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Docile Bodies

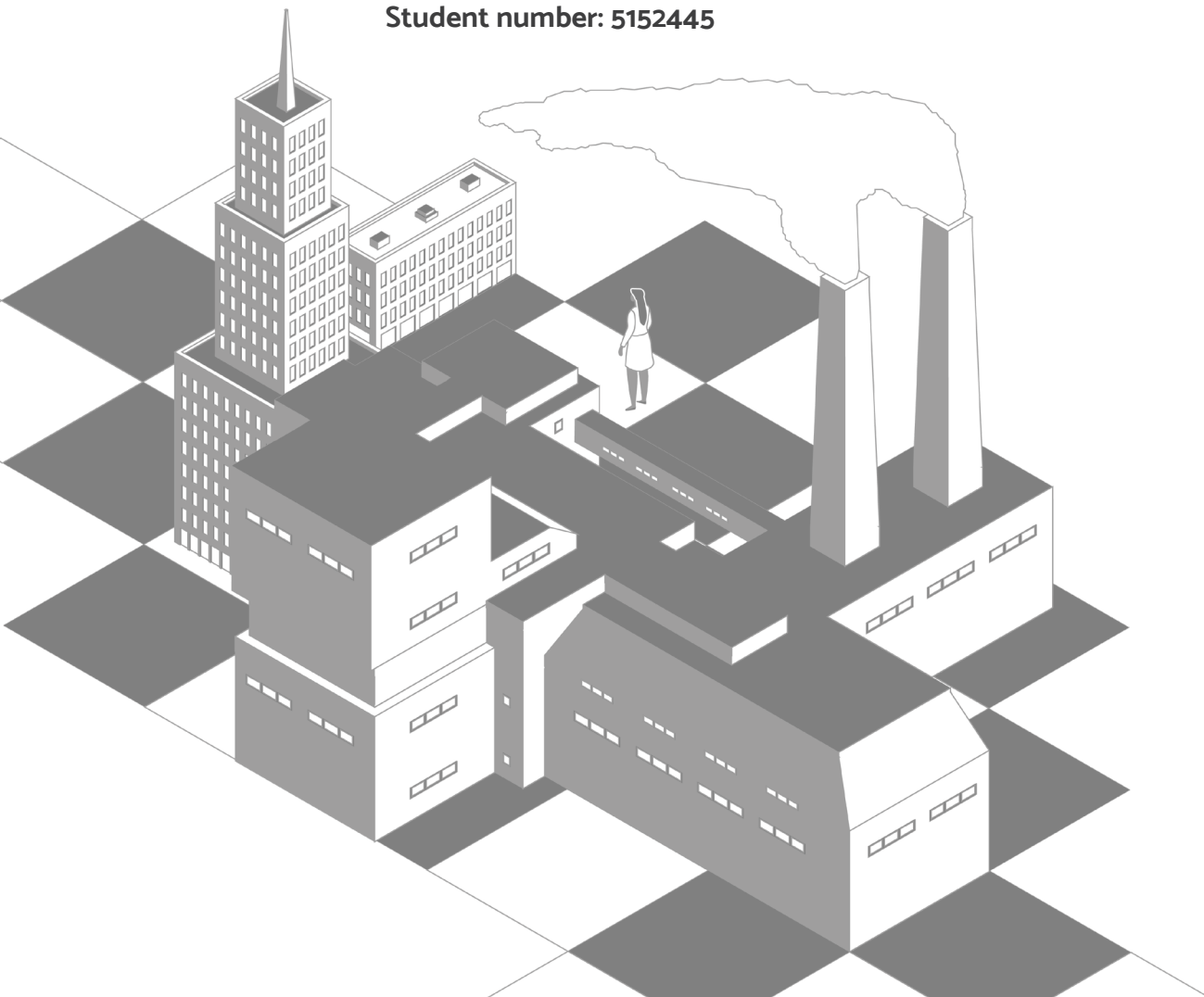
*Romanian Communist domesticities and
Socialist Women in Berceni (1977-1989)*



This history thesis has been presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the "Architectural History Thesis Course" (Q3 2020-2021), part of the M.Sc. Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences Degree (Track: Architecture) at T.U. Delft.

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, and all sources of information consulted have been acknowledged in accordance with academic citation criteria.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this work, and especially my supervisor Maria Novas Ferradás for her committed guidance, patience and support.

I would also like to thank the OAR Archives, especially Olimpia Sultana for the guidance in accessing and selecting the materials that formed the backbone of the present thesis.

A debt of gratitude is owed to all who agreed to be interviewed for this thesis's purposes (Ioana Cioaca, Irina Cioaca, Luminita Cioaca, and Iuliana, who asked that her surname remain anonymous). Crucially, Mihaela Murgoci has been an invaluable source of information through her own 2016 research into the historical development of Berceni and her stories of her childhood in the neighbourhood.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude towards my family, my friends and my partner whom have shown tremendous support throughout the entire process and have maintained my spirits high, especially when dealing with severe information shortages.

Abstract

The research proposes a dialectical re-reading of the Romanian Communist housing as a gendered control mechanism. Therefore, the thesis concentrates on Berceni neighbourhood between 1977 and 1989 as a case study for a larger urban phenomenon under the late Romanian Communist Regime (1965-1989). In this context, the research juxtaposes the Marxist ideologies on women's emancipation (proliferated throughout the Eastern Block) with the experiences of female inhabitants in Berceni. This contextualisation is crucial, given that response to women's issues was state-enforced and disseminated top-down. In aiding with a broader political and economic agenda, state policy dictated that women should be liberated from home duties (the private sphere) and be transposed into productive members of the society (the public sphere). Given that decision making was assigned to a predominantly male political elite, the state disregarded the family resources necessary to fulfil tasks historically associated with womanhood. Therefore, *Socialist Women* became just as tied to domesticity as their predecessors. What changed was that they were now forcefully assigned a dual character: an aseptic asexual public persona of state worker along the already existing sexualised domestic one. In understanding the link between women and domesticity, the research confronts the implications of state propaganda on the *Lived Experience* identified in the stories of some of the women inhabitants of 1977-89 Berceni. Among other points, the paper highlights women's isolation, over-working and distrust as some of the aftermaths of this clash between ideology and context.

Key Words

#Housing #Communism #Gender #Berceni #Propaganda

Acronyms

CC - The Central Committee

CNF - The National Council of Women

IMGB - The Enterprise for Heavy-duty Machinery Bucharest

PCR - The Romanian Communist Party

RPR - The Popular Romanian Republic

RSR - The Socialist Romanian Republic

UFDR - The Union of Democratic Romanian Women

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

My mother was came home once very upset. She said that the Securitate was everywhere and that she was not in the mood for party meetings. It was the first and last time she had an outburst like that. You never knew who might be listening, even when you were inside the flat.

- Mihaela Murgoci²

State control, with an inherent similarity to Foucault's model of the penal colony (1995), is a known mechanism of re-education through a continuous trajectory of subjection employed by the Romanian Communist Regime (1948–89). The totalitarian rule imposed by the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) in line with the Eastern Block policies achieved, in fact, a state-wide panopticonian model, dissolving the boundaries between public and private space.

As will be shown through the following chapters, housing was a means of shaping the *Socialist Society*. The inherent link between women and domestic spaces meant that the process of women's emancipation under the direction of the Communist Regime was complex and often-times fraught with contradictions. The 1973 Oil Crisis, national calamities (floods in 1975 and the Vrancea earthquake in 1977), the Recession (1973–75), Ceausescu's visit to North Korea (1971), and the pressure to repay external state debt, generated from 1977 a schizoid reality, torn between the state propagandised welfare and the experience of increasingly restrictive living conditions. Building on the clearly gendered nature of Romanian Communist politics, state crises facilitated the reinforcement of gender-normative behaviour and will be shown to have severely affected women's habitation patterns and relationship to the urban fabric.

Academic interest in gender politics under the Romanian Communist regime has mainly centred on the schism between Marxist ideologies and applied Romanian *State Socialism*, with its resulting pro-natalist policies and the gendered division of labour especially visible in positions of power (Boia, 2021). Under the Communist Regime, women's emancipation became a state-enforced and, therefore, a top-down pursuit (Miroiu, 2007; Cirdei, 2012; Baluta 2012). This labelled women as equally subordinated to the state as the men (Boia, 2021). Practically the Romanian society transitioned from a traditional

1. The Department of State Security, colloquially known as Securitate [Security] was the State Intelligence Agency during the Communist Regime.

2. Murgoci, M. Personal communication [Online Interview] (Bucharest: February 14, 2021).

patriarchal society to a modern, state patriarchy (Miroiu, 2007; Cirdei, 2012). As such, women became bodies to be "liberated" from the home duties (the private sphere) and be transformed into productive members of the society (the public sphere). However, the process did not label women as equal to their male counterparts but simply used the latter as the model for the *New Socialist Woman* (Massino, 2009). However, Marxist literature overlooked the need to transform the *traditional man* model alongside. While the state considered domestic labour menial and degrading, there were few alternatives for fulfilling the roles women occupied historically (Ciupală, 2004). Therefore women, rather than being liberated from domesticity, were assigned a dual character: an aseptic asexual public one of state worker and a highly sexualised and gendered domestic one as the mothers, wives and home-makers.

Following Nikita Khrushchev's 1954 "Industrialised Buildings Speech", the Romanian Communist Regime commissioned extensive state-funded collective housing estates, one of which in Berceni neighbourhood, on the outskirts of Bucharest. Berceni, a relatively young workers' neighbourhood, started materialising as an urban entity in the 1960s following the construction of The Enterprise for Heavy-duty Machinery Bucharest (IMGB) industrial platform. Due to a shortage in workers' housing, the communist state started constructing the first housing block estates in Berceni in 1963. The development in Berceni is characteristic for the late communist architectural vocabulary in Romania. Therefore, the research concentrates on the chosen neighbourhood as a means to elaborate on the link between women and domesticity, confronting the implications of state propaganda on the *Lived Experience* of female inhabitants of 1977-89 Berceni.

The research responds to the lack of local academic literature covering subjects such as the development patterns of the Berceni neighbourhood, the *Lived Experience* of female inhabitants in the area, and the impact of state housing policies on female inhabitants. This literature gap is combined with a more general lack of academic coverage of Romanian collective housing under the Communist Regime. Given this, methodologically, the research is based on literature reviews of the scarce publications available and archival research, particularly the *Arhitectura RPR* magazine (the principal architectural magazine of the Communist period). The archives of the Institute for Typological Projects (the institute that issued the designs for the housing blocks in Berceni) represent a particularly poignant gap in archival research. The institute dissolved in late 2020, and private developers bought the project archives. In complementing the secondary sources, the research showcases a series of interviews with former residents in Berceni. In this manner, given the very similar limitations, the paper is a pursuit of a similar nature to Lynne Attwood's "Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space" (2010).

The research is structured concentrically, firstly delving on the state of the Communist Society during the period of study. Consequently, further chapters elaborate on the experiential implications of the political context.

Among other points, the research highlights women's isolation, over-working and distrust as some of the aftermaths of the clash between ideology and context.

C H A P T E R O N E



STATE
CONTEXT IN
ROMANIA
(1958 - 89)

1

State Context in Romania (1958-89)

While the present research covers the period of nationalist dogmatism in Romania between 1977-89, Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization politics are vital for understanding the evolution of the Romanian political context. Khrushchev became First Secretary of the Soviet Party's Central Committee (CC) in 1953 following Stalin's death. In 1956, he denounced Stalin's purges and laid the foundations of decreased repression throughout the Soviet Union. At that time, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, a politician of fervent Stalinist dogmatism and severe cruelty, was the First Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party's (PCR) CC (1944-65). Khrushchev's rise to power in Moscow had a two-fold impact on Gheorghiu-Dej's politics. Firstly, with the 1958 withdrawal of Soviet troupes, Gheorghiu-Dej launched a campaign of political repression and cleansing of the Moscowite apparatus from internal Romanian politics (Burakovski, 2011, p.47). Secondly, the (late) publication of Khrushchev's 1954 "Industrialised Building Speech" was utilised ideologically and legally in a relatively unmodified form (Stroe, 2015, p.47). This allowed Romanian architecture to reorientate towards more contemporary Western theories.

Gheorghiu-Dej's cleansing campaign ended in 1964, heralding a type of national-socialism freed from international (mainly Soviet) over-involvement (Burakovski, 2011, p.47). The 1964-70 period was characterised by a trend of apparent liberalisation, continued after Gheorghiu-Dej's death in 1965 by Nicolae Ceausescu (General Secretary of PCR's CC starting with 1965). The unfreezing of the intra and inter-state social order, the increased access to wide-range goods and cultural products of Western origin, the decreasing state censorship and the overall positive outlook of the economic situation allowed state propaganda to portray Ceausescu as a moderate reformist.

Despite this, architecture remained one of the prime propaganda tools of the regime. The *etatization* of architectural production centres that occurred between 1948-52 had ascribed the architects to forced institutional anonymity and subjected them to the political system (Panaitescu, 2016). As such, under the Romanian Communist Regime, architecture had consistently served as political means to create the *Romanian Socialist Society*.

Within this context, architect Marcel Locar introduced the notion of the *microraion* into the 1960s Romanian architectural vocabulary. Consequently, the *microraion* became the unit truly representative of the ideal socialist city (Maxim, 2019). In line with political aspirations for a modern socialist architecture, the *microraion* achieved a detachment from Bucharest's historic city grid. From 1960 onwards, Bucharest became a poli-centred concentric system formed of four main elements: the *dwelling group*, the *microraion*, the *raion* and the *group of raions* (Sebestyen, 1960, p.11-14). As Boutrais and Charvet noted in 1967, the *microraion* was at the heart of this urban system (p.339). In 1960, Locar provided clarification in *Arhitectura RPR* on the general organisation of a *microraion* (Fig.1.) (Locar, 1960, p.24-26). The *microraion*'s

Fig. 1. Locar's Scheme of the distribution of functions within a micraiaion

Locar, M. (1965). *Schema de Distributie a Micraiaionului* [Distribution Scheme of the Micraiaion] [Illustration]. In *Arhitectura RPR* (1960, 5).

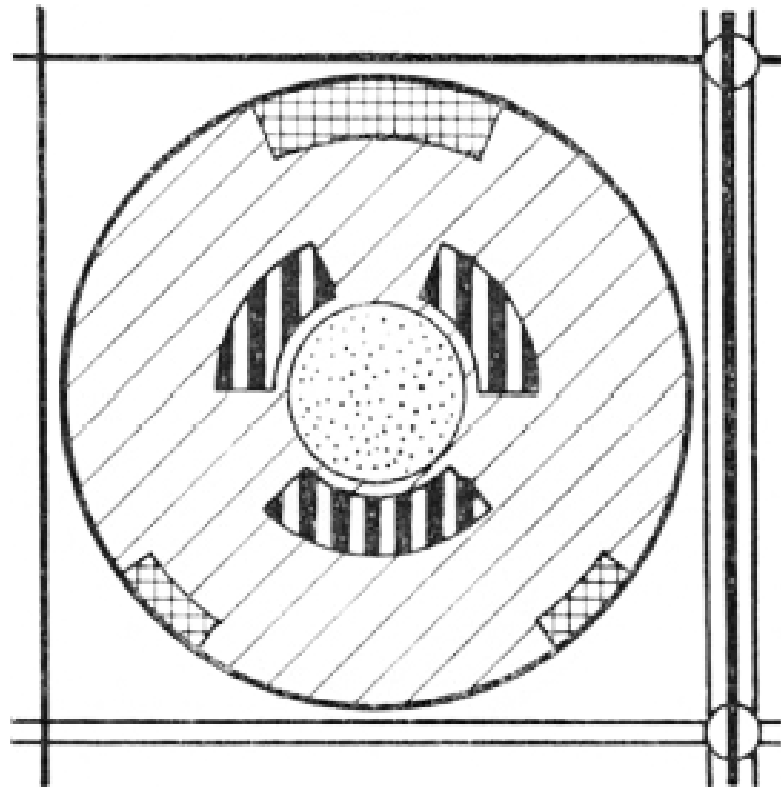
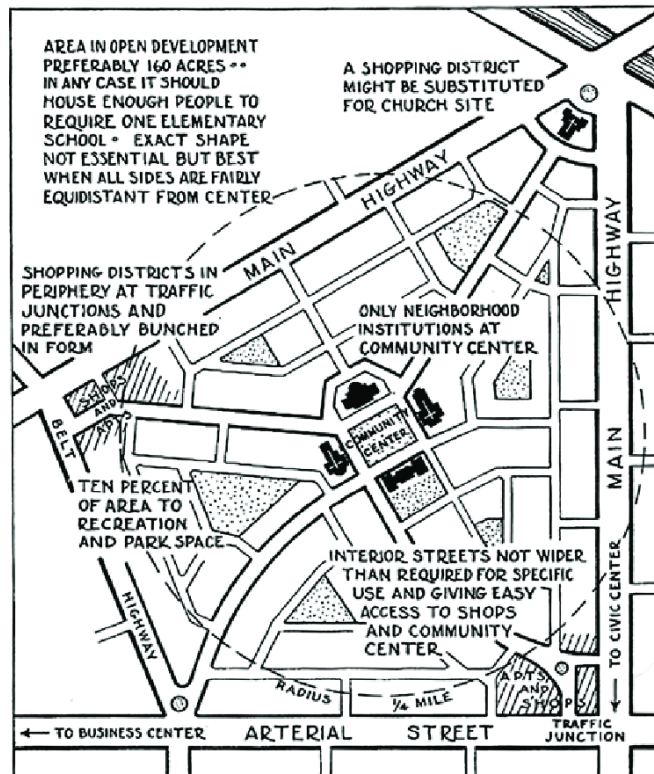


Fig. 2. Perry's Scheme of the distribution of functions within a neighbourhood unit

Perry, C. A. (1929). *The neighborhood unit, a scheme of arrangement for the family-life community* [Illustration]. In *Neighborhood and Community Planning, Regional Plan of New York and Its Environments*.



borders were limited by high-traffic roads, in this manner maintaining a relatively pedestrianised centre. The urban unit provided a suite of public amenities (grocery shops, crèches, schools, cinemas, doctors' cabinets, restaurants and canteens) meant to complement the home's private space. The functions of these public spaces provided all the basic and cultural amenities necessary to reduce the residents' dependency on external outlets (Sebestyen, 1960, p.11-14).

However, while national politics portrayed the concept of the *microraiion* as a purely socialist urban element of soviet importation, architect and theorist Miruna Stroe remarks on the blatant similarities between the *microraiion* and the *neighbourhood unit* theorised in 1929 by Clarence Perry (2015, p.98). Perry's urban unit, based on the model of American cities and town, was defined by the same elements of complete and independent servicing, the creation of an internal community as an addition to the private space of the dwelling and the separation of pedestrian and motorised traffic (Fig.2). Similarly to the *neighbourhood unit*, the *microraiion* engendered a fundamental (and forced) change in the dwellers' lifestyle. At least on a dogmatic level, this had been the goal of the communist regime from its incipient stages. Additionally, through the veiled references to Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne and the Charter of Athens employed by Romanian architects, the *microraiion* contributed to a departure from soviet models of production and heralded the creation of a contextualised Romanian Socialism. However, this import of westernised architectural vocabulary did little to change the architects' asserved status to the party, access to information and decision-making being strictly controlled by superior political instances of often-times untrained backgrounds (Stroe, 2015, p.24).

The political control of the architectural field mirrored the dynamics present within the broader social plane. Despite the heralded political liberalisation trend from the mid-1960s, the 1966 Decrees no. 770 and no. 778 (practically banning abortion procedures and increasing control over divorces) represented signs of sustained political intervention in the private sphere. The accelerating nationalist propoganda and political interplay went largely unnoticed by the general population. This allowed Ceausescu to become publicly the sole political figure capable of stopping Moscow's expanding sphere of influence over Romania. Following Ceausescu's visits to China and North Korea in 1971, dogmatism replaced liberalisation, *Official Discourse* emphasizing the superiority of national over individual interests. From this point, the political apparatus condemned cultural elements of Western import and increased indoctrination of party members as part of a long process of politico-ideological education of the population (Burakowski, 2011, p.155).

Dogmatic socialist architecture contributed to the creation of a *new socialist person* with a clearly defined *socialist lifestyle*. The Foucauldian *panopticon* model describes architectural production both across the Romanian Socialist Republic (RSR) and in Bucharest and Berceni. Architecture

generated and engendered social control, therefore determining social behaviour (Foucault et al., 1995). Foucault's later contextualisation in his interview with Rabinow that architecture supports politics of use determining and restricting social behaviour is equally implicit here (Rabinow, 1998). None of the architectural elements employed in Berceni was generated in a national void, the *microraiion* and the housing blocks being elements of ultimately Western genesis. As such, they were descriptive of (and functional in) a non-socialist environment. Simultaneously, the concept of Lacanian *creatio ex nihilo* is also identifiable on a programmatic level in Berceni. The replacement of the old pre-socialist, as Giurescu described it (1966, p.693), unsanitary housing model (and de-structuring of the associated lifestyles) with socialist housing blocks became a means of erasing local memory and engendering a socialist conscience.

Despite increasing signs of economic scarcity, Ceausescu consolidated his power fully with his 1974 Presidency, resorting to increased dogmatism. At this point, the state (and all its actions thereof) became a *meta-subject* of Ceausescu himself. The economic situation generated food, products, electricity and gas shortages across the country starting with 1971 (although Bucharest would only be affected by these later). Politics suffered a process of "schematisation and empty ritualisation, devoid of content" (Burakowski, p.344). Living conditions deteriorated rapidly after 1977, given Ceausescu's decision to pay the entire Romanian foreign debt before term and the otherwise accelerating industrialisation.

The 1974 "Program of the Communist Party to create a multilaterally developed socialist country and push Romania towards Communism" was one element of blatant disconnect marking the clear separation of the *Official Discourse* and the *Lived Experience* concerned with the increasingly isolationist direction of the country (Burakowski, 2011, p.180). A major earthquake in 1977 provided the occasion to materialise this *Official Discourse*, paving the way for the megalomaniac redevelopment of Bucharest in the late 1980s. At this point, control of the population was achieved through two strategies: firstly, coercive methods applied by the *Securitate* and, secondly, disinformation fuelled by propaganda and falsified public data. From 1980 onwards, shortages of food on the internal market and the limited provision of heating, electricity, and gas to private consumers increased consistently until the fall of the regime in 1989. In 1981 *scientific nutrition* programme institutionalised the rationalisation of goods based on studies qualifying the population's daily intake of calories. However, even these official prerogatives were rarely met due to widespread shortages. At a time of severe wintertime cuts to electricity and heating for private consumers, Ceausescu inaugurated a costly plan for the reconstruction of Bucharest's historic centre. In 1985 authorities restricted wintertime heating of homes to 12°C. In 1989 Romania finalised its external debt payments. Despite this, the existing consumption restrictions would remain in place, in this manner, dissolving any hopes of improved living conditions.

This led general animosity to increased dramatically, culminating with the fall of the regime on December 25th, 1989.

Overall, Ceausescu's regime generated a "generalised semiotic rupture", a double exclusion of public and political experience (Petcu, 1999, p.180). The progressive use of propaganda with the regime's advancement excluded the population (*the signifier*) from the *Socialist Society* itself (*the signified*). Simultaneously, architecture as *creatio ex nihilo* impacted society at all levels and had clear parallels to the declarative statements of departure from the capitalist/ bourgeois society and the creation of a *bonafide* socialist state. The state generated a fissure between the architect and the architecture, *etatisation* generally equalling to the erasure of autonomy and identity. The architect's disembodied figure associated with the overarching figure of the state became a *non-subject*, and at the height of the personality cults a *signifier* for the state leader (Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceausescu respectively), thus a *meta-subject* (Petcu, 1999, p.180). In this process, the state portrayed architecture as a strict result of the Heideggerian *genius loci*, directly linked to the population (an excluded *signifier*). These often baseless claims ignored the import of Western/ Soviet architectural models and the population's lack of involvement in the architectural decision chain. The process of excluding the population from the socialist society had been present in the state's architectural decisions to an increasing degree since 1948. In this sense, the apex of communist creation in the 1970s-80s, rather than being an element of outstanding nature, was the mature stage of the socialist ideal.

This societal rupture, as identified above, becomes crucial in understanding the differentiation between the *Official Discourse* and the *Lived Experience*. The following chapters will explore the implications of this phenomenon in Berceni and the schizoid experience that the state subjected women to through its architectural apparatus.

2

C H A P T E R T W O



**THE URBAN
DEVELOPMENT
OF BERCENI
(1950-1989)**



Fig. 3. The Relationship of Contemporary Berceni Neighbourhood (in Red) to Bucharest landmarks.

Image by Author.

The Urban Development of Berceni (1950-1989)

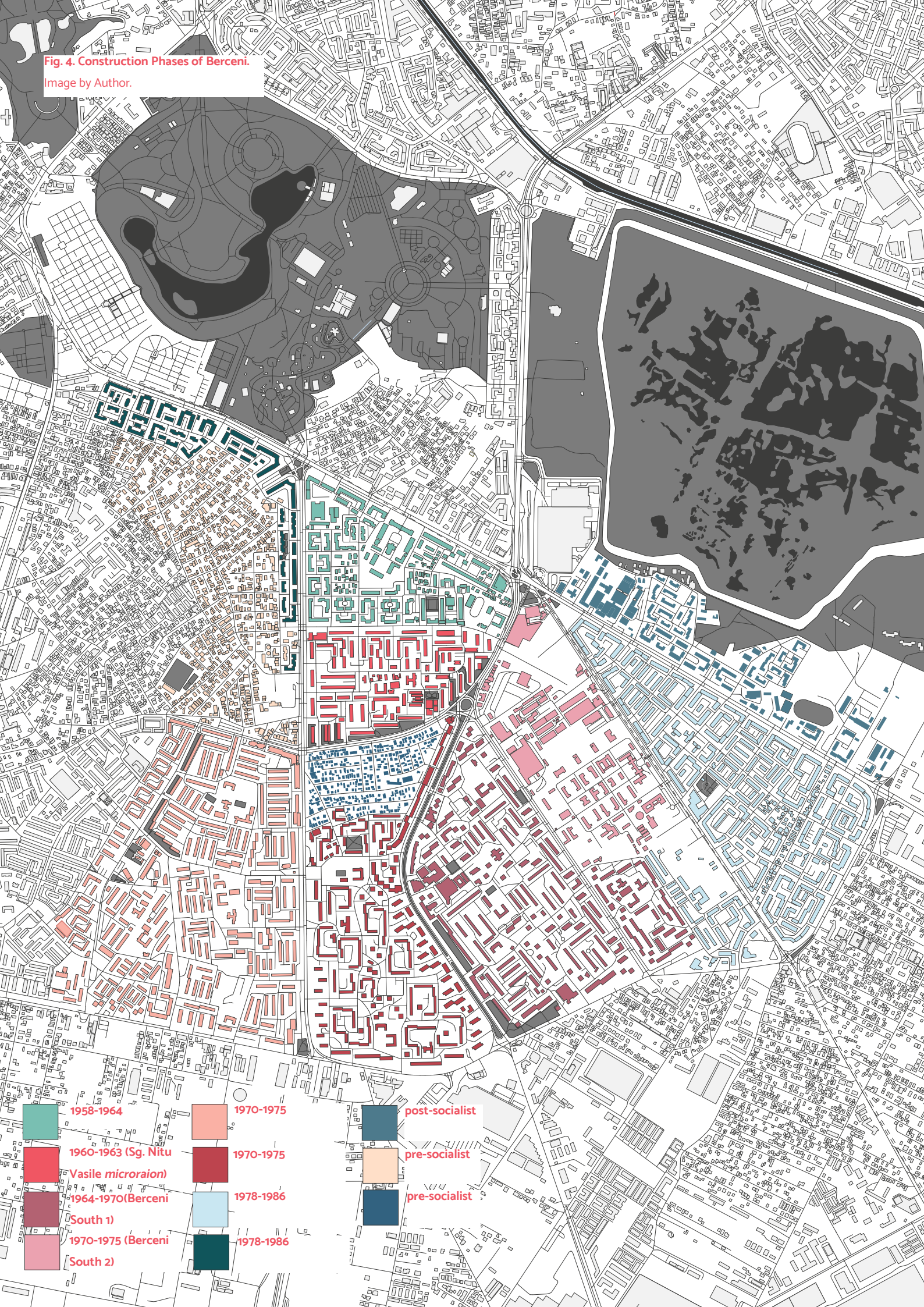
Berceni is a relatively young workers' neighbourhood in contemporary Bucharest, Romania. The neighbourhood started materialising as an urban entity in the 1950s when the urbanisation of Bucharest's peripheries meant that many housing agglomerations on the Southern border of the capital became part of its administrative territory (Panoiu, 2011, p.186). Consequently, Berceni developed progressively throughout the communist period starting with 1963. Following the communist expansion, contemporary Berceni came to be bordered on the Northern side by Bellu Cemetery and Oltenitei Road, and Turnu Magurele and Luica Streets on the Southern side (Fig.3). The first extensive construction phase of contemporary Berceni started during the late period of political control of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Therefore, similar to other of Bucharest's *Grand Ensembles*, the planning of Berceni started at the beginning of the 1960s, during a period of consolidated political repression. The development of the later construction stages occurred during the liberalisation period of Nicolae Ceausescu's leadership.


With the institution of Communist leadership in Romania in 1947, the political elite introduced quinquennial plans for internal production and development as a means to create the new *Socialist Society* (and, through extension, the *bonafide socialist person*). In line with Soviet Block directives, the first quinquennial plan imposed the country's rampant industrialisation (Giurescu, 1966, p. 219-23). This led to an increase in Bucharest's population (associated with housing shortages) due to the influx of rural workforce relocating to the new industrial centres. Additionally, mirroring the 1935 *General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow* (Maxim, 2019, p.43), Bucharest was split into 8 Raions (Sora, 2012, p.12), one of which Nicolae Balcescu (encompassing the contemporary Berceni neighbourhood) (See Appendix 2). Therefore, the true communist redevelopment of the Berceni started with the 1963 completion of The Enterprise for Heavy-duty Machinery Bucharest (IMGB). Simultaneous to the industrial complex and in response to the workers' housing shortage, the Northern side of the Nicolae Balcescu Raion was developed under the name Sg. Nitu Vasile microraion (Fig.4).

In 1963, Eugen Cosmatu provided an overview of the Sg. Nitu Vasile *microraion* in *Arhitectura RPR*. This was one of the first professional mentions of the communist housing ensembles in Berceni. According to the article, the built area, at the time encompassing 29,000 m², had replaced "small houses in a mediocre and insalubrious state", built sparsely over a vast area (Cosmatu, 1963). The juxtaposition between the *derelict* nature of the old pre-socialist city and the radiant future engendered by the new developments was a common talking point of state propaganda (Maxim, 2019, p.47) and underlined the drive of the communist housing production system to re-frame the *Socialist Society* entirely. Consequently, the project for Sg. Nitu Vasile *microraion* replaced the existing urban grain with 36 housing blocks of 5 and

Fig. 4. Construction Phases of Berceni.

Image by Author.





9 floors. Following a quick overview of the housing blocks, Cosmatu's article focused on the three commercial complexes located peripherally (Fig.5-6). The latter contained functions such as bars and neighbourhood canteens (operationally similar to restaurants), a lottery, grocery shops, a haberdashery, a perfume store, a shoe and technical repairs shop, and a hairdresser. The breadth of facilities described was impressive, the public complexes serving the population of the *microraion* well through the first decade of functioning. Moreover, following the typical functional distribution of a *microraion*, the commercial centres were peripheral, allowing for the central positioning of facilities for children (Pop et al., 1968, p.51).

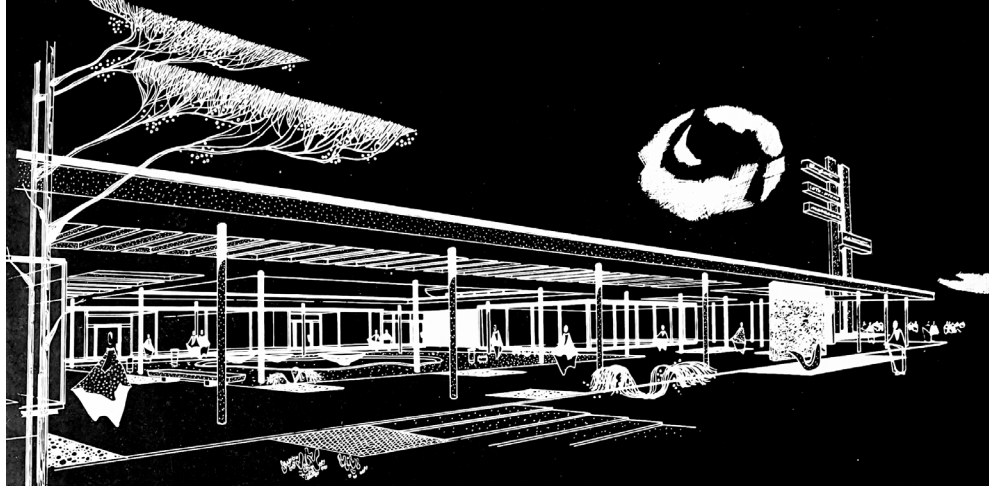
It is interesting to note that this was the first formal account of the Sg. Nitu Vasile *microraion* in *Arhitectura RPR*. There are few mentions of the housing units in the area before the 1970s, and archival research has not unearthed any articles preceding Cosmatu's writing. This gap came despite extensive coverage of housing developments in the magazine following the publication of Khurshev's 1954 "Industrialised Building Speech". Berceni, along with several other areas primarily on the Southern side of the capital, was a pioneering communist project for perimeter development around Bucharest's industrial zones. Therefore, the lack of importance afforded by Cosmatu's article to the housing units themselves, in favour of concentrating on the communal facilities, fell in line with the political concept of forced communitarian integration of the population. Peter Derer's 1985 writing "Locuire Urbana" underlined this link between the public and the Private spheres, analysing the distribution of public functions within the *microraions*. Derer remarked that "[t]he possibility to contemplate transforms the dwelling in a "space of potential action", supporting the creative integration in the collective life" (1985, p.23). Through this, the author explained that the functions and the usage of the dwelling should be complementary to the public space to (forcefully) integrate the dwellers into the community. The state backed the integration process by providing the necessary supportive infrastructures (e.g., crèches, canteens, shops).

The second phase of construction in Berceni, extending on the South of Sg. Nitu Vasile *microraion* and officially referred to as Berceni South 1, was covered on the 5th of April 1964 by *Scanteia* (the principal propaganda newspapers of the Romanian communist regime). Post-1970 expansions of the plan, phase officially referred to as Berceni South 2, covered the area West of Constantin Brancoveanu Boulevard, expecting to deliver 15,000 apartments. By 1968, 5,600 of these apartments had been delivered (Pop et al., 1968, p.54).

The *Scanteia* article opened with a typically propagandist statement describing the "first groups of workers, armed with the corresponding technical means, [...] conceiving the roads of the new neighbourhood" (Scanteia, 1964). This quote reiterates the previously discussed leitmotif of societal change within the communist discourse. According to the coverage, the development initially provided 5,500 apartments in housing blocks of 5 and 10 floors, built

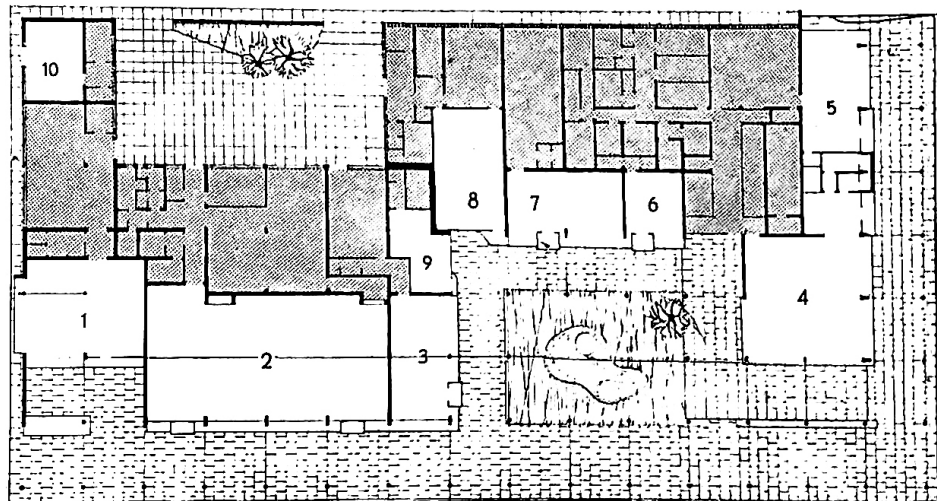
Fig. 5. Design perspective
issued in 1963 as guiding
principle behind the design of
the comercial centers in Sg.
Nitu Vasile Micraiaion.

*Complex Comercial nr.1 -
Fatada principala. [Comercial
Complex no. 1 - Main Facade].
From Arhitectura RPR. (1963, 1).
Bucharest: Uniunea Arhitecilor
Din Romania*



**Fig. 6. Plan of Comercial
Complex 1**

*Complex Comercial nr.1 - Plan.
[Comercial Complex no. 1 - Plan].
From Arhitectura RPR. (1963, 1).
Bucharest: Uniunea Arhitecilor
Din Romania*



out of prefabricated panels. Over the following years, the neighbourhood came to encompass extensive public amenities: two big commercial complexes, a post office, a telegraph and telephone office, a radio station, a pharmacy, a state bank office, a 650 seat cinema, an elementary school and a gymnasium. The central part of Berceni South 1 was occupied by a park and sports facilities, while the blocks allowed for several courtyards containing children's play areas. Berceni South 1 received additional coverage in issue 6 of the *Arhitectura RPR* magazine of the same year. The article described the development as providing the "premises for a future settlement that prefigures the mode of life of the man created by [a] society in full swing development" (1964). Simultaneously, a further 3,000 apartments were issued on the Oltenitei Road between 1964 and 1968 (Pop et al., 1968, p.51).

On the 29th of May 1974, *Scanteia* announced the opening of Tineretului Park adjacent to Oltenitei Road. In 1975, BIG Berceni multi-store, "a [...] unit with a complex profile - everything under the same roof", opened just East of Sg. Nitu Vasile *microraiion* (Basca, 1975 (5), p.30-31). Consequently, Children's World Park, one of Bucharest's biggest theme parks, opened in 1976 (Murgoci et al., 2016, p.18). Between 1966 and 1978, the IMGB expanded visibly (Fig.7-8), and the influx of workers became increasingly challenging to manage solely through terrestrial public transport routes. Therefore, the construction of the underground lines was approved in 1974 and, in 1986, a metro route opened, having as the final stop the IMGB.

The accelerating dwelling construction rhythm that characterised the late period of Gheorghiu-Dej's leadership and continued under Ceausescu, progressively affected the quality of the housing blocks delivered. As Miruna Stroe notes, the size of a conventional apartment fell from 36 m² in 1954 to 30m² in 1960 (2015, p.84). This was primarily due to the political implementation of the K₃ indicator meant to reduce the non-inhabitable areas (hallways, bathrooms, kitchens) to a minimum. The political direction pursuing a functional rather than necessarily aesthetic architecture resulting from the implementation of Khurshev's 1954 "Industrialised Building Speech" merged in the early 1960s with utopian views on the development of the built environment. As such, Mircea Alifanti predicted that, based on the doctrine of the *Socialist Society*, the household of the future would essentially eliminate the need for cooking. Instead, precooked meals available in shops and an extensive network of restaurants and canteens available within the *microraiions* would satisfy the inhabitants' nutrition needs (1963, p.40-47). At the same time, Mihail Caffé stressed that the home would become an extension of the urban network (1963, p.19-23). These articles highlight the *Socialist Ideal* of progressive redundancy of the kitchen within the urban household. As will be shown in Chapter 3, although this view was widely influential for the designs constructed during Ceausescu's leadership, the implementation of the *Official Discourse* meant that dwelling layouts rarely functioned as planned.

The dwelling construction goals set by the communist state additionally

Fig. 7. Aerial view of Berceni area in 1966

1966 Map. [Photograph]. (1966). Retrieved from <http://fostulbucuresti.github.io/#16/44.4270/26.0853/!a2!p1!p2>.



Fig. 8. Aerial view of Berceni area in 1978

1978 Map. [Photograph]. (1978). Retrieved from <http://fostulbucuresti.github.io/#16/44.4270/26.0853/!a2!p1!p2>.



impacted the distribution of housing to the population. A 1953 decision of the CC oversaw that new apartment designs allowed large families to share the same space. Practically, the new legislation ensured that up to five family members could share a two-room apartment (Tulbure, 2016, p.270). Later legal revisions dating from the 1960s, mainly based on an improving national economic situation, meant that officially apartments would be assigned on a one-room-per-person basis (Vais, 2020). However, as Chapter 3 will show, the discretionary application of the legislation still led to crowded apartments. Additionally, the mid-1960s legislation and its predecessors legally assigned the living-room as a sleeping space. This contradicted the official discourse surrounding the living-room, often portrayed as an evening space for the whole family's (and especially women's) sustained self-education. In reality, the implementation of this legislation compromised, on the one hand, the quality of communal family space and, on the other, the privacy of the people assigned to sleep in the room. Therefore, while on a programmatic level, the architects designed apartment layouts for a varied familial life, the architectural concept often clashed with the political system that generated it.

On a programmatic level, Berceni provided a breadth of facilities that would, in theory, render the neighbourhood self-sustaining and provide high living standards for the inhabitants. However, as will be shown in Chapter 3, the *Official Discourse* surrounding Berceni and its affiliated design strategies would become dissociated relatively quickly from the *Lived Experience* of the inhabitants. As shown above, the rampant rhythm of housing block construction had a negative impact on the quality of the built environment. Therefore Chapter 3 will further detail some of the exact implications this process had on the inhabitants' daily lives.

3

C H A P T E R T H R E E



**WOMEN'S
LIVED
EXPERIENCE IN
BERCENI
(1977-1989)**

Fig. 9. Women's magazine cover from 1950 showcasing the social image of women at the time

Cover. From Almanahul Femeia (1950, 3 (2) 1). Bucharest: Casa Scanteii



Fig. 11. Women's magazine cover from 1961 showcasing the social image of women at the time

Cover. From Almanahul Femeii (1961, 11 (1),1).

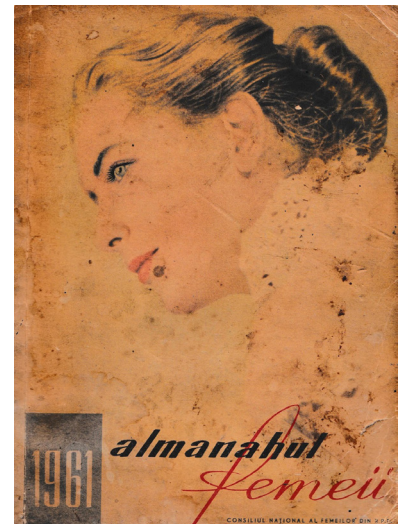
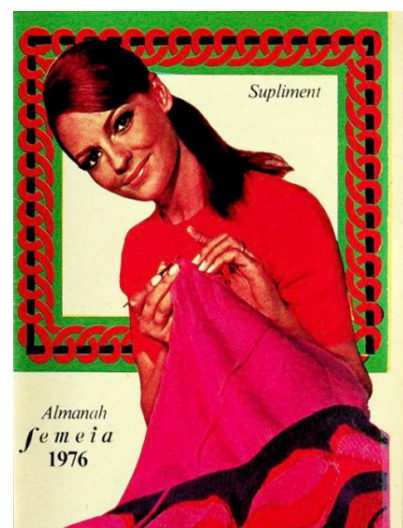


Fig. 12. Women's magazine cover from 1976 showcasing the social image of women at the time

Cover. From Almanahul Femeia (1976, 26 (3), 1).



3. Women's Lived Experience in Berceni (1977-1989)

In order to be able to fully understand the condition of women in Berceni between 1977-89, it is crucial to first delve on the evolution of gender relations between the state and the subjected population. With Gheorghiu-Dej's consolidation of power in 1948, the party-state established The Union of Democratic Romanian Women (UFDR), an overarching institution concerned with women's issues directly subordinated to (and controlled by) the party apparatus. The UFDR consolidated all pre-war women's organisations, unifying their members towards the goal of creating a *Socialist Utopia* (Massino, 2019, p.61-63). The union was the spearhead for women's politically imposed emancipation, claiming to help achieve women's financial autonomy. However, as Jill Massino concedes, "the socialist state [...] was interested in economic equality with men only in so far as their programme of mass industrialisation could be realised and support for the state could be garnered." (2009, p.132). In 1957 the UFDR became The National Council of Women (CNF), in the process, growing increasingly politicized (Jinga, 2015, p.99). This resulted in decreased agency and a lack of influence over policies that negatively impacted women's lives (see Decrees 770 and 778). With the relative liberalisation of the 1960s, women's political image departed from the stark depictions of earlier years of the devoted and selfless worker and mother. Economic stability meant that the *Socialist Woman* no longer had to sacrifice self-care and beautification to cater to their other duties within the society and the household. Ceausescu's control and dogmatism, and the increasingly difficult economic situation of the late 1970s, reversed this trend and pushed women again towards motherhood as a means of satisfying their socialist duties (Fig.9-11).

Due to her dual public-private role, the Socialist Woman's condition within the Romanian society was especially evident within the housing sector. As shown in Chapter 1, the party leadership had consistently used architecture to implement a socialist top-controlled order. Given that until the late 1980s women were severely under-represented in the party apparatus, state views on gender were imposed mainly by a male majority and by the state leadership. Women's lack of political advocacy translated into a lack of input and impact on housing legislation. The implementation of the K_3 indicator (Chapter 2) is evidence of this. The spaces affected by the indicator were primarily female control areas, given that household maintenance was prevalently a woman's job.

While the previous chapters have drawn on academic and archival material, the present chapter will cover the coping mechanisms employed by women in Berceni in dealing with the political and social situation described above. Three women, Mihaela Murgoci, Ioana Cioaca and Iuliana (who asked that her surname remain anonymous), have been interviewed between January and April 2021. The transcripts of these interviews are available in Appendix 1. Except for Mihaela, the respondents were not native to Berceni, having moved to

Fig. 12. Photographs from Ioana's flat

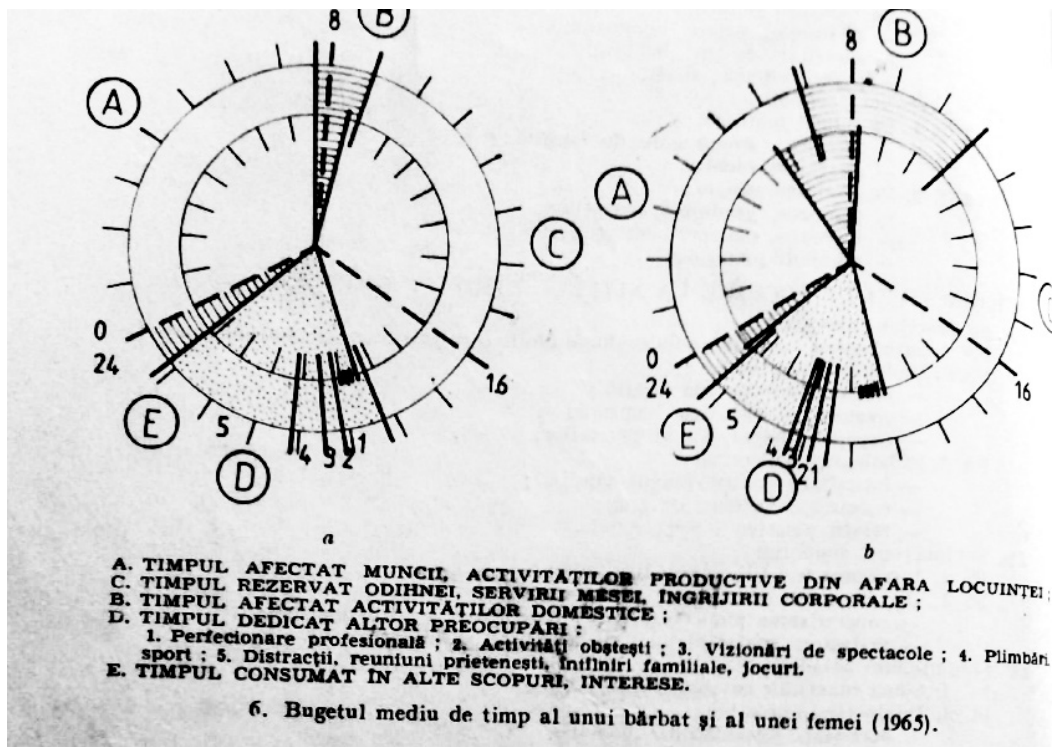
Cioaca, I. (approx.1980).

Photographs [Unpublished Photographs].



Fig. 13. Derer's scheme of gendered housework distribution

Bugetul Mediu de Timp al Unui Barbat si al Unei Femei [The Average Time Budget of a Man and a Woman]. From Locuire Urbana, Bucharest: Editura Tehnica, 23



the neighbourhood from the countryside. All respondents still live in their flats in Berceni. The interviewees ranged in age from forty to seventy. At the time of the interview, Mihaela was a teacher. Throughout her childhood, she lived with her parents, sister and grandmother in a three-room rented flat. Ioana, now retired, rented a flat in Berceni together with her family of four (two daughters, Irina -born in 1977, and Luminita, a son and her husband) starting with 1975. Lastly, Iuliana and her husband bought a four-room flat in Berceni in 1979, where they lived with their daughter (born after the move) and their son, Florin.

During the interviews, the issue of space became a recurring notion. Mihaela remarked on the general lack of space during mealtime. The small kitchen was not large enough for the entire family. Therefore, the family often served their meals in the entry hallway. Mihaela also recalled having to share the living-room sleeping space with her grandmother as a child. Sleeping arrangements in Ioana flat functioned similarly: the daughters shared a bedroom, the son slept in the living-room, and the parents took the remaining small bedroom. Ioana also noted that the arrangement became further crowded when relatives stayed overnight for extended periods. Photographs provided by her also show birthday parties and celebrations consistently taking place in the big bedroom (Fig.12).

The interviews also highlighted the disconnect between the heralded cosmopolitanism of the 1960s-70s and women's *Lived Experience*. While in all households, the husband/father carried out the shopping and some maintenance tasks, the women were in charge of cleaning, washing and cooking. Peter Derer's 1985 writing "Locuire Urbana" acknowledged this shortcoming (p. 28). The writing mapped the gendered distribution of tasks within the household in 1965. The research showed that the average urban man allocated little over an hour a day for household tasks, while the woman allocated more than 4 hours (Fig.13).

Simultaneously, even with the relative opening of the internal market to Western goods, household appliances were at a premium. Ioana's family bought a washing machine in 1977, two years after moving into their flat in Berceni. However, the washing machine was manual and required extensive assistance. Mihaela was unsure whether her family owned a washing machine as she recalled her mother generally boiling laundry in a big pot in the kitchen. The family used the same pot in the 1980s to boil water for showering during winter, given the shortages of heating and warm water. Iuliana recounted a similar situation. Given the shortage of money, her family slowly bought a washing machine and other conveniences in time after buying the family flat. Iuliana specifically recalled not having time for much in between work and raising her two children. As such, she had to conscientiously spread her housework over one week to ensure she took care of the children, prepared sufficient food for the family, cleaned the house and did the laundry.

Housework, such as washing and drying clothes, also generated an

unhealthy internal environment in some instances. Mihaela recalls an extensive problem with mould on the flat's North-facing side, which housing block administrators solved after several complaints. Ioana's family faced a similar issue. After prolonged contact with the housing block's administration, workers came to check the entirety of the flat's wall openings. The investigation revealed that, as a means to cut costs, constructors had filled joint spaces between walls and window frames with newspapers instead of proper insulation. Ioana recalled that this issue, combined with extensive cooking, washing and drying of clothes, generated widespread mould. Conversely, Iuliana's family did not encounter any major issues with their flat.

It is indeed true, as discussed in Chapter 2, that Beceni, having been planned on the basis of the *microraiion*, provided (in theory) a breadth of public functions meant to support private life. However, as Ioana, Mihaela, and Iuliana's cases showed, these facilities were not always trusted or reliable. While Ioana registered her youngest, Irina, at a crèche, the personnel's lack of appropriate care meant that she developed health issues early on. Given the situation, Ioana and her husband asked Ioana's sister, Elena, and her husband, Ion, for assistance. Over the first years of her life, Elena and Ion raised Irina in the countryside. The couple had to alternate between night and day shifts to be able to supervise the child constantly. In Mihaela's case, living with her unemployed grandmother provided the necessary assistance with childcare through the early stages of Mihaela's childhood. After the grandmother's death, whenever needed, Mihaela's mother took the child with her to the workplace, being too concerned to leave Mihaela on her own in the flat. Iuliana also recounted sending her nine-month-old son, Florin, to the crèche soon after moving to Beceni. Within one week, Florin lost a worrying amount of weight, showed scratches and got sick. In her words, "I cried, like any mother would"³. Despite the monetary shortages (primarily due to the purchase of the family flat), Iuliana decided to stay home and raise Florin and his younger sister until they were old enough for school.

Despite the communist state's declarative statements on the kitchen's redundancy within the socialist society, neither Mihaela's nor Ioana's families attended restaurants apart from when on annual leave. This was either due to the lack of money or simply because of the lack of time. While Iuliana did not mention the use of restaurants specifically, she recounted her family had money issues after moving into the flat in Beceni. In this context, it is quite unlikely that her family would often attend restaurants or canteens. Additionally, she stated that her family did not have time for much apart from work and household maintenance. However, she did indeed recall her husband taking the children to the neighbouring parks so she "could do the

3. Iuliana. Personal communication [Online Interview] (Bucharest: March 21, 2021).

housework in peace”⁴.

The unreliable public services were a widespread phenomenon. Often, the declarative functionality of public facilities was not realised to an acceptable level. This forced women to search for alternative means of supporting and caring for their families. The disparity between *Official Discourse* and the *Lived Experience* increased between 1977-89. Shops that had initially serviced the population appropriately could no longer provide essential goods. Families had to queue for limited groceries as early as five o'clock in the morning, and the state controlled per person product purchases. Additionally, the rationalisations of internal produce further aggravated the gendered distribution of housework, the latter needing to be planned around the availability of gas, water, electricity and heating.

The critical element of the *microraion* and its role as the *bonafide* unit of the *Socialist Society* was its perceived ability to ingrain a communal attitude and way of life, ultimately leading to a collective (rather than individual) consciousness. Indeed, at a planning level, the functions of the *microraion* appear as such distributed to ingrain this *Socialist Ideal*. However, the nature of the political system that ordered this concept's application (see Chapter 1) meant that control forced the population to become increasingly isolated by choice. When questioned, none of the interviewees recalls significant adult friendships during the period of study. Mihaela's mother only formed friendships with some work colleagues and kept in contact with the neighbours across her block's hallway. Given this, Mihaela and her mother sometimes looked after their neighbours' baby daughter when the parents were not home. This is potentially another failure of the socialist childcare system. At the same time, Mihaela's grandmother, who had been a housewife her entire life, rarely had contacts outside the household and her family, instead focusing on helping Mihaela's mother maintain the flat. Similarly, Ioana did not recall having much time for friendships. She does however mention similarly friendly relations with the neighbours across the hallway. By contrast, Luliana's family would “keep themselves to themselves”, sometimes having her mother and relatives visit. Luliana remarked on the fact that only recently she made a couple of friends within her housing block.

This isolation, perhaps, more than anything, illustrates the role the political system played in how inhabitants, and especially women, adapted to the apparently functional housing model imposed by the *microraion*. It is in this case not unsightly to remark that a disorderly and irrational *Lived Experience* crushed the *Socialist Dream*.

4. Luliana. Personal communication [Online Interview] (Bucharest: March 21, 2021).



CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

This research explored the connection (and dissonance) between *Official Discourse* and *Lived Experience* in Berceni between 1977-89. The paper has demonstrated the issue of state housing has been deeply connected with a range of social issues such as the ideal of the *Socialist Society*, attitudes towards gender and the implications of public life on the private experience. While the study has concentrated largely on the Berceni neighbourhood, the conclusions elaborated below can serve as a starting point for larger studies on the relation between state and gender policy throughout the entire period of communist control in Romania.

As shown in Chapter 1, given the extensive state control over the architectural apparatus, housing became a means of propagandizing the *Official Discourse*. As such, the typologies resultant within Berceni over the studied period, rather than responding to the *Lived Experience*, reflected the ideal of the *Socialist Society*, the two being widely disparate. The *par excellence* urban unit of the *Socialist Society*, the *microraion*, was an element of Western import. Given the minimal adaptation of the concept from its American counterpart, the *neighbourhood unit*, the *microraion* as implemented in Berceni was, in fact, less than appropriate for the real *Socialist Society* of the late 1970s and 1980s Romania. Perhaps this disconnect from Socialism is precisely why the housing estates in Berceni are still largely functional and in demand, and many interviewees emphasized that Berceni is a nice neighbourhood. However, the fact that the housing estates would only function (and modestly at that) according to the architects' conception during a period of political relaxation (of clearly expected finality by the system), shows that the housing blocks in Berceni were never an element belonging to the society that generated them.

The dissonance between *Official Discourse* and *Lived Experience* has also been tracked in the process of women's emancipation. As such, it has been shown that the propagandized equality between genders was largely an element planned to benefit the state rather than the population it was imposed on. Equal gender representation and treatment only went as far as it suited the party and the party leader, and, in many cases, state policies would reverse self-professed advancements made in this area by previous administrations (see Chapter 1 and the 1966 Decrees). Given the dual nature of women's duty to the state (a private one in the household as a mother and housekeeper and a public one in the society as a worker and party member), the discrepancies between gender norms are most visible in the housing sector. As has been shown in Chapter 3, housing and state policies in Berceni not only did not improve gender dynamics but, in many cases, paired the former with social isolation and exhaustion. Practically, *Socialist Women* did not have much more control over their lives than their pre-socialist predecessors.

Indeed, the Romanian Communist state did not succeed in bringing about

genuine communal living, nor true gender equality. However, it did achieve its housing goal on one front: bringing together different social categories and housing them in the same districts, streets and housing blocks. The irony is that by the late 1980s this collage of inhabitants would be brought together not in achieving an ideal *Socialist Society* but in enduring ever-worsening living situations. Although in themselves, the ideals of the *Socialist Society* and the *Socialist Woman* were radical, especially considering the patriarchal pre-socialist Romanian society, implementing these ideals was never achieved. The high levels of domestic violence, the political under-representation and the employment gap of contemporary Romanian women (Boia, 2021) show that traditional ideas about male and female roles had been remarkably resilient throughout the Communist period and overrode the willed *new gender relations*. Although most women would be state employed by the end of the Communist period, and as such, they fulfilled the same public role as their male counterparts, they were also largely held responsible for the orderly running of the home.

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■

APENDIX 1

Respondent 1: Iuliana (21st March 2021)

Q: When did you move into the apartment in Berceni?

A: We lived in the countryside and I contracted this apartment in 1979 together with her husband and we moved together with our child, Florin, nine months old.

Q: Could you describe the state of the flat when you moved in? Where was it located? Was it new? Was it furnished? How close was it to shops?

A: It is on the 6th floor. We have three rooms. We furnished it ourselves along the way.

Q: In what area of eastern Berceni is it?

A: On Soseaua Oltenitei, near Piata Sudului.

Q: Was it new?

A: Yes, it was new and we chose it because there was a school behind the block, where I sent the two children to learn. After Florin, the girl came as well. I was very happy that I contracted this apartment since it was close to the school and market. I'm happy.

Q: Can you tell me how the rooms were distributed? Where did you sleep?

A: When the kids were small I stayed in a room with both children, initially with Florin who was 9 months and after that came Cristina. The husband stayed in the other bedroom. When the children grew up, Florin had his room, Cristina had her room and I stayed with my husband in a room.

Q: Was the apartment yours or did you rent it?

A: We contracted it together with my husband. We paid for it. Then they could pay.

Q: Where did you and your husband work?

A: My husband was a turner at Metalica. I didn't work here. I stayed at home with the children at first and after that I worked on Viilor at the Chocolate Factory.

Q: How much time did you and your husband spend during the commute?

A: About half an hour, it was not very far, by tram, we did not change the lines. And my husband travelled similarly via public transport.

Q: What was your daily routine?

A: I went to work every day and did all the work at home, everything I had to do, with two children it was a lot. My husband also helped me a lot. He went to the park, The Children's City, he walked the children so I could be freer, so

I could do the housework in peace. It helped me a lot.

Q : How was the apartment equipped ? Did you have a washing machine, vacuum cleaner, telephone, television, iron?

A: We bought them step by step. The washing machine was first because I washed by hand till then. We gathered the money to buy the apartment. We had to give an advance for the apartment and after that we paid instalments on loan. It was difficult.

Q : So you were in charge of the house tasks?

A : Yes, I was. My husband was at work. After job he did the shopping

Q: How long did you have to work per day?

A: Well, you should know that I worked at job for eight hours and after that the evening was over. So I scheduled the housework every day: one day I washed, one day I ironed, daily of course, the children should be with their clothes ironed, cleaned, dressed. They went to the school, and all that, the uniforms... it was not like it is now

Q: And after all that, did you still have time in the evening?

A: Ah, no, there was no time. Because I was already ... just ... “finished”, as they say.

Q: From what you told me, Florin was quite small when you moved.

A: Yes, he was nine months old and I put him in the crèche and he got sick. After that I took him home, I did not leave him anymore and I stayed with him for a while because where he was at the crèche, he came scratched, with a cold. And I started crying, like any mother would. That was...he lost 900 grams in four days. You will realize what I went through. I stayed home to raise him. I stayed home for a while. It was very difficult for me, the salaries were low, but thanks to God, now, at my age, I enjoy them (the children).

Q: And the girl, did you raise her too?

A: Yes, she was born in 1981.

Q: Did the children attend the kindergarten? Or did you stay with them until they went to school?

A: No, I did not send them to the kindergarten. I took care of them like that until they went to school. I raised them (that is, cared for and educated).

Q: How did you spend your free time with your family? How about holidays?

A: There were other times (than now), we worked on Saturdays. They called us to work on Sundays too, we did not have holidays. That was it, I' have been through it all. I did not have time. Now thank God, I have time to go. I do not

really go to the park. But I go to church for a short walk.

Q: Do you live in the same apartment?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have contact with people in the block, neighbours? Did you help other people around you?

A: No, I did not meet people. Now, along the way, I have two neighbours, with whom I get along. I still talk to them, we go to the market.

Q: I understand that it was a very difficult period between 1979 and 1989. Did you have friends at work or were you close to family?

A: No, I had no friends at work. I did not make friends, because ... no ... But in the family, you know how it is in the family, we still consulted.

Q: Did people come to visit you often?

A: Only from the family. My mother, my aunts, I do not have enough friends to come to the house. I did not make friends, so I could open my door to someone else.

Q: How was the period of rationalization after 1977? How did the power outages affect you? The lack of heat?

A: For us, it was like for everyone else. At that time we had no electric devices. Then we had a washing machine and a refrigerator. I did not have a freezer in the fridge, because there was not much meat to find. I was queuing with both children to buy products. When I found them, I would take a bag of oranges if I had the opportunity. That was it, they were children and had to be fed.

Q: Were you party members?

A: I was not.

Q: You said the apartment was yours. If there were problems with the apartment, who would take care of the maintenance?

A: I had no problems, the apartment was good.

Respondent 2: Ioana Cioaca (22nd February 2021)

Q: When did you move to Berceni and why?

A: We moved in 1975, in Almasu Mare Street, halfway between Giurgiului Road and Gazarului Road. The apartment was allocated to my family, from the institute where my husband worked (Institute of Mechanical Research). The family consisted of parents (mother and father) and two children (a 4-year-old boy and a 2-year-old girl). We moved from Fratesti village. Initially, my husband worked in Moreni in another county and commuted weekly. The apartment had three rooms, completely detached, comfort I. The small bedroom belonged to us, the parents. The large bedroom was for children. The living-room was used for common activities, especially for watching television. In 1977 the third child was born: a girl. Maternity leave was three months after birth. The flat was crowded. Then, a niece came to study at a high school in Bucharest. She slept in the same room as the girls. The boy slept in the living-room. We (the parents) stayed in the small bedroom.

Q: How can the apartment be described in the period after you moved?

A: The apartment was new, comfort I, on the 4th floor. It has a large entrance hall, left closet and a large kitchen where the whole family ate. From the hallway you could reach all the rooms and the bathroom. The exposure was good, the kitchen and the living-room faced the road, the bedrooms faced the green space between the blocks. With trees on the edge and gardens arranged by the residents. Near the block were stores (vegetables and fruits, staple foods, milk, eggs, meat, household store), cinema, school, kindergarten (it was not near the school). At the beginning, my husband used to do the shopping, very early in the morning (starting with 4 or 5 o'clock). When children grew up (and with the food crisis/ rationalization) the children went shopping when they were not in school.

The neighbourhood was green, with lots of trees. There were family-only apartments with children. The children were playing around the block, with the key around their necks. The area was not circulated, only the cars of those who lived in the blocks. In addition, the block was at the end of the street. The block was put into use Morii Lake flooded, so the block was distributed according to the classic criteria (service, no members), but also out of necessity - hence the fact that the neighbours were not from the same interest group.

Q: What was your routine?

A: Working week of six days, eight hours a day. I was a biology teacher at a school in the village of Fratesti. When we attended agricultural practice, I got up at 5 or at 6 o'clock I was at the train station, returned at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The husband picked the children up from kindergarten, or school later. During normal classes: I went to school at 10-11 and returned around 6, 7 or 8 o'clock in the afternoon, depending on the train schedule. The food

was also brought by me from the village where I worked. I used to take bread to the village and get food from there.

My husband: when he came from work he did the hopping, picked the children from school or our niece when she lived with us: she was in high school, about 14-18 years old. The children bought bread. When they got older, they went shopping, when they were not in school.

We were buying clothes from Romarta Copiilor store (in the city centre). But we did not buy luxury items.

Q: What kind of property was the apartment?

A: It was a rental, managed by ICRAL, which made the major repairs. Such as the repair of the ceiling and exterior walls around windows (initially empty spaces were filled with paper and plaster) through which water infiltrated and mould formed. We painted the walls, and made small interior repairs. We had to complain a lot to get this fixed. The rent paid was very small (about 100 lei). The maintenance was about the same amount. The block administrator was elected by the block members after 1989.

Q: Where did you work? How far from work did you live?

A: I was a biology teacher at a school in Fratesti, 80 km from Bucharest. I commuted daily by train (about 1.5 hours round trip). During the commute (on the train) I knit.

My husband was an engineer, His commute took 10 minutes by trolleybus (the station being about 3 minutes' walk). Schedule from 8 to 15. Sometimes he went away (for tests), and he returned at 10, 11 at night. He did not drive because the headlights blinded him at night.

Q: Did you have a washing machine?

A: Initially not, but we bought one in 1977. We had a stove, a television.

Q: Did you have a car? If so, who was in charge of it?

A: No, we were afraid to drive.

Q: Phone?

A: Initially no. Then from about 1980 ... in coupling (2 numbers on the same thread, the conversations of the other number could be heard). After 1989 we had an individual number

Q: tell me more about the rationalisation period?

A: After 1977 they started the rationalizations. The children bought bread (a lot) and I took it to the village. I exchanged it for vegetables. There were queues, we had made "relationships": we took good vegetables to the pharmacy, bakery, butchery. Instead, they (the sellers) set aside products when they were in stock: butter, coffee, sugar, oil, medicine. About the heat: when we

moved in the apartment, it was good, but after the rationalizations started we warmed up with the heat from the stove.

After the 1980s: it started to get colder in the houses, the television program was about 3 hours long. They cut off the electric power twice a week, up to 2-3 hours a day. The alternative was lighting with gas (with gas lamp, which were not very common) and candles.

Q: How were the neighbours in the block?

A: We became friends only with our neighbours from across the hallway. There were also scandalous neighbours (drunkards) that were arguing in the house. Only once did the police come. Eventually they moved.

Q: Who did the housework?

A: I was in charge of cooking, washing, cleaning, ironing, tailoring. Also, I did the shopping on the way home from the train station.

My husband's tasks were: cleaning, cooking sometimes, shopping at 5 o'clock in the morning for milk, yogurt, eggs, etc., at the groceries near the block or on the way home, from his work.

Children sometimes participated in the cleaning; when they were not studying, they were especially required for shopping during the period of rationalization.

Q: What friendships did you have?

A: There was a husband's cousin. We got along well with our neighbours: on the landing.

Q: How did you spend your free time?

A: We went to the theatre, circus (once a month with the children). Weekly to the movies. In the summer we went on vacation to the Black Sea. When they got older, the children went on camps with me, I was the companion on the camp.

Berceni was a beautiful neighbourhood with lots of greenery, children had a place to play. Str. Almasu was a quite zone, with 4-storey blocks of flats, with 3 to 4 rooms apartments, with many children. we only went to the restaurant during weddings or on vacation.

I didn't have free time, only occasionally.

Q: How about the savings?

A: The CEC was the only savings bank. We raised for the children when they grew up. For loans we used Mutual Aid House (with very low interest).

A: I have to say, Berceni was quite nice. But I really did not have much time. Women with 3 children received a monthly allowance. From the Decree of 1965: the "heroine mother" was a woman with at least 4 children. But, I was the heroine in my own way. I had to deal with the daily commute (6-day work

week) and all the family things to do. The children grew up really happy. We only had to send Irina to stay with my sister and her husband, Elena and Ion , when she was littele because the creche had been really bad for her. Elena and Ion had to raise her for a while and alternated between night and day shifts so they could be with Irina.

Respondent 3: Mihaela Murgoci (14th February 2021)

Q: Can you tell me how old you were in 1977?

A: My parents moved to the apartment around 1967-1968, the block was built in 1965. In 1977 I was 4 years old in the earthquake, so I was still small.

Q: Then I will try to focus on this period after 1977, depending on how much you remember.

A: Well, I can tell you how I was in the house, for example. Or well, how many people we were.

Q: You mentioned in our correspondence told me it was a three-room apartment.

A: My (parents) lived in two rooms somewhere on Viilor and they had my sister and in order to move to a three-room apartment they had to take my grandmother with them, who lived separately. And then four people lived in three rooms. When I showed up, I was five people in three rooms.

Q: How were the rooms were divided?

A: My sister, who was 18 years older than me, was sleeping in a room, so she was quite old. I slept with my grandmother. And my parents (slept) in a room.

Q: You told me that your grandmother took care of the housework.

A: Because my family worked, my grandmother used to cook, because she was quite old. And when she died in 1979, I don't think I was in school yet. As a result, the room where I was staying with my grandmother became my room.

Q: How much time did your grandmother or mother spend cooking, cleaning, washing?

A: Well, at one point I was cleaning, I mean I was sweeping, I remember arguing with my family because they were leaving crumbs on the floor. And as I was the one who did the cleaning, I would say: Ah, don't make crumbs on the floor! I don't know if you know or if you heard, in a communist apartment you don't have a living-room, you have a bedroom really. And in ours, the kitchen was quite small. Neighbours broke their pantry wall and enlarged the kitchen, but we did not feel the need to do so. And then we didn't all fit in the kitchen to eat. When we were all five in the room, I still remember that I was small, we ate in the lobby at the entrance. There we had a round table and there we gathered, because it was right next to the kitchen. And if there were a lot of us, we ate in the living-room, where there was a table. Finally, after my grandmother died and at one point my sister got married and left, we ate only in the living-room. Which is somehow like this: as you enter the apartment there is a hall, on the left is the kitchen, straight ahead is the living-room, there is a hall on the right that leads to the small bedroom,

bathroom and large bedroom. So somehow my cleaning activity was mainly in the living-room where we ate and, well, they made crumbs on my floor and I kept arguing with them. So I took care of that. My mother washed clothes, but I don't know, I think once a week. When she cooked, all I remember is that it took a long time. We were very hungry (until the end). And she was very meticulous. I mean, I have to admit, I don't cook like my mother did. That is, all the vegetables, one by one, were put in the pot to boil, in the meantime she was doing something else. With me they are all in a pile, boil and cook yourselves! And it took about an hour, two I think, all this cooking. I think we ate two days of that food. She didn't cook every day, because she didn't have the time. Nor was she in the mood. And when shopping, my father used to do some of the shopping, then my mother and I would go to the market and help her carry bags.

Q: You said you were in charge of cleaning. Do you remember whether you had a vacuum cleaner?

A: At first we didn't have a vacuum cleaner. Then we had one which made a lot of noise. We didn't have a washing machine. I think my sister had one, but it was the type that only washed and you had to take the clothes out and squeeze them. I think we had a mixer. My mother had received a kitchen mixer with which she made cakes when she retired from job at the local high school.

Q: How old were your parents?

A: I am a child who appeared later, at the age of 47 they had me and finally, my father retired because of a disease when I was in the 7th or 8th grade and my mother, well, you know how things were back then regarding age. When I entered high school, they were both retired.

Q: Your father was in charge of shopping. Did he have a car?

A: Yes, we had a car and after he had a heart attack we sold the car. My father was a waiter. He also brought food from the restaurants he worked at. After my parents retired, there was an "Order House". It was a place where you could order food. I think both my parents had a 4,000 lei per month pension, so they didn't have a big pension. And 2,000 lei was spent on that order. And they sat on the phone, after receiving the pension, a whole morning to manage to order. And so we also had meat and things in the house that were not found in the regular shops.

Q: Was this "Order House" open to everyone?

A: Yes. But you needed to know the phone number. It was pretty close to us. Besides the Cultural Cinema. But I don't remember if the order came home. I don't think my family went there, I think the order came home. We also received other more special things, besides meat. Such as dressed peanuts. And my parents would buy cartridge of Albanian BT or DS cigarettes to give

them to the doctors. Neither of my parents smoked.

Q: This was happening when you were in high-school?

A: Exactly

Q: Did your father go shopping by car?

A: Shopping, meaning he brought food from his workplace. Shopping... at that time the shops were empty. What could you find? You could find, I don't know, bread, then the rest was rationed, sugar, oil. I also went shopping with my mother. To the market, for example, I went with my mother, my father did not go, because he'd arrive home late. I used to go shopping with my father in autumn. I had a box, which I had painted. It was a potato box. I don't know why, but in the fall they bought a lot of potatoes, the peasants probably didn't come to the market in the winter, because they didn't freeze the products. The potatoes were kept on the balcony, in a box, so we would have enough for the whole winter. I think my parents used to shop together then (in the autumn), buy pickles and stuff that was a little heavier.

Q. So there was not much to find. What would you buy from the market and how far it?

A: The market was quite close, I don't know, five minutes from the house. There were quite a few markets in Berceni. There were seasonal fruits and vegetables brought by the peasants. They were not imported. You could find oranges and bananas in stores, in winter, before Christmas and then we had to stand in line for them. It was not a "very happy" time.

Q: Who was in charge of queuing?

A: There was a queue for milk or yogurt. I think my father was the one who bought these. I know he took me too and I berated him because it was five o'clock in the morning. As a result, I didn't like milk very much. Later, when my parents retired, I would go shopping with my father. And for example, in the winter he would put me on a sledge, pull me to the shops. I don't know what you could buy in stores at that point, I guess you could find something things. I know I was sat with a bag in my arms, on the sleigh and my father was pulling the sleigh. It was also a way to walk the child in winter and do some shopping.

Q: How far were the stores?

A: We had quite a few shops around, but not all of them sold meat. I don't know how people found out, I think they informed each other: "at X store they have just brought in meat...". And the whole neighbourhood went there. What else could you buy from the store? Marmalade. It was like a block. You would order some and the shop assistant would cut from it. It was like a kind of jelly. Margarine was still in the shops. I think at some point you could find flour, I don't think it was rationed.

Q: Regarding free time, did you go to the cinema? How did you spend your time outside of the house? I understand that, for example there were many playgrounds for children in Berceni.

A: I live near the Cultural Cinema. And I still remember that if I wanted to go to the movies, there were foreign movies. I remember going to the queue for tickets. I went with my family, I didn't go to the movies alone. I think my parents were taking me to The Children's World, which was a stone's throw away from us. Otherwise, when I was little, my mother would take me with her to work. My mother worked at the Economic High School (currently Virgil Madgearu). And on holidays my mother took me with her. I had befriended the teachers. At one point the high school also had a food production section in the basement and they had cakes. And I would trick those girls into giving me cakes, even if my mother was served the check. After my grandmother died, she was afraid to leave me alone in the house. After my grandmother died, at one point I was waiting for her and I climbed on the windowsill. When my mother saw me, she froze, she didn't know how to climb the four floors of the block faster. She scolded me, she told me "don't climb on the windowsill!", but that's why she took me with her to the high school. And as a reward after, she would take me to the Bucharest Confectionery. But we didn't go very often, because it was quite expensive.

Q: What kind of movies was the cinema screening?

A: Well, I saw Star Wars, I think I saw movies with Alain Delon, movies with Florin Piersic, with outlaws, generally Romanian movies. I think I saw some Spider Man, but I was little and I couldn't read and I didn't understand much. And a teacher from our block of flats also told me that in that cinema there were also theatre performances for children. Or end of the school-year celebrations for children from the surrounding schools. But I never attended these. We also studied on Saturdays, so only Sunday was free. That is as much as it was in terms of leisure time.

Q: How often did you go on holiday? And where would you travel or what would you be doing?

A: When I was little and when we had a car, we went to the seaside every year. My mother had a sister there, near Mamaia. Or we stayed with an aunt, somewhere in Ovidiu Square. I went to Vatra Dornei. I'd also go in the countryside, but that was quite rare, to visit my other aunt and uncle. But we went to the seaside mainly. After my father had a pre-infarction and retired early, he was no longer allowed to drive. Then, there was Chernobyl and we did not go to the seaside any-more for a few good years.

Q: How did you spend your free time together as a family?

A: We left together on holiday when my parents had time. I'd get quite bored

during the summer. I spent all summer reading. When left in Bucharest, I would sit and read or go out with other children. But I did not have many friends around the block. My schoolmates also left Bucharest during the summer.

Q: Did you have a television set? Did you watch shows together with your family?

A: We had a television set, but there was not much you could watch. But at one point we could catch Bulgarian shows if we set our television correctly. And that's how I learned English. It was a channel, Studio X, I think. I don't know when exactly, but I think they showed subtitled movies on Sundays and I could understand because they were in English. But otherwise there was nothing to watch on the television.

Q: What did your parents do in their free-time? Did they read?

A: Yes. I also strolled the streets up and down and they had to scold me come back home.

Q: Were your parents party members? If yes, was your mother forced to attend social classes? How did being a party member affect her? Did it affect her free time?

A: I only remember the fact that we (students) had to do a lot of things. I think my parents had meetings, they told stories, but not many. My mother was came home once very upset. She said that the Securitate was everywhere and that she was not in the mood for party meetings. It was the first and last time she had an outburst like that. You never knew who might be listening, even when you were inside the flat. My parents were just simple members. And they were not involved in "something". I mean, they just paid their dues. Politics did not interest them. But it was an advantage. I know that my sister, who worked at the Post Office, struggled to join the party because not being a party member hindered your career advancement. And, late on, it became complicated to join the party because you needed a lot of references from work, from neighbours. I know they upset the neighbours below that they wrote (in 'recommendation') that we are a family making noise.

Q: Did being a party member help your mother in her career?

A: My mother was a communist activist when she was young. But after that I do not know whether it helped her with anything. She really did not tell me. After the "Revolution" I think my parents were somehow ashamed to tell me much about their communist past. But I do not know if it helped them. But probably yes. But my mother, anyway, had "healthy origins" so to speak. Maybe being a party member helped my father, because his grandfather was "a petty bourgeois", he had a small shop, so he did not have any problems.

Q: In high school, were you involved in party activism?

A: I know that at one point we had to learn to fire a gun and I did not hit any targets. In high school we had all kinds of meetings. But I don't remember them any-more. And I still remember that we had to do some "patriotic work", they made us rake the Kisseleff Boulevard. We met on a Sunday morning and the noise we made upset the people in the area who were trying to sleep. Being at a high school in the centre of Bucharest had some advantages: I did not work in the field, as others did (from other high schools).

Q: I know that after 1977, especially after 1980, there were increasing power outages. How did this affect you and your mother?

A: I do not think I would do my homework if it was no electricity. And we were not expected to. But I would learn at candle-light and we had a gas lamp. But in high school (in class) I shivered from the cold. I would have to wear a jacket and gloves inside. It was also cold inside the house. It was super cold. How did it affect my mother? Well, if she had cooking to do, for example for the holidays, she would wake up at night (very early) to make food or cakes. It was not because they had to be ready by the next day, but only at that hour was there cooking gas available. Hot water did not exist. We were heating the water on the stove. We had a big pot. We would pour about 3 pots of super hot water in the tub and then fill it with cold water and then we washed with a kettle.

Q: How often did this happen?

A: Well, the hot water did not reach our apartment on the 4th floor. And in the summer there was no problem, we washed with cold water. At least it was hot outside. I think the clothes we had to disinfect were also boiled in that big pot. It was the pot just for boiling water.

Q: Were you renting your flat? Who did the repairs? Did you have any problems such as mould?

A: The big repairs were done by the state. If your sink broke, you had to fix it yourself. My mother took care of the electricity. If necessary, my father would repair the doors, handles. But we had so really big problems. The block is oriented half facing the South, half facing the North. And on the Northern side, where the bedrooms are, there was a lot of mould. It was cold and probably vapour condensed, especially when boiling water or turning on the stove. My mother kept some bricks on the stove to keep us warm. And then of course there was condensation. The administrators fixed this with some polystyrene.

Q: What sort of relationship did you have with your neighbours?

A: Well, my parents were quite withdrawn. But they got along well with the neighbours. Moreover, at one point, in front of our apartment, there were some young people who had a baby and my mother went to take care of

the child before my niece was born. We got along well, but I cannot say there was a community. We got together to clean around the block in the spring. I think men were in charge of this generally.

Q: Do you remember if your mother went to the hairdresser? Or how often did he go out? Did you go to any restaurants?

A: We went to the restaurant on vacation. My father worked at a restaurant, so I think he did not feel like going to a restaurant in Bucharest. My mother would go to the hairdresser's, but I do not know how often. I think so did my father. I think we used to go shopping, for example when we had to buy clothes or shoes.

Q: Did you find what you needed?

A: Hardly. We shopped on Lips cani, because it was the place with many shops. My grandmother would sometimes make dresses for me. There were not many nice clothes on the market. I remember now, I think my mother was more friendly with her colleagues from work than with our neighbours.

Q: Do you remember if your parents had savings?

A: Well, they did not have much money deposited. If they had money, they would spend it on our holidays. When we went to the seaside, even if we were staying with my aunt, we ate at the restaurant. So they did not save much. I suspect, however, that they raised money to buy the car.

Q: I imagine it took a while to buy the car.

A: Yes. And cars were not so easy to buy, meaning you were on a waiting list. You waited for a while until you got the car. Otherwise, I think we did well, money wise. While my father worked, he also received tips. Then, I think we did really well. When he retired, he worked extra. I mean, he was still allowed to go to the restaurant. I guess, we did not have enough money.

Q: Did you have relatives visit during the holidays?

A: Yes, usually on holidays, Easter and Christmas the whole family gathered with us, that is, my sister came with my husband. Our relatives from the country-side sent us pig and other traditional stuff. And my family went to the country-side, they would fill the trunk with all sorts of things.

■

APENDIX 2

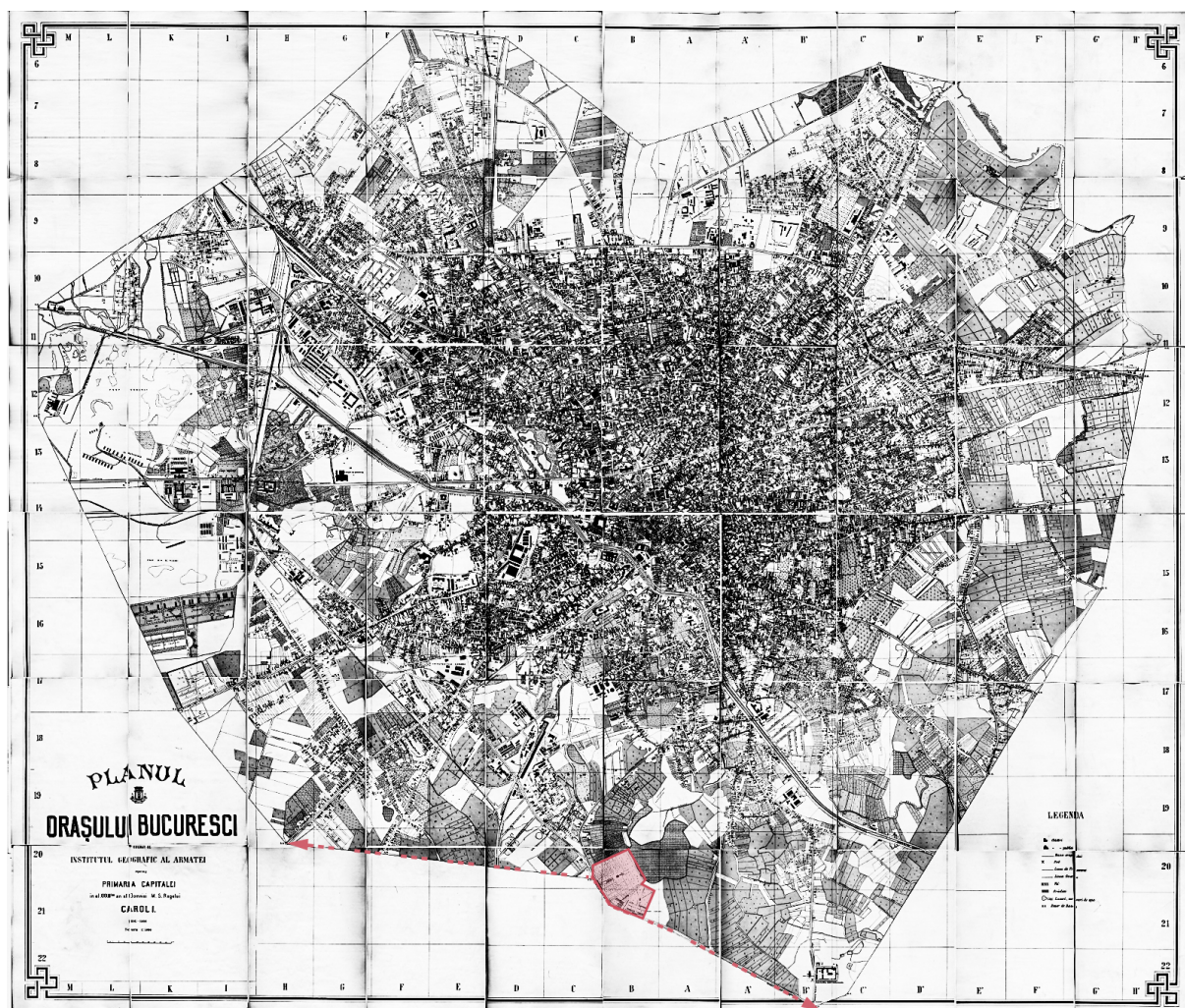


Fig. 1. 1895 - 1899 Plan of Bucharest commissioned by the Geographic Institute of the Army (Institutului Geografic al Armatei). Original Scale 1:5000. Edited by Author.

Harta Bucuresti 1895 - Planul Institutului Geografic al Armatei. [Map of Bucharest 1895 -Plan of the Geographic Institute of the Army]. From Romania 594. by I. Marinescu, 1899. <https://romania594.blogspot.com/2018/05/harti-bucuresti-in-format-kmz.html>

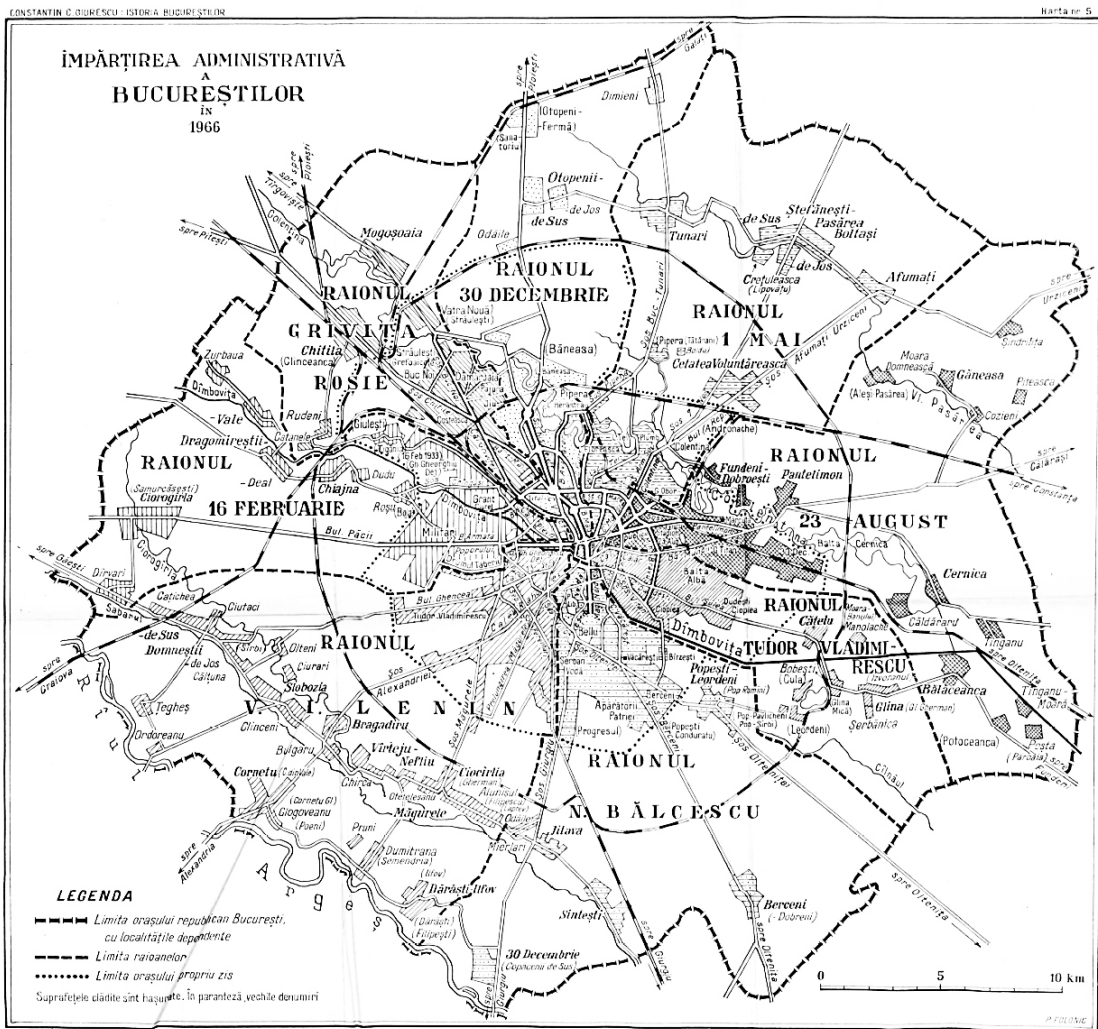


Fig. 3. 1966 Plan of Bucharest
 Impartirea Administrativa a Bucurestilor in 1966. [The Administrative Distribution of Bucharest in 1966]. From *Istoria Bucurestilor din Cele mai Vechi Timpuri pina in Zilele Noastre [The History of Bucharest from the Earliest of Times Upuntil Nowadays]* (p. 336), by C. Giurescu, 1966.

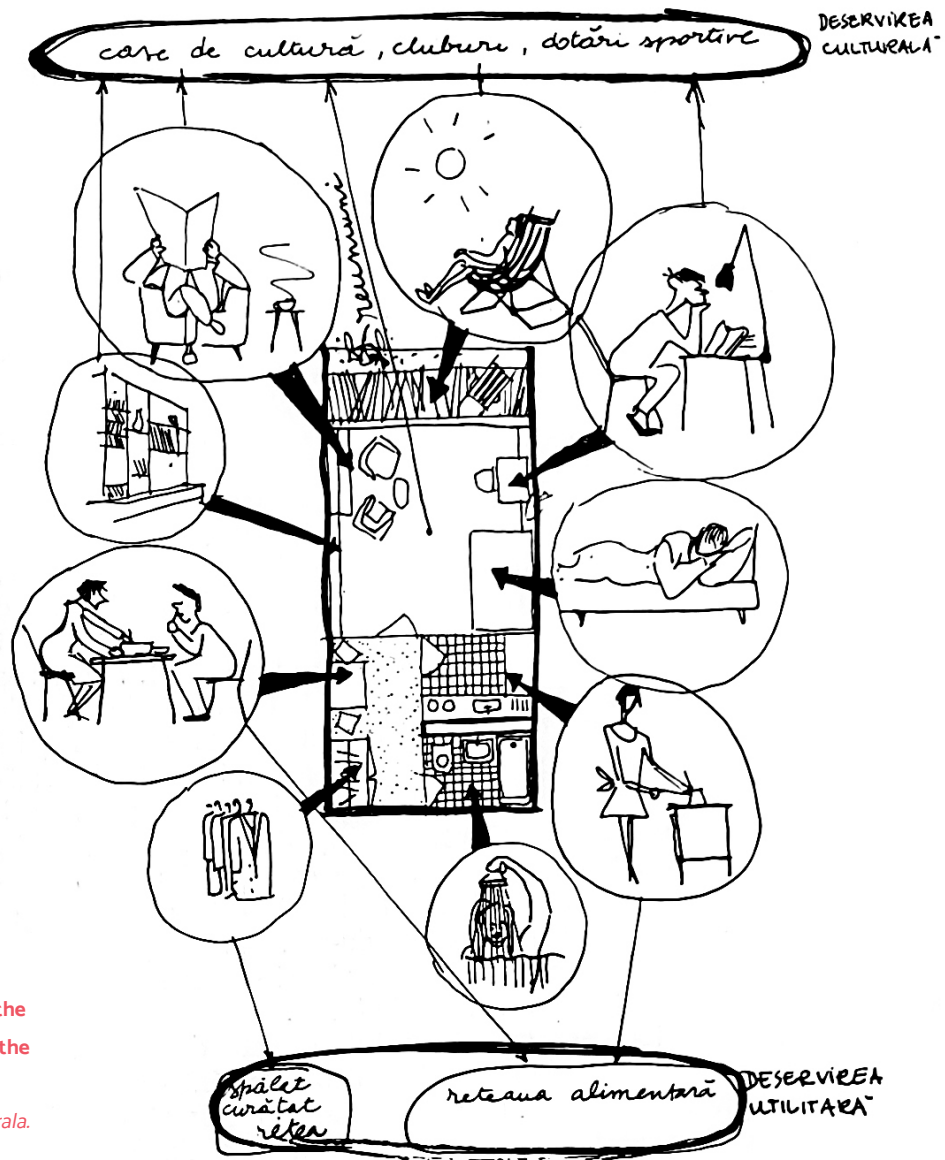
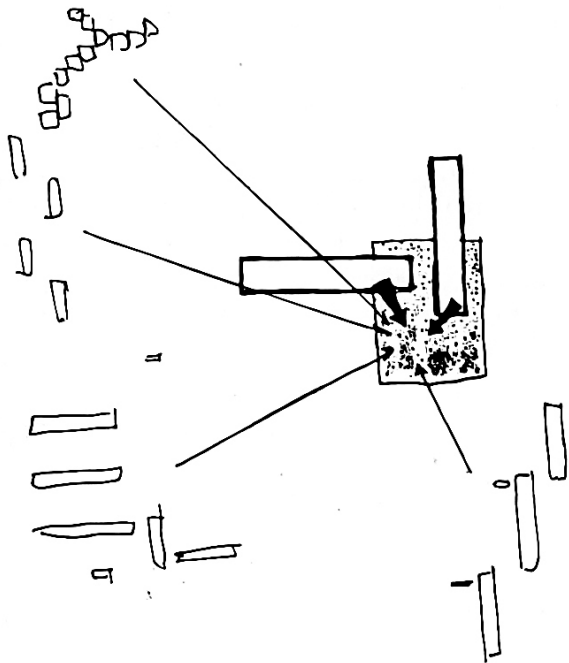


Fig. 4. 1963 Sketch by M. Caffè depicting the interlink between the functions of the microaion and the functions of a flat.

Dotarea Utilitară și Dotarea Culturală.
 [Utility Allowance and Cultural Allowance]. From *Arhitectura RPR* (1963, 2), Bucharest: Uniunea Arhitecților Din România

În cazul locuințelor mici completarea funcțiilor interioare cu dotările colective utilitare și social culturale este absolut necesară



dotarea complementară deservite în primul rând blocurile cu apartamente mici dar poate fi și o dotare de ansamblu sau de microaion

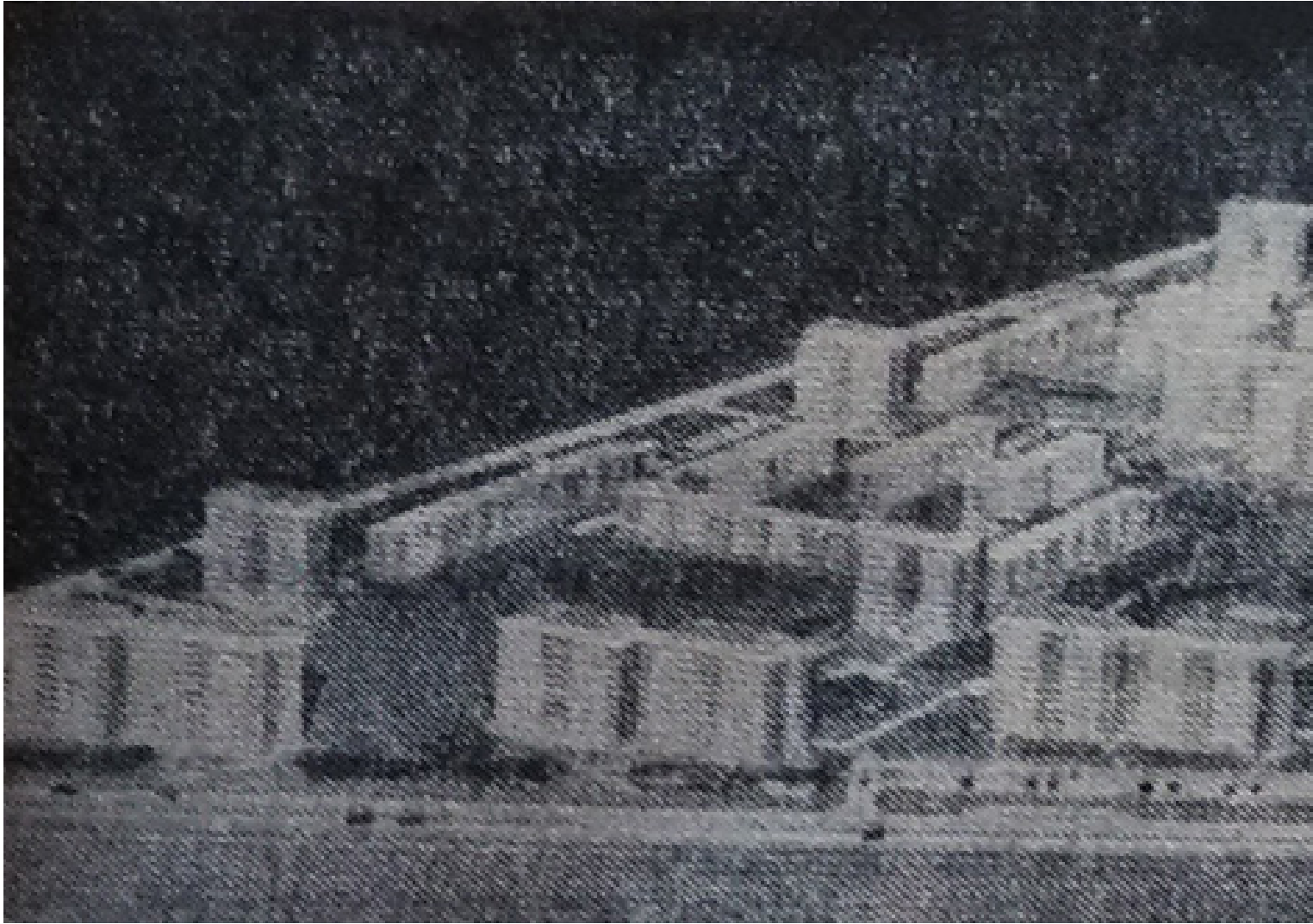
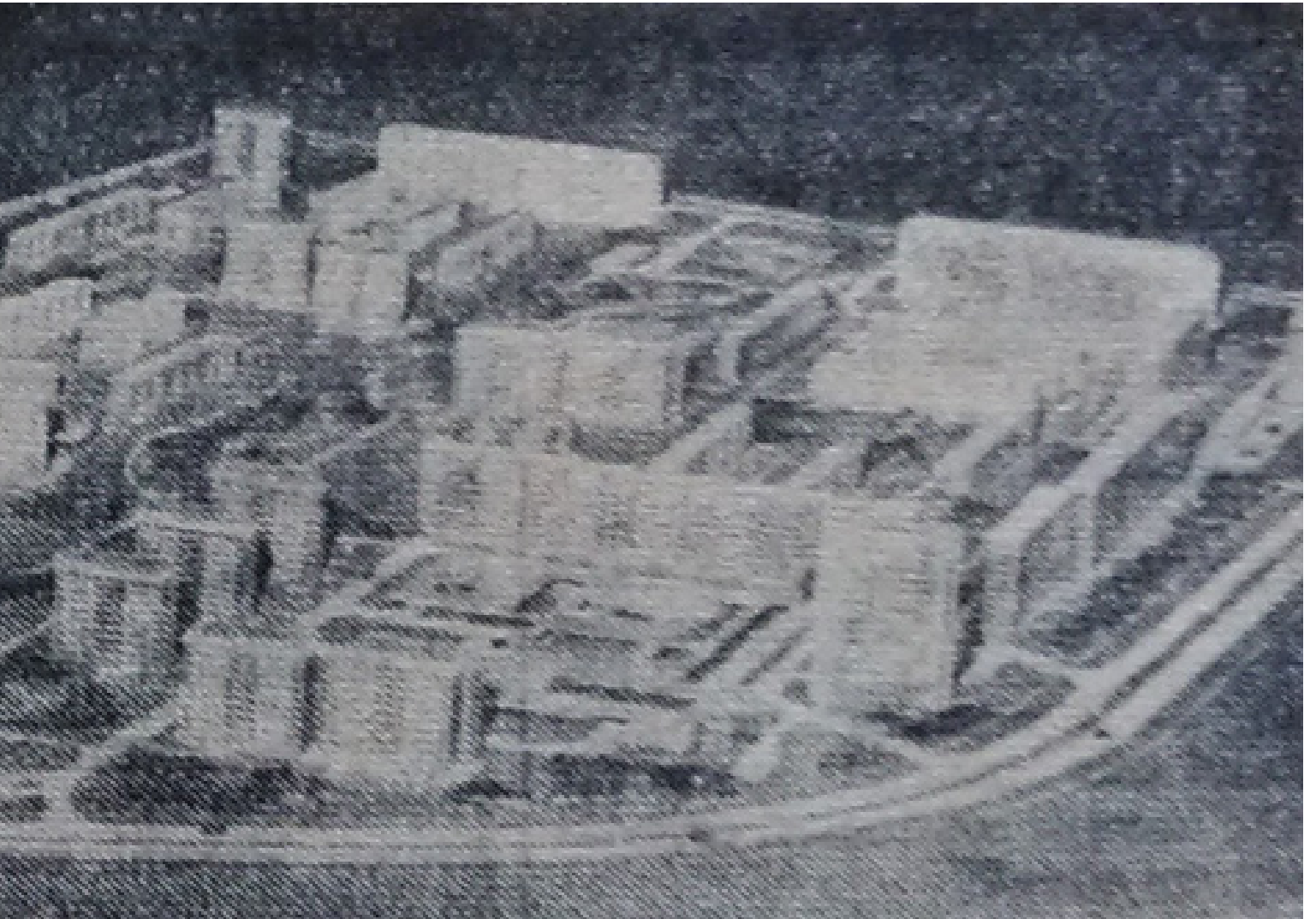


Fig. 5. Announcement of Berceni Sud 1 in Scanteia

Un Nou Cartier in Zona de Sud. [A new Neighbourhood in the Southern Area]. From Scanteia (1964, 5th April).

Bucharest: Casa Scanteii.



Ana-Maria Vasilache

Docile Bodies

