Pavilion of ROMANIA

at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

*FADING BORDERS*

The 17th International Architecture Exhibition was rescheduled to start on 22 May 2021 but its theme remains relevant and becomes even more valuable under the current global context, although it was considered long before the pandemic. 2020 made clear our global vulnerabilities. People, states, businesses and entire cities have experienced the direct consequences of an interconnected world. Now, maybe more than ever before, we realize that territorial boundaries fade, opening new opportunities, but also common challenges that call for dialogue and cooperation to identify common solutions. Challenging the Biennale’s overarching theme „How will we live together?”, Romania will showcase the FADING BORDERS phenomenon, a reality that ranks top in the public agenda of the international community.

In the past ten years, over three million Romanians have left the country. The migration wave has translated into individual success stories beyond the country’s borders, but also caused a depopulation issue that has slowly deprived the cities left behind from precisely the attributes that enrich urban life.

What are the stories of the ones who left? How has life changed for the ones who stayed? Does development equal expansion? How do we need to design our cities to enhance life quality in a perpetual changing social architecture? What role does architecture play to help us live together in healthy and prosperous communities? These are the questions launched by the team of architects Irina Melita, Stefan Simion, Cristi Bradescu, Stefania Hirleata and Radu Tirca from the POSTER architectural office that translate into an open invitation to visit the Romanian pavilion within the Biennale Architettura 2021.

However, FADING BORDERS is not merely a Romanian story. It is a universal story for our contemporary societies that face mass migrations and the huge challenges—as well as the huge opportunities—they generate. The Romanian presence in the Biennale Architettura 2021 aims at fostering a constructive debate about the contribution that architecture can bring to a successful management of the migration phenomenon.

Stefan Simion: *“FADING BORDERS emphasizes and opens the conversation about how the mobility of large masses of people will impact the way architects could imagine future forms of housing in the broad sense. Migration has been so far a phenomenon related to poverty, war, natural disasters, but the reality of migration should be brought to the centre of discussions about how we shall live, how cities will live, because, most likely, this phenomenon will expand and it will be linked to the pursuit of improving the quality of life. So, we want to initiate a constructive, positive debate, a look to the future, a hypothetical discussion about how we will live together when the word <<together>> becomes very diverse, and the duration of the housing acquires a different dynamic”.*

The tension between the two realities (the ones that left and what is left behind) will be emphasized by the scenography of the pavilion, divided in two halves. On one side visitors will experience the universe of Romanian emigrants and their new lives in foreign cities. On the other side visitors will meet the Shrinking Cities of Romania, witnessing their current vulnerabilities but ultimately focusing on the opportunities that can bring back hope and welfare to these areas. The story line of the pavilion is deeply human-centered and appeals not only to our brains, but mostly to our emotions as universal citizens. In this sense, FADING BORDERS integrates two complementary projects – *Away* and *Shrinking Cities in Romania*.

*Away* is an independent journalistic survey of a creative team (Teleleu) that have themselves left the comfort of their home to travel around the world and document authentic stories right where they happen. The documented stories showcase the stories of struggle, success, hardships and fulfillment of Romanian emigrants that, in fact, tell the universal story of the migrants that search for a better life somewhere away from home: adjusting to new environments, facing inclusion issues (jobs, customs, housing, citizenship etc.), creating new communities and new cultures. All these lively exchanges of experiences give new twists in our perspective of what it means to live together.

*Shrinking Cities in Romania* is an in-depth research on the post-communist shrinkage of Romanian cities (by IdeilaGRAM). Statistical data show that most Romanian cities, of different sizes and types (small touristic towns, large and small industrial ones, agricultural towns, old historic cities, harbors by the Danube) are facing various forms of decline: socio-cultural, economic, physical, demographic. Rather than focusing on a pessimistic outlook, the study welcomes a constructive understanding of the phenomenon. Contrary to the common wisdom, shrinkage is embraced as a vector for modernization and innovation, re-use, alternative resources, artistic creation, and revaluation of interpersonal relationships.

As a conclusion to the research presented at the pavilion, MAZZOCCHIOO magazine (a publication curated by the project team) will shape the debate by gathering a series of contributions from international architects answering the question: *How will Migration influence Architecture and the City?*

The FADING BORDERS project will be presented in both exhibition spaces held by Romania in Venice: the Romanian Pavilion in Giardini and the New Gallery of the Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice.

The Biennale Architettura 2021 will take place in Venice from 22 May to 21 November, with a preview on 20th and 21st May. There will be 63 National Participations in the historic Pavilions at the Giardini, at the Arsenale and in the historical city centre of Venice.

**Commissioner:**    Attila Kim

**Curators/Architects**:   Irina Meliță, Ștefan Simion, Radu Tîrcă, Cristian Bădescu, Ștefania Hîrleață

**Participants**:

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Belcineanu, Laura Popa-Florea

TELELEU:

Elena Stancu, Cosmin Bumbuț

MAZZOCCHIOO Journal:

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