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# Hybrid Housing at the Interference Between the Urban and the Rural in Romania – the Political and Economic Influence on Housing Forms and Lifestyles

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**Abstract.** Hybridization has become a popular topic in the contemporary culture research, and together with the process of globalization have contributed to the emergence of heterogeneous processes that have led to the manifestation of hybridization in all fields. In this article, we will look at a hybrid type of housing situated at the interference between the urban and the rural, which appeared since the twentieth century in Romania and that we filtered through the urban models defined by Françoise Choay. These models, inspired on the one hand by the belief in progress (the progressive model), and on the other by the nostalgia for the past (the culturalist model), are identifiable in the way cities and villages have developed in Romania in the last century. Even before the First World War, there was a concern and an intention to align housing policies in Romania with the European trends influenced by the emergence of garden cities, which came as a solution to the chaotic and unhygienic development of cities caused by the increasing industrial production. The culturalist approach of the housing development lasted until World War II, when the communist regime came with new housing policies that led to housing production in the sense of the progressive model. The communist period was characterized primarily by a policy of industrialization of the country, which led to a strong urban dynamic and a movement of migration from the village to the city. The forced relocation of the peasants in the city determined a ruralization of the city by the way in which the living space was appropriated by the new inhabitants. Paradoxically, the city was ruralized, while at the ideological level the urbanization of villages was required. Post-communist and contemporary housing questions the validity of these classical urban models, the possible alignment of concepts like sustainable development or low-tech city with their principles or the need to define new ones. The characteristics of housing promoted by each period (type, size, location, construction materials) translate a paradigm shift of social transformations, environmental conditions, and residential areas, and analysing the housing stock dynamics in different historical periods in urban and rural areas at different administrative-territorial scales allow the identification of housing production mechanisms. The production of housing determines certain architectural forms, which, in turn, influence the lifestyle of the inhabitants, and these new lifestyles end up having an impact on the production of housing. Hybridization is visible both in terms of architectural form and lifestyle, the challenge being to determine the productive discrepancies of these three layers: production (politics and economics), architectural form and lifestyle.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the opposition between the city and the village continues to weaken, as the urban society becomes more complex. The expansion of urbanization has diluted the boundaries between the city and the village, and the generalized urban character responds to geographical and sociological considerations, without corresponding to a specific spatial category [1]. People's relationship with nature is disturbed by the emergence of hybrid forms of built and natural spaces, the mixture of artificial and permeable soils, and some researchers believe that the emergence of a profound mutation in our relationship with the world is fundamental [2]. In order for this to become possible, it is important to understand the hybridization process that surrounds us and its manifestation at the level of housing.

The hybridization of housing in the sense of the urban and the rural interference has existed throughout the history of housing in Romania. In this article we propose a review of the forms it has taken and their inclusion in the urban models proposed by Françoise Choay. Her models were inspired by the projects and the ideas of those who imagined the city of the twentieth century. They arose in different economic and political contexts and developed according to them, starting from utopian ideas inspired either by the "belief in progress and in the omnipotence of techniques" (the progressive model) or by an "aversion to the mechanized society and a nostalgia for the old cultural communities" (the culturalist model), or from "the aversion to a denatured world and the nostalgia of a deep relationship with nature" (the naturalist model) [3]. We also seek to question the relevance and the applicability of the principles of these models to new current ways of urban development.

The two models we will focus on are the progressive and the culturalist model, respectively.

The progressive model has modernity as its central idea, and its representatives were: Gropius in Germany, Rietveld in the Netherlands, Le Corbusier in France, and the constructivists in Russia. The 1933, the Athens Charter became the common good of progressive architects, and its inspiration was the standard man, identical in all cultures [3]. The principles of this model are: independence in relation to the site resulting from the emergence of new technical possibilities (bulldozer architecture), efficiency, industrial aesthetics, health and hygiene, separation of functional areas, geometry, mechanization, privilege of the individual type to the detriment of the community type and standardization [3].

The culturalist model, ideologically opposed to the progressive one, appeared not only before the latter, but even before the creation of the term urbanism. Representatives of this model were Ebenezer Howard, motivated by political and social considerations, and Camillo Sitte and Raymond Unwin, whose views were depoliticized in favor of an aesthetic approach. The projects they imagined or carried out determined the ideological characteristics of the model: thus, Howard's garden city resulted in a city with precise boundaries, both physical and demographic, in which there is a social balance among the population living with strong community values; Camillo Sitte used the analysis of past cities to conclude the fundamental role of the street and the importance of crossings and meeting places as guiding forms of the city, to the detriment of buildings, as well as the space adapted to the natural terrain and climatic conditions; Unwin, who created the first English garden city, tried to reconcile the culturalist model with the demands of the present, without always succeeding, due to the incompatibility between limiting and controlling urban expansion and the needs of modern economic development [3].

The two main models are differentiated by the fact that they are oriented towards two fundamental directions of time, the past and the future, in order to borrow the image of nostalgia or progressivism. The culturalist model imagines an urban future with references to images of the past; the progressive one breaks with the past and proposes a future of the images of a new modernity. The determining criteria that distinguish the two models are: temporality, the relationship with technique, the connection with nature and the social structure [4].

## **THE URBAN RURAL HYBRIDIZATION IN THE HISTORY OF HOUSING IN ROMANIA**

The progressive and the culturalist model are identifiable in the way the cities and villages in Romania developed in the last century. Since the twentieth century, the doctrines of left or right succeeded each other depending on the historical context and have led to the creation of different types of economies that have shaped urban or rural areas.

The characteristics of housing promoted by each period (type, size, location, construction materials) translate a paradigm shift of social transformations, of environmental conditions and of residential areas, and the analysis of the housing stock dynamics in different historical periods in urban and rural areas at different administrative-territorial scales allows to identify the mechanisms of housing production [5]. In this analysis we will follow how the production mechanisms of the housing forms changed in different historical contexts and we will search ways in which the rural and the urban interfered.

Soaita and Dewilde proposed a chronological classification of the types of economies that succeeded each other in Romania, defining them as follows: the capitalist economy, the alternative - capitalist, the non-capitalist, the anti-capitalist [6]. They influenced the emerging and developed forms of housing, as well as the predominant type of property and found their equivalence in the models of cultural and progressive urbanism.

## The First Half of The Twentieth century

In the first part of the twentieth century, Romania was governed by the liberal right-wing model, in which the dominant society was the bourgeois capitalist one. Before 1945, when housing was self-provided by each family according to their needs and possibilities, we had a non-capitalist economy, according to the classification made by Soaita and Dewilde. Even before the First World War, there was a concern and an intention to align housing policies in Romania with European trends influenced by the emergence of ideas of garden cities, which came as a solution to the chaotic and unhygienic development of cities due to increased industrial production.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, solutions were sought to limit the negative impact of industrialization on the urban environment in Romania, and after participating in the International Housing Congress held in 1910 in Vienna, Romanian reformers concluded that the right housing model for the working class was the individual housing, presented by Western reformers and adaptable to the Romanian lifestyle. After Poland and Hungary, the principles of garden cities were quickly adopted in Romania, where plots with houses surrounded by gardens appeared, as a model for the expansion of cities [7]. During the interwar period, the architect Cincinat Sfințescu encouraged the application of the principles of garden cities in Romania. [8].

### Plots of the Communal Society for Cheap Housing

The first such plots appeared in Bucharest and were intended for the political and economic elite and then their principles were extended to housing designed for the working class. The individual home, surrounded by a small garden, promoted an ideal type of family, which, although moved from rural to urban areas, had to preserve the traditional Romanian values and thus guarantee the continuity of the nation. This type of housing represents the space of the industrial, modern family, composed of husband, wife and children, in contrast to the extended family, typical of the rural environment [7]. ‘Figure 1’

This type of development can be framed in the culturalist model, resulting in a hybrid housing, located at the interference between urban and rural, which had hygienic purposes, the application of the principles of the city-garden and the use of neo-Romanian architectural style. Thus, the plots planned by the Communal Society, between 1911 and 1916 were not uniform or monotonous, although they contained standard dwellings, and were built with quality materials and equipped with public facilities [7].



**FIGURE 1.** House type C, Clucerului street, Bucharest, part of the first plot of the Company [7]

Hybridization in the case of these types of housing can be explained by the urban character defined by the architectural aspect of housing (neo-Romanian style), access to nearby urban facilities (churches, maternity hospitals, kindergartens, schools) and urban living conditions (care for hygiene), interspersed with rural elements reflected mainly by the emergence of gardening practices, made possible by the existence of the garden for each home. The presence of agriculture in the life of families nuances the urban character of this type of housing and rurbanizes it.

### **The Dioști experiment - a Romanian village model**

An example of a hybrid rural dwelling in the interwar period is the Dioști experiment, which was destroyed by fire in 1938 and rebuilt according to the strategy of creating model villages in order to build a modern Romania that involved the integration of the peasantry into a broader vision of society.

The reconstruction project was based on sociological and architectural studies and household models were proposed as examples of good practice, to be later imitated. The intention was, on the one hand, to continue the tradition and, on the other hand, to adapt the household to modern living standards. Each household was designed to function as an efficient agricultural unit, and the three types of houses proposed had in addition to 2, 3 or 4 bedrooms, household outbuildings (cellar, kitchen, stable). The houses had a rustic look given by natural materials and local crafts, and the layout of the space was simple and functional. Apart from the kitchen, no specific functions were allocated for the other rooms, given that before a single room performed all the functions [9].

The intention to modernize the villages and implicitly the rural society can be translated with the introduction of specific urban elements in a type of rural housing: the increase of the number of rooms in a household, attention to new rules of hygiene and health and a more comfortable lifestyle, the emergence of some institutions (civic center - main square, cultural center, gendarmerie, church, school).

### **The Communist Regime - The Political Context, Legislation and Forms of Housing**

After the Second World War, the communist regime came with new housing policies that influenced the development of housing in the sense of the progressive model.

The communist period was characterized primarily by a policy of industrialization of the country, which led to strong urban dynamics [5] and implicitly to a movement of migration from the village to the city [10], resulting from the increasing need for housing in urban areas [11]. During the first phase of the communist regime (1945-1948), the official ideology legitimized itself by the radical denial of the old bourgeois-landlord regime [12], and Soaita and Dewilde framed the economy of this period in the typology of the anti-capitalist economy.

Although the housing problem was considered a priority state issue, it was not resolved in the first decades of the regime, as the main priority was industrial development, for which most of the state budget was allocated [5]. Thus, between 1951-1965, the largest share of households was built from private funds (83.15% of the total) [11]. The economy has thus returned to a non-capitalist type, developed by the care of families or of the community.

The Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 2447 of 1952 recommended the Soviet model of architecture, which involved radical changes in the urban development policies by imposing the vertical development of the city and the construction of blocks of flats [5]. The legislative effects were not really visible until the next decade.

Between 1966-1970, a balance was struck between private and public housing [11], and in the 1970s and 1980s the dominant economy was the anti-capitalist one. Now the state was the main housing provider: 80% of new homes were built in the 1970s and 93% in the 1980s [6]. In the urban environment, the construction of collective housing buildings was generalized, and private initiatives for individual housing were limited to extinction. The political decisions and the technical norms imposed during the communist period led a paradigm shift [5] that can be framed in the progressive model of development due to the general principles applied: the encouragement of collective housing as an ideal of a modernized society, standardization, mechanization, efficiency, independence in relation to the site (standard projects were implemented regardless of the existing context).

The laws with the greatest impact on the development of cities and villages were the Decree 545/30 of 1958, the Law 19/1968, the Systematization Law 58/1974.

The Decree 545/30 of 1958 established clear boundaries for any city in Romania and prohibited the construction outside these boundaries, the Law 19/1968 imposed the expropriation of land situated outside the buildable land, the ban on alienation of land and the transfer of the right to property only by inheritance. The Law 58/1974 or the systematization law provided several conditions and regulations that influenced the development of housing in Romania, also known as the law that proposed the urbanization of villages, by raising the standard of living to urban standards.

This law was the operational instrument for the *socialist reconstruction* basis of villages and towns through demolition and renovation. By applying these policies, parts of the central areas were demolished in many Romanian villages to make way for modernity: a shopping center, one or more blocks of flats, a market [5].

Because the communist ideology encouraged mainly urban development, the village has become a retrograde space for farmers or for those left outside of the new socialist order. The negative perception of rural areas meant a lack of public investment. The city was the absolute center, and the villages were a social or an economic periphery [13]. At

the end of the 1980s, the *big leap* of housing construction ended in most cities and the systematization moved to the second phase, the rural one, which was expected to abolish 3931 villages and relocate the population to localities with greater development prospects. The imposition of the two-level block-house model was justified as follows: by vertically arranging the living space, land was gained for agriculture.[14]

But the “rural urbanization” projects involved huge costs, and Romania was phasing a terrible economic crisis in the 1980s, which meant that the blocks built in villages did not have basic facilities [15] (running water, sewerage, own kitchen) [16]. The aim was the uprooting of a population from its environment and its forced relocation, the destruction of the architectural and the cultural heritage, the traditional relations with the village communities and the uniformity of the population [17]. This law faced a strong criticism from Romanian intellectuals, which was doubled by the refusal of villagers to abandon their villages.

## **Architectural forms of housing during the communist period**

### **Block of flats in urban areas**

Historically, the development of cities has always been privileged over the development of villages, and this was especially visible in communism, when the promotion of collective housing, specific to the progressive model, led to a paradigm shift in housing in general: the individual housing was for the disadvantaged, while the apartments housed those in a more advantageous social position [6].

We can identify 3 types of housing specific to the communist period: individual urban and rural housing (tolerated or partially encouraged in certain contexts), collective housing in urban areas and collective housing in rural areas. We will continue to focus on the last two typologies, both due to their predominance among the total number of dwellings produced, and due to the hybrid character, that has developed through the forced urbanization of a part of the population.

Urbanization during the communist era had social, cultural, psychological and individual consequences. The predominant form of housing in the city became the block of flats, and most of the tenants were peasants relocated to the urban area to meet the labor force needed for the newly created factories.

In Romania, the tall blocks of flats built between 1960 and 1990 are predominant in the urban environment and are characterized by a great typological poverty both as a structure of the building and as types of apartments [18]. But the architectural form of housing should be understood in direct connection with the way of life of those who live in it. There is a reciprocal relationship between housing and the cultural capital of the inhabitant. The space is occupied by the individual through his own perspective of understanding housing, the inhabitant looking for the place according to his aspirations and needs [10]. Once moved from the village to the city, people brought with them habits and certain conceptions of their old way of life.

The adaptation was difficult and incomplete primarily because of the different conformation of the space from that with which the new occupants were accustomed. The change from the individual dwelling they had in the village (in which the outer space of the courtyard and the garden were the most important) to the collective dwelling produced a ruralization of the city by the way in which the living space was appropriated in the process of adaptation by the new inhabitants of the village.

The individual has been uprooted from his family environment and from his identity and placed in a non-place, in a space that has nothing to do with identity and is neither relational nor historical[19]. Thus, the occupants gave character to the spaces through small interventions related to the use of the space, not through assumed and conscious architectural gestures: they changed the access door to the apartment; they closed the balcony (used for storage, workshop, summer bedroom, etc.) and associated it with the porch; the staircase of the block replaced the village street, where plants, outdoor shoes, a piece of furniture (table, chair, bench at the gate) appeared; the common spaces around the block were taken by people who created an urban garden or meeting places and playgrounds ‘Figure 2’. The population migration, conceived as a progress, as a step towards urbanization, has become rather a ruralization of the city, an import of rural housing features in the urban environment [10].



**FIGURE 2.** Urban gardens in Drumul Taberei, Bucharest, 1984. Photo: Dan Dinescu

Moreover, during this period a new social category was formed, the *worker-farmers* (Vintilă Mihăilescu), who lived in the city and worked in factories, but who kept in touch with the family left in the country, which they helped with the field work [20]. The idea of worker-farmer refers to a part of the population whose hybrid way of life is divided between the urban and the rural, and the exchange of products between the two environments together with the double life that some of the new workers led represented a period of transition in terms of adapting village life to city life.

Among those who did not keep in touch with the village as well as the worker-farmers, some dealt with the exploitation of the productive space near the blocks of flats: informal urban gardens appeared in-between the blocks (in La Terenuri area of Mănăştur neighborhood in Cluj, agriculture has been practiced since 1974-1975). The urban gardening was formalized in Romania in the early 1980s, during the economic and food crisis, by a decree "which required the transformation of unused urban spaces into agricultural land" [21]. Although the land on which the gardens are cultivated has an uncertain legal character, it is generally still tolerated by the authorities today.

Collective housing developed in cities during communism was urban primarily because of the access to urban facilities and infrastructure: running water, sewerage, heating, urban transportation, access to cultural services, health, education. But the emergence of the productive space in the urban environment (between the blocks) and the way the interior space was occupied (from the perspective of rural housing) have transformed this type of housing into a hybrid one, in which urban and rural coexist and draw their own form and manifest, especially in terms of lifestyle.

### **Block of flats in rural areas**

As we have seen, the 1974 systematization law encouraged the urbanization of villages.

The model of housing in the rural environment imposed for the houses financed from the state funds was a two-story building, made according to standard projects. The plots needed for the construction of houses or for the collective housing were 200-250 square meters, and the unbuilt surface, much smaller than that of a classic rural household, was intended for gardening and other household activities.

The architect Eusebie Latiş observed that by limiting the productive land area, the agricultural activities were limited, transforming the families from the producers to the consumers [22].

Thus, in many small towns and villages, "block houses" were built for the employees of small rural or mining industries, as a result of the demolition of single-family houses [13], following the principle of bulldozer architecture, specific to the progressive urban model.

The problems related to this form of housing, arose since 1979, when the Committee for Problems of People's Councils defined a design theme for the development of housing for rural areas, to be developed by the County Design Units.

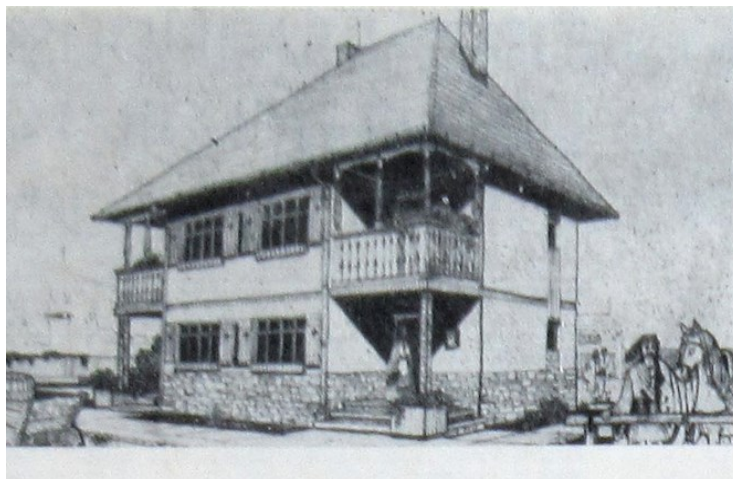
The main problem of these standard projects for the rural environment was that of local specificity. Ion Stancu, the architect responsible for guiding the elaboration of standard housing for the rural environment within the county design units, following a thorough documentation on the history of Romanian architecture, drew up a guide suggesting the following: tracking the spatial relationship of the building with the site (in the elaboration of projects); achieving



a harmonious balance between aesthetics, function and the constructive part, for a better integration in the landscape; preservation of specifically rural elements (porch, gazebo, etc.); the modern functionality of the rural house 'Figure 3' should not exclude the cellar as a storage place; the use of the duplex system; the use of traditional local materials (stone, wood, tiles, tiles) together with new materials (asbestos cement glazed as a substitute for shingles, plain and reinforced concrete, prefabricated ceramic floors) [23].

Thus, a hybrid architecture was proposed, in which an urban typology of housing (apartment block or duplex) borrowed rural forms or elements (porch, porch, gazebo and window) or combined modern materials with traditional ones in an attempt to respond to the local specificity. They wanted to exclude any interpreted urban elements, but by proposing new materials as a substitute for traditional materials (glazed asbestos cement instead of the traditional shingle) or by introducing standardized construction elements and technologies, they fragilized the authenticity of the constructions and the intended local specificity.

In the past, the rural architecture of Romania was a vernacular architecture, confronted with ways of life that responded in a sustainable way to the numerous exigencies and constraints. Rural housing was the product of craftsmen and rural architects, who accumulated their knowledge through apprenticeships and who did not follow explicit programs, but who worked with a community they knew and with a local social environment. Innovations of their knowledge or of their instruments could have appeared, but their work remained artisanal, producing typical products, marked by individuality [24]. After the introduction of the law of systematization, the involvement of the educated architect in the design of rural housing typologies came to validate the perception of le Corbusier, who, concerned about the impact of the industry development and communications on vernacular architecture, concluded that the general standard is set in the city, and especially from now on, there will be a need of series building or inventing what will become the new vernacular that is according to the industrial society [24].



**FIGURE 3.** Rural housing proposal - Cluj county [23]

The implementation of these standard projects was different from the imaginary in most cases: the intended urbanity of these houses consisted primarily in providing urban facilities (running water, etc.) in order to increase the quality of life, and the rural architectural form was supposed to support the integration in the local specificity. But the start and the acceleration of the systematization program of villages in a period of economic crisis has determined a hybrid form of housing in rural areas: the shape of housing was urban, but was covered in a volume that consisted of rural elements, which functionally and as a way of life could not be called urban: the lack of basic infrastructure (water, sewerage) led to the placement of toilets in the yard, heating was done with stoves as before, the kitchen served several apartments. The lack of urban facilities canceled the intended urban character for these dwellings. Basically, the inhabitants of these block of flats lived as before or worse in terms of access to facilities, but in a different form of housing: an interior space without a direct connection with the outside, a substantial reduction of the garden and of the household annexes intended for farming. By introducing an urban form of housing in rural areas, a downgrade was achieved compared to the previous situation (of the collective housing in blocks of flats), in which the quality of urban housing in collective blocks of flats was increased by the presence of rural elements in the urban space.

In case of this typology, the hybridization is manifested both in terms of architectural level and in terms of lifestyle level.



## **The post-communist period - The Political Context, Legislation and Forms of Housing**

The ideology of the communist regime was replaced after 1990 by that of economic liberalism, which, over time, through housing policies, was transformed into neoliberal capitalism [25]. The main feature of the post-communist period was the withdrawal of the state from the housing policies, specific to all post-socialist states. This phenomenon has led to the privatization of housing and the stimulation of private property. Thus, a low-income social class became owners of their apartments, whose maintenance became a burden due to the withdrawal of the state from the maintenance responsibility [26].

The central government has decentralized some of its responsibilities, transferring them to local government structures, without ensuring financial decentralization. The withdrawal of the state, at the insistence of the World Bank and the IMF, was not initially supported by the creation of housing market institutions or mechanisms to take over the functions previously performed by the state. In Romania, it was only in 2002 that financial instruments appeared, such as mortgage loans or loan subsidies that facilitated access to the purchase of a home. The launch of the mortgage loan in 2002 led to an unexpected rise in house prices [26]. The multiplication of investment funds encouraged the housing construction, leading to an explosion of real estate investments in residential complexes (both in individual houses and apartment blocks), most located on the outskirts of urban areas or in peri-urban areas [5].

In the 1990s, the Romanian economy had a sinuous evolution with periods of recession or high inflation (1990-1992, 1997-1999) which alternated with short periods of growth (1993-1996). The imbalance culminated in 1997 when inflation reached 151%, but in 1999 the decline stopped and economic growth began in 2000 [27] (and lasted until the economic crisis of 2008).

In this economic and political context, during the first post-communist period, the big cities were marked by a partial deurbanization, while the smaller ones by a re-ruralization, as a result of a migration of population from the city to the village, deindustrialization, suburbanization and demographic changes [28]. During this period, a land market was created due to the elimination of restrictions related to the single property ownership and to the repeal of the law on agricultural land restitution that offered the possibility of buying agricultural land and transforming it into buildable land [29]. This is how urban phenomena such as: urban sprawl, suburbanization, urban marginalization, appeared.

The urban sprawl is associated with the development of new residential areas outside the boundaries of the cities defined during the communist period. The uncertain economic and political context, which has long been in a state of transition, has not prioritized the development of coherent housing development strategies. Thus, there were several situations of rapid and chaotic suburbanization, in which unauthorized housing was built before the existence of the necessary urban facilities.

In Romania, the 1990s came with important changes in the way of life and thinking of the population: housing, home address, prestige, the notion of home and space were re-evaluated. Due to the lack of a national plan for urban assimilation and integration, the new urban forms that have emerged have adopted a mimetic model already present in European and American cities [13]. The three forms of housing that emerged in the post-communist context were: houses and neighborhoods for gated communities in the immediate vicinity of large cities (built by a wealthy social class), followed by a second generation of individual houses specific to the middle class characterized by lack of urban facilities resulting from the adoption of cultural forms [13] without substance. After the development of the financial and mortgage system, residential neighborhoods of collective housing appeared both on the outskirts of cities and in nearby villages.

Suburban forms of housing development are the result of a period of transition in Romania, which was characterized by a lack of control over the building construction fields and by the impact of freedom of choice and action of the population. The mix of situations makes it difficult to establish a direction that fits into one of the classic models of urbanism. At a time when the Western world was increasingly focused on solutions such as sustainable development, Romania was dominated by a laissez-faire attitude.

### **Forms of individual housing in post-communism**

Suburban developments in Romania have visibly surrounded cities in the 1990s and the new landowners became builders of some ideal houses from their point of view. The owner-builders took advantage of the economic informality, a too relaxed legal system, and the lack of regulations in the field of housing and construction specific to the period. As in most Eastern European countries, suburban housing in Romania had a degree of informality defined primarily by unauthorized and subsequently legalized construction, private financing of cash construction and unplanned suburban neighborhoods lacking basic utilities [29].

One of the examples of informal and chaotic development is the suburban area of Pitesti, a typical socialist city. Adriana Soita analyzed the way in which the post-socialist suburbanization manifested itself in this city. All participants in the study were part of the first or second generation who lived in the city and maintained active ties with the family left in the countryside. The rural way of life was a common feature of homeowners in these suburban homes. For more than half of the interviewees, one of the main motivations for building a house was the escape from the block of flats, characterized by inactivity and its replacement with a garden house that encourages an active lifestyle, relaxation, and freedom and which gave them a sense of ownership [29].

The chaotic nature, poor accessibility, lack of public infrastructure, facilities and public spaces, characteristic rather of a rural environment, did not represent obstacles in the emergence of suburban developments. Moreover, they were offset by a sense of freedom and property, and the solutions proposed to solve the problems related to the lack of basic utilities consisted of wood-based heating, individual wells, installation of septic tanks.

### **Forms of collective housing in post-communism**

The Romanian suburb began with the first people who managed to realize the dream of their individual home and return to nature after decades of living in socialist blocks [30]. But as this form of housing became more popular, more chaotic, and more expensive, the construction of single-family homes could no longer assure the profitability of the land [31]. This situation led to the construction of apartment buildings. Paradoxically, the suburban forms of housing were transformed into the blocks from which the first inhabitants of the suburb escaped.

In the neighborhoods that appeared in the first phase after 1989 in the outskirts of cities there are various forms of housing: from 10-storey blocks of flats to villas for several families or individual houses of all scales, built near garden areas. The new post-socialist suburbs are laboratories for testing several types of housing: terraced houses, multi-story apartments, or penthouses to which have been added the new ones, specific to the peripheries: houses that look like blocks and blocks that try to look like houses [31].

The economic crisis of 2008 led to an imbalance in real estate and many ongoing projects were abandoned, leaving many vacancies in the chaotic spaces of post-socialist neighborhoods. This triggered a forced stop to real estate inertia and brought a break for both constructors and buyers. A change of perspective has emerged for everyone: regulations have become more consistent, quality has increased, and consumer demands and tastes changed.

The development of the individual and collective forms of housing from the post-communist period are difficult or even impossible to frame in any of the directions of the classic models of urbanism, due to the lack of a general or local development strategy. Still a general feature can be deduced: the spread of the urban in rural areas and the emergence of hybrid forms of housing. These were manifested either by the urbanization of an agricultural territory, specific to the rural environment, or by the existence of rural-specific living conditions in urban-specific forms of housing.

Some theorists believe that the idea of post-communism can be abandoned today, but others argue that this concept is still very relevant to the way people relate to housing [6]. Many of those born in socialist housing "still aspire to belong to a (...) community, to earn more than a shelter and to create a real home" [10] and see living in the socialist bloc as a temporary stage in their residential journey before building or purchasing a home. Thus, we are witnessing a re-ruralization of Romania determined by the change of expectations and the desire for a certain type of comfort.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Cities and villages have hybridized and today they are part of the same world, especially in peri-urban areas. The villagers have lost their autonomy compared to the peasants of the 1960s, many inhabitants depend daily on the metropolitan area for work, consumption, and leisure activities [32]. Although this phenomenon appeared long before in the western countries, today it has become a reality in Romania, in the villages and the peri-urban areas of the big cities. With the adoption of the capitalist model, the emergence of advertising and the promotion of consumerism, artificial needs were created that did not exist before. Television has become present in both urban and rural areas, and this is reflected both in the ambitions of the city people and of the villagers, which are very different from those of 30 years ago. Those who live in the village aspire to urbanity, with all that it brings, and the townspeople want a life in which they can combine both the advantages of city life (access to culture, facilities) with a country house where they can enjoy the clean air and quietness (qualities hard to find in the city).

The urban models proposed by Françoise Choay had a utopian approach, born from the imaginary and were conceived in a context marked by the importance of social progress and its technology, science and welfare, in which

the project to radically transform the world by influencing space was very important [4]. The question today is whether these models are applicable to the sustainable development and to new currents of thinking.

Since the early 2000s, the rise of new technologies, information and communications has led to the emergence of *technological thinking*, which seeks to provide new solutions for the society that has become too effervescent and unstable. More recently, the *low-tech approach* has emerged, which challenges the programmed burnout of certain resources and reaffirms the primary goal of sustainable development, questioning more critically the conditions, the finality and especially the need for development itself. It also encourages a sobriety of consumption and production, not a refusal of technology, but its fair and sufficient use [33].

Although certain directions and features of the classical models of urbanism may be applicable today, the context of today's reality is very different and a redefinition of them or the definition of new models is welcome. The inspiration for the classic models was the work of well-known architects or authors, while the directions that urban development has more recently taken no longer have sole representatives to build appropriate doctrines because all actors seek to discover ways in which the functioning and the development of a city could respond to the unsustainability of westernized lifestyles.

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