

# PRAXIS AND LIFE-WORLDS IN THE POST-COMMUNIST CLUJ-NAPOCA

Silviu G. Totelecan\* – University Babeş Bolyai Cluj-Napoca

*This paper emphasizes the outcomes of two socio-anthropological researches done in 1999 and 2004 in the Cluj-Napoca city from Transylvania, Romania. We have investigated inhabitants from different areas of the city and also "local experts" from urban field (e.g., local administration representatives, architects, public notaries, lawyers, estate agents etc.). The fieldwork was focused on the housing quality in the post-communist urban environment and on the developmental paths followed by the city in the latest years. The main conclusion is that the Romanian urban environment is passing an aggressive process of counter-urbanization, visible at the macro-level as deregulation, at the mezo-level as the diktat of spatial organization and also at the micro-level (i.e., the household space), where, is manifest/obvious in the aesthetics of the post-communist houses and latent/obscure in the habitudes of the socio-spatial consumers of this period.*

## Introduction

The socio-economic and political transformations that took place in the Romanian society since the 1989 Revolution are covering institutions, groups, markets (e.g., the capital market, the housing market, the land market etc.), locations (urban, rural, suburban or periurban) etc. The social change has brought us transformations of the attitudes, behaviors, and socio-economic-political-cultural praxis. Here, I will emphasize some of the processes which, in the past years, have been affecting the urban environment: the *built environment* of the city and the *daily life* of its inhabitants. I should mention here that due to the research restrictions (i.e., I have investigated only the Cluj-Napoca city at two different moments in time: 1999 and 2004), the conclusions of this paper cannot be directly applied to other Romanian cities, although the common knowledge rises the idea of similar development (or regress!) for the urban environment.

The *first research* – "The transformations of the housing market, mobility, and social segregation in the Romanian cities: case study of Cluj-Napoca, Romania" – financed by The German Society for Research (DFG) was done between February and July 1999, as a joint research project between the Sociology Department of "Babeş-Bolyai" University from Cluj-Napoca and the Institute of Geography from University of Göttingen (coordinator Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Bürkner). The *second one* – "Housing inequalities in post-socialist cities. Villas' Neighborhoods in Cluj-Napoca" – a grant financed by the Romanian Minister of Education and Research (CNCSIS code 392, topic no. 39,

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\* Silviu G. Totelecan is PhD in sociology, senior researcher at the Department of Socio-Human Research, "G. Barit" Institute, Romanian Academy – Branch of Cluj (website: [http://www.geocities.com/silviu\\_totelecan/](http://www.geocities.com/silviu_totelecan/), e-mail: [silviu\\_totelecan@yahoo.com](mailto:silviu_totelecan@yahoo.com)).



contract no. 33374/29.06.2004, coordinator: Senior lecturer Dr. Rudolf Poledna) was carried out between August and September 2004. Both projects had a *quantitative dimension* – approached through sociological surveys based on questionnaires on households, livelihood, sources of income etc. of the city's inhabitants and a *qualitative* one – approached through semi-structured interviews with *respondents* living in different areas of the city (i.e., neighborhoods such as: *Centrum – RC, Gheorgheni – RG1, Grigorescu – RG2, Mănăştur – RM1, Mărăşti – RM2, Zorilor – RZ* etc.) and with *local experts* working in administration, public and private companies, a total of 60 interviews<sup>1</sup>.

My focus in this paper will be on the *qualitative dimension* of these research projects.

- a) On the general problems with which the city of Cluj-Napoca as a “whole” is confronting today – data resulting from the investigation of *two types* of “experts” that are in a *process of permanent negotiation of the urban development principles*<sup>2</sup>. In the *first category* are placed those who, as a consequence of the positions occupied in the local administration, *could and must elaborate and implement developmental strategies of the municipality*: local councilors, urban service representatives etc. I am referring to all those *plans and policies* regarding the urban local community, which are supposed to establish an integrated development of the city, to ensure a medium and a long-term perspective within which the individual interests of the inhabitants (persons and companies) – divergent for most of them – can be reconciled. As a counterbalance, in the *second category* of experts are located those specialists who, by their profession, must *serve the beneficiaries' interest and facilitate individual strategies*: public notaries, advocates, architects etc. This later category often has an uncomfortable position, as they often need to *work against the public interest* when following their private agendas.
- b) On the information provided by the respondents relating to *facts* about their daily life in the city (e.g., socio-cultural identity of the inhabitants, available types of capital, socio-spatial life trajectories, problems and solutions that appear within and without the domestic space etc.), and *perceptions* of it (e.g., views regarding the socio-economic status of the neighbors, the quality of living and of the houses, the motivations of the preferences for certain areas of the city etc.). They are reflections of the inhabitants, differentiated by residential areas where they live, with reference to the physical and social

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<sup>1</sup> Please noticed that I will use “« »” as quotation marks for the respondents and the experts accounts.

<sup>2</sup> Our analysis starts from the argument of Mike Savage and Alan Warde (1993, 122): “One approach is to think of the city as a text, in the same way that a novel or a film might be a text. This text has certain authors, is constructed in a particular way by various procedures and techniques, has a series of meanings embedded within it and is subject to forms of reading. Conceiving the urban as text in this way may help in understanding how cities gain their specific meanings”.



space of Cluj-Napoca city, and also about the *emergent socio-spatial dynamics*<sup>3</sup>.

For “capturing” the grassroots level *shades/overtones* resulting from the in-depth interviews, I have implied Glaser & Strauss’ *Grounded Theory* (1967) as *data structuring device* and *objective hermeneutics* (“Methoden der objektiven Hermeneutik”, developed by Ulrich Oevermann<sup>4</sup> and his colleagues, *Institut für Sozialisationsforschung und Sozialpsychologie*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany) as tool for *comprehending and interpreting the text-materials*. It must be said that social scientists are working with *double-represented social reality sequences* (i.e., with facts, believes, jokes and stereotypes on the one hand and with cultural stories, worldviews etc. on the other; with *manifest and latent structures of the meaning*, Dürschmidt 2002): generated by the *respondents* but also the *researchers* (due to their theoretical/methodological frameworks “entrapment”), which are *not ended* after the interviews transcription. They are continually retelling stories about the world and knowing that became evident that *theorizing* and not necessarily *making a theory* (Mucchielli – ed., 2002) has to be their goal.

In the objective hermeneutics frame, the meanings are embedded in “structures” and the individuals are only *vehicles* of those meanings. Therefore, “counts less” who and how is saying and very much what the *structure/entity requires* for him/her to say. The objective hermeneutics holds the existence of a social reality beyond the *context created by interview* and this social reality can be brought to light by approaching the “primary-documents” as narrative-texts. A proper knowledge of the social reality, of the possible meanings offered by the life-world, could not be reached without that *go-forth-and-back movement* from facts/narratives to ideas, meant to assure the development of interpretations which go beyond the limits of our given framework. This *motion* is assured by the *ten steps grounded theory process* (*Collect Data, Transcribe Data, Saturate Categories, Abstract Definitions, Theoretical Sampling, Axial Coding, Grounding the Theory, Filling in gaps*, Mckenzie, Powell, & Usher – eds. 1997) which assumes a permanent *construction and reconstruction* of the object of investigation by *swinging between concepts and empirical data*.

## From Communism to Post-Communism

*The experienciation* of the physical and social space is having a time of strong reconfiguration. Its beginning appears to coincide with the start of the transition

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<sup>3</sup> One of the first scholars who have used the concept of *emergence* was the philosopher George Henry Lewes in 1875. He, as R. Keith Sawyer (2001, 553-554) has noticed, thought that a distinction between two types of effects, *resultant* and *emergent*, is needed: “An emergent effect is not additive, not predictable from knowledge of its components, and not decomposable into those components. Lewes’s classic example was of the formation of molecules from their component atoms; hydrogen and oxygen are the cause, and water is the effect – the properties of water are emergent from the combination of hydrogen and oxygen”.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of Oevermann’s work see [http://user.uni-frankfurt.de/~hermeneu/bib\\_oev.htm](http://user.uni-frankfurt.de/~hermeneu/bib_oev.htm).



period in Romania<sup>5</sup> when the individual expectations related to the social changes that had occurred, have dramatically decreased (Totelecan 2005b). Under the pressure of *inflation* («in each year less and less things I am able to buy... last year more than this year, and with two years ago even more» – *RM2*), *unemployment* («has greatly affected me, at all the levels, it even ruins my health» – *RG2*), but within a *context overwhelmed by freedom* – which, unfortunately, *just a few can afford*, no wonder that *the before time* (i.e., the Communism), when «working less, debating less, even thinking less... but surviving» – *RM1*, become *appealing* for an increasing number of people. Some respondents have motivated “the looking to the past attitude” as follows:

«In the 90s the level of the life conditions was very high and it was very easy to live... we ate at the restaurant nearly daily and we did not have too many expenses. It wasn't always ok, but everyone had the chance to make business because everything was profitable. Nowadays [in 1999] everything is problematic, *you cannot eat anymore in fancy places or buy clothes as much as you want*» (*RM1*). «Now, when my daughter asks me if I allow her to go in an excursion with her school... I must think twice before I give her an answer... we have a lot of expenses regarding the costs of the school for the kids (e.g., for writing materials, clothes, books etc.), *often our budget is running out*» (*RM1*).

The past *daily livelihood security* («I had a secure working place... I knew that I go there, I work and I get paid.» – *RM1*), although within *the lack of purchasing opportunities of desired and needed goods*, is now replaced by *the feeling of insecurity related to tomorrow's means of existence*.

«I do not say that the former regime was good. Before 1989 was also not ok. At that time everything we brought, we did it in a hidden way<sup>6</sup>. I can not say that we ate worse than now... but I want to emphasize that everything was out of our reach then» (*RM1*). «The youth, the young people, my daughter, my son, what kind of advantage have they today since they do not know if tomorrow they will go to work or not, if they will have a job or not, if they will be paid or not? For sure, these are not advantages» (*RM1*).

Paradoxically, in the Romania of the new millennium, every desire can be satisfied, but the necessary resources implied by it have made its *denial the main option* for the majority of Romanian people. In the former time (i.e., the so-called “golden epoch” of Communism), as *RM1* told me, with an average income people had the chance to go out every day for a coffee or a beer and to have a family lunch on weekends. Today he said, after 1989, we have moved from “heaven” to “hell”.

<sup>5</sup> Dorel Abraham and Marilena Gânju (2000, 22-23) have noticed that after 1989, Romania “underwent some significant changes in the political, economic, and social field. During transition, the key-words that describe these changes best appear to be «market economy», «privatization», «democratization». These economic and political processes act on individuals through them, so that it becomes natural to bring about a large range of social effects. [...] It becomes more and more obvious that the phenomenon of transition concerns not only the changes in the economic field, but also in the field of institutions and the relationships between them, of behaviors and individual and group attitudes”.

<sup>6</sup> The respondent has referred to the fact that the stores had just a few products and the people had to know every store sellers in order to obtain, from behind the desk, the required products.



*Post-Communism* brought us moral advantages, the hope of a better life, the freedom of thought and action etc.; counterbalanced by an impressive number of *disadvantages* or as some subjects called them: *chaos and disappointing, fear and despair*, which, the ordinary citizen can not face it easily. Although incomplete, I am drawing here a work-in-progress version of these:

1. Job insecurity (jobs themselves are hard to get!) and the failure of private initiatives;
2. Impossibility of financial accumulation of capital;
3. Fall of living standards and of purchasing power;
4. Deterioration of cultural capital (when the monthly income is low and not enough for the regular housing costs, things such as: the acquisition of books, journals and even newspapers or seeing a theater play, an opera and even a movie are issues regularly left out of the family schedule);
5. Dissolution of the primary social relations (after 1989, the increasing feeling of property, has created a lot of disputes between the descendents – brothers and sisters but also within other kin types – of the older generations in their contests for land and houses);
6. Fragmentation of the public interest in correlation with a very weak administration capacity of the local resources (e.g., the former local authorities of Cluj-Napoca city – replaced in 2004 – have considered investing in local symbols as a higher priority than building houses);
7. Lack of prospects and consequently traumas and anxieties.

Macro-structural transformations launched by the Romanian Revolution have influenced urban social life and facilitated *social atomization*. Despite the *emergent opportunity* resulting from the change of the system (e.g., high chances for social and territorial mobility, for capital growth – economic, social, politic and so on –, for the access to resources and information etc.) or to a certain extent because it, have generated many *counter effects*<sup>7</sup>, the multiple possibilities of the man to “unwrap himself” into the world were doubled by countless “closing ups” to the other. As an interviewee (architect) remarked: «the man has locked himself in his apartment and outside of it has had no interest in cleaning, reshaping, improving the environment or in establishing way of communications with his neighbors and the enlarged community». The individual home become the absolute expression of the hanging back from a “worthless community”, which rather prejudices than improves the individual being. The comfortable perimeter of the dwelling, a domestic space desired to be placed, if is possible, in an environment close to the nature and designed

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<sup>7</sup> “The post-communist transition brought with it an increase in urban unemployment, an increase in general poverty, a land restitution process and the need for new adaptive strategies from the part of the transition losers. In this new context urban unemployment acted as a force pushing for former immigrants coming from villages, into the cities. The need to survive was met with lower costs in rural areas, with taxes remaining low and the help of small plots of restituted land. Targeting cities for residence and returning from them to former village residences was the new dominant pattern of survival strategy for large segments of the population.”, Dumitru Sandu *et al.*, 2004, 1-2.



according to the owner's personality, makes promising the avoidance of contradictory discussions with the block's (i.e., buildings made in the communist period, with large number of quite small-sized flats) neighbors, reduces the lack of intimacy, keeps the individual away from *intermingling* with the others.

The shift from the block type of residence to the family house has not so much to do with the *never-ending interference* with the others, *less priceless* also in the Post-Communist Romania's rural areas, where it used to be the "backbone" of social bounding<sup>8</sup>, but rather with the huge need to escape from the *swarming communist space*. The fact that the socialist system and later the communist one wanted to *homogenize* the housing conditions (which in the end became a quest for uniformity and not for improvement; in the name of the communist egalitarianism so-called "barrack room" type of apartments became present everywhere) has created high distaste for everything that is nearby of the built environment and daily life *standardization*. That was practiced with good will, being related with the *strict control* of the citizens and having nothing to do with the social requirements of housing diversity. The *positive* aspect (if there was such a thing), compared with the up-to-day situation is that there was at the time a normative framework that could *impose* (in the name of the centralist system) minimum living standards – which of course often were not respected: «Today we cannot talk about a coherent urban strategy. Via National Agency for Housing are built flats for young families, which is a good thing, but those are made without taking in consideration a specific urban area where the infrastructure and the facilities are available. The main concern is the needs fulfillment and not having a housing policy which should be implement adequately» (architect).

The need of people to *escape from the restricted spaces* built under Communism, has reached the *boiling level* in the first years of transition (unfinished process yet). Then (and also now), due to the rapid growth of the capital and of the strong desire for *maximum visibility achievement*, the urban and rural environment was *assaulted by ostentatious constructions*. Their style is very much questionable, with doubtful esthetic taste of the beneficiaries and not in the last instance with the lower innovative capacity of the architects – who have spent long time of their carriers as public servants within a system that designed centralist project which were obligatory implemented.

## The built environment

In the most expensive real-estate market in the country, namely the Cluj market, where the prices are competing with those in the West, to buy a house is not an option for an average income family. On the other hand, the aspiration for "my

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<sup>8</sup> For an extensive discussion on *social-spatiality*, and *physical-territoriality* (the double dimension of the space), and also on the differences between the household, the neighborhood and the community space see: Silviu G. Totelecan, 2003.



own roof” forced people to search for optimal strategies through which they will achieve this goal. If we take a look at the rhythm of constructions we can conclude that many of them have found such ways. Unfortunately, the house building process is running within a context where urban strategies and regulations are missing. Local urban development has less consideration for *sustainable development*<sup>9</sup> or at least for *coherence*, furthermore, due to the personal economic interests, the specialists who need to stand over its accomplishment, create *development projects adapted to beneficiaries’ interests* (often people with high socio-economic and political capital), which shadowed social optimum and promoted the individual one.

It must be mentioned here that the large majority of the local experts, though there are many disputes between them, are well aware of the fact that the urban environment means a certain degree of needs fulfillment regarding its functionality. It became extremely important to leave behind *the anti-urban socio-communist logic* and move further to a comprehensive level of urbanity. The fact that is still functioning a distorted understanding of what urban development means has much to do with macro-structural concerns of Romania’s development as a whole. The *lack of internal cohesiveness of the state* and the existence of a *bureaucratic system* far-off the Weberian meaning of the concept, seem to play a central role. Political elites cannot act as *developmental promoters* (Chibber 2002: 951-952) if they will not become independent and autonomous from the local elites and if they will not support the state institutions. The state, if it wants to promote development, is obliged to have strong internal cohesiveness and follow well-defined collective goals.

Along with the collapse of the communist system and the *apparent retreat* of the state from the social life, its *authority institutions have also collapsed*. The individuals’ needs of being their “own masters” make practically inoperable any forms of the former guidance. After the ’89 revolution, the enormous pressure generated by the population over the state has restricted those spheres of activities in which it has emitted and actively implemented rules (e.g., *the deregulation* at the beginning of 90s, existing in urbanism and housing policies which have allowed *chaotic development* of the built environment). One of the main outcomes was *the substitution of the state institutions* with the persons that took authority positions within them. This “replacement” has corroded the institutional responsibility itself.

Housing privatization, land restitution<sup>10</sup> etc., events which in the 90s were received with great enthusiasm by almost all social categories, have

<sup>9</sup> “Sustainable development is defined as the kind that does not compromise the foundations for future development and should be achieved through economic activity that does not impede the regeneration of natural resources as well as through the development of social equity, since inequity is argued to be detrimental for the sound management of natural and human resources by corroding social cohesion and solidarity (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; Houghton and Hunter, 1994, 17–18; Hall and Pfeiffer, 2000, 16–18).”, Thomas Maloutas, 2003, 168.

<sup>10</sup> The 61/1990 Law and then the Law 85/92 has regulated the *transfer of the apartments* from the state to the population. By buying those flats, the majority of the population turned from renters into owners. The Law 112/1995 and the Law 10/2001 (also in the real estate regulations) reassigning the house ownership from the



signified not only a *transfer of propriety rights* but also the *discharge of the duties and obligations* of the former owner – the state as a representative of the collective propriety. By reason of *lack of authority coercive forms*, or more accurately due to the lowest implications of them in the public space, the man has practically remained *indifferent to others*, at the issues which are outside of its private space, indifference which, by accumulation, has provoked harmful effects at the societal levels, which now are *claiming a new type of state intervention* – in the post-communist fashion.

Today, after one and a half decade of the “let them do as they want” policy, which has affected the built environment and the life of the people who live within, the resulting consequences are uncountable. The *lobbyists’ pressure* (i.e., creators & beneficiaries of the city environment, often without urban visions, which do not have and are not interested of the holistic approaches of the local territory) over the environmental dimension of the city life, in combination with the *lack of determination for law enforcement* from the urban institutions (e.g., Urbanists Association, The Architects Union, of the local administration structures in general) have created many *counter-development effects*. Lately they were perceived even by those who until yesterday were only aware of the personal interests and strategies. They have started now to claim *local authority intervention and a coherent development of the city*, although, no longer than a decade ago, they were completely against such kind of “state-behavior”.

The truth is that the above issue is, in fact, targeting *local authority over-implication* in designing and redesigning the city features and not at all its *presumably vague contributions – under-implication*.

«Political interests define when and if an urban plan is to be accomplished, and of course, the size of the constructible perimeter of the city [...] in 1995 was 4069 ha, in 1996 6470 ha and in 2000 was 8815 ha. Neither the members of the Local Council nor other officials of the local administration did think that such enlargement will create a lot of problems for the municipality (i.e., the urgent need of infrastructure development, problem which even for 1995 situation is not solved). The main concern was to provide the legal framework for all those (with money!) which have started to construct in areas where was not allowed»  
(*Engineer from the City Hall Urbanism Department*).

Recognizing that could mean implicitly the lobbyists’ recognition of the fact that *what was done was done because they wanted to be done*. Such a stance is not at all convenient for them, and this is the reason they are playing a double-faced game: claims for “rule-free situation” – but only for them, and requests for “authoritarian interventionism” – only for the others. The authorities’ over-implications have two forms, both extremely dangerous for the Cluj-Napoca’s health: *the passive type* or “closing the eye procedure”, namely the conversion of the penalties of those who did not respect the urbanism regulations in

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state to the people. The Law 18/1991 has made the reform of the land; by the restitution of the land, an important percentage of the population became land owners. Nowadays the state has 10-15% from its former ownership.



briberies for those who should enforce the laws; *the active type*, i.e., changes of the local urban norms in a way that certain beneficiaries/the local patrons will benefit and the rest of the inhabitants (at least from the neighboring area) will probably have to suffer.

This kind of *local public management – based on interests and not on strategies or projects*, though is responsive at the today dynamics and facilitates the urbanization process of the city, in the end it remains emblematic for what can be called *counter-urbanization*.

«There is one phenomenon which neither us – County Council nor them – City Council are able to control: those chaotic constructions inside and outside the city. We have our culpability in that, but also responsible is the Law's permission, which gave the chances to build in unacceptable areas..., knowing that if two bricks are already one above the other, nobody will intervene or try to pull down the construction. Consequently, houses are randomly placed in the territory, there are no alignments, systematizations or minimum respected urban conditions. Those who will live in such neighborhoods will have high discomforts... because everybody builds on its place everywhere it wants without taking into consideration the environment outside their propriety» (*county councilor*).

It is interesting to note, as I have already mentioned, that the former *counter-urbanization promoters and/or beneficiaries* are *lobbying now for the application of the rules*. The increasing number of the buildings nearby their surroundings, done in a “norm-free” context, which is threatening the proximity in a double way: socially and physically, has made them aware of *whom, what and how* to build. Building against the norms, environmentally questionable, has surprisingly achieved a positive effect at the level of social space. There seems to develop a *new form of community reconstruction*, i.e., a process of *rebuilding the community around the members' interests*.

In a double *post-context*: post-communist and post-modern – or to a certain extent *pseudo-modern* (Voicu 2001), the community as *face-to-face interaction type* became challenging, especially in the urban environment more atomized than the rural counterpart. Concepts such as *online/offline community* which suggest the *affiliation/non-affiliation* at the *network society* (Castells 2000) gain more meanings. In a variety of socio-politic and cultural context, *the amplification of the multiple identities and the permanent roles' negotiation* (Wilson & Peterson, 2002, 456) has replaced the face-to-face communities with the *communities of practice*. Though, the community is defining less and less in geographical terms, or according to the spoken languages, or else as belonging to certain social categories (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity etc.) and more and more as *the outcome of social reciprocity and interactive engagement* (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002, 347-348) regarding well-defined goals.

Unfortunately, in the area investigated here, the seeds of such community are new and its *intervention* in the urban life came a bit too late. *The mental picture* of Cluj-Napoca city has not so much to do with the urban complex as a whole. There is no consistent or coherent view to actively seek to understand



how various elements contribute to a complex whole. To a certain extent, it is a range of perspectives that coexist and are likely to see cities in quite different and *potentially conflicting ways* (Marvin & May, 2003, 213). Those are the products of the *urban spatial organization diktat* (Ward, 2003, 203-204), the end result of the “space privatization” after the 1989 when the inner city has passage a process of *retailization*.

## The city life

The peasants’ delocalization in the 70s and the stimulation/pressure put on rural inhabitants to relocate to cities – in the name of socialist industrialization – has brought along practices, habits, belief and various kinds of behaviors rooted in the village culture. This “anti-urban culture” has coexisted with the city’s socio-cultural climate – deficient and unclearly hard-set. The *in-betweenness style of life of the inhabitants* (Totelecan 2005a) has affected the generations of children who developed a *hybrid type* of urban dweller. For a large number of them, the daily life is still *imbued with rural practices and enslaved by urban needs*. Here are some examples, synthesized from the interviews:

«We keep cattle, pigs, sheep, we have milk, cheese, wool... we work the land and we get our foodstuffs from there» (*respondent from Dâmbul Rotund neighborhood*). «I have a garden in Andrei Mureșanu which provides me with vegetables and fruits; maybe 10-15% of my expenditures are covered in this way» (RM2). I have planted potatoes, carrots, parsley, peas and bean... nearby Sânnicoară» (RM1).

«With clothing is extremely hard, because prices are high. For example, if you want to buy shoes you cannot buy a suit with a month’s salary. For that, you need to make savings from one salary to the other and maybe then you will have a chance» (*respondent from Dâmbul Rotund neighborhood*). «I hope that my daughters will find some boys who already have their own houses... will see that maybe in the next years» (RM1). «Our income is low, my wife is unemployed, and we have small kids... I cannot think of having a seaside or mountain holiday because the costs are too high for us» (RM1).

The city life of those mentioned here is usually spent in an *alienating space* – «each of us are living in our blocks of concrete», *claustrophobic and without personality*. Supplementary, the *mixture of social classes* that are living in the same proximity is deepening the communication gap; it ruins the interpersonal relations and increases the frictions within the neighborhood: «all the time problems exist because it supposes that we are living jointly/communally but in fact everybody is for itself» (RM2). Variations of those issues are present in each neighborhood of Cluj-Napoca. Although the inhabitants speak well about their areas, they often mention other neighborhoods – fragments of the same city – when they want to illustrate negative aspects of the city. Mărăști was labeled by our respondents as «laborers’ neighborhood, congested, polluted, without green space or playgrounds for children, a high agglomeration of apartments surrounded by concrete and noisy streets». In Grigorescu they say,



«it was nice until they (i.e., the communists) started to build blocks around. Now it is a cold neighborhood – heating system being all the time an issue here. Gheorgheni is an ugly area, is darker and its gives a felling of insecurity. Zorilor is placed too high and they always have access problems there».

From the point of view of housing quality, the *gray* appear to be the color which “covers” the city. Day by day, a growing number of people make tremendous efforts to escape the *block type living conditions* and *insulate themselves* within the cozy environment of individual houses. Inheriting a land or buying a land on the long-term family income is the first of the two-step procedure that will make that dream come true. This is at hand for a larger number of persons than the second one, which implies the construction of the house. Selling the flat or acquiring a loan is the usual option, but frequently that it is not enough. Regrettably, the inexistence of a solid financial capital obliged the man to build with low costs, often without specialized building contractors and with daily-workers teams. Minimizing the costs will have an effect on the quality of construction and, on the long run, will in fact increase the total costs (i.e., the beneficiary will need to hire extra-teams for fixing the damages of the former). Noticeable at *macro-level* as deregulation and at *mezo-level* as the diktat of spatial organization, the counter-urbanization is also visible at the *micro-level* (i.e., the household space), where, is *manifest/obvious* in the aesthetics of the post-communist houses and *latent/obscure* in the habitudes of the socio-spatial consumers of this period.

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