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A NEIGHBOURHOOD. A HOME. 20 YEARS

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, a melting pot of dwellings, collective and individually, of green areas, parks and small crop gardens, connected by a series of streets and alleys, having between them a set of complex relationships, sometimes dichotomic.
THE HOME, the space where most of our lifetime is spent, a space of experiences, of intimacy, of memories, a world full of dreams and aspirations, in which we contemplate them. A space subject to transformations that, in turn, influences, sometimes unconsciously, its habitants and altering the attributes of living.
THE HUMAN BEING, a link between the two, giving identity to a place, while also adopting it, thus forming a community.

Timisoara is constantly developing, construction sites keep on appearing everyday with more and more cranes that stretch high in the sky. The city won its title of Capital of Culture for 2021 so apartments from new residential districts sell like hotcakes. Everyone tries to catch an apartment at a fair price, always searching for a good location in the ongoing chaos settled over the urban area, but still, will they be able to build a strong community as fast as the flats rise? Or do they perceive them as independent houses which only lack the private backyard? On its way, the expanding city often meets other settlements, which are integrated in its urban tissue. The latter begin to gradually lose their rurality, the population changes and mingles, loses certain habits and assimilates new ones, the attributes of dwelling alter and life seems to be trying to adjust itself to the new conditions, in a perpetual interdependence with the space and with the environment. Almost imperceptibly, the area of houses blends in with the area of tenements, resulting in new spatial relations and in new human behaviours. The herd of cows which can be observed on the road in the morning and in the evening decreases each year, becoming merely a memory, among the many others the neighbourhood would have left in some people's minds. The spaces behind the tenements inevitably adjoin the gardens in which people still cultivate vegetables.

The tendency people have, to associate space and different elements of urban design with necessities, comes from us being part of a utilization cycle, most of the time unaware of it, when talking about how a space should be used and how it's actually used, starting with a dynamic behaviour stretching in the whole neighbourhood, characteristic to children, from running and climbing all the way to playing „Hide and seek" in all sorts of recesses, passing to teenagers that gather in key points around the neighbourhood for chattering in the evenings, to adults who meet up around small market shops and tenements' corners to discuss, ending with elders enjoying the sunset on the front alley bench. All this types of interactions with space define us as individuals, giving identity to a place and we also rediscover the diversity of necessities as we pass through life from one stage to another.

Co-living, and especially the private space of an apartment, has a substantial influence on our behaviour and on our ongoing process of development as individuals. By interacting with the space, living among families, friends and neighbours, we establish relationships with people who share common interests, creating a community. The majority of people end up living in the same district their whole life but the growing number of apartments available for rent begin to interfere in the already existing life pattern. Starting from a macro to micro analysis of a district, we discover many complex relationships that exist between space and its inhabitants, a cluster of social patterns around tenements, making changes in people's systems of values, without them actually noticing it. These observations extend to the micro scale of the private space found in apartments, where types of human relationships are based on room's configurations and also organically changing itself in time with its users. There is a huge contrast when it comes to what co-living meant 20 years ago and, at the same time, what meant to be part of a community built around it.

The changes undergone by neighbourhoods are gradually minor and slightly taken into consideration, but, in retrospect, twenty years substantially leave their mark. In the suburbs, the streets are currently asphalted and intensely used, the public street lighting is so effective that almost eliminates the gloom, suggesting security, but diminishing intimacy and disturbing biological rhythms. The spaces in front of the houses are crowded each and every time an event takes place in the nearby park. The residents take care of their green areas, patiently removing the weeds with shears, while cigarette stumps are dropped from the rushing cars, stumps which subsequently lie beside the kerb. At any time during day or night, the mechanical street sweepers can be heard. The people in the neighbourhood walk the streets, walk their pets, quiet or noisy, but no longer meet in well-known places, "for a chat". Children playing with the ball in the street can be seen increasingly rarer, either due to insecurity, either due to the new activities they are attracted to. Sometimes a rooster still crows after midnight, sometimes a cart passes by. The single constant is the lighting of bonfires during summer and autumn, which seems not to have altered for decades.

Two old ladies having a conversation, with their heads hanging out of the windows, each from it's own balcony, a noisy meeting between the flat administrator and residents taking place on the front alley, friends who gather for a drink at the local bar, kids playing on the streets, climbing trees and garages, these are all pictures that use to live amongst the multitude of grey neighbourhood, built in communism. Technology becomes more and more present in our daily routine, together with changes on the social-economical plan, being key factors in this process.

New residential projects investments develop a good marketing strategy but, at the same time, the coagulation process of a community suffers from instabilities found in the society. The quality of materials and aesthetics is far superior since communism closed its tenements "factories'', but then people have also changed, they interact less and less, tenants come and leave and maybe the most noticeable change to remark is to look exactly for what is missing, the noise made by children, which occurred on streets, gardens and parking lots that today only serve as resting places for cars. Is it technology to blame? The fear of parents to leave their children unsupervised outside? The surplus of cars? A new generation with other necessities?

All of us had this type of conversation with the parents regarding the subject of playing outside, you had to respect a set of spatial boundaries set by them: "don't go pass the last flat", "don't cross the avenue", "don't leave the area around the back garden or the parking lot", "you must remain in my sight" would have been sad by a mother overlooking her offsping from the balcony, which also was part of the kitchen. Power utility poles, trees, fences, gas pipes, garages, walls, gardens surrounded by vegetation, stair entrances, parking lots, all this elements were used by children to point out limits, borders, which defined what "neighbourhood" meant to them, regardless of what an urban planner may have had to say. Choosing where to play from all this places was a decision based on emotions, preferring a space protected by trees from passing strangers, or avoiding a street completely because it happens to be the gathering place for bullies, making excess of the imbalance between ages. Space enclosed by tenements becomes a canvas for all social activities, most of the time bringing

residents on a neutral ground, an alternative to meetings that took place in someone's apartment.

Garages transformed in small family businesses remain just a faint imagine in the collective memory, having your doors opened for people taking odds and ends, an auto-service, a depiction of what was once an arrow painted on a wall pointing to the only place in the neighbourhood for buying acidified soda or a craftsmen shed for building metal fences. Every district had enough minimarkets where you could buy stuff and also chat with the saleswoman happening to be your neighbour as well. All this small companies lose ground in front of hypermarkets that are coming closer to the city, invading it at one point, leaving behind a melancholically door covered in locks, with windows overlaid by wood boards. By losing this small shops, people rely now on bigger commercial centres, using them also as meeting places and a support for other social activities, streets becoming only part of their daily routine of leaving the neighbourhood.

Some parts of the city still preserve, in front of the houses, those sitting places, sometimes improvised from objects of no avail to the household, identified as "the street bench". Their condition proves that their role is long gone, that nobody still spends any time there watching and greeting the passers-by or waiting for the animals returning from the pastures. They remain mere traces of a lifestyle that began to fade away with the urbanization. One seldom stops in front of some window to talk to the person who, leaning over the window sill, gazes satisfied at the space before his house. People withdraw increasingly more in the intimacy of the home, allowing just the access of the close ones and distance themselves from the public space. The relations between neighbours suffer because of the life rhythm, which does not even allow to know each other, the interactions between them consisting only of some words cast out by complacency.

The houses' yards still keep their attribute of transition space, of median area between the street's turmoil and the interior's calmness. Here, during summer, the table and the chairs can be brought out, in order to admire the flowers in the garden, the guests can be received and, above all, the kids

can play at will. But all of these have a price, the loss of contact with the neighbourhood and the lack of its cognition. If until quite recently the gates would remain open throughout the day, and the neighbours would call one another for different problems, they currently remain locked, due to insecurity or due to the fear of abusive interference of acquaintances in the private life.

The influence of the interaction with the space and with the occupants upon the personal behaviour is inversely proportional with the dimension of the setting in which it develops. The apartment becomes a physical alter-ego of the occupant, who passes, in turn, through different phases, through renovations that lead to the transfiguration of the previously acquired habits. The reconfiguration of the rooms, the loss of contact with the outer space by sealing the balconies, the hierarchization of the spaces, together with other actions that change the function and the aspect of the dwelling, can be discovered in our behaviours, by adjusting to the new space. These changes usually appear in moments of increase or decrease of the family, of the friend group, changes that can lead to the extension of the ego upon the space or its withdrawal, a fact which frequently produces tensions between the members. The slow process of space metamorphosis reaches its end on the moment of our fusion with it, offering it identity. A museum that accommodates memories, displaying the life of the occupants and always prepared for new ones. Even though during his existence it will know multiple owners, all of these will refer, when talking about this place, as “home”, the place that will offer comfort, safety and the necessary intimacy.

An apartment itself passes through different stages, together with its inhabitants. Having a difficult start involving accommodation, psychologically and financially, becoming a space full of life, animated by parties, guests and friends, neighbours who would come in your kitchen for a coffee mug in the morning, gathering around the TV to watch a show or a football match, people with common interests ending up in separated rooms, wives and mothers preparing delicious meals in the kitchen, men having discussions in the living room, teenagers looking for a small, comfortable room which suits their shyness and little kids running

everywhere, invading all these places and being part of them all, ending up as a merely modest living space for elders. A segregation encouraged by technology shifts all this interactions in virtual space, visits become old fashioned and taking place outside of our private space. Our homes convert more and more into a fortress, face to face communication pales in front of the accessibility the internet offers you.

On the other hand, the specific interior organization of an old house determines specific human behaviours, while the modification of the spatial configuration is always made according to the users' needs. It is astonishing how, as the family evolves and life's phases and rhythms succeed, the dwelling rooms lose functions and acquire new ones, merge or divide, extend or isolate in relation to the outer space. And all these changes are eloquent beyond measure regarding the paths of the dwellers' lives. The two chambers facing the street, formerly used both as bedrooms and living or working rooms, nowadays merge into a wide space for receiving guests, which only in details still keeps the memory of the previous organization. Here, the beds and wardrobes give place to a vast bookcase, symbol of a new phase of knowledge and understanding. In the past, in order to reach the bathroom, the child used to pass through the parents' bedroom, through the unheated entrance hall and through the kitchen, which sometimes awoke the olfactory perception. Things have changed, for the garret, turned into a habitable attic, currently accommodates the sleeping area and the study, the most intimate spaces, situated at the end of the home's route. From up above, the neighbourhood assumes another dimension, its limits are perceived differently and the need for contemplation can be once again fulfilled. A window open towards the street, besides the terrible noises produced by cars, brings inside other aspects of existence that, despite all endeavour, cannot be ignored: the barking of a stray dog, the yelling children returning from school, sighs, reproaches told over the phone, conversations between the elders regarding who has and who has not attended a funeral. All of these pervade arbitrarily, but trigger reactions and thoughts as diverse as the stimuli that have induced them.

Those who step into one's home are received in different rooms, depending on the relationship's degree of familiarity: the relatives and the friends are

introduced in the living room, where anniversaries are commonly celebrated, while the acquaintances are invited to have a sit in the kitchen. It is not about preferential treatment, but about the extent of intimacy and comfort related to the other persons. For the strangers, the changes that occur in time become more evident, even though they do not perceive all the behavioural subtleties those changes imply. In this regard, it is obvious that introspection, age and manner of considering one's own home have a crucial role. The temporary reconfiguration of furniture and the careful placing of the Christmas tree influence the habits and the perceptions. The spot where you would expect to see the armchair is now occupied by the TV console, which, in turn, gave room to the tree. Behind these fortuitous modifications, the cyclic delight of change and reinventing the space resides, in order to strengthen the identity and the dwellers' sense of belonging.

But the identity and the sense of belonging do not confine only to spatial configurations. They imply both a material dimension and a spiritual-psychological one. People come to identify themselves with the space of the dwelling through objects that represent them, through displaying collections, through the colours of the wall paint or though the finishes. There is no doubt that these aspects have an influence upon the identity of the space. And it is them the ones which confer the other dimension, the immaterial one, that converts in time into memories, into experienced sensations, into states of mind or into pursuits of happiness. Inside the dwelling place, niches of memory can be identified, which, through their spiritual weight, get to shape characters and determinate behaviours. The scents, the flavours and the other sensations connected to these spots last throughout the years, maintaining their singularity. Along with ageing, the elements of identity might suffer alterations, some are overlooked, while others replace them. Their history and metamorphoses stand testimony to the evolution of the residents and to the changes their lives undergo: the kindling and extinction of some passions, of some habits, the discard of objects that no longer represent them.

The immaterial inheritance of the childhood house is carried by the future adult in each and every dwelling he or she adopts, trying to cast, most often

unconsciously, its archetypal image upon them. Residing in a house continues long after one ceases to be physically present in it and only ends with his death. To the same extent he holds inside the inheritance of the house, the house, in turn, keeps a part of his identity and many interventions would be needed in order to completely remove it.

Past and present. These two aspects represent the basis upon which we bring forward our questions regarding the place one individual has within the co-living architectural programme and also regarding the impact the built environment has upon his or her behaviour and habits. In most of the cases, architects and urban planners used to and still tend to make compromises concerning the quality of both tenements and public spaces surrounding them. The pressure coming from investors, always trying to achieve profit, also contributes to this situation, prejudicing the dwelling's system of values. We see all these things as key factors in maintaining a decreased rate in human interactions, both in public and private spaces, interactions that were once dispersed across the neighbourhood. Due to the above mentioned flaws, people bring different changes to the environment, in order to suit their needs. In the last 20 years, we have seen people bringing improvements, welcoming new technologies, altering their habits.

And yet, what does the future hold in store? Twenty years from now, what new necessities will architecture try to fulfil? Will people still be able to bring improvements to the design? Is this kind of action the result of a specific human behaviour, or the aspect of a faulty design process? Will technology overtake physical interactions to the point of isolating people into their homes? Will they have the same kinds of thoughts and memories? All these questions are worthy to be debated upon.