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Titre: NESTING IN BUCHAREST

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R SUM 

L' tude est bas e sur une exp rience personnelle de la vie dans les blocs socialistes en Roumanie, et en particulier   Bucarest. Plus sp cifiquement, le sujet est centr  sur la th matique du bricolage et les autres pratiques informelles pr sentes dans l'environnement des logements collectifs. La narration se construit autour des gens qui vivent dans ces appartements, et d veloppent un mod le sp cifique de bricoler   l'int rieur ou m me   l'ext rieur de l'espace priv , avec des interventions qui partent de la fermeture des balcons-le ph nom ne le plus fr quent, jusqu'  la d molition des murs int rieurs ou l'appropriation de l'espace public pour recrer le jardin priv . Ces interventions,   part de leur r le de l'installation dans le milieu de vie, r v lent certains besoins des locataires, que l'architecte est en mesure de d chiffrer, afin d'am liorer cet environnement de logement. L'intervention offre ainsi une nouvelle couche capable de soutenir cette pratique du bricolage sans supprimer les couches pr c dentes. Le projet propose une alternative   l'isolation thermique des blocs du logement collectif, visant   impliquer les r sidents dans la r activation des espaces qui sont en propri t  commune, en introduisant une mixit  fonctionnelle et la coagulation d'une communaut  dans ce processus.

MOTS-CLEFS

R habilitation du b timent, Bricolage, Isolation thermique, Confort thermique, Sociologie urbaine, D veloppement social des quartiers, Politique et pouvoirs publics, Habitat participatif, Kit

NESTING IN BUCHAREST

How can we integrate *bricolage* in the rehabilitation of
socialist blocks and make it a tool for finding one's place
in the city?

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Atelier de recherche en ~~ce~~ sur l'Architecture 2019-2020

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LBARC 2231 | Atelier de recherche en *œ* sur l'architecture : Compositions

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1 THE QUESTION

A STORY OF BRICOLAGE

“Come outside and work in the garden with me” was something that my grandmother would so often tell me when I was younger, something that she still tells to my brother or my mother whenever she has the chance. She is 78, and her garden is not a real garden, but the simple, poor space around her block of flats, a space that nobody cares about but her.

My grandmother used to live in the countryside, in a big house, with land to work, animals to feed, and a whole family to care for. But it was a happy life, a simple life that she would give up in her twenties when she got married and found a job in the city. The CITY. Back then, it was something to which many people aspired: a flat in the city, no more country life, no more physical effort day and night, no more dirt and sweat for the daily food. Living in the city meant having a job, a salary, a flat- the CITY life.

However, communism was tough in the city. Here, where everything was much easier to control, being in the direct eye of the local authorities or even close to the ears of a curious neighbor, who was ready to tell about your “inappropriate” jokes to the Security office. So, my grandmother found herself navigating in this world of anonymity in the blocks of flats, where the walls are so thin that your neighbor can easily hear you speak, and you could hardly ever know or trust anybody.

She does not hate living in her flat. With time, she adjusted to it, she built a life in it and she remained close to her family. It is warm, small, somewhat fit to her needs, she is happy here. But the feeling of living in a house, a place on the ground, with a porch and a garden has never left her. Out of all my family, my grandmother, as the first generation living in a block, is very conscious about it, without even knowing. She is permanently aware of the neighbors, always knowing how to adjust the volume of her



The forbidden garden- private and/or public?
(Source: by the author)

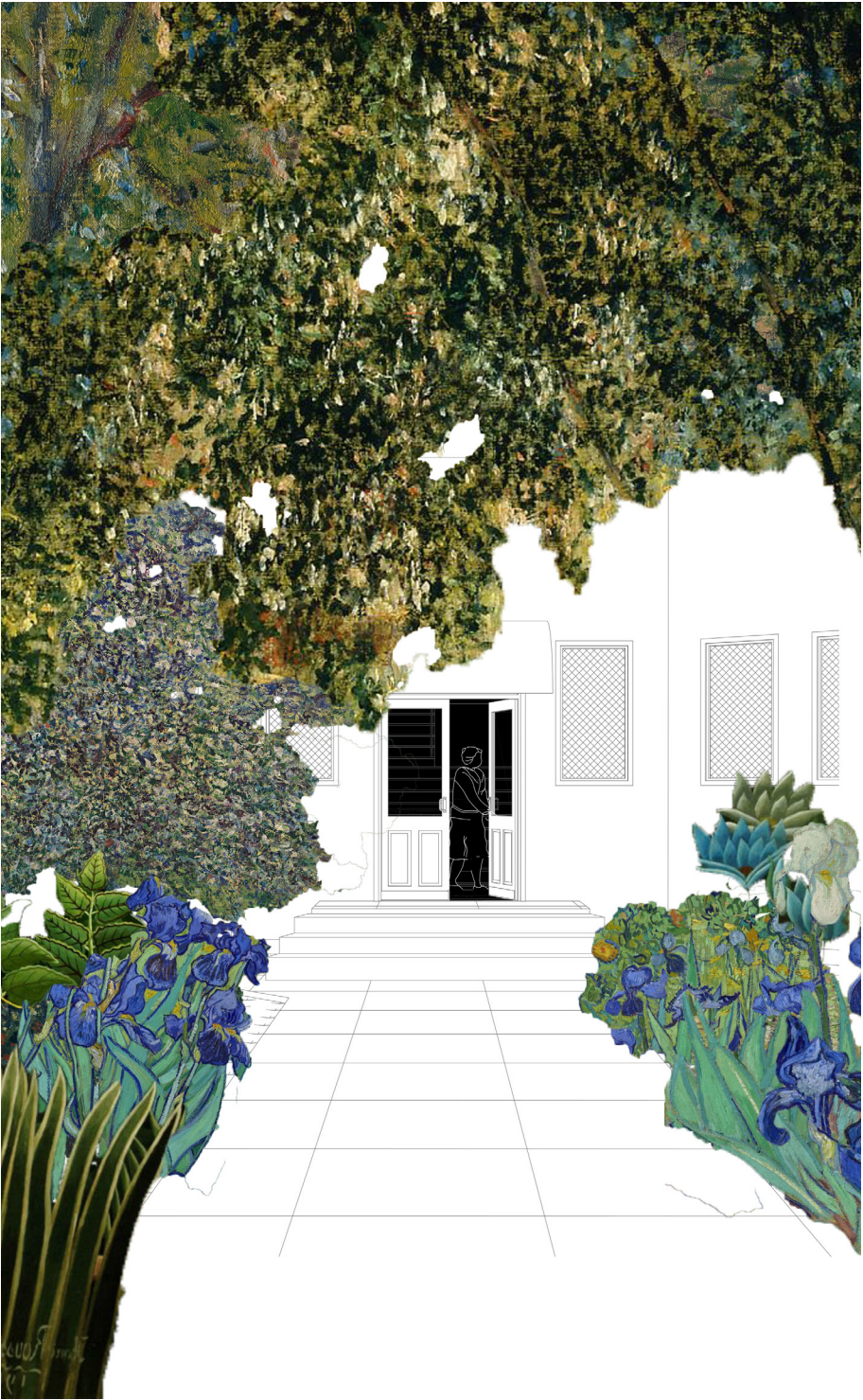
voice so that she won't bother them. She replaced the traditional porch with the balcony of her apartment, where she has created her small garden, but also a storage space for her pickles, which she still prepares meticulously each autumn. The kitchen is her personal space. She wanted to be up to date with the modern times, and so she asked us to remove the door, and open it up, in the style of the American kitchens that we so often see in the movies. But she still cooks in a very traditional way, so all the other doors in the flat must be closed whenever she does her magic. And finally, she is very fond of her extended garden, which is made up of all patches of soil that she found around the block. She planted them several times, in different manners, according to what she dreamt of. First, she planted the castor seeds, which grew up so quickly and so high that they turned into a forest. Of course, walking through a forest to reach the entrance of your block is not always so amusing, as much as it was a fantasy for me as a child. So they had to be cut off. Then, there was the flower garden, for which she chose irises, and they last even today just until people start ripping them off and selling them in the market. Lastly, there are the cherry trees, which she protected fearlessly from her window, so that they are still here today. Even they have had their trials- young children with their urge to climb and pick the cherries would so often break their branches. But she cast them away, and so, the garden with her cherry trees is enhancing the green space around the block, giving sour cherries and shade in the summer.

However, my grandmother is not a unique case. These habits that she has, both inside and around her block, are habits that an entire generation of people has kept, showing that a flat, however comfortable it may be, is not a real house. It cannot be called a home, at least not in the proper sense of the word.

The symptoms may not always be the same. But some people living in the block have found the means to escape this anonymity and show the territory that they "own". It may be in the garden at the ground floor, it may be in the improvised-*bricolage* done to close their balcony, or it may be in the shy attempt to decorate the staircase hall with flower pots and some pretty images found in an old calendar. In the end, their actions lead to the same conclusion- the real home is a house, as it is a space of freedom, a space of flexibility and intimacy, a space for all family members to grow and feel safe, while the flat in which they live makes most of these needs out of reach.

Today, we see these symptoms in the first people inhabiting the blocks of flats, while in the next generations these are either taking other forms or fading away. However, while people adjust themselves to the flat by adjusting the flat to their needs in whichever way they can, the sense of the house is slowly disappearing. That is, a memory of a way of life that stood at the base of the Romanian society since its beginnings, a way of life that was maintained until very late in the 20th century, a way of life that still remains an ideal for most people.

At the same time, it is very clear that, in spite of its negative aspects, the socialist housing blocks, found in most of the largest cities in the country, but especially in the capital of Bucharest, represent the largest concentration of housing units, one that cannot be replaced and should not be neglected. Most people living in Bucharest, as well as the ones coming here from other cities, are bound to live most of their life in



such “matchboxes”. In spite of their importance for the mass of people, their public authorities are doing very few to care for them, the only action done by them remains at the level insulating the outer shell or fencing the green spaces around the block. With no other intention from the administration to continue caring for this public domain, people have taken advantage in order to extend their property over these spaces, an activity resulting in these improvised (illegal), but nonetheless beautiful, gardens at the ground floor. Moreover, seeing that these blocks are now outdated and require adaptations in order to respect contemporary building codes or simply the updated idea of comfort, some of these begin to change their appearance, the most urgent need being the thermal insulation of the façade, which takes place either through private initiatives or through publicly financed programs. Either way, it becomes clear that the heritage represented by these socialist blocks is one that, even though it stems from the communist regime and might embody many of its ideals, needs to find a way to better receive its inhabitants, offering them an environment which can host their ritual of installation into a real home, of nesting. And in doing this, the blocks could manage to offer a voice to each of its inhabitants, making them step out of the private universe in the form of a community, one that could better mediate the transition from the intimate environment to that of the larger scale universe, the city.

Finally, considering the context of contemporary Bucharest and the informal practices already present, the question remains: how do we treat these symptoms of the loss of the house? And how do we recover the memory and sense of the house for the present generations as well as for the ones to come? And, furthermore, can we recover that sense of community that was once so present in the housing neighborhoods, but was slowly lost with the transition towards collective housing? Finally, can informal practices, such as *bricolage*, become a coagulating element, triggering the formation of this community?

2 THE SCAR

THE CONTEXT OF BUCHAREST

2.1 THE INHERITED PROPERTY

FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC AND BACKWARDS

*“In Bucharest, even the poorest
had their own house and their own garden...”*
-I. TUDORA

The discovery of the city of Bucharest is the discovery of a multitude of cities in the same place, at the same time. Walking through the city and its different neighborhoods, the mind can also explore the history of Bucharest, its making, its different ways of living, since the moment it started forming as a settlement to the way we see it today.

The city was born as a commercial node between routes which connected the major cities in the country, which was back then split into three- Wallachia in the south, Transylvania in the north-west, Moldavia towards the east, each of them with its own capital. The routes extended further towards the east and west, making Bucharest a city connecting the Orient and the Occident, whilst inevitably borrowing from both in its culture and traditions. Thus, Bucharest became a settlement out of the need for a break in these roads, and developed in a quite spontaneous manner for a long time.



1852 Bucharest

The Organic city

*A sample of the urban fabric in the city centre
and its organization of the neighborhood based on the religious pole, surrounded by gardens*

(Source: by the author)

Its foundation was the private property, which took various shapes depending on the owner, his wealth, status and function in society. Naturally, such characters found their place towards the center of the settlement, often having very large properties which included everything they needed- the main house, the annexes, the servants houses, possibly even a church, the garden, all protected by a fortification. The people who were less fortunate found their place towards the outskirts, in a more reduced form, but still in the shape of the house and its garden. And so, the city became a cluster of these private properties, fortified if the status allowed for it in the case of the rich or other important elements such as the churches and monasteries, whilst the rest represented a fabric filled by smaller properties.

At this time, two specific aspects of Bucharest come into attention. One of them is the character of the city formed through individual islands, some of which may have their own protection, a feature that is primarily due to the fact that the city itself was not fortified. This is a consequence of the status of the region, Wallachia at the time, which was under the control of the Ottoman Empire, and who forbade building fortifications around these cities in the south, in order to reduce the risk of resistance and opposition, whilst facilitating the control. This aspect resulted into a specific appearance of the settlement- with no limits imposed by the fortification the city was free to develop without the constraint of the land, taking up as much as it was possible, permanently growing in the periphery, whilst also preserving a very flat appearance, having no need for density and increasing in height. The second aspect, related to the first one, refers to the agricultural heritage of the people who came to inhabit the new city, and who preserved the rural structure of the household that was so well known for them. In this way, most of the plots preserved the format of the long and narrow agricultural field, most of these properties being cultivated, giving the overall appearance of a very green city, with the small houses floating into a sea of vegetation.

Regarding the question of public domain, this remained at the level of residual space, left after the formation of the private property islands. Thus, at its basis, Bucharest did not incorporate the notion of public space or squares such as it can be found in other cultures, this residual space remaining a territory for uses such as markets. Public life took place in the private properties, where there are cases of known public gardens which were in fact open to the public due to the goodwill of the landlord¹.

The notion of public domain and an organization of the urban fabric arrived with the instauration of the monarchy, in the second half of the 19th century. With the arrival of a king of German origins, the country, now uniting the three regions and not only under the form of Great Romania, gained its independence in 1877 and began looking towards the Western Europe for inspiration in order to give a new face to a new country. The main source for this inspiration was France, and resulted into the apparition of new architectural styles, new monumental buildings of public institutions which were meant to celebrate this new found independence, an extension of the city due to an

¹ Ioana Tudora in Tudor ELIAN, *Bucurestiul Informal (Informal Bucharest)*, Phd thesis- "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, 2017, p. 71



Contemporary Bucharest

The Unfinished city

*A sample of the urban fabric in the city centre
and the insertion of major landmarks of the 19th and 20th century*

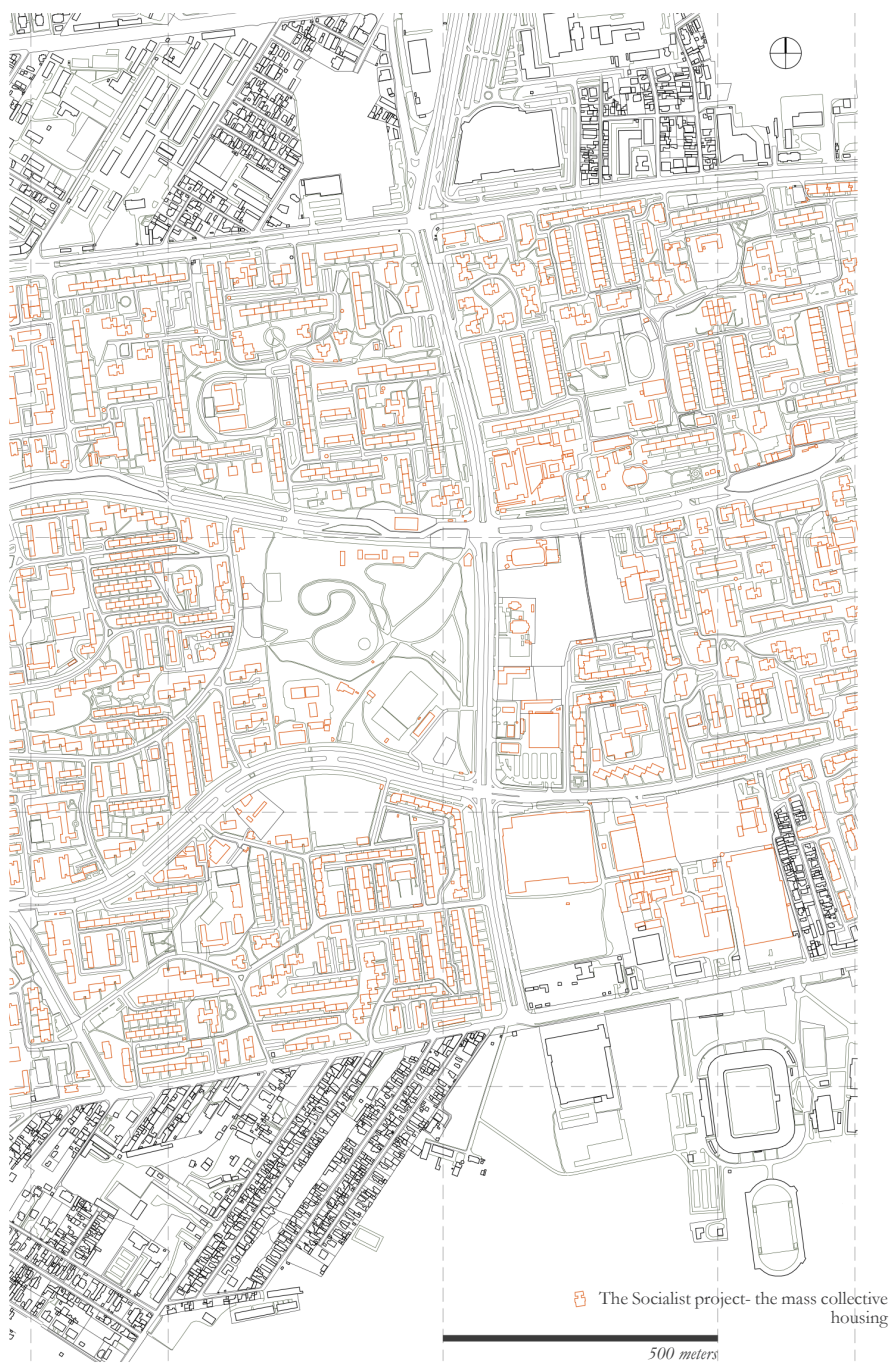
(Source: by the author)

increase in population, a restructuring of the chaotic urban fabric. However, even if these interventions were of great importance, they have found a way to integrate into the existing fabric, while not erasing the existing structure of the city.

The property regime took a complete turn with the arrival of communism in the 20th century, which radically changed the relation of people to the place they inhabit. First of all, the bourgeoisie of the time was condemned because of their wealth and, as the unhealthy part of a communist society, were cast aside and had their properties nationalized. This meant that people were crowded into a house, reducing the surface of one family to a small number of rooms, while others were brought in, in a process of rationalization of the living surface. Then, with the arrival of the Ceausescu dictatorship and the destructions caused by the earthquake of 1977, which became a pretext for a massive restructuring of the city, certain neighborhoods were evicted and destroyed, leaving room for the socialist blocks of flats or the monumental project of the House of the Parliament and its entire axis, suggestively named the Victory of Socialism. All property became property of the state, people found themselves in a position which implied renting their living space from the state, while private property was reduced to a minimum. The disappearance of this right to property in most cases brought about an attitude oriented exclusively towards the private universe, in most cases the apartment, whilst all that remained outside this private sphere was of no interest of the individuals, being the responsibility of the state.

Even so, today Bucharest still brings together the feeling of multiple cities superimposed one over the other: the organic development with its Turkish influences—more dense in the center but very open toward the periphery, the French influence of the 19th century, the American aspiration of today in its office quarters, the contemporary architecture that tries to both adapt and innovate, while the base of the city still remains, composed of its simple, vernacular houses and their large gardens.

Moving towards the periphery of the city, this countryside atmosphere becomes even more present. The scale slowly shifts from high rise collective housing blocks built during the communist regime to the small scale individual houses that still preserve the spirit of the old city, a reality that creates a contrasting environment given by both the built environment and the ideologies it represents. The fact is that, as a newcomer, the long, straight boulevards and their facades manage to offer this impression of an organized city, giving out the feeling of monumentality and power— a fascinating impression of grandeur in the city center, a very uniform image towards the periphery. But it was the image that the ideology of communism was meant to provide— equality— the working class, no individuality, mixed classes living together for they were all now working for the same purpose— the well-being of the nation. And what else could have been better to provide this image other than precisely the places where these people live. So the setting was put into place, the image of equality— the collective housing— which would hide the previous way of living— the *"bourgeoisie"*— the villas, the individual houses and their gardens.



Contemporary Bucharest

The Socialist city

*A sample of the urban fabric in a socialist neighborhood
and the radical shift of scale compared to the existing fabric*

(Source: by the author)

This is how the “concrete curtain”² appeared, through interventions that are easily distinguished on any plan, enormous collective housing units were used as a disguise, as an image for the new city. The main boulevards were bordered with them, the view of the horizon was shut down by these high-rise buildings, in a process legally called plating. The plan was to renew the city and the people living within at the same time, and this was efficiently done by building the facades of the urban islands, while the rest would soon follow. But it never did, so nowadays people are living in this city of facades, sometimes not even knowing about the world that they are hiding behind them.

Bucharest is a surprising mix of high-density and low-density housing, these collective blocks are part of a policy that was supposed to introduce high density in specific parts of the city. Starting from the boulevard surrounding the historic district, and reaching out into the periphery, what the blocks did manage to introduce was this dramatic contrast. Whether between the exterior façade and the inner buildings, mostly low-rise, individual houses, or between these massive, planned interventions and the rather organic, countryside feeling of the periphery, new interventions mostly ignored this permanent tendency of the city to expand through small scale, individual houses.

2.1.1 POPULATION INCREASE AND EXPANSION OF THE CITY

Throughout the history of the city, there were two key moments in the expansion of Bucharest, which pushed the limits of the city and massively increased its population, an aspect that was an important influence for the built environment and the need for housing. However, an interesting aspect of these massive increases in population is given by the manner in which they were treated, determining particular effects on the existing urban fabric and the relation with the city.

The first would be toward the end of the 18th century³, when the Ottoman Empire lost its control over Wallachia, allowing it to develop, especially from the commercial point of view. In this way, many people from the countryside saw this as an opportunity to find work in the capital, and searched for ways to establish their homes

² The “concrete curtain” refers to the massive housing units that were built during the communist times, which exceeded the height of the buildings that constituted the existing urban fabric. Around 10 stories high, the blocks were strategically built on the borders of existing urban islands, in order to rebuild the image of the city and impose the communist idea of equality and uniformity. The remaining fabric was trapped inside these curtains, becoming a hidden world that many people have come to forget or ignore.

³ This was a consequence of the peace treaty signed at Kuchuk-Kainargi between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, ending the russo-turkish war of 1768-1774. One of the conditions imposed by the Russian Empire was that, in spite of the fact that they would return Moldavia and Wallachia to the Ottoman Empire, the Russians still had the right to protect the orthodox population and intervene when the Turkish were not respecting the terms. Also, the Ottoman Empire would not require tax payment from the Romanian countries for two years.- from CALOTA Irina, Dincolo de Centru : Politici de locuire in Bucuresti (1910-1944) (Beyond the city centre : Housing politics in Bucharest 1910-1944), Bucharest: Ozalid, 2017



The Layers of History

The Successive Expansions

*The different waves of population which led to the expansion of the city
1791-1914-1960*

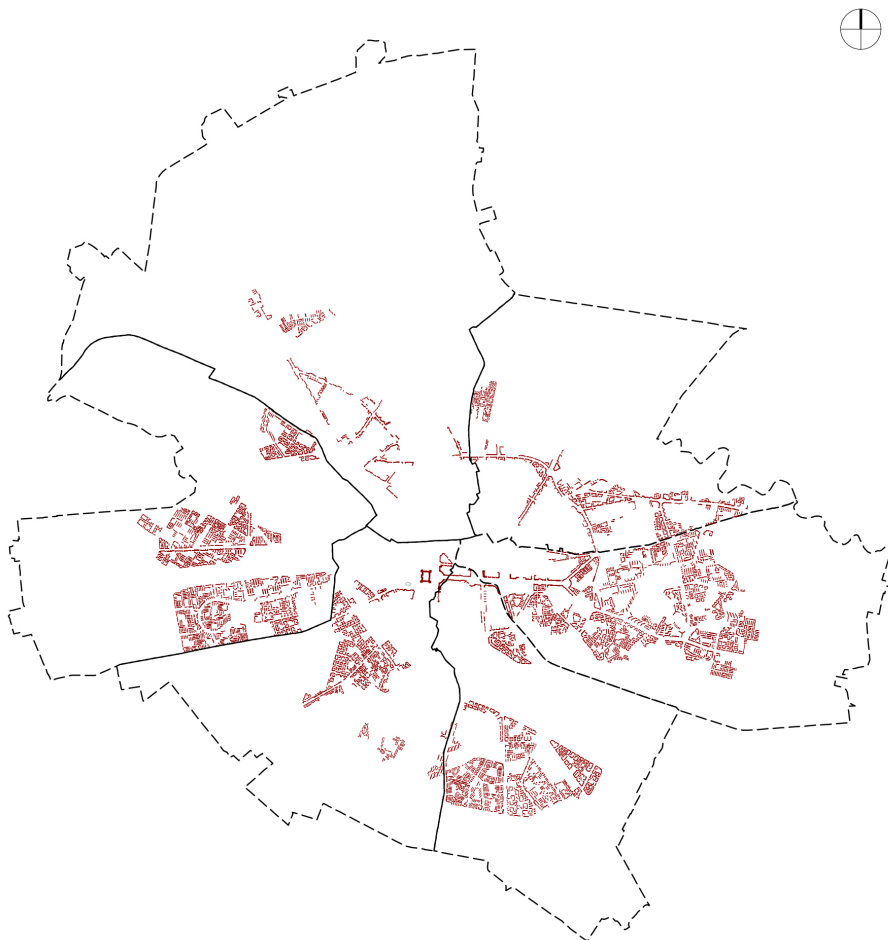
(Source: by the author)

around it. The main resource of land at this moment was the large area of agricultural plots owned by the richest families, towards the outskirts of the city. These lands were not only generous, but were situated outside the administrative limits, which meant no obligations for paying taxes. And so, people began to settle in these areas, generating a periphery which was made out of individual houses with their own gardens, just like in the countryside. The model of this single family house was based on the vernacular type that came together with the population, for it was part of their knowledge, their instinct. People continued to build their small houses on one side of the plot, with small, appropriate sizes and few rooms, while later other units could be added if necessary, towards the depth of the plot. This configuration was determined also by the size and proportion of the property, which was still reflecting the agricultural preoccupations of the time, having a narrow opening towards the street and a great depth, permitting a zoning of the garden according to the people's needs. Even though we now see that these types of houses were a clear response to the urban and cultural environment of the time, they have managed to survive, being a well-known presence in today's Bucharest, a type known as the "wagon" house. The expansion of the city in the 18th century, mainly through these "wagon" houses, has forced the authorities to take the periphery into consideration and enlarge the territory of Bucharest, maintaining this large area- low density aspect of the city.

The second wave of population arrived in the beginning of the 20th century, with the development of industrial areas towards the periphery of the city, a moment that put into question the problem of housing the workers of each industry who were living in quite precarious conditions. The solution chosen for this problem was still the individual house, under the form of large allotments, which were coupled, each house having its own garden. An important reason justifying this choice was the preservation of a lifestyle and the model of the family, closer to the one at its origins, found in the rural environment. Even though they were planned as standardized types of houses, they managed to integrate into the existing landscape, preserving its scale and proportion regarding the green space represented by the garden.

The third massive influx of population came during the communist times, when industry was developed around the city and required a huge workforce. The system however was prepared this time. The pretext of equality and the emphasis put on the working class, as well as the earthquake of 1977 and the destructions it caused became good reasons for a rebirth of the city, by demolishing parts of the ancient fabric and replacing it with high-rise, high-density collective housing. Huge neighborhoods made entirely out of these types of blocks were built in the second half of the 20th century, until the fall of the regime, and these prefabricated concrete boxes became an imposed replacement of the traditional house.

At first it was a dream came true. Thousands of people were lured into these stacked boxes by the illusion of a free home- attributed by the state depending on the workplace, one that would not imply as much maintenance work as a house, one that would have electricity and water and an indoor toilet. But one that would also break



The Scar

The Insertion of the Socialist Blocks

The introduction of the mass housing ensembles, in the shape of plating boulevards or dormitory neighborhoods, represented the solution for the third wave of population

(Source: by the author)

forever the much needed relations that existed between people in the countryside or in the housing neighborhoods that were until now so familiar.

And so, this fairy tale of equality and no social classes came to show its negative side. The new apartments distributed by the state to the working class belonged to nobody- they were the property of the state, and so the inhabitants were free not to care, free to use them in whatever way they wanted, free to manifest themselves in the interior, private space, but also free to neglect the façade and the shared spaces. The apartment block also introduced anonymity. People were lost in the masses and could no longer identify themselves or their neighbors. That meant, on one side, the loss of identity that a house would give its inhabitants, associated with their reputation and status in the community, but on the other side contributed to the loss of moral figures and the “correction” system that a village would have in place- all these people were now mixed together in these vertical structures, without knowing who were those that surrounded them⁴. The apartment in a block of flats meant also the lack of the garden and the flexibility of the house, which, as a consequence, reduced the image of the traditional family from the extended one to the now “classic” (nuclear family) figures of the mother, father and their children, separating the generations that previously lived so close one to another. And, most importantly, people were placed in these “match boxes” without even knowing what they were losing- their house, their garden, their peace and independence, their freedom.

⁴ An interesting aspect of this transition towards the collective housings was the fact that certain expressions changed their meaning in the current language. Until this moment, the expression “the one upstairs” was a reference to God, not the neighbor living upstairs, for this manner of stacked living was never a reference in the mentality of the people. Also, the idea of moral compass in the village meant that the house was a representation of the traditional family and the character of its owners, making it easy to distinguish the good, hard working neighbor from the bad one, a distinction that was now impossible to make in the collective blocks.- from BICIUSCA Florin, *Experimental “Catelu”* (The Experiment of “Catelu”), Bucharest: Paideia, 2007, p. 19

2.2 THE INHERITED WAY OF LIFE

COPING WITH HISTORY AND UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

*“The lack of events in people’s lives,
the lack of perspective [...] causes frustrations.
So what can a man do under these conditions?*

*Pick up the hammer and take down the balcony wall-at least.”
-F. BICIUSCA, THE EXPERIMENT OF “CATELU”*

The people of Bucharest today, in a proportion of 70%, live in collective blocks. We can now even speak of the different generations of people living in an apartment, and their specific behaviors that can show just how much they miss their previous lifestyle.

By all means, these new built neighborhoods, with the block of flats as the base unit, did manage to solve the problem of mass housing, which was needed due to the fact that Bucharest was, once again, increasing its population, mainly constituted by the working class. However, as we have seen previously, this was not the first time. The question of housing arose also in the beginning of the 20th century and was due not only to the influx of population, but also the precarious living conditions which favored the spreading of tuberculosis in the city. At this time, doctors, politicians, architects and engineers came together with the solution of creating a Society for Cheap Housing⁵, which was meant to plan and provide large allotments of cheap, individual houses for the working class. The idea of collective blocks was immediately discarded, for it was considered that they were against the norms of hygiene and most often represented an attempt of the land owner to make some profit, while completely disregarding the living conditions that he was offering to the buyers.

⁵ The Society for Cheap Housing (1908-1948) was a society based in Bucharest, whose activity consisted in building large ensembles of cheap houses, on land that was acquired from the state. These houses were initially destined for the working class of the various industries that were built around the city, but a vast majority actually ended in the property of privileged individuals. Most of these allotments are still present in the landscape of Bucharest today, however many of them have suffered interventions and changes, many of them falling under the category of *bricolage*, as proof that even these standardized units needed to allow the need for adaptation during time.- from VOINEA Andrei Razvan, *Idealul locuirii bucurestene : familia cu casa si gradina* (The Ideal of Living in Bucharest: the family with a house and a garden), Bucharest: The Association Studio Zona, 2018



The materialization of a political regime and the consequences over the housing in Bucharest-
demolition of the traditional house and installation of the socialist blocks (Source: The digital archive
of the Uranus Now exhibition, collage Radu Manelici, photo: Andrei Birsan, Stefan Tuchilă)

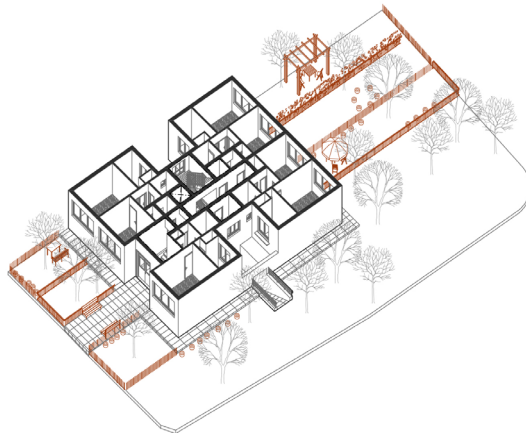
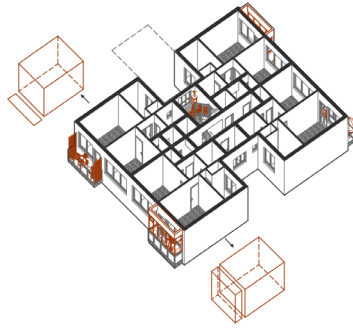
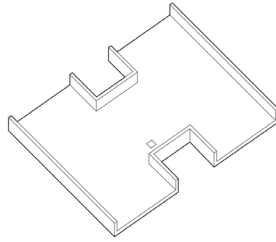
The massive use of the blocks of flats knew its peak during the communist times. Their construction started in the 1950s, firstly toward the periphery, closer to the industrial areas. In this time, certain neighborhoods were born, while in other cases, the authorities prepared the terrain by demolishing entire streets lined with individual houses. The process of building continued to advance in the direction of the city center, whilst the earthquake of 1977⁶, which destroyed many parts of the city, offered a justification for the demolitions to come. This time, the demolitions were concerning entire neighborhoods, such as the Uranus⁷ area, which was meant to allow the place for the well-known Parliament building or the House of the People. These demolitions continued with important monuments, especially religious ones, some of which are now lost while some have found a new place (through the system of rails patented by a Romanian engineer, he was able to move certain churches and monuments out of the demolition area). No matter the costs, the necessary place was found for what are nowadays the neighborhoods with blocks of flats, sometimes composed of completely identical units, inducing such a great anonymity such that the postmen became lost when having to deliver a letter to a certain address.

Through this induced anonymity, the people inhabiting the block of flats have developed a multitude of patterns, most of which stem from the habit of living in a house, which previously was the only known lifestyle. These patterns may be sometimes very discrete, while hiding a larger problem, the one of the incapacity of the apartment to harbor such a complex manner of living that was once so tied to the outer space. Furthermore, these habits may even be considered normal for somebody passing by them on a daily basis, much like I did myself most of my life. It is just recently that I have managed to find a justification for such small, apparently insignificant details such as the pair of plastic shoes left just outside the apartment entrance, which previously were the shoes destined for working in the garden, and show that, even today, after years of living in the flat, the owner of these shoes is still ready to start working in his back yard. Other such patterns include decorating the staircase landings with pots of flowers which no longer fit inside the private space and which, once placed in the common area, may become a responsibility for anyone willing to participate. Even more, a detail frequently noticed might be the traditional bench placed just at the entrance of the block, which becomes a socializing pretext both for the elders in the area and for the children who need a place where to play.

Many of these patterns that imply an appropriation of a certain space, be it interior, private and common, or exterior, public, through an intervention done by

⁶ On the 4th of March 1977, Romania was hit by an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.4. Its effects were devastating all in many cities in southern and eastern parts of the country, but especially in Bucharest, where many buildings collapsed. Most casualties registered after the earthquake were from Bucharest. —from Wikipedia, consulted on the 1st of June 2020, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1977_Vrancea_earthquake

⁷ The Uranus neighborhood represented the area that was demolished in order to build the House of the Parliament



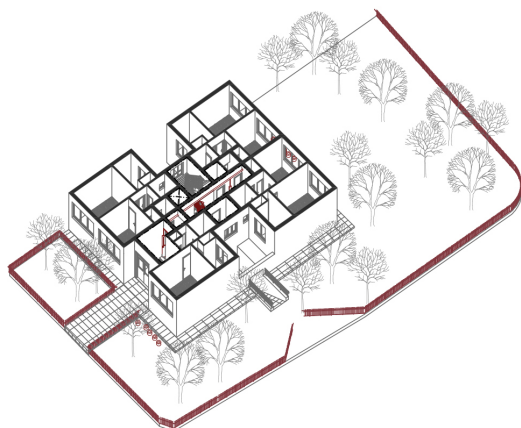
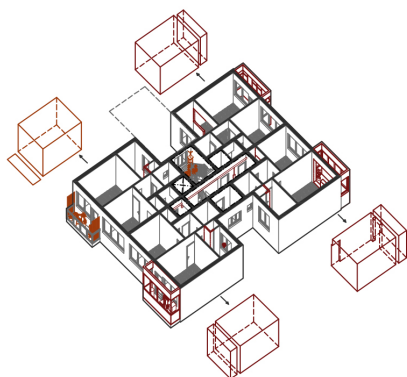
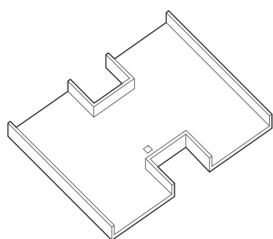
*Bricolage
by the First Generation
An extension of the private space towards the outside,
a recovery of the garden*

(Source: by the author)

the person inhabiting the space are part of the practice called *bricolage*. Defined as a nonprofessional, manual activity that is done at home, the *bricolage* has been for a long time part of the Romanian culture. It was often seen as a manly activity, but one that was necessary for survival, for adaptation, but also a tool that could be used for expressing individuality. *Bricolage* is present from the early forms of inhabiting, whether we are looking at the vernacular architecture in the countryside, the “wagon” houses of Bucharest, or even in the late blocks of flats, either the ones built in the communist times or the recent developments. It has been a tool for transforming spaces that were not sufficiently adapted to the needs of their users, or as a tool to recover spaces that people miss from their previous life- such as the porch or the garden. But also, it became a way for expressing people’s individuality in places as anonymous as the blocks of flats and a manner of bringing people together and re-questioning the idea of a community.

From the point of view of the young generation, who is the product itself of this type of living and thus so used to this life in the blocks of flats, it’s quite surprising to see that the tradition of the family house and its garden is not so far away. In fact, when we think of the first generation of people that came into the collective housings, we speak of people such as my grandparents, people that are still here, yet nostalgic after their previous lifestyle. They are the people that were born before the rise of communism but have spent most of their life under the regime, maybe even believed in the communist dream, only to feel betrayed afterwards, while fighting in the Revolution. These are the people that miss the garden the most, they will use their balcony both as a replacement for it and as an intermediary storage space, in the way they previously used the porch- they fill it with plants, they store their pickles, they smoke their cigarettes and take in the view (which sometimes reaches the horizon, but other times the living room of the neighbor in the next block). The ones living in the ground floor will go even further- they will take it as their responsibility to take care of the green space surrounding the building, which in reality is public and normally under public administration, and they will transform it into their long lost garden. They will plant flowers and maintain them all year long, they will add a bench, create small pathways and sitting spaces, often even fencing it in order to really mark it as their “property”. For this generation, *bricolage* is seen as a normal action related to survival, but an action that will also immediately appropriate a space and give it a function, an identity and meaning. It is a manifestation of the spaces that they miss, and a way to recover them in an attempt to transform particular spaces in the block into the ones found in their idea of a typical home, decomposing the house and assembling it into the apartment in the block and its additional spaces.

The second generation inhabiting the blocks is the average person of about 40 or 50 that we might walk by in the street every day, such as my parents. This is the generation that was born under the communist regime and was still quite young when they saw it fall, in 1989. In the years that followed, they have known a quite disorganized democracy, and a society trying to find its compass and a new set of values. They are the ones that grew up in the apartments, but having their grandparents in the countryside, often not far away so they could visit. In this way, their memory of the house with a garden is their summer paradise, a place of childhood memories, where the house and its



*Bricolage
by the Second Generation
An individualistic approach towards the block,
interiorization of bricolage*

(Source: by the author)

garden allowed for a larger playground and freedom. However, once childhood is over, these people today find themselves continuing their life in the block, making efforts to come to terms with the apartment and live in it peacefully. They will take down walls, increase the interior surface by enclosing the balconies, create an open space living room and an American kitchen, forbid smoking inside and give up traditional cuisine, all in the effort to adapt the apartment to their particular needs, but also themselves adapting to a modern lifestyle somewhat imposed by living in the block of flats. At the same time, they will always remember their grandparent's house- their childhood space- and keep that as the ultimate dream. And with this in mind, they might remain in a permanent search to recover that memory, in whichever way they can, even if it is in the shape of a house in some luxurious development at the outskirts of the city, in the style of the American gated communities. These places have started to develop in the past years outside Bucharest, as ensembles of villas where you have a huge building all for yourself, a garden that is in fact just grass, all of this most often "off grid"- with promises from the authorities that they will soon connect the area to water and sewage systems. This generation will most often restrain their actions related to *bricolage* more towards the private space, acting more at the limit of the façade, closing their balconies and continuing their actions within the limits of their intimate space.

The third generation living in the apartment blocks is made of people such as myself, people that have lived all their lives in just one home- the apartment- and can hardly imagine themselves living in an actual house. This is a generation living in a continuously shaping democratic system, a confusing time that sometimes seems to aim backwards, in the days of the old regime. The vivid memories that parents have of the former regime are forever present, while the system of today is still reluctant to accept the new, younger voices that will, hopefully, in the end, become part of it and rebuild it. This is the generation that never had an actual house, and even the space of childhood memories was the one in between the blocks. In this way, the space of the block has become a normal way of living, seeing that, in the memory of these people, the house has no representation, at least not in the way it is in the mind of the previous generations. Thus, this idea of living in a house is a concept that has become more and more difficult to understand and relate to, while the only resources most often come from the stories of the parents, nostalgic memories of their childhood. In these generations of young people, the idea of flat becomes enough, the *bricolage* slowly comes to an end, while the desire for a house fades away. However, this is also the generation that is much less attached to their flat, for later it becomes their parents flat, while the young face the decision to leave the nest. Many times, these people end up in larger cities such as Bucharest, live in a rented place, while struggling with the notion of belonging and the effort of finding a place to call their own. The *bricolage* being now forbidden, for the property belongs to somebody else, the people of my generation have started reaching out in more public places, in groups where being an outsider is a reason to feel welcomed, and having initiatives associated to *bricolage* in spaces where this is not seen as a rule breaker, such as maker spaces. Yet, there is another alternative for the people my age,

What kind of bricolage can we expect from the third generation



who come to feel misplaced and finally leave not only their city, but the country itself⁸, in search for independence, a path of their own and a way of living that might actually fit their needs, often arriving themselves to change and become a mixed product of two different societies and cultures. In some cases, these are cases of people leaving the country for work in order to earn money and support their families still in the country. However, what also happens is an exchange of cultures between the newcomer and the hosting country, which comes to reflect ultimately in the local architecture, becoming an imported architecture, one that covers up the particular features of the existing.

⁸ The migration rate in Romania is the highest in Europe, with 17% of the country's total population living outside the country since it joined the European Union in 2007. The tragic aspect is that many of the young professionals are choosing to leave the country, due to a lack of stability in the political and economic fields, making the choice to build a life in another country. —from the website Emerging Europe, New Statistics confirm Romania's Demographic Catastrophe, consulted on the 1st of June 2020, at <https://emerging-europe.com/news/new-statistics-confirm-romanas-demographic-catastrophe/>

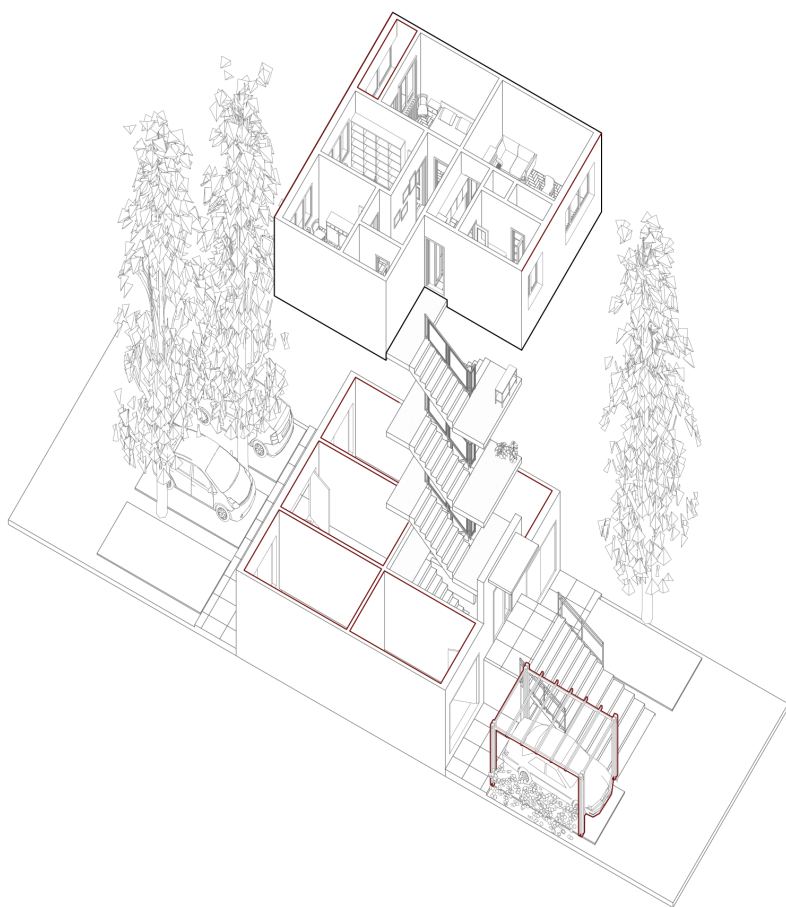
2.3 THE STORIES OF THE INHABITANTS

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS- TEN LESSONS

The practice of *bricolage* in Bucharest nowadays has come a long way, serving people in fitting their environment to their needs, whether we speak of factors such as the size of their habitat or the living conditions. However, much like the human body, the living space, in this study focusing on the apartment, reflects on the outside symptoms of a problem coming from within. Its manifestations are present everywhere in the city, varying in scale, approach or materiality, but always sending an urgent message to the architect and observer, that he/she at his/her turn has to decipher- the living environment is outdated, not fit to their needs- and that this message offers the architect a chance to help, by proposing a healing solution. The project of the blocks of flats has brought people together in this rigid structure, meant to create a uniform community inhabiting it- the modern man. But, as it turned out, such a heterogeneous society, coming from very different backgrounds was bound to fight back, and did so by challenging this rigid structure to transform, ending up by reflecting in its façade precisely this diversity that was supposed to remain silent.

In my study of *bricolage* in the blocks of flats, I have searched to reach various people, of different ages, work domains, different ways of living and relation to the apartment that they inhabit. The apartments themselves differ in size and in use, most of them being found in the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei*⁹, but also taking into account other cases in different socialist neighborhoods, thus confirming certain general conditions of living in such types of blocks, while also showcasing certain features of *Drumul Taberei* which create a favorable environment for the future project. The approach chosen for the analysis was the interview, which was developed throughout the Bucharest lab Workshop, where two of the following case studies were a subject of the studio coordinated by the UCLouvain. Most often, the interviews would derail from the precise subject of the question, revealing significant information through the use of stories and memories and became also, in the case of the youngest subjects, an opportunity to exchange information about architecture and planning details that would reinforce

⁹ *Drumul Taberei* is a neighborhood in Bucharest, situated at the south-western part, being the first large scale socialist housing ensemble built under the communist regime. It represented an adaptation of the principles of the free urban planning, meant to offer an independent neighborhood, where its inhabitants could find all the public amenities their needed, from education to entertainment.



D's apartment

86, lives alone

Block type A, built in the 1970's
Drumul Taberei, Bucharest

(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the interview and visit on site)

or justify certain feelings that they already had about the neighborhood or the block itself. Most importantly, the subjects became conscious of their attitude towards the environment they inhabit, their wishes for change, their needs, their desires to either stay or leave, but also the reasons for their choices.

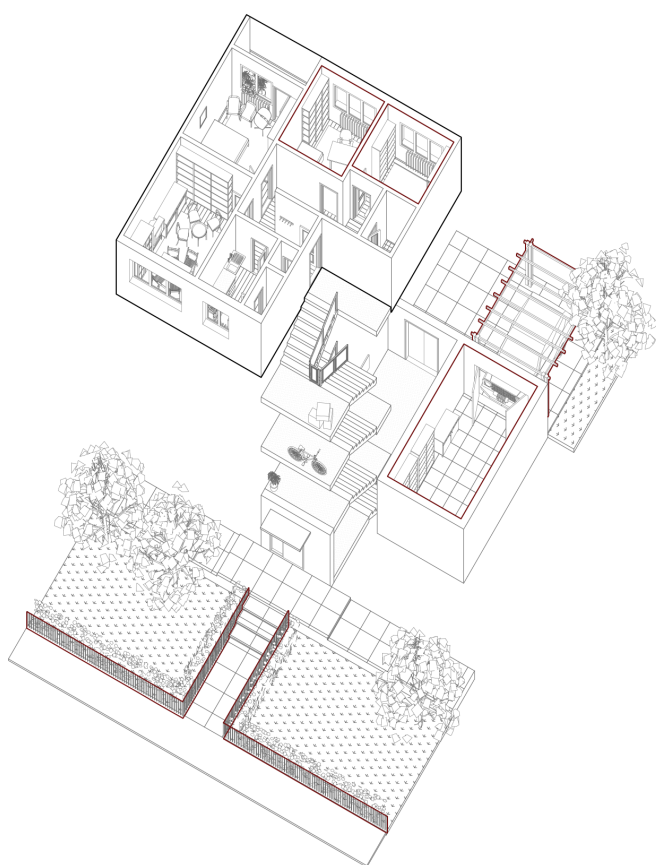
The case studies are structured according to the type of person that lives inside the apartment, creating a catalogue based on generations that influence the life around these socialist blocks. In this way, the main types of people that were included in the study belonged either to the first generation of people inhabiting the block from the moment it was built, people who own their apartment and have lived here their entire lives. The second category would be the second and third generations living together, the family, implying a lifestyle that varies in time, while the third is represented by the newcomers, the people inhabiting their apartment by renting it, either short or long term, showing this attempt to appropriate the space that does not belong to them, and in some cases comes to feel like home, while in others not.

Finally, each apartment was studied in its context, influenced by the type of block, the floor, the common spaces and their use, the circulation, all the way to its ground floor and its exterior, each time searching the signs of appropriation through these informal practices like *bricolage*, representing a way to bend the rigid planning of the socialist block and reach for an environment fit to the needs of the dweller, through whatever means they have at hand. As signs of informal practices, this repertoire represents also the clues that may lead the architect to read these needs of the inhabitants, interpreting them in order to come up with a possible solution, one that brings the knowledge of the architect, the *bricoleur* and the specific context of the blocks towards a better, adapted outcome.

LESSON 01. THE FIRST GENERATION

The subjects who first welcomed us into their homes were D and Y, during the Bucharest Lab workshop. Both of them are living in the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei*, in the area known as “the loop”, which was built during the 70’s. They live in the blocks known as type A and type D¹⁰, which are very similar. These are 4 stories high above the ground floor, having two apartments per floor, one with three bedrooms and the other with two. The particular aspect of these typologies is given by the fact that both of

¹⁰ “The typologies of the blocks are not very different, their distinction being made even today through their identification letter. It is very well known in the jargon of the neighborhood- if one may speak of such a language- what kind of apartment has, for instance, a Z or an A block. In the beginning, the blocks were built using mainly one or two bedrooms apartments [...] those with three bedrooms appearing mostly in the time of the increase of population, as a response to the consequences of the demographic pressure imposed by the political regime to increase the birth rate. Such apartments are found in the A or H types”- in STAIU Mihaela, *Amprente...: o incursiune antropologica asupra locuirii din marile ansambluri: cazul Drumul Taberei* (Impressions...: an anthropological incursion on dwelling in the large ensembles: the Drumul Taberei case), Bucharest: «Ion Mincu» University Press, 2013, p. 30



Y's apartment

90, lives alone

Block type D, built in the 1970's

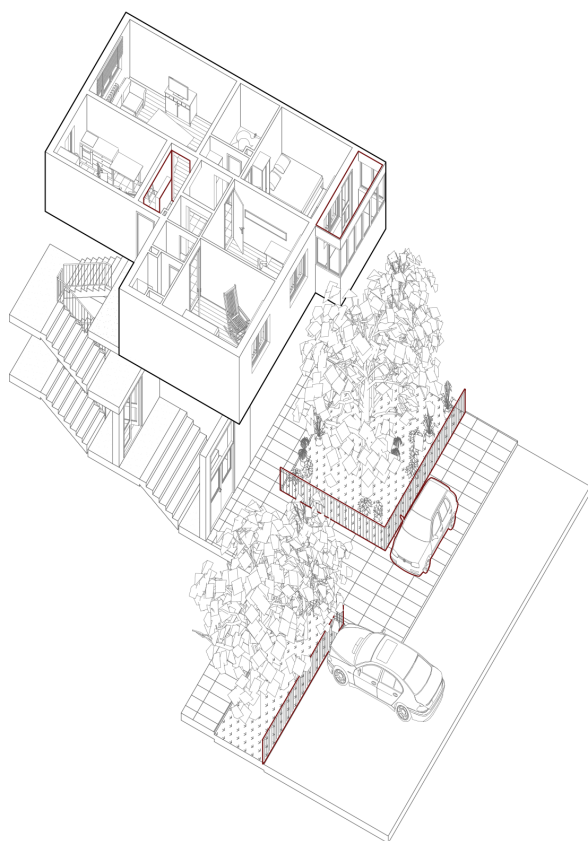
Drumul Taberei, Bucharest

(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the interview and visit on site)

them have garages at the ground floor, which have allowed the opportunity to develop particular uses of these spaces and around them.

D is 86, lives alone in a three bedroom apartment, which she managed to buy when the block was freshly built. While walking us through it, she explains the story of how she and her husband, both of them being engineers, chose to live here due to the proximity to their work place, and made the request to have the apartment unfinished, creating the opportunity to choose and install the finishing together. Thus, in her case, *bricolage* could be considered to be all the adaptations that were made in the apartment by themselves, making the whole space a perfect fit to their family of four, but also, nowadays, a reminiscence of his presence. Since living alone, although she has all of the space for herself, she has not changed much, preserving the rooms of her children for when they should come visit. *Bricolage*, in her current living conditions, is also represented by her **adaptation of the balcony**, which was **enclosed** through the will of her children, who became aware of her **need for a space to dry her clothes**, one that would be close to her, seeing that the common space which had this function in the block is found at the ground floor, making it hard for her to climb down the stairs with such a load on her hands. At the same time, speaking of this laundry space, which was one of the common spaces in the block, she states that the neighbor near to it has incorporated it into his own apartment, without asking for permission, putting an end to any initiatives to reinsert that space into the use of the community, as aspect that D herself had thought of. The outside of the block, in this case, offers to the public a uniform image, being completely isolated using polystyrene, and painted in different shades of brown and beige. The element of variety remains the garages, some of which preserve the original doors, painted in different colors, while sometimes having also creative installations into the space in front of them.

Y is 90, also lives alone in a three bedroom apartment, one that he also was able to buy when he moved in. The interesting aspect of his apartment is that it was never renovated, thus remaining in its original form. Since remaining alone is such a big apartment, Y has preserved one bedroom for himself, the one with the balcony, while **the other two were transformed into his own workshop**, where he repairs and plays with different gadgets, fixing them or making them fly. These two rooms are completely filled with many interesting objects, creating a clutter that only he knows to untangle. Being such a creative personality, Y has taken *bricolage* into the entire apartment, with small details and adaptations being noticed everywhere, such as in his secondary bathroom, completely transformed into a storage space, or in objects that he created himself in order to make the apartment more comfortable (see photos for details). He also speaks of the fact that he knows very few people in the block, many of them preferring to be on their own. While at one point there might have been some initiatives from the people to act together (by planting or installing a bench in the green space around the block), these have disappeared completely in the past years. Now, **the outer appearance of the block gives the impression of a patchwork**, each inhabitant either changing the windows,



J's apartment
23, lives with family
Block built in the 1980's
Crangasi, Bucharest

(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the interview and visit on site)

closing the balcony, insulating the apartment or installing solar protection based on their own preferences. Here also, the garages, this time present on only one side of the block, have added variety to the landscape of the street. They have also found **other uses** such as small stores or repair shops for cars, thus creating an opportunity for **work** to develop around the block.

Through the stories of D and Y, it can be noticed that the apartment, with so many years and memories that are offering it its sentimental value, has managed to host life in its many forms, while life also, at the moment where space has become available, just like water, has come to fill it up by developing new or old habits. However, we might also notice a tendency for achieving more comfort thermally, through insulation or protection against the sun, but also functionally, when, with age, the inhabitants might need some adaptations in order to carry on daily tasks in a block where the only circulation is made through the stairs. The lessons offered by D and Y concern the adaptation of the block with the age of its inhabitants, but also to the idea of mixed activities that would offer a more dynamic life in the neighborhood.

LESSON 02. THE FAMILY- GENERATIONS TWO AND THREE

The second category of people is represented by J and A, both of them having spent their whole life in a block, growing up in it together with their families, at times being in the situation to leave it, due to their search of independence or attempt to leave the nest which does no longer fit their needs. Their lifestyle in such cases is proof of how life itself comes to expand and contract according to the number of members or changes in their particular way of living, and also proof of the fact that the apartment was subjected to changes as a consequence of these fluctuations, remaining however inside the limits of this rigid structure.

J is 23, and lives in the neighborhood of *Crângasi*¹¹, in a three bedroom apartment together with her mother and two sisters. They bought the apartment after the revolution of 1989, when they needed a larger space for their family. At their arrival, the whole space had to be renovated by taking one room at a time, this implying a **flexibility** in the use of each room. The renovation they made is represented by the **change of the finishing materials**, the **tearing down of the storage spaces** but also of the wall between the kitchen, the entrance hallway and the living room, **transforming the kitchen into an open space**, and lastly the **enclosing of the balcony** using PVC windows. Apart from these interventions, each shift in the number of family members, whether it is about one of them leaving the flat, or another coming in, have led to continuous adaptations of the bedrooms, when each member had a moment of **compromise of his/her personal space and privacy**. Her favorite space is her own room, while also appreciating the common areas that they share, thus preferring the scenario of living with three or four

¹¹ Crângasi is a smaller neighborhood of socialist blocks built during the 70's, situated at the north-west of Bucharest.



A's apartment

22, lived with her parents

Block type P, built in the 1970's

Drumul Taberei, Bucharest

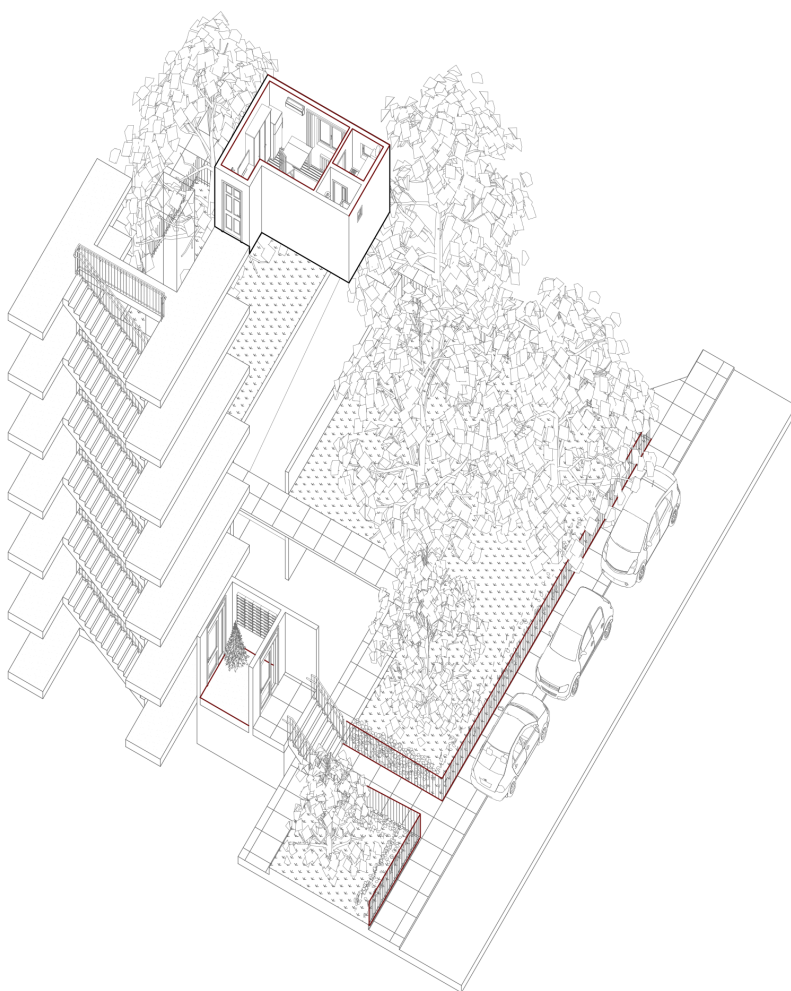
(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the interview and visit on site)

members, preserving the feeling of intimacy. However, an element that interferes with this feeling is the **acoustics** of the space, whether this comes from the noise of the street or the one from the neighbors. Also, another issue would be the **small balcony**, and the fact that it has to be a closed space, losing its quality of an aerated garden-like spot. At the same time, living in a block that has not been thermally rehabilitated does reflect in **the expenses, which are quite high** and with great differences from the cold and warm seasons. Lastly, she speaks of the existence of a **community life**, which is partly due to the stability of the inhabitants, most of them being families that own their apartment, and who do not change much in time, leading to an environment where all neighbors know each other. This also results into a landscape that is very green, with improvised gardens around the blocs, J saying that she would love to **take down the fences** isolating these green spaces, leaving them open for everyone to enjoy.

A is 22, and has lived her whole life in *Drumul Taberei* in a type P block¹², along with her parents and grandmother at first, in a one bedroom apartment of around 60 m². Unlike the previous case studies from the same area, A's family arrived here during the 80's, and was able to acquire the apartment only after the fall of communism. In 2002, A received the bedroom to be her own room, while the whole apartment was renovated with few alterations such as the **opening of the storage space in the kitchen**, the **enclosing of the balcony**, at first in an **improvised manner**, using polystyrene on top of the existing metallic railing with blue glass, a feature existing in all blocks of this type. This first insulation, although a mishmash, did have an impact on the inner temperature, at least until the block became part of the **project for thermal rehabilitation** in the neighborhood, developed by the city hall¹³. Regarding the rehabilitation, she explains that they used polystyrene, the finishing of the balcony was done quite well, but the windows installed using the public funds proved to be of bad quality in time. In spite of this, due to the fact that A and her family live at the fourth and last floor, the apartment **heats up** very much in the summer, making it mandatory to leave the windows largely open, compromising the already precarious **acoustic privacy**. In 2019, A moved out of the apartment, in order to allow for her parents to occupy it completely, but also in a search for independence. However, she does say that, if it were for the apartment to

¹² The type P consists of a 4 stories high block, having a monolithic structure and cantilevered balconies, unlike the other blocks in the neighborhood of the same height. It was meant to have 8 stories, a proof of this fact being the presence of the elevator shaft which was built, but never used. Also, another particular aspect of the block is given by the hollow cores which are meant to bring light and ventilation to the kitchens, bathrooms, common spaces and staircase.

¹³ The Program for Thermal Rehabilitation developed by the town hall of the sector 6, to which Drumul Taberei belongs, provides the rehabilitation of the facades and uses 60% European funds, and 40% the local budget of the city hall (out of which 25% should be paid back by the inhabitants, in a maximum of 10 years)-on the website of the City Hall of the 6th Sector, to which Drumul Taberei belongs to, consulted on the 18th of April 2020, <https://www.primarie6.ro/primarul-gabriel-mutu-se-tine-de-promisiune-incepe-reabilitarea-termica-a-blocurilor-din-sectorul-6/>



R's apartment
24, lives alone, renting
Block built in the 1970's
Balta Alba, Bucharest

(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the interview and visit on site)

have an extra room, preferably somehow **independent** from the rest, she would gladly return. Referring to the community life, inside the block, at each floor, there are spaces destined for drying out laundry, which have and are still used by at least two out of the four neighbors on the floor. Also, she notices that the life of the block changes with the arrival of the tenants, who seem to affect the stability of the community, and who most often seem to forget the conditions imposed by living together in a block, thus making a lot of noise, heard by most of the neighbors especially due to the hollow core where all kitchens have their windows. Finally, A notices that there are no spaces for work or study outside the private space, while the job offers inside the neighborhood are quite limited and not fit for many of its inhabitants, including her parents, who never worked here and were always forced to commute towards their workplace.

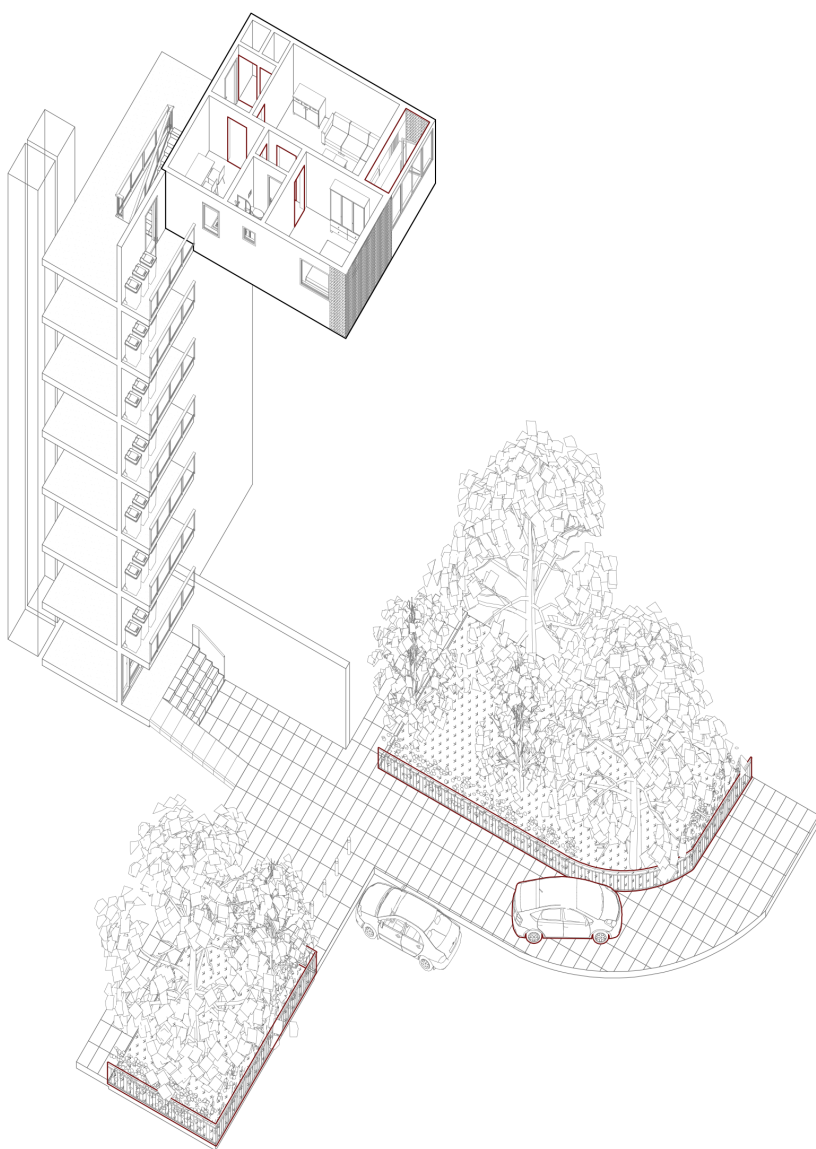
Through these case studies of people who have grown up here, in particular areas of Bucharest, I have attempted to understand the vision of these “insiders”, their perception on the living space, the block and the neighborhood. Their lesson is that of independence, whether it might be referred to independence inside the flat, where each member craves his/her own intimacy in this space that is defined by living together, even though this together might seem at times an obligation, or the independence found outside, but not necessarily very far away from the place of origin. At the same time, their lesson is also concerning the awareness of the impact that the thermal insulation of the block has on the expenses, especially when speaking of an entire family, and also on the comfort of the inner space. Once again, *bricolage* is represented by the variation in use, the renovations and tearing down walls in order to create an open space, but also in these attempts for thermal insulation, either improvised by the inhabitants or done by public authorities.

LESSON 03. THE NEWCOMERS

The third category of case studies was that of the people who are newly introduced in the community of the block, people who are renting or in transition, adapting their lifestyle according to the environment, but with the consciousness that this is a temporary adaptation. These case studies are represented by R and R.E, both of them coming from outside Bucharest, integrating in a certain degree into the block communities that they have inserted themselves into.

R is 24, came to Bucharest due to her job, and has been alone living in a one room apartment in the neighborhood of Balta Alba¹⁴. Her block is ten stories high and has around 12 apartments per floor, implying that all of them are **reduced in surface**, even if sometimes they are inhabited by large families. In a very rational manner, R describes the space as just enough for her to live, meaning that she **compressed all her life** to just eating, sleeping and occasionally studying in the apartment, most of the

¹⁴ Balta Alba is the largest housing ensemble built during communism, in Bucharest, in the eastern part of the city.



R.E.'s apartment
24, lives with partner
Block built in the 1970's
Drumul Taberei, Bucharest

(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the interview and visit on site)

time being away for work. She states that the space would be completely unfit for more than one person, and is perfectly aware of the fact that it is just a **temporary stop**. However, she is satisfied with the fact that she can afford to pay everything herself, and has noticed the advantage of the **complete insulation of the block** reflected in the **small monthly charges**, which fluctuate very little between the winter and summer. *Bricolage* here consists in the compressed functions that are mixed together in one space, making the apartment work, while leaving **no room for personal interventions**, even if they would be allowed by the owner. Concerning the common spaces, she says that there is a community life divided according to the age categories, while the spaces where they meet are the entrance of the block and the small park nearby. However, her only contact with her neighbors is, very rarely, in the elevator. In the end, she does consider the whole neighborhood unfit to her needs, having no mixt areas, no places for her to go out or for remote work, consisting of a good example of a dormitory neighborhood¹⁵.

R.E, also 24, lives in *Drumul Taberei*, in a one bedroom apartment, together with his partner. Their block is a type Z, which translates into a building ten stories high, with six apartments per floor. They have been living in this apartment together for about one year, with it being into the property of the parents of R.E's partner. Hence, they have renovated the apartment, meaning that they have **stripped it down of all floorings and doors**, creating a completely **open space** that offers intimacy through its sequence of partition walls. As far as the interventions that they did themselves, being two artistic personalities, they chose to leave the concrete floor exposed and paint it white together with the walls, creating a **blank canvas** on which they could attach their own work of art. The block of flats has not yet been insulated, and feels a bit **cold during winter**, but remains cool in the summer due to the depth of the rooms, even if these are oriented towards the south. They do appreciate the **balcony**, which was half enclosed in the living room, but brings into it the breeze they enjoy during the hot days. They occasionally meet some of the neighbors, mostly around the entrance of the block, many of these being older people or families. Regarding the neighborhood, they do appreciate the **improvised gardens at the ground floor**, the green spaces and the pedestrian circulations where they can jog calmly. But, the neighborhood does remain disconnected from the rest of the city, making people depend on their car. However, they would not give away the opportunity to have their **work in the neighborhood**, providing that it is a job fit for them, even if they do think that going out for work in other areas of the city does bring some variety and fresh air into their daily lives.

The lesson of this last category is that of diversity, both inside the block and at the level of the neighborhood. This diversity, which at the level of the block might translate into a series of common spaces, could be a way to create opportunities for encounters between the neighbors, achieving a communication between the different

¹⁵ A phrase used to describe the enormous socialist housing ensembles built during communism, these are neighborhoods destined to lodge the working force of the city during the night, whilst other activities which are part of their life take place elsewhere.



The installation into the private space, resulting in the need for flexibility, or thermal insulation, as seen in the case studies of Y, D and A, from left to right (Source: The photography archive of the Bucharest Lab, photos by Christine Fontaine)



The appropriation of the common space of the staircase hall, as means of extending the private space, as seen in the case studies of Y, D and A, from left to right (Source: The photography archive of the Bucharest Lab, photos by Christine Fontaine and the author)



The appropriation of the public domain in search for functional diversity and the personal dimension of green space, as seen in the case studies of Y, D and A (Source: The photography archive of the Bucharest Lab, photos by Christine Fontaine and the author)

generations and social categories present in the block. Also, these people speak of a process of integration that happens precisely when these encounters are more often, breaking the boundaries and diminishing the distance between the different inhabitants.

THE FINAL LESSONS

All of the case studies, through their variety in age, status and relation to their own living space, have brought about the fact that living in a block can be both enjoyable, while at times becoming difficult and oppressing. The elements that they mentioned in their discourse speak of particular aspects of their own habitat which they would like to change or improve, some of these creating a common narrative that can apply at a general scale, while others being more particular wishes, generated by a very personal point of view. From the perspective of the architect, these elements, which translate into a statement of the needs of the inhabitant, become ideas that generate a particular kind of intervention that could improve the life in these rigid, socialist blocks. As a conclusion based on the interpretation of the interviews and the analysis of their corresponding living spaces, these ideas would be as follows:

1. The need for thermal insulation- noticed from the enclosing of the balcony and from the public initiatives, greatly improves the quality of life and diminishes the monthly charges
2. The need for the balcony as an open space- seen from the emphasis everyone put on this particular space, the balcony needs to take both a functional role as well as that of the garden
3. The need for privacy and independence- which could take the form of an extra room, detached from the rest of the apartment
4. The need for privacy and acoustic comfort
5. The need for extra space
6. The need for flexibility and adaptation
7. The need for personal expression and nesting ritual
8. The need for a recovered public green space
9. The need for community life and common spaces
10. The need for work opportunities close to home

3 THE REMEDIES ANALYSIS AND DECOMPOSITION

3.1 BRICOLAGE AND ARCHITECTURE

3.1.1 THEORETICAL APPROACHES- THE ARCHITECTURAL MIND

“There still exists among ourselves an activity which on the technical plane gives us quite a good understanding of what a science we prefer to call ‘prior’ rather than ‘primitive’, could have been on the plane of speculation.

This is what is commonly called ‘bricolage’ in French.”

*-C. LEVI STRAUSS, THE SAVAGE
MIND¹⁶*

The term *bricolage* originates from the French language, based on the verb *bricoler*, also used in its noun form *bricoleur*, which in English would translate into a man capable of creating a construction or solving an issue with whatever means he finds at hand. In the English language however, a term capable of capturing the exact meaning of *bricolage* does not exist, so the term itself was adopted in the current language as it is. Probably the most accurate translation would be the *DIY*, “do it yourself” movement,

¹⁶ LEVI STRAUSS Claude, The Savage Mind (La Pensée Sauvage)- online version <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/levistrauss.pdf>, consulted at the 9th of January 2020

having somewhat the same purpose of hacking objects at hand and using them in other ways than the ones they were created for, a movement considered as a reaction to industrialization and prefabrication.

In time, there were several theories elaborated in order to explain *bricolage* and its meaning related to the field of anthropology, mainly in the work of Claude Levi-Strauss¹⁷. In his writing, he distinguishes two different types of thought: the “*savage mind*” which would be represented by the *bricoleur*, and the “*scientific mind*”, the engineer. By contrast, Levi-Strauss explains the fact that the *bricoleur* is part of a system based on mythical thought, which is composed of heterogeneous elements used to solve whatever task arises. In this way, the *bricoleur* makes due with “*a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions*”¹⁸. In opposition to this, the engineer is thought to be the “*true craftsman*”¹⁹, one that is making use of a scientific language and knowledge, disposing of a complete system which includes materials and tools that are especially made for a specific project. However, the philosopher Jacques Derrida contradicts the idea of the engineer as the “*absolute origin of his own discourse*”²⁰, and states that this myth might actually originate from the mentality of the *bricoleur*, who is bound to find creative ways of solving issues compared to the technical approach of the engineer. Derrida compares the two through the perspective that the engineer places himself at the center of a stable system the he himself creates, through the language that he masters, while the *bricoleur* is having an approach that creates a system surrounding one that already exists, bringing a new way of thinking without destroying what is existent. In this sense, the two contrasting perspectives also differ from the point of view of the solidity and duration in time, the engineer mostly aiming to create a solid system, while *bricolage* admits the fact that its results have a limited duration in time, being unstable and fleeting.

Taking into account the theory of Levi-Strauss, we might question what is the relation of the architect to the *bricoleur* and where exactly does he fit between these two types of thinking. On a general basis, *bricolage* might appear as an adaptation of the architectural object in order to appropriate it and shape it according to the needs and wants of its inhabitant. However, from the perspective of the architect, who typically aims to create a project upon which he has complete control and whose use he plans and anticipates, *bricolage* appears as an unexpected, unplanned and unwanted action. Most

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 11

¹⁹ MAMBOL Nasrullah, Claude Levi-Strauss's Concept of Bricolage- online article published at 21st of March 2016, <https://literariness.org/2016/03/21/claude-levi-strauss-concept-of-bricolage/>, consulted on the 9th of January 2020

²⁰ Ibid

often, it is seen rather as affecting the aesthetic of the object, while the meaning of it becomes secondary or irrelevant. Even so, *bricolage* in such situations is a clear reflection of the user's needs, and the fact that his environment is not fit to his way of living and is incapable to adapt architecturally. In fact, it is quite recently that architects have begun to consider thinking their projects in order to include this possibility of evolution and adaptation, not just at the interior, but as well at the exterior, actually involving the inhabitants in the construction process. Such projects include Elemental's social housing projects in Chile, the Villa Verde or Quinta Monroy, which offer the inhabitants a half-built house, with the possibility for them to build the second half later according to their possibilities, needs and taste. The question of taste and the architectural aesthetics is related to *bricolage*, considering that, most often, this activity is considered to result into uncontrolled, ugly interventions. A theory of "anesthetics"²¹ in architecture is found in the writing of British architect and theorist Neil Leach, who questions this importance of aesthetics, an aspect which many times seems to prevail compared to other components of the architectural work, equally or sometimes more significant and which give it a more profound meaning. The risk that Leach sees into this emphasis put on aesthetics is that architects might become numb in the face of the social or political factors that have an important part in the architectural conception of the project. On the other hand, the lack of aesthetic consideration could lead to an architecture of the banal, common, creating monotonous images that would ultimately become invisible, incapable of being judged aesthetically²².

As a result of these theories and practices, it seems that the architect may find his place just at the middle, being able to speak the language of the engineer, understanding that of the users and their needs, while mastering his own craft. In his position as a mediator between different experts on one hand, while on the other a representative of his own field, the architect has the ability to bring creative solutions to the table, negotiating between the needs and a technical answer, while molding them into a creative, innovative solution, an architectural response. In this sense, the architect could be considered as the creative intelligence mind added as a new type of thinking in the theory of Levi-Strauss, one that is able to combine and understand the "savage" and the "scientific" minds. Nevertheless, the task of the architect would be to preserve and value the thinking of the other two, particularly with respect to *bricolage*, which might be considered the type of thinking that architects sought to eradicate, in an attempt to create the perfect project that could give an answer to all of the needs of its users. Also, another question related to the profession might be whether the domain of observation and the creation that generates architectural projects might need to establish a limit, considering that an openness to all of these informal practices, seen as opportunities for creating a

²¹ LEACH Neil, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, MIT Press, 1999 – online version <https://ro.scribd.com/document/366325287/Leach-Anaesthetics-of-Architecture-pdf> [20200213]

²² ELIAN Tudor, *Bucurestiul Informal (Informal Bucharest)*, Phd thesis- "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, 2017

project, might lead to their formalization, putting them under control²³, in which case the essence and meaning of *bricolage* would be annulled. It seems that the architect finds himself in a rather complicated position, that in which he needs to learn, respect and allow for the informal practices of daily life to take place, while attempting to improve living conditions by proposing smart, creative solutions as an answer to people's needs, while also learning that he has to let go of the control over his own project, for ultimately this belongs to the users and must allow them the freedom of inhabiting it their own way.

Another important aspect that has been related to the practice of *bricolage* is its connection to property. Generally, it is believed that *bricolage* happens in spaces that are owned by the *bricoleur*²⁴. In the book of Phillipe Jarreau, *Du bricolage: Archeologie de la maison*, *bricolage* is seen as a way of appropriating a space, representing a ritual of installation into that specific environment. In the private space, *bricolage* can be a means of creating an identity, of expressing individual freedom, while the author also underlines the idea that a house must belong to the inhabitant for it to really become a home²⁵. In this way, the inhabitant creates a relation to the environment that he inhabits, implying that this ritual of nesting becomes mandatory in order to create the feeling of being at home. Hence, the relation to property might be significant in the way that *bricolage* or other informal practices in the private space can be allowed or considered worthwhile in then scenario where these take place in a space that is owned.

However, the one question that arises is that of the different scales of *bricolage*, in those cases where it appears in spaces found either at the limit of private property, into that of the common space or even in the public domain. Taking into consideration this theory that *bricolage* could permit the installation of the subject into the private universe, provided in this study by the apartment, it might be possible that a corresponding scale of this practice be the one that permits the installation into the larger scale universe, that of the block, neighborhood or city. For the inhabitant, the feeling of belonging in the private universe is somewhat related to the identification with the city that acts as a host, resulting into either a degree of attachment to the city, when this exists also for the private environment, or into a feeling of alienation, when the private space itself is not welcoming or satisfying this important need of identification.

In reality, the private universe refers not only to the space of the private property, but is enlarged and enriched by the connections implied by inhabiting a neighborhood, the proximity to the people in the block and the space around it, which is equally important due to its role as a transition space²⁶, connecting the private universe to

²³ Ibid, p. 55

²⁴ JARREAU Philippe, *Du bricolage: Archéologie de la maison*, Paris : Centre Georges Pompidou, CCI, 1985

²⁵ "il faut que l'édifice soit à soi pour qu'il puisse être un chez soi" -Ibid

²⁶ MOLEY Christian, *Les abords du chez-soi : en quête d'espaces intermédiaires*, Paris : Editions de la Villette (collection Penser l'espace), 2006

that of the city. In this way the transition process allows for these spaces to become more valuable, taking upon themselves the feeling of familiar, of extended home. Nonetheless, by being placed outside the private property, this territory of transition implies that it is a shared space between all the inhabitants in the neighborhood, and more specifically the block, and that this space should offer this familiar feeling for all these people. As such, the question of common, transition space might also entail a common responsibility, a common administration and process of decision making, hence translating into an scale of *bricolage* operating at the level of these transition spaces, leading from a movement of DIY (do it yourself) to that of DIT (do it together)²⁷, involving the participation of a community. In this way, the process of installation is able to surpass the limits of the private space, allowing for the individual to find a nest not just at the level of the housing unit, but also at the scale of the collectivity, translating into a better use of such spaces into the interest of the dwellers.

As a conclusion, the architect is the professional that is able to occupy a position in between the “savage mind” and the “scientific mid”, being a translator and interpreter of people’s needs, as well as a master of his/her own field of knowledge. Through this position, the architect is able to establish a limit between the aims of a project, whilst allowing a part of its conception to the inhabitants itself. Regarding the practice of *bricolage* as an important part of the installation ritual, the architect can estimate the complexity of this process which goes further than decisions regarding details such as furnishings, but comes to the inherent qualities and structure of space and its ability to transform according to different demands and lifestyles. Furthermore, the architect is able to take initiative, not waiting for a specific project to arise, but taking advantage of the position as a professional that has both the ability and responsibility to regard towards the future and anticipate the development of a new way of life. Thus, the architect takes up a social responsibility, one that concerns the people to which the buildings is destined for and not only, and should consider their involvement into the architectural project through all of its phases. In this way, the architect, through such projects that imply participation, becomes a professional that deals with the mediation between the various actors and their needs, education in architecture, revealing hidden potentials of existing spaces and, ultimately, the coagulation of a community of people with common interests, involved into a process of decision making, reaching creative answers to their needs, together.

²⁷ DELPRAT Etienne, YA+K, BASCOP Nicolas, Manuel illustre de bricolage urbain : Outils, ressources pratiques et projets à faire soi-même pour rendre la ville plus conviviale et partagée, Paris : Gallimard (ed. Alternatives), 2016



The vernacular culture of self building and the resulting extensions of the house (Source: by the author)

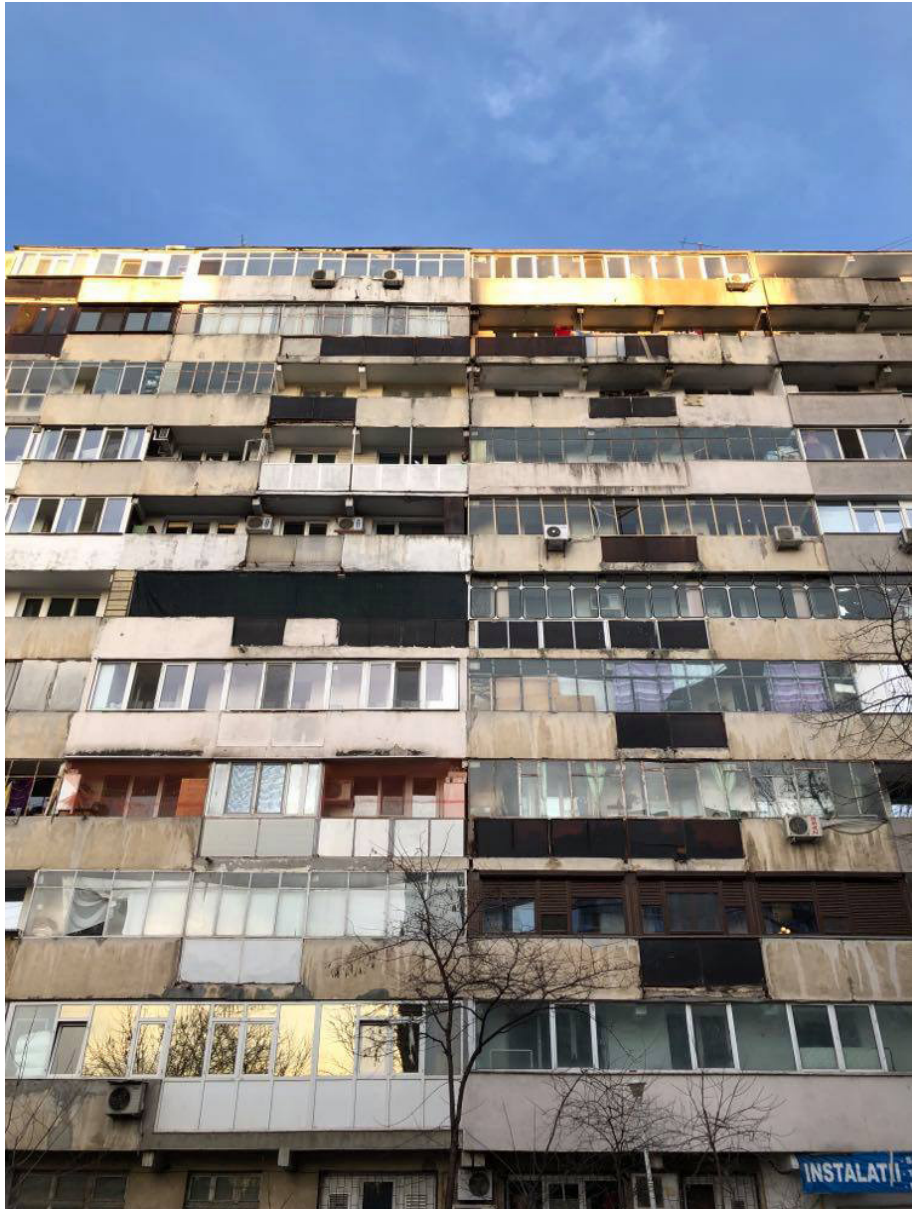
BRICOLAGE IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Bricolage (or *bricolaj* as it was translated into the Romanian language directly from its French source) is found as a practice in the Romanian society from its very early stages, but primarily with the purpose of survival, of adaptation to the poor living conditions, taking up more recently this value of installation ritual, of expressing individuality.

As we have seen before, Romania in general, and Bucharest up until the 19th century was predominantly built based on rural settlements, composed of traditional houses that were built with the local materials belonging to each site. The tradition of building in these areas consisted of what we may call today participative architecture, for it involved many members of the family and the community, which would help each other when building a house. The knowledge base for building would be inherited from the older generations and improved in time, according to the climate and geographical conditions but also taking into account precise rules of the community, whether these regarded religious or traditional practices, related to mythical beliefs. Due to the fact that this was an architecture done by the users, it was fit to their needs, but could also support extensions, improvements, adaptations and constant reparations to withstand the test of time. In a way, this architecture could be considered *bricolage* at its basis, seeing that it is a project composed of the materials the people found at hand, while it could also evolve through the same *bricolage*.

The architect became involved into this process quite late, and mostly in the urban environment. In the city, even if the houses were planned, their users still found ways to improve it, due to several factors: most often, houses were quite small in surface and needed to adapt to a growing family, the need for space being noticed in all typologies of living, from the wagon houses to the communist flat. In rural settlements however, the notion of an architect is still abstract even today. It could be said that this tradition of building your own house that took place for hundreds of years generated a consciousness of the builder/user that he is capable of tending to his own needs, making his own house and improving it later on if he needs to. In a way, the architect has many things to learn from these informal, instinctual practices of building and their patterns of use. On the other hand, he could also be able to bring contemporary adaptations and improvements in terms of comfort and efficiency, adding to this knowledge of building and possibly reducing the idea of survival inherent to *bricolage* in this context, so that it may rely more on a sense of installation into a particular place, of nesting.

Indeed, throughout this tradition of building and inhabiting, we might also need to analyze the question of property, for this is also deeply rooted into it. The Romanian culture puts a great accent on owning property, in the sense that it represents a necessary step in a person's life- finding a place of his/her own. The relation to property in Bucharest is quite interesting, considering that the city is based on private property from its beginnings, in a way that even public gardens in the city were, in fact, private

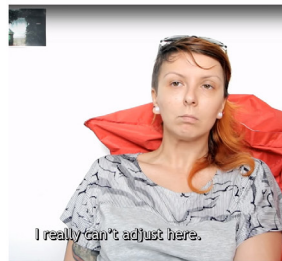
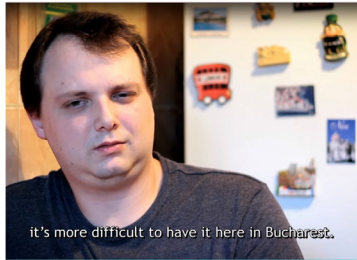
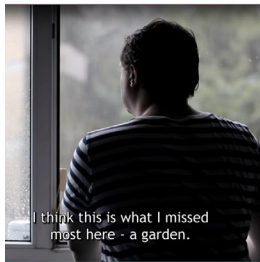


The revival of private property, the patchwork facade generated by the process of closing the apartment or insulating the apartment, individually- the resulting vertical village (Source: by the author)

properties which were open to the general public through the goodwill of its owner²⁸. In this way, *bricolage* was always well justified considering that it was always done within the frame of the private property, and such it was not conditioned by the approval of the owner, for the owner was the *bricoleur*. Yet, the arrival of communism changed the relation of the people with property, considering that everything came into the ownership of the state, the housing typology shifting suddenly to the collective block, while the apartments were being assigned to people based on precise criteria such as studies or the number of family members. Such conditions developed somewhat a reaction of indifference of the dwellers towards the outer shell of their accommodation, and focused on their intimate universe, while trying to figure out the manner in which these new units were meant to be inhabited. During this time, *bricolage* became less frequent, considering this absent feeling of owning the place, the law which prohibited interventions on the façades, of these newly build collective blocks, but also due to the scarcity of the materials found on the market. The fall of communism brought about a revival of the private property, and people were offered the possibility to recover the houses that they previously owned, while also having the opportunity to buy the apartment in which they had been living. And so they did. The apartments became private property, and *bricolage* became worth it once more, in the attempt to adapt this time the apartment to the needs of the inhabitants, while taking into account the memory of the house.

The housing context of Bucharest today is reflecting much of this new found private property in the block of flats, sometimes ending up in situations resembling a territorial war between the people who appropriate public spaces and transform them into “private” ones. But, at the same time, the development of the capital into a powerful city that brings together opportunities for work or studying also implies an increase of population coming from smaller cities from all around the country for these purposes. These people, with different social backgrounds and behavioral patterns, most often find themselves renting a flat in a block, considering that the housing market is saturated with such offers. And so, this population, who feels uprooted from their city of origin and in search for ties to the host city, is most often forbid to make use of *bricolage* due to the fact that in most cases the owner of the flat does not allow it. Still, the ritual of installation needs to take place even in such situations, and while generally massive interventions are not permitted, the owner might accept smaller ones. There might be a relation to the degree of *bricolage* in such situations to the way in which the installation process would be considered complete or not, also relating to the degree of attachment to the flat. But, as considered before, the flat itself represents the small scale city, the close universe of the inhabitant and the relation he/she has to the flat ultimately reflects on the relation to the global city. Hence, the quality of life in this small scale city affects the quality of life in the large scale city. The factors that influence the life quality are numerous, and are

²⁸ “The only condition for a garden to be “public” did not depend on the type of property of the land, but rather on the size of the garden and the goodwill of its owner” – Ioana Tudora in ELIAN Tudor, Bucurestiul Informal (Informal Bucharest), Phd thesis- “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, 2017, p. 71



Fragments of interviews speaking about the desire of the inhabitants in blocks of flats to recover the feeling of the garden associated to the house, but also the wish for belonging to a place, to a community (Source: Bucharest Housing Stories documentary series, episode on Blocks)

found in the inner, private world as well as in the shared spaces. This interdependence between these worlds was captured in one of the interviews on the subject of the blocks, in the documentary series Bucharest Housing Stories: *“I’ve tried before. It’s my second, no, my third try [to settle in Bucharest] [...] Nothing has changed. I really can’t adjust here [...] People keep to themselves here. I have no relationship whatsoever with my neighbors, which means we do not borrow sugar, we don’t ask for flour, none of that.” And then with respect to the private space: “[...] you don’t have space. I spend most of my time in the room, but [...] I enjoy this oasis I made, which is a 4 square meter balcony.”*²⁹

3.1.2 MATERIALIZATION- BRICOLAGE IN ARCHITECTURE

Following the idea that the nesting ritual in the private space, many times involving practices such as *bricolage*, may come to impact the relation to the scale of the city, the references that I have chosen as a basis for the project do involve *bricolage* seen into different scale, ranging from that of the ensemble, the block, the public space or the detail. Their purpose is to emphasize the implication that the inhabitants have in the process of conception and execution of a project, which is that of providing the direct experience of the user related to space, but also the importance of the educational process, where the architect can transfer some of the knowledge to the users, providing for the tools necessary for a better use of spaces and architecture.

Participation is key to most of the selected projects, as well as the architect’s approach to analyze the existing patterns and behaviors which lead to *bricolage* and other transformations. The idea would be for the architect to take these into consideration as symptoms of existing problems, while also remaining aware of the fact that a project cannot come close to perfection while having complete control, but by allowing the inhabitants to come into possession of their living space, taking over the control of the architect.

In this way, through the consideration of *bricolage* as an integrated part of the architectural project, the architect comes to realize the limits that he/she has, and that the value of the profession might be found even in the situations where the architect can propose a project him/herself, help bring together the local actors involved and fully support the initiatives of these people along their process of development of the project.

²⁹ Fragment from an interview, part of the documentary series Bucharest Housing Blocks ep. 1- Blocks-Ronita, <https://bucharesthousingstories.ro/episodes/blocks/>

The Architect as professional implementing an
incremental approach in the project
the case of Elemental



The project of Quinta Monroy, by Elemental, provides the possibility
for the inhabitants to build half of the house themselves
(Source: Archdaily)

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

In the international context, *bricolage* has already started to become a part of the architecture discourse, in the sense that a project is able to acknowledge the informal practices that people feel the need to put at work in their own living environment. By taking this into account, some architectural projects have actually left people this opportunity and freedom to act on their own habitat, the architect providing the basic tools and guidelines, while allowing *bricolage* to take place or even encouraging it to develop.

I have chosen to look at four different applications of the idea of *bricolage* in contemporary architecture, which interested me either in the way they integrated *bricolage* as part of the incremental approach of the project, in the role of the architect and the manner in which the project was supervised and guided or in the scale variation and the way these projects represented possible translations into architecture of actions that are now taking place in the context of Bucharest.

The first analyzed project that integrated *bricolage* from its conception is represented by Elemental's Quinta Monroy, in Chile. It consists of a social housing ensemble of around 100 houses, built using the limit imposed by the subsidies from the Housing Policy, which normally would have permitted the building of only 30 houses. The shift in thinking the project started from considering the total amount of money available as being for the whole desired number of houses, taking them as a whole and not just one house as an individual unit. The project is remarkable through the innovative concept of offering the people "*half of a good house*", which comprised the necessary basis for living, into a unit of 36 m², while considering that the inhabitants would be able to build the other half by themselves, when they would dispose of the money and would need the extra space. In this way, the dwellers are provided with the loadbearing walls which are able to support the intervention later on. Each family has the freedom to complete their house in any way they wish, using the materials they have at hand, this flexibility being one of the aspects that manage to increase the value of the houses in the ensemble, contrary to the general situation of social housing, where value tends to decrease over time. Another positive aspect of the project consists in the fact that the architects sought to build on the same site where these people had been living illegally, in an improvised manner, and not displace them towards the outskirts, where they would be completely disconnected from the city and decrease the opportunity for them to integrate into the community. Also, the project proposes a collective space- "*an intermediate level that permits surviving fragile social conditions*"³⁰.

The project was finished in the year of 2004, and the years that follow have provided an opportunity to observe its evolution in time, its real achievements compared to the ones proposed in the conceptual phase, and the negative aspects that could be improved. In this sense, the main idea- allowing for 50% of the house to be self-built, is in fact not new, such expansions happening naturally in informal settlements.

³⁰ Archdaily, Quinta Monroy/Elemental, consulted on the 10th of May 2020, at <https://www.archdaily.com/10775/quinta-monroy-elemental>



The project of Quinta Monroy, by Elemental, once the process of appropriation took place (Source: Archdaily)

However, the project itself could be considered an illustration of a way in which these practices can be formalized, an incremental approach such as this one generating better outcomes from the point of view of the design. In exchange, the question regarding the importance of the aesthetics might arise, and whether the project delivers, in fact, an image that simply translates the same model of the previously existing *bricolage* into an architectural aesthetics, while the project might lack contact to its inhabitants, appearing as “*an example of a neighborhood generous builders create for the poor*”³¹. At the same time, the project seems to offer no quality in the collective space, the materials used are quite poor, while another important aspect is offered by the conditions of buying the house, often obliging the inhabitants to become in debt in order to afford it, while having to take care of their other needs of the family. However, for the purpose of the subject treating the practice of *bricolage*, a critique that becomes quite relevant is the lack of an empowerment process, which could have been achieved through consulting directly with the future inhabitants of the project, thus offering the possibility for the architect to understand their needs more clearly. The project is to be appreciated by involving the dwellers into the construction of their own house, however this process does appear only after the architect has finished its conception and construction, implying that, further on, the users do have their freedom to intervene, but only within the limits imposed by the architect, having to accept them without any previous notice. On the other hand, the building process could have been transformed into an educational one, precisely by involving the inhabitants. The opportunities offered by such an approach could benefit to both sides-architect and inhabitant, by offering insight into the particularities of their thinking, in which case the architect could have better understood the needs of the people and share the process of making a decision for determining the precise use of the public funds. At the same time, the inhabitants themselves could have profited from being involved into the construction process, which could have been a training, helping their reinsertion into society. Overall, while not denying the innovative aspects and the integration of the process of self-building, associated to *bricolage*, the process itself could have been improved by a closer contact with the future dwellers, supporting a community through a process of empowerment- “*Something that should be promoted much more is that housing is not an architectural product. ... It's the result of a social process, a cultural process.*”³²

The second project that became the most important reference relating architecture to the idea of *bricolage* is represented by the 2019 winner of the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture, the Transformation of 530 dwellings - Grand Parc Bordeaux by architects Lacaton & Vassal. Their project is represented by a rehabilitation of three inhabited blocks of social housing, originally built during the

³¹ Agencia Latinoamericana de Informacion.net, Half a good home isn't enough, consulted on the 10th of May 2020, at <https://www.alainet.org/en/articulo/176832>

³² Christophe LaLande, leader of the housing unit at U.N.-Habitat, the United Nations agency dedicated to human settlements, in The New Republic, Can Half a Good House become a Home?, consulted on the 10th of May 2020, at <https://newrepublic.com/article/134223/can-half-good-house-become-home>

The Architect offering an alternative
for a rehabilitation of collective housing
the case of Lacaton & Vassal



The winning project of the Mies van der Rohe Award 2019, the project of Lacaton & Vassal offers an alternative to the thermal insulation of the block, while creating also an extension of the private space (Source: e-zeppelin.ro)

1960's, that needed to become up to date with current building requirements such as energetic efficiency. The method applied for the renovation is a technique developed and previously applied on other projects by the same architects, namely adding an outer layer of space formed by a prefabricated structure, one that attaches to the façade of the building and offers an extra room for the apartments through a winter garden- an intermediary space between the heated rooms of the apartment and the exterior, one that can be use by the inhabitants in any way they prefer. While the project itself did not interfere with the loadbearing structure of the existing block, it does suppose the modernization of circulations and utilities, the entire project arriving at a significant improvement regarding energy consumption. The most significant transformation of the existing became the replacement of the old windows, reduced in surface, with large, sliding windows that were needed in order to open up the apartment to the newly added space. Another important aspect is that the inhabitants were able to continue staying into the apartment while the renovation was being done, through a detailed planning of the construction process done by the architects, who tried to make the process more efficient and less time consuming.

The significance of the project is increased by the fact that the rehabilitation of social housing has become a much discussed subject, becoming extremely significant also for the city of Bucharest, where such blocks occupy an important place in the housing landscape. The project in Bordeaux, through the added extra space, offers not only an extension of the flat surface, but also an alternative to thermal insulation, which in this case is decomposed into a series of elements such as the improved glazing that replaces the existing windows, the added layer of air that becomes an intermediary between inside/ heated and outside/cold, the insulating and reflective curtains, the outer polycarbonate panels³³. At the same time, this layering of elements that permit a play of transparency allows for flexibility in exposure, each inhabitant being able to choose between moment of concealing or revealing the intimate space of the apartment. This feature allows also for flexibility in use of the newly added space, which can be inhabited as an outdoors space integrated into the private apartment, or as an extra room, a variety which may result into surprising uses, as the architects noticed *"People place things in the winter gardens that we as architects would never expect. But you must have confidence in the inhabitants to use this capacity. We are always surprised by their creativity."*³⁴. However, the focus of the project into the thermal rehabilitation did allow for other aspects to receive less attention, particularly in the case of the common spaces, which became simple storages for bicycles, or even in the renovation of the exterior space, which did not reach its full potential. At the same time, the intervention could have profited from the involvement of the inhabitants, which

³³ GHENCIULESCU, Stefan, A Beautiful and Responsible Project. The Transformation of 350 Dwellings, the Grand Parc Neighborhood, Bordeaux, France, in Zeppelin #154, 2019, p.56-66

³⁴ Jean-Philippe Vassal for The Guardian, Grand Parc, Bordeaux review – a rush of light, air and views, consulted on the 10th of May 2020, at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/may/12/grand-parc-bordeaux-lacaton-vassal-mies-van-der-rohe-award>

The Architect as professional capable to enable the
use of available urban spaces
the case of Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée



The project Passage 56 as a space offered to the community in the neighborhood of St. Blaise, with the participation of the inhabitants
(Source: AAA, urbantactics.org)

at times find the added space quite grey and uniform, while others could have appreciated a consultation prior to the building, considering that some might not have wanted their apartments to suffer any changes³⁵. As a whole, the intervention does represent a very successful project, one that allowed a wider flexibility in the use of the apartments and an innovative manner of insulating the block as opposed to current tendencies, while the regulating, uniform outer aspect might be well justified by the block as part of the social housing park, and not privately owned by the inhabitants. Ultimately, the through this new façade created by the added structure, the ensemble receives also a new face/ new image, changing its perception from the outside on the neighborhood.

At the scale of the urban space, one project that integrates the users into its development is that of Atelier d'Architecture Autogeree, precisely the Passage 56, located in the Saint Blaise neighborhood in Paris.

The project began with an empty plot in the area that was considered to be unbuildable due to the fact that it was surrounded by other buildings which had windows towards this space. Thus, the architects decided that the function of the space come from the inhabitants of the neighborhood and associations active here. In this way, they were able to build a network of people interested in ecological construction and gardening, people that were brought together by the empty plot which was able to unite all of their fields of interest. Further on, throughout the building process, the terrain preserved its use and became a subject to explorations into the field of sustainable building. It was enclosed towards the street with a simple façade that can be opened, while a small room is found at the upper floors. The users have found needs to build other small equipment for their practices, such as a mobile greenhouse or a multifunctional wall on the perimeter, these processes being accompanied by the architects, who sought to continue their support for the development of the space. Due to this support, the Passage 56 has managed to organize the interested local actors and bring them together in a space to which most of them have the key, they can propose and organize activities, they share responsibilities with the other users, all while remaining under the principles of ecology and self-management. On the whole, even if the project is quite reduced in scale, the achievement of bringing people together to use and manage such a space themselves represents a most important feature. Nevertheless, this achievement is based on the will and needs of these actors, which became known once the architects decided to make the space available to the people, by opening it up for them, and find out what they would like to use it for. In total, the process of empowerment of the community is complete, through the gestures of asking for needs and attempting to answer them, while also giving the freedom to the users to act upon the space themselves. At the same time, another interesting aspect is the constant guidance of the architects, that remain available to the users for the future needs that they might have, this ensuring a certain efficiency in building, achievement of the desired function and guarantee for a better architectural outcome, while also putting in place an architectural education of the users-

³⁵ GHINITOIU, Laurian, A Beautiful and Responsible Project. The Transformation of 350 Dwellings, the Grand Parc Neighborhood, Bordeaux, France, in *Zeppelin* #154, 2019, p.66-71

The Implication of the Architect
at the scale of the object
the case of MVMA



The project Balkontuin enables the use of the balcony as a garden, through carefully thought objects that gain an architectural value
(Source: MVMA- michiel van mastrigt architectuur)

*“AAA continues to inspire uses and accompany local emergent initiatives, all while ensuring a knowledge transfer towards the future managers of the space.”*³⁶

Lastly, architecture can find its place even at the scale of the detail, into the objects that make possible a particular use of space. In this sense, an illustrative example is the practice of Michiel van Mastrigt, based in the Netherlands, in which he helps individuals and companies clarify their questions regarding a particular need and translate them into a spatial solution. His focus is mainly on small scale objects that solve a particular issue of the user, based on his/her needs and desires, objects that could be considered as ideas that are tested in a 1:1 model. Examples of his work are represented by objects that fulfill simple needs or improve existing practices, and may be creatively solved into apparently simple objects such as flower pots, or tables installed on the balcony of an apartment, which improve its functioning. Projects such as these, situated very closely to the individual, place the architect in contact with the daily needs of the people, enabling him/her to accompany the architectural project even in the smallest details. Due to these, it can be noticed that the architect can extend or limit his/her practice to vary in scale and level of detail, this being permitted through the will of the client, his/her needs and desires.

LOCAL EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Nowadays, even with all the people housed in a block that provided a solution from the point of view of comfort and utilities compares to the rural houses, the issue of installation in such spaces, and implicitly in the city, is still a necessity for these newcomers. And such, the need for an evolution of the housing block is demanded by these people, workers, students, families, be it people born and raised in the city or people who moved here.

Today we speak of Bucharest as an anomic city³⁷, a question raised by the Romanian sociologist Alfred Bulai, representing a city with a population that has lost faith in the public authorities and their administration, and thus seeks to take this responsibility onto themselves and organize it according to their rules. People, through their informal practices and their manifestations, demand this improvement of their quality of life. Thus, *bricolage* became a tool to make this happen, as a practice that solves people's issues

³⁶ Atelier d'Architecture Autogeree, Passage 56, consulted at the 11th of May 2020, at <https://www.urbantactics.org/projets/passage56/>

³⁷ Bulai, Alfred, „Decalajul normativ și anomie. Este București tiul anomic?” (The normative gap and anomie. Is Bucharest and anomic city?), in Mihăilescu, Vintilă (coord.), *Societatea reală, Of, București tii mei...*, vol. 2/2005, Paideia, București, 2005, quoted in ELIAN Tudor, *Bucureștiul Informal (Informal Bucharest)*, Phd thesis- “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, 2017

The Responsibility of the Architect regarding Public
Space and the Coagulation of a Community
the case of Studio Basar



The Library is reopening- subject of the project "City School 2015-2016: The Library from Militari" (Source: Studio Basar)



The Botanical Garden between the blocks of flats- subject of the project "City School 2 2016-2017: The Playground- Library from Militari"(Source: Studio Basar)



The Uverturii Garden- an opening in the fence- subject of the project "City School 2 2016-2017: The Playground- Library from Militari"(Source: Studio Basar)

without waiting anymore for the administration to do it. As such, it became a way to put forward and communicates people's needs, which could be solved in a better way with the implication of an architect, while still allowing the activity to take place and fulfil this necessary role of nesting into the private space, into the city. An increase of attachment to the flat would result in creating a bond with the city, and furthermore developing the consciousness of the community in the city and a care for urban space, be it part of the small scale city or the global one.

Ultimately, we could even consider that this is a responsibility of the architect. In his conference, Cristi Borcan of Studio Basar, a practice that is mainly based in Bucharest and works with this idea of *bricolage* and participation, he encourages the architects to take initiative. Illustrated in their work, the idea is that an architect does not necessarily have to wait for a commission and a client, but might take it as his responsibility to act and propose a project whenever he sees a need. In Bucharest, they are the practice that works at the level of communities, involving them into the design and building processes. They have proven that, even in a post-communist society, and even through small interventions such as a well-thought bench or a sitting space, architectural objects find the capacity to become places in the collective memory and generate communities around them. Their projects include sitting spaces in areas where they were a necessity, urban furniture that enhances the space between the blocks and encourages people to come together, multifunctional modules that are borrowed in order to organize various activities, or even urban interventions that support communities in certain neighborhoods of the city, helping them become more visible. They became involved in the environment of the blocks in an attempt to reactivate it, one such action being the project City School, which took place in two sessions, one concerning the reopening of a public library and raising awareness of the existence of the space, while also questioning the real needs and wishes of the inhabitants regarding this space. Once this space was opened to the neighborhood in its new form, the second editions took the initiative into the public, green space. One great achievement was the possibility to take down a part of an existing fence (with legal authorisation), installed by the public administration around a green space, and design a sitting area inside. At the same time, the project experimented with planting the existing green space, abandoned, together with the inhabitants and including the different generations living in the neighborhood. In this way, the projects hoped to attract attention towards the available spaces around the blocks of flats, their current state, but also their potential, once these spaces can be unlocked for the use of the people.

Another project that comes to deal with the common spaces in the block is a workshop organized by the Association DTM³⁸ along with a group of architecture students, in 2018, named Block.Unblock. It consisted about the renovation of the entrance of a block of flats, by giving it a personality and designing objects specifically for that place. Hence, the inhabitants, who disliked the space before and were quite

³⁸ The association Designers, Thinkers, Makers is a group that aims to support Romanian design, with a mission to improve life quality, having as tools architecture and design.- from the website of the association, consulted on 1st of June 2020, at <https://asociatiadt.ro/despre-noi>

The Questioning of the Program for
Thermal Rehabilitation
the case of Manopera architecture practice



Improving Tudor- a research installation done during an international architecture and urbanism workshop, in search for ways to rehabilitate the socialist blocks of flats, both physically and morally
(Source: Manopera.com)

ashamed of the way it looked, regained a space that is welcoming, and gives out a positive energy compared to the one before. The inhabitants were involved in the renovation of the space, by establishing priorities and budgets together with the professionals, and became also a resource for the projects, investing their time and skills into a better space for all neighbors.

Finally, a recent initiative challenges also the idea of the thermal rehabilitation of the blocks of flats, which are being insulated using polystyrene, through a national program destined for it. The initiative stems from the project that represented Romania at the 2018 Venice Biennale, where the pavilion presented spoke about the people living in the socialist blocks and their memory of the in-between free space. Further on, the architecture office Manopera, who took part in the project for the pavilion, questions the thermal rehabilitation of the blocks, emphasizing its superficial treatment of the problem. Inspired by the project in Bordeaux of Lacaton & Vassal, they organized a workshop, together with the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, where they explored the possibility of adapting a similar solution to the context of the Romanian collective units. At the same time, they launched the platform *bloculmeu.ro* (myblock.ro), which aims to do a survey amongst all people in Romania living in the blocks which might be interested in this type of different thermal rehabilitation.

To conclude, such initiatives in that started emerging in the national context are important because, in treating the subject of the blocks and the manner in which they can be brought up to date, they are in search for different solutions through which they can achieve the best results. Moreover, their trial to involve the inhabitants of such spaces by obtaining their opinion and participation shows an understanding that this bottom-up approach is much needed when transforming the living spaces of these people, and their involvement guarantees a higher rate of success.

3.2 THE SITE- DRUMUL TABEREI

3.2.1 THE PLANNING OF AN IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD

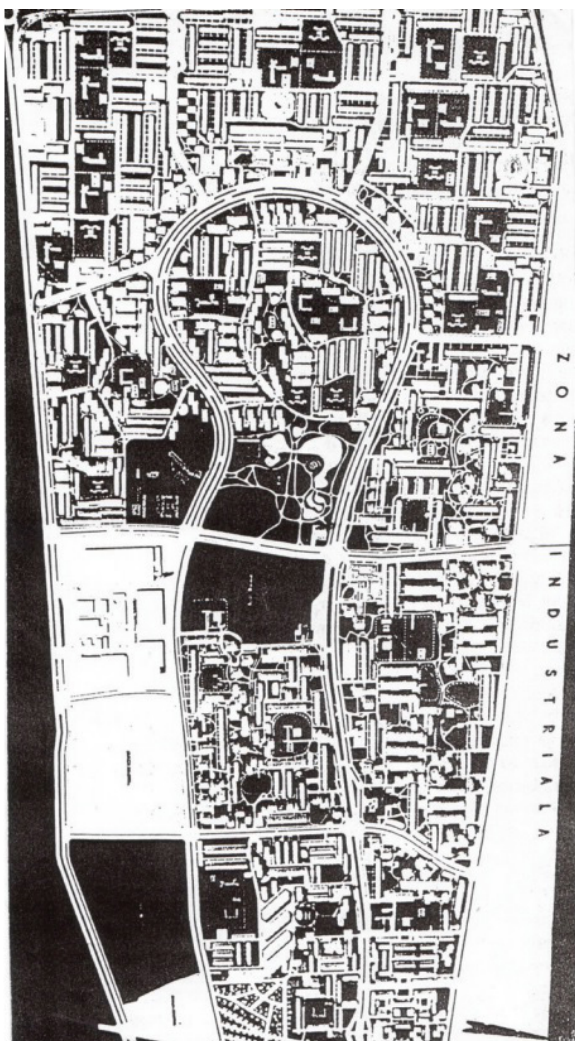
*“When we first moved here, they had already built the Favorit cinema
and some other blocks around it. [...] Yes, we would sunbathe in front of the block...
there were these large ditches and earth piles left from the digging...
Everyone would sunbathe there.”*
-M.S., age 62, living in Drumul Taberei

39

The neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei* is found at the eastern part of Bucharest, and represents the first large scale collective housing ensemble executed during the communist regime. I have chosen to focus on this area due to its characteristic features that were planned from its very beginning, and that make it representative for such projects at their time, whilst also creating an interesting framework for observing informal practices that appeared here after the revolution in 1989, which manage to bend the rigid frame in which the inhabitants found themselves into. In this way, the inherent features of urban planning and architecture, but also the human factor and the transformations it generated, offer in *Drumul Taberei* an environment that could be a good host for innovative changes in the lived space.

The planning of the project came after a shift in the architectural thinking of the time, which happened after the year of 1954, when the speech of Nikita Khrushchev proclaimed a turn in the socialist architecture of the time. This new way of doing architecture was meant to put into work the technique of prefabrication at a large scale, becoming a reason for a new aesthetics, derived strictly from the construction technique. In Romania, considering that the industry to produce such elements was not very advanced at that moment, and took some years of adjusting, along with the formal acceptance of the principles it proposed, effective changes in the architecture and urban planning could be noticed some years later, beginning from the 1960's.

³⁹ Quote from an interview comprised in the study by STAICU Mihaela, *Amprente...: o incursiune antropologica asupra locuirii din marile ansambluri: cazul Drumul Taberei* (Impressions...: an anthropological incursion on dwelling in the large ensembles: the Drumul Taberei case), Bucharest: «Ion Mincu» University Press, 2013, p. 32



A model of the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei*, 1971
(Source: STAICU Mihaela, *Imprints...*)

The project for *Drumul Taberei* was the first of its kind, in construction since the end of the 1960's, while it was already approved since the year of 1962 by the leader at that time, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. As it was such an innovative and important project, it is said that its execution was closely followed, while the materials put into work seem to be of better quality than the ones used in the following ensembles of this kind, with the leader becoming involved into the smallest details such as finishing materials or the curtains required⁴⁰.

From the point of view of the urban planning, the new direction imposed a particular unit for composing such large ensembles, namely the *microraión*, defined as “a basic urbanistic unit, a housing ensemble conceived organically, whose population is bound together through social and cultural institutions of daily use, thus representing the smallest, complex, structural unit with an important degree of autonomy”⁴¹. These units were meant to be isolated one from the other through the use of the main boulevards, while at their interior most of the circulation would remain pedestrian. The entire ensemble was divided by the boulevard nowadays called the “loop” and hosted, at its centre, the park and other public amenities, all structured on a transversal axis. Each unit would include its particular types of blocks and most of the functions needed for daily life, hence developing a particular atmosphere in each one of them, a distinction that can still be noticed even today.

However, this socialist urbanism was quite inspired by the modernist principles, and so, the project of *Drumul Taberei* put into place, in a quite successful manner, some of the ideals that modernists had enunciated some years earlier. In this way, *Drumul Taberei*, around the 1970's, seems to be part of a modernist dream, with perfectly built rectangular blocks, some of them low, integrating into the landscape, others towering high, with functional zoning between living areas, schools and public services. The boulevards were large enough to host car traffic (which not many people could afford at the time), and the whole built environment was meant to be seen as a great park, with trees and green spaces present everywhere. The fact that this materialization of the modernist principles took place in this neighborhood was favored by the fact that the communist regime was able to impose the new principles, inspired by the soviet manifesto proclaimed by Khrushchev. However, an important difference compared to the Western Europe regarding the modernist principles was that, in the case of Romania, these collective blocks were not social housing, but meant for everybody, as the communist ideology proclaimed. In this way, the population in the blocks was a heterogeneous one, imposing an equality between the different social classes, all coming to live under the same roof.

When looking in more detail, the blocks in the neighborhood can be noticed to have particular finishing, from brick to colorful ceramics, and range from 4 stories to 10

⁴⁰ STROE Miruna, *Locuirea între proiect și decizie politică: România 1954-1966* (Dwelling in between project and political decision: Romania 1954-1966), Bucharest: Simetria, 2015

⁴¹ P. Derer in STAICU Mihaela, *Amprente...: o incursiune antropologică asupra locuirii din marile ansambluri: cazul Drumul Taberei* (Impressions...: an anthropological incursion on dwelling in the large ensembles: the Drumul Taberei case), Bucharest: «Ion Mincu» University Press, 2013, p. 17



The neighborhood of Drumul Taberei- a postcard from the 1960's
(Source: via.bucuresti)

stories high, the lower type being most present. This can easily be justified through the fact that these blocks of 4 stories have been found to be the most efficient from the point of view of the building costs involved, most of them being composed of prefabricated panels, a system easily seen in the façade composition⁴², while the higher types still used the monolithic structure, done through pouring the concrete directly on site.

The typology of the blocks allows for some variations, each of the types being distinguished through its letter, which along with the number determines a part of the address. Especially after the fall of communism, when the apartments could be sold, the letter associated to the type of block has become particularly relevant in the real estate market, with people becoming more and more aware of the particular features of the type which might suit them better. The large majority of the blocks provide for apartments with one or two bedrooms, while some areas include also blocks with three bedrooms. From the point of view of the density, when speaking of the more frequent 4 stories high buildings, these sum up multiple entrances which repeat around six to eight times in length, each entrance comprising from nine to twenty apartments, no elevator. In the case of the higher buildings, these consist most often of just one entrance, having around six apartments per floor, this time with one or even two elevators. Particular features of these blocks might include garages at the ground floor, some functional common spaces and even atriums for more light. However, the density and especially the height of the block seem to be factors that influence the community life and the informal practices that the inhabitants might share. Hence, actions into the common and public spaces or even the simple maintenance of these spaces is much more present in the cases where there is less density and the building is lower, whilst these practices become more diluted when looking at higher and more crowded places.

Another interesting aspect which affects the life of the neighborhood even today is represented by the process of moving inside the area and the option to buy the apartments. Since the process of occupying the apartments in this neighborhood began around the 1970's, when the mass demolitions in Bucharest has not yet started, most of the people moving inside *Drumul Taberei* did so willingly, often representing an improvement compared to the previous living place. At the same time, when people started to move in, the apartments could still be bought from the state, either by paying the entire sum of money, or by taking a credit. This implies that the area became a place with a big majority of home owners, many of these even intellectual people (engineers, doctors, lawyers etc.) who had chosen the neighborhood due to its proximity to the work place, compared to the other ensembles of this type which were built later and did not allow for the purchase of the apartment anymore, the only possibility being its renting from the state. Even in those situations when people would arrive later in *Drumul Taberei* and could not buy their place anymore, many of them took the opportunity to do so after 1989. In the present, the neighborhood remains in its majority made out of home owners, even if in some cases the younger generations have replaced the ones who had

⁴² but which has been hidden nowadays with the technique of thermally insulating the blocks using polystyrene



The center of Drumul Taberei 34- a postcard from the 1960's
(Source: via.bucuresti)

first arrived here, while in a smaller proportion there are also apartments for rent, which sometimes do introduce a foreign element into the familiar atmosphere of the block.

Lastly, at the scale of the neighborhood, each independent unit did provide for functions such as education for all age levels, and other functions such as healthcare or entertainment. A landmark in this landscape, some of these spaces became representative for the neighborhood and very well known amongst the inhabitants and even outsiders. Such points of interest were mostly placed along “the loop” and were most often commercial centers mixed with entertainment, such as the cinema *Favorit*, the commercial ensemble of *Drumul Taberei 34* or the market hall named *Moghioros*. However, the current situation of these poles is degrading, much as the general quality of life in the area, the cinema was demolished, the ensemble of *Drumul Taberei 34* is now just banks and pharmacies, while the market hall still functions in the form of a large, close hall, while street commerce is hidden in the back.

3.2.2 THE CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE PREMISES

Along with the documentation about the birth and life of this neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei*, it is interesting to notice the current situation of the neighborhood and how do people inhabit it nowadays, and relating it to the first people that came here. The fact that these people who first arrived are still present and even willing to tell their stories of how they saw the blocks rise under their eyes and how they led their life in such a new environment represents a valuable source of domestic history. However, this might not mean that there is much time to recover these stories.

The age average in the neighborhood is on the rise nowadays, with many of these first people still living here. And, while this might often mean a calmer community and a better care for the common areas, this does predict a transition that has in some places already begun, one between the first owners of the apartment (the first generation inhabiting the block) and their successors (the second generation). This translates into the arrival of a new population that may be willing to live better in the blocks of flats, being open to new ideas and solutions that might improve their lifestyle. At the same time, the neighborhood does provide for a good environment for families with children, who may choose to move here due to the calm atmosphere and the services offered, amongst them the kindergartens and schools that became quite well known throughout the entire city.

A change of in lifestyle has already begun in the area, when, with the freedom gained after 1989, the blocks began changing their appearance through *bricolage*, which became a tool for closing the balcony, a much needed measure due to the cold weather. Also, with the recovery of private property, the apartment became a valuable asset and allowed for changes in whichever way the owners desired, restricted later only by



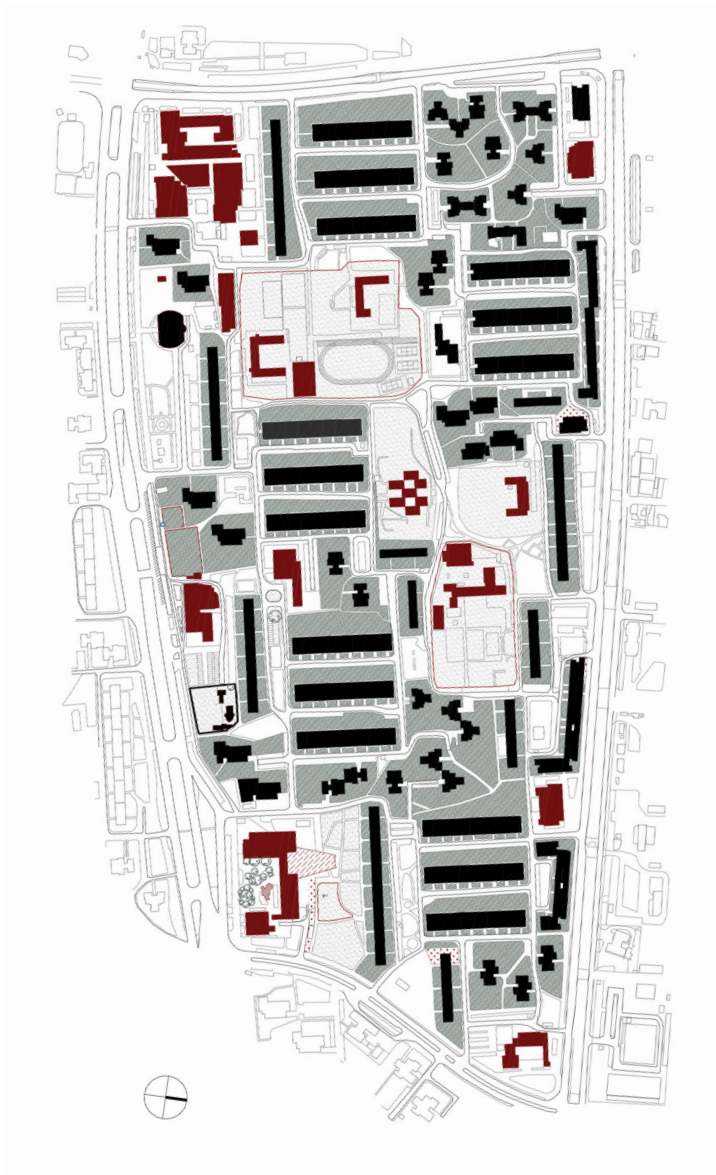
The center of Drumul Taberei 34- the loss of a landmark, today
(Source: by the author)

the obligation to obtain a building permit. *Bricolage* came out into the green space and allowed for its appropriation, and came all the way down to the streets, where improvised commerce was installed by the people. Thus, along with the existing functions provided by the initial plan, the neighborhood after the revolution began a search for life in the streets, as a manifestation of freedom.

This atmosphere of improvisation and impression of patchwork is still preserved in some areas of the neighborhood, but has become rarer due to the latest initiatives from the public authorities to insulate the blocks of flats, but also to control the public domain surrounding the blocks by fencing it. Through this, the initial idea of continuous green space is nowadays annulled by the sequence of fences that are being put up everywhere, from the public domain, to the public functions and the privatized spaces. The insulation of the block seems to come with both of these “benefits”, aiming for thermal insulation using polystyrene, while also dealing with the public space after these works are done. The consequence is that the blocks come to lose all architectural qualities that they were provided in their original phase (particular finishing, other details such as the railings, or even the desired expression of the structural system in the case of prefabricated blocks) while getting a new envelope in a toxic material that allows for the inhabitants to pick their colors of the façade, most often resulting in very unique combinations which reduce the overall unity of the neighborhood. The last phase of the intervention is having the green space fenced all around, a fact that seems to reduce the informal practices in these areas. The program seems to advance with an alert pace, many areas in the neighborhood getting prepared to become part of it while some have already been rehabilitated. The reality of these rehabilitations is that they do, indeed have a positive impact on the energetic performance of the block and reduce the monthly charges, but it is an intervention that tends to deteriorate over time, especially if it is done with poor materials.

On the other hand, the value of these apartments has increased in the past years and continues to do so, and is caused also by the construction of the new subway that will connect the neighborhood to the rest of the city. A project that people have waited for many years, the subway has finally begun to materialize in the urban landscape of the area. However, the works for this have had other consequences. Placed along the main boulevard, the working sites have interfered and dismantled with what were before green spaces towards the street, small/improvised commerce and places that people frequented often. As such, the subway works once finished, these pieces of land will be in need of remodeling, hopefully in a way that is oriented towards the people.

Lastly, there are also initiatives that concern the community life of the area, and projects in development to make use of the existing space towards this common use. Such situations are present in the cases of the former landmarks previously mentioned such as *Favorit* cinema- which was demolished and will be replaced by a new cultural center, while in the case of *Drumul Taberei 34*, which had half of it demolished, it will soon reestablish its commercial function through a new project, that of a commercial pole on ground floor only, in the shape of several pavilions. At the same time, there is also a neighborhood Hub open since 2019, a space that includes co-working, meeting



Microrraion 1- perception

The image of the neighborhood today preserves somewhat the functional zoning planned from the beginning, offering also a very green image with several cores of public functions

(Source: drawing done by the author)



Microrraion 1- reality

The situation on site presents the extent of the public domain, which often becomes a restricted area through the fencing process, reducing the possibility of the inhabitants to extend their private or common spaces towards this unused area.

(Source: drawing done by the author)

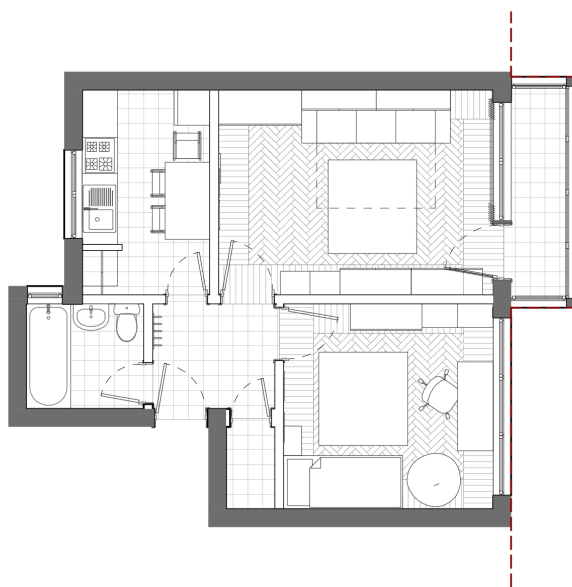
rooms, as well as spaces for workshops or other activities destined for the community in the area, found in a commercial center. This space is the result of a survey amongst some inhabitants of the area, which have expressed their need for such a space. Hopefully, this project, still at the beginning, will gain more popularity amongst the people living in the area, and will also contribute to the coagulation of a community bound by a civic spirit, such as Civic Groups⁴³ that have already begun to form.

3.3 **DECOMPOSITION - A TOOLKIT** PREMISES FOR A PROJECT

Taking into consideration the needs extracted from the interviews of the inhabitants in the block of flats, a rehabilitation of these buildings that aims to give an answer to these demands needs to respect also the existing legislation that concern them. As such, the proposed intervention, aside from the social component given by the dwellers, is restrained by the legal framework which defines the spaces in these blocks.

Amongst these restrictions, the property regime, updated and consolidated after the fall of communism, represents a crucial aspect that reflects also in the use of the spaces and the responsibilities that the inhabitants may have regarding these spaces. At the same time, considering the current conditions on site and the initiatives that have begun to materialize and develop actions which impacting the environment of the blocks, there can be noticed two different sources for these actions- one that comes from the administration of the cities, and another that comes directly from the people concerned. These two different types of organizations may appear to be many times in conflict, often opposing two types of approaches regarding new initiatives. The administration often puts forward a top-down approach, one that may seem just superficial problem solving, while the inhabitants represent a bottom-up strategy, one that attempts to identify and solve the real problems, seeing that they are directly affected. However, these two initiatives do not need to be in permanent opposition, seeing that both may have common goals, and it may be possible to imagine a collaboration between these entities, one where each of them can be heard.

⁴³ In the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei* there are already a few Civic Groups active: The Civic Group *Callatis Drumul Taberei* (since 2010), the Group “*Let’s Save the Drumul Taberei Park*” (since 2014), the Initiative Group “*Favorit*” (since 2010). They are all part of the Civic Network of Bucharest, along with others in the city, each of them addressing particular issues in their neighborhood and pushing for a better communication between the public authorities and the inhabitants. –from the blog of the Civic Group Callatis Drumul Taberei, consulted on the 26th of May 2020, at <http://callatis-drumultaberei.blogspot.com/2016/04/s-lansat-reteaua-civica-bucuresti-din.html#more>



——— Limit of the private property

■ Common property

- - - - - Limit surface towards the
public space

The three types of property

Scale of the Private Space

(Source: by the author)

Understanding these restrictions, as well as the emerging initiatives and the projects that already take place around the blocks, represented the necessary conditions that needed to be understood prior to formulating a response to the needs stated by the people in the interviews. In this way, the needs, desires, as well as the frame imposed by law and current realities on site consist of the toolkit- the elements that shape the architectural solution.

3.3.1 THE TYPES OF PROPERTY IN A BLOCK

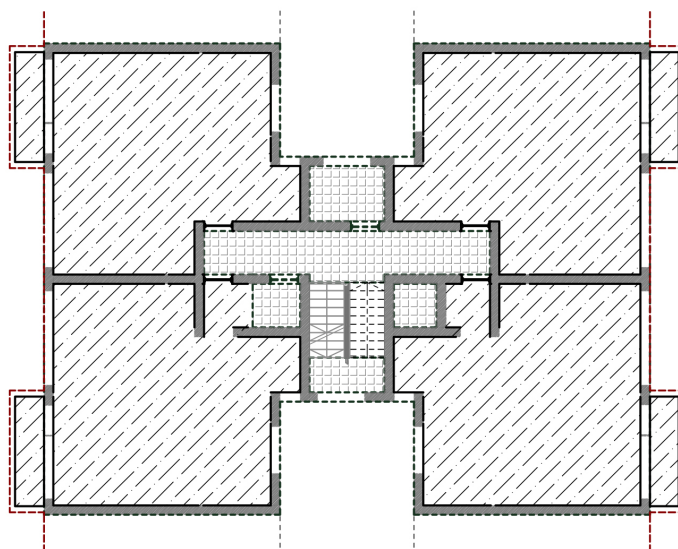
During the communist regime, which dictated the construction of the majority of these socialist housing ensembles that people live in today, the property regime was very clear- everything was in the property of the state, with rare exceptions of people who managed to buy the flat in the early years⁴⁴. People were simply renting their living space, while state institutions or undertakings would handle the housing fund themselves, imposing the appearance that should have been maintained and possible interventions allowed, which were very few.

Nowadays, with the recovery of private property, the blocks have been split between all the owners of the flats, who have been allowed to buy the apartment in which they have been living after 1989, while also making them an object on the real estate market, one that could be sold or rented to anybody. Becoming a private property has also enabled changes that can be made, either on the inside- tearing down walls, even if sometimes they might be part of the loadbearing structure, or towards the outside- the process of enclosing the balcony and thermal insulation just on the perimeter of one's own apartment, leading to the impression that people seem to consider this outside façade of the apartment as a private space⁴⁵, a fact that results in a patchwork of colors and materials on the facade of the block.

But, along with this private property, the law also imposes a type of common property regarding all the elements of the block that have a common use, but not only. According to the current legislation, the term of common property in the context of the block implies:

⁴⁴ *"The apartments could be bought either by full payment or installments through a loan from the CEC (nowadays the CEC Bank) ... the ones who could pay in cash had priority in choosing the apartment"* (M.S. bought an apartment in this way in 1971, now retired)- an interview from 2012, from the book STAICU Mihaela, *Amprente...: o incursiune antropologica asupra locuirii din marile ansambluri: cazul Drumul Taberei* (Impressions...: an anthropological incursion on dwelling in the large ensembles: the Drumul Taberei case), Bucharest: «Ion Mincu» University Press, 2013, p.25

⁴⁵ *"The phenomenon of local thermal insulation is indicating the fact that the façade is understood by the inhabitants as part of the private property (contrary to the law) upon which they can act in various ways and most of the times without a building permit, eventually with the approval of the neighbors or the block association, and that the block is firstly a sum of apartments and not a whole, defined by a collective or communitarian way of living."* - ELIAN Tudor, *Bucurestiul Informal* (Informal Bucharest), Phd thesis- "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, 2017, p. 162



Private property



Private property



Common surfaces



Limit surface towards the
public space

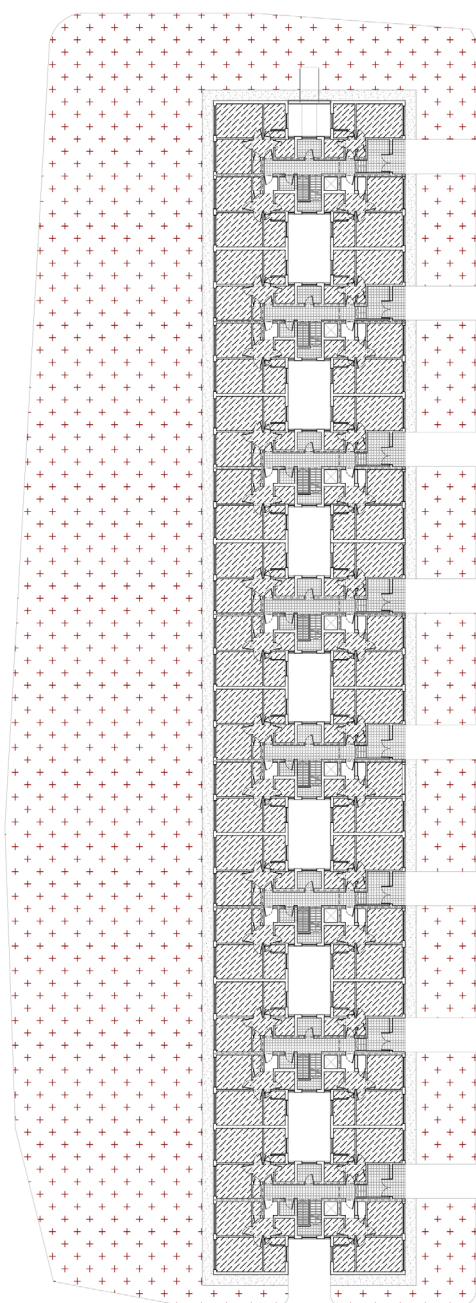
1. the land on which the building is placed, composed by the built surface but also the unbuilt surface necessary, according to the nature and destination of the building, which insures its normal exploitation;
2. the foundation, the inner courtyard, the loadbearing structure, the perimeter walls and the ones that are separating two properties and/or common spaces, the roof, the terraces, the staircase and its hall, the distribution halls, the cellars and underground spaces that have not been compartmented, water tanks, the own central heating of the block and elevators;
3. the installations for water and sewage, electrical, communications, heating and gas from the service-pipe to the supply, etc.;
4. the other assets which, according to the law or by agreement of the parties, are destined for common use;
5. the smoke evacuations and air vents, as well as spaces destined for washing and drying are considered to be common exclusively for those parties that make use of these according to the project of the building⁴⁶.

However, real life situations often see the disappearance of these common spaces, either by transforming their original destination into a private space, or appropriation by certain neighbors which have turned these unused spaces into their own. So, while a common use for these spaces may have existed at some point, nowadays, with the privatization of all spaces, inhabitants tend to turn any possible part of the common space into their own, by obtaining the accord from the block administration, or not. These kinds of interventions may include appropriation of parts of the hallways, buying a part of the terrace for adding an upper floor to an apartment at the last floor, or even enclosing the part of the exterior circulation space in front of the apartment at the ground floor.

Towards the outside, the law includes into the common property the circulation around the block, connecting it to the public road, which ensures its normal access and use. Thus, the law declares all green space around these blocks as being public domain (but not public space), the property of the administration, which is supposed to take care of it. Again, in real life situations, it can be noticed that, with no concern of the authorities for this public domain, the inhabitants have slowly began to appropriate it and transform it into their own garden, by growing flowers, placing a bench and a table, but also a fence that makes a clear statement of this newly acquired “private” public property. Most often, these interventions come to live quite a long life, these unauthorized operations usually do not bother the administration, who sees its land being taken care of by the people.

These interventions take place regularly, most of the times without any permit or license to intervene in this public domain, a work of those who are either not knowing, not caring or maybe brave enough to step outside their property. Also, many of these interventions fall into the field of *bricolage*, in the sense that they are mainly improvised projects, done by people that have just the knowledge of what they need or want, a vague idea of how they might get there, and an inventory of tools and materials they

⁴⁶ The New Civil Code, Book III, Title II, Chapter IV, Section 3, Article 649



-  Private property
-  Common property-interior
-  Common property-exterior
-  Public domain

The three types of property
Scale of the Block

(Source: by the author)

might find around their house. Yet, this *bricolage* that has become a way of altering the environment that people live in remains a tool for just some of them, who use it mostly as a means to enrich their own, personal universe, whilst taking from the spaces in the common property. In this way, the society of a block has developed in the direction of individualism, with people taking for themselves this space that belongs to everyone, but in fact to no one.

It might be argued that, considering the historical context of these blocks and their initial purpose of creating a collective habitat of anonymity, when in fact the population was a heterogeneous one, in need of expressing their own background and character, this resulting patchwork seen in the facade and the public spaces has come to truly reflect this mixture of people that were put here together. This existing *bricolage* done up until the present has remained mostly at the scale of the individual unit, done separately and not by everyone, augmenting the power of the individual and opposing the coagulation of a possible community by enforcing the belief that each man is on his own. These individualistic interventions concern mostly the interior of the apartment, be it renovations or alterations of the existing walls (seeing that these interventions sometimes may touch on the structural walls, and that these are part of the common property, it comes to be a concern for everybody), closing of the ventilation shafts in order to gain an extra space, enclosing the balconies in order to enlarge the interior, insulation of the facade, the last two consisting often of uncorrelated actions between the different owners, offering this patchwork towards the public domain.

To continue, the question might be what happens with the scale of the common spaces. Here, there could be two scenarios: it is either that the neighbors arrive to appropriate this space in different ways, either by enclosing it or building it, in which case this common space feeds the expansion of the individual and cancels the possibility of a common use; or, on the other hand, it might be a shy representation of each neighbor in this space, in an attempt to nurture and enhance it in whatever way they can, giving in this way plants or old pieces of furniture that might fill in the emptiness, or simply creating a garden or a sitting space for all to use. This scale of the common spaces is often touched by *bricolage* that serves the individual, but other attempts have come to contradict it, showing the need for communication and working together. Still, these acts of kindness towards the shared space remain quite limited, being offered by some and seeing few responses in return.

At last, *bricolage* takes upon another scale- that of the public domain, the one that has been abandoned by the administration in charge of it, and who comes to host pieces of gardens and green space done by the inhabitants, either continuing to impose privatization, or creating a space for the community. However, in this case, seeing that the terrain around the block belongs to the administration, it is always under the threat of sudden changes, with situations ranging from decisions to modify a green space and turn it into an asphalt street, or even finding the terrain to be sold to a private investor, willing to build in between the blocks. Taking this into consideration, it seems that without a change in the property status of this land, the green space of the blocks remains in danger.



The Program of Thermal Rehabilitation put to work in the neighborhood of Drumul Taberei, creating the image of a veil covering the existing facade (Source: by the author)

Finally, the fact that the block does bring together these three types of property provides for an important set up for a possible intervention. As seen from history and present times, private property, regained in the past 30 years, still has a great importance in the mentality of the people, who are many times in search to enhance or enlarge it in any possible way. However, in most cases, this private property comes to overshadow the common one, which remains unused, leading to abusive appropriations by the inhabitants. The communities in the block have reduced these common spaces to their minimum, these coming into discussion only when dealing with the common expenses that they imply, any needed repairs, while a new action is represented by the thermal insulation of the block, in which case the owners committee have to come together and choose the colors in which they want the block to be painted. Beyond this financial responsibility, there is no other conception of these spaces in terms of their surface and potential use, which in the end could benefit each person in the block.

3.3.2 THE PUBLIC INITIATIVES

Today, the administration has developed the Scheme for Thermal Rehabilitation, a public program that promises to thermally insulate the blocks in the areas where it is enabled. This comes after a long period of time where people have expressed this need in their own interventions on the block façade- previously by enclosing the balcony themselves, often in an improvised manner, or nowadays by calling on specialized firms which deal with this kind of insulation and doing it just for themselves. Both images can reunite on the same façade of the same block, somehow expressing the financial status of the person living inside, but giving a poor image on the whole, while in some cases the insulation comes to be not so effective.

Thus, the newly developed program for thermal insulation has come as a solution for all people living in the blocks, and as a new threat to their architectural image. The program began financing such projects since the year of 2008, while profiting from European funds since 2017⁴⁷. Briefly, the process for becoming part of the program is as follows:

STEP 1- Identification and repertoire of the eligible blocks of flats- falls into the responsibility of the local authorities

STEP 2- Notification of the Block Association concerning the possibility to apply for the rehabilitation program

STEP 3- The decision of the assembly of the Block Association regarding the application- signing of the application and its inclusion in the annual program

STEP 4- Designing the rehabilitation works- contracting experts for the necessary services (technical evaluation, energetic assessment, the documentation for the building permit, the technical project, etc.), the Block Association divides and approves the expenses. The Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration verifies the

⁴⁷ As shown on the website of the Romanian Government, consulted on the 23rd of May 2020, at <https://data.gov.ro/dataset/reabilitare-termica>



The Program of Thermal Rehabilitation- before and after in the same place, at the same time, creating the image of a large scale patchwork (Source: by the author)

documents and submits the block into the program, conditioned by the funds allocated for this purpose from the state budget.

STEP 5- Execution of the project- the project on the blocks is done according to priorities, depending on the efficiency, number of apartments and age of the buildings. Once the execution has begun, the Ministry and the block Association are meant to begin the monthly payments, according to previous agreements.

STEP 6- Reception of the works once the project is done and the issue of the Energetic Performance Certificate of the building.

The technique used in insulation is the ordinary polystyrene, which is a combustible material that releases smoke and which does degrade in time if it is of low quality⁴⁸. This technique also implies that the polystyrene covers up any detail of the existing façade and reduces it to a flat surface, which is “enhanced” with the colorful paint, different in every block. In this way, some of them might choose neutral colors, while others might prefer strong ones or even a play of shapes and different colors on the facades. Either way, thermal insulation has achieved somehow the impression of a patchwork at the urban scale, eliminating that at the level of the block.

Regarding the expenses, today the program receives European funds which are non-returnable, providing for 60% of the total sum necessary for the projects. The remaining 40% is provided from the local budget of the City Hall, out of which 15% remains the investment of the public administration and 25% is to be recovered from the owners in the block through installments up to 10 years⁴⁹. The entire sum of money is meant to cover the expenses for the design phase, technical support and execution. Additionally, once the rehabilitation is done, the program includes the improvement of the access alleys and the space around the block, offering them a “modern look”⁵⁰. This translates into a fencing of the green areas around the block, allowing for an impression that the administration might finally take up the responsibility for these spaces and that the inhabitants should reduce their interventions upon these spaces, when in fact fencing them is the only action that takes place.

⁴⁸ In the previous interview with A, she shares an opinion regarding the rehabilitation done on her block, saying that the final finishing is alright, whilst the windows installed were cheap and of low quality. The rehabilitation reflects in her monthly charges, which are lower, but the windows that her parents installed were chosen by them in order to have a better quality.

⁴⁹ From the website of the City Hall of the 6th Sector, to which Drumul Taberei belongs to, consulted on the 18th of April 2020, <https://www.primarie6.ro/primarul-gabriel-mutu-se-tine-de-promisiune-incepe-reabilitarea-termica-a-blocurilor-din-sectorul-6/>

⁵⁰ “The local public authorities are under the obligation to elaborate, organize, supervise and control the application of multi annual programs regarding the improvement of the architectural and environmental quality of the buildings through the structural and architectural rehabilitation of the building envelope, in accordance to the urban plans and their corresponding local codes” -According to the law num. 153 from 2011, regarding the measures for increasing the architectural and environmental qualities of the buildings



Improving Tudor- a research for alternatives to the thermal rehabilitation of the socialist blocks (Source: Manopera.com)

To conclude, this program for thermal rehabilitation does indeed improve the energetic performance of the block, while offering the impression of a clean and modern appearance, but erasing, on the other hand, any trace of the previous *bricolage* that offered the façade its diversity and individuality of each inhabitant. However, the choice of colors and patterns that come to decorate the block restore the impression of patchwork at the scale of the neighborhood, one that is imposed this time by the program for rehabilitation and does not identify or represent the community in itself. Furthermore, it is a matter of time until the new façade begins to degrade due to the poor quality of the materials used in the execution. Even so, this technique that seems to rapidly take over the blocks of Bucharest might signal the need for an alternative method, one that might achieve more than the thermal insulation, while involving also the inhabitants of the block. In this context, the previously mentioned initiative of Manopera architects, who are experimenting with this alternative approach, becomes even more relevant considering that their research aims to spread the awareness regarding the superficial treatment of the existing program and the better solutions that already exist, through their online platform that hopes to find people interested to actually put such a project into practice.

Another scheme that might benefit the blocks is the recently created Program for Consolidation of Buildings labelled to be at risk caused by earthquakes. Bucharest is a city placed not far away from an important source of earthquakes, one that generated in the year of 1977 an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2, which caused massive destructions and important damages for all buildings in the city. Due to this, a system for cataloging these affected buildings was put into place, represented physically by the red dot, a mark that is present on all buildings which are the most at risk in case of a future earthquake. The blocks in the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei* do not belong to this category but, being built before 1977, should require at least a technical assessment of the structure in order to prepare for future earthquakes. The Program for Consolidation was recently created, and its priority is to rehabilitate older buildings that are in a much worse shape. However, once the program develops, funding might be allocated also towards the blocks of flats, seeing that their assessment and rehabilitation is important for the whole population living there.

3.3.3 THE EMERGING SOCIAL INITIATIVES

At the other end, that of the inhabitants, the public initiatives have begun to find their criticism in the voice of the Civic Groups that have begun to emerge in different areas of Bucharest. They are constituted by people who find themselves not satisfied by the environment in which they live in and come together in hope that a more powerful voice can generate changes along with the local authorities. At the same time, some situations have generated the coagulation of such groups when there was a need to protect certain objectives that were threatened by demolition or changes and were not respecting the law, making the people react and impose their point of view as those who have to live amongst the changes imposed.



Tei Community Center, a project done by Studio Basar together with the members of the «Lacul Tei» Civic Initiative Group, enabling them to be seen and organize workshops and activities around it
(Source: Studio Basar)

Such Civic Groups are found also in the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei*, and mostly ask for the administration to do its job when it comes to public spaces or roads and their maintenance. In other parts of the city, Civic groups have even managed to contest projects and protect certain buildings, such as the manifestation against the demolition of old industrial buildings, pushing also for their classification as architectural monument, or even the protection of public parks and gardens against abusive renovations.

In such cases, architects may find themselves in the position where they are capable to help such initiatives, such as the projects of the Lacul Tei Civic Centre⁵¹ working with the architecture practice Studio Basar, creating a community center out of a container, a space which enables the people to hold activities around it and attract attention to their cause. In these projects, the architect working with the Civic group is able to empower the community and support its development, resulting in a positive impact at the scale of the city.

CONCLUSION

The elements of the toolkit speak of current conditions, given both by the neighborhood, but also by the developing initiatives, of modernization of the city and improving the living conditions. However, if the voice of the people living within the city is not heard, the proposed interventions come to be the result of people who may have no contact or connection to the city itself, disregarding a reality that people are confronted with or will have to face once the projects are implemented. As such, the top-down approach of the administration finds a response in the bottom-up civic groups, while between them and in support of the inhabitants, the architects may come to support these communities by unlocking spaces and materialize their presence, enabling them to have a stronger voice, a more powerful presence and an even more important impact in the city.

⁵¹ « "Lacul Tei" Civic Initiative Group (LTCIG) - "a group of ordinary citizens living in "Lacul Tei" area that decided to try to change the living in the neighborhood" - is one of the civic groups that have emerged in Bucharest in recent years as a response to the opacity of the processes and mechanism that make up urban planning. Thus, ordinary citizens, supported by specialized NGOs, began to coalesce around current issues of their neighborhoods and claim their right to the city. « This community center came to exist based on the needs of a community, and the architects came in support of this, designing the space out of a maritime container, one that enables a multitude of activities around it and engages the local actors in the neighborhood. – from the website of the architectural practice Studio Basar, consulted on the 1st of June 2020, at <http://www.studiobasar.ro/?p=8284&lang=en>

4 THE PROJECT

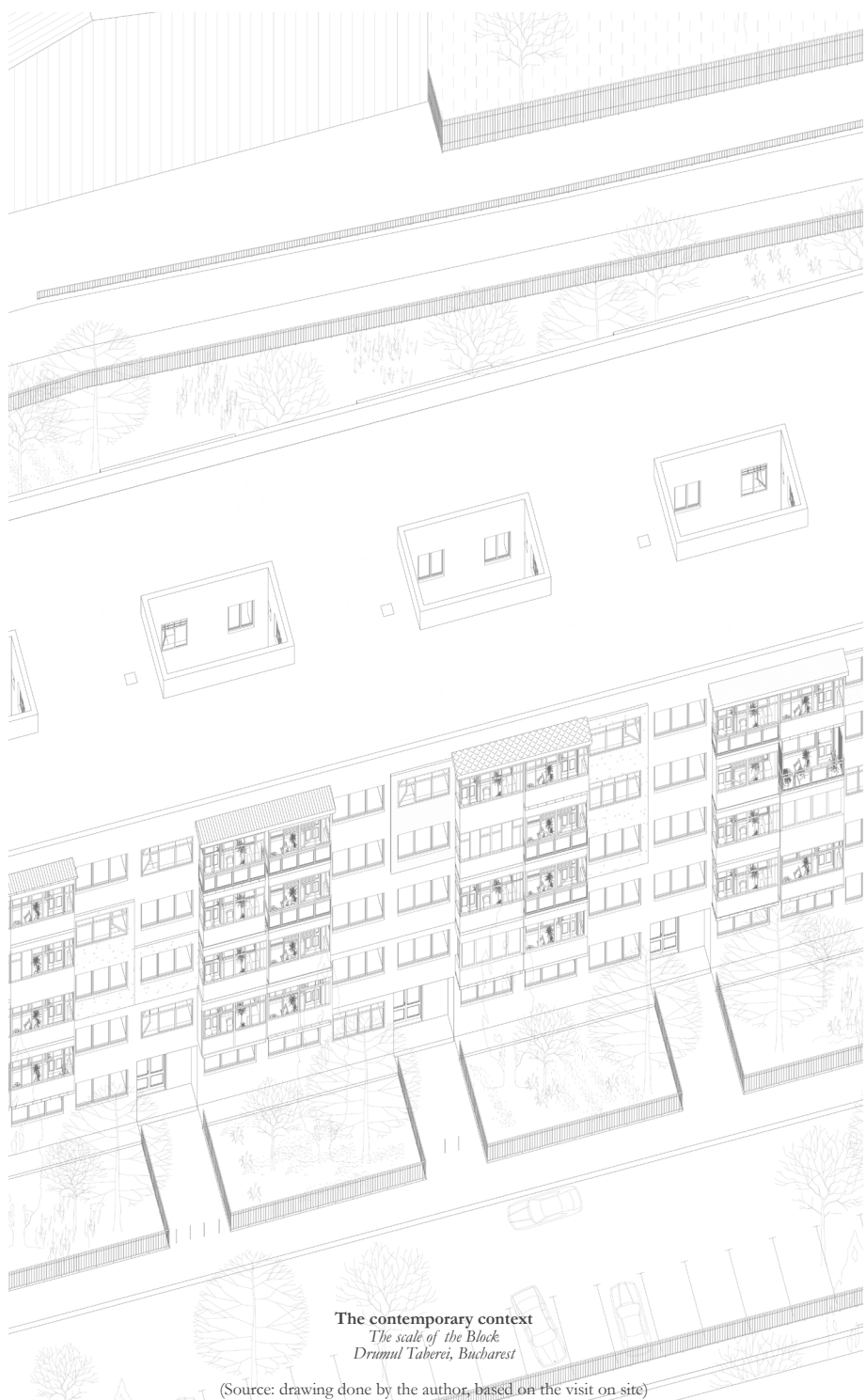
4.1 THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMICAL FACTORS

At last, the project comes to be the sum of the elements presented throughout the study, stemming from the needs and desires of the people living in the socialist blocks, but also relying of the legal frame and the existing initiatives already in development. In this way, elements such as the thermal rehabilitation, done in the manner of the inhabitants by enclosing an intermediary space- the balcony, became a central idea around which the other factors began to build up. With this phenomenon of thermal rehabilitation becoming available at a larger scale, the project brings forward the other issues that demand an improvement in the lifestyle of the people in the block, which, together with the thermal rehabilitation, are able to generate a much more complex and well adapted solution.

As such, the proposal takes the needs of the people inhabiting the apartments as a basis for its materialization. The obvious need for thermal insulation, so often met on site, along with other needs such as the presence of an open space, the need for privacy, independence, flexibility, green space, community life, mixed functions and the opportunity to work closer to home, but also that of personal expression and nesting in the space of the block became central elements which, crossed with other imposed restrictions, result in a solution that starts from the inhabitants and meets with the administration, a bottom up approach.

At the same time, the proposal takes into account the setting offered by the neighborhood of *Drumul Taberei*, the situation regarding the population living here and the emerging social initiatives. Thus, considering that the neighborhood was a place where the first inhabitants arrived mostly by choice during the 1970's, and taking into account that many of them are still living here today, the neighborhood does offer a good environment for families with children, in search for a calm area that also disposes of education functions already on site. Also, the fact that the age average is quite high at the present meant that, in the years to come, the apartments owned by the first generation that lived here will face a transfer process towards the second generation, one that will bring younger people in the neighborhood, and possibly a new desire for an improved way of life. Because of this shift, it is possible that the area will face a process of population renewal, some of which might actually be returning to their childhood home, or others who might come to sell or rent the apartment, again bringing other categories of people in the neighborhood.

Together with this social process, the existing initiatives funded by the Government, such as the thermal rehabilitation program, might become tools for the inhabitants to improve their living environment. Seeing that the thermal rehabilitation supposes also a technical assessment of the building, these blocks that already resisted



The contemporary context

*The scale of the Block
Drumul Taberei, Bucharest*

(Source: drawing done by the author, based on the visit on site)

a few earthquakes could be evaluated for existing damages and become a subject for structural reinforcement, a process that could extend the life of the building.

However, the most important factor that the proposal aims to introduce into the entire process is that of coagulation and empowerment of a community. As a lesson learnt from international examples who either lacked or based their intervention on the community, the proposal hopes to shift the mentality of the inhabitants in the socialist blocks from that of many individual, separate units sharing a common frame, to that of one complete and complex living unit which relies on life in a community. As such, the project is meant to reveal the potential of this third type of property- the common property, one that seems to be neglected or undervalued at the present, but one that could become an important part of life in a block, once it is no longer seen as small amounts of private property to which each inhabitants has a claim, but as a whole surface open for exploitation in the interest of the community.

Finally, it is this common property that gives the value of the project, who seeks to take advantage of it and enhance it, whilst building up the community of the block around it. The exploitation of this common ground implies that the people living in the block become aware of the importance of this property and their responsibility towards it, while also realizing that, in the current situation where bricolage in the block has already taken advantage of every private area available, it is now through the common property, and implicitly with the community, that the lives of each individual can be improved. As such, the block becomes a complex unit integrating and valuing all three types of property- private, public and common, the latter becoming the support for nesting not only in the private space, but also finding one's place in a community, and lastly, in the city.

4.2 **THE STRATEGY**

FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COMMUNITY TO NEIGHBORHOOD

The project proposes an alternative to the existing thermal rehabilitations of the socialist blocks, aiming to comprise not only the insulation, but a more complex solution for people's needs and desires. Based on the presented Toolkit and existing premises, the proposal aims not to erase, but to enhance the practice of bricolage, by becoming an extra layer of space which is open towards this informal practice, an important part of the nesting ritual in a space.

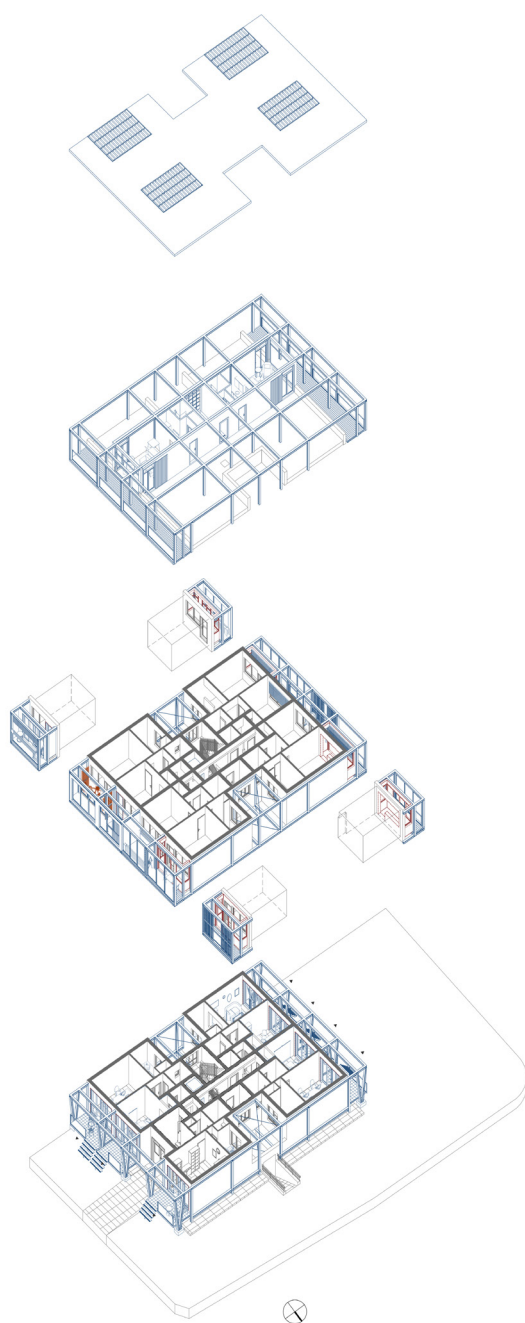
Taking inspiration from the works done by the people themselves on the block-enclosing the balcony in order to insulate the apartment, but also from the reference of Lacaton & Vassal block rehabilitation in Bordeaux, the intervention aims to attach a metallic structure to the existing block, one that would be independent and have no impact on the building. As a support structure, this addition is meant to offer the base for a thermal rehabilitation and a structural consolidation, whilst becoming also a space that can be appropriated by the inhabitants in any way they wish and at any moment they have the possibility to do so. The intervention proposes a slight enlargement of the common circulation around the block, within the limits imposed by the law, and places itself right on this common domain, thus implying a common ownership.

The case study for this project is the type P block in Drumul Taberei, found in the interviews as the home of A, a typology that is the only one presenting cantilevered balconies, implying a more complex treatment of the façade in order to integrate them in the intervention as part of the bricolage left by the previous generations, but also an element that creates particular relations between the private space and the added frame of the intervention, according to each configuration created by the inhabitant prior to the intervention. Further on, this proposed alternative to the thermal rehabilitation of the blocks could be applied to all other types of blocks, seeing that their envelope permits a relatively easy attachment of the added structure.

Financially, the intervention could benefit from the funding of the Program for Thermal Rehabilitation, one that normally finances the ordinary rehabilitations using polystyrene, their design and execution. Considering that an intervention that proposes an added, more complex structure would amount to a larger sum than a normal rehabilitation, and that the owners would have to return the money for it, the implementation of the project might consider a strategy that would include the exploitation of the available spaces in order to produce the necessary funds to finance a part of the intervention.

Taking this into consideration, the proposal is meant to imply a successive activation of the spaces found under the common property, as follows:

1. The terrace- as the largest surface of common property, it is the first surface that could be opened up for new uses, such as independent units built on it, creating a fifth floor. The new modules could be built either by the community of the block, or by an external investor, renting the surface of the terrace. In order to achieve this, the



The phases of the intervention

*The scale of the Entrance
Drumul Taberei, Bucharest*

(Source: drawing done by the author)

vertical circulations would continue up to this last floor, while the installation of an elevator is also necessary. The placement of these independent units under the form of small studios would answer to the need of independence of the inhabitants, in cases where these would need to rent a one of these for a family member, or that of functional diversity, considering that the studios could be opened up and used as cores enabling the use of parts of the terrace for particular events or activities with a larger public.

2. The structure- once funding is enough, the installation of the added structure can be done. In this way, the supporting frame for the thermal insulation is added one that offers an extra space of about 2 meters in front of the apartments. Seeing that this procedure demands a structural evaluation of the building beforehand, the intervention could act also as structural rehabilitation if needed. The structure comes as an envelope all around the existing, allowing the frame to be appropriated both in the facades and the terrace level.

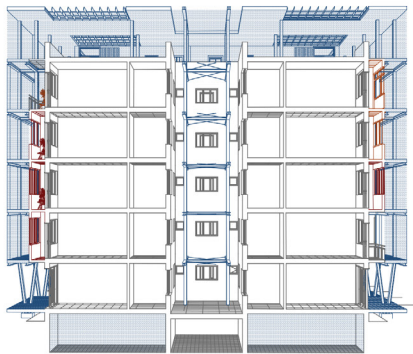
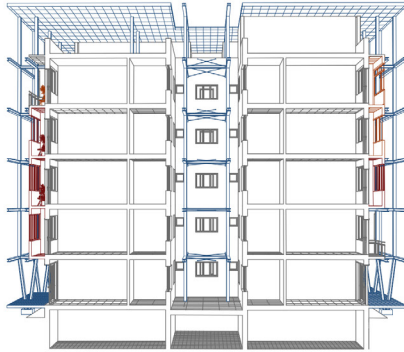
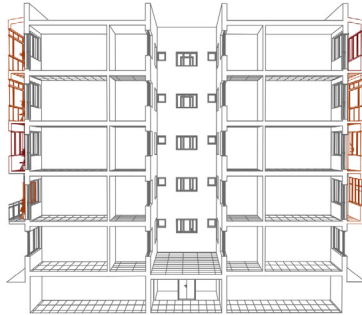
3. The thermal insulation- the closing of the structure may vary according to the existing configuration of each apartment, particularly in relation to the existing balconies. As such, the options may vary from insulating enclosures and glazing in situations where the existing is not at all protected, to light, sliding panels or no enclosure at all, in cases where the insulation already exists. At the same type, the applied solution will vary according to the orientation of the building, in this case having the long facades facing East and West, requiring more solar protection at the West, while the East should be more protected. This answers to the need for thermal insulation, as well as the individuality of each piece of the façade.

4. The appropriation of the structure- the added space allows for a new use of the apartments, which may vary from room to room, but also throughout the different floors. In this way, the added structure permits opening up the ground floor of the building for functions destined for the public, such as small cafes, offices or other functions working with the more people, each unit at this level benefiting from a separate entrance through the added structure. Further on, at the first and second floors, the intervention would allow for a mix between housing and offices, which would work with a smaller number of clients. This answers to the need for nesting in the space, through the fact that the appropriation can be done according to the inhabitant's needs and wishes, while also bringing a functional diversity and the possibility of a workplace not far from home.

5. The terrace- remains a space for individual units, that the inhabitants are able to use either for themselves or give out for rent. The units remain restricted in size, leaving for surfaces of the terrace still open for various activities, which the community can control or restrict within a certain schedule.

6. The appropriation of the green, public space around the block- seeing that it is not maintained by the local authorities, and that the people have been using it since they have been living here, they would be able to claim the right to this land, with the condition that the vegetation remains the same, allowing for community gardening and other associated activities.

7. The spreading of the phenomenon at the scale of the neighborhood- the implementation of this strategy at the scale of the neighborhood would mean an



A Support for Bricolage- existing and future

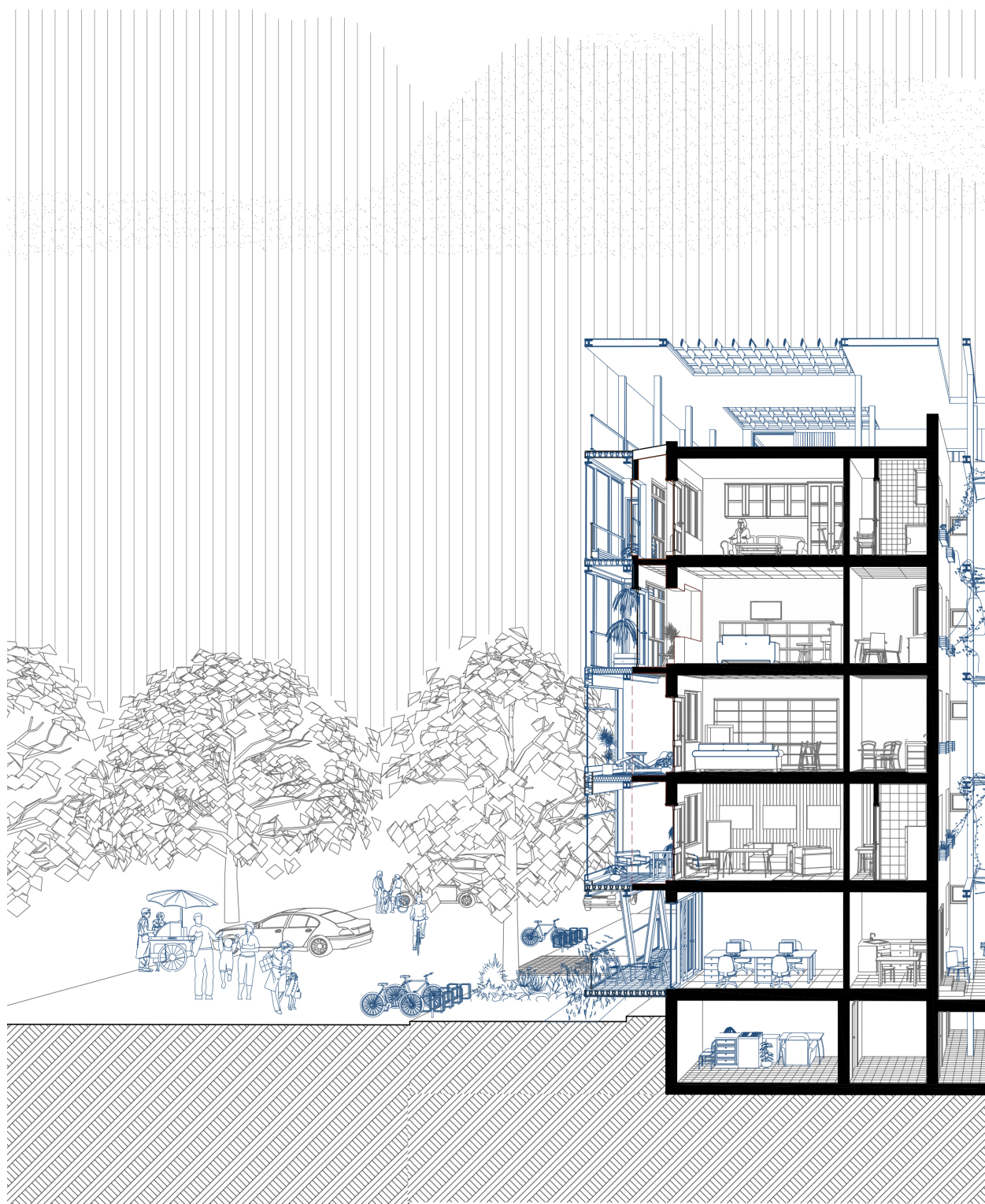
The scale of the Block
Drumul Taberei, Bucharest

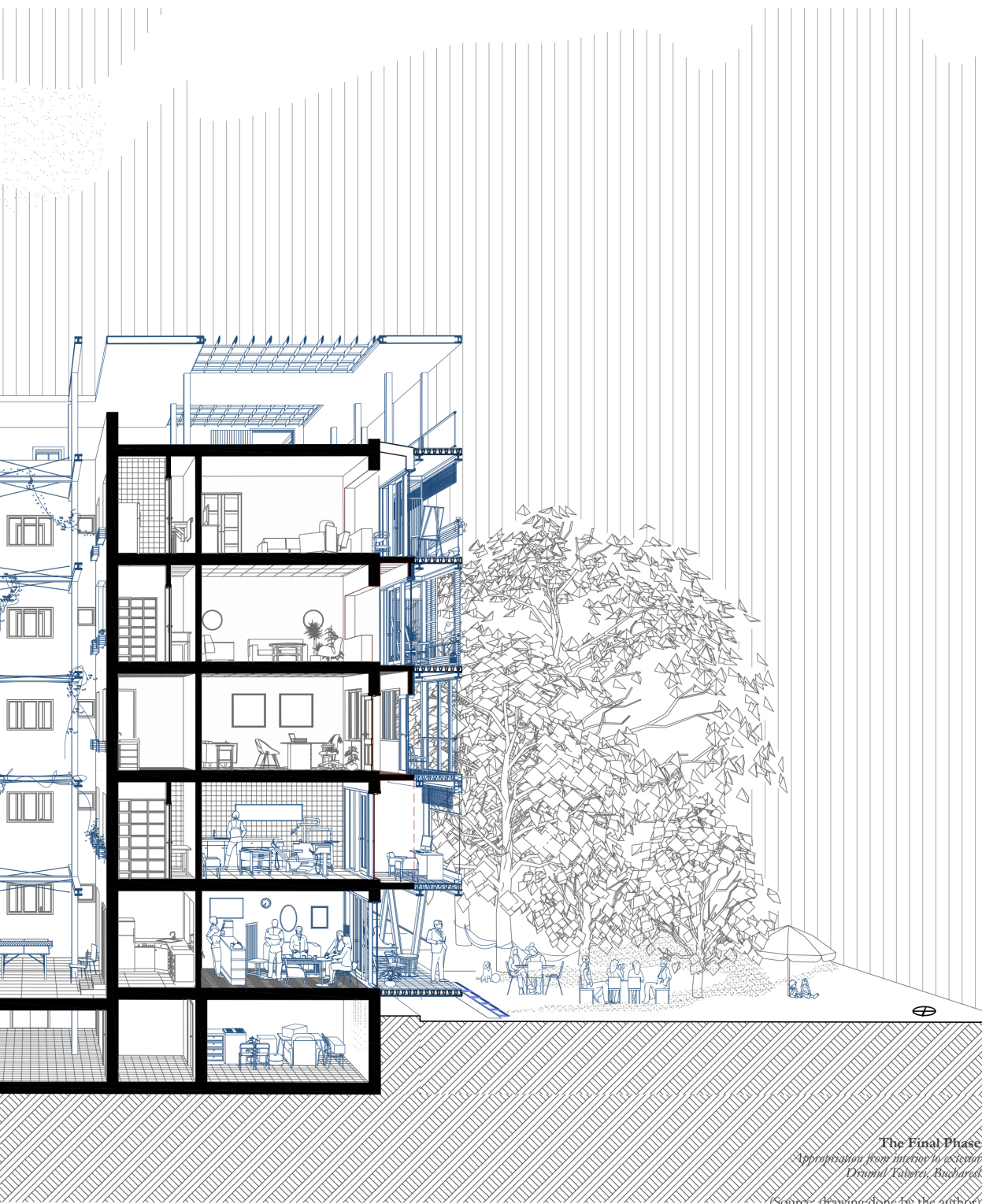
(Source: drawing done by the author)

activation of all blocks, turning them into extroverted living units, as opposed to the current introverted attitude. The blocks would communicate more towards the green space, but also between themselves, with the inhabitants being able to make their own choice regarding how much of their private space can be revealed.

Such a strategy would, first if all, put into place the process of empowerment of the community, through the fact that the inhabitants in the block take charge of the spaces that belong to them, and whose potential is so great precisely because it amounts more when taken as a whole. Moreover, the community of the block would be conducting the process of activating the common spaces, while also benefitting from the added space of the intervention. Each step of the strategy is meant to bring the community together, having them take decisions together, and, finally, profiting from their decisions, together.

Finally, the place of the architect in such a project would be that of the professional revealing the potential of the spaces available, designing the final project with the community and according to their goals, and elaborating the strategy that would lead to the desired result. The architect provides the project, taking into account the previous stages of the existing, whether it may be *bricolage* or other interventions. The intervention is meant to be an added layer into the history of this *bricolage*, one that provides more efficiency, while adding a filter in front of the private space of the apartment, a façade that may be more regulated, but still part of the inhabitant's identity. At last, the architect can become also a custodian of the building, remaining responsible for it and its evolution, in the sense that he/she oversees the appearance of future needs and supports their materialization into objects that answer them in a more effective manner, achieving a complete functionality of the space. Thus, the architect becomes a support for the activation of the community, and the spaces that belong to it, helping the people communicate better not only between themselves, but also to the authorities who need to hear them.





The Final Phase
Interpretation from interior to exterior
Ornamental, Tactile, Richness
(Source: drawing done by the author)

CONCLUSION

As a final lesson, it might be noticed that bricolage became a journey to understand not only the needs and signals that this practice transmits in the environment of the blocks, but even more to become aware of the unique vision that an architect comes to have due to his/her formation, to understand, interpret and formulate and answer.

Moreover, the ability of the architect to manage and organize the evolution of a project, together with the users, develops a practice that implies an educational component, through the participation element, which may reflect on both sides- the client/user learning about architecture and the built space according to their personal needs, whilst on the side of the architect, a manner of sharing responsibility and control over the final outcome, while remaining in touch with the practical works and the anticipation of the buildings process. Such an architecture, done with the people, would mean a better response from the public towards their built environment and a deeper attachment towards the city, with a feeling that the inhabitants actually are able to shape their living environment.

Considering all the aspects that preceded the materialization of the project, the study of bricolage and the necessary implication of the inhabitants into the adaptation of their own living environment, a certain image of the architect was formed, one that would assemble these elements necessary to cope with the factors implied by such a project. As such, this new and much needed architect would be able to balance participation, project management, incremental design, sustainability and technical detailing, while not compromising his/her values as a professional, regarding aesthetics or functionality. At the same time, the architect would be able to take initiative, stimulating action and pushing communities to claim their right to better living, to a better city.

This journey has made possible the imagination of an architectural practice that has no need for an ego that separates from the actual needs of the people, one that listens and asks for opinion, one from which both architect and client have more to gain than just material benefits. Such a practice would be much needed in the context of Bucharest today, where many times large scale interventions completely disregard the people concerned by them, but does surpass this environment and is able to apply in any climate, leading to an architecture inspired by and produced with the locals, while leaning on the architectural knowledge built up of all international examples and practices.

An architecture done with the people, one that can evolve and represent the inhabitants/users, bringing the architect closer to the people and making both sides involved in the entire process of creating and building, is indeed one that the research and project lead to, and is an architecture that I would like to practice myself and see more often throughout the world.

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