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ASPECTS ON THE URBANIZATION OF BIHOR COUNTY IN THE COMMUNIST PERIOD (III): THE TOWN OF PETRU GROZA (ȘTEI)¹

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ABSTRACT

An interesting case study on urbanization in communist Bihor can be made on the so-called “mining (miner’s) towns”, which include localities such as Vașcău, Nucet, Șuncuiuș, Popești, Ștei. Their development is mainly or strictly linked to mining activities in their area. In this case, we will examine how the town of Petru Groza, now known as Ștei, emerged in the local urban landscape and how it evolved. It practically developed from nothing, on a plain plot of land, but near a village also called Ștei before the communist period. The town was built from scratch in the 1950s mainly for the Soviets, who were mining for uranium at Băița. But in the following decades, after the Soviets left, the local population gained access to the town. Further urban development began, erecting apartment buildings, schools, and factories, increasing the population and local economic life. We will see how urbanization took place in Ștei and how it changed the local landscape and the way of life.

Keywords: urban development, Soviet city, urban planning, urban systematization, city life, socialist urbanism, Romanian urbanism, Petru Groza Town, Ștei Bihor.

A few of the localities that emerged and developed in Bihor County are related to mining, being located in its eastern part, in the hill-mountain area. One such example, the Dr. Petru Groza town, was founded in 1956, near the existing village of Ștei.

During the interwar period, this village had a predominantly agricultural economy, although timber exploitation was quite active, and a sawmill was also in use. Raw materials were brought to the village from the villages of Sighiștel and Băița, on a narrow-gauge railway. At the same time, two grain mills also operated in the village². The village of Ștei had, in 1930, 586

¹ This article follows two studies on the cities of Bihor County during the communist period, one referring to Aleșd and Beiuș and the second to Marghita and Salonta. See: Cristian Culiciu, “Aspects on the urbanization of Bihor County in the communist period (I): Aleșd and Beiuș”, in *Crisia* *LIII*, 2023, p. 305-327, Idem, “Aspects on the urbanization of Bihor County in the communist period (II): Marghita and Salonta”, in *Crisia* *LIV*, 2024, p. 315-342. The article is a synthesis of a study on the contemporary history of the town of Ștei, Bihor County, published by the author in Romanian in: *Ritmuri istorice șteiene* (coord. Gabriel Moisa, Sorin Șipoș), Țării Crișurilor Museum Publishing House, Oradea, 2025, p. 99-155.

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² H. Brauner, *Comerțul și industria lemnului din România* [Commerce and wood industry in Romania], Sibiu, Kraft&Drotleff S.A. Publishing House, 1929, p. 221; Ioan Simedre, *Ștei – monografie* [Ștei – monograph], Beiuș, Buna Vestire Publishing House, 1996, p. 50-51; Ion Zainea, *Economie și societate în Bihor (de la Marea Unire la Dictatul de la Viena)* [Economy and society in Bihor (from the Great Union till the Second Vienna Award)], University of Oradea Publishing House, Oradea, 2007, p. 107.

inhabitants³. In 1943 – 1944⁴, it was connected to Oradea, the seat of Bihor, by a railway with a train station and a road.



Map of the village of Ștei in the 19th century (maps.arcanum.com)

After the communists came to power in Romania, between 1944 and 1947, the means of production were nationalized (1948-1950). At the same time, agricultural land was also transferred to state ownership. The first local agricultural association was established in Ștei in December 1957, and in February 1962 it became a Collective Agricultural Farm⁵. In the spring of 1962, all agricultural land had become state property. However, agriculture would decrease in the economic balance of the locality.

As for the administrative organization and affiliation of Ștei at the beginning of the communist period, in the autumn of 1950, through the administrative-territorial reorganization, the counties were abolished, being replaced by regions and rayons, in Soviet (Neoclassic) style. Bihor County was transformed into a region with seven rayons, and the village of Ștei, previously the seat of a commune, became part of the Lunca commune, with the Beiuș rayon⁶. Later, in 1952, Ștei was included in the Lunca Vașcăului rayon, remaining in its structure until 1960, when the locality, already a city, was included in the Beiuș rayon⁷.

³ The Central Statistics Institute, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930* [The general census of the population of Romania from December 29, 1930], published by Sabin Manuilă PhD, vol. 1, the Central Statistics Institute Publishing House, Bucharest, 1938, p. 37.

⁴ *Monografia județului Bihor (1943)* [Monograph of Bihor County (1943)], edition, introductive study and footnotes by Gabriel Moisa, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, p. 79.

⁵ National Archives of Romania – Bihor County Service (N.A.R. – B.C.S.), *Sfatul popular al Orașului Dr. Petru Groza* [Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council] fund, file 81/1962, sheet 111.

⁶ Cristian Culiciu, "The 1950 administrative reform in Romania. The case of Bihor County", in *Analele Universității din Oradea* [Annals of the University of Oradea], History-Archaeology fascicule, tome XXVI, University of Oradea Publishing House, 2016, *passim* and p. 141; *Indicator alfabetic al localităților din Republica Populară Română* [Alphabetical indicator of the localities from the Peoples Republic of Romania], the State Scientific Literature Publishing House, Bucharest, 1954, p. 409.

⁷ Lucian Ropa, *Contribuții la cunoașterea modificărilor administrative din județul Bihor în perioada 1944-1968* [Contributions to the acknowledgement of the administrative changes in Bihor County in the period 1944-1968], Primus Publishing House, Oradea, 2009, p. 94.

The urbanization of Ștei was possible due to the increase of mining activity in Băița. The exploitation of underground resources was, however, old, in the 17th century silver, gold, and copper were extracted, and later molybdenum and bismuth with the help of German colonists that were brought to the area during the reign of the Empress Maria Theresa. Towards the end of the 19th century, copper, silver, and lead were exploited in Băița, and during the First World War, the mining activity focused on extracting bismuth and molybdenum ores⁸.

Uranium ore was discovered during World War II by German soldiers, but systematic research was done by Soviet geologists in 1949. Its exploitation began in 1952, through the Romanian-Soviet joint company Sovrom Kwartit (a name used to disguise the activity under the impression of quartz exploitation), the main argument being related to Romania's obligation to pay war debts to the Soviet Union. In a short time, about 17,000 to 20,000 miners were brought from all over the county to the galleries near Băița, attracted by the high wages, but they did not know what they were extracting, and therefore were not aware of the dangers they were exposing themselves to. The only ones who knew the reality were the Soviet "specialists" housed in the barracks and new apartments in Ștei. The mining perimeter of the uranium deposit at Băița was about 3 km long and 1.5 km wide, the ore being at a depth of 60 meters⁹. After extraction, the ore was transported to Ștei for primary processing, then loaded onto trains and transported to the U.S.S.R.; rocks with a very high uranium content were sent by plane from the airfield set up on Dumbrava Hill, near Ștei. It was not until 1958 that the dangers of mining activity became known, which was also the year when the Soviet army left Romania. The Soviets also left Ștei and in 1959 the number of mining employees dropped to 3,550. The decline continued in 1960 to about 2,100 people, and in 1965 the exploitation of uranium core was definitively abandoned in favor of researching and extracting molybdenum, copper, bismuth, lead, zinc, silver, and other raw materials. After 1970, the extraction of white limestone with a marble appearance, used in mosaics, also began¹⁰.

The mining activity stimulated the development of a related industry, especially for the repair of mining equipment and the wagons used to transport ore from the galleries. For example, in 1955, the Machine Repair Plant was established, having 135 employees¹¹.

The significant reduction in mining activity and its reorientation towards the extraction of safe materials for civilian use allowed the development of the industrial sector. This helped the growth of the town of Dr. Petru Groza in the 1960s-1980s. The mining equipment repair plant increasingly specialized in the production of such goods, rather than just repairing them, especially mining carts. In 1960, it had 586 employees¹², and in 1963 it expanded its activity by completing a new cutting workshop¹³, operating under the name of the Mining Equipment Plant. The number of workers exceeded one thousand in 1968, while production had diversified to several types of mining equipment, road construction equipment, hand drills, trailers for electric

⁸ Nicolae Țucra, *Vașcău. Comună – oraș – ținut. Monografie* [Vașcău. Commune – town – territory. Monography], Brevis Publishing House, Oradea, 2000, p. 580.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 581.

¹⁰ Mariana Barna, *Industrializare și demografie în centrele urbane ale Crișanei* [Industrialization and demography in Crișana's urban centers], University of Oradea Publishing House, Oradea, 2014, p. 71; Nicolae Țucra, *op. cit.*, p. 582.

¹¹ Ioan Simedre, *Ștei – 500 de ani – monografie* [Ștei – 500 years – monograph], EX LIBRIS HOFFNUNG Typography Publishing House, Ștei, 2003, p. 71.

¹² *Crișana*, year 18, no. 303, December 25, 1963, p. 1.

¹³ *Scântea*, year 32, no. 6015, September 14, 1963, p. 1.

carriers, elevators, and pallet trucks, the plant becoming the Mechanical Enterprise. Shortly after, after further expansions of the factory¹⁴, it also started producing electric carriers¹⁵. The period of maximum development of the enterprise was in the 1980s when it had 4510 employees, producing lifting and transporting equipment, elevators, conveyors for agriculture machines, technological equipment, motor carriers, oil equipment, and electrical devices¹⁶. However, in the context of the economic crisis, the factory had numerous problems with the supply of raw materials and energy, as well as with the transport of finished products, having delays in deliveries and quality problems¹⁷.



In foto: U.C.R.U.M. -- vedere a exteriorului uzinei.

The Mining Equipment Repair Plant (Crișana, December 25, 1963)



The main entrance and the yard of the Mecanica Enterprise in the 1980s

There was also a factory that produced closing elements, such as windows and doors, developed from a carpentry workshop belonging to Sovrom Kwartit. In the 1960s, it belonged to the Forestry Enterprise of Lunca Vașcăului, and in the second half of the 1970s and in the 1980s it operated under the subordination of the Woodworking Plant from Oradea. It produced furniture fasteners, and later furniture parts, with 512 employees in 1970 and 710 in 1980¹⁸.

Other industrial enterprises were local and of small size, but employed a relatively relevant number of workers. One was the canister and packaging factory, subordinated to the Sinteza chemical enterprise in Oradea, and produced barrels and thin sheet metal packaging for the

¹⁴ *Scânteia tineretului*, year 25, no. 207, September 5, 1970, p. 1; *Munca*, year 28, no. 7774, November 14, 1972, p. 3.

¹⁵ Mariana Barna, *op. cit.*, p. 106-107; *Crișana*, year 24, no. 203, August 28, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Familia*, year 20 (120), no. 6 (226), June 1984, p. 4; *Scânteia tineretului*, year 40, no. 11021, November 5, 1984, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Scânteia tineretului*, year 29, no. 10593, June 20, 1983, p. 3.

¹⁸ Gh. Blaj, Șt. Szanto, I. Chira, *op. cit.*, p. 113; Ioan Simedre, *Ștei – monography*, p. 67; *România liberă*, year 38, no. 11104, July 10, 1980, p. 3.

chemical, petrochemical, food, spray, and glazing putties industries. At the same time, the Miorița enterprise in Oradea had in the city of Dr. Petru Groza a Winding, Knitting, and Garment Section¹⁹. Another small production and service section belonged to the “Muncitorul” Crafts Cooperative from Beiuș.

Public transport between the town of Dr. Petru Groza and neighboring localities and the rest of the county and Oradea was carried out by train and motor vehicles. The town had a train station, located on the Vașcău – Holod railroad, inaugurated in 1887, from where there is a connection to Oradea in two directions: through Rogoz and Felix Spa, respectively through Ciumeghiu. The Holod – Oradea railroad was closed in 1994, following landslides between Tășad and Drăgești. The railroad between Vașcău and Ciumeghiu was used for passenger transport until 2020, being maintained only for freight trains. The city’s bus depot was created in 1959 to serve the mining enterprise with buses and trucks. Later, the vehicles were intended for transporting people and goods in and around the city of Dr. Petru Groza. The bus station was opened in 1980, with public transport routes with Băița, Beiuș, Buntești, Lelești, Oradea, Pietroasa, Vașcău²⁰.



Passenger train between Vașcău – Dr. Petru Groza – Arad in the 1980s
(facebook.com/RomaniaOltTimes)

The village of Ștei remained active this whole time, the town being built next to it. The arrival of the Soviets in Ștei was described by one of the witnesses of the event, Ioan Simedre, who later became a teacher in the locality: “They started getting off the train, they got off and kept getting off... until we got tired of standing and watching them. They then unloaded boards and construction materials, which they carried to the end of the cabbage gardens, about where the fire department is now located, and they built a kind of small town of barracks there. At the same time, on the way, on the road, a bunch of army vehicles with Soviet specialists, who had come by plane to Oradea, entered the village and immediately got to work. The next day, they drove their bulldozers through our gardens and started work from several sides at once”²¹. One of the first buildings erected was a restaurant, intended exclusively for the Soviets.

¹⁹ *Familia*, year 22 (122), no. 8 (252), August 1986, p. 4; Gh. Blaj, Șt. Szanto, I. Chira, *Bihor – monografie* [Bihor – monograph], Sport-Turism Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979, p. 108; Mariana Barna, *op. cit.*, p. 38, 51, 57, 75, 133; Ioan Simedre, *Ștei – monograph*, p. 67-68.

²⁰ *Scântea tinereții*, year 36, no. 9705, August 7, 1980, p. 5; *România liberă*, year 49, no. 11472, September 17, 1981, p. 1.

²¹ *Evenimentul zilei*, year 15, no. 4608, October 20, 2006, p. 12.

The new town was built on the plateau west of the village of Ștei, near the railway. Barracks made of planks were built in the West (towards Hotărel), North-West (towards Ghighișeni), and North-East neighborhoods. Another complex of barracks was enclosed by a plank wall and was inhabited by Soviet soldiers.



"A new town on the country's map", wrote the *Crișana* newspaper on December 19, 1956

The town was built according to a cheap model, with straight, parallel, and perpendicular roads, in a grid system, on an area of 80 hectares, expropriated from the locals in 1955. The residential buildings were of Soviet type, with a minimum of four apartments (buildings with three floors of DK type) and of German type – houses with two apartments (BW type). The main street, then called Lenin (now Unirii), started in front of the Sovrom-Kwartit headquarters and the House of Culture, an area where the rest of the cultural facilities were located and stopped in front of the sports base, which also had a swimming pool, being bordered by apartment blocks and social-educational facilities. This entire complex was intended exclusively for the Soviet military and specialists and included a cinema, restaurant, buffet, cake shop, and other shops, all of them prohibited to locals²². The architecture of the buildings was monumental, even if they were small and medium in size, it copying the socialist-realist theme of the time and, in turn, a reinterpretation of the neoclassical style, found in the Soviet Union, identifiable by the use of columns and pediments, large windows and frames.

²² Ioan Simedre, *Ștei – 500 years*, p. 55; *Regiunea Oradea în anii democrației populare* [Oradea Region in the years of people's democracy] [1956], p. 54; Cezar Morar, *Turism și dezvoltare regională durabilă în zonele miniere defavorizate din județul Bihor* [Tourism and regional durable development in the disadvantaged mining areas of Bihor County], University of Oradea Publishing House, Oradea, 2013, p. 127-128; Liliana Iuga, Oana-Cristina Țiganea, "Ștei / Dr. Petru Groza. Pledoarie pentru patrimoniu construit în micul oraș secret marcat de istoria războiului rece" ["Ștei / Dr. Petru Groza. A plea for built heritage in the small secret city marked by Cold War history"], in *Revista monumentelor istorice* [The historical monuments' magazine], no. 2-3, 2019-2022, p. 26.



Local architecture – blocks of flats and the main square, with the House of Culture

During the same period, plots for houses were drawn up, and allocated by the local administration to those who settled in town. Several dozen houses were built annually, while the barracks received too little maintenance, gradually deteriorating and becoming uninhabitable²³.

Ștei became a town by Decree No. 12 of January 10, 1956. Two years later, following the death of former Prime Minister Petru Groza, the name of the locality was changed to the town of Dr. Petru Groza, officially from January 17, 1958²⁴. During the communist years, the locality was administrated by a People's Council, established in 1956 and organized into several Services, but in the 1950s, all leadership positions were held by "pairs" consisting of a Romanian and a Soviet, with documents being signed by both representatives²⁵. In 1968, due to the new administrative-territorial reform, when regions and rayons were abolished, and counties were re-established, the town's People's Council

²³ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Sfatul popular al Orașului Dr. Petru Groza* fund, file 9/1957, sheet 193; Idem, file 20/1958, sheet 88.

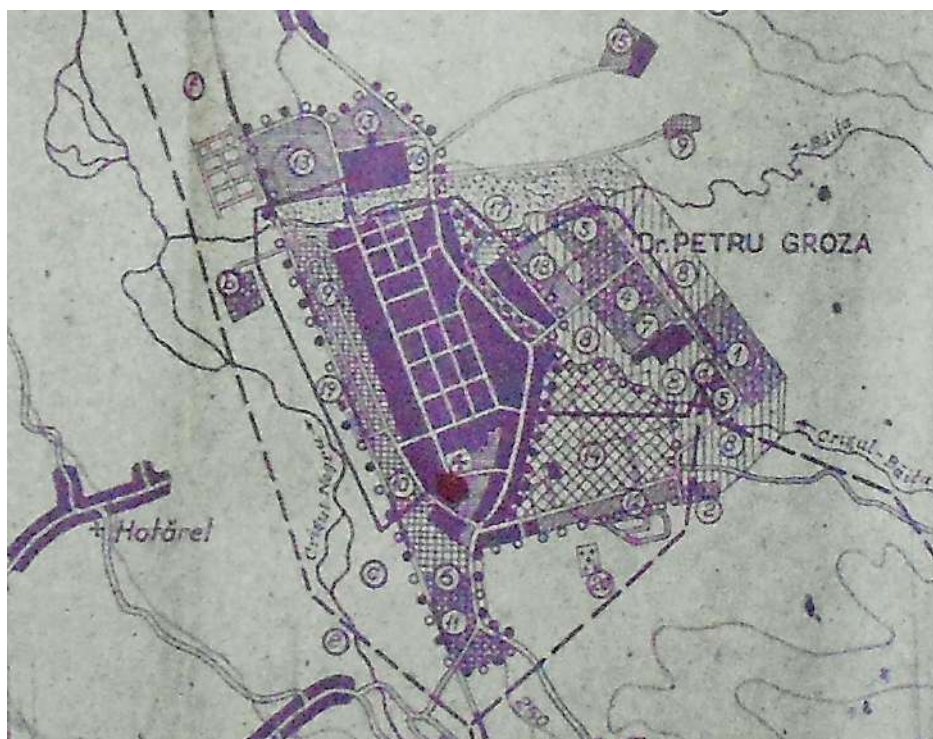
²⁴ Coriolan Suciu, *Dicționar istoric al localităților din Transilvania* [Historical dictionary of Transilvanian localities], vol. 2, Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1968, p. 177; *România liberă*, year 16, no. 4128, January 17, 1958, p. 1.

²⁵ Ioan Degău, Nicolae Brânda (coord.), *Beiușul și lumea lui. Studiu monografic* [Beiuș and its world. Monographic study], vol. 3, Primus Publishing House, Oradea, 2008, p. 660.

was reorganized. Since the 1950s, the town had the status of a “new socialist city”, along with localities such as Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (nowadays Onești) and Ucea (later Victoria)²⁶.

In 1960, after the departure of the Soviets, the local town administration took over the barracks, apartments, administrative, recreational, and public catering buildings, with all the related public infrastructure, built by them. The possibility was opened for housing applications and some of those who occupied the barracks could now move to apartment blocks. That year, in the town of Dr. Petru Groza there were 744 apartments and another 766 dwellings arranged in barracks, to which the houses in the village were added²⁷.

The urban landscape of the locality changed mostly due to the construction of new buildings, most of them with apartments. These investments began slowly, increasing starting in the second half of the 1960s. Thus, in 1968, two blocks of 40 apartments each were under construction, and by 1974, 1,503 apartments and 240 privately owned houses had been completed²⁸.



The systematization plan of the town of Dr. Petru Groza in the second half of the 1960s (A.O.C.H., County Communal and Housing Management Enterprise fund, file 281)

1 – the Mining Machine Repair Enterprise; 2 – the canister factory; 3 – the closing equipment factory; 4 – bus depot; 5 – 35 Kv power house; 6 – the Mining Enterprise; 7 – I.E.G.; 8 – industrial area expansion; 9 – Mining Enterprise warehouse; 10 – Forest Enterprise warehouse; 11 – warehouse area expansion; 12 – Two story housing area expansion; 13 – five story warehouse area expansion; 14 – five story housing; 15 – hospital expansion; 16 – proposed motel; 17 – proposed park; 18 – stadium; 19 – train station; 20 – cemetery; 21 – waste storage; a – water treatment/storage station; b – sewage treatment plant; c – P3 well; d – P4 well; e – P5 well; f – P6 well

²⁶ Liliana Iuga, Oana-Cristina Țiganea, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁷ *Scânteia*, year 29, no. 4998, November 23, 1960, p. 3; N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Sfatul popular al Orașului Dr. Petru Groza* fund, file 39/1960, sheet 152, 186; Idem, file 41/1960, sheet 123.

²⁸ Gheorghe Ardeleanu, “Orașul Petru Groza, file de biografie” [“Petru Groza town, biographical notes”], in *Trei decenii de afirmare a județului Bihor pe coordonatele socialismului* [Three decades of Bihor County’s affirmation on the coordinates of socialism], Oradea, 1974, p. 211.

The town of Dr. Petru Groza was built on vacant land. In 1973-1974, at the national level, urbanization entered the stage of city systematization, meaning, broadly speaking, the replacement of the built stock, together with the related infrastructure. The systematization of the town Dr. Petru Groza also began, according to the specially designated legislation²⁹. The entire process was carried out based on a city systematization scheme – an integrated plan referring to all functional areas and through systematization details – specific projects on neighborhoods and parts of neighborhoods. This was the case for the area of Gării (today Andrei Mureșanu) – September 13 – Republicii (nowadays Miron Pompiliu) streets, in 1977-1979. The project included demolishing several existing buildings, mostly private houses, and expropriating some agricultural land of the “Secerișul” Agricultural Production Cooperative from Rieni, and their replacement with 147 apartments³⁰.



Apartment buildings on Andrei Mureșanu Street (I.O. Berindei, Gr. P. Pop, *Județul Bihor*, p. 88)

Some 400 new homes were finished by 1977³¹, and in 1978 the State Council approved a new draft of the general systematization plan of the town. In the summer of 1984, the local press reported that the town of Dr. Petru Groza had over 3,000 apartments, including those built by the Soviets, and in 1986 there were 2,510 state-owned apartments rented to citizens, 120 one-room apartments of the Mecanica and Mining Enterprises and 192 rooms in dorms for unmarried workers. The last apartment buildings erected in town in the late 1980s were those in the Petrileni neighborhood towards Miron Pompiliu Street, near some 1950s flats. The number of private houses built in the locality was quite small, in the last two decades of the communist regime just over 200 such buildings were erected³².

There were also unbuilt projects. The investment plan of the Bihor County People's Council for 1989-1990 provided for the construction, on Tineretului Street, of six four-floor blocks with

²⁹ *Lege nr. 58 din 1 noiembrie 1974 privind sistematizarea teritoriului și localităților urbane și rurale* [Law no. 58 from November 1, 1974 on the systematization of the territory and urban and rural localities], <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/351>, accessed on March 14, 2025.

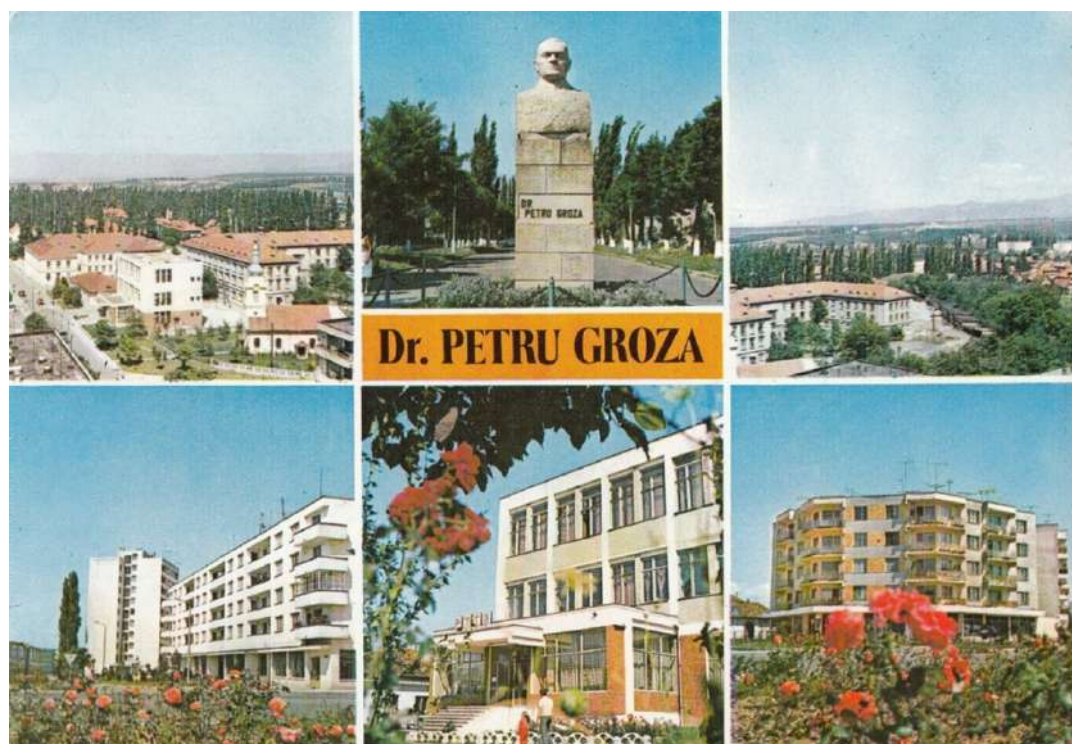
³⁰ Archive of Oradea City Hall (A.O.C.H.), *Întreprinderea Județeană de Gospodărire Comunală și Locativă* [County Communal and Housing Management Enterprise] fund, file 286, unnumbered sheets; Idem, file 294, sheets 1-5, 104-106.

³¹ *Orașul Dr. Petru Groza în plină dezvoltare și înflorire* [Dr. Petru Groza town in full development and flourishing], brochure, November 1977.

³² *Crișana*, year 39, no. 11627, July 26, 1984, p. 2; *România liberă*, year 33, no. 9646, October 29, 1975, p. 2; *Familia*, year 22 (122), no. 8 (252), August 1986, p. 4; *Crișana*, year 43, no. 12859, July 22, 1988, p. 3.

a total of 195 apartments. They would have replaced one or two-story houses from the 1950s and an administrative building³³.

To improve the lives of the inhabitants, the street network needed improvement. In 1971, the town of Dr. Petru Groza had 15.7 km of streets, of which 12.8 km were modernized³⁴.



Postcard from the late 1970s – early 1980s

Another necessary component of the urban sphere was the provision of public services. In the 1960s, the apartment buildings erected by the Soviets were centrally heated with hot water, through boilers and a distribution system. The heating was distributed unevenly and with interruptions, due to the undersized system, insufficient fuel, and wear accumulated over time. Interventions, repairs, and small investments were made according to possibilities, such as in 1966, when three thermal agent tanks were transferred here from Oradea³⁵.

The city's water supply was ensured in 1960 through six wells drilled at depths of 150-600 m, operated with electric pumps, resulting in a monthly flow of 95,000-100,000 cubic meters. Water reached consumers through an urban distribution system³⁶. It was expanded in the 1960s, and the wastewater was cleaned in a treatment plant. The distribution network reached 18.6 km in length in 1971, while wastewater was transported through 13.8 km of sewer pipes³⁷.

During the 1950s, relatively few investments were made in town, in the adjacent areas, and for the improvement of local infrastructure and life. The local administration was able to intervene only in the village and in the Petrileni neighborhood, located in the northern part of town. They generally referred to the arrangement of streets, sidewalks, and water drainage

³³ A.O.C.H., *County Communal and Housing Management Enterprise* fund, file 73, unnumbered sheets.

³⁴ *Localitățile județului Bihor* [The localities of Bihor County], 1971, p. 22.

³⁵ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 160/1967, sheets 157-159, 337.

³⁶ Idem, file 39/1960, sheet 98.

³⁷ *The localities of Bihor County*, 1971, p. 22.

channels. In 1959-1960, the food market was modernized, a children's park was set up, and the authorities requested the abolition of vegetable gardens and pig pens visible from the street³⁸.

During the 1960s, the arrangement of streets and sidewalks, drainage ditches, and green areas continued, together with tree planting³⁹. The appearance of the city center was completed with the stone bust of Petru Groza, unveiled behind the House of Culture on June 26, 1970⁴⁰. Later, the bust was moved in front of the Administrative Palace, at the entrance to Lenin Street (nowadays Unirii Street).

Another aspect of the urbanization of the town of Dr. Petru Groza was the increase in the population's access to services and to the commercial network. In 1968, a craft complex of the "Muncitorul" Cooperative from Beiuș was opened in the town center. The building included service spaces, such as tailoring, shoe repairing and photo workshops, a barbershop and hairdressing, and TV and radio repair service. At that time, there was also a furniture warehouse in town⁴¹, and in 1971 the local commercial network included 28 stores, four of which were for food, including a restaurant, a buffet, and a cake shop⁴². In the first half of the 1980s, the town's commercial area increased by about 5,000 square meters, and in 1982 the local market was modernized and reopened⁴³. Even though the number of shops grew, goods, even those of strict necessity, were difficult or impossible to find, a situation to be found throughout the studied period. Moreover, their hygiene and sanitary conditions left much to be desired, an issue transmitted to the hospital and local authorities from time to time, but with only a few measures taken⁴⁴. The supply of food (onions, beans, potatoes, cabbage, root vegetables) during the winter received support through the establishment of silos in the village of Lunca⁴⁵.



"Lioara" sports hall (Ioan Simedre, Ștei – 500 years, p. 172)

³⁸ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 41/1960, sheets 110-111, 119.

³⁹ *Scântea tinerețului*, year 19, no. 4286, February 24, 1963, p. 3; *Crișana*, year 19, no. 166, July 17, 1964, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Scântea*, year 39, no. 8468, June 27, 1970, p. 7.

⁴¹ *Crișana*, year 23, no. 19, January 24, 1968, p. 1.

⁴² *The localities of Bihor County*, 1971, p. 22.

⁴³ *Scântea*, year 51, no. 12543, December 21, 1982, p. 5.

⁴⁴ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 8/1956-1957, sheets 136-138, 140; *Ibidem*, file 54/1961, sheet 113.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, file 184/1968, sheets 5, 10.

The sports infrastructure also received several projects. As already mentioned, the town's first sports base, including a swimming pool, was built in the Soviet complex, at the northern end of Lenin Street, being intended, at the time of the development, only for the Soviets. Later, after the Soviets left, it became of public use. In 1957, the "Minerul" sports base was developed, where the first official football matches were organized in town. The most significant investments in the sports infrastructure were concentrated in the "Oțelul" sports complex, managed by the Mecanica Enterprise. In February 1984, the "Lioara" multi-purpose sports hall was opened here, with a capacity of 1200-1400 seats, being the second largest building of this kind in Bihor, after the Sports Hall in Oradea. The complex also included two football fields, one of which had a 5000-seat grandstand, and two other training fields, volleyball, basketball, tennis, and handball courts⁴⁶.

The urbanization of a locality also involves the development of educational infrastructure. In 1952, a school building was inaugurated for the children of Soviet specialists and one for those of local citizens. Starting from September 1, 1956, the mixed middle school had 11 classes. It operated with three sections: day school, night school (for workers who attended school courses after work hours), and one with low attendance, having, in the 1957/1958 school year, 18 classes for grades 1 to 9, with 20 male and eight female teachers. The school also had a boarding school, with insufficient seats for its necessities⁴⁷. In 1961, it was equipped with new beds, mattresses, pillows, sheets, and blankets. At the same time, a kindergarten also operated in town, at its maximum capacity, so two more opened. In 1965, two of these kindergartens operated with a normal schedule, and one with a reduced schedule, with a total of nine groups of children and 260 seats. The state of the kindergartens and how they were equipped differed, because the unit in the Petrileni neighborhood was not provided with appropriate furniture, operating in a rented apartment, while the other two were renovated and equipped with the necessary furniture and usable items⁴⁸, but were not properly maintained.

In 1965, the general school was renovated and equipped with benches and furniture, including teaching equipment. That year, 1,148 students were learning here, from primary school to the 11th grade⁴⁹. Three years later, there were two schools in town, with 41 classes for normal teaching and seven for night school.

In the town of Dr. Petru Groza, a specialized education system was also established, according to the economic needs. The Mining School Group opened in 1952 to train specialized personnel in mining: miner, driller, dosimetrist, wagon driver, sample collector, and geological and geophysical technician. Since 1960, the school began training mining electricians, mine locksmiths, ore preparers, turners, and welders, and by the end of the 1960s, the school building was renovated and equipped with new workshop equipment⁵⁰. This school group was directly subordinated to the Ministry of Mines, Petroleum and Geology, becoming a professional mining school, and in 1975 it was transformed into Industrial School no. 2 with the following profiles: mechanics, electromechanics, mine-petroleum-geology. The institution maintained the mining specialization but expanded to meet the needs of the new factories in the city, which, as

⁴⁶ *Scânteia*, year 53, no. 12910, February 25, 1984, p. 5; *Crișana*, year 39, no. 11627, July 26, 1984, p. 2.

⁴⁷ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 8/1956-1957, sheets 27-28; *Ibidem*, file 20/1958, sheet 69.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, file 82/1962, sheets 101, 115, 123.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, file 131/1965, sheets 370-372.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 273.

mentioned, evolved from the mining sector to the manufacturing sector. The headquarters of Industrial School No. 2 was built in the mid-1970s, having 18 cabinets, eight laboratories, five workshops, two dormitories, a sports field, and a library⁵¹.



The new building of the town high school was finished in 1968 (*Crișana*, November 10, 1968)

Due to the growing demand for workers and specialists in industry, especially for the Mecanica Enterprise, in 1974 the Industrial Machine Construction High School was established, on the structure of the old humanistic high school, also created in the 1960s. A little later, the high school was transformed into School Group no. 1 Dr. Petru Groza, as a general school with the first stage of high school, with two profiles: light industry and mechanics, for the training of millers, turners, and woodworkers. Students benefited from both theoretical and practical training, guided by the school's master instructors during internships at the Mecanica Enterprise (mainly boys), as well as in the local departments of the Sinteza and Miorița enterprises (especially girls)⁵². For the first stage of high school, in 1976, places were divided between the Electronics and Mechanics specializations, and for the second stage, the specializations of Electromechanics for technological equipment in the mining industry and Mining in the exploitation of deposits. There were also places in the vocational school.

In 1979, the School Group was equipped with a new building, located near the Mecanica Enterprise, having 20 classrooms and six laboratories, a dormitory, and a cafeteria. However, in 1984 the School Group lost its high school classes, remaining as a primary and secondary school⁵³. The high school component became an independent Industrial High School, then called "No. 1" which also had a post-secondary component with an economic profile and another with a health profile, to which a school for foremen in machine industry was added⁵⁴.

Another educational institution, the Professional Automobile School, was founded in 1961. It trained 12 classes of students in 1968/1969, both theoretically and practically, in terms of knowledge and maintenance of cars, traffic rules, driving cars and trucks, and health issues. The teaching infrastructure included classrooms and practice rooms, equipped with teaching

⁵¹ Ioan Simedre, *Ștei – monography*, p. 87; *Scânteia tineretului*, year 19, no. 4371, June 6, 1963, p. 2; *Ibidem*, year 40, no. 10953, August 16, 1984, p. 4.

⁵² *Tribuna școlii*, year 2, no. 68, November 4, 1972, p. 4.

⁵³ *Familia*, year 12 (112), no. 6 (130), June 1976, add page.

⁵⁴ Ioan Simedre, *Liceul Teoretic „Avram Iancu” Ștei – 50 de ani – monografie* [“Avram Iancu” Theoretical School Ștei – 50 years – monograph], EX LIBRIS HOFFNUNG Typography Publishing House, Ștei, 2006, p. 38-44.

materials, and driving courses conducted with the help of the school's instructors. The unit became a Driving School Group in 1975⁵⁵.

The educational activity is linked to the cultural one, necessary in a growing town/city. The building of the House of Culture, located next to the Administrative Palace, was built in 1955-1957. These facilities were initially intended exclusively for Soviet specialists and their families, and after 1958 for all those interested. The "November 7th" Club also operated in the House of Culture, where, in 1959, the external conducting section of the People's Art School from Oradea was opened. At the same time, the Club had a theater group, brass band, dance, and soloist groups, which presented performances in the city and its surroundings⁵⁶. In general, the activities of the House of Culture were held in its headquarters and other spaces and had various themes, literary, artistic, and festive, but also of political-ideological and propagandistic nature, in tune with the political system of the time. The theater and stage groups of the House of Culture operated intermittently from the 1960s, till the 1980s, with breaks of several years. In return, its folk music band won several awards, organizing, in 1978, performances in Stry Smokovec and Bratislava⁵⁷. In 1985, the Music and Poetry Circle of the House of Culture won the First Prize in the republican phase of the "Cântarea României" National Festival⁵⁸. A small radio center also operated in its headquarters, which transmitted the national radio program, with some local inserts and could be heard on radio sets and in public spaces, through loudspeakers located in town. Also, in the headquarters of the House of Culture, the courses of the People's University were held, a series of theoretical and practical courses, both in history and science and of a political-ideological nature, about the history of the Romanian Worker's / Communist Party, including practical skills, about medicine and health care⁵⁹.



Since its founding, the House of Culture of Dr. Petru Groza town has housed the city library (in photo), including a room for film screenings. The library had a reading room, a lending room, and a depository, having a total of 16,774 books in 1962 and about 15,400 in 1966⁶⁰. In addition, the town also had trade union, enterprise, and school libraries. At the same time, in the 1960s the town library supported a group of amateur artists for children.

The cinema, another element common to the urban world, was also present in the town of Dr. Petru Groza. It initially operated exclusively for Soviet specialists. The local cinemascope was opened to the general public in 1963, screening 14-15 films per month⁶¹. Movies also penetrated the locals' homes, having 776 television subscriptions and 678 radio subscriptions in 1970⁶².

⁵⁵ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 184/1968, sheets 269-271.

⁵⁶ *Crișana*, year 14, no. 279, November 27, 1959, p. 2; N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 81/1962, sheet 67.

⁵⁷ *România liberă*, year 36, no. 10346, January 30, 1978, p. 6.

⁵⁸ *Familia*, year 22 (122), no. 8 (252), August 1986, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Crișana*, year 14, no. 236, October 8, 1959, p. 3.

⁶⁰ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 81/1962, sheet 214; *Ibidem*, file 150/1966, sheet 9.

⁶¹ *Munca*, year 19, no. 4823, May 10, 1963, p. 2.

⁶² *The localities of Bihor County*, 1971, p. 22.

Urbanization also requires providing complex medical services for more and more people. The Dr. Petru Groza territorial hospital was established in 1952, later supplemented by a polyclinic. The medical staff was insufficient during the 1950s and 1960s, and among the specialized services of the Polyclinic were those of internal medicine, radiology, work capacity expertise, the Urban Circumscription serving patients through pediatrics, school medicine, adult treatment, and dentistry⁶³. The polyclinic was subordinated to the Beiuș hospital for a period, and in 1965 it had 20 beds for adults, but with insufficient medical equipment, food being brought with difficulty due to the lack of a specifically designated vehicle⁶⁴. In 1961-1962, Red Cross departments were established in the town⁶⁵, and the local neuropsychiatric hospital was opened in 1966⁶⁶.



The Neuropsychiatric Hospital (*Crișana*, July 26, 1966)

The town hospital operated independently since 1975 when it separated from the Beiuș hospital, its services included internal medicine, pediatrics, rehabilitation and physical medicine, and ophthalmology, with 155 beds and an outpatient clinic with offices and surgical rooms⁶⁷. In total, in 1988, two hospitals, a polyclinic, an urban dispensary, and company dispensaries operated in the town of Dr. Petru Groza, employing 59 doctors and 201 medical personnel⁶⁸. At the same time, a pharmacy opened in 1954, initially in a barrack. It became a permanent pharmacy in 1957, moving to its own space and being the only unit of this kind until 1989⁶⁹.

The urbanization of Ștei, which became the town of Dr. Petru Groza, meant an increase in the number of inhabitants and a social-professional diversification. The most significant and rapid population growth occurred in the 1950s. The village of Ștei had 521 inhabitants in 1948, but in 1956 their number reached 5,874, not counting the several thousand workers who migrated from many regions of Romania to work in the Băița mines. In the 1960s, the growth trend was moderately maintained. In 1962 the town had 8,988 inhabitants, and the fact that it had collective housing also increased the population density to 1,114.2 inhabitants per km²⁷⁰. In

⁶³ N.A.R. – B.C.S., *Dr. Petru Groza Town People's Council* fund, file 55/1961, sheet 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, file 131/1965, sheet 245.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, file 81/1962, sheet 141.

⁶⁶ *Scântea*, year 35, no. 6852, January 6, 1966, p. 5.

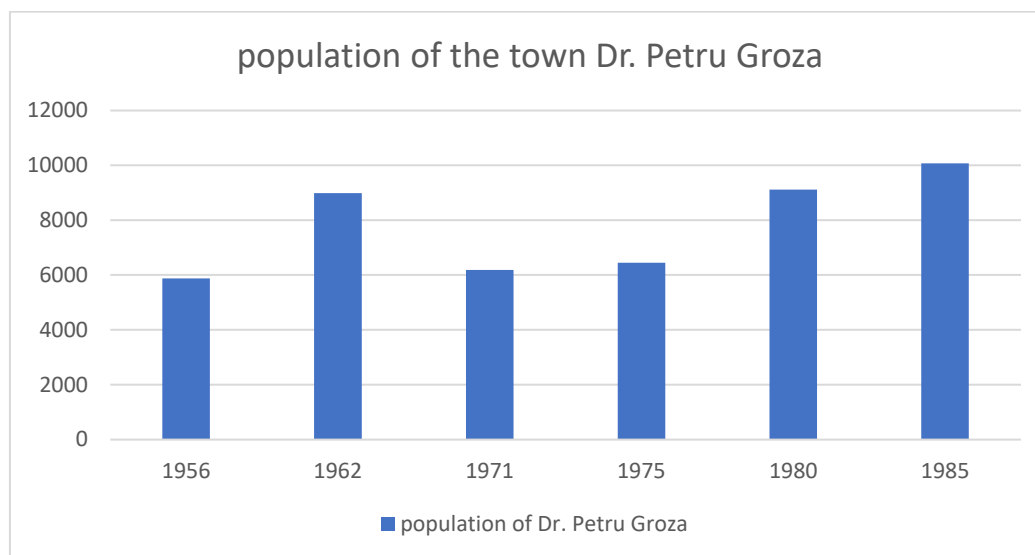
⁶⁷ *Scântea tineretului*, year 44, no. 12166, July 14, 1988, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Crișana*, year 43, no. 12859, July 22, 1988, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Manuela Bianca Pașca, *Istoria farmaciilor din Bihor, de la începuturi până în zilele noastre* [The history of pharmacies in Bihor, from their beginnings to nowadays], University of Oradea Publishing House, Oradea, 2013, p. 192-193.

⁷⁰ I.O. Berindei, Gr. P. Pop, *Județul Bihor* [Bihor County], Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Bucharest, 1972, p. 75.

1971, the town was inhabited by 6,181 people, of whom 3,371 were men and 2,810 women. Thus, the population dropped, due to the decrease in uranium mining activity. In 1975, the total population rose to 6,446 inhabitants, and in 1980 it was 9,116 people, of whom 8,072 were residents of the town. The population grew during this period, following employment in the industrial sector. In 1985, the total reached 10,070 people, of whom 9,459 were residents of the town⁷¹.



Thus, the population of the town of Dr. Petru Groza grew as a result of economic impulses, first in the mining sector, and then in the manufacturing industry. The majority of the population was young⁷², made up of people able to work, therefore a good employment basin. In 1971, there were about 4,000 employees in town, the number rising significantly by 1985 when it reached 14,150⁷³. The number of employees was higher than that of the population because some of them were not living in town, but commuting from neighboring localities, and those of the Mining Enterprise were calculated in town, where its headquarters was, even if they worked in Băița. 654 of the town's employees had higher education, being engineers and sub-engineers, teachers, economists, doctors, and others⁷⁴.

The town of Dr. Petru Groza had a few periods of growth and degrowth. It's a typical case for a town built from scratch, although there was a village next to it from the beginning. For some people, this meant an opportunity, especially for those who, in the 1950s, came from all over Romania to work in the nearby mines, but it also meant a tragedy for locals and also for those

⁷¹ Central Directorate of Statistics, *Anuarul statistic al Republicii Socialiste România 1976* [The 1976 statistical yearbook of the Socialist Republic of Romania], p. 17; Central Directorate of Statistics, *Anuarul statistic al Republicii Socialiste România 1981* [The 1981 statistical yearbook of the Socialist Republic of Romania], p. 51; Central Directorate of Statistics, *Anuarul statistic al Republicii Socialiste România 1986* [The 1986 statistical yearbook of the Socialist Republic of Romania], p. 16.

⁷² Anda Raicu, "Orașul de la poalele Bihariei" [The town from the foot of the Bihor Mountains], in *România pitorească*, 1974, no. 5, p. 8.

⁷³ *Familia*, year 20 (120), no. 6 (226), June 1984, p. 4; *Crișana*, year 39, no. 11627, July 26 1984, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Traian Bondar, "Integrarea intelectualității în activitatea economică și social-politică a Orașului Dr. Petru Groza" [The integration of intellectuals in the economic and social-political activities of Dr. Petru Groza town], in *Crisia*, 15, 1985, p. 213-214.

workers, who were exposing their selves to unknown dangers. Dr. Petru Groza's urban landscape changed for the good in the 1970s, but the economic crisis of the 1980s did not promise a good life for its inhabitants, who had to face poorly supplied stores, hard working conditions, low heating in their apartments and schools and a general state of dissatisfaction, common to all Romanian towns and cities of the time. After 1989, when the Romanian communist system fell, the town was renamed Ștei and it crossed a long and painful economic crisis even after the year 2000. Nowadays, the town is slowly developing, with new infrastructure investments, renovations, new medical buildings, and a new industrial area.



The town of Ștei on a satellite image from 2023 with the old village in the center, the Soviet/communist town to the left, and the industrial area, built since the early 1960s, to the right (Google Earth)