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Final Report

The purpose of my research at OSA was the investigation of the social housing reform in the first decade of state socialism in Bucharest, Romania (1944 – 1954), focusing on three main lines of inquiry:

- When did the technique of executing individual dwellings in allotments come to an end and why?
- Which were the strategies that the socialist administration implemented as they criticized constantly the previous housing strategy considering that only the high rank officials/engineers had access to housing?
- What was the style that the architects used in order to satisfy the new socialist ideology and who moved in the new dwellings/apartments?

These questions are relevant for my thesis which analyzes social housing in Romania between 1906 and 1954, focusing only on standardized dwellings that the state designed within allotments based on the *garden-city principle*. I argue that the state did not produce and distribute these dwellings for the working classes, but rather for the public officials as a means of recognition and reproduction of the political authority. Between 1909 (when the first dwellings are actually constructed) and 1944 (when the political regime changes) the different state companies such as *Company for Low-Cost Housing, the House of Constructions, Romanian Railways* constructed more than 5000 dwellings in Bucharest grouped in 40 allotments, which are analyzed in the first four chapters of the thesis.

My preliminary assessment was that although most of the historians suggest rather a sudden change and embrace a vision based on the communist/modernist architecture binominal structure, my argument is that, at least up to the mid 1950s, the communists adopted the same strategy of individual dwellings for housing the workers and only after the 1955 they advocated on the construction of block of flats, as a pragmatic answer to the rising number of workers in Bucharest. By the end of the forties, the new authorities closed down the state companies who produced and distributed housing in the capitalist regime, considered to be infective, expensive and discriminate in favor of the upper-middle class. In exchange, they centralized the reform at the Minister of Construction. Despite the change, the urban technique of allotments based on the garden-city principles as well as the individual family with its own dwelling remained at the core of the reform until mid fifties.

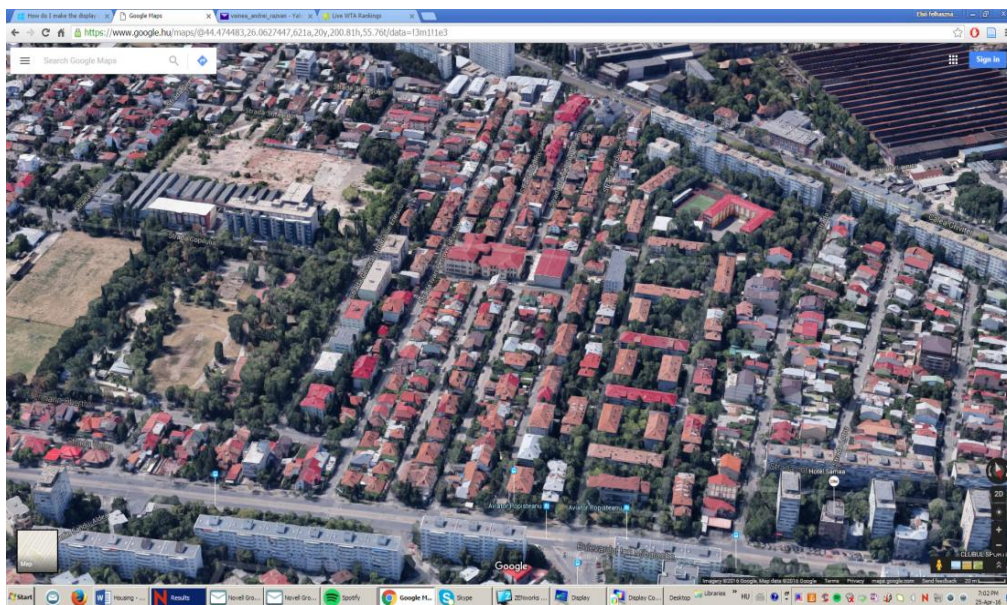
In order to confirm/infirm these answer these questions and main hypothesis, I adopted a method which focused on four main sources: investigating the (1) RADIO FREE EUROPE information items from the fund *300-60-1: Romania*, (2) an analysis of the official press (*Scânteia, Scânteia Tineretului, Munca, Universul*), (3) filed work on the sites in Budapest where similar projects have been built at the same time and (4) an extended annotation of the studies from OSA and CEU Library (books and journals). The result was a comparison between the official press which presented a narrative of the new housing reform which focused on *home warming* from the perspective of the state and of the new (shock) workers that received the dwellings vs. a perspective that Radio Free Europe Reports which relies on the old lodgers' records of the neighborhoods and foreign interpretations. This comparison created a balanced

narrative between the two contrasting perspectives, which still needs to be completed with the oral testimonies that I plan to investigate in the following stage of the research in Bucharest.

1. RADIO FREE EUROPE INFORMATION ITEMS

Most of the work was carried in the fund 300 – 60 – 1: Subject Unit: Romania in the following sub-funds: Communication – Railways and Radio, Industry, Labor, General Mood, Standard of Living, Trade, Soviet Holidays and Property and Description of the Capital.

One of the most relevant documents presented the old district of Grivița (*“Bucharest Red District turns Black”*: (1956), (foto1) where the core of the Romanian communists had lived, as most of them worked for the Romanian Railways Company (C.F.R.), which had their headquarter in the Grivița district. This district (massively bombed during the WW2) was the first to be reconstructed by the socialist government in order to house their main supporters, the workers of C.F.R. Consequently they design and executed the first block of flats and proposed a new socialist order. However, the report considers that the workers still face harsh conditions, low salaries, the workers housewives hate the new Communist bourgeois while, in terms of housing, the report underlines the bad conditions, the fact that the state didn't renovate all after the bombardments, too many lodgers in one house. In addition, the streets delegates were actually *Securitate* informants, whereas the voluntary work was mandatory. Moreover, according to the documents from the sub-fund *Communication: Radio* installing public radio in the district and pushing for individual radios in each of the houses from this particular district created tensions among the lodgers, who considered them as means of control imposed by the state. Another important sub-fund *Soviet Holidays and Private Property* presents an extended analysis of the living conditions in the new dwellings, as well as the daily life in the Grivița district. Similarly, the sub fund *Description of the Capital* captures the daily life through the eyes of the foreigners who visited Bucharest during the Youth Festival in 1953. All these reports converge to a narrative which presents rather the negative aspects of the daily life in the new districts designed after 1945.



II. SOCIALIST (OFFICIAL) PRESS



In comparison, the official press was creating a different image of the reality, “inventing” a new genre in the Romanian press, the story of moving from an old house to a new apartment through the lens of the new lodgers.¹ The press also presents an accurate chronology of the new projects and offers reliable answers to the questions that I asked. *Scânteia* represented the official newspaper (daily), *Scânteia Tineretului* was the official magazine of the Youth Organization of the Communist Party (UTM), whereas *Universul* and *Munca* focused on international, respective work related issues.

For example, *Scânteia* and *Scânteia Tineretului* published extensive inquiries from the Grivița district almost at the same time when *Radio Free Europe* released their report previously mentioned. In contrast with *Radio Free Europe*, the articles who cover this topic proposes a narrative which begins with a clear antithesis between capitalist past and communist present, and, consequently with unhealthy dwellings vs. new apartments, unemployment vs. well paid job the new socialist industry. Additionally, the press focuses on workers profiles (including stories narrated from women perspective), claiming the actions that the new regime took increased the new cultural life (theatre, cinema) and the representativeness of the workers (due to their street delegates), as well as their access to information (radio), basically presenting the same topic from a contrasting perspective as Radio Free Europe.

In a nutshell, the main chronology of this decade reveals an experimental strategy, as the new authorities had no previous plan for reconstruction and imposing new urban planning and architecture. After august 1944, Dej became the Minister of Communication and Public Works and promoted the building of three main district with blocks of flats (Coravu – foto 2, Ferentari –foto 3, Rahova), functionalist from an architectural point of view which meant nearly 1500 apartments, insufficient for the resolving the housing crisis. In parallel, in Grivița, the C.F.R. designed the above – mentioned projects and tried to invent the socialist urban order, with no real effects, especially due to economical difficult situation.



¹ As Christine Varga Harris “Home and House” (a study dedicated to the housing reform in USSR during Khrushchev years named this genre as “home-warming”, which I will also be using.

At the same time, the new authorities dismantled the main construction companies that build the projects starting 1910 (The Communal Company for Low-Cost Housing and the House of Buildings) and nationalized/confiscated most of the dwellings that they had already build (almost 4000), in 1948. The authorities realized that the construction of a block of flats meant a big investment, so they have decide to return in 1950 to designing individual dwellings, this time under the patronage of the Minister for Construction. Thus, the Decree 758 / 1950 – consisted in offering the possibility of the workers to receive a loan from the central bank and the obligation of their factory to provide the materials, so that the worker would erect his house independent. The Minister of Construction designed standardized dwellings that the workers were obliged to use. How did *Scântea* present this law which praised the individual dwelling? Claimed that is according with the communist ideology because the property is no longer the result of capitalism, but of fair work. This resulted in the designing of the allotments, similar with the ones that were executed between 1910 and 1948 where standardized dwellings were built: Apusului, Sportului, Mezeș, Miercani and Piculina (foto 4-5)



Another important aspect that the press presents is connected with the choice for designing new allotments, even new small garden cities all across the country, in contrast with the strategy between 1910 and 1948 which focused only on Bucharest. As a result, the national dimension of this investment generated a limitation of dwellings (either blocks of flats or individual houses) in Bucharest, but created new socialist towns/districts in Hunedoara, Victoria, Cluj, Moinești, Filipeștii de Pădure etc.

This reform lasted until 1953, when the new *socialist realist* style was adopted also in architecture which lead to the design of new *cvartals*, following the Soviet style, as per the resolutions of the Party from November 1952. However, building standardized dwellings in allotments lasted until 1954, when they were completely replaced by the *cvartals*. These three strategies (new block of flats in the *Red District*, functionalist block of flats in Coravu, Rahova and Ferentari and individual dwellings) represented the first answers in order to resolve the housing crisis, which shows rather a confused and experimentalist policy rather than a clear socialist direction. Another argument to support this hypothesis is connected with the style that the architects use: in the case of Grivița blocks of flats they try to create a villa for 6 families with sufficient plot of land for gardening, in order for the workers to maintain their rural way of live in the city. In contrast the functionalist blocks of flats conveys for the complete restructuring of the social space, as the space between the blocks of flats enhances the ideas of modernity and urban life supported by the socialists. The come-back of the individual dwelling surrounded by a small garden reflects the failure of the state investment and the need to urgently house the workers despite ideological approaches.

III. FIELD STUDY IN BUDAPEST

In order to contextualize the topic, I analyzed the architecture of three urban projects: Wekerle Housing Estate (photo 6), the MAV dwelling on Tatai Utca and the blocks of flats close to Ors Vezer Ter, near Fogaras utca (photo 7). The Wekerle Housing Estate (dated from the beginning of the 20th century represented the first important project for the state officials, as it consists of more than 4000 individual dwellings. Designed on the principles of garden city, in the *national style*, the project resembles the first allotments in Bucharest executed at the same period, in terms of beneficiaries, the choice for *national* morphology and allotment technique. At the same time, the project of Tatai Utca reserved for the workers of MAV, built after the WWI presents a similar architecture, a simplified national style, also similar with the Romanian housing estates built for the workers of the C.F.R. Lastly, the housing project built in the 50s differs from the Romanian similar projects in terms of scale and urban planning.



IV. BOOKS AND STUDIES

Among the most important titles that I have annotated, I list:

- Varga Harris, Christine, “Stories of House and Home, Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years”, Cornell University Press, 2014
- Downton, M. J, Housing the workers, 1850-1914 : a comparative perspective, Leicester, 1990
- Bullock, Nicholas, The movement for housing reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914
- Popescu, Carmen, Le style national roumain, Rennes, 2004
- Ward, Stephen, The garden City. past, present and future.
- Harloe Michael, The people's home? : social rented housing in Europe & America, Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 1995

Conclusions and OSA Environment / Parallel Archive Activity

The research at OSA confirmed most of the hypotheses that I have argued in favor of, as I consider that both the Radio Free Europe reports and the Romanian Press revealed the experimentalist years in architecture, urban planning and housing. The research brought new evidence in this direction. However, it has also opened new directions of perspective: by comparing similar studies, I came to the conclusion that the daily life in the early fifties can also be approached with a oral history methodology, different than the one I have previously used. Moreover, this comparative approach releases new directions such as the analysis of the interior architecture. Simultaneously, I consider that the statements for the official press are balanced by the Radio Free Europe reports and create a more realistic narrative. On the other hand, the research infirmed one hypothesis, that the new lodgers had clear working-class background. On the contrary, as the Radio Free Europe reports convincingly demonstrate, an important majority of the new tenants were actually Party members, Securitate officers or high rank officials.

Regarding the work at OSA, I had benefited from clear guidance from Csaba Szilagy and important technical advice from Judith and Robert. More important, in 2017, together with my colleagues from Bucharest we will develop and website dedicated to this topic – housing the workers in the first decade, therefore I took advantage of Csaba's and Oksana's experience with this media. Moreover, in 2017 we plan to organize an exhibition in one of the above-mentioned districts and we consider of organizing it also at OSA. In total, I have written 47 pages for the chapter and prepared two small articles for a Romanian Journal, which will contain the mention that they were written under the auspices of OSA. As for the work with Parallel Archive, I have uploaded almost 140 articles from the press on the topics that I have analyzed and share with my fellow colleagues from the Department of History of Architecture in Bucharest and with many other researches of this topic.

MyTags

View ▾

șantier/construction-site (3), architecture (12), bărlad (1), bicaz (2), brașov (1), **bucharest (57)**, ceferisti-railway workers (15), cluj (1), codlea (1), comanesti (1), constanța (2), construction industry (8), craiova (2), cvartal (1), doicești (1), ferentari (10), fetesti (1), filipești de pădure (4), floreasca (6), garden-city (6), grivița roșie (14), houses of culture (1), hunedoara (4), iași (3), **locuințe muncitorești (78)**, lucăcești (1), lupeni (1), medgidia (1), mediaș (1), miners' town (9), oltenia (1), oradea (2), orașul-stalin (brașov) (2), pașcani (4), petroșani (2), ploiești (2), prefabricate (16), reșița (4), romanian elections (8), **romanian towns (62)**, **social housing (92)**, suceava (2), tuberculosis (1), urban planning (12), uricani (1), vatra-dornei (1), vatra luminoasă (3), workers (1), **working class districts (38)**, zidărie-masonry (9),

My Virtual Collections (134)

-  Munca 1955 (8)
-  Munca 1956 (23)
-  Scânteia 1951 (6)
-  Scânteia 1952 (18)
-  Scânteia 1953 (22)
-  Scânteia 1954 (3)
-  Scânteia 1955 (17)
-  Scânteia Tineretului 1954 (2)
-  Scânteia Tineretului 1955 (6)
-  Scânteia Tineretului 1956 (16)
-  Universul 1951 (4)
-  Universul 1952 (9)