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WHAT IF THEY WERE | RECONSIDERING (SOCIAL) HOUSING IN BUCHAREST.

Why would not an ensemble of social houses work in a central area of Bucharest?

In terms of living, there cannot be a more important and present problem than that of social housing. My intention of studying the social housing program emerges from the desire to understand the socio-economic mechanisms underlying the implementation of this program and the role the city can play in solving the problems that the necessity of social housing raises. If *social housing* is an institution where we place those individuals whose behavior is "outside the norm" based solely on a precarious economic situation, a heterotopia of deviation, the problem seems to be more deeply rooted in the collective subconscious.

In what context do we ask ourselves about social housing and would it not be more honest to consider housing as a social one in general?

In order to better understand the current situation of social housing in Romania and to anchor this study in real life through empirical data, I will provide interviews with residents of the social housing district of Bucharest, "Odai".

Bucharest. Facts and phenomena.

abstract

This first chapter aims to evaluate the urban and social characteristics of Bucharest, by making a short incursion in the social history of the city and analyzing elements related to urban morphology and syntax. In order to better understand the size of the challenges that the city may impose on the diploma project *Reconsidering (social) housing in Bucharest*, the analysis starts from a general framework, a macro perspective of the *city*, then focusing on a meso plan of *the central areas* of the city and reaching at a micro-scale of the *neighborhood*, through the community filter.

Bucharest hosts two major phenomena related to alert urbanization, (1)*gentrification* and (2)*ghettoisation*, processes of interiorization of the communities living in the central areas of the city and peripheral areas, respectively. Without any apparent connection, the two phenomena brought into question highlight the deepening of the social cleavage that the economy of the past 25 years creates through class inequalities and poverty, features physically manifested by the current state of the habitat.

We will therefore analyze how a certain type of living can help us understand the importance of the habitat (neighborhood) in the life of a community, and how the need for belonging to a community can influence the whole dynamic of an urban mechanism.

social diversity

the development of the city. The city is not just the architecture of the buildings it hosts, it also resides in all the types of relationships that settle between places and inhabitants, the connections that people make between different places in the city, regardless of the distance, and which places set between inhabitants of different neighborhoods.

A social, cultural and neighborhood mapping is needed to see the dynamics of the city and the magnitude of the effects of the two urban phenomena we mentioned above.

social diversity. the footprint of history on the inhabitants of Bucharest. The city is the result of overlapping feudal, modern, communist and capitalist intentions and interventions. In the collective sense, the city center coincides with the historical center that overlaps with the old Court of Commerce of the Princely Court. The inhabitants of these areas have constantly changed and have adapted to the new rules and patterns of housing the private and public spaces - from the feudal society to the reorganization of the social structure on liberal criteria at the beginning of the 20th century[1], to social equalization based on positive segregation in communism through *social mobility*. *How are the central areas of the city today? Who lives in the peripheries?*

urban phenomena

gentrification. the social dimension. *Gentrification*, a highly visible process of neighborhood modernization and tissue regeneration, also involves moving a lower category of inhabitants outside the central areas of the city and replacing them with a younger and more economically advantageous category. Chelcea, Popescu, Cristea[2] support the idea of the existence of several types of gentrification actors, from state tenants, former owners, external actors, political capitalists to institutional investors. In the case of Bucharest, there is a close link between property ownership and gentrification: the post-socialist transformation of property rights on housing - their privatization, the retrocessions inevitably followed by massive evictions and subsequent commodification.

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[1] the period of social and ethnic diversity - landlords, administrative oligarchy, self-employed in the city center, craftsmen and workers in peripheral areas - *"Under the ethnic representation, at the 1899 census, Bucharest had a cosmopolitan character, inhabiting 186,623 Romanians, 43,318 overseas, 38,660 Austro-Hungarians, 3,698 Albanians, 2,968 Germans, 2,107 Italians, 1,358 Greeks, 938 Bulgarians, 732 Ottomans, 350 Swiss, etc., but also 6 Chinese and 2 Americans. "* - Interview with Bogdan Suditu, 2016.

[2] CHELCEA, L., POPESCU, R., CRISTEA, D. (2015): Who Are the Gentrifiers and How Do They Change Central City Neighbourhoods? Privatization, Commodification, and Gentrification in Bucharest. Geografie, 120, No. 2, p. 113–133.

ghettoization. a look at the periphery. In terms of the affected communities, Pulay[3] uses two concepts (1) "repair and maintenance citizenship" and (2) "incomplete citizenship". The first refers to the inhabitants that are directly affected by the waves of retrocessions and evictions (interventions on the city's infrastructure), the second concerns the *ghetto* communities, where stigma and resistance to change are the basic characteristics of inter-human connections. Not specific to the central areas of the city, ghettoisation generally occupies the unpleasing space of the outskirts, where access to the city infrastructure is difficult or inexistent, and territorial stigmatization is closely pursued by social stigmatization.[4]

two perspectives

problems. the two perspectives (1) social housing, (2) the city. In Bucharest, we are talking today about the wounds of the urban tissue and about the inhabitants' alienation and their loss of the public space. At the same time, we are witnessing a contemporary attitude of patrimony neglect and urbanistic interventions that seem to continue the wave of last century's massive demolitions (for example the Berzei-Buzeşti artery). The trend of expansion and development of the city is expressed through gentrification and ghettoisation, urban phenomena in the process of materialization, having as territorial support the central areas, respectively the peripheral areas of the city.

results. The city, as a body, begins to be dysfunctional; the periphery is no longer fed, the city turns its back on it, therefore it remains totally disconnected from the city life. From a formal point of view, the attention is not directed to central areas, but to the expansion of Bucharest, so *gentrification* acts spontaneously, becomes uncontrolled, which leads to inappropriate juxtapositions concerning scale, style and function. This becomes an out of control situation for the inhabitants of Bucharest, who

[3] Gergo Pulay, Networked infrastructures and the "local": Flows and connectivity in a postsocialist city, City 19(2-3): p. 344-355

[4] Historically, marginalized social categories of Bucharest are associated with Sector 5, Ferentari neighborhood - "bedroom" area with poor local infrastructure associated with high crime - Cătălin Berescu – Ghetoul şi zona de locuire defavorizată (ZLD) Aleea Livezilor, în BOTONOGU, Florin (coord.) – Comunităţi ascunse Ferentari, ed. Expert, Bucureşti, 2011, p. 39.

have difficulties in managing urban perspectives or the scale that is no longer directly addressed to them.

In an attempt to find responses to the formal and social issues raised by these urban phenomena, I propose a scenario based on the theory of *social mixity*, analyzing the costs and benefits of its implementation in the studied site, from two converging perspectives (1)the neighborhood, a perspective of morphology and syntax and (2) the inhabitant / the community, the social perspective.

Social housing as a tool.

abstract

At the basis of urban development there is a key concept, *social sustainability*[5]. This implies the existence of an environment favorable to a harmonious development of local society through social diversity - the coexistence of different social groups, social integration and the improvement of living conditions for all groups of citizens. The consequences of this process of social sustainable development would reduce both segregation and social exclusion, as well as social inequalities.

Through the scenario I propose, *social mix*, *social housing* plays a crucial role. It is not only a tool for maintaining social diversity that is a primary feature of the central areas of Bucharest, but also an instrument for the formal revitalization of the tissue. The dwelling intervenes in the city's syntax problems (broken neighborhood connections, inappropriate functions for community dynamics) and morphology, preserving the character of the studied area (from problems related to the height of the

[5] György Enyedi and Zoltán Kovács (eds) Social Changes and Social Sustainability in Historical Urban Centres.The Case of Central Europe. Discussion Papers Special. Pécs: Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2006.

cornice imposed by the existing regulations, to tissue reintegration - the specific occupation of the plots).

Inclusion versus exclusion

neighborhood - community - the precarious dwelling. In Park's acception[6], the concept of *community* is closely linked to the site, with local communities being defined as "natural areas" that are the result of competition between real estate and population groups struggling for home accessibility. Thus, the *neighborhood* can be defined as a collection of inhabitants and institutions occupying a clearly defined spatial area, influenced by ecological, cultural, economic and political factors - and subordinated to an extended community.

Finding the physical boundaries of a neighborhood, especially in the defragmented neighborhoods of Bucharest, is a difficult task in terms of social processes. Limits can be more easily understood by observing neighborhood interactions, spatial constraints that create *patterns* of everyday activities, defining community through behavior, and by the way individuals relate to dwelling.

What happens when the habitat becomes an insecure place and dwelling is precarious?

the terms of "*precariat*" and "*precarious dwelling*". With regard to social inequalities that are increasingly prevalent within cities, in an uncertain economic climate, the term *precarious* speaks about the uncertainties and risks of a developing social class[7] - without any prospect of a decent job or a reasonable standard of living. We can, therefore, direct the discussion to a *precarity of habitat* specific to disadvantaged communities. Situations that show housing precariousness include conditions that describe the poor

[6] Park R.1916.Suggestions for the investigations of human behavior in the urban environment. Am. J. Sociol. 20(5):577–61 pp. 147–154

[7] Guy Standing (May 24, 2011). "The Precariat – The new dangerous class" http://www.policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=4004&title=+The+Precariat+–+The+new+dangerous+class

physical structure of buildings and / or the dysfunctional relationship between the family and the space they live in - an uncertainty of living.

social inclusion. what is missing from the approach of *social housing* in Bucharest? In Bucharest, the social housing policy is not adapted to the real needs of citizens. The ratio between the number of social housing and the number of requesting families is extremely disproportionate, and the lack of transparency of housing allocation processes and the legislative blurring between state institutions become a network of uncertainties.

The social housing districts in the Romanian space use *space exclusion* as a tool for community control and at the same time as a way of quickly solving problems, without taking into account the effects that can occur in the long run. A route becomes intuitive: *spatial exclusion - social exclusion / marginalization - ghettoisation*. The examples are many, from Henri Coanda's social housing[8], the Micro 17 neighborhood of Galati, the Pata Rat situation[9]to the Odai neighborhood[10].

social mix

assumption. social mix - a possible solution? Can we assume that a diversity of habitat will create a *social mix*, and social diversity will certainly lead to the creation of *socio-economic opportunities* for disadvantaged individuals?[11] Starting from the problems that a homogeneous tissue can raise for the economic and cultural development, Andersson's question has drawn my attention not only from the social perspective of his approach but also from the benefits that this approach can bring for this type of environment.

[8] a neighborhood of social housing built near the city of Constanta, a container-built neighborhood where the high degree of crime and poor housing conditions turned it into a ghetto
[9] the Roma evicted from Cluj now living near the rubbish pit
[10] case studied in Chapter 3 of the paper, *Case studies*, study supported by interviews with three families living in the Odai neighborhood, a neighborhood without a real physical connection with Bucharest, outside the trolley line 304
[11] Musterd, Sako, Andersson, Roger, „Housing Mix, Social Mix and Social Opportunities" in URBAN AFFAIRS REVIEW, Vol. 40, No. 6, July 2005,p. 1-30

theory. Fighting discrimination and segregation by introducing the term *social mix*[12] in laws concerning housing and urbanization issues, is shaped by associating it with housing for the disadvantaged (Besson Law, 1990), or with social housing projects (the Law on Solidarity and Urban Regeneration, 2000). Social mix is both a condition - the cohabitation of different social groups on the same territory - and a process - to facilitate this cohabitation, in order to achieve a balanced distribution of the population in the territory[13].

The social mix applied on the built environment relies on its ability to impart an improvement in the quality of life of disadvantaged communities and an increase in social mobility. The theory is simple. The mix of habitat expressed by assemblies comprising social housing, public dwellings and private dwellings will create a socially and economically mixed community. This can also bring social opportunities to disadvantaged people, which, in other conditions of segregation-based urban configuration, are nonexistent. Through *social opportunities,* we understand the social, economic and spatial mobility that makes it easier for residents of a neighborhood to access public institutions, decent jobs, and education.

would a change in social dynamics not be beneficial to the city? and the *complexity of the social housing problem and the improbable plumbing of the defragmented urban tissue do not require a simple answer, the same answer?*

the Romanian case. At a local level, the social mix specific to Bucharest's center is rather spontaneous and appears as a result of the inefficiency of public policies and the lack of architectural programs that could exploit such a type of relationship generated by a heterogeneous social system. The architecture of buildings betrays the type of dwelling and the economic status of occupants and seems to be the one that sustains this cleavage. Hence the tendency to "clean" the "good" neighborhoods of the city by

[12] The concept is introduced by the law against social exclusion in 1998 in France (Gerbeau, 2015: 8)

[13] definition of the concept by AITEC specialists techniciens, experts et chercheurs) - aitec.reseau-ipam.org

segregating groups of people who are not economically and socially fit for the dynamics of the city center.

What is the case of social dwellings? They are located outside the “bedroom” neighbourhoods, outside the city skirts, a space with no clear boundaries, slightly tangent to the city, but distinctly separated by its lack of connections, an annex to which the city turns its back. The best example is the Odai neighborhood[14]. The clear, intransigent gesture of building the neighborhood outside the city does not encourage the formation of connections with the latter, and the residents of the neighborhood no longer belong to the Bucharest society.

benefits and costs of implementing social housing programs

in the city center

fear of urban ghettoisation. Inevitably, a question arises: are *we likely to bring the ghetto into the city center by proposing a social housing project located within walking distance of Victory Square?* I propose to focus our attention on the beneficial effects a social housing project can bring to a central neighborhood and vice versa.

According to a study on the effects of neighborhoods on a community[15], the problem of relocating disadvantaged families addressed from the perspective of behavioral and health-related consequences suggests that in homogeneous social groups phenomena leading to economic variations of neighborhoods are rather related to delinquency, depression, risk behaviors, especially among young people. Neighborhood influences the type of social connections, social control, mutual trust, institutional resources and routine of everyday activities. The influence of the "social" model of the "educated", the "wealthy" and the more likely to be accepted on the labor market is also important.

[14] district studied in Chapter 3 *Case Studies*

[15] Robert J. Sampson,1 Jeffrey D. Morenoff, and Thomas Gannon-Rowley, ASSESSING “NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS”: Social Processes and New Directions in Research , Annu. Rev. Sociol. 2002. 28:p. 443–478

The city would not suffer from this experiment, since ghettoisation is rather a consequence of poverty, not of exclusion. The culture of the poverty model implies that individuals from low-income communities show a low performance that they will retain, while the geography of the favorable model supports the idea of improving this performance in the case of increased opportunities[16]. Thus, residential mobility can provide a chance to improve the city's social and economic dynamics.

the social context of Bucharest. In the case of the studied area for the "Reconsidering (social) housing in Bucharest" project, the framework is a defragmented one. Even if we are analysing a central neighborhood, both the morphology and the architectural programs, along with the functions they house, talk about social diversity and a mix of dwelling. Given the presence of the UNARTE campus and the student hostels of ASE, we can identify an important student community. These are surrounded by collective and individual dwellings in good and working order. When relating to derelict buildings,[17] we can identify two other categories of residents, those with very low income or no income, but who risk losing their homes and homeless people or *squatters [18]*. Social diversity is already present in the central area of Bucharest, the problems are related rather to the lack of ownership of this diversity.

perspectives converge. Location is the key point in the development of social architecture and represents a first step in rethinking the program. By asking the question *of social housing*, access to city infrastructure and the primordial need for community membership, the answer does not indicate the outskirts of the cities.

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[16] JAMES E. ROSENBAUM, LISA REYNOLDS & STEFANIE DELUCA How Do Places Matter? The Geography of Opportunity, Self-efcacy and a Look Inside the Black Box of Residential Mobility, Housing Studies, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2002, p. 71–82

[17] According to the mapping of unused spaces in Bucharest, a study conducted by the CALUP platform, the studied area is located in the most dense *cluster* of unused spaces in Bucharest. Some of the dwellings in the immediate vicinity of the sites proposed for the diploma project are abandoned, have lost their jobs, many of which are now occupied without legal forms and in poor living conditions. Others are still in process of restitution, which will be followed by evictions; CALUP, http://beta.calup.ro/ro/explore

[18] squatter = a person who lives in a empty building without permission, Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus © Cambridge University Press

Case study.

The third chapter will focus on the local situation of the social housing by analyzing how urban phenomena and city development influence the social housing policy. The Bucharest case is a less discussed situation so far, the information required for the case study being extracted from interviews we have conducted with three families living in the Odai social housing district of Sector 1. It is very difficult to draw a conclusion on the possibility of ghettoization of Odai[19]. We can only see that the difficulties that have been presented to us are common, to some extent, to the whole neighborhood - social and spatial exclusion, housing insecurity and difficult access to infrastructure.

methodology. Given that social housing is a sensitive issue for both the state institutions facing this problem and the disadvantaged families who have applied for a social housing, finding a person to act as a gatekeeper and be familiar with Odai was preferable. However, Odai being a relatively new neighborhood, finding such a person turned out to be difficult. Also, noteworthy is the lack of empirical research regarding the Odai community, the only documents that provide us with quantitative information are the decisions of the Sector 1 City Hall in Bucharest regarding the allocation of social housing and the architectural project approvals.[20] The present research is a qualitative one and was conducted through direct discussions

[19] The Odai District is a district relatively new, built in 2012, the dwellings being put into use with 3-4 years.

[20] The social housing project in Soseaua Odăi, number 3-5, is part of a large social housing program called "The Decade of Housing". As presented by the City Hall of Sector 1 Bucharest, it is a solution to the housing problems of the persons evacuated after the restitution of the nationalized houses, but also of the economically disadvantaged people, who do not have a dwelling. To build this neighborhood, an investment was needed from local budget funds. There are, therefore, nine blocks with 414 apartments benefiting persons included in the above mentioned categories, a 440sqm kindergarten, a park and commercial spaces of 1650sqm, the project being completed by the end of 2013. The legal provisions to enter possession of a social housing are regulated according to GO no. 19/1994, the dwellings being awarded after a score according to the criteria fulfilled. However, housing distribution processes are non-transparent, legislation becomes blurred by overlapping competencies and competencies between state institutions.

with families in their own homes based on semi-structured interviews[21]. Families we've approached have been randomly selected and will remain anonymous.

Field diary.

March 30, 2017. P. now lives with his wife and three of his children in a two-room apartment on the 1st floor. They received their apartment in December 2013 after having waited 15 years for the allocation. They had been evicted from a house near Cismigiu following the retrocession. P. tells me that he liked to have a courtyard, and now living in the apartment building seems tedious.

P .: *"So with five children, they gave us two rooms, seven people, two rooms (...) sleeping cramped, but we have to do with what we have. To have a roof over your head, as they say"*

P. did construction work for a long time, but because of his asthma he cannot work anymore, the construction site moved at home. He keeps on investing in the apartment to *"bring it to reality"*. In the living room we sit around the table, me and my colleague, P., his wife, a neighbor and their two young girls. They are 7 and 9 and go to a weekly boarding school in Dămăroaia, but they have been staying home for a few days, they got sick because of the mold in the house. The elder son is not at home, he's 16, and he's left school. P. hopes to find him a job.

P .: *"I even painted the walls and more mold appeared. So I do not know what to do next. I was going to put tiles everywhere, in all rooms (...) I still have a problem, I'm telling you that there are bedbugs. I don't know where they appear from. I tried all kind of chemicals but nothing works."*

[21] Field visits and interviews were carried out with the help of Arina Iacob, PhD student at SNSPA Bucharest.





The photos were taken with the consent of Mr. P.

The neighborhood does not seem to favor the existence of a community, even if the shortcomings and problems are common. The lack of common spaces and the precarious interactions are the basis of the relationship between neighbors. I also learned from them that the kindergarten and the commercial building are not functional. The closest store is in a gas station, a 15-minute walk away, the ambulances take 5 hours to make a call, and the bus needs at least an hour and a half to reach the center, and that, when it makes the stop.

P .: *"When I first saw it, I really enjoyed it. When you first come to a new house everything is ok but when you figure out what it is like.."*

On the ground floor of the same building, I met D and her daughter. Three generations live in the dark 3-room apartment, D., her daughter and her two grandchildren, her son and his wife, a total of 6 people. They do not have any more furniture in the house, they sleep on mattresses or blankets, the furniture they threw away because of mold and bedbugs. D. is a widow, she has raised her two children alone and was very happy about the allocation. When she saw herself at the edge of the city, she wanted to leave.

daughter: *"The children were infected from the bedbugs"*

D:*" They told me not to give up this apartment because I won't be getting another one(...)the doors fell on us..what we have suffered. They told me i*

was not allowed to change anything, because i was not the owner. And when will I become? "



The photos were taken with the consent of Mrs. D.

They moved from Ciocanesti of Dambovita in Bucharest to Matache Square in her aunt’s house for the girl's surgeries. The mother is working as a street sweeper. Now she faces 4-week notice. She's afraid she will not find a job anymore.

D: *"All winter I lived with rags down (at the door) not to freeze (...) What to do first? To buy a door or to eat? (...) I've been working for 20 years. Here we used ro throw the garbage "*

*"I did not like the area, **I felt like a stranger**. I say, lady, what am i supposed to do here in the field? I say, what have they built here where we used to bring the garbage? I recognized the place. And I did not like this building, the last one, here, why is my name here, exactly on this door?"*(D., interviewed March 30, 2017)

Conclusions or instead of.

In search for a common answer both for the morphology and syntax problems of Bucharest and for the problems that the social dwelling raises in the Romanian space has led to finding a possible solution through the theory of social mix and the mix of habitat. The paper proposes a possible scenario and aims to analyze it from two converging perspectives, the city perspective and the perspective of society.

The current situation of social housing in Romania is problematic by the stigma accompanying the concept. We can conclude, following the presentation of the Odai neighbourhood, that the social housing does not occupy a privileged position either within the city or within the society.

Social housing is therefore not only an end in itself, but also an instrument for the formal revitalization of tissue in the central areas of the city, formally intervening in redefining the morphology of the habitat (by form, scale, land occupation), restoring broken connections. It becomes an instrument for maintaining the social diversity specific to Bucharest, an instrument of social mix.

What if they were it is not a question, but rather an invitation, a removal from the comfort zone. Let us imagine that we can do better.