

METHODOLOGY OF ROMANIAN FIRST URBAN AESTHETICS SURVEY



FUNCTIONAL AREAS IN THE EU

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1. Why is urban aesthetics needed?

Urban aesthetics is a relatively new field of study, which has appeared on the public agenda in recent decades in many states of the world with the economic, cultural, social development and, last but not least, with the physical development of the built space. The aesthetic approach of cities and the measurement of the impact that this approach could have on the development and increase of the quality of life in such settlements opens wide directions of research and knowledge. The two main arguments that the literature invokes are given by the impact of urban aesthetics on the social and economic framework of a community.

If the social framework concerns about the negative impact between the environment and individual behavior have some history, for example the well-known theory of broken windows and the famous experiment behind it, the concerns of the scientific community regarding the positive impact of the environment on individuals are late to arrive. As Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh¹ (2018) remarked in the exceptional work "Beauty", the role of aesthetics in urban design becomes visible through the different relation of individuals to the respective space in which measures for this purpose were taken. One example is the case study of the construction of the Manhattan High Line, a linear suspension park built on one of New York City's disused suspended railroad tracks whose effects on the behavior of individuals in that area were significant. According to the paper, *"the power of efficient design is noticeable in ways that were probably unintentional. In the case of High Line, one can observe the effects of the beautiful structure in the behavior of its users. Every morning at 7 o'clock, Stefan runs the whole length of it and is surprised by the complete lack of garbage. Not a single paper or empty dose was observed on the ground in his runs. Only a few meters away, however, in the Meatpacking District, garbage is plentiful. Even more impressive is a New York Times article that notes that 2 years after opening, no major offenses were reported on the High Line"*(Sagmeister, Walsh, 2018).

From an economic point of view, the main aspect that comes to mind is the high tourist potential that aesthetics offers to a city. The fact that beauty attracts is well known, and the number of concrete cases proving this is undoubtedly considerable. The examples provided by the aforementioned work show a certain type of aesthetics whose direct effect is not only the significant increase of the tourist potential of an area, but also of its practical functionality: the one based on uniqueness, on creating an identity of that space. One such example is the Ihwa Mural Village in Seoul, where aesthetic measures have significantly transformed a nonprofit area into a major economic hub of the city: *"What was once a depressing neighborhood with no chance of making a quick profit has become a destination that is currently attracting international visitors. This growth in tourism has supported the growth of craft businesses, cafes, galleries, and small bars throughout the neighborhood."* (Sagmeister, Walsh, 2018).

The areas of action of aesthetics are diverse and vary in relation to the individual senses (sight, hearing, smell), but the literature highlights visual aesthetics as the main area of interest of urban aesthetics with its three basic variables: Urban planning, architecture and public space design. (Garcia-Domenech, 2015). In the article "Urban aesthetics and social function of current public space: a desirable balance", the authors attribute to urban planning the role of creating certain standards and typologies of urban planning so as to form *"differences of urban landscape, from the old medieval center, to post-industrial urban renewal or to modern suburbs"*(Garcia-Domenech, 2015), in order to create homogeneity and a general identity that contributes to the positive aesthetic perception of the area. At a lower level, architecture comes, in this context, to shape and consolidate the urban landscape of the aforementioned typologies, by creating consistent building facades and suitable for the area in which the site is located. Finally, on the last level, the design of the public space represents the decorative details of the city, *"the aspect that is all the more immediately perceived by an urban observer (...) the first impression of the city, both by proximity and through the palpability of the observer."*(Garcia-Domenech, 2015). This category includes various key components of a common public space such as green space, street furniture (benches, decorative objects such as fountains or works of art),

¹ Sagmeister, S., Walsh, J. (2018). Beauty. Phaidon Press.

pedestrian space, public lighting and much more, all of which are adapted and have specific particularities to the area in which they are located, thus giving the necessary coherence to the public space.

In terms of the trends towards which urban aesthetics are oriented, the literature highlights two more or less distinct directions in today's societies: that of modernization and that of preserving traditional models. In principle, both trends are composed of distinct ideas on the idea of visual aesthetics, both in terms of architecture and urban design and urban planning. However, both models of aesthetics focus on the coherence of the built space due to the simultaneous perception of all the constituent elements of an urban area: *"Art in the public space, unlike other art forms, is usually designed for a certain location and not for everyone. This relationship is attached to the aesthetic value of the work of art. Location cannot be universal when the relationship between the art object and the public space is conceived at the same time. When that strong relationship between object and space is changed, the whole basis of creation is lost and there are problems of scale and proportion, of static or dynamic observation and accessibility to the work of art."* (Garcia-Domenech, 2015).

Thus, the trend towards modern, focuses on creating a current, contemporary identity, specific to new cities: *"If the work of art is a representation of the values of contemporary society in the public space, it should not be afraid to speak the language of the present. In general, in Romania, due to the absence of a conceptual approach, the manifestations of contemporary art tend rather to approach conservative, realistic, historicizing forms, especially if we talk about commemorative and memorial monuments. However, commemorative art, by its very nature, is primarily intended for the next generation to enjoy a particular event or personality. For this reason, art should approach current visual language and not use outdated language."* (Chirilă, Stan, 2022). The trend of urban aesthetics towards modern has as main audience the young generations, having in its composition and being based on certain specific visual patterns, new technologies and contemporary design.

The trend based on traditional, classic elements, focuses on preserving the already existing identity of cities. *"Urbanism in the early twentieth century, obsessed with zoning and progress, had forgotten history and, by extension, the classical historic city. The classical historical cities of Europe have left us an important legacy, an urban heritage present in the form of public space, revealing the true soul of the city, reasons why the new currents of urban aesthetics focus on revitalizing the traditional movement of public space"* (Garcia-Domenech, 2015), this conservation trend being based on aspects and aesthetic forms already present in the respective space in order to capitalize on and revive the already built identity of cities.

It should be added that the two trends mentioned above, the modern and the traditional, are not entirely separate, but both aim at the general goal of creating a space identity in response to the trend of *"uniformity of spatial development model of the capitalist globalist system in which urban efficiency occupies a more important position on the public agenda than aesthetics"*. (Mărieș et al., 2022) *"Therefore, the strengthening of the local identity and the capitalization of the local patrimony will gain an increasingly important place in the attractiveness of a place, especially in the fight for the inhabitants. Community spirit, social vitality and the most dynamic streets are found in spaces that have evolved over time and where the mix of architectural styles and functions and the rich palette of textures, materials and new and old urban elements are maximized."* (Mărieș et al., 2022).

2. Survey objectives

The Urban Aesthetics survey was an instrument meant to achieve the following objectives:

- To provide an input of constituent elements of the urban space and a set of hypotheses regarding the construction of an aesthetic approach in urban planning;
- To support a communication platform on urban aesthetics and its development directions in urban planning, architecture and design of public space;
- To provide a starting point for a collaborative approach between specialists in architecture, urbanism, visual and decorative arts, public administration, and citizens in order to identify solutions that will offer the urban space aesthetic quality.

3. Representativeness of the survey

Data collection was performed at the level of the entire population. Data collection was performed in the CAWI system over a period of one month (January-February 2022). The platform on which the questionnaire was posted was popularized through various means: social networks, discussion groups, websites, etc. A total of 5,225 questionnaires were collected nationwide from 140 cities in Romania.

The Cochran formula was used to determine the margin of error, for a random sample and a confidence interval of 95%.

$$e = \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}} * 100 = \frac{1}{\sqrt{5225}} * 100 = 0,0138 * 100 = 1,38 (1,4)$$

Where

n = volume of the resulting sample

e = margin of error

The resulting database was weighted for representativeness by urban category and development region. The weighting was achieved by using a weighting index calculated as a ratio in the subsequent weight expected in the case of the parameter (population over 18 years according to INS) and the subsequent weight obtained after data collection (at sample level). Four urban categories and eight development regions were used in the weighting process. The urban categories used were the following:

- Cities with over 300,000 inhabitants
- Cities with 100,000-300,000 inhabitants
- Cities with 30,000-100,000 inhabitants
- Cities with less than 30,000 inhabitants

The weighting involved the following steps:

- Establishment of weights at parameter level for the urban categories used at the level of each region.
- Calculation of sample weights for each urban category for each of the regions;
- Calculate the weighting index for each category and create the weighting variable in the database.

Compared to the structure of the population by age, the average age of the resulting sample is 7 years lower, the results being the expression of the active urban population of Romania with internet access, which frequently uses this means of communication. The gender balance (female / male) resulted directly from the application of the quaestor, according to the INS data, without the need to include the gender ratio in the weighting formula.

4. Data collection verification

The data collection verification was performed at the database level as follows:

- All questionnaires that had more than 85% serial answers were eliminated (by serial answers we mean the same answer variant regardless of the question)
- Questionnaires with a completion rate of less than 95% of the total questions were eliminated (24 of the 25 questions in the questionnaire)

5. Limits of representativeness

- The data are representative of the active population of Romania, with internet access and who frequently use boarding schools. The "desert" strategy used to increase the number of respondents did not allow the precise targeting of people in special areas, such as marginalized areas, although the promotion of the link to complete the questionnaires was also made to these groups, but the number of responses from this segment of the population was significantly lower.
- Another limitation is access to the elderly, who do not use the internet frequently and are reluctant to complete online questionnaires, even if the link has been sent to these categories of the population.

6. The questionnaire

The questionnaire applied in the survey to identify the construction landmarks of urban aesthetics is an innovative, unique tool that combines the following categories of items:

- perceptual identification items specific to psychological tests (shapes, colors, sequences and structures),
- architectural appreciation items (windows, facades, materials),
- urbanistic items (heights, densities, urban types, arrangement of public space)
- socio-demographic and social characterization items of the respondent (age, gender, education, type of city of origin).

The first three categories of items were called positioning items in urban aesthetics. The selection of these items was made on the basis of the necessary and sufficient principle, under the imperative of maintaining an acceptable size of the questionnaire (maximum 25 items), a highly comprehensible form of it and a high level of standardization. The final form of the questionnaire, resulting from expert analysis, is set out in the Annex.

7. Data processing

Data processing was performed in three stages:

- The frequency analysis and the analysis of the central tendency indicators indicated the preferences of the investigated population at general and specific level by age categories, gender, and level of education, urban type and development regions.
- Contingency analysis that highlighted the relationships between socio-demographic elements and positioning items in urban aesthetics and the fact that the architectural elements tested in the questionnaire strongly correlate with each other indicating the existence of pillars in forming the individual conception of urban aesthetics
- Factor analysis that led to the profiling of categories of respondents with a high level of consistency.

Annex : Questionnaire

Socio-demographic data

SD1. Gender

1. Male

2. Female

3. Other

SD2. Age

|_|_| years

SD3. What is the last school you graduated from?

1. No school

2. Primary school

3. Elementary school

4. Professional school (10 classes)

5. High school (12 classes)

6. Post-secondary school

7. Faculty

8. Postgraduate studies

SD4. What is your occupation?

1. Employed in the public system

2. Employed in the private system

3. Freelancer (doctor, lawyer) including PFA

4. Student

5. Other occupation. Which.....?

SD5. You have minors in maintenance?

1. Yes

2. No

SD6. What city do you live in? _____

Q1. Which of the following types of cities would you prefer to live in? (one answer)

1. Large metropolis: over 1.5 million inhabitants

2. Metropolis: between 500,001 - 1.5 million inhabitants

3. Medium city: between 200,001 - 500,000 inhabitants

4. Small town: up to 200,000 inhabitants

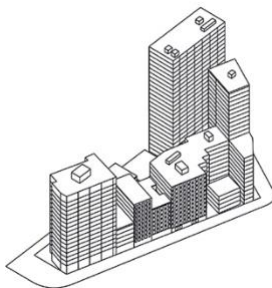
Q2. Which type of neighborhood would you prefer to live in? (one answer)

1. Neighborhood with tall buildings, with heights of over 8 floors

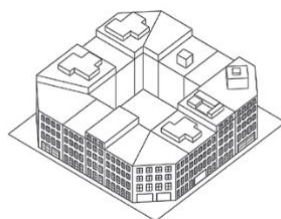
2. Neighborhood with medium buildings, with heights between 5 and 7 floors

3. Neighborhood with small buildings, with heights between 3 and 4 floors

4. Neighborhood of houses, with maximum heights of 2 floors



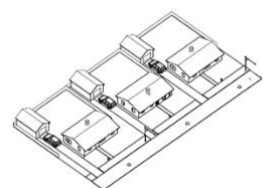
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2.

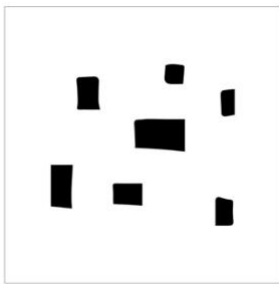


3.



4.

Q3. Which of the three abstracted ensembles do you find most beautiful? (one answer)



1.



2.



3.

Q4. Which of the following four-sided shapes do you find most beautiful? (one answer)



1.



2.

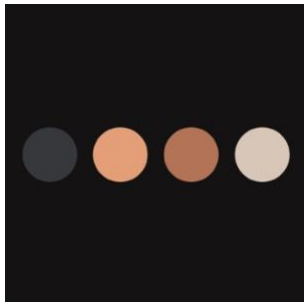


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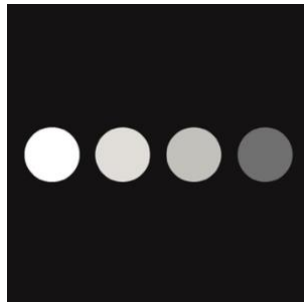


4.

Q5. Which of the following color combinations would you like to find more often in the buildings in your city?



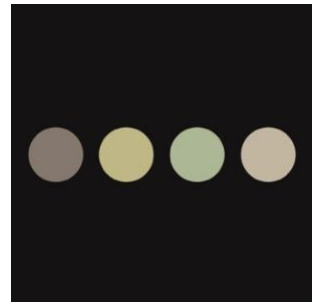
1.



2.



3.

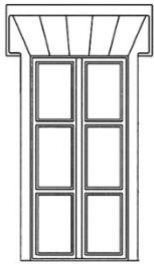


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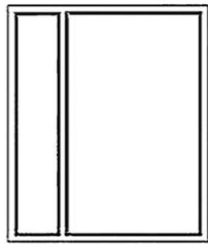
Q6. Which of the following horizontal sequences do you find most enjoyable, engaging?



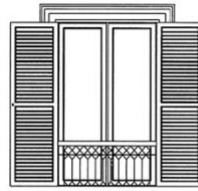
Q7. Which of the following windows do you think is the most beautiful?



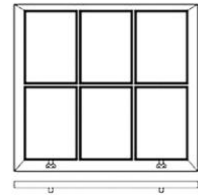
1.



2.



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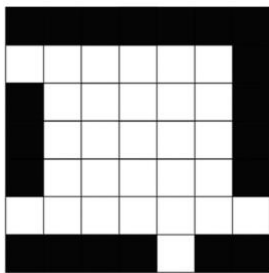


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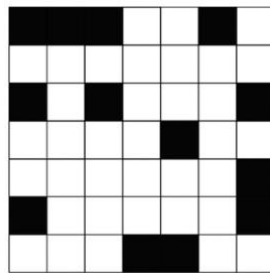
Q7A. If you could choose which of the windows would you like in your office / workspace? (one answer)

Q7B. If you could choose which of the windows you would like in your home? (one answer)

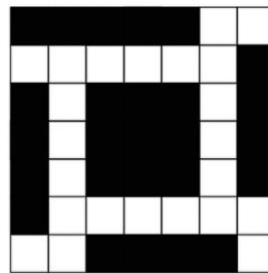
Q8. Which model do you find most beautiful? Write next to each one, from 1 to 4, in order of preference, where 1 is the most beautiful and 4 the least beautiful.



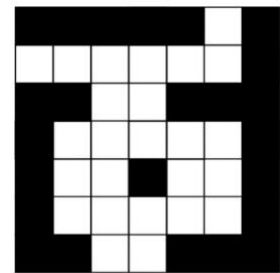
a.



b.



c.



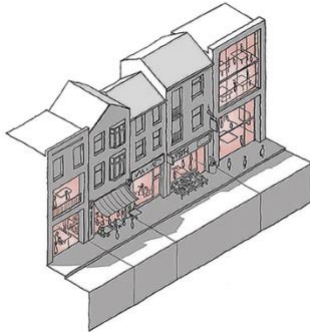
d.

Q9. Write in the left-hand column, with grades 1 to 6, where 1 is the most important thing for you, and 6 is the least important, the following interventions on a street:

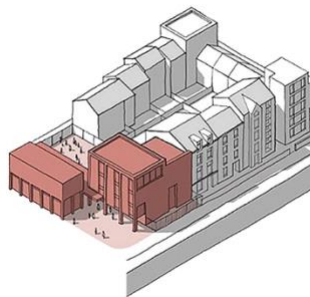
	Wider sidewalks and fewer parking lots near the sidewalk
	Bicycle paths on the sidewalk
	Green space along the street and less parking places
	Narrower sidewalks, but more sidewalk parking lots
	State areas shaded by fountains
	Public toilets with dedicated areas for mother and child

Q10. Which of the three images of the ground floor of the buildings would you like to find more in your city?

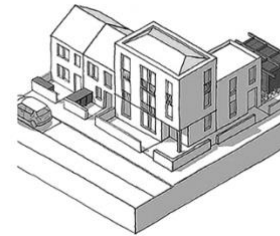
1. Ground floor with shop windows and terraces
2. Mixed ground floor, with access restrictions in private buildings and free access in public buildings
3. Ground floor with access restrictions, green spaces and entrances to buildings



1.



2.



3.

Q11. What kind of street design do you like the most? (one answer)



1. Bicycle lanes on the street, marked and delimited by poles



2. Bicycle paths on the sidewalk, delimited only by the pavement and by the parking spaces at the curb.



3. Streets with common lanes for cyclists, pedestrians and motorists, with speed restrictions and parking only for residents.

Q12. What does a beautiful city mean to you? What are its three main attributes?

1. _____
1. _____
2. _____

Q13. Take a look at these neighborhood maps. Which one do you think is the most orderly? Write in front of each one with marks from 1 to 4, where 1 is the most orderly and 4 is the messiest.



1.



2.



3.

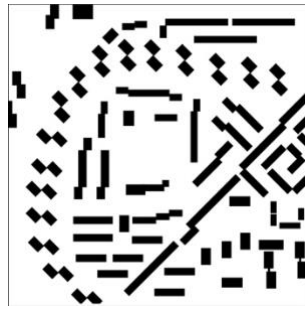


4.

Q14. Take a look at these neighborhood maps. The black areas represent the buildings, and the white areas represent the space between them. Which of the four images do you think is a neighborhood you would like to live in? (one answer)



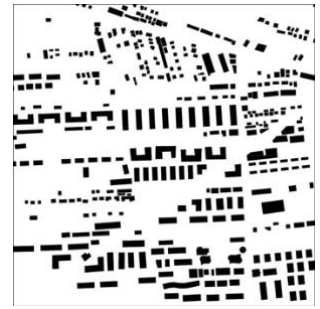
1.



2.



3.



4.

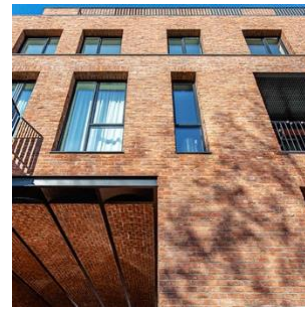
Q15. Which of the following facade materials would you like to see more often in your city? Write down next to each picture, from 1 to 4, in order of preference, where 1 is the first choice and 4 the last choice.



Stone



Plaster



Brick

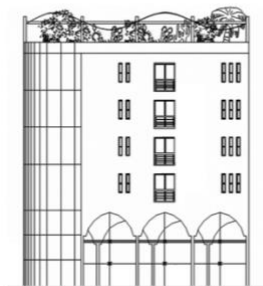


Glass

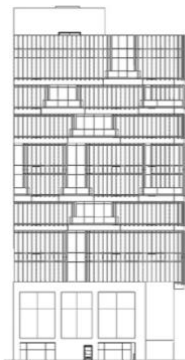
Q16. Which of the following facades do you think is the most beautiful? (one answer)



1.



2.



3.



4.

List two reasons for your choice.

1. _____
2. _____

Q17. Which of these pedestrian spaces do you think is the most beautiful? (one answer)



1. Pedestrian space with trees, bicycle parking lots and shop windows



2. Pedestrian space with terraces delimited by planters



3. Pedestrian space with car access for residents, with plants in planters



4. Pedestrian space with low green areas, with trees and rest areas, without terraces and without shop windows.

Q18. Name the top 3 (three) favorite places in your city (parks, streets, public squares) where you choose to hang out.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Q19. Which of the following qualities of public space (parks, streets, public squares) are most important to you when choosing a place to walk / relax? (maximum 6 choices)

1. Memories, the memory of events kept by that place;
2. Presence of natural decorative elements (trees, gardens, flowers, green space);
3. Presence of classical decorative elements (fountains, monuments, decorated facades, period buildings);
4. Presence of modern decorative elements (glass buildings, modern art, graffiti large concrete spaces);
5. The feeling of security in the space (without fear of aggression);
6. Likely to meet many people of different ages in that space;
7. Large number of spaces / places to rest / break (benches, sunbeds, seating areas)
8. Many opportunities to do various activities (tracks, roller skates, sports fields, climbing walls)
9. Multiple spaces to socialize with friends (bars, terraces, cafes, restaurants)
10. The feeling of attachment to that space (the feeling that it belongs to you, that it is dear to you);
11. Proximity to the house, easy access to the space;
12. Free access to the space
13. Something else. What?.....