



**HOUSING ESTATES DEMARCATING
THE OBOR SQUARE
IN THE CONTINUATION
OF IANCULUI ROAD**

SÍDLISKÁ OHRANIČUJÚCE
NÁMESTIE OBORA
V POKRAČOVANÍ
CESTY IANCULUI

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 29(4–5),
1981, p. 55

Tracing the Housing Frontline: The Post-Socialist Legacy of Housing Policies in Bucharest during the 1970s–1980s

Front bývania: postsocialistické dedičstvo
bytovej politiky v Bukurešti v 70. – 80. rokoch

Cosmina Bouaru

 10.31577/archandurb.2023.57.3–4.5

Tento príspevok predkladá analýzu vývoja bytovej výstavby a jej distribúciu v rámci Bukurešti a skúma dôsledky štátneho plánovania v rokoch 1974 až 1989 v postsocialistickej mestskej a sociálnej krajine. Štúdia sa venuje transformačnej role bývania ako verejnej služby a jej dosahu na koncepčné modely sídlisk v rámci socialistického modelu mesta a jeho spoločenskej štruktúry, pričom berie do úvahy radikálne zmeny v angažovanosti štátu v kolektívnej bytovej výstavbe po roku 1989. Polarizujúci charakter politického aparátu poznamenal štúdium architektúry posledných desaťročí socializmu, ktoré sa zameriavalo najmä na vývoj vzťahu medzi rôznymi typmi bývania a modelmi realizovanými v rámci územného plánovania, ako aj na sociálnu dynamiku podielov výstavby. Tieto iniciatívy boli v Rumunsku zosúladené s programom urbánnej systematizácie, ktorý bol zavedený po roku 1974 a vyvrcholil výstavbou väčšieho množstva bytových jednotiek ako kedykoľvek predtým v minulom storočí. Len v Bukurešti bolo vybudovaných viac ako 3 500 bytoviek v mestských celkoch rozdelených do 12 veľkých štvrtí. V tomto kontexte analyzuje štúdia súvislosť medzi politickým odôvodnením „územnej homogenizácie“ a obmedzeniami v architektonickom navrhovaní a územnom plánovaní. Architektonický a urbanistický výskum realizovaný Inštitútom „Proiect“ București (IPB) čelil obdobiu nejednoznačnosti v dôsledku kvantitatívnych vyjadrení vynútených politickými obmedzeniami. Dané skutočnosti spája táto štúdia pomocou konceptu frontu bývania, ktorý vystihuje prístupy tohto obdobia, od bulvárových obkladov až po scvrknuté obytné komplexy.

Front bývania sa po roku 1974 stal jedným z východísk pri vytváraní rezidenčných celkov a sektorov v mestských častiach berúc do úvahy vzťah medzi zahusťovaním a vymedzenými hranicami, v rámci ktorých boli integrované aspekty zlepšujúce kvalitu života v susedstve, ako napríklad sociálna vybavenosť a zelená infraštruktúra. Na mestskej úrovni slúži front ako nástroj pri štúdiu urbánnej geografie politickej agendy integrácie obytných celkov v rámci mesta na základe sektorovej organizácie, ktorá má svoje korene vo výrobných centrách. Viaceré dobové dokumenty a retrospektívna reinterpretácia tohto fenoménu, na ktoré sa v štúdiu poukazuje, v tomto ohľade zdôrazňujú sociálno-ekonomický význam bývania v bukureštských štvrtiach a porovnávajú protichodné urbanizačné politiky z obdobia pred rokom 1989 a po ňom. Štúdia hodnotí stabilitu obyvateľstva v štátom plánovaných štvrtiach počas režimu, správu bytového fondu a spôsob, akým komplexné urbanistické celky boli počas komunizmu navrhnuté tak, aby umožňovali každodenný život v najbližšom okolí. Tento kontrast vychádza z iniciatív štátu a vyhodnocuje správanie protikladných javov v nedávnej histórii: donucovanie totalitného politického režimu verzus neoliberálny prístup štátu nepripraveného na liberálnu ekonomiku v 90. rokoch; zahusťovanie/depuplácia a migrácia; dominancia štátnej ponuky pri absencii dopytu/poklese dopytu, ktorý následne naklonil ručičku váh na stranu súkromných investícií; uniformita/individualita. Tieto faktory sú naďalej predmetom mapovania kvality života v Bukurešti, čo vyvoláva obavy o zlepšenie podmienok na úrovni budov postavených počas socializmu, ako aj o „zdravie“ existujúcich obytných štvrtí ako prostredia pre súkromný život i komunitu.

The Premises of Systematization of Large Housing Quarters of Bucharest

In every former socialist European state, housing was regarded as a public service¹, reflecting the state's ideological control over economy and society. Socialist housing policies involved the control of citizens' funds² and the abolition of land rent, while also serving as a means of land division based on functionalist principles, aligned with the ideological goal of constructing a production-oriented society. However, in the Socialist Republic of Romania (S.R.R.), the level of political involvement in housing production was much more pronounced than in other CEE countries³. Therefore, the conceiving of housing ensembles in the major cities of Romania was subject to political constraints, as design themes were issued by the governmental bodies of popular councils⁴ to the state institutes and enterprises engaged in comprehensive research on building and urban design.

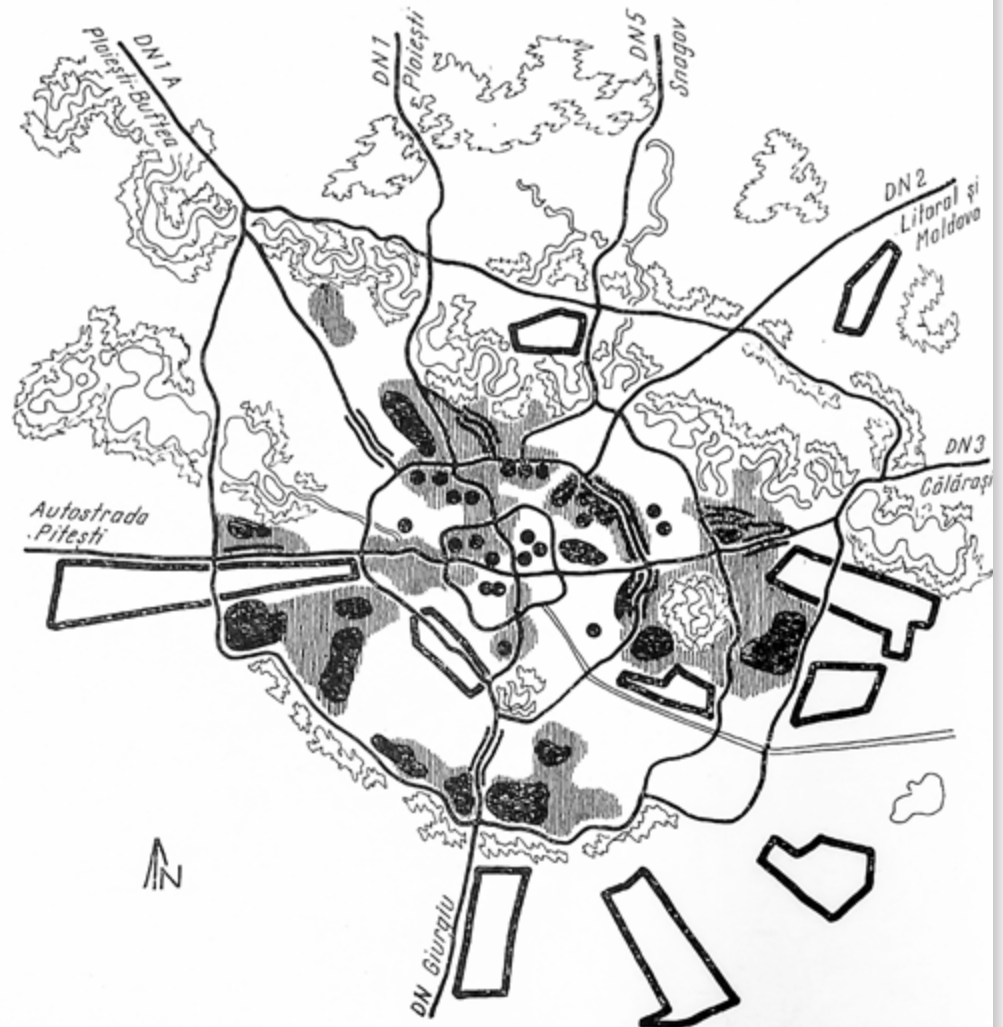
Additionally, ongoing adjustments to the legislative framework, driven by territorial homogenization resolutions, further shaped the process of conceptualization.

In the 1970s and 1980s, characterized as the stage of “consolidation of the socialist economy”⁵, Bucharest represented one of the living environments most thoroughly and deliberately shaped by political measures, given its status as the administrative capital and the most populous city. However, its evolution cannot be dissociated from the initiatives of the 1960s, the final decade of the stage of “establishing the material foundations of the socialist society”⁶. The socialist model of functionalist urbanism was grounded in the theory of microrayons, which materialized in the development of housing between peripheral and second ring areas close to the capital’s production units. In the 1960s, a typical approach emerged to achieve a harmonious balance between green spaces and social-cultural facilities in proportion to the density of residential quarters, aiming to provide support for the influx of the workforce relocated from rural areas to the peripheral housing quarters of Balta Albă-Titan (northeast), Pantelimon (easternmost), Berceni (south), Drumul Taberei (southwest), Militari (west), and Aviației (north). While the mid-1960s brought a relative period of liberalization, allowing for cultural exchanges and experimentation inside the modernist framework, the housing models underwent significant modifications. The focus shifted towards improving standardized projects, under the pretext of exploring the scientific dimension of architecture, an argument that would become universal by the following decade⁷. This transformation led to the ubiquity of the functionalist image within the major ensembles of Bucharest, accompanied by the predominance of low-comfort Type III and IV apartments with the smallest usable areas per inhabitant.

However, despite these developments, the interest in the quality of life in residential neighborhoods, which had been partially managed through the advocacy in the theory of microrayons for a balanced ratio of built space to green space 6/1-5/1⁸, began to decline in the early 1970s. During those years, the state consolidated its power and control over the mechanisms of economic efficiency. Consequently, this led to two distinct development paths for Bucharest’s urban organism. The first path was shaped by state policies focusing on the densification of residential quarters, aiming to increase housing capacity and enhance connectivity with the city center to complement the ensembles built in the 1960s. The second path, particularly evident in the 1980s, followed the redefinition of socialist urban identity on a larger scale during the so-called ‘cult of personality’ period—a highly coercive phase of the totalitarian regime that significantly influenced urbanization and the redefinition of the state’s built symbols in the capital city.

In the pursuit of establishing an egalitarian society and homogenizing living conditions, the state implemented urban systematization measures from 1973 to 1974. These measures aimed to control land and eliminate disparities between rural and urban areas. The focus was on urbanization strategies and expanding housing capacities in medium and large cities. With a proactive stance, the state took the initiative as early as 1973 (Law 41/1973) to address the refinement of the construction perimeter and land use within the cities, emphasizing limited management of green spaces and construction near the main roads. Consequently, in Bucharest, the emphasis was placed on the rational use of spatial systematization of the fabric connecting the city’s central limit and the peripheral housing quarters. These aspects laid the groundwork for the densification of residential neighborhoods until 1974, amplified by measures presented as ‘care for the working class’ such as reducing the number of occupants per apartment from 4.3 to 3 and eliminating low-comfort Type III and IV apartments, which competed with the expected number of dwellings. Simultaneously, the expansion of the Bucharest housing stock raised the issue of mobility, necessitating the initiation of the construction of the capital’s metro line—a long-debated topic that spanned two decades. The Central Committee (CC) of the Romanian Communist Party broached the subject during the CeX meeting in 1972, and it was subsequently ratified as an official decision by the State in 1973⁹. The circuit aimed to create an urban relationship between residential neighborhoods, the large ensembles that had either started in the 1960s or were still under development, industrial areas, and the city center. The guarantee of investment efficiency was supported at the end of 1974 when the state published two laws that would affect the entire territorial development policy. The Act on the Systematization of Territory and Urban and Rural Areas (58/1974) imperatively prescribed the rational division of land within city perimeters, emphasizing that land was a ‘national asset’ through Act 59. One of the clear motivations behind this was the streamlining of production policies by transferring a segment of the population from rural areas to major

Diferite categorii de amplasamente pentru construcția de locuințe în București:



- plombe sau mici grupe de locuințe
- ▬▬▬ flancări de magistrale
- unități urbanistice complexe
- ▨ zone compacte cu locuințe în stare corespunzătoare
- zone industriale
- ⊞ spații plantate

CATEGORIES OF VARIOUS LOCATIONS FOR FUTURE HOUSING ESTATES IN BUCHAREST.

LEGENDA FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: GROUPS OF SMALL HOUSES, HOUSING ENSEMBLES FLANKING MAIN ROADS, COMPLEX URBAN UNITS, COMPACT ZONES DOMINATED BY FULL-SCALE STATE HOUSING ENSEMBLES, INDUSTRIAL AREAS, GREEN SPACES.

KATEGORIE RÖZNYCH LOKALÍT PRE BUDÚCE SÍDLISKÁ V BUKUREŠTI.

LEGENDA ZHORA NADOL: SKUPINY MALÝCH DOMOV, OBYTNÉ SÚBORY LEMUJÚCE HLAVNÉ CESTY, KOMPLEXNÉ MESTSKÉ CELKY, KOMPAKTNÉ ZÓNY S DOMINANCIU ŠTÁTNYCH OBYTNÝCH SÚBOROV, PRIEMYSELNÉ ZÓNY, ZELENÉ PLOCHY.

Source Zdroj: LĂZĂRESCU, Cezar. 1977. Urbanismul în România. Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, p. 35

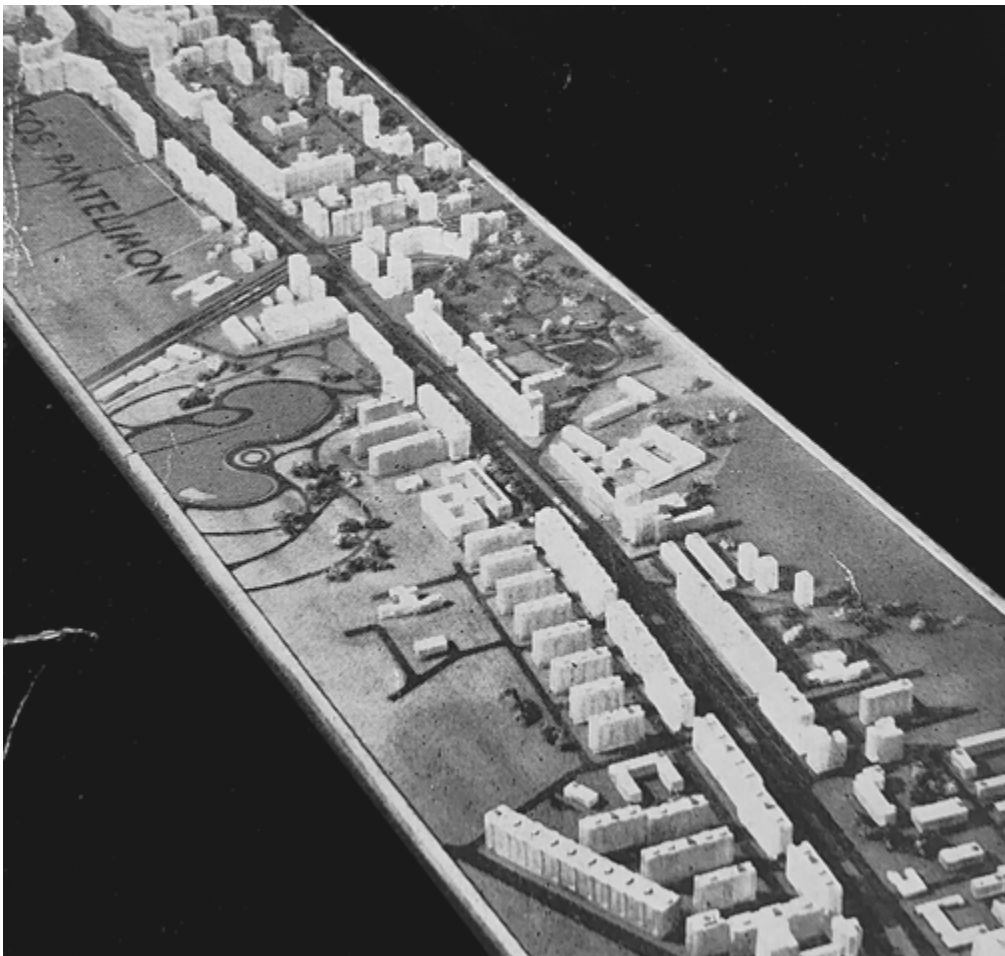
cities and prioritizing the use of land for agriculture, accentuating the urban dimension of socialist progress. For Bucharest, the Party's agenda set a population growth from 1.4 million (1970) to 2.2 million (2000)¹⁰, within a 30-year interval, implying an increase in built density in terms of the ratio between building height and open space, as well as the demographic density of approximately 500 inhabitants per hectare. Following the political directive of "harmonizing the new buildings with the existing ones",¹¹ a method emerged of successive placement of buildings in between the housing ensembles. This approach entailed a dedicated exploration of new building modules and dwelling-units types, which in turn demanded collaborative research between architectural projects and the prefabrication industry to achieve mass serialization of housing units. In the 1970s, architects highlighted the necessity of diversifying prefabricated facades and apartment types to address the crisis in architectural research. At the scale of residential quarters, the 1974 law rejected the theory of the microrayon¹², in which the principles of urban remodeling were considered in line with international practices by emphasizing green spaces (to the detriment of spaces for social engagement, as a specific aspect of the ideological desideratum¹³) and the withdrawal of residential buildings behind planted barriers. For projects adopted after 1974, the formulas followed the state's directive for "compact residential ensembles [...] with cohesive street fronts"¹⁴, either through successive densification and the construction of tall buildings along major arteries in newly built neighborhoods,

or the complex housing formula. These methods were exemplified primarily in the major Bucharest ensembles until 1989, in line with the state agenda's focal points, such as connectivity and the elimination of "improper" housing stock in the city center.

Densification of the Urban Fabric: Exploring Interstitial Housing Development

In March 1975, the State prioritized mobility in urban systematization plans. Residential neighborhoods were concentrated along existing roads, boulevards were widened, and national roads were expanded within the urban perimeter⁵⁵. The rationale brought to the forefront emphasized good connectivity between residential neighborhoods, workplaces, and the historic city center. Furthermore, centralized planning considered the densification of quarters like Titan and Balta Albă as one of the shaping factors for another significant step in urban development—the commencement of the construction of Bucharest's subway network in the same year⁵⁶. Studies conducted between 1973 and 1977 by IPB emphasized the cladding of major boulevards by sacrificing the green barriers of pre-existing complexes or extant open space, whether vacant or occupied by inappropriate housing. These modifications led to a reconsideration of the ratio between built space and open land, from 1:6–1:5 to 1:4–1:3 and an increase in average building height, in line with the five-year plan of 1976-1981, which aimed to construct 150,000 apartments (30,000 per year)⁵⁷.

In light of these aspects, starting from 1975, IPB focused its studies on consolidating and densifying the urban fabric between the pericentral ring and the boulevards mediating the entrances from the east (the Black Sea coast) and the west (Transylvania). The main agenda aimed to connect the central ring to the peripheral industrial areas, including the Faur – 23 August factories (east) and the Militari - Preciziei quarter (west). The proposed approach involved transforming the main roads into urban corridors through the construction of collective housing ensembles reaching



HOUSING CORRIDORS FLANKING THE PANTELIMON BOULEVARD

OBYTNÉ KORIDORY LEMUJÚCE
BULVÁR PANTELIMON

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 23(4),
1975, p. 40



**THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE
OF PĂCII BOULEVARD**

VÝSTAVBA BULVÁRU PĂCII

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 23(4),
1975, pp. 30–35



**HOUSING ENSEMBLES FLANKING
THE PĂCII BOULEVARD**

OBYTNÉ SÚBORY LEMUJÚCE
BULVÁR PĂCII

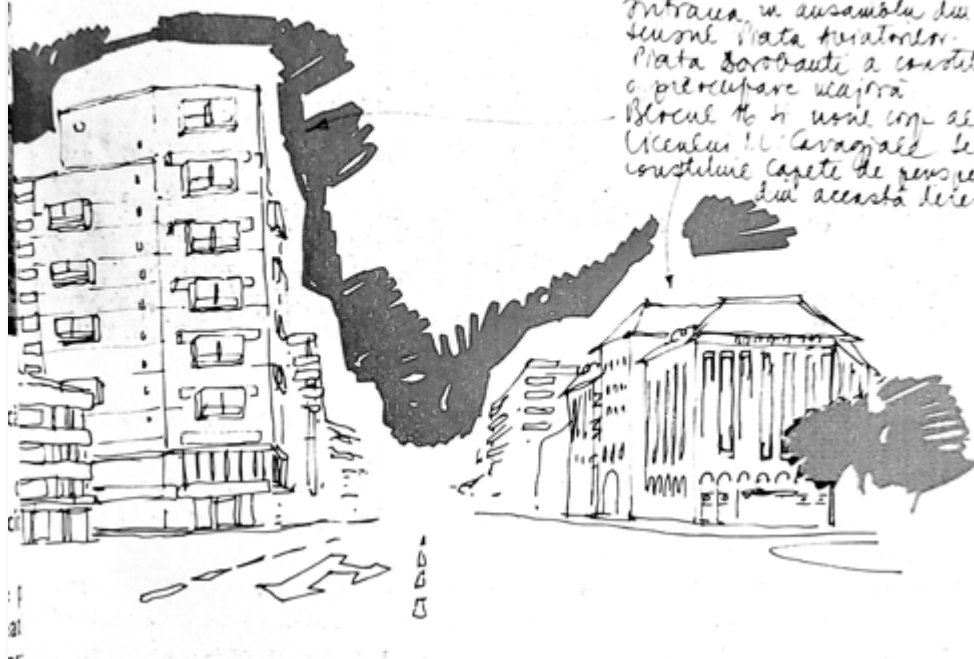
Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 23(4),
1975, pp. 30–35

heights of up to 10 storeys. Practical implementation started with the construction of the 'Cosmos' and 'Pantelimon' complexes (1974–1976, D. Hariton, Gh. Nădrag, R. Ghelman) along two segments intersecting the city's second ring road, spanning 3.5 km. Meant to complement the systematized complexes near the Faur industrial park, these additions further aimed to provide cover for the connecting artery with Mihai Bravu Road, a key route for traffic heading towards the city center. A year later, the project expanded towards the city center's border, from the intersection with Iancului Road¹⁸, involving the demolition of historical fabric and sacrificing the planned green space between the road and the street. At the western exit of the city, in the Militari neighborhood, 'string' of ten-story residential buildings was planned along Păcii Boulevard, spanning 3.7 km, which replaced a portion of green space designed as a green barrier between medium-rise housing units previously built near the Preciziei industrial zone. At the same time, these solutions violated the desirable, yet increasingly less imperative, arrangements of interstitial spaces of the housing ensembles. In addition to the minimization of green infrastructure, parking lots were also regulated with a minimal ratio of one space per six families¹⁹, stipulated by the law which allowed for a residual possibility. The focal points of social life in the neighbourhood were marginally translated to the boulevards, where restaurants and cinemas were sporadically inserted, within a context that encouraged global social culture.

These aspects were refined by the architects at IPB in urban systematization studies through complex theories of urban units consisting of residential complexes. The principle of the complexes entailed a functionalist structural use of the territory, achieved through a rationalized relationship between the housing groups that consisted of four or more buildings concentrating their facilities and circulations within their enclosed perimeter. On a microscale, these complexes were configured on the principle of a "functional cooperation of public facilities". This principle was further extended at the macroscale by distributing circulation to the points of interest, located at varying distances from the housing groups, thus reducing the number of social facilities accordingly. This model allowed for the expansion of the residential areas within the intermediary area between 1977 and 1989, with a great emphasis on extending the urban fabric of the existing major housing quarters adjacent to the low-density large areas, not always matching the functional criteria for the allocation of housing, such as engagement in production and service capacity. Aiming to reduce the investment of collateral aspects of the living, some projects were designed as complements to ensembles with infrastructure conceived according to the design principles of the 1960s, such as the 1 Mai area in the Drumul Taberei quarters (1977–1986, southwest). However, the model of complex urban units was tested at its fullest in partially systematized areas like Titan-Balta Albă (1965–1980, east), Rahova (south, in the 1980s), Floreasca (major project, 1984–1987, north), or areas with low

Posta a fost ardel „asimilat”
noului ansamblu.

Într-una, în ansamblu din
sezonul Plata Aviatorilor.
Plata Dorobanților a constituit
o preocupare majoră.
Blocul № 4 și unele corpuri
de la Ucenul 11. Arhitectul le
constituie Capete de perspectivă
din această direcție.



**STUDIES FOR THE DOROBANȚILOR
ROAD SYSTEMATIZATION**

ŠTÚDIE K SYSTEMATIZÁCII
CESTY DOROBANȚILOR

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 25(6),
1977, p. 24



**STUDIES FOR RESIDENTIAL
COMPLEXES IN BĂNEASA**

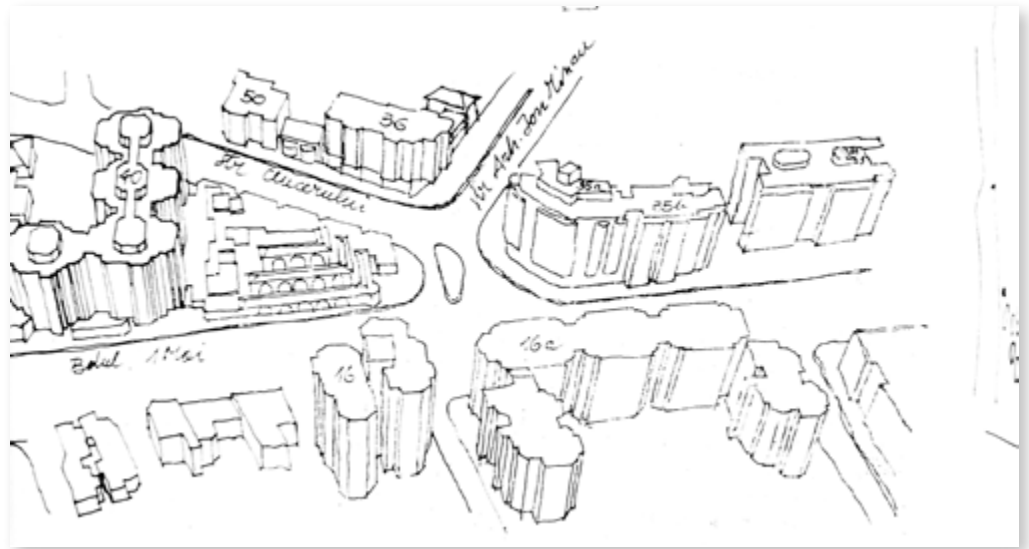
ŠTÚDIE K OBYTNÝM KOMPLEXOM
V BĂNEASA

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 29(6), 1981

**STUDIES TOWARDS
SYSTEMATIZATION OF THE 1 MAI
QUARTER WITHIN DRUMUL TABEREI**

ŠTÚDIE K SYSTEMATIZÁCII ŠTVRTE
1. MÁJA V RÁMCI DRUMUL TABEREI

Source Zdroj: *Arhitectura*, 25(6),
1977, p. 34

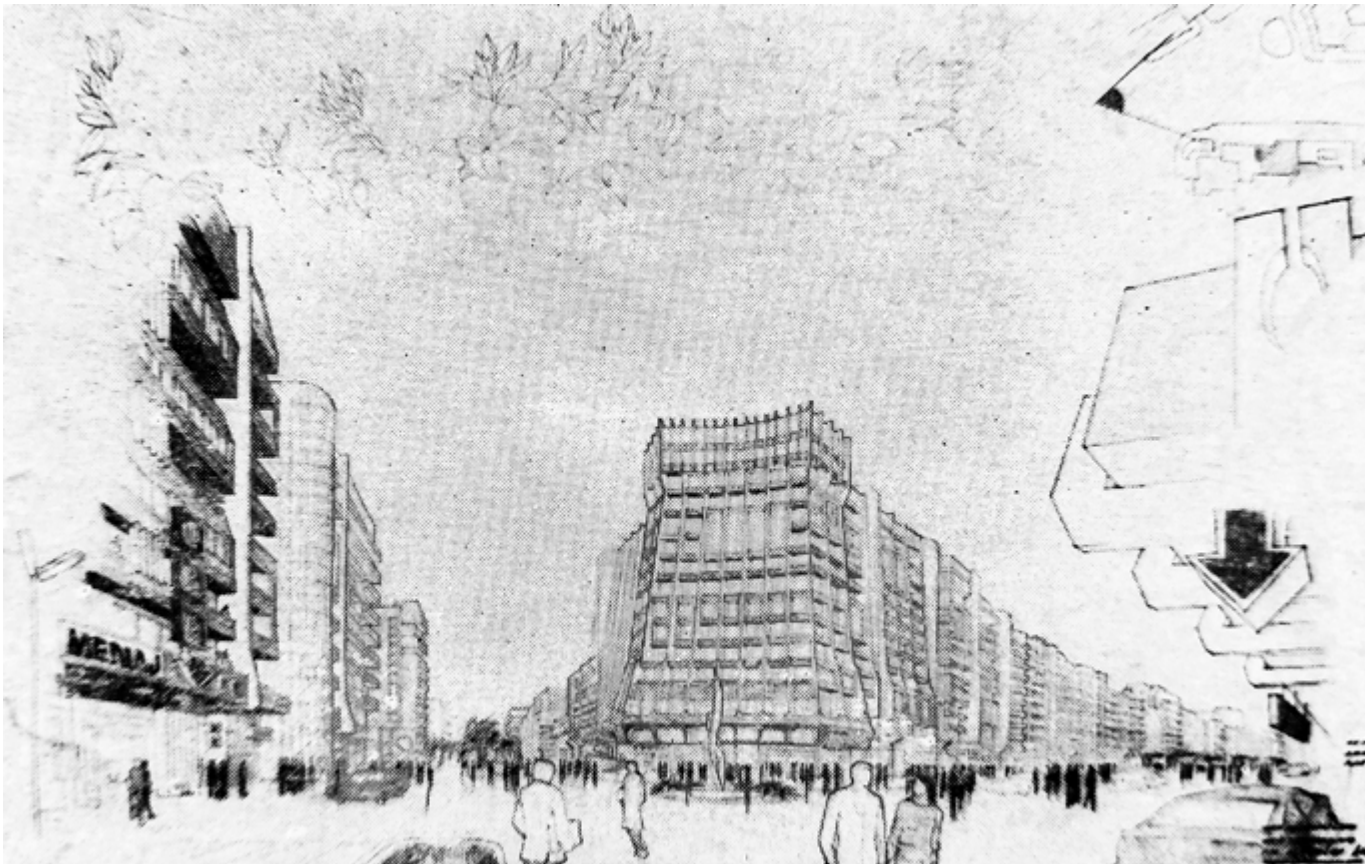


building density like the Colentina neighborhood (1977–1980, northeast), where vertical housing was emphasized in buildings over 12 floors. Derived from the microrayon formula, the residential complexes aimed for the distribution of housing groups following the model of enclosed spaces, but with configurations featuring the axial dominance of buildings along the street frontage, while concentrating parking lots, green spaces, and playgrounds within the interior perimeter. At the level of composite urban units, the law stipulated the provision of parks for 8,000-10,000 residents, but this aspect was overshadowed by the pace of systematization in these areas until the 1980s. The composite approach resulted in a branching infrastructure with secondary streets having 1–2 lanes in each direction or one-way capillaries. This aspect was often regarded as a deficient factor in the “cohesion of the entire urban organism”²⁰. Moreover, contemporary authors observed the distortion of the principles governing social dynamics, in terms of the arrangement of social-cultural facilities within the complex urban units based on their service area. As a result, the public spaces of neighborhoods, such as local squares and markets, were subsumed to the secondary planning rationales.

On the scale of the capital, these aspects were greatly exacerbated, especially through the massive implementation of complex urban units in underdeveloped areas like Rahova, Aviatorilor, and Berceni. The density graph experienced massive increases due to the number of housing units, despite the inflation of spatial effects by the legal measures aimed at improving the quality of life, such as increasing the area per inhabitant from 8.8 square meters in 1977 to 10.5 in 1985, reaching over 12 square meters after 1989. Consequently, the large neighborhoods in the second and third rings experienced the addition of thousands of new housing units in the 1980s, comparable in terms of connectivity variables and green infrastructure. The systematization agendas considered areas where parks were planned until the 1970s as providing a compensating strategy for the largest projects of successive additions and expansions, such as Colentina and Titan-Balta Albă. However, this method could not be considered a constant factor, as seen in the case of Militari’s and Rahova’s ensembles, neighborhoods with minimal amenities. Despite this, green infrastructure projects were treated almost incidentally in the 1980s for smaller-scale ensembles like Crângași, where the leisure facilities at Morii Lake were designed on the city’s periphery. However, beyond these debatably sensitive differences, the graphs depicting the socially directed distribution established by the State, as the main sponsor of housing construction and the architect of the socialist society, were divided functionally based on roles in production and ideologically based on loyalty to the ideals of the Romanian Communist Party, displaying the situation that occurred in the city center.

The Struggle for Urban Centeredness

The deficiencies in the approaches toward the housing fabric between the peri-central ring and the peripheral zone were much more pronounced in the case of residential area systematization in the central ring, approaching similar patterns of covering key connection routes between the center and residential complexes. However, this time the plans argued the necessity of front expansion



**SKETCH OF THE CORNER
PROPOSAL AT THE CROSSROAD
BETWEEN NICOLAE TITULESCU
BOULEVARD**

NÁVRH ROHU NA KRIŽOVATKE
MEDZI BULVÁROM NICOLAE
TITULESCU

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 23(4),
1975, pp. 40–42

through some of the historical areas characterized by low occupation density. By 1975, new proposals had been explored along the northern side of the second ring, with Nicolae Titulescu Boulevard systematized by extending the Iancului-Obor new housing frontages to the west towards Victoriei Square, one of the four polarizing nodes of the major intersecting arteries cutting through the center. Using a similar approach, the frontage was extended to the entrance of Calea Dorobanților in 1977 in the northeast. While in the Pantelimon ensembles' project, the demolition was justified based on the mobility plan and economic profile, the new housing projects involved demolishing a part of the historical urban fabric and replacing it with belts of high-rise residential buildings to increase density and land use, thus increasing the amounts of state funds used in systematization. All the same, the actual planning of the housing ensembles in the center was truly articulated only following the devastating earthquake in March 1977, with a magnitude of 7.4 Mw²¹, which damaged or destroyed many interwar buildings. The reconstruction efforts were followed by massive interventions and demolitions in the 1980s in the areas between Mihai Vodă Monastery and Unirii Square. The focal point, however, was Arsenal Hill, where the Republic House (Palace of the Parliament) was proposed. As such, the conception of the housing ensembles in the center surpassed the simple functional attribute towards an urban composition aiming for a symbolic urban footprint of the totalitarian regime. In this sense, the housing front of Victoria Socialismului [Victory of Socialism] Boulevard, whose axis focused on the Casa Republicii, and that of the Uranus neighborhood, unfolding along its long sides, had become supporting elements of the new administrative center. The unfolding of the new ensembles marked, in itself, the background of a public space of the street and the Unirii Square and Alba-Iulia Square, unique in the approach of those decades, including through the language of classical interpretation.

The streets' ambience varied from green spaces acting as a barrier to the boulevard on the axis of Victoria Socialismului to their complete absence on the parallel axis to the west of the Republic House. The chance to move beyond the limits of functionalist imagery and the offer of spacious housing units provided in the systematization of these arteries attracted interest in participation from multiple architects²². However, despite the different approach to the street ambience and

**THE SYSTEMATIZATION
OF NICOLAE TITULESCU
BOULEVARD THROUGH
CORRIDORS OF HOUSING
ESTATES AND HOUSING GROUPS
ENCLOSURES**

SYSTEMATIZÁCIA BULVÁRU
NICOLAE TITULESCU
PROSTREDNÍCTVOM KORIDOROV
SÍDLISK A ZÁSTAVBY OBYTNÝCH
SKUPÍN

Source Zdroj: Arhitectura, 23(4),
1975, pp. 40–42



**THE 90S MAP OF BUCHAREST:
LOCATIONS AND SIZES OF THE
MAIN HOUSING QUARTERS
PLANNED DURING 1974–1989**

MAPA BUKUREŠTI Z 90. ROKOV:
UMIESTNENIE A VEĽKOSŤ
HLAVNÝCH OBYTNÝCH
ŠTVRTÍ PLÁNOVANÝCH
V ROKOCH 1974 – 1989

Author Autor: Cosmina Bouaru, 2023



public functions within the artery, the new frontage alignment brings forth another set of challenges due to its congested and incomplete planning. The displacement of a significant length of the major historical fabric resulted in the emergence of residual spaces in the rear area of the ensembles. Thus, unlike the enclosed environments of the ensembles created in the other rings, the sporadic perforations of these long frontages reveal spaces both utilitarian and unwelcoming. The same situation arises in the case of the connection segment between Arsenal Hill and Drumul Taberei (to the west) and Rahova (to the southeast), in the systematization of the housing ensembles of 13 Septembrie Boulevard with higher-comfort apartments. Despite the notably simplified approach of the street ambiance, behind these frontages these utilitarian spaces become the connection zone between the old individual housing area and the new ensembles.

This situation was perpetuated after 1989 Revolution: the city center was still under construction, and the prolonging segments of Victoria Socialismului boulevard towards the eastern side were only completed after 1990. Despite the cramped parking lots within the housing clusters, paradoxically, there was no significant compensation for the flawed approach to the public space behind the street frontage. The civic center, despite its proximity, resembled more a fortress than a space for the people, even with the systematization of Izvor Park (the park with the least shade in Bucharest). However, the consequences of faulty planning and the forced insertion of large housing estates into the historic fabric led to mutations in local and still wider social dynamics and distribution, presenting more challenging conditions than the ensembles in the peripheral and second rings.

The Social Dimensions of the Dwelling Project of the 1970s–1980s

The period from 1975 to 1989 witnessed an amplification of the quantitative dimension in the expansion or densification of areas in Bucharest, spanning 11 neighborhoods. Some of these neighborhoods reached completion in the first decade after the Revolution. However, beyond the urbanistic aspects, their performance as a foundation for life and the social unification of the residents was subject to mechanisms of social differentiation driven by the ideological and economic underpinnings of the executive apparatus. In the 1980s, state power exerted its firm control over the housing stock, enforcing restrictions on the economic status of families, confining them to a single dwelling even in cases where homes were purchased. The residents, in turn, were regarded as temporary occupants, liable to be relocated at any given time. Interestingly, the construction direction relying on public funds allocated a mere 4.3% (1980) the NMP, a figure noticeably inferior to that of other nations when it came to the development of expansive complexes²³. This coordinated effort sought to allocate the housing stock based on carefully curated waiting lists²⁴, primarily prioritizing the qualification criterion as a productive force, firmly emphasizing the significance of production until the external debt had been effectively settled. Regrettably, the non-working class, constituting an estimated 3%²⁵ of the country's population during the 1980s, was deprived of access to state-provided housing.

While the criterion of workplace proximity determined the population allocation, disparities in living conditions were influenced by the benchmark of political loyalty, particularly following the purging of non-party members from institutions after 1971²⁶. These disparities, evident at first glance, favored the party nomenklatura and military cadres, who were slated for relocation in the first ring encompassing Victoria Socialismului Boulevard, 13 Septembrie Avenue, and Panduri Road. However, the conditions of livability revealed significant variations even within the second zone. Notably, Drumul Taberei emerged as a neighborhood of higher rank compared to Balta-Albă-Titan, with differences increasing towards the periphery²⁷.

Nevertheless, the state's agenda diminished the social stability of the living environment. Firstly, this was achieved through the integration of a framework for social activity, driven by ideological motives (mitigating the unpredictability of ideational exchange) and economic considerations, necessitated by the extensive densification across vast distances and swift population relocations. The mobilization of the population across different areas of the capital acted as a catalyst for social blending, typically involving the first generation of Bucharest residents, comprising individuals from rural regions or former owners of housing stock slated for demolition in the 1980s. From this perspective, the highest level of immobility was observed in peripheral and central neighborhoods, where a forced amalgamation occurred in the urban fabric, blending the lifestyles of detached-house owners with that of the new types of dwellings²⁸. As can be imagined, the shortcomings of the interstitial spaces exacerbated the contradiction within these intermingling realities in central areas, which could be characterized by sterile or conflictual social dynamics. However, the essence of the 1970s–80s past-the-frontage communities is

evident among the inhabitants of the second ring and peripheral housing ensembles. This group experienced an interesting evolution after the 1989 Revolution.

The Situation of Collective Housing in Bucharest after 1990

After 45 years of a centralized economy, the 1989 shift towards a free market and individuality unfolded amid a transitioning capital city and a socially and economically vulnerable urban landscape. Subsequent decades saw a significant transformation in housing, affecting both its structure and the way the inherited housing stock is inhabited. This transformation is influenced by the evolving planning approach following the 1990 economic decentralization.

Regarding housing production, this shift created a favourable environment for the multifaceted emergence of the private sector, gradually phasing out state-owned planning enterprises by the early 2000s and paving the way for development driven by private investment. These changes can be attributed to the delays and the thwarted political momentum resulting from the perpetuation of certain entrenched power structures, which undermined the promises of the technocratic movement²⁹. The absence of a cohesive economic strategy towards the free market caused a slowdown in the process of economic recovery. Likewise, inconsistent management of privatization after 1991 had a profound impact on the housing stock and the functioning of production units. In 1990, the privatization of IPB through the MEBO method³⁰ marked a pivotal moment, shifting the emphasis from habitability studies and large-scale projects towards liberal practices. On one hand, the effects of these dynamics are discernible in the disparities between the number of housing units created in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with production declining by 50%³¹. Over the course of a decade, the focus shifted towards the completion of previously planned ensembles. One improvement here occurred in the partial modification of growth rates to reach 14.7 square meters per dwelling, in alignment with international housing standards³². Additionally, the State Housing Association (ANL), established in 1999, played a role in providing affordable housing for the increasing number of individuals affected by the rise in unemployment rates resulting from privatization measures, and in stimulating demand within the housing quarters. However, many of these state housing projects were mainly developed in peripheral zones or occasionally inserted at the margins of collective housing and industrial areas.

On the other hand, the old planning rationales were replaced by ambiguous state initiatives in the realm of planning. Being primarily limited to municipal concerns, they sought to address urban planning regulations through the new General Urban Plan. However, no clear strategies were proposed for investment in complementary facilities and infrastructure solutions for the already designed housing ensembles. Moreover, the rapidly changing ratio between private and state investments, from 1:7 in 1990 to 10:1 in 2008, occurred without the state acknowledging the consequences of the future privatization of most former industrial and service areas. Therefore, two-sided new terms confronted the prospective social and economic aspects of a so-called capital of a democratic state with the habitability of the 1970s–1980s housing ensembles, in terms of population mobility and the approach to the inherited housing stock.

Against the urbanization policies that failed to address the actual demand and instead served as political aspirations, the decentralization of housing production was shortly counterbalanced with demographic decline fueled by significant emigration between 1992 and 2002³³. Moreover, a segment of the working class population began to return back to rural areas from where they had been previously moved under communism. In Bucharest alone, more than 100,000 residents relocated from the municipality, with this number doubling in the first decade of the new millennium, leading to a population density reduction from 8,687.2 to 8,093.8 inhabitants per square kilometer from 1992 until 2002³⁴. Given the unstable economic transition, the demographic decline reflected only one component of the fragility of the living environment built in recent decades, incapable of fostering a sense of belonging. As the 20th century drew to a close, political directives were replaced by circumstances revealing the lack of comfort and adaptability in the new life within housing ensembles. After 1990, a new form of mobility emerged, driven by individual ownership decisions. Apartment transfers took place through exchanges, rentals, and later accelerated purchases, due to a significant drop in apartment prices until 2004. However, these changes resulted in constant instability within the tenant community, particularly with the infiltration of foreign economic agents who acquired multiple apartments, sometimes renting them to commercial entities sharing the same residential floors. Simultaneously, the diminishing demand for collective housing was

counterbalanced by the manifestation of the population's growing preference for individuality. As a result, Bucharest experienced peripheral expansion in neighborhoods characterized by individual housing, primarily in the northern and southern regions of the capital. These areas, initially marked by underdeveloped infrastructure, later became tributaries to major traffic arteries, which continue to be heavily utilized despite the decline in their previous production-oriented milestones.

The rematerialization of land rent led to the emergence of uneven and often inadequate neighborhood amenities that failed to meet the residents' needs. Despite ongoing development projects, neighborhood public services and spaces were neglected, such as local markets and public medical facilities. Instead, empty lots along the main boulevards of Militari, Pantelimon, and Rahova became sites for the construction of malls. Ironically, some of these significant private investments became the nuclei for neighborhoods where the planning of the 1970s and 1980s sacrificed elements that could have helped generate a sense of place³⁵. Thus for almost two decades, life in the inherited housing 1970s–80s ensembles has reflected a rationalized existence between blocks, characterized by unhealthy public spaces and long, unfriendly pedestrian distances along incomplete boulevards to most facilities and parks. These factors had a profound impact on the social dynamics of neighborhoods surrounding residential blocks, raising concerns about spontaneous interventions by tenants in green spaces, aiming to enhance local comfort and promote personalization. Recognizing the need for improvement, the municipal authorities of Bucharest took the initiative in the early 2000s to establish children's playgrounds within the enclosed areas between the blocks. Consequently, these areas generally appeal to a broad social spectrum, sometimes forming the sole refuge from the noisy streets at the front. As an unintended consequence, these factors have given rise to a peripheral culture, even within some neighborhoods situated within the second ring.

Conclusions

Despite three decades having elapsed since the transition to a liberal economy, the issue of housing density in Bucharest remains a prominent topic, particularly considering that a large portion of the housing stock built between 1974 and 1989 is still in use today. Hence, it is crucial to examine the contrasting expressions of the situation in the large housing complexes of Bucharest before and after 1989. The recent phase of urban planning established a challenging framework for cohabitation within these extensive neighborhoods and their transition to a post-socialist urban landscape.

As it stands, the "housing front" displays the epitome of totalitarian planning of life in the 1970s and 1980s—a restrictive approach, blind to the available alternatives that could enable different ratios between the quality of life and production through different economical and social actors. Originally designed for and by a centralized economy, Bucharest's recent neighborhoods struggled to accommodate the evolving urban organism in terms of access to goods and the changing patterns of commuting, aspects gradually exacerbated in post-socialist decades. Despite attempts at the renewal of urban planning regulation, the cladding of major boulevards, and the reduced vitality in the latest ensembles created during socialism, their status has shifted from a superfluous instrument of urbanization to a challenge for the capital city in its continuous expansion. Eventually, some of the deficiencies in the 11 neighborhoods either became or created conditions for urban mobility over time, on amenities and design.

The present article proposes a causal examination of the urban and social dimensions within and beyond the 'long front' of housing during the last decades of socialism, considering the transition to a mosaic-like urban built environment and social dynamics fueled by new capitalist aspirations after 1990.

- 1 CLAPHAM, David, HEGEDUS, Jozsef, KINTREA, Keith, TOSICS, Ivan and KAY Hellen. 1996. *Housing Privatization in Eastern Europe*. Westport: Greenwood Press, pp. 15–17.
- 2 See GYÖNGYI, Pasztor and LÁSZLÓ, Peter. 2009. Romanian Housing Problems: Past and present. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Sociologia*, 54(1), p. 14.
- 3 Unlike the countries in Central Europe, such as Hungary, where privatization began in 1980 (in 1980, only 34.1% of the housing stock was financed by the state), or Poland (1980 – 18.2%) and Czechoslovakia (1980 – 38.8%), where construction cooperatives existed, in the S.R.R., housing represented one of the main instruments of the State for direct and indirect quantification of production (1980 – 94.3%) and, therefore, territorial remodeling. RUNCEANU, Claudiu. 2014. *Evoluția și recalificarea ansamblurilor de locuințe din București. Mize și oportunități*. Bucharest: Editura Universității Ion Mincu, p. 79.
- 4 *Act 10 regarding the Committee for the Issues of Popular Councils, 25 June 1973*. Great National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Available at: <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/26387> (Accessed: 30 March 2023).
- 5 IONESCU, Grigore. 1982. *Arhitectura pe teritoriul României de-a lungul veacurilor*. Bucharest: Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, p. 609.
- 6 LĂZĂRESCU, Cezar. 1977. *Urbanismul în România*. Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, pp. 9–12.
- 7 Typically, the rationales discussed within the Union of Architects of the Romanian Socialist Republic were based on the idea of alignment with the official shift towards a functionalist direction in 1958, which viewed architecture primarily as a science of construction, coupled with the prefabricated building-component industry to optimize national investments. Therefore the paradigms they addressed at during the Housing Colloquium of the International Union of Architects (of CEE Countries) in 1966 remained within similar parameters, aiming to enhance the efficiency of design techniques and themes by establishing housing requirements and maximum floor areas. The concern for calculation and rationalization could be motivated by the pressure of predetermined deadlines in the five-year plans, targeting elements of “progress” that were meant to become the foundation for the activities and lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Following this path, the discussion was shifted in the 1970s and 80s towards mathematical models that could be used for calculating the housing exigencies.
- 8 RUNCEANU, Claudiu. 2014. *Evoluția și recalificarea ansamblurilor de locuințe din București. Mize și oportunități*. Bucharest: Editura Universității Ion Mincu, pp. 82–84.
- 9 PANAITESCU, Alexandru. 2012. *De la Casa Scânteii la Casa Poporului. Patru decenii de arhitectură în București 1945–1989*. Bucharest: Simetria, pp. 167–169.
- 10 LĂZĂRESCU, Cezar. 1975. Probleme actuale ale urbanizării în țara noastră. *Arhitectura*, 23(4), p. 10.
- 11 *Act no. 58 regarding the systematization of territory and urban and rural settlements, 1 November 1974*. Great National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Available at: <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/351>. Law 58 established the recommended height for constructions in the urban environment 5 levels and not less than 2 levels. Article 4 stated that “In order to obtain an optimal density, the executive committees of the popular councils will take measures for the location of homes and in completed complexes, aiming to harmonize new constructions with existing ones”.
- 12 DERER, Peter. 1985. *Locuirea Urbană. Schiță pentru o abordare evolutivă*. Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, pp. 150–155.
- 13 MIHALI, Ciprian and IOAN, Augustin. 2013. *Identitatea urbană*. Bucharest: Paideia, pp. 92–93.
- 14 Derer, P., 1985, p. 160.
- 15 Act no. 37 regarding the systematization, design, and implementation of traffic arteries in urban and rural localities, 26 November 1975. Great National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Available at: <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/173522>. The law mandated the extension of at least two roads within the city to facilitate these developments.
- 16 The capital’s metro line was a topic of debate for two decades, being defined in the Central Committee’s CeX meeting in 1973 as a necessary measure to improve urban transportation conditions, aligning with the ambitious plans to increase the population in the capital.
- 17 JUGURICĂ, Constantin. 1975. Probleme ale dezvoltării zonelor centrale ale municipiului București în etapa 1976–1980. *Arhitectura*, 23(4), p. 10.
- 18 GHELMAN, René, HARITON, Dinu and NĂDRAG, Gheorghe. 1977. Șoseaua Iancului. *Arhitectura*, 25(6), pp. 28–29.
- 19 There were 25 square metres allocated for each parking space including maneuvering space. Spaces originally intended for functions other than residential would end up being occupied by blocks of flats.
- 20 MATEI, Adriana. 1979. Mutații sociale determinate de schimbările conceptului de locuire în condițiile urbanizării. *Arhitectura*, 27(1), p. 34.
- 21 Bucharest suffered the most significant material damage and loss of human lives following the earthquake on March 4, 1977. The seismic traces were primarily localized in the central area, where 28 tall buildings from the pre-1940 period collapsed, and another 150 were significantly damaged. The investments for reconstruction amounted to 1.4 billion old lei out of the total 2 billion invested nationwide. Sources: GEORGESCU, Emil Sever. 2001. Seismele și speranțele secolului XXI. *Tribuna Construcțiilor*, 3(5); IACOB, Ana. 2017. București – Locuri și oameni – După cutremurătoarea noapte din 4 martie 1977. *București – Materiale de Istorie și Muzeografie*, 31(1), pp. 178–179 [online]. Available at: <http://bmim.muzeulbucurestiului.ro/> (Accessed: 30 March 2023).
- 22 Panaitescu, A., 2012, pp. 167–169.
- 23 DAN, Adrian and DAN, Mariana. 2003. Housing Policy in Romania in Transition: between State Withdrawal and Market Collapse. In: The International Conference of FSSU. Sibiu, Romania, 2003. Sibiu: Psihomedica, p. 14.
- 24 TSENKOVA, Sasha. 2000. *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe: Space, Institutions and Policy*. doi: 10.1007/3-7908-1727-9.
- 25 Dan, A. and Dan, M., 2003, p. 6.
- 26 Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (coord. TISMĂNEANU, Vladimir). 2007. *Raport Final*. Bucharest: Humanitas, p. 34.
- 27 RUNCEANU, Claudiu. 2014. *Evoluția și recalificarea ansamblurilor de locuințe din București. Mize și oportunități*. Bucharest: Editura Universității Ion Mincu, pp. 82–84.
- 28 SUDITU, Bogdan. 2016. *Bucureștii în locuințe și locuitori de la începuturi până mai ieri (1459–1989)*. Bucharest: Compania, pp. 197–198.
- 29 See also FLOREA, Ioana, GAGYI, Agnes and JACOBSSON, Kerstin. 2022. *Contemporary Housing Struggles. A Structural Field of Contention Approach*. [online]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-97405-3> (Accessed: 10 April 2023).
- 30 Following the publish of Law 58 regarding privatisation of commercial societies in August 14th 1991, several enterprises were privatized by MEBO (Management and Employee Buyout) method in the first wave spanning between 1992–1995.
- 31 STANILOV, Kiril. 2007. *The Post-Socialist City Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism*. Dordrecht: Springer, p. 174.
- 32 Among the CEE countries, Romania ranked second (after Lithuania) in the ranking of the largest increases in average living area, from 40 sqm in 1990 when the average size of an apartment was 40 sqm, to 47 sqm in 1995, to 73 sqm in 2000, approaching the European standard of 70 sqm. (Stanilov, K., 2007, p. 176).
- 33 DE HAAS, Hein and VEZZOLI, Simona. 2018. *European Migrations: Dynamics, drivers, and the role of policies* [online]. EUR 29060 EN. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi: 10.2760/168653. The article recalls a number of over 300,000 individuals leaving Romania.
- 34 INS – Direcția Regională de Statistică a Municipiului București (eds.). 2012. *Anuarul Statistic Al Municipiului București 2012* [online] Available at: <https://bucuresti.insse.ro/arhive-anuare/> (Accessed: 10 April 2023).
- 35 Recalling N. Altman and I. Low’s 1992 study *Place attachment*, the following article measures the new neighbourhoods identity in terms elements that support attributes as places of attachment and places of symbol: STOICULESCU, Robert, HUZUI Alina and CHICOȘ Alina. 2013. Polarisation of Social Inequalities in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods of Bucharest Metropolis. *Romanian Review of Regional Studies*, 9(1), pp. 66–67.