From Printed Word to Bureaucratic Negotiation. Housing Projects for Workers during the 1950s in Romania

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In an article published in 1956 by the *Arhitectura RPR* magazine, Mihail Caffé lamented that although this magazine had "to emphasize the successful achievements and condemn the mistakes" of architecture, most of its texts were simple descriptions of the building projects finalized throughout Romania. While the communist regime's official practice claimed that any ideas, concepts, or opinions should be appropriated "critically," Caffé did not specify if *Arhitectura RPR* should voice statements made by politicians or architects. In fact, within the Romanian media, the magazine itself embraced an ambivalent standing. On one hand, it was printed in a limited edition and targeted a very small audience, which rarely consisted of someone else but architects and state bureaucrats. On the other hand, its content consisted of a combination of political readings of the building projects and architectural solutions that sometimes differed very much from the official line. As such, the public character of the *Arhitectura RPR* became a center of power, which, in Thomas Wolfe's words, "presented both problems and possibilities."[1]

In this article, I will dwell on this ambivalent function of the *Arhitectura RPR* by looking at how the review analyzed the housing projects built in the newly developed Romanian industrial sites during the 1950s. I will pay a particular attention to aspects related to comfort, function and aesthetics because they carry a significant value in deconstructing the political understanding of workers' everyday life. In order to do so, this article will focus upon the case of Hunedoara, a steel production center located in the southern part of Transylvania, which had became an icon of the massive industrialization program in Romania during the 1950s. This site is relevant for understanding the official approaches to social housing not only because it lodged a large number of inhabitants, but also because it conscribed the ideological implications of the industrialization process. Accordingly, politics and architecture were not distinct categories, but entangled discourses on social engineering projects. For instance, immediately after Stalin's death, the Romanian authorities re-evaluated the mass housing projects already finalized in Hunedoara. Being particularly concerned with how the industrial worker inhabited that space, the officials came up with a number of suggestions on dwellings' aspect and function. Yet, by 1957 when the Romanian authorities re-engaged with massive industrialization and diminished the significance of consumption goods industry, many of these concepts had been re-evaluated as well, most

1 Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

of the time by lowering the initial comfort standards. Nevertheless, this article will show that local authorities in Hunedoara appealed to the initial official understanding of comfort in their attempt to adjust projects elaborated by the central leadership. In this way, I argue that although the official understanding of the workers' housing was articulated by political priorities and ideological constraints varying from one moment to another, it also articulated the negotiated relations between central and local institutional structures.

The Impact of the New Economic Policies upon Housing Programs for Industrial Workers

In the spring of 1953, when Stalin died, the economic situation of Eastern Europe was very difficult. Since the end of the Second World War, the population of the Soviet Union had been experiencing a steady deterioration of the living standards; in fact, the little capital of popular support that the regime managed to attain by the end of the conflagration, shortly evolved into frustration and disappointment. In other states of the bloc, the new communist governments failed to carry out consistent social programs.[2] It was becoming apparent that unless authorities identified immediate solutions, massive waves of popular discontent would outburst across the entire bloc. The new economic course marked a shift in the investment strategies. While until that moment, the official ideology claimed that a country's independence depended on its level of heavy industrial development, after 1953, much attention was being paid to consumption goods industry and mass housing programs. In Romania, for instance, the Communist Party Plenary meeting held in August 1953 adopted several consistent social measures such as building housing facilities for 50,000 families within a two-year span and modernizing the production capacities of agriculture.[3]

While the new economic program was quite pragmatic in scope, the immediate implications delineated a complicated, yet ambivalent reality, articulated by entangled discourses on the nature of orthodoxy in Marxism. In other words, the Romanian political leadership had to integrate the changing line of economic programming into a valid ideological statement.

The shift in economic priorities occurred because of a complex reading of Marxist-Leninist views on the "socialist nation." During the early 1950s, the party ideologues explained this concept as a transient construct that tied the national identity to the state of economic development; that was based on class determinism meaning a "hegemonic image of the proletariat in the national life, as a bearer of a higher conception of the world, which provided national revival."[4] In order to carry out such a program, the regime defined the concept of "popular masses" as an entity formed by "the working people, both industrial and agricultural workers, led by the industrial proletariat."[5] Accordingly, the socialist nation was superior to what the party ideologues termed as the 'bourgeois nation.' The alliance between the industrial and the agricultural proletariat became the main concept around which the entire theoretical reasoning was constructed. Furthermore, similar to what Terry Martin has termed as a "primordial" approach to the nation, the official discourse was imbued with concepts like "the people," "tradition," "value," "morale," "vernacular,"

2 Elena Zubkova. *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

3 "Un an de activitate" [One Year of Activity], *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1954): 1-2.

4 C. Rusu, "Construcția și instrumentalizarea ideii de națiune în perioada regimului comunist din România, 1948-1971" [Constructing and Instrumenting the Nation during the Communist Regime in Romania], (PhD Dissertation, Babes Bolyai University, 2012), 134.

5 A. Roth, "Despre determinarea categoriei sociologice de mase populare" [On Determining the Sociological Category of Popular Masses] *Cercetari filozofice* 2 (1957): 81.

"local specificity," and "family." This meant that in order to prevent any "defensive nationalism" within the Eastern Bloc there was the need to "depoliticize national identity [...] through the systematic promotion of all forms of national unity that did not conflict with the existence of a unitary, socialist state."[6] In this way, the decisions adopted at the 1953 party meeting concerning mass housing and modernization of agricultural capacities would be granted an ideological support.

The socialist realist dictum 'national in form and socialist in content' served as the perfect framework for the new economic course. This was a Stalinist notion dating back in the late 1930s, which stated that the works of art would make use of the traditional – that is, vernacular artistic elements to reflect the revolutionary socio-economic reality of the present.[7] The concept was not new in Romania either. Since the late 1940s, socialist realism gradually penetrated the cultural fields, which meant that issues related to national form as expressions of popular support were frequently addressed. Nevertheless, in terms of architectural production, for instance, the political decision to improve the well-being of the 'popular masses' meant that aspects like way of living, housing conditions or rural communities' structure and organization would be granted an ideological meaning significantly higher than during the previous period.

After the August 1953 party plenary, however, the political approaches to economic projects fluctuated under the impact of various events occurred on the international arena, but the dominant trend consisted in picking up again the development of heavy industry and slowing down the consumption goods industry. Furthermore, the climate of relative cultural and political relaxation that followed the adoption of the new economic course and lasted until the second half of 1957, coincided with a growing concern to recuperating the Leninist ideas, which would lead to questioning Stalinist dogmatism.[8] Such changes, otherwise quite significant, had an unexpected impact upon the official understanding of the workers' housing projects as well as upon the architects' aesthetic choices. While the authorities were particularly concerned with lowering the construction costs as much as possible by industrialization and standardization, architects saw in the official growing interest in folk tradition an excellent opportunity to distance themselves from the socialist realism practice of using some classical decorative elements on the building façades and to embrace modernism instead.

The link between the two consisted of a sociological-inspired interwar Romanian methodology that approached housing in close connection with the dynamics of social and economic life. Starting with 1954, the authorities were particularly concerned to establish how the industrial projects already finalized affected various rural or industrial areas. Research campaigns led by different institutional structures aimed to identify the "typical" social features of those communities regarded by the regime as being the most economically advanced; such findings would serve as benchmarks for sketching up nation-wide social programmes. In the field of architecture, for instance, the housing patterns specific to these communities would be used in planning workers' dwelling types throughout the country. [9] The architects' solutions would also have to take into account another element that was articulated by ideological stances. The family,

6 Terry Martin, "Modernization or Neo-traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism," in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, eds. David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 166.

7 Katerina Clark, "Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space," in *The Landscape of Stalinism, the Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 5.

8 Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Mizeria utopiei. Criza ideologiei marxiste în Europa răsăriteană* [The Poverty of Utopia: The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe] (Iași: Polirom), 1997.

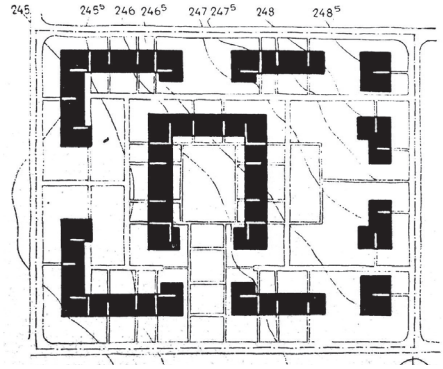
9 H. Culea, "Sociologia monografică și problema țărănească" [Monographic Sociology and the Peasant Question], *Cercetări filozofice* 6 (1956): 98; T. Cristian, "Obiectul și metodele de cercetare ale sociologiei marxiste" [Object and Research Methods of Marxist Sociology], *Cercetări filozofice* 5 (1957): 167-73.

as an expression of "real monogamy because of its tie with the socialist economic base," was further given an official dimension by the adoption of the Family Code in 1956.[10]

Concepts crystallized between 1954 and 1957 represented, therefore, the result of entangled discourses on value of traditional housing, standardization and construction industrialization, but opened up, as well, sociological related questions on the newly urbanized workers' tastes and consumption options.[11] Within this contextual framework, there are a couple of questions relevant for understanding the significance of the official discourse on workers' housing: How influential was the official reading of workers' housing amongst the architects? To what extent did the economic programming influence the official understanding? What kind of impact did such an official discourse have amongst the Romanian bureaucrats? To answer such questions, further in the this article a particular attention will be paid to how the housing projects in Hunedoara were discussed within these theoretical frameworks. Such a perspective leads the way towards a broader understanding of the printed texts at various levels of the state leadership.

Hunedoara. From Ideology to Housing

In an article published by the review *Arhitectura RPR* in 1953, Cezar Lăzărescu claimed that the L-shaped buildings of the Hunedoara socialist realist neighbourhood completed during the early 1950s "gave the impression of a courtyard." A specific element of socialist realist architecture, the "cvartal" became the main urban structure of the new city; it represented the urban space delineated by the junction of four streets. Buildings constructed around that perimeter had to trace an enclosed space using similarly constructed buildings, organized in an ensemble of stylistically sober and simple edifices. The interior of these cvartals was devoted to green spaces and public zones. (Fig. 1 and 2)



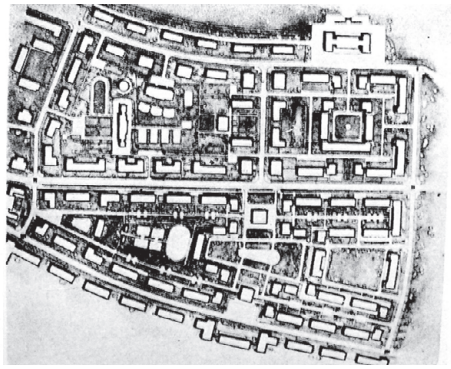


Fig.1. Hunedoara. Project of a cvartal. C. Lăzărescu, „Din experiența proiectării și construcției cuartalelor de locuințe," *Arhitectura RPR* 1(1953): 8.

Fig.2. Hunedoara. Cvartals (1952-3). Architects Gheorghe Petrașcu, Nicolae Porumbescu, Radu Udroiu. Gustav Gusti, "Locuința în clădiri cu puține caturi. Referat prezentat la Plenara a II-a a Uniunii Arhitecților," *Arhitectura RPR* 6-7 (1954): 27.

10 H. Culea, "Critica unor teorii sociologice burgheze în problema familiei" [Critique of Bourgeois Sociologic Theories on the Question of Family], *Cercetări filozofice* 2 (1956): 50-52.

11 Radu Crăiniceanu, "Case noi în Valea Jiului" [New Houses in the Jiu Valley], *Arhitectura RPR* 9 (1957): 36; Sebestyen, Gheorghe, "Gádoros Lajos - Amenajarea și dimensionarea locuinței. Cum să construim locuințe noi, ieftine și comfortabile" [Gádoros Lajos – Housing Design and Dimensions. How to Build New, Cheap and Comfortable Houses], *Arhitectura RPR* 8 (1957): 52.

This represented the first open criticisms of cvartals erected in Romania during the 1950s. A year later, Ion Silvan criticized the structure of the same housing units, arguing that some rooms were unusable because of the uninspired location of doors, stoves or windows, a solution chosen "more likely to save the façades' organization." Arguably, in order to obtain a rhythmic aspect of the buildings' exterior one "could find an excess of doors and windows, placed indiscriminately in rooms, bedrooms or kitchens."[12] Cautioning his colleagues that building economically was not tantamount with implementing cheap housing solutions, but streamlining housing construction processes, another practitioner asserted that undersized apartments were illustrative for the "total lack of interest in the life and comfort of the working people."[13]

Such statements were not singular comments in a myriad of enthusiastic remarks about the Romanian architectural production, but expressions of the recent decisions of the communist party's leadership. Accordingly, at various meetings held behind closed doors, the Romanian politicians had discussed many of the topics published later in the *Arhitectura RPR* magazine; they seemed to be particularly concerned with the case of the construction sites located in the proximity of the most important centers of heavy industry. By surfacing into the press, the architectural discourse became part of a complex mechanism that aimed to convey coherently the politicians' understanding of workers' everyday life and home comfort.

Starting with 1953, both the professional architects' publications and the party newspaper *Scânteia* published articles that criticized the layout, construction finishing, comfort and quality of workers' housing in locations like Hunedoara, Jiu Valley or Reşiţa, to name just a few. For instance, over the following months, the *Arhitectura RPR* magazine published a number of articles featuring solutions on developing urban apartment buildings, which revolved around several dominant aspects: 1) to establish typified projects at national level to ensure optimum living experience regardless of local conditions, exposure to sunlight or cost price limitations; 2) to standardize the two room apartment's area to an average value of about 40 sq m; 3) to re-evaluate rooms sizes, including hallways, kitchens and bathrooms to facilitate solutions for appropriate furniture. Although the new path would further rely on a "critical" study of "Soviet methods and standards,"[14] as Gustav Gusti carefully acknowledged, it marked a steady but gradual transfer of designers' interest from the purely aesthetic concerns of socialist realism towards a growing attention paid to urban functionality and industrialization of construction.[15]

The regime's perspective on the working class' dwellings in Hunedoara was also picked up in several interventions made at the second Plenary of the Architects' Union held in July 1954. Publishing a selection of speeches of the most visible architects of the moment, like Mircea Alifanti, Gustav Gusti or Gheorghe Petraşcu, the editorial staff emphasized the ongoing political priorities. Unlike the previous texts, which mostly stressed the functionalist arguments, this time the discourse leaned towards issues like the designers' ideological proficiency and the main features of local architecture. For instance, not only that Gheorghe Petraşcu and Gustav Gusti were very critical about the lack of functionality of the dwellings completed in the Hunedoara socialist-realist cvartals, but also Petrascu's intervention comprised a harsh criticism on how the architects had materialized the requirements of the socialist realism style:

12 Cezar Lăzărescu, „Din experienţa proiectării şi construcţiei kvartalelor de locuinţe" [Designing and Building Housing Cvartals] *Arhitectura RPR* 1(1953): 8; Ion Silvan, „În legătură cu proiectarea secţiunilor tip de locuinţe" [On Designing Typified Housing Sections] *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1954): 8, 11.

13 N.P., „Discuţii asupra unor secţiuni tip de locuinţe" [Discussing some Typified Housing Sections] *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1954): 34.

14 Gustav Gusti, „Construcţia de locuinţe, problema centrală a arhitecturii sovietice" [Housing, the Central Question in Soviet Architecture], *Arhitectura RPR* 4 (1954): 1-9.

15 Ion Silvan, Gheorghe Popescu Negreanu, „Noi secţiuni tip pentru blocuri cu puţine nivele" [New Typified Sections for Low Rise Collective Housing], *Arhitectura RPR* 5 (1954): 1.

"Short buildings and the big distance left between them fails to create a street front; there is no clear separation between the street and the interior of the cvartal and no marking of any of its accesses. The view escapes uncontrolled within the cvartal, up to the street that runs parallel to 100 or 200 meters or even next cvartal. On slopes, adaptation to the terrain is illusory, the symmetries being broken by un-rhythmic successions of plinths and cornices. It results in a tiresome and perplexing disorder. [...] Allegedly, the concept of force, enthusiasm, and optimism found an expression into the heavy volumes, sullen towers, petty gables that break eaves unjustly, disproportionate balconies and loggias draped with a fancy baroque decoration of cheap vulgarity." [16] (Fig 3 and 4)

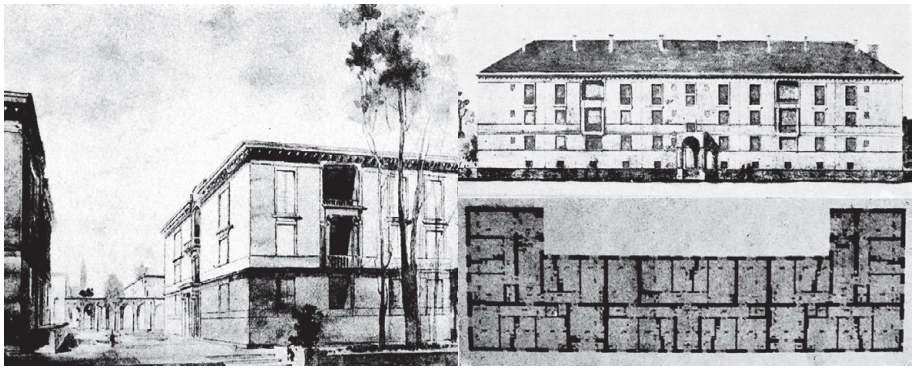


Fig.3. Hunedoara. Street perspective. C. Lăzărescu, „Din experiența proiectării și construcției cuartalelor de locuințe," *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1953): 5.

Fig.4. Apartment building in Hunedoara. Architect Radu Udroiu. Gustav Gusti, "Locuința în clădiri cu puține caturi. Referat prezentat la Plenara a II-a a Uniunii Arhitecților," *Arhitectura RPR* 6-7 (1954): 23.

The rationale of Petrascu's statement might appear difficult to comprehend within the political context of the year 1954 when socialist realism was still the dominant architectural manifestation accepted by the regime. Yet, the *Arhitectura RPR* provided an answer to this ambivalent situation by means of Gustav Gusti's speech and by the concluding remarks of Mircea Alifanti's. Gusti engaged himself in a thorough discussion about institutional responsibility in conducting architectural programs, pointing out towards the Academy of the PRR as the missing link between the political view on the working class' economic significance and the comfort of homes. He warned that the Academy of the PRR still lagged behind the original plan (included in the party decisions in November 1952 on the establishment of State Committee of Architecture and Constructions[17]), which stated that a new research institute would be opened under its coordination to assist architects' ideological training. In other words, Gusti asserted that architects' lack of ideological training produced "petty" buildings precisely in the most important industrial centers of the country, which would harm the general living conditions of the working people. By doing that, Gusti resumed previous topics discussed in the meetings of the Council of Ministers that warned that architects failed to align to the new requirements of the August 1953 Plenary Party meeting, since they were more interested in "discussions and statements."

16 Gustav Gusti, "Locuința în clădiri cu puține caturi. Referat prezentat la Plenara a II-a a Uniunii Arhitecților" [Low Rise Housing. Paper presented at the 2nd meeting of the Union of Architects] *Arhitectura RPR* 6-7 (1954): 22; Gheorghe Petrașcu, "Câteva probleme de compoziție și plastică în legătură cu proiectarea clădirilor de locuințe cu puține caturi. Coreferat prezentat la plenara a II-a a Uniunii Arhitecților" [Issues of Composition and Artistic Expression in the Design of Low Rise Housing. Paper presented at the 2nd meeting of the Union of Architects], *Arhitectura RPR* 6-7 (1954): 45-6.

17 ANIC, Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri. Stenograme birouri pe ramuri, 15/1952, 1-41; 18/1952, 1-15.

Moreover, the governmental authorities had claimed that the architects' "lack of soul and patriotism" weakened the new political construction.[18] However, Gusti's statement was not a simple rephrasing of the decision-making factors, but his exposé targeted an open problem of the day, which revolved around the responsibility of the Academy of the PRR to carry out theoretical programs that would support the transformative program of the party. Not surprisingly, Gusti appealed mainly similar allegations of "dogmatism" and lack of ideological proficiency that were directed against other research institutes functioning under the Romanian Academy, particularly the newly established Institute of Philosophy, which was partially responsible with conducting theoretical work on issues related to socialism.[19]

Unlike other theoretical research topics, though, the issue of workers' housing encapsulated a far more complicated case, as at stakes there was the necessity to construct dwellings ideologically valid and financially viable. In Gusti's words, "there were noticed tight interests to fulfill the economic plan's requirements [...] on behalf of both architectural institutes and beneficiary, which were foreign to the party line."[20] As such, the party had assumed a massive program of housing construction, suitable for lodging workers within the most preeminent industrial locations, but one year after the August 1953 Plenary meeting it became apparent that neither the politicians nor the architects had a very clear image on how such houses should look like or how much should they cost. On the contrary, the discussions that followed revolved around an abstract and vague ideological concept of "getting architecture in touch with real life." Accordingly, while the employees of the newly established Institute of Philosophy of the Academy were sent to conduct research internships in factories such as GAS, SMT and GAC,[21] architects were assigned the task to familiarize themselves with the specificity of the folk tradition so that any exogenous elements would be dismissed from building projects. Seen in this key, Gheorghe Petrașcu's reading of Hunedoara socialist-realist cvartals as a "dogmatic," "luscious" and "vulgar" product, which ignored the working people's "life problems" and local constructive features, was part of the new rhetoric of the party to "recover the progressive past" so that the architecture would reflect the "primordial" and "patriotic" values of the "popular masses."[22] In this way, without questioning the general principles of socialist realism, the Romanian architect led the way towards an ideological engagement with the folk tradition, which became central when the party articulated its own discourse about the "socialist nation."

The political influence upon the official discourse of the *Arhitectura RPR* was further emphasized by the fact that the magazine did not publish all the speeches made at the architects' plenary. Thus, in another intervention made at the architects' plenary session in July 1954, which was not published in the *Arhitectura RPR* magazine, but is available in the archives of the Union of Architects, Gheorghe Trifu contested the arguments invoked by his more visible colleagues, like Mircea Alifanti and Gheorghe Petrașcu. He reminded his fellow architects that, contrary to what others had claimed in their speeches, the population did not voice any dissatisfaction with the rooms' size or shape, the apartments' layout or the general aesthetic aspect of the new housing facilities. Trifu argued instead that the social investigations conducted among the new urban dwellers pointed out that the real problems consisted of very bad quality of finishing, the doors and windows that did not close properly, or the missing pipes or sanitary facilities.[23] Accordingly,

18 ANIC, Fond Consiliul de Miniștri, Stenograme, 5/1954, 260.

19 Rusu, "Construcția și instrumentalizarea," 114-20.

20 Gusti, "Locuința," 23.

21 Rusu, "Construcția și instrumentalizarea," 114-20.

22 Petrașcu, "Câteva probleme," 49-50.

23 Arhiva Uniunii Arhitecților (AUA), 24/1954: Plenara a II-a a Uniunii Arhitecților din RPR. In fact, the archives of the communist institutions abound in information on the institutional blockages, problematic quality of the living space, lack of professional

the selection of the materials made available to the public suggested a growing concern with debating ideological "concepts" and theoretical notions rather than engaging in an in-depth public discussion about the nature of the building system or institutional (dis)-functions.[24] In fact, looking at how the political authority articulated the public message within the *Arhitectura RPR* delineates a complicated interaction between the state and the architects' profession. I suggest that re-engagement with modernist functionalism later on was possible because of the ambivalent readings of those concepts around which the official discourse revolved. Thus, the meaning of housing related concepts, like form, size, and function was an outcome of continuous adaptation and re-adaptation of contexts and dominating ideologies – that is, the political understanding of social programs.

Accordingly, the main theme of the texts published in *Arhitectura RPR* between 1954 and 1957 revolved around the concept of individual dwelling - that is "a space serving the spiritual, emotional and material needs of both individuals and families."[25] Nevertheless, the increasing concern for the comfort of the dwellings' interior space echoed modern as well as sociological-related influences. In fact, quite often it was mentioned that "the differences in lifestyles of various inhabitants" should be placed at the center of the architects' attention, and such an approach was impossible unless scientific investigations would be conducted within various communities.[26]

Moreover, architects like Gheorghe Popescu Negreanu or Gheorghe Sebestyen argued that no aesthetic option should be adopted if that solution restrained the functionality and comfort of the interior space. Furthermore, in line with the Marxist theoretical definition of the family as a superstructure of the economic base, Mihail Caffé cautioned that the industrial family greatly differed from the rural one. Accordingly, housing solutions suitable for "patriarchal families" or ones that "tied females to domestic activities" were inappropriate for the new urban environments.[27] While accommodating more than one family into a single apartment was a solution proposed by the 1953 projects – that is, before the August 1953 Plenary Party meeting, the architects had to comply with this new responsibility and identify the best alternative to construct cheap apartments for nuclear families rapidly.[28]

To avoid "promiscuity," otherwise caused by housing two families into one single apartment, Gheorghe Popescu Negreanu stressed instead that smaller apartments would better accommodate the newly urbanized population.[29] The 24 sq m two-room apartment, first mentioned in *Arhitectura RPR* in 1956, became the quintessence of "comfortable and economical" contemporary living solution for a three-member family. Thus, the new housing typology was

training or difficulties in the dialogue between various institutions involved in the programs.

24 For the time being, the institutional chaos of the construction sites was kept away from the public's eye, even though numerous archival materials document the fact that the country's leadership was fully aware of the numerous problems. In fact, the first public statements on the institutional blockages date in the second half of the 1950s when the central leadership began open criticisms against local authorities.

25 "Rezoluția celui de-al IV-lea Congres al Uniunii Internaționale a Arhitecților" [The Resolution of the 4th Congress of the International Union of Architects], *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1956): 50.

26 Mihail Caffé, „Probleme ale locuințelor tip" [Problems of Typified Housing], *Constructorul* (19 October 1957): 3; Ion Șerban, „Tipuri de apartament în funcție de modul de viață" [Apartment Types in Relation to Way of Life] *Constructorul* (9 November 1957): 3.

27 Mihail Caffé, "Pe marginea concursului de locuințe unifamiliale" [On the Competition for Individual Housing] *Arhitectura RPR* 3 (1956): 31.

28 Gheorghe Popescu Negreanu, Gheorghe Sebastyen, "Proiectarea tip de locuințe" [Designing Typified Housing], *Arhitectura RPR* 4-5 (1956): 10.

29 Ibid.; see also, Gheorghe Popescu Negreanu, Gheorghe Sebastyen, "Noi studii de secțiuni tip pentru locuințe în blocuri" [New Studies for Typified Sections for Collective Housing], *Arhitectura RPR* 6 (1956): 8; "Discuție de creație asupra cartierului de locuințe Balta Albă, București" [Discussing the Creation of the Balta Albă Collectie Housing Area in Bucharest], *Arhitectura RPR* 7 (1957): 64.

significantly smaller than the 40 sq m two-room apartment proposed in 1953.[30] As with many other concepts, this too echoed the politicians' concerns to cut down the production costs, without diminishing the legal sanitary norm of 8 sq m living space per person. It was also a more down to earth approach to housing. Unlike an optimistic rhetoric of the early 1950s that claimed that into the near future 40 sq m apartments would comfortably accommodate single families, by the mid 50s the pressing difficulties of the present required immediate solutions.

Downsizing the apartments' size challenged architects to design housing patterns appropriate for a variety of family types, lifestyles and social statuses. The new solutions had to integrate the findings of the monographic campaigns already conducted. Inspiration, and one might add justification, came from a "critical" reading on the traditional housing's typology. As such, statements about the inappropriate use of classical elements, which were regarded as expressions of exogenous manifestations of architectural designs, cautioned architects that "dogmatic" use of constructive elements would fail to meet the working people's ideological and aesthetic needs.[31] On the contrary, as Gheorghe Petrașcu stated, "simple, noble and picturesque" façades, specific to rural architecture of the Constanța region, were sources of a "relaxing intimacy" for any inhabitant; moreover, he added, the very small-scale rooms had nothing of a constraining limitation. (Fig. 5)[32] Based on this critical analysis of the local tradition, the architects were assigned the task to synthesize standardized projects that would feature such local traditions, so that housing projects would be the outcome of a "complex study of the complex realities."[33]

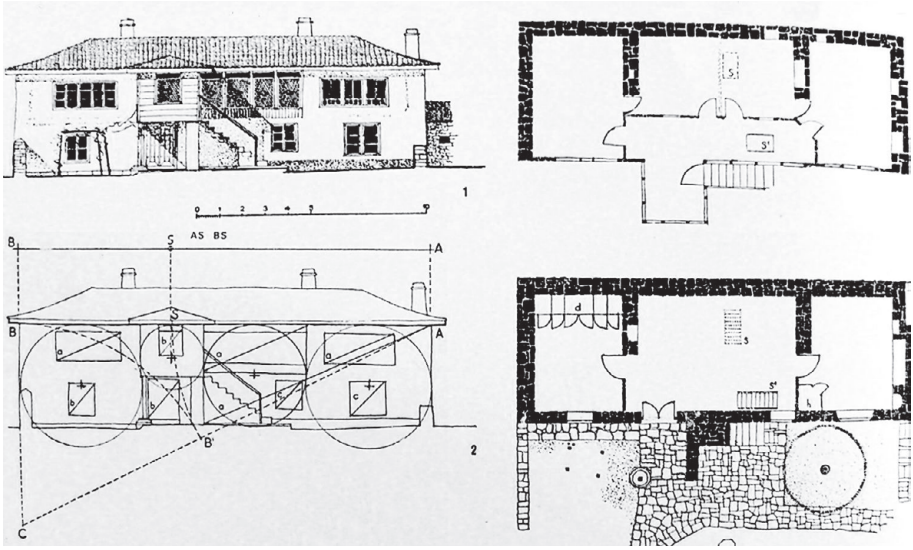


Fig.5. Traditional dwellings in the Constanța Region. Gheorghe Petrașcu, "Pe urmele unei arhitecturi populare valoroase," *Arhitectura RPR* 9 (1956): 26.

30 "Plenara a IV-a a Uniunii Arhitecților din RPR" [The 4th Meeting of the Union of Architects of RPR], *Arhitectura RPR* 6 (1956): 3.

31 M. Urzică, "Despre unele exagerări în proiectarea arhitecturală" [On Some Exaggerations in Architectural Design], *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1956): 32-33; "Editorial: Elaborarea proiectelor TIP – Sarcina principală în domeniul arhitecturii" [Editorial: Typified Design – The Main Task in Architecture], *Arhitectura RPR* 3 (1953): 8.

32 Gheorghe Petrașcu, "Pe urmele unei arhitecturi populare valoroase" [In the Footsteps of Valuable Traditional Architecture], *Arhitectura RPR* 9 (1956): 23-24.

33 "Editorial," 8.

It should not come as a surprise that *Arhitectura RPR* illustrated the specificity of the Constanța region, as the official propaganda claimed that in this region the collectivization process had known an unquestionable success. Furthermore, as Costin Murgescu stated in an article published in the *Contemporanul* magazine, the social realities of Constanța and Hunedoara regions, which were assessed based on statistical and monographic investigations, served as role models for a national program of urban and economic development starting with 1957.[34]

Contrary to Petrașcu's critical reading of socialist realist housing made at the Plenary of the Union of Architects of 1954, the 1957 engagement with local typologies (taken as source of inspiration) echoed increasingly visible design trends. These trends stated that "modern architecture continues a line of folk tradition, where the ideal preoccupations were subordinated to the constructive logic and functionality of the living space."[35] Under the impact of the industrialization of constructions, modern character of architecture lay not in the actual integration of the classic elements in the façades of new buildings, but in synthesizing contemporary concepts that "express the whole way of life of a nation." [36]

In this respect, Hunedoara served again as the best example of how a printed discourse about housing, using similar terminology, expressed very different perspectives and understanding on the workers' housing. Accordingly, the socialist realist cvartals erected in the city at the beginning of the 1950s were once again criticized within the *Arhitectura RPR* in 1957 and 1958. Unlike the critical reading of the construction project carried out during the years 1953-1954, this time the target was the socialist realist aesthetics itself; engaging with functionalism overlapped the party's visible preoccupation to streamline housing construction by a firm policy to reduce cost. For instance, M. Caffé considered that

> "Dwelling is expressed most clearly in a simple language, devoid of monumental ostentation, created by the atmosphere of green spaces and vegetation, and specific architectural elements (loggias, balconies, terraces). Nowhere is this better seen as in the workers' city of Hunedoara, where there are two adjacent neighborhoods: one of the simplicity of forms, familiar and discrete images, and other of monumental and academic composition of the great courts of honor and vanishing points."[37]

Caffé's statement recuperated the "garden city" architectural project completed by the late 1940s in Hunedoara, which consisted of individual dwellings (Fig. 6 and 7). While during the early 1950s, both political authorities and architects had thoroughly criticized it based on ideological flaws, once the functionalist influences were getting more visible within the Romanian architectural milieu, the initial housing solution became the illustration of the new searches for local specificity. Accordingly, the official critique of the socialist-realist project also raised pragmatic arguments about the questionable quality of life in these spaces. Accordingly, the average population density in these cvartals was about 500 inhabitants per hectare, while in other neighborhoods the value did not exceed 150. Furthermore, R. Marcus considered as "realistic" some solutions adopted lately like raising individual houses in the Chizid neighbourhood or new residential buildings in the downtown area. In this way, "dwellers will no longer feel constrained

34 Costin Murgescu, „Cercetările monografice la sate în România" [Monographic Research in Romanian Villages], *Contemporanul* (9 August 1957): 1 and 3; Idem, (23 August 1957): 2.

35 Mihail Caffé, "Despre cateva probleme actuale ale arhitecturii" [On Some Current Issues in Architecture], *Arhitectura RPR* 9 (1957): 51.

36 Ibid., 53. See also the speeches delivered by Radu Laurean and Horia Maicu at the plenary meeting of the Leadership Committee of the Architects' Union, *Arhitectura RPR* 1-2 (1958): 2 and 5.

37 Mihail Caffé, "Despre câteva probleme," 50. See also, „Concluziile ședinței plenare lărgite a comitetului de conducere al Uniunii Arhitecților asupra problemei reducerii prețului de cost" [Conclusions of the Enlarged Meeting of the Board of the Union of Architects on Reducing Costs] *Arhitectura RPR* 7 (1958): 5.

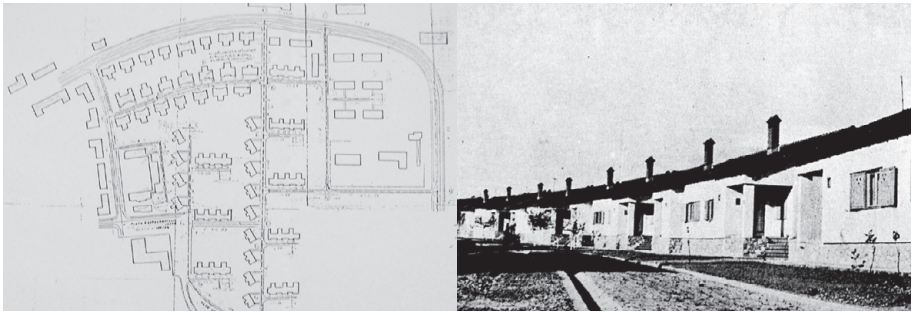


Fig.6. Garden city in Hunedoara. Archives of the Hunedoara City Hall, Fond Igo, 1948, vol. 8589, f. 17.
Fig.7. Hunedoara. The Garden city. Architects Gustav Gusti et al. Gustav Gusti, "Locuința în clădiri cu puține caturi. Referat prezentat la Plenara a II-a a Uniunii Arhitecților," *Arhitectura RPR* 6-7 (1954): 19-20.

by the premises of the old rigid and cold blocks; free flowing walkways will link streets and natural vegetation will harmoniously complete the composition of blocks arranged away from the automobile circulation."[38]

Housing in Hunedoara

To put together an official perspective upon workers' housing was not a simple discourse to be published in the *Arhitectura RPR*. On the contrary, it produced effects shortly among the architects and more importantly among the central and local bureaucratic representatives. It is significant to illustrate how all these concepts have been internalized because they provide a glimpse of the concrete reality beyond some simple theoretical notions carefully articulated in the official press. In this respect, the public effort to carry over a large housing program in Hunedoara by the late 1950s stressed the conflicting interactions between ideology and economics.

By 1957, the Romanian communist regime publicly had assumed a new project of raising the production capacities of the heavy industry sites in the country. One year later, at the party plenary meeting held in November 1958, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej announced that over the next period the authorities' effort would be directed towards minimizing the production-costs in the main industrial sectors and developing steel and chemical branches. This announcement followed a complicated interval during which the domestic economic policies echoed largely a certain insecurity of the leadership, which was visibly concerned about the possibility of the outburst of social unrests similar to the ones in Poland or Hungary. By resuming the industrialization process, the authorities appeared to have consolidated their power position and to have come to terms with the population. In this respect, the public discourse on workers' comfort already articulated in the press over the previous period, served as an excellent benchmark for political programming. Thus, not only that the dwellings would be economical, minimalistic and in large number, but the houses were further fully integrated into an ideological concept.

In this respect, Hunedoara represented a good example. Starting with 1957, the steel production would increase by 10 to 30% yearly so that by 1965 it would reach a value four times higher than in 1958. Such ambitious programs would be achieved by massive investments into the modernization and extension of the technological capacities, as well as a considerable rise in the

38 R. Marcus, „Sistematizarea orașului Hunedoara" [The Planning of Hunedoara], *Arhitectura RPR* 2 (1959): 11.

number of employees. While such measures implied consistent amounts of financial resources directed towards Hunedoara, it became apparent that investments into the development of infrastructure were mandatory as well. According to the official statistical data of 1958, in Hunedoara, more than 60% of the housing facilities consisted of barracks, which made living conditions in such overcrowded spaces very difficult. Modernizing communication and transport systems, erecting numerous housing units, improving services and cultural facilities were just a few of the required programs; otherwise, convincing a large number of workers to relocate in the industrial city would be hard to achieve.[39]

The new urban plan of the city of Hunedoara adopted in the fall of 1957 raised questions related to comfort and function of the urban space. In order to address the pressing housing issue, the plan advanced the possibility of constructing several dwelling neighbourhoods, public buildings and entertainment spaces. Initially, the architects came up with six different projects, which did not meet the authorities' criteria. Shortly after, the representatives of the Ministry of Heavy Industry criticised severely the proposed systematization plans in terms of their layout and functions. The governmental structure's reading of the urban project resumed the same discursive concepts that were part of the official approach to workers' housing over the previous several years. Accordingly, the first aspect to be criticized related to the monumental and highly decorative building solutions, which resembled socialist realist designs. On the contrary, the state's officials argued, such façades would stand in opposition with the ideal contemporary urban space. Moreover, "in Hunedoara a new city was built, not just a neighbourhood, which alternatively could serve for experimental purposes."[40] They had also encouraged architects to pay a closer attention to "simplicity and functionalism" so that "a new aesthetics would emerge as a result of industrialization."[41] Alternatively, any dwelling should reflect "the technical, economic and aesthetic features of the social frameworks."[42] Dismissing any reminiscences of socialist realist architecture fleshed out the bones of more down-to-earth concerns. Apparently, in order to adopt a monumental urban solution and also meet the costs constraints, architects limited drastically the comfort of the interior space, which made these dwellings to have "unplastered façades, no ceramic tiles in the bathrooms, no tubs, very small kitchens, which would have required custom made furniture."[43] To correct such mistakes the governmental officials concluded, not surprisingly one might add, that dwellings should exemplify the local specificity in terms of materials used and the general appearance of the apartment buildings. By doing that, the interior comfort of the dwelling would not be affected by a monumental approach to urban planning.

In a first instance, reading the systematization plan within the frameworks of the official discourse echoed the high level of political investment into social programs. However, in spite of such statements related to workers' everyday comfort, no mention of the apartments' size had been made. The authorities' concern to lower the construction costs became the main argument in imposing some draconic conditions upon the local authorities. Following several political meetings held both in Bucharest and in Hunedoara region during which the central leadership stated its discontent regarding the local conditions of the housing programs, the November 1958 party plenary meeting officially accused the local authorities of catastrophic management. By that time, the authorities had set up maximal construction cost for dwellings thus hoping to increase

39 Archives of the Hunedoara County (S.J.H.D.A.N.), Fond P.C.R. Municipiu Hunedoara, dosar nr. 1/1960, f. 33.

40 Archives of the Hunedoara City Hall (A.P.M.Hd.), Fond D.A.U.A.T., 30/1958 - Avize pentru Proiecte 2012 și 2013, 6.

41 National Archives of Romania (A.N.I.C.), Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, 363/1958, 8; see also, „Congresul al V-lea al UIA. Rezoluția Congresului" [The 5th Congress of the UIA. Resolutions], *Arhitectura RPR* 8-9 (1958): 6.

42 „Pentru reducerea costului în construcțiile de locuințe. Ședința plenară lărgită a comitetului de conducere al Uniunii Arhitecților din RPR din 18 și 19 iunie 1958" [Reducing Housing Building Costs. The Enlarged Meeting of the Board of the Union of Architects of RPR, 18-19 June 1958], *Arhitectura RPR* 7 (1958): 2.

43 A.P.M.Hd., Fond D.A.U.A.T., 30/1958 - Avize pentru Proiecte 2012 și 2013, 7.

the number of completed units. In terms of housing solutions, this effected into dwellings designs featuring 24 sq m two room apartments, which were to be constructed nationwide. Although this was no extraordinary decision as *Arhitectura RPR* first mentioned it as early as 1956, it produced numerous tensions between the central and local authorities. Not only did the Hunedoara leadership reject any criticism made by the central authorities, but they laid the entire responsibility upon the central governmental institutions, which were supposedly "unaware of the real facts." Accordingly, the representatives of the Ministry of Construction were accused of having spent most of their time in the offices, "leading an easy life with no worries" and refusing to go to the homes of the "popular masses" to see how they lived. Under these circumstances, the local authorities concluded that improving the quality of workers' everyday living comfort would be hard to achieve.[44]

The local authorities' dissatisfaction with the initial projects was so high that they have rejected all the designs previously materialized in other locations of the country and demanded new blueprints to meet the „special needs" of the working class. They argued that "one should be Lilliputian to live like that." Furthermore, another local official stated, "it is well known that if someone dies, that person can be removed on the window, or if someone wants to furnish the apartment one needs to assemble the pieces."[45] Furthermore, the leadership of the Hunedoara Steel Plant took advantage of its influential position within the Ministry of Heavy Industry and forced the re-evaluation of designs „because it opposed two room apartments to have a living area smaller than 30 sq m."[46]

Conclusion

This article aimed to investigate the making of the public discourse about the workers' housing programs within the main Romanian industrial cities during the 1950s and its impact upon the bureaucratic structures of the state. Paying a particular attention to the political investment into the social programs – that is, an attempt at securing legitimacy and popular support, this research stressed the close connection between political engagement with the built environment and the evolution of dwelling's patterns as an outcome of social differentiation.

Hunedoara was not the only industrial site that was discussed within the texts of *Arhitectura RPR*. Similar questions were addressed in regard to other industrial Romanian cities. Unlike other locations, however, Hunedoara represented a particular case not only because its steel production capacities absorbed a great majority of the financial resources available for national industrial development, but also due to architectural programs constructed here. Although it differed from the Jiu Valley towns where experimental construction sites were mentioned, Hunedoara projects illustrated the overlapping influence of Soviet architecture and modernist planning readings. The garden city around which the idea of everyday comfort was articulated, echoed some of the interwar sociological methodology. In this way, the evolution of the official reading on workers' housing conveyed the gradual re-connection of the architectural profession with modernism. Accordingly, the postwar design practice unveils itself not in terms of a violent fracture between interwar years and communist rule, but as an expression of entangled discourses on social modernization.

44 S.J.H.D.A.N., Fond P.C.R. Județul Hunedoara, 62/1958, 53 and 64.

45 S.J.H.D.A.N., Fond P.C.R. Județul Hunedoara, 6/1959, 76; 62/1958, 53.

46 A.N.I.C., Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Organizatorică, 4/1959, 49. S.J.H.D.A.N., Fond P.C.R. Județul Hunedoara, 55/1959, 339.