

## ORIENTATION

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*ORIENTATION* (the same word in French, English, and German, just with different accents) is one possible solution for social harmony. I will refer to this term as that act intended to facilitate one's access to certain information, on a certain path, at a certain time, towards a certain goal.

### Definition

If in the west *orientation* can mean a specific program in the organization of a formal event, at the beginning of a school year, etc. or an essential guide in a station, a building, or a city, the equivalent term in Romanian would be *descurcare*, a word which suggests getting by, managing, or taking care of oneself.

To live in harmony in society means, among other things, to find what one is looking for without too much trouble, to not have to return many times for the same thing, and to not lose sight of one's objective by getting lost or becoming exhausted.

To pass a day in harmony means that, from the moment you get out of bed to the moment you climb back into bed, you feel that someone or something is taking care of you and leading your steps and attention. 'To guide', 'to instruct', 'to direct', and 'to conduct' are synonyms with 'to orient'.

The list with the names of the stations on a bus route directs us to our destination; the sign at an intersection with the name of a hospital guides us towards the intended location; the name and facade of a store is a reference that conducts us to the desired address; yellow stripes instruct bicyclists and pedestrians how to use the sidewalks.

When this is not the case, then the antonyms of the word 'to orient' come into play: 'to distract', 'to disorient', when, on another day, you feel hostility and confusion, when no "magic hand" is there to straighten you out - clearly something is tangled.



The cultural differences between Romania and western Europe can be compared to the ways in which we get around a city. Here one manages; there one gets oriented. Here one either increases or loses one's ability to orient oneself and reach one's goals; there there is a sense of reaching out to meet the needs of the citizen. The reason for this is pragmatic, not just humanitarian - for the citizen to meet his obligations to his utmost ability and to have free time, *loisir*, *freizeit*, *timp liber*. Free time not to collapse exhausted after the day's rushing, or to *sit* in front of the television, or for the second or third job: free time for personal creative development and free time for others. Time to find internal harmony and be in harmony with others. In speaking of this time, I'm not just referring to the timing, to the period, but also to the ability to do something in this period of time. The mental, emotional and physical state to attune what you do to what others do.

*A curiosity - an interest - a need:*

"I was curious where Martisor Street was, in Bucharest or outside? I had heard (or read somewhere) that there was an orchard; since I couldn't go to the country, I thought maybe I'd go pick cherries there, straight from the tree, like when I was a child. There my interest in cherries faded, since you can't go in the orchard and there were dogs, but I found some children's books in the museum, which were cheap and were needed at the school. I then sat and read on a bench. It was so quiet, I passed the time happily."

At Martisor is the Tudor Arghezi Memorial House. From a balloon (since a plane would be too high), a large green surface can be seen, and in the middle a red and white house (the traditional colors of *Martisor*). Where is the house? I searched for a map with all the museums in Bucharest for a group of museum specialists from all over the country. Such a map would indicate both the locations and the time it takes to get from one museum to the next. The group of specialists left Bucharest without having dared to cross the city without a guide.

### **Museums and cultural institutions**

I reiterate what I defined previously, putting it under the domain and responsibility of cultural institutions. What connection is there between cultural institutions and how we get by or orient ourselves on the street? Starting from the premise that cultural institutions are also responsible for a harmonious society, I consider that museums may help citizens and tourists to orient themselves better in space, just as well as their own

visitors. They may welcome them, conduct them through their rooms, guide them in choosing an event from the museum's calendar and orient them towards another visit.

Museum specialists who work in public relations and marketing could use their qualifications and experience, *outside the walls of the museum*, creating programs or counseling projects that gradually lead to a better oversight and use of public space.

One of the principle functions of the museum is to disseminate their collection. This is done through exhibitions and educational programs. The final goal will not be only to instruct and to entertain the visitor (education and entertainment), but also to give the visitor the feeling that he finds himself in that place, that the place belongs to him as well.

The design of the exhibition keeps track of the main object or idea, the beginning and conclusion of the chosen theme - so it keeps track of and sometimes is the path of the exhibition, following the concept of the organizer. The organizer guides the visitor as to what to see, how, how much, what not to see, what should remain in the background, what should be left incomplete, where access is forbidden, what can be touched, what will be said only at the end, interactive stations, benches, or a lecture room or cinema. The organizer does all this through the decisions he/she makes: where and how he/she places written explanations in the exhibition room (panels, labels, flyers, etc.), where he/she leaves room for passing through, the arrangement of the lighting, but also through following standard rules regarding signs and indicators: entrance - exit, fire extinguisher, elevator, stairs, toilet, cafeteria, offices, etc.

This attention to detail is a quality of the organizer of an exhibition; details regarding the arrangement of exhibitions, but also details regarding the functioning of the institution in the public's benefit. Exhibitions are not just made for displaying objects or important ideas, but also for the public, that "element" that disturbs the show, that fills the room, that wants to touch, to sit down, to comment, to ask, to stay too long or too short, etc., etc.

How is the museum without visitors, how is the street without travellers, how is the bus without passengers? After all the exertion and crowd, when you are alone in a museum, on the street, or on a bus, you think, "Ah, how nice it is, no one bothering me. The whole place is mine, I don't have to share it with anyone." But man is a social animal, he will long for his peers, "together is better". But how should that "together" be? Maybe we should ask ourselves, "How can I not bother my neighbor?" rather than, "How should my neighbor not bother me?" The museum,

like other cultural institutions, ought to do exactly that: to invite us, to gather us, to guide us, and more recently to offer us options, to ask for our feedback.

Harmony doesn't mean absence, passivity, inactivity, silence... it means appropriateness, union, completion, reciprocity, the duality of to give and to receive, to speak and to stay silent, to overlap, to cohabit, to put end-to-end: to emanate energy.

How many museums have a separate section for visitor services or telemarketing? Maybe returning "from the field", to the particularity of the museum institution, they will discover the importance and specific activity of this service.

What is the goal of the research and application of city planning, of more efficient routes for pedestrian travellers? To create a less chaotic atmosphere in the public space for a more visible civic cooperation, for relieving stress and uncertainty, for a public space more receiving and less aggressive.

## Examples

### What is being done:

**NORC** is the first online service in Central and Eastern Europe that offers panoramic images at street level. The average age of the team is 40 years. They offer a kind of orientation. "This weekend we'll stop in Cluj-Napoca, where we'll take advantage of a special occasion, TIFE, the Transylvania International Film Festival. You can catch one of the films or events from the festival, so you need to know exactly where every cinema is located. We planned the guide from the tourist's perspective in Cluj, so we think that the map and the street panorama will guide you to your favorite movies."

It is a very useful system of orientation, but for those who are familiar with the internet. This activity could be continued through maps. Many museums, together with other institutions, could make a project of elaborating personalized maps for different domains. It would be for the benefit of local people as well as visitors: maps with universities, with research institutes, food markets, stadiums for sports and concerts, maps with administrative buildings, with hospitals, medical centers, recovery centers...

**What else could be done:**

To orient = to arrange in a certain position or direction according to some point of reference (a cardinal point, a direction, an object)

Points of reference are what help us to orient ourselves in space. Recently 4 points of reference in central Bucharest disappeared, statues representing Ion Heliade Radulescu, the founder of the Romanian Academy; Gheorghe Lazar, the founder of the first Romanian language school in Bucharest; Spiru Haret, reformer of the Romanian education system at the turn of the 20th Century; and the voievode Mihai Viteazul.

They will be for a while at Parcul Izvor, after which they will be returned in front of the University. How can this space be perceived in the meantime, other than as a construction zone complete with noise, forbidden zones, dust, mud and missing statues? What could a museographer do to maintain the statues' presence in that place in the collective memory, to minimize people's frustration that *their* statues were taken, to encourage people to visit the new location, to justify to the taxpayers this use of their money? If Gheorghe Lazar were placed across from the University, on the exact spot of the former school that he founded, now could be an opportunity to tell travellers about the history of Parcul Izvor, with everything that was there before. It would be a cultural, civic action, and more!

What else could be done to make travelling in Bucharest easier, for example, and finding points of reference?

- the *Eva* logo, preserved next to the *Diverta* logo, and the *Romarta Copiilor* logo preserved next to BRD, for the generations who are familiar with these stores.

- a more visible and attractive sign to mark the place where the church of Sfanta Vineri once stood.

- street signs and house numbers, and apropos of details, for the letters not to be crowded on the sign to the point of being illegible from across the street or from a moving vehicle.

**Lessons from museums**

**The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance** in Sighet has a reception and orientation space in a room called the "Map Room". Here there is a presentation, in space and time, of the Romanian gulag, through a chronology of the 45 years of Romanian Communist history. There is also a big map of the country with detention



centers, work camps, forced residences, psychiatric hospitals for political prisoners, sites of resistance fighting, executions, and mass graves. The categories above are presented in finer detail in 6 other smaller maps.

**The Louvre** and the **Philadelphia Museum of Art**, two of the largest museums in the world, some time ago changed the way they receive visitors. The impressive, majestic entrance, which discouraged the public-at-large from approaching that temple-like place, transformed, in the first case, into a glass pyramid with a very large lobby without the severe 17-Century architecture, and in the second case was doubled with a second *entrance in the back*, complete with parking, which makes it the preferred entrance for people who come by car. The temple-style building of the Philadelphia Museum of Art continues to receive its visitors through the main entrance as well, inviting them to first walk up the many steps with immense posters of the exhibitions printed on the front to be visible from a distance, but also with its Sylvester Stallone sculpture in his famous role from *Rocky*, which was filmed on those same steps.

**The InfoBox** in Potsdamer Platz, Berlin, was a large red box with several floors that stood from 1995 until 2001 to show how that space around the border of the formerly divided city would transform into a new center of the city: what buildings would be built, what access routes it would have to the rest of the city, how the shore of the river would look, how the houses would be transported, etc. When the construction started, the center disappeared; it had done its job. Not everyone is pleased with how the new Potsdamer Platz center looks, but all were informed and could prepare themselves for that modernization, that metamorphosis of the city.

The city of Bucharest changes continuously, unobserved, without notice, without justification. A street is paved and later repaved. A house disappears, a block of flats appears. A green space becomes parking, a sidewalk becomes a terrace. A recipe for social harmony, considering such invasion in public space during this transitional period, cannot be implemented.

## Conclusion

Some of the Bauhaus-style apartment blocks from the inter-war period still have on the facade, next to the beautiful wrought-iron door, the remains of the metal sleeve which held a panel with the resident's name

and sometimes his profession: doctor, lawyer, notary. From the street, you could tell if the person you were seeking was there.

Now, in the Ceasescu-era apartment blocks, ironically the most resistant, there are more and more firms, some with signs, and some without. From an aesthetic point of view, each has its own design. And like in transition, today they're here, tomorrow they're gone.

In the 90's a German professor from the Goethe Institute was impressed by how many Bauhaus-style buildings are in Bucharest. Maybe she made herself a personal guide with this subject. Among museum friends or our friends, foreigner 'pilgrims' in Romania, we can find some who would offer their map, their guide, their journal and give us an example of how they managed in our urban space. Certainly they went home with a sharper (or duller) sense of orientation.

When it comes to orientation, who helps us more here, Tarkovsky's *Stalker* or the GPS? Or are we between the two worlds?

