Housing Concepts:
Addressing Habitation in Architecture's Terms

Housing as a social issue, as a field of academic research, and even as a physical environment goes way beyond architecture. The space of habitation might be seen as architecture's fundament, but this relation has become more like a myth since the advent of housing, the dwellings for the masses. Even if, for a remarkable moment, it was precisely through housing that architecture reinvented itself as "modern," since the 1980s much of the interest in this field seems to have been lost in the discipline. The relationship between architecture and housing is anything but obvious today.

In the globalized world and under neoliberal hegemony, housing is mostly seen as real estate, and its "crisis" seems never to end.[1] The discourse on housing is dominated by developers, social activists, policy makers, and administrators, who reason mostly under the pressure of immediate concerns. Short-term thinking overwhelms the reflection that could lead to better alternatives for the environment of habitation.

Envisaging such alternatives – projections of more viable and affordable housing solutions, and a sustainable future habitat – should be a primary task for architecture. Nevertheless, the reflection on housing is today mostly developed outside the field of architecture. Despite a certain growing interest in housing research lately, from architectural historians, theorists, and practitioners alike, the discipline of architecture still does not give housing the kind of attention it receives in social sciences, for instance.

About thirty years ago, sociologist Jim Kemeny noticed a loss of conceptual content in housing studies in general, despite the many fields involved. He explained it as an effect of multidisciplinarity: defining a common ground of discussion between different disciplinary perspectives tended towards the "lowest common denominator." This was an "epistemic drift" that could be countered only by researchers going back into the depth of each discipline's theoretical insights and developing specific concepts and ideas; only this "feeding back into the disciplines" could enhance creative interdisciplinary thinking in the long run. In his own field, Kemeny pleaded for "bringing theory back in"– in other words, for re-theorizing housing sociology. Only after its own concepts had been theoretically clarified could sociology become truly integrated with other perspectives and only then could a genuinely interdisciplinary field of "housing studies" begin.[2]

Architecture had a role to play in this picture. The "spatial organization of housing" was admittedly indispensable to sociology for defining its own housing concepts; but the sociological eye saw it more like a framework — the "locational context"[3] of social issues. While the "epistemic drift" was elicited by the subtle intrusion of policy making into academic thinking,[4] the "lowest common denominator" was mostly epitomized by the "bricks and mortar" approach, which addressed housing in "its simple and crudest sense," as physical reality. The architectural contribution to housing was recognized as truly basic, in both senses: it appeared as fundamental, but also reductive.

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1 Nelson Mota and Yael Allweil, "Introduction. The Value of Housing," *Footprint* 24 (2019): 1-10 (profiled issue: *The Architecture of Housing After the Neoliberal Turn*).

2 Jim Kemeny, *Housing and Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11, 13, 16-17.

3 Ibid., 8-10.

4 Ibid., 16.

As it is usually the case when regarded from the outside, and especially from the more sophisticatedly theorized social sciences, architecture's complexities tend to be overlooked. Its role in the field of housing seems to be that of a mere provider of background for social processes – or, even worse, of product packaging. This should incite architecture to go back to the very basic questions of what architecture is and what it does. In the interdisciplinary dialogues on housing, architecture must also be able to speak out its own terms, those which allow it to say precisely what it has to say, naming the things that only the architectural eye can see. Nothing exists until we name it. Architecture needs to develop concepts that translate its specific reflections and proposals about the spatial environments of habitation and their culture, as its own contribution to the field of housing.

It would be risky and indeed intellectually dubious to consider architecture independently from the social and economic processes that generate it.[5] But it would also be a disciplinary failure, and definitely an epistemic loss, not to acknowledge and explore what architecture's specific conceptual tools could do for the complex field of housing. Architecture conceptualizes the inhabited space in ways that cannot be replaced by any other disciplinary perspective. With its problem-centered insights and concrete explanatory power, it has its own knowledge-building processes and could provide valuable answers to some of the most critical questions of housing. Architectural researchers should not do the science that sociologists do; they should instead act like sociologists do: bring some theory back in and develop their specific conceptual tools. This is what the current issue of sITA attempts to do — to investigate housing concepts in the field of architecture.

In the interview that opens this issue, **Gaia Caramellino** gives an insight into some of the approaches on housing research that emerged in the last decade. As an architectural historian dedicated to history and theory of housing, and as a connector by excellence, Gaia Caramellino has been situated at the center of several actions reviving housing research lately. She talks about the collaborative research developed by several groups and networks, which she helped create. She stresses the importance for all disciplines to interconnect while researching the space of habitation, as a way of enriching each other's methodologies. In her own research, Gaia Caramellino is especially interested in cross-cultural and comparative perspectives. She investigates the way housing concepts and ideas move and transform between contexts, specifically by addressing terminology — the disciplinary and cultural translations of the **terms of habitation**.

Together with Yael Allweil and Susanne Schindler, Gaia Caramellino was the co-initiator of the research project and recent conference "The Terms of Habitation: Re-theorizing the Architecture of Housing,"[6] the topic of which this issue of sITA largely draws on for its inspiration. Seven of the contributors here have attended that conference too. The project addressed architecture's "divorce from housing" and proposed the return to terminology as a basic theoretical framework, through which architecture could be reasserted "as a crucial aspect of housing provision." Investigating the terms of housing, the project assumed, would help architectural and urban design relate to policy, finance, and other facets of housing provision, and thus also sustain "the capacities of architecture in a post-neoliberal society." Terms "embed normative assumptions"; they "mutate in motion" and they "are often efficacious" even if "poorly defined"; eventually, they take on "the enduring tensions between housing and architecture."[7] Terms are not just pre-set words listed in disciplinary glossaries; they have power. They name concepts, which move through geographic spaces, professional cultures, and historic times, redefining their meanings according to new contexts and articulating into new

5 Rheinhold Martin, Jacob Moore, and Susanne Schindler (eds), *The Art of Inequality. Architecture, Housing and Real Estate. A Provisional Report* (New York: Buell Center, 2015), 60-66, available at: https://www.arch.columbia.edu/books/catalog/8-the-art-of-inequality-architecture-housing-and-real-estate (accessed November 17, 2021).

6 The project "Re-theorizing the Architecture of Housing as Grounds for Research and Practice" was initiated by Yael Allweil (Technion Institute of Technology), Gaia Caramellino (Politecnico di Milano) and Susanne Schindler (MIT and ETH Zurich) and was hosted and generously supported by the IIAS - Israel Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem in 2019-2020; https://iias.huji.ac.il/rg.retheorizinghousing (accessed November 17, 2021).

7 Yael Allweil, Gaia Caramellino, and Susanne Schindler, "The Terms of Habitation: Re-theorizing the Architecture of Housing," conference statement; the conference was organized by IIAS in November 9-12, 2020, https://iias.huji.ac.il/Retheorizing_conference (accessed November 17, 2021).

ideas. The focus on how the spatial realities of housing are termed is a key to open the theorization of architecture's role in housing.

The current issue of sITA addresses a series of such terms of habitation, naming concepts that are contextualized in various historical times and geographic spaces — from the 1920s to the present day (with remarkable incursions into Roman Antiquity) and throughout Europe (with notable excursions to both ends of the world). However, most papers address the thirty post-war years, arguably the golden years of housing, and specific national contexts in Europe, on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Rebecca Carrai addresses the process of ***normalizing*** in relation to post-war housing in Sweden. Besides formal norms and regulations that standardized the domestic spaces provided by the welfare state, there were also some other softer normative references for living in the new homes: official manuals and commercial catalogues. The paper compares the "Good Living" (*God Bostad*) manual, edited by the Swedish housing governmental body during the 1950s and 1960s, and the Ikéa catalogue, the presentation brochure of the famous furniture company. They both defined the ideal home and modern living in detail, but they had different discourses on it (the paper focuses on their take on the bedroom). On the one hand, there was the official perspective on the home, the top-down imposed modernity of public housing; on the other hand, there was the commercially induced customization and empowerment of the users, encouraging them to escape the unifying official norm. This was in fact a confrontation about who had the right to define what a good modern home is – the state, or the private provider and the user.

The topic of users' agency is an important subject of reflection – and will be developed in other papers too in the present issue of sITA, most notably in Élodie Degavre's and Lily Chi's articles. But another two articles here – the Croatian story developed by Sanja Matijević Barčot and Ana Grgić and the Estonian one by Epp Lankots – address the same confrontation as the one exposed in the Swedish case, that is, between state provision and imposition, on the one hand, and the users' own agency escaping it, on the other. This proves that this opposition — essentially between a socialist and a liberal perspective — was by no means defined by the Iron Curtain.

Sanja Matijević Barčot and **Ana Grgić** focus on the concept of ***socialist dwelling***, as it was explicitly debated in Croatia between the late 1940s and early 1960s. The main question at the time was what were the specific attributes of housing that could be called "socialist." The paper dwells on the debates developed about the socialist apartment in the architectural discourse at the time. It reveals the ideological confrontation between the adepts of single-family houses and the ones of high-rise high-density collective housing. This subject was also debated in Hungary and Great Britain at the time, cases that are brought about in this issue by Mariann Simon's and Savia Palate's articles. In the Croatian case, the debate is eventually transmuted into an opposition between the formal housing provision by the state and the informal agency of the users. Authors challenge the commonly held view that the socialist state won the race of controlling housing provision, showing that, despite being ignored by the professional discourse, housing built privately and informally, through quasi-legal building practices, were in fact prevalent. Eventually, in Croatia, the state tacitly accepted informality as part of the socialist city.

Epp Lankots focuses on the ***floor area*** as a key term for the idea of housing standardization in the Soviet Bloc, and a key instrument in the search for a low-cost optimum of the living space. Her paper focuses on a rather lateral consequence of this well controlled minimum space of habitation, namely the proliferation of secondary summer houses. The paper investigates the (quite spectacular) case of "summer cottages" in Estonia during the 1960s and 1970s. As a sort of compensation for the tight socialist apartment, this officially sanctioned phenomenon opened a way to some quite un-socialist luxuries: the attainment of "privacy, leisurely lifestyle and material self-affirmation." Architects took limitations as challenges – for even if these houses were not mass produced, they were still subjected to strict size-limitations and some forms of collective control – and came up with imaginative solutions in order to fulfill all the desires that a city apartment could not satisfy. Architecture was here at its best, with the ability to transform the minimal floor area of these summer houses into some jewels of good living.

The postwar period can be considered one of **Modern Architecture**'s hegemony in housing. All the papers that deal with postwar housing cases also highlight the imperative for housing to materialize a "modern" lifestyle. **Maria Tassopoulou**'s paper approaches the moment in the history of the Modern Movement when it became hegemonic, the moment when modern architects, in their institutionalized forum, the CIAM, acknowledged the huge opportunity that post-war housing crisis and reconstruction represented for their ideological victory. The paper focuses on the first postwar CIAM, the sixth, which took place in Bridgewater (UK) in 1947, and which represented a true turning point. This was the moment when modernism prevailed, attaining the tipping point in its diffusion into the larger masses of the profession. The paper analyses how the close and elitist professional circle formed in the inter-war period was broadened with new generations of architects, and was also opened towards larger interdisciplinary milieus, in an "opening-the-circle strategy."

A specific moment in the history of high modernism, at the very root of invention of modern living by the interwar avantgarde, is presented in **Mónica Cruz Guáqueta**'s article on the term ***équipement***. Defined as an architectural concept during the late 1920s and the 1930s, the notion embodied the idea of modern living, going beyond the old notion of "furniture." *Équipement* is also an authored concept: it belongs to Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand. In a feminist stance, the paper also addresses the condition of professional women at the time. Indeed, feminist notes can be sensed also in other contexts addressed in this issue of sITA, particularly in Chiara Ingrosso's and Julia Kershaw's articles. Cruz Guáqueta's study credits Charlotte Perriand's contribution explicitly, as the one who was crucial to materializing Le Corbusier's rather theoretical definition of the notion; it also criticizes the fact that the pieces of furniture produced through the collaboration with Perriand are exclusively attributed to Le Corbusier even today. The notion of *équipement* is a case where the change in the concept of the interior of the dwelling was so radical, that an entirely novel term became necessary; the fresh word was adopted "as a theoretical construction," to express the new efficiency of the modern home. Modern interior design and the terms that named it were together the agents of the "overwhelming transformation in the ways of living" that modernism brought about.

Unlike interwar modernism, focused rather on the equipment of the private interior, postwar modern approach brought about a new focus on the shared "equipment" of collective housing. **Savia Palate**'s article tackles the **playspaces** designed for the post-war council housing in Britain. The discussions about outdoor playgrounds that emerged during the 1950s and 1960s epitomize the larger debates on the balance between private comfort and shared facilities in the public housing at the time. Despite the reluctance towards prioritizing communal facilities in principle, playspaces gained momentum as high-rise housing multiplied and the size of flats shrank. However, as British society increasingly became one of car owners, playgrounds entered in competition with car parks, as the true "indispensable extension of the home." The discussion on playspaces is relevant for the involution of all communal areas in council housing estates and their unsustainability, once the inhabitants become more "middle-class," that is, more home-centered. Eventually, council housing was privatized, and the housing regime liberalized.

Chiara Ingrosso addresses the Italian ***condominio*** of the 1950s and 1960s, a notion that shows that, unlike in the quasi-socialist housing regimes of the welfare states of northern Europe, postwar housing developments in southern Europe were outright liberal from the start. The period is known in Italy as the time of the economic "boom," a phase in which governmental policy stimulated the production of a large number of apartments, and at the same time supported private property, thus making housing instrumental in the consolidation of the middle-class. The *condominio* was a mass housing "model" for the middle classes. As an urban typological concept, the term also had a "declination": the *palazzina*, corresponding to a different, more self-centered urban form. As "product homes," *condomini* were also authored architectural objects, raising the question of the role of the architect in housing commodification. The paper refers to the cities of Milan and Rome, but it mainly makes the case for Naples, challenging its unfair marginalization in current architectural historiography.

As ultimate architectural argument in favor of the quality of Neapolitan *condomini*, the paper presents the case study of the idiosyncratic Palazzo della Morte by Stefania Filo Speziale.

Housing typologies often challenge our preconceptions: it was liberal-oriented Italy that mostly produced the multi-family housing type, often in some form of block typology, while socialist Hungary extensively built single-family detached houses. Predictably though, socialist regimes adopted systematic typification, no matter the building type. The concept of **pre-design** or type-design is crucial for how socialist states addressed post-war mass housing. **Mariann Simon** draws a detailed history of the pre-designed single-family houses in Hungary, since the late 1940s to the present day. What is interesting in the Hungarian case is precisely that state policies encouraged family houses on a mass scale, along with private ownership on a relatively large scale – unlike in most of the Soviet Bloc countries, where large mass housing estates were developed based on type-designs of blocks of flats, and usually for renting. The article deals with the long-term perspective, of about 70 years, following the history of pre-designed, typified houses from the early socialist period until the 2020s. It identifies three consecutive phases: "Standard, Recommended and Model Design." These terms not only give a name to the three categories of type-designs during the three respective periods (early socialist, late socialist, and post-socialist), but they also reflect the increasing degree of liberalization in the evolution of the socialist housing regime in Hungary.

The issue of an alternate typology to the ubiquitous collective block-of-flats, also in a socialist context – Romania during the 1970s – is also dealt with in Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu's interview, which closes this sITA Dossier. The kind of typology he talks about was however not officially promoted in Romania; it was rather subversive and had no consequence in real practice, where the block-of-flats remained the predominant typology.

A different meaning for the term "**block**" is addressed in **Ilaria Maria Zedda**'s paper, which reflects on typology too, specifically the Berlin block. The paper analyses the way this typology was redefined by the 1987 housing program and exhibition in Berlin. She compares the two famous *Bauausstellungen*, Interbau 1957 and IBA 1987, and the main themes they focused on. The very fact that the two housing programs were also exhibitions made their thematic preoccupations so much the more significant. Interbau 1957 was mainly focused on its apartments, while the approach in IBA 1987 was focused on urban performance. In the latter case, housing was engaged mostly from outside, and therefore the importance of façades prevailed. Interiors were "abandoned to conventional housing standards" and yielded to the bureaucratic procedures of West Berlin policy. The change between the two cases reveals, in fact, the shift from modern to post-modern typologies. In IBA 1987, housing returned to the city center and to the historical urban typology of Berlin's perimeter block, but abandoned the functional mix that characterized the historical city. At the same time, the typological approach to housing embraced a great variety, including many styles – this was the "IBA variety." The paper notes eventually that IBA 1987 could still be considered remarkable today, as an initiative in which public housing played a leading role in the city center, not at the periphery: this was a last attempt, "perhaps the last on a large scale in Europe," to the "mission impossible" of "reweaving the relationship" between architecture, urban design, and public housing.

Housing as public issue is also addressed by **Miruna Moldovan**, along with specific housing typologies, but in an entirely different context: the contemporary notion of **emergency housing**, or, as it is called in Romania, "housing of necessity." The paper compares two situations, one in which the function of emergency housing is performed by a dedicated typology of modular housing, and another in which existing housing (specifically the blocks of flats from the socialist period) circumstantially accommodate the emergency use. Using the concept of "home," questioning the flexibility and versatility of the respective habitation environments, and investigating the daily living practices in each of the two selected cases (in the cities of Constanța and Baia Mare respectively), the paper demonstrates the rather loose connection between the concept of emergency housing and architectural typology.

Also from a contemporary perspective, **Claudiu Toma** addresses the notion of "**media-living**" and the topical question how the new digital media technology transforms the domestic living experience today. The transformation appears as radical: the contemporary home has become a "media-home"; media communication and social networks lead to a loss of privacy and, at the limit, may entail the transformation of the domestic space into a "virtual panopticon." Assimilating the digital media communication with mass media communication, the paper discusses three consequences for the experience of habitation: the oblivion of the past, the reconnection between home and workplace and the relation with the ubiquitous presence of digital media objects (or mass-media objects) in the home. The conclusion is that the omnipresence and dynamism of the mass media digital technology has entirely metamorphosed, in a short period of time, the traditional binomial privacy-intimacy of the home, and our emotional bonds to the home. "Media-living" is an extreme concept of habitation indeed, which should be taken into consideration.

An idiosyncratic perspective on habitation is also explored by **Julia Kershaw**. She addresses the space of the house as seen from the arts field, by investigating Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's engagement with architecture. Clark redefines, in a very personal way, a notion and a fundamental tool of the architect: the model, or "architectural ***maquette***." As part of the Brazilian constructivist project, in her models of homes and architectural interiors, assembled in 1955 and 1960, Clark explores "concrete and neo-concrete strategies" to achieve the transition between her geometric paintings and three-dimensional architectural objects – just like the avantgarde constructivists once did. The house interiors in her models encourage individuality and spatial fluidity, and her installations from the 1960s encourage participation. Although Clark's models and installations remain in their rather imaginary world of art objects, in this case, art could show architecture the way to dealing with change, dynamic space and participatory processes.

The issues of change and users' participation, but also the importance of long-time perspectives on change and gradual evolution of the inhabited space, are of crucial importance to residential architecture. They are the central topics of the next three articles in this issue of sITA. **Élodie Degavre** and co-author **Gérald Ledent** address the notion of "**kit**" or system-based architecture, the concept of a method of housing production where a series of prefabricated components are assembled according to the user's choice. Belgium was at the center of the emergence of participatory processes in architecture. The debates on how the inhabitant could be included in the design and construction process, and how could industrialization support this aspiration, led to theories about "system" architecture and "open form," thoroughly developed from the late 1960s to the 1980s, with a peak during the 1970s. The paper develops three case studies of housing projects by architects Jean Englebert, Paul Petit, and Lucien Kroll. The research also uses a specific methodology of "visual anthropology," by filming on location and recording the opinions of the agents involved in the projects, including the inhabitants; and most importantly, filming allows time to unfold. Time is crucial for this concept of an evolving assembled system, which deals with processes rather than objects. The rather fictional method of filming also underscores the constructed nature of the discourse surrounding these housing projects.

With the term of "housing **agency**," under which she gathers the notions of incremental housing and adaptable design, **Lily Chi** discusses the same kind of housing architecture, which internalizes time and change, and does so by involving the users in the process. The paper analyzes many case studies that spread over more than half a century, from the late 1960s to the present, from all over the world (Peru, Chile, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, and Japan). In her choice of case studies, Chi makes a point in demonstrating the longevity and continuity of the ideas of change in housing design, and hence the fertility of a long-time perspective. More than other papers, Chi's work focuses specifically on design problems. It highlights the design characteristics that make the selected housing units become frameworks for customization and expansion, turning housing from product to process. The conclusion is that designing for adaptation is a proof of architecture's agency and that "form matters." The

best concept that supports this idea is Herman Hertzberger's definition of "polyvalence": "a form that can be put to different uses without having to undergo changes itself."

Polyvalence is not a recent invention — the Ancient Roman *domus* had it too. This is – we might say – what archeologist **Cătălin Pavel** demonstrates in his paper about the agency of **doors**. The main idea the paper states is that, in the Roman *domus*, major changes in lifestyle over time do not necessarily translate into major changes in the architectural form of the house. This is demonstrated on the case study of the *Casa del Menandro* in Pompeii. By changing the positions of doors (and windows and thresholds), the internal limits of the house and the boundaries between houses inside the *insula* have changed in time, but without changing the structure of the rooms themselves. The role of doors in the "space syntax" can be now observed by archeologists inside the *insula*: instead of a clear geometry, the units have intricate shapes. The whole *insula* could endure countless operations of use reconfigurations, by the change of doors only. Doors have been blocked up and relocated, and rooms moved to different houses, while walls stood steadfast. The door is a mobility device in a system of great stability. By their transparency, rather than closure, doors are also time-transparent, allowing the kind of soft change that preserves and makes visible the material traces of successive reuses; doors usher in the value of "vestigiality": this is the value of longevity and of house as heritage.

In rather opposed situations, the next two papers of this issue of sITA address housing's role in heritage preservation: one is critically analyzing new housing developments as means to support the radical reinvention of the place, in London; the other is highlighting the living practice of habitation as a way to preserve a major urban structure as heritage.

Hazel Cowie addresses how a certain interpretation of "**heritage asset**" used in contemporary housing-led regeneration leads to conservation practices that exclude the existing "living practices of use." The paper is based on the case study of the post-2012 London Olympics regeneration of a dismantled industrial area in East London. It is architecture's narrative that is in question here, the fact that this kind of practice frequently relies on a single arbitrary discursive construction, a sort of legitimation through the "Authorized Heritage Discourse" (AHD). Terms do play a crucial role: "New London Housing Vernacular" describes the new-old architectural style of brick-clad housing that is now the norm in the new real estate developments of London. Also, the bureaucratically defined "heritage asset" labels the formalized processes of heritage and conservation that justify reductive approaches to regeneration. These terms give names to the concepts of a "linear, singular heritage-based approach" that translates isolated pieces of heritage and local cultural capital into a more easily marketable and reductive version of place.

A totally different heritage story is given by **Ana Šverko**'s paper, which addresses an ancient context that is alive to this day — Diocletian's Palace in Split. The key concept here is the **domestication** of public space, which is seen as the main reason for the successful survival of this World Heritage site. The ancient palace has become, in time, a city; and the city is now inhabited like a house, like one big home interior. This occurred most certainly because of the appropriable character of the urban spaces, which their domestic origin assured. Residential activities constantly overflow into the public space, and it is precisely this continual habitation of the city's collective spaces that has ensured its preservation for a very long time. The changes in lifestyle over the centuries did not produce major changes in form, as the existing forms constantly adapted to new functions; this is again a story of a Roman *domus*. The paper refers primarily to Aldo Rossi's interpretation of Diocletian's Palace, and to his concept of "monuments" as landmarks that endure in time, but do not go against urban change. Eventually, the paper makes the case for the domestication of historic cities in general, in their struggle to preserve authenticity in the face of "touristification." The conflict between tourism and habitation in famous city centers should be solved precisely by defending "the domestication of public space" and by supporting habitation in the historical city centers. In a direct dialogue with the present theme of sITA, the article concludes by calling for "an alternative way of conceptualizing the issue of housing in an interdisciplinary context," one that recognizes the spatial complexity of "the living space itself."

The Dossier of this issue of sITA concludes with the only contribution made from the position of the architect who introduces his projects in his own terms. In his interview with Ana Maria Zahariade, **Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu** addresses his work on the typology of **semi-collective** dwellings – low-rise high-density housing. This typology has been a subject of some research in Romania mostly during the 1970s; to no avail, however. The discussion focuses on a series of Gheorghiu's (unbuilt) designs: his diploma project of 1973, drafted at the "Ion Mincu" Institute of Architecture in Bucharest; housing designs conceived as a teacher at the school of architecture in Timișoara in the 1970s; studies of typification and modularity from the 1980s, while he was employed by the IPCT[8] – the institute dedicated to type designs in socialist Romania; and eventually, studies he has developed for a private developer in the 2000s. Gheorghiu explains that in the 1970s "semi-collective" meant something else than today, when it is defined exclusively from the ownership perspective. Semi-collective housing was understood in its dissenting dimensions, as an alternative to the prevailing "collective housing." The term "collective habitation" is also misleading, Gheorghiu warns; the "collective" side of housing is questionable in most cases, and what is meant is simply "multi-family" housing. Eventually – as a nod to the present topic of sITA – Gheorghiu argues that terminological discussions are important and that housing terms should never be understood in their simplest forms, in architecture.

The insightful accounts gathered in this sITA dossier invite the reader to discover just that — the complex nature of exploring housing issues in terms of architecture. Housing ideas are always at home in the field of architecture.

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