Emergency Housing in Romania: Adapted or Specifically Designed

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Introduction

The housing crisis is one of the most present and discussed topics of the last decades. It has almost become a continuous and ordinary type of crisis. In order to address the problem, in a world more globalized than ever, there is a growing concern to internationalize and standardize solutions for affordable or mass-housing, but the most urgent one – emergency housing – tends to be overlooked. By definition, emergency housing is an immediate but temporary architectural response to a crisis situation where people lose their homes. A crisis is a temporary period of time of intense difficulty, danger and uncertainty. On a larger scale, the loss of housing may be due to exceptional situations such as natural or environmental disasters or political and military conflicts. There are also small-scale situations, in which people belonging to vulnerable or marginalized social groups lose their homes due to financial reasons, legal proceedings or home abandonments in the aftermath of physical or emotional abuse.

In any of these cases, emergency housing strategies have three main stages: the immediate shelter, the temporary housing and the restoration of the permanent settlement.[1] The immediate shelter is generally the first-hand solution, such as the tent, and its aim is to secure a person's basic need for housing for one to several days. The second stage is the temporary housing, where a person is relocated after being secured, and has a duration of use of a few weeks to a few months, although in some questionable cases it may be for years. The third stage concerning the restoration of the permanent settlement may overlap with the second one, but it is meant to be the final stage in which the users permanently relocate and can resume the course of their life.

This paper focuses on the second stage of emergency housing strategies – the temporary emergency housing – and its aim is to discuss whether this category of public housing functions better within a specific architectural typology or its main quality is to adapt to various (existing or new) housing typologies in order to address the emergency housing crisis when needed. The house, architecture in general, is the formal setting of everyday life. Yet, as stated before, emergencies are situations outside the everyday life and therefore it is relevant to understand the condition of a person during a crisis situation. Anthropologist Hedda Askland states that "architects are increasingly turning to social science theory to seek relevance and impact of ideas"[2] during their design process and when rethinking architectural concepts, such as emergency housing. It is necessary to understand and to objectively observe all the dimensions of the space that architecture produces when creating and becoming the framework of its inhabitants' life. Anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu states that "the house is seen as a social experience of living, domestication and mutually defining dialogue with objects and the

1 Alina Florea, *Locuirea de urgență: bune practice și proiecte din România* [Emergency Housing: Good Practices and Projects in Romania] (Bucharest: Ed. Universitară "Ion Mincu," 2012), 25.

2 Hedda Haugen Askland, Ramsey Awad, Justine Chambers, and Michael Chapman, "Anthropological quests in architecture: pursuing the human subject," *International Journal of Architecture Research* 8 (2014): 284.

surrounding space."[3] The social experience of inhabiting or simply living, which is fulfilled in time and space, leads to the becoming of a house into a *home*. Briefly, a house becomes a *home* if it is inhabited or *lived*. When studying the concept of *home*, Mihăilescu states that „home represents the individual, the unique – and there can be no general definition of the unique."[4] If a home can define the individual and her or his life, then when the loss of it occurs, Mihăilescu states that "it can be lethal."[5] Given the fact that emergency housing is temporarily inhabited and its users change frequently, having their social experience of living both limited and shaken by the uncertainty of a crisis, can we or should we theoretically define a specific typology that addresses such circumstances?

In the case of Romania, emergency housing units (legally stated as "necessity housing"[6]) are managed by the local public authorities and are part of the public housing fund of each city. At present, there are no up-to-date public statistics on the number of social or emergency housing specifically, but only on the number of public housing units. However, in the public housing fund there are also other specific public housing units included, such as service housing, protocol housing or housing for the youth. According to the *Housing Fund* published by the National Institute of Statistics in 2021, until December 31st, 2020 the percentage of public housing compared to the total number of housing units in Romania is 1.23%.[7] By comparison, in most European Union member states the social housing fund alone is somewhere between 10% and 19% of the total housing fund.[8] For example, in the Netherlands social housing accounts for 20% of all housing in the country, and in France it accounts for 10% of the total housing.[9] Romania is definitely facing a crisis regarding public housing and this can only have a negative impact on the inhabitants. If the public social housing fund is "a central instrument of ensuring the right to housing as a universal human right,"[10] then the emergency housing fund should be the absolutely necessary and immediate tool for solving emergencies. Again, the lack of itis more than worrying.

As stated before, all emergency housing is temporary. But in the specific case of second stage emergency housing strategies, the users live for a certain limited period of time established in the vast majority of cases from the beginning of their moving into such a house. Given the fact that emergency housing is managed by the same public authorities as social housing, in Romania "the lease is concluded by the beneficiaries established by the local and mayoral council or other authorized person, for a period of five years. The lease may be extended on the basis of the income statement of the beneficiaries and other supporting documents."[11]

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3 Vintilă Mihăilescu, "Introducere" [Introduction], in *Etnografii urbane: cotidianul văzut de aproape* [Urban Ethnographies: The Everyday Seen Up Close], coord. Vintilă Mihăilescu (Bucharest: Polirom, 2009), 19.

4 Vintilă Mihăilescu, "Acasă în lume" [Home in the World], in *Acasă în lume* [Home in the World], coord. Vintilă Mihăilescu and Ioana Tudora, in colab. with Gruia Bădescu et al. (Bucharest: Igloo Media, 2020), 27.

5 Mihăilescu, "Acasă în lume," 45.

6 Necessity housing (ro: *locuința de necesitate*) is, according to the Romanian Housing Act no. 114/1996, a type of housing legally stated as social housing, but which can be rented only for a shorter period for users who find themselves in emergency situations.

7 Elena Mihaela Iagăr (coord.), *Fondul de Locuințe* [Housing Fund] (Bucharest: INS, 2020), 6.

8 OECD, „Social housing: A key part of past and future housing policy," *Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Policy Briefs* (Paris: OECD, 2020), http://oe.cd/social-housing-2020, 5.

9 Ibid.

10 Enikő Vincze, *De ce și cum să accesăm o locuință socială ? Ghid pentru elaborarea dosarului de solicitare de locuință socială pentru reprezentanți ai societății civile, experți cu responsabilități în incluziunea romilor, persoane interesate în accesarea unei locuințe sociale* [Why and How to Access Social Housing ? Guide for the Elaboration of the Social Housing Application File for Civil Society Representatives, Experts with Responsabilities in Roma Inclusion, Persons Interested in Accessing Social Housing] (Cluj-Napoca: Fundația Centrul de Resurse pentru Comunitățile de Romi, 2020), 4.

11 Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Administrației Publice [Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration], "Analiză privind locuințele sociale în România" [Analysis on social housing in Romania], http://sgg.gov.ro/docs/File/UPP/doc/analiza_impact/Analiza%20privind%20locuintele%20sociale%20in%20Romania.pdf (2015), 13.

Therefore, from a legislative point of view, the duration of use of a social house is five years. For example, in Great Britain there is the same five-year limit, but the average period of residence for users has been of around three years.[12] Regarding emergency housing units, the period of use can vary from a few days to several years. For example, a study on the notion of housing exclusion in the European Union in 2019 deepens the importance of emergency accommodation, finding that in Italy the average period of use of emergency housing is about two and a half years, while in Luxembourg it is 100 days and in France about 99 days.[13] In emergencies, the duration of use varies depending on the crisis situations and the circumstances that led to the loss of the home, pointing once again at the unpredictability of emergency housing and its occupation intervals.

In Romania, some of the most common causes for the loss of housing on a large scale are related to extreme weather conditions such as floods or landslides. For example, only in 2020, 3,335 homes were destroyed by floods.[14] On a smaller scale, housing loss occurs mainly due to forced evictions from nationalized or repossessed homes. For example, research conducted during 2008 and 2017 the Non-governmental Organization *Blocul pentru Locuire* found that between 2001 and 2017 there were 36,300 forced evictions nationally.[15] In most cases, after the immediate shelter stage, people who found themselves in these extreme situations were provided by the local authorities with emergency housing. But if the public housing fund is so limited, how or where were these emergency housing units established?

As a research method, in order to properly identify the situations in which emergency housing was established, based on the *Free access to information of public interest act* no. 544/2001 requests were issued to the local administrations. Also, the public documents, council decisions, and emergency ordinances issued by the national authorities, as well as media articles from 2015 to 2021, and existing social surveys conducted by National Institutes or Non-governmental Organizations such as *Blocul pentru Locuire* were thoroughly analyzed. Due to the lack of official statistics regarding the exact number of emergency housing units, the information contained in this paper is incomplete. However, it was found that the social and emergency housing fund in Romania was constituted in two ways: either by rehabilitating existing constructions such as socialist mass-housing blocks or old collective housing for industrial workers, or by building from scratch new housing blocks or re-using modular units such as prefabricated containers.[16] For example, the Government established a national *Program for the construction of social and emergency housing*, through which it allows public funds for the rehabilitation of existing housing blocks or the construction of new ones. Only in 2020 the construction of 2,749 social and emergency housing units was proposed through this program.[17] But in cases where the public administration had neither available public housing units nor financial resources to rapidly purchase modular units, people were left homeless for a short period of time. Even though emergency housing is temporary and its need of use is unpredictable, its existence is mandatory, and public authorities should look at it as a long-term investment in an attempt to address the

12 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, "Length of tenancy in social housing," https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/social-housing/length-of-tenancy-in-social-housing/latest (2020).

13 Chloe Serme-Morin (coord.), „Oversubscribed, insecure and unsuitable: emergency accommodation in Europe," in *Fourth overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2019*, (2019), 38.

14 Inspectoratul General pentru Situații de Urgență [General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, Romanian Government], "Analiză statistică a acțiunilor de prevenire, pregătire și răspuns în situații de urgență pentru perioada 01.01.2020 – 31.12.2020" [Statistical Analysis on Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Actions for the Time Period 01.01.2020 – 31.12.2020] (Bucharest, 2021).

15 Blocul pentru Locuire, *Raport privind evacuările forțate din România efectuate în perioada 2008-2017* [Report on Forced Evictions from Romania Conducted Between 2008 – 2017], (Bucharest, May 2019), 7.

16 Monica Constantinescu and Mariana Dan, „Locuințele sociale în România – o analiză de ansamblu" [Social Housing in Romania – an Overview], in *Revista Calitatea Vieții* XIV, 1-2 (2005): 88.

17 Ministerul Dezvoltării, Lucrărilor Publice și Administrației [Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration], „Programul de construcții de locuințe sociale conform legii nr. 114/1996" [The social housing construction program according to Law no. 114/1996], https://www.mdlpa.ro/pages/constructiidelocuintesocialeconformlegiinr1141996 .

overall housing crisis; but due to debatable reasons such as corruption, ignorance, incompetence, or simply lack of interest, the matter is not considered a priority.

When studying emergency architecture, the architect Sergiu-Cătălin Petrea states that "emergency housing is transformed together with the change of priorities or ways of living of those who occupy it temporarily or not, being permanently subject to renewing/adaptability."[18] Therefore, in order to discuss the versatility and adaptability of emergency housing, two case studies that represent the two typical situations of establishment were chosen for analysis. In the first case study, the emergency housing units were established in two mass-housing blocks found in the Northern city of Baia Mare, which were originally designed in Socialist Romania for young single individuals. In the second case study, in the Southern city of Constanța, a campus with several housing blocks was built from scratch using modular units such as containers, having the precise purpose of being social and emergency housing units.

Given the relevance of understanding how a house is inhabited or lived during the limited time of a crisis situation, these typical situations were analyzed with a methodological grid comprising four main criteria, which relate both to architectural characteristics and aspects regarding the social life of the inhabitants: urban context, architectural aspects, the relation to the public authorities and their management, and the everyday life of its users. The urban context seeks to understand whether the location, the settlement, the neighborhood or the immediate site vicinity-have any influence on the inhabitant's life. At present, "the neighborhood is a topic of major interest in the field of urban sociology, urbanity itself being defined and conditioned by human interaction."[19] Therefore spatial relations determine or produce social relations. In addition, the architectural criteria focus on aspects related to functional or spatial characteristics and their development, both at a micro-level of the interior space, and at a macro-level of the entire building in which a unit is located. A closer look on the relations between the user and the public authorities is relevant, because the public authorities are the main actor in providing the basic need for housing and mediating the crisis situation, by managing the framework for the user to carry on with their everyday life. Moreover, when studying architecture and social interactions, Dragoș Dascălu states that "administration is an agent of power"[20] and "the direct and sustained involvement of public authorities is beneficial on the process of stimulating interactions."[21] Last but not least, a point of the analysis grid seeks to observe the inhabitant (which in this study will be referred to as the user) and their social life in exceptional situations, in order to understand if a temporary house can become a *home*. Even though we find ourselves in a global context of migration, facing issues regarding the housing crisis, this discussion is still considered relevant by anthropologists who state that "it is therefore a total illusion that the older nomad or the newer migrant would not have a 'home.' We all owe it to ourselves to settle in space."[22]

Emergency Housing Established in Existing Mass-housing Units

In the first situation, the necessity housing units were established in blocks of the large mass housing complexes in open premises,[23] designed following the norms of modern urbanism. In Romania, these large mass housing complexes were mostly built between the 1960s and

18 Sergiu Cătălin-Petrea, "Arhitectura în condiții de urgență" [Architecture in Emergency Conditions], PhD diss. ("Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, 2011), 66.

19 Claudia Pipoș-Lupu, "Habitation and its vicinity: Typologies and ramifications of the concept of neighborhood. 1947-1989," *Argument* 11 (2021): 37.

20 Dragoș Dascălu, *Arhitecturi relaționale* [Relational Architectures] (Iași: Lumen Publishing House, 2016), 296.

21 Dascălu, *Arhitecturi relaționale,* 296.

22 Mihăilescu, "Acasă în lume," 27.

23 Constantinescu, Dan, „Locuințele sociale în România," 88.



Fig. 1: Left – Large-scale: location of emergency housing units in Baia Mare. Right – Small-scale: the two buildings hosting emergency housing units. The red line is the barrier constructed by the local administration to close the open premises.

1980s and were designed by State Design Institutes,[24] which developed a significant number of standardized housing projects used throughout the country. During that time the state was "the sole investor and client"[25] and these large mass housing complexes were either belonging to the public housing fund or were subsequently allocated to the working class, allowing them later to eventually buy the units and become home owners. In those times, many people who benefited from those houses were displaced from rural to urban areas.

Two buildings were chosen for analysis, situated in the city of Baia Mare and having emergency housing units established. This case study was chosen because of its typical situation of emergency housing establishment, but also because of its controversial and notorious premises, which are often showcased and discussed in the local and national media, leading to a better understanding of the users' life and their relationship to the vicinities and the local surroundings.

When discussing the urban context, the emergency housing units are distributed in several buildings of large mass-housing complexes situated in the outskirts of the city, close to the disused industrial platforms. (Fig. 1 – Left) The neighborhood in which they are situated was built according to the modern urban planning systematizations conducted by the state during the 1980s.[26] Today, the neighborhood is known at a city level for being ill-famed, having low life expectancy and a high criminality rate. In a social study conducted by the media platform Storia.ro, in 2017 nationwide the neighborhood was ranked 7th in the top twenty most insecure neighborhoods in Romania.[27] As a matter of fact, its settlement, its poor and predominantly Roma inhabitants, its lack of quality public spaces and its vicinity with a polluted and disused industrial platform raise concerns regarding insecurity, urban fear and segregation. When studying urban fear, researcher Simone Tulumello stated that affordable mass housing neighborhoods "are amongst the favorite targets of commonplaces about crime, fear of difference stigmatization."[28] Therefore, the placement of emergency housing units in neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city, which are locally considered notorious areas, can only amplify the state of insecurity in which users already find themselves.

24 Ana Maria Zahariade, „The communist project in concrete – a history of our profession," in Ana Maria Zahariade, *Architecture in the communist project. Romania 1944-1989* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2011), 138.

25 Zahariade, „The communist project," 137.

26 Dorin Ștef, *Baia Mare de altădată* [Baia Mare from Other Times] (Baia Mare: Eurotip/Glasul Maramureșului, 2014), 25.

27 Roxana Roșu, "Topul celor mai sigure orașe din România" [Top Secure Cities in Romania], *Ziarul Financiar* https://www.zf.ro/zf-24/topul-celor-mai-sigure-orase-din-romania-pe-ce-loc-se-afla-bucurestiul-infografic-16142573 (30th January 2017).

28 Simone Tulumello, "Fear and urban planning in ordinary cities: from theory to practice," *Planning Practice and Research* 30:5 (2015): 489.



Fig. 2: Left – Prefabricated concrete modules & unit plan. Right – Floor plan.

The emergency units are distributed in two apartment blocks (Fig. 1 – Right), which initially had open surrounding premises. In 2010 the public authority decided to close the open premises by building a wall, motivating this decision by stating that it would "protect children from traffic on the nearby street, and also to establish order and discipline in the area."[29], while in reality it served mostly to hide the poor living conditions. Furthermore, the local administration has established a barrier to control the inhabitants, producing segregation rather than interaction. This decision was sanctioned in 2011 by The National Council for Combating Discrimination because "the erection of a dividing wall between the social housing occupied mostly by the Roma minority and the main street discriminates."[30] A physical barrier can only become a social barrier, cutting the chances of any interactions between the users and the surrounding communities. A solution would be implementing a surrounding space which would encourage social interactions in order to diminish segregation and stigmatization, while also allowing users to participate in designing or simply using properly the outside space.

Regarding the architectural characteristics, the buildings in which the units are located are defined by the functionalist features of the 1980s mass-housing series[31] that can be found across the whole country. The two buildings are bar-type apartment blocks, having four stories, being built of prefabricated concrete panels and modules. These modules had a standard dimension of 3,6 x 3,6m.[32] (Fig. 2 - Left) A unit was reduced to a minimum standard, not only in terms of size, but also in terms of spatial qualities. One could argue that such a neutral framework can give users freedom in personalizing their space, but the minimal dimensions do not actually allow for flexible features. The floor plan (Fig. 2 – Right) reveals no common or designated spaces or rooms to encourage everyday activities such as meetings or any other type of social interactions.

In crisis situations, post-emergency architecture and design can help restore balance because "shock is absorbed by design consumption."[33] A neutral architecture, one that maximizes the quality of the interior and exterior space, can provide the necessary framework for design consumption by allowing people to customize and personalize space. And "the true function of good design remains anesthetic, a symptom of trauma that cannot be expressed,"[34] but which can be used to improve the everyday life of a person going through an exceptional situation.

Legally, the emergency housing units are under the administration of The Municipality of Baia Mare, according to the public local council decisions and the official answers obtained.[35] The

29 Oana Sandu, "Dincolo de zid" [Beyond the Wall], *Decât o Revistă* 72 (2011). https://www.dor.ro/dincolo-de-zid-integral-din-dor-7-2/.

30 Ibid.

31 Ștef, *Baia Mare de altădată*, 45.

32 Alexandra Florian, "Noi moduri de abordare a locuințelor standardizate" [New Ways of Approaching Design for Standardized Residential Buildings], *Arhitectura* 2 (1982): 14.

33 Beatriz Colomina, Mark Wigley, *Are we human? Notes on archaeology of design* (Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers, 2016/2018), 100-101.

34 Ibid.

35 Primăria Municipiului Baia Mare [The Municipality of Baia Mare], "Adresa nr. 40019: Răspuns la accesul la informații publice privind situația locuințelor de urgență din Baia Mare" [Address no. 40019: Response



Fig. 3: Emergency housing blocks.

units were regulated as necessity housing in 2015 after rehabilitating the buildings that used to host single individuals and workers on the industrial platform that can be found nearby. Legally, the inhabitants are individuals and "families in areas at high risk of social marginalization in terms of housing"[36] and belong mostly to the Roma minority. Almost 100 families were relocated here following the demolition of their informal *Craica* community, without any prior sociological studies, as stated in *The Report on the Roma communities in Baia Mare,* conducted by The Institute for the Study of National Minorities.[37] Even though these families should have lived there for a limited period of time, until they could, or be helped to, recreate their homes, most of them are still living in these units. Therefore, their temporary living has at the time of this article reached almost six years.

In this situation the users belonging to the Roma minority were forced to lose their houses. They had indeed improper and unsanitary living conditions in their informal settlement, but their compulsory relocation was not done in order for them to benefit from better living conditions. The users were moved from a slum consisting of architecture built and developed by themselves to standardized urban blocks devoid of spatial qualities, in an advanced state of degradation (Fig. 3). Individuals, couples or families with many children were all located in units having the same standardized surfaces and dimensions: for example, A.B. (male, user), his wife and their five children are all living in one unit, which has an area of 22 sqm,[38] while the Romanian Housing Act no. 114/1996 states that a family of seven should be accommodated in a home with an area of at least 107 sqm, which means five times bigger.

Vintilă Mihăilescu stated that "people who are displaced from the fabric of their community are currently forced to start from *tabula rasa*, one of the most insidious norms because it is equivalent to freedom: *freedom of de-location*."[39] But in this case, the Roma minority do not enjoy the freedom of de-location, but on the contrary: coming from an informal community and having no legal constraints they ended up in an urban environment surrounded by a physical barrier where the public authority tries to impose its control. For them, appropriating

to the request of publishing information regarding the situation of emergency housing in Baia Mare] (November 25, 2020).

36 Ibid.

37 Estera Roxana Hetea, *Raport despre comunitățile de romi din Baia Mare: Craica, Cuprom, Horea, Pirita și Ferneziu* [Report on the Roma Communities in Baia Mare: Craica, Cuprom, Horea, Pirita and Ferneziu] (Cluj-Napoca: The Institute for the Study of National Minorities, 2012).

38 Sandu, "Dincolo de zid."

39 Mihăilescu, "Acasă în lume," 88.

space in an attempt to find or reconstruct their *home* is not encouraged at all, neither by the architectural framework nor by the management conducted by the local authorities.

In this case study, it seems that emergency housing adapts to a kind of neutral minimal housing, initially designed to host single individuals and industrial workers. However, having only one standardized and prefabricated architectural typology – a one-bedroom unit – which addresses all kinds of users ranging from singles to families with five children, may seem problematic at least.

Emergency Housing Units Established in New Modular Blocks

When addressing the first strategy stage of emergency housing – the immediate shelter – the most common architectural solution used by the public authorities in Romania is the container. The shipping container is a prefabricated modular construction having standardized dimensions of 6,0 x 2,4m and being made of a self-supporting steel structure thermally insulated with mineral wool.[40] Depending on the facilities needed (for example it may have a small bathroom incorporated), the production cost of such a module in Romania is currently around 3,000 euros.[41] For example, in 2020, during the state of emergency established due to the coronavirus pandemic,[42] the container was used in Timișoara as a quarantine space for suspect patients[43] in an attempt to limit the spread of the disease. However, although this production cost can be considered cheap and affordable, the container does not have any furniture and can only be suitable for providing immediate shelter, for the duration of a few days.

There were many international attempts to use shipping containers and improve them to become temporary or emergency housing in an attempt to satisfy living conditions for a longer period of time, such as a few months. For example, Australian architect Sean Godsell developed a post-disaster architectural solution called "Future Shack," based on a shipping container having a bathroom, a kitchenette, and custom-made furniture for all basic needs, which could be delivered and assembled in no more than 24 hours, but which had production costs exceeding $30,000.[44] The production cost was considered too pricey even for Australia.

There was a particular case in 2011 when the public administration of Constanța decided to build an entire campus of housing blocks made of containers, which had the primary purpose of becoming the city's public stock of social and temporary housing.[45] This case study was chosen because here the emergency housing was established in buildings built from scratch as social and temporary housing. Moreover, the design solution is based on modular prefabricated containers.

Regarding the urban context, the campus is located in the Tomis Nord neighborhood, in the vicinity of large mass-housing complexes in open premises built in socialist Romania according to the same modern urban planning systematizations of the 1980s.[46] Compared to Baia Mare, where

40 Containerul.ro, https://www.containerul.ro/produs/containere-modulare/containere-modulare.html.

41 Ibid.

42 Președintele României [The President of Romania], "Decret semnat de Președintele României domnul Klaus Iohannis, privind instituirea stării de urgență pe teritoriul României" [Decree signed by the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, regarding the establishment of the state of emergency on the Romanian territory] (March 16, 2020).

43 Primăria Municipiului Timișoara [The Municipality of Timișoara], "Proces verbal încheiat astăzi 24.11.2020 cu ocazia ședinței extraordinare a Consiliului Local Timișoara" [Minutes concluded today 24.11.2020 on the occasion of the extraordinary meeting of the Local Council of Timișoara] (November 11, 2020).

44 Guomin Zhang, Sujeeva Setunge, and Stefanie van Elmpt, "Using shipping containers to provide temporary housing in post-disaster recovery: Social case studies," in *Procedia Economics and Finance* 18 (2014): 619.

45 Primăria Municipiului Constanța [The Municipality of Constanța], "Decizia nr. 65/2011 privind aprobarea Programului de construire a locuințelor modulare în Municipiul Constanța și a altor lucrări tehnice aferente" [Decision no. 65/2011 regarding the approval of the Program for the construction of modular housing units in the Municipality of Constanța and other related technical works] (March 31, 2011).

46 Octav Olănescu, Vlad Sebastian Rusu, Anamaria Olănescu, and Miruna Moldovan, "3 Intervenții macro cu impact asupra întregului cartier" [3 Macro Interventions with an Impact on the Whole Neighborhood], in



Fig. 4: Left - Large-scale: location of emergency housing units in Constanța. Right – Small-scale: Social complex "Henri Coandă": 1– housing blocks, 2 – public canteen, 3 – local police department, 4 – park and picnic area, 5 – sports field.

the housing units were on the outskirts of the city, here the campus enjoys an approximately central position, well connected to urban facilities at a city level. (Fig. 4 – Left) Even though the campus was designed in 2011, it was based on the same modern urban planning outlines, having a series of 33 container blocks arranged in open premises, with a central public space for community facilities such as a social canteen, a park and picnic area, and a local police department.[47] (Fig. 4 – Right) The central public space, having both indoors and outdoors common spaces for all the users provides an urban framework conducive to social interaction.

Even though the neighborhood where the campus is located is well-ranked, following the construction and the relocation of the first families, the campus came to have the reputation of a notorious place because its inhabitants were constantly involved in scandals disturbing public order.[48] The interactions between the locals and the users were greatly diminished; therefore, the local community, motivating that they felt unsafe, drafted a petition requesting to move the campus to the outskirts of the city.[49] In their opinion, removing the problem – the social campus – from the urban context was the right choice in order to restore the public order they were used to. In Constanța the campus users are also mostly belonging to the Roma minority and, as shown in the previous case study, moving them to the outskirts of the city would ultimately lead to residential segregation. Sociological studies have shown that "although residential segregation is a neglected variable in contemporary discussions of racial disparities, it has long been identified as the central determinant of the creation and perpetuation of racial inequalities."[50] In this case, what the locals wanted to be done was not a solution of the problem at all, but rather a deepening of it.

In terms of architectural characteristics, the blocks are entirely built of attached and stacked containers. Based on the container module, three types of housing units were designed:

Ghid de regenerare urbană a cartierelor de blocuri – Constanța [Guide to Urban Regeneration of Housing Neighborhoods – Constanța], ed. Viorica Ana Merlă, Marcel Ionescu-Heroiu (Constanța: The World Bank, 2021), 289.

47 Primăria Municipiului Constanța, "Decizia nr. 65/2011."

48 Telegrafonline, "Viața în cartierul brazilian al Constanței" [Life in the 'Brazilian neighborhood' of Constanța] (2017). https://www.telegrafonline.ro/viata-in-cartierul-brazilian-al-constantei.

49 Oana Sandu, "Cine m-a pus să vin aici, dar altundeva unde să mă duc?" [Who made me come here? But where else should I go?] (2019) https://www.dor.ro/cine-m-a-pus-sa-vin-aici-dar-altundeva-unde-sa-ma-duc/.

50 David R. Williams and Chiquita Collins, "Racial Residential Segregation: A fundamental cause of racial disparities in health," *Public Health Reports* 116 (2001): 404.

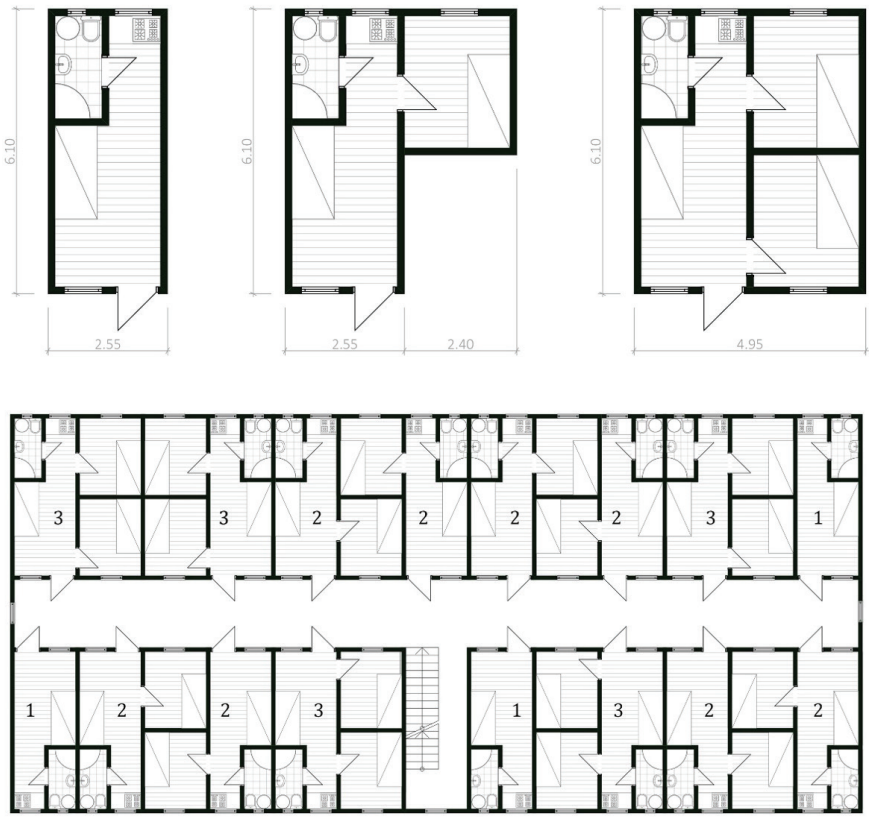


Fig. 5: Up: Types of modular housing units: 1 – one bedroom unit, 2 – two bedrooms unit, 3 – three bedrooms unit. Down: floor plan.

one-bedroom units having an area of 15.5 sqm, two bedrooms units having an area of 22.7 sqm and three bedrooms units having an area of 30,2 sqm. (Fig. 5) Each unit has its own bathroom and a small kitchenette, with minimal interior features.

Even if at first sight these modular housing units seem more generous in terms of interior space and facilities than those in Baia Mare, the quality of the materials, the production process and the qualities of the interior space are all doubtful: O.D. (female, user) states that "the lack of light in the room sometimes makes her feel like she is in prison"[51] and that she does not "know how they will manage when the children grow up, because the 22 sqm are already insufficient for them."[52] Even though there are three types of housing units, O.D., her husband and their three children were placed in a two bedrooms unit having 22,7 sqm while the Romanian Housing Act no. 114/1996 states that a family of five should be accommodated in a house with an area of at least 87 sqm, which means four times bigger. As in Baia Mare, the housing units are undersized and not fit to accommodate large families.

Even though the design of this campus had a healthy conceptual basis, the faulty implementation led to a questionable architecture. The exterior aspect of the buildings is once again neutral and reduced to minimal (Fig. 6), but this aspect allowed the users to personalize and appropriate both the interior and the exterior space. People started decorating the buildings

51 Sandu, "Cine m-a pus să vin aici, dar altundeva unde să mă duc?"
52 Ibid.



Fig. 6: Emergency housing blocks, their gardens and their users.

and even creating their own private gardens outside the blocks.[53] (Fig. 6) For example, in an attempt to make people feel they have more than just a temporary shelter, gardening has been used in temporary refugee camps as means to appropriate and participate in designing and creating their own space, because "cultivating the land can feel permanent"[54]. When discussing the architecture of appropriation, researcher Rene Boer stated that in cases of *squatting,* where people relocate and illegally occupy buildings to cover their need for temporary housing, "a typical kind of architecture starts to emerge, which is the result of a combination of the immediate need and desire to transform the space (…), out of the lack of budget to make actual investments, the ease of adapting to the found typology, and the uncertainty of being evicted."[55] In Constanța, even without a budget, the users managed to appropriate the outside space and to design their own meeting places (Fig. 6). Having the opportunity to participate in the planning of the outside space allowed people to continue their everyday activities and encouraged social interaction at least between themselves.

Like in Baia Mare, in Constanța most of the users belong once again to the Roma minority. According to a social survey conducted by researcher Marian Mandache in 2019, 17 Roma families living in the informal *Munții Tatra* community were temporarily relocated in the campus as a result of the demolition of their improvised settlement[56]. So, once again the people were moved from low-density rural settlements made out of tents to standardized modular housing units located in urban high-density blocks. The brutal transition made without a prior

53 Telegrafonline, "Viața în cartierul brazilian al Constanței."

54 Julia Travers, "Community and vegetables grow side-by-side in Syrian refugee camp gardens," https://www.kuer.org/2018-02-22/community-and-vegetables-grow-side-by-side-in-syrian-refugee-camp-gardens.

55 René Boer, Marina Otero Verzier, and Katia Truijen, *Architecture of appropriation: On squatting as spatial practice* (Rotterdam: Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2019), 21.

56 Marian Mandache, *Închiderea cercului: vulnerabilitatea locuințelor romilor și interesele generale locative* [Closing the Circle: The Vulnerability of Roma Housing and General Housing Interests] (Constanța: Legal Resources Center, 2019), 5.

consultation with the people involved had a major impact on their social life. For example, O.D. (female, user) stated that "if someone asked us where we wanted to live, most of us would have said that we would like a piece of land and a house on the same land that they left."[57] Even after she and her family found themselves relocated in the campus, she "dreamed that it would be the solution for people like them, who lived in the countryside in improvised houses. But the relocation didn't make them feel safe or wanted by the rest of the community."[58] In their case, emergency housing was not seen as a temporary solution, but as a chance to a new life, a chance to build their *home*.

Anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu discussed the fact that "an identity of belonging to a place, to a space, be it borrowed or temporary, but inhabited in such a way as to become a *home*, is deeply inscribed in the unconscious of everyone."[59] Therefore, even if people live for a short period of time in emergency housing units, they should be granted the opportunity to feel safe and at home. In an emergency situation the "residents' daily lives are governed by atmospheres of anxiety in the housing crisis as structure of feeling, as well by their own personal uncertainties, worries and crises."[60] So, moving people to a place where they not only do not find their peace due mostly to ethnical or personal reasons, but where they also feel unsafe because of bad management and a controversial relationship with the public authorities is more than questionable.

In this case, the emergency housing was purposely designed out of modular containers, which allowed the public authorities to rapidly create high-density temporary housing buildings. Compared to the units in Baia Mare, the existence of three types of units in order to accommodate various types of users, from individuals to families, can be considered an improvement and can be a future solution, if designed and managed properly.

Conclusions

In Romania, emergency housing legally stated as *locuințe de necesitate* has two typical establishment situations: either it manages to adapt to the existing standardized housing units, or it is specifically defined and designed using modular and flexible solutions such as shipping containers. In both cases, the architecture is reduced to minimum, both in terms of quality and implementation costs.

Considering the first aspect of the analysis criteria – the urban context –, both case studies were located in neighborhoods with large mass-housing complexes built mostly in 1980s Socialist Romania. While in Baia Mare the neighborhood was situated in the outskirts of the city, having weak connections with the city's facilities and lacking quality public spaces, in Constanța the location was almost central, having a high degree of accessibility to the city's facilities, the social campus providing even incorporated public spaces and sport facilities. However, both sites have come to be considered controversial, notorious and ill-famed areas, producing residential segregation. The urban context of emergency housing is crucial and should encourage social interactions both between users and between users and the immediate vicinity. Instead of strong physical barriers, it should have a surrounding spatial interface with outdoor spaces, which allow the users to appropriate space in order to fulfill their needs and continue practicing their everyday activities. Emergency housing should be focused on integration, not segregation.

Regarding the architectural characteristics, both temporary housing units have functionalist and standardized features, being constructed of prefabricated modules: prefabricated concrete panels from the 60s or contemporary modular shipping containers. They both seem to create a

57 Sandu, "Cine m-a pus să vin aici, dar altundeva unde să mă duc?"

58 Ibid.

59 Mihăilescu, "Acasă în lume," 88.

60 Ella Harris, Mel Nowicki, and Katherine Brickwell, "On-edge in the impasse: inhabiting the housing crisis as structure-of-feeling," *Geoforum* 101 (2019): 158.

minimal and neutral framework, which, if having proper dimensions and if allowing adequate spatial comfort, would be an optimal solution for temporary housing. Given the fact that the users may come from very different ethnic or social groups, a neutral architectural framework should provide the necessary room for users to personalize and appropriate. By having the opportunity to personalize their spaces, users inhabit or live their houses, even if they are only temporary homes.

Modular shipping containers allow for more flexibility when creating different types of emergency housing units, but rehabilitating the existing housing stock or other abandoned buildings and establishing emergency housing units is a more ecologically appropriate and affordable solution that should be firstly taken into consideration by public authorities when addressing the housing crisis. This would also be a major step in trying to align the national public housing stock with the European Union standards.

The relationship between public authorities and the user has a strong impact in crisis mediation. The fact that in both cases local authorities tried to radicalize the control over the users who belonged to the Roma minority only led to issues related to segregation and social exclusion. If such a relationship would be based on integration and stimulation of social interaction, it would help the users to restore their life balance by allowing them to continue their everyday activities. In terms of architecture, this would mean to design public or shared spaces around or inside the emergency housing blocks to encourage everyday activities and therefore interactions between users. Due to its temporary nature, the emergency housing might not always be able to provide a framework for the users to completely recreate their *home*, but it should become a framework for restoring balance and safety in order to make the transition to the next stage – the restoration of the permanent settlement.

Given its users' diversity, its unpredictable duration of use and its unpredictable necessity, which may vary in response according to large-scale catastrophic weather phenomena or small-scale eviction situations, emergency housing cannot have strict or limited design criteria to follow, but it is necessary to have a permanent emergency housing stock available. This means having empty emergency housing units available in the existing public housing stock or having modular unit funds ready to be shipped and implemented in extreme cases. Emergency housing might not have a clear architectural typology, but it is definitely characterized by adaptability and flexibility. Considering the users, emergency housing should be established in neutral frameworks, which should always allow for space appropriation. However, flexibility in space appropriation should mainly refer to architectural qualities, because it is not to be forgotten that emergency housing is and should always remain temporary for its users. Its built framework, both interior and exterior, needs to allow integration strategies that are to be encouraged by the public authorities, always keeping in mind the restoration of the permanent settlement.

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