Archbishop of Athens. Also from 1925 we find a picture of the king and the crown princess dressed in parade uniform for the National Day celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> of May. The burial of king Ferdinand receives large photo coverage in Dutch newspapers in 1927. From this period up to the first years of World War II there are also many pictures with members of the royal family of Romania.

All kinds of street merchants are shown in the pictures from Bucharest up to the 1930's: flower merchants, firewood merchants, lemonade merchants and pretzels merchants. From 1922 we find a picture of men holding lambs in their arms and beneath the title: “On the streets of Bucharest, Easter lambs are offered for sale” (*Haagsche courant*, 1922). The picture is tagged as “Easter customs”. Also from 1925 a picture with the title “New

Year's eve in Romania: Traders with flower bouquets in the streets of Bucharest". "Flowers serve there as good luck wishes on New Year's eve", mentions the text further (Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant, 1925).

In the illustrations with explanations sub-category also, the peak results are from the period right before the start or during the Second World War, with 154 results in 1938 and 230 results in 1940. After the end of the Second World War, the number of illustrations with text mentioning Bucharest drops dramatically, with 150 results between 1946 and September 1989.

In the communist period we see a peak in the number of published articles in the 1968-1971 period, with 768-794 articles. Childcare in the Romanian Socialist Republic is praised in an article from 1952. In 1967 we come over an article with a picture, entitled "Romanian capital from above". Underneath, in capital letters the mentioning: "Despite strict regime, Bucharest maintains a Latin atmosphere" (De Tijd De Maasbode, 1967). The earthquake from 1977 receives great coverage in the Dutch press of the time, as does the 1989 revolution.

#### **4. Research limitations**

Despite the numerous advantages of digital archives, there are research limitations that must be taken into consideration and must be carefully weighed when drawing conclusions based exclusively on results found in such digital archives. As other researchers have shown, the data contained at the moment in these digital archives is by no means exhaustive or equal to the data found in analogue archives (Krieken, 2015; der Weduwen, 2015). Other researchers (Krieken, 2015) who have used the data from Delpher for hypothesis-driven studies also admit to the problems of generalizability and the replicability of findings, due to the continuously changing selection of all available data (Krieken, 2015). In August 2015, Delpher contained about eight million newspaper pages, representing about 10 per cent of all Dutch published newspaper pages (Krieken, 2015). In this archive, the newspapers that were digitalized or that will be digitalized in the future are not randomly included in the "sample", but are selected based on their representativeness of society at that point in time (according to the website of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek/ Nationale bibliotheek van Nederland, the organization behind the project).

Present day digital archives have solved many of the weaknesses (interface designs, search tools, browsing options etc.) identified by users in their earlier versions (for example Maxwell, 2010), although the possibility of duplicate entries or of errors in the word recognition software still exist (Van Groesen, 2015). For example, the incorrectly written name *Boekaret* (instead of *Boekarest*) will turn about 69 results in the Delpher digital archive, because it was spelled incorrectly in the original printed paper and digitalized as such.

The tagging of certain articles, or their inclusion in a certain sub-category is also debatable. For example, looking through the search results for Bucharest in the category personal announcements (familieberichten) I found a small news article (81 words) about

the peasant revolt from 1907, entitled “Peasant revolt” (*Boerenoproer*), an error in tagging or inclusion in a sub-category, as this piece of news has nothing to do with personal announcements about births, deaths or marriages. Another example of debatable classification is an article about the death of Mircea Eliade (269 words) which is also found in the personal announcements (*familieberichten*) category based on the search menu options. However, this is a news article, presenting in the length of a column, the life and work of Eliade.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Based on the present observations, the city of Bucharest itself is not central in the Dutch newspapers that have been digitalized by Delpher. In the earliest occurrences, the city is mentioned in the context of political events in which other states were involved. Bucharest receives the greatest media attention in the Second World War (when compared with other time periods). There are interesting trends that could be further researched in detail, in separate case studies, either for specific time periods (for example the news about Bucharest from the communist period, or pictures of people in Bucharest from the period between the two world wars), or for more specific keywords. Another useful analysis would be a comparison of the information found in Romanian digital archives and in foreign ones. The smart city can include in its digitalized history these foreign representations of his own past, which could prove useful, among others, for educational, research and marketing purposes.

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