

EDITING THE SOCIALIST DWELLING: CATALOGUES OF HOUSING TYPE PROJECTS IN THE 1960s AND 1970s ROMANIA

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Abstract Catalogues of type projects have been essential to mass housing production in communist Romania. The paper investigates how they evolved during the 1960s and the 1970s, the centralized system of institutions that designed, disseminated and applied them, the research activity that was invested in them, their problematic relationship with prefabrication, the international context that influenced them, and their hierarchizing effect on places and on architects. Researching these catalogues can provide a better understanding of the large housing estates that have shaped Romanian cities since the early 1960s and which define them even today.

Keywords architecture, socialist housing, type design, communist Romania, 1960s, 1970s.

Introduction

Type projects – pre-designed serial plans, edited in 'catalogues' or 'albums' – have been extensively used in communist Romanian architecture. They were not just tools of design, but also instruments of political control, fine-tuning buttons in the hand of the regime, which used them for managing the costs and standards of state housing production.

'Type projects' (*proiecte tip*) was the broad name for a few kinds of generic architectural designs. A type project consisted of several 'series' of so-called 'type sections', detailed plans accompanied by perspective drawings, technical descriptions, materials and costs specifications (fig.1). The 'series' were mainly classified according to structure and materials, while 'sections' (*secțiune* or *tronson tip*, i.e. plan of the juxtaposed apartments

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forming a repeatable building segment) were classified according to the various functional configurations.

In the strictest interpretation, 'type projects' designated the 'frozen' complete projects, which were used as such, without alterations. During the 1960s, type projects in this narrow sense were gradually replaced by the so-called 'directive projects', which lacked final technical detailing and economic components and thus left a larger margin of freedom to the architects who adapted them on site (on the condition of complying with the overall cost limits nevertheless). Frozen type projects remained eventually to be used only for fully industrialized structures, such as the prefabricated large panels housing.

The repertoire of type projects also included 'reusable projects', which were projects initially made for particular sites, then adapted for other locations – starting as a kind of *de facto* type projects.

All these catalogues were centrally edited and printed, by *Editura de Stat pentru Arhitectură și Construcții* or *Editura Tehnică* during the 1950s and early 1960s, and later directly by the central institution that produced them. They were distributed all over the country, to all design institutes and their documentation centres, but also to various libraries (they can be found today, for instance, in university libraries like the Central University Library in Cluj).

Why the 1960s and 1970s

Housing type projects were used during the entire communist period in Romania. However, we argue that the most relevant years for the process of housing typification were the two decades of the 1960s and 1970s, more precisely the interval between 1957 and the mid/late 1970s. The late 1950s and the mid-1970s can be seen as two shifting moments for the process of typification: when the *use* of type projects reached mass scale and when their *making* has been diffused throughout the national territory, respectively. It was during this twenty years period that type design has been fully shaped as a system of mass design production at the national scale.

It is true that type projects were essential already for the Soviet model of housing production, which was adopted in Romania in the early 1950s. However, although typification was an explicit objective during those years too, type-housing ensembles had a relatively small scale and were rather of local relevance, more like social housing.¹ Typification had not succeeded in imposing itself as a generalized method of design: in 1956, only 30% of the dwelling units were based on type projects in Romania, compared to 80% in the USSR and 70%

¹ Irina Tulbure, *Arhitectură și urbanism în România anilor 1944-1960: constrângere și experiment* (București: Simetria, 2016), 274.

in the P.R. of Poland and the P.R. of Hungary.² The building production itself was underdeveloped; Romanian housing construction had the lowest rate in Europe, West or East.³ Meanwhile, the accelerated industrialization dislocated more and more people from the countryside to the cities, aggravating the urban housing crisis. The state housing production had to be significantly increased. By the late 1950s, the return to modernism, which was rather a means of efficient architectural production than just a question of stylistic expression, transformed type design into an issue of national scale and importance. It was then that the leap to mass housing production occurred.

Typification was impelled by the decentralization of the design system. In the first post-war decade, the architectural profession had been extremely centralized. Almost the entire institutional base of architectural design was concentrated in Bucharest, with only 4% of all architects in Romania active outside the capital city.⁴ In order to increase the design capability throughout the country, and speed up urban development, 16 new regional project institutes have been created in 1957.

In this context, type projects became crucial: it was through them that central control would be maintained over the architectural production at the periphery. Specifically for this purpose, a key central institution had been created in 1956: IPCT (*Institutul de Proiectare pentru Construcții Tip* / The Design Institute for Type Constructions). IPCT carried out the research and design of all kinds of type projects (mainly housing, but also schools, culture houses etc.) and edited them in catalogues, which were then distributed throughout the national territory. This was a first turning point in type design production.

However, the true success of typification was reached when not only type projects, but the process of typification itself was disseminated all over the country. This took about two decades. Architect Mihail Caffé, an IPCT employee, remarked in 1975 that it was finally the time to decentralize typification and let local institutes make their local type designs. He suggested a new distinction between 'fundamental typification' in the centre and 'operational typification' at the periphery.⁵ From the mid 1970s on, any housing project designed in any of the design institutes in the country became a potential type project, if approved by the central advisory body CSCAS.⁶ Typification has been indeed diffused throughout the national territory, and type projects would be produced at the margins too. However, through the selection and decision processes, the system still remained highly centralized.

² Miruna Stroe, *Locuirea între proiect și decizie politică. România 1954-1965* (București: Simetria, 2015), 71.

³ Stroe, *Locuirea*, 69.

⁴ Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura în România 1944-1969* (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1969), 61–64.

⁵ M. Caffé, "Amintiri despre tipizare", *Arhitectura* 2(1975): 12-13.

⁶ *Consiliul de Stat pentru Construcții, Arhitectură și Sistematizare* / The State Council for Constructions, Architecture and Systematization

Type projects and the system of design institutes

Given the importance of type projects as instruments of control of state housing production, IPCT was placed in the centre and at the top of a strictly centralized design system. But this system was far from immobile and was continually readjusted in order to better serve the changing state policies concerning architecture and especially housing developments.

The way IPCT itself changed its affiliation and appellation during this period reflects the very evolution of the role of typification itself – from a strictly construction-related issue to an instrument with a larger political, economic and social scope. Since its establishment in 1956 until 1963, IPCT functioned as the specialized type-projects studio within the IPC,⁷ which belonged to the Ministry of Constructions. This was consistent with the fact that, during this first phase, type design was naturally related to the objective of the industrialization of constructions. Between 1963 and 1969, IPCT was placed directly under CSCAS, the governmental advisory body in architecture and urbanism (a kind of 'ministry of architecture', as architect Alexandru Panaitescu calls it⁸). This was the climax of IPCT's activity and also the period when the first large housing estates in Romania were built. Finally, the shift of interest from type buildings to planned urban ensembles, which occurred in the late 1960s, was reflected by IPCT's reorganizations in 1969 and 1974, with the 'new' institutions expanding their activity to the field of 'systematization' (i.e. urbanism): IPCT fused with ISCAS,⁹ becoming ISART¹⁰ in 1969¹¹ and was absorbed by ISLGC¹² in 1974. It reappeared however as a stand-alone body after 1977, recognized as indispensable for the ever increasing housing production figures.

The capital Bucharest had a special status in the system. All housing projects here were made by IPB,¹³ established in 1952. IPB came to type projects in a more natural way: by simply reusing some projects, in order to save time and cope with the plan. For instance, for the housing ensemble around *Sala Palatului* (Palace Hall), IPB designed a project specifically for that particular situation. The new Palace Hall needed to be perceived on a background of

⁷ *Institutul de Proiectare pentru Construcții* / The Project Institute for Constructions

⁸ Alexandru Panaitescu, *De la Casa Scânteii la Casa Poporului. Patru decenii de arhitectură în București 1945-1989* (București: Simetria, 2012), 40.

⁹ the design institute of CSCAS

¹⁰ *Institutul de Studii și Proiecte pentru Sistemizare, Arhitectură și Tipizare* / The Institute for Studies and Projects for Systematization, Architecture and Typification

¹¹ M. Caffé, "Perspective ale locuirii în România în preocupările unor lucrări experimentale", *Arhitectura* 1(1972): 27-29 (p.28).

¹² *Institutul pentru Sistemizare, Locuințe și Gospodărire Comunală* / The Institute for Systematization, Housing and Communal Management

¹³ *Institutul Proiect-București* / Project-Bucharest Institute

housing that was homogeneous and geometrically abstract, which the presence of kitchens on the facades would have spoiled. So kitchens were located in the middle of the plans, turned onto small inner courtyards, in order to leave the facades with a 'clean' expression.¹⁴ Because the scheme worked well for the housing located on the new boulevards too, the plans have been later reused in several other areas of Bucharest.¹⁵ In the early years, 'reusable projects' were simply the generalization of some particular experiences. Later, IPB would programmatically establish its own typification method by reuse: the best projects were selected on a yearly basis, serialized and reused as much as possible; eventually, they would be catalogued too (fig.2).

The type, directive or reusable projects catalogued by IPCT were sent downwards to the regional design institutes, first called IRPs,¹⁶ renamed DSAPCs¹⁷ in 1959; in 1968, following the administration reform, these multiplied and became IPJs or CPJs.¹⁸ These local design institutes, with which IPCT signed contracts of 'technical assistance',¹⁹ were the ones that adapted type projects for actual constructions.

Local institutes had a very modest design capacity in their beginnings. The small number of architects in general, but especially in peripheral locations, was a problem that was brought up frequently in professional discussions. It also legitimized extensive typification during the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1968, there were only 2000 architects in Romania, to a population of 19 million; this was a very small figure, if compared to Bulgaria for instance, with 7000 architects to a population of 8 million.²⁰ Architects complained about the short time they had for designing the very large figure of the planned housing units: an average of 4 hours per apartment and a final project to be rendered every 5 days.²¹ Type projects indeed relieved them from a substantial workload.

However, local institutes were not only consumers of type projects but became, albeit occasionally at first, their producers too. Sometimes the projects edited by IPCT (which were periodically revised, in order to comply with the frequently changing norms and laws) arrived

¹⁴ A. Moiescu, "Locuințe în Piața noii Săli a Palatului RPR", *Arhitectura RPR* 4(1959): 30-34 (p.34); M. Dima, "Noul ansamblu de locuințe din Piața Palatului RPR", *Arhitectura RPR* 4(1960): 8-14.

¹⁵ T. Ricci, "Aspecte din proiectarea secțiunilor de locuințe în Institutul Proiect-București", *Arhitectura RPR* 5(1960): 2-5; B. Cotaru, "2500 Apartamente pe Magistrala Nord-Sud – București", *Arhitectura RPR* 3(1961): 39-47.

¹⁶ *Institute Regionale de Proiectare / Regional Project Institutes*

¹⁷ *Direcții de Sistematizare, Arhitectură și Proiectare în Construcții / Directions for Systematization, Architecture and Construction Design*

¹⁸ *Institute/Centre Județene de Proiectare / County Project Institutes or Centres*

¹⁹ T. Coheci, N. Pruncu, "O primă etapă de proiectare la IRP Craiova", *Arhitectura RPR* 6(1958): 12.

²⁰ N. Nedelescu, "Nu proiecte tip, ci doar proiecte directive", *Arhitectura* 3(1968): 16-17.

²¹ "A doua conferință pe țară a Uniunii Arhitecților din RPR. Discuții", *Arhitectura* 3(1965): 22-43 (pp. 29, 37).

at the local institutes too late for them to be used in the housing plan of the current year; in order to meet the deadlines, local architects did not wait and designed their own *ad-hoc* type projects.²²

The top-down hierarchy of type design was conveyed further downwards, as in their turn the IRPs / DSAPCs / IPJs, which were based in the regional or county capital cities, made projects that were reused in smaller cities in their regions. For instance, in the city of Cluj itself, housing projects were types designed mostly by IPCT and some were even reused from IPB;²³ while the project institute in Cluj designed housing for towns like Ocna Mureș and then reused them for Aiud and Câmpia Turzii.²⁴

By the mid 1970s, local institutes became strong enough to contribute as steady sources to the process of typification. It became a regular practice for certain projects designed by local institutes to be chosen as types. After a careful selection and revision, and if approved by CSCAS, they could be introduced into the catalogues centrally edited by IPCT/ISART. A 1975 catalogue, for instance, included projects designed by Institutul Proiect-Brașov, IPJ Constanța and IPJ Dîmbovița, along with ones made by IPB and IPCT. IPJ Mureș extensively used an adapted a type designed by IPJ Bacău in the early 1970s.²⁵ Many of the blocks of flats built in Cluj in the 1980s would also use a type project designed by IPJ Bacău.²⁶ After the mid-1970s, the Romanian housing design system was a large pool of shared type-design resources.

In any case, all 'type projects', 'directive projects' and 'reusable projects', made by either central or local institutes, had to be approved by the main advisory body, CSCAS (renamed CSEAL²⁷ in 1969); this had a major contribution in the selection and publication, but also the drastic reduction of the variety of housing types that were actually used in practice.

Uniformity and differentiation

Type projects were often criticized in professional and political discourses in the late 1960s and during the 1970s. They were held responsible for the monotony that characterized large housing estates, with buildings identical to each other and urban environments that looked exactly the same no matter the city they were built in. Type design was clearly an

²² C. Orban, "IRP Oradea", *Arhitectura RPR* 3(1959): 5.

²³ L. Karcsag, Fl. Trișcu, "Blocuri de locuințe la Cluj", *Arhitectura RPR* 6(1958): 6.

²⁴ I. Bărbășcu, I. Stancu, "Din activitatea Institutului Regional de Proiectare Cluj", *Arhitectura RPR* 3(1959): 10-11 (p.11).

²⁵ C. Radó, "Jaloanele proiectării în IPJ Mureș", *Arhitectura* 2(1973): 13-15 (p.14).

²⁶ author's interview with architect Gheorghe Vais (who was employed at the IPJ [ICP] Cluj between 1980 and 1991), December 10, 2017.

²⁷ *Comitetul de Stat pentru Economia și Administrația Locală / State Committee for the Local Economy and Administration*

equalizer tool, an instrument for levelling the housing standards among people and across regions.

However, housing types also provided a few well controlled differentiations, in size, organization and costs. A considerable difference of standard between Bucharest and other cities was accepted. Although production cost reduction was an imperative all over the country, for housing in Bucharest larger apartments costs were allowed, compared to peripheral cities. For instance, while the production cost of a so-called 'medium' (two rooms) apartment in Bucharest was 43.400 lei,²⁸ in Cluj it was 38.500²⁹ and in Bacău 35.000³⁰ (all these prices are for 1959 and for central locations in the city).

Type projects were also instruments of imposing socialist values and controlling lifestyles. IPCT employed sociologists and conducted sociological research in order to inform the process of typification.³¹ For sociologists, whose discipline had been banned from universities between 1948 and 1965³² and who engaged their knowledge in productive areas instead, housing design was a privileged domain of 'applied sociology'. The 'housing sociology' they professed provided architects with the necessary knowledge about 'social types', which were to replace their traditional clients – as sociologist Max Lupan, an IPCT employee, explained.³³ Although rather occasionally than programmatically, specific type plans were studied for a few professional categories, such as miners and chemistry workers.³⁴

Type design evolved and suffered a few major transformations during these two decades, following the changing housing policies of the regime. In the late 1950s and during the first half of the 1960s, because the co-habitation was widespread in big cities and the urgency was to provide one apartment per family, the apartment types were programmatically small.³⁵ Building many undersized one-family apartments was considered preferable to producing fewer larger apartments that would end up being co-habited. Minimal space was also a means to build a larger figure of dwelling units cheaper (fig.3). It also endorsed the socialist lifestyle, by externalizing some of the traditional dwelling functions (e.g. food production and consumption should have been replaced by the eating in canteens).

²⁸ Moiescu, "Locuințe", 34.

²⁹ "Blocuri de locuințe în Piața Mihai Viteazul - Cluj", *Arhitectura RPR* 3(1959): 12.

³⁰ "Blocuri de locuințe în Parcul Libertății - Bacău", *Arhitectura RPR* 3(1959): 42.

³¹ M. Caffé, "Aspecte de aplicare în proiectare a cercetării sociologice de arhitectură", *Arhitectura* 2(1969): 7.

³² Maria Larionescu, *Istoria sociologiei românești* (București: Ed. Universității București, 2007), 195.

³³ M. Lupan, "O anchetă privind condițiile de folosire a locuinței urbane", *Arhitectura* 3 (1967): 20–31.

³⁴ M. Lupan, "Condiții pentru dezvoltarea sociologiei locuinței", *Arhitectura* 2 (1969) : 4.

³⁵ abiding by the governmental decision (HCM) 146/1960.

The modernist dwelling theories served as design basis. Reviving the Bauhaus idea of *existenzminimum* (even if not named as such) led to a dwelling reduced to its functionalist basics. Romanian architects were looking for the essential plan, for the perfect organization of the home within the limits of the strictly necessary space, in the so-called 'optimum solutions' plans³⁶ – perfectly functional but, precisely for that, deprived of flexibility.

By the mid 1960s the policy changed. Larger apartment types with more rooms were also required, especially after the anti-abortion decree of 1966.³⁷ The political decision that apartments would be sold to their inhabitants³⁸ also determined a certain diversification of types and increase of surfaces. However, the main political demand remained that more apartments should be produced with the lowest cost possible.

Small surfaces returned in 1968, with the notions of 'half-rooms' and 'comfort categories' – a principle already practiced for a decade in USSR.³⁹ What was called the 'action of diversification' of housing⁴⁰ was in fact the formalization by law,⁴¹ and consequently by type plans, of the fact that significant social difference was to be admitted in communist Romania. The four 'comfort categories' introduced in 1968 provided considerable disparities in surfaces and equipment. The better apartments were sold to the population, so that the state housing production system could keep being financed, while the cheaper types had to compensate for the relatively costly ones, ensuring the overall cost reduction that was politically required.

Between 1968 and 1977, there was a relative raise of life quality in Romania. From the late 1970s on, lower category types were partially given up and comfort standards increased.⁴² The new political objective concerning housing became 'one person per room'. Type plans were diversified and improved and apartments became of an overall better quality, in terms of floor-plan designs (fig.5). The state continued to privatize apartments, in order to finance its housing system and keep the state production going (in 1975, 60% of the new housing in Bucharest was built for private ownership),⁴³ which also contributed to a relative improvement of surface standards. However, the imposed cheapness determined a lack of quality of the construction itself, in terms of materials and techniques.

³⁶ T. Ricci, "Tipizare, industrializare, prefabricare II", *Arhitectura* 3(1975): 43-46.

³⁷ decree 770/1966.

³⁸ acts: HCM 445/1966, law 9/1968, law 4/1973.

³⁹ L. Roșianu, Gh. Sebestyén, "Cîteva probleme tehnico-economice în proiectarea locuințelor", *Arhitectura RPR* 12(1958): 2-7 (p.7).

⁴⁰ M. Caffé, "Aspecte", 7.

⁴¹ acts: HCM 127/1968, HCM 1650/1968, HCM 1669/1969.

⁴² decree 68/1975

⁴³ T. Ricci, "Aspecte din proiectarea locuințelor în capitală", *Arhitectura* 2(1976): 21-23.

The problematic relationship with industrialization

Very soon in the typification process, architects remarked that their capacity of designing economical type plans had a limit, from which on, no matter how many studies they made, more cost reduction would be impossible to attain through mere design, unless quality decreased dramatically. It was industrialization, and particularly prefabrication, that should have pushed economic efficiency further.⁴⁴

The very sense of design typification was to facilitate the industrialized means of construction, especially those that maximized *factory* prefabrication. However, prefabrication, and especially large panels prefabrication, had never succeeded in becoming efficient. Although it was a major issue in political directives and architects' discourses, it showed rather few accomplishments in reality, and these were mainly concentrated in the most industrialized cities (such as Braşov, where 70% of housing was built with large panels integral prefabrication in 1971⁴⁵). In the entire country, under 20% of the state housing production was built with large panels in 1968.⁴⁶ In spite of the fact that it was strongly promoted politically, it barely reached 40% around 1975, according to architect Cezar Lăzărescu⁴⁷ (the figure was only 28% for integral large panel prefabrication, according to engineer Adrian Lupescu, former director of IPCT).⁴⁸ The prefabricated large panels system in Romania was nothing like the East German *plattenbau* in terms of general use and efficiency.

Type design had a rather problematic relationship with industrial fabrication. For instance, the 'series 2926' (Fig.4) was prefabricated at the factory Militari in Bucharest, a factory that took 5 years to be made functional – it finally was in 1967 – and produced components exclusively for this particular series;⁴⁹ it was hardly a success story.

The problem was that project typification preceded and prevailed upon the standardization of fabricated components. Instead of designing a few basic standardized elements, which could have been combined afterwards into a variety of plans, type projects were drafted in their entirety first and divided in many different building components after.

Little by little, architects realized that they should have reasoned the other way round. By the mid 1970s, it became clear that they should have typified plans *after* standardizing the system of interchangeable construction elements. But by obsessively looking for the so-called 'optimal' plans, they had made type projects for 'closed prefabrication' instead of practicing

⁴⁴ "Pentru reducerea costurilor construcţiilor de locuinţe", *Arhitectura RPR* 7(1958): 2-3; "Probleme actuale ale realizării ansamblurilor urbane", *Arhitectura* 2(1969): 24-30 (p.30).

⁴⁵ "A III-a Conferinţă a Uniunii Arhitecţilor din RSR – Din cuvântul participanţilor la discuţii", *Arhitectura* 2(1971): 24.

⁴⁶ C. Lăzărescu, "Probleme ale industrializării şi prefabricării", *Arhitectura* 6(1969): 23-25.

⁴⁷ Cezar Lăzărescu et. al., *Urbanismul în România* (Bucharest: Ed. Tehnică, 1977), 45.

⁴⁸ A. Lupescu, "Locuinţa în contextul măririi gradului de industrializare", *Arhitectura* 2(1976): 9-10 (p.9).

⁴⁹ W. Juster, "Locuinţe din panouri mari", *Arhitectura* 4(1968): 44-46.

'open prefabrication'.⁵⁰ 'We have typified without industrialization, we industrialize with a rudimentary typification', Mihail Caffé complained.⁵¹ (actually him too mistaking the latter – which should have been referred to as 'standardization' – for 'typification', and this was precisely the problem of Romanian architects' approach).

Prefabricated large panels housing were built with the 'frozen' kind of type projects and were also, in general, of the lower comfort categories. The bad construction workmanship and techniques, based on primitive concrete heavy prefabrication, also contributed to their inferior quality. During the 1960s, the less rigid 'directive' projects gradually replaced the 'frozen' ones in IPCT catalogues, but large panels housing remained almost exclusively attached to the latter. 'Directive projects' were designed for more supple mixed structures, which involved prefabrication only partially and allowed more spatial and functional flexibility to the apartment plans.

Eventually, comparing how they accomplished their respective tasks, the typification of plans performed a little better than the industrialization of constructions. In spite of the fact that, in principle, architecture was politically subordinated to the higher and general industrialization objective, type design remained a step ahead of fabrication in the state housing production of communist Romania.

Foreign inspiration

In the late 1960s, another resource of housing cost reduction emerged: urban densification. This was also consistent with a general shift of interest which occurred at the time in the architectural profession, from building-scale types to larger scale urban typologies. This shift was also related to another occurrence: the Romanian architectural milieu has been increasingly opened to foreign influence.

Unlike in the early 1950s, when the Soviet models of typification had exclusively been imposed on them, from the late 1950s on, Romanian architects were able to choose from other sources of inspiration too. In the early years of mass housing, Eastern European models prevailed. Romania attended the conference on the type design in the Communist Bloc, organized in East Berlin in 1957, and hosted its exhibition in Bucharest in 1958.

It was the participation to the 5th UIA⁵² Congress in Moscow in 1958 – the first major international congress on the problems of typification⁵³ – that could be considered as a first opening to the West, albeit indirect. Through exchanges within the UIA and foreign publications, information on Western architecture became gradually available.

⁵⁰ T. Ricci, "Tipizare", 43-46.

⁵¹ Caffé, "Amintiri", 12-13.

⁵² *Uniunea Internațională a Arhitecților* / The International Architects' Union

⁵³ I. Silvan, "Sesiunea internațională asupra proiectării tip", *Arhitectura RPR* 6(1957): 31.

By the mid 1960s, some Romanian architects started being openly critical towards the models of typification and prefabrication of the communist East. Ascanio Damian, the rector of IAIM,⁵⁴ remarked that 'the GDR has been uglified' by its 'efficient' large panels method of construction, 'with the wide complicity of architects and technicians'; large panels are 'an invention that is stillborn, without perspectives', he claimed.⁵⁵ Let us avoid the 'primitive-communist exaggerations', such as the 'narrow functionalist limitation of the inhabitable space', Mihail Caffé also wrote.⁵⁶

The period between the late 1960s and early 1970s would be the most liberal in the entire Romanian communist period and one of considerable openness to the West. Western inspiration was demanded by the Communist Party's leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, himself.⁵⁷ After the mid 1960s, Western sources even prevailed over the Eastern ones in the architecture documentation centres.⁵⁸ However, all these sources were controlled and centralized. It was CSCAS that selected and assured the access to the international architectural publications.⁵⁹ This was an advantage for the architects who worked on type projects, as IPCT was at the time directly affiliated to CSCAS; they have been among the first to accede to its resources.

Periodicals such as the French *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, became highly influential.⁶⁰ The large housing estates of the early 1960s in Romania resembled strikingly to the French *grands ensembles* (although more as urban image, rather than in floor plans design). Romanian architects proudly assume this resemblance even today, claiming that the modernist estates of the 1960s that they designed were of no lesser quality than those they saw in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* and other western magazines at the time.⁶¹ However, there is a certain time of delay between those models and their Romanian counterparts. As architectural historian Jean Louis Cohen remarks for post-war Eastern Europe in general, the same 'Fordist concept of affordable standardized products' was adopted here, only with 'a ten to fifteen years time difference in respect to the most advanced areas of the West'.⁶²

⁵⁴ *Institutul de Arhitectură Ion Mincu București* / The Ion Mincu Institute of Architecture Bucharest

⁵⁵ "A doua conferință", 40.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁷ Stroe, *Locuirea*, 143.

⁵⁸ Panaitescu, *De la Casa Scânteii*, 35.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁰ C. Popescu, "Looking West: emulation and limitation in Romanian architectural discourse", *The Journal of Architecture* 14(2009): 109-128.

⁶¹ Interview with architect Vasile Mitrea, May 24, 2017. Mitrea was collaborator in the planning of the modernist Grigorescu and Gheorgheni housing estates in Cluj in the early 1960s.

⁶² Jean-Louis Cohen, "Reflections on the Cold War", in *Constructed Happiness. Domestic Environment in the Cold War Era* (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2005): 278-281 (p.278).

This delay can be explained by the fact that, in spite of the openness policy and thirst for Western information, this information was still very much limited and controlled. The CSCAS documentation centre was well organized and endowed, but western periodicals were acquired mostly in single copies, which could be hardly loaned,⁶³ so they did not really circulate and were accessible to very few. Those who could have had access to imported magazines presented them in meetings (like architect Tiberiu Ricci, who sometimes reviewed foreign publications at the Architects' Union meetings). Romanian *Arhitectura* reviewed international periodicals and books regularly and also hosted articles about architecture in western countries. The few architects who travelled abroad made illustrated presentations for the others; most of the information came second hand (architectural historian Carmen Popescu calls this mediated knowledge 'the procuracy effect').⁶⁴ Most Romanian architects had only a vicarious experience of travel and documentation, which could explain the evident delay in their inspiration and why Romanian large housing ensembles of the 1960s looked so similar to those published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* during the 1950s.

Still, this delay became shorter and shorter, and when the 'prospective' trend, with its obsession for spatial cities, became fashionable in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, it was absorbed almost in synchronicity. In 1969, Cezar Lăzărescu wrote about how economic efficiency could be attained through the increased density of integrated urban structures and 'spatial urbanism'.⁶⁵ Type projects ceased to be the main issue of housing development; the 'habitat' at larger scales became the new topical concern.

This becomes evident if we look at how the content of the magazine *Arhitectura* has evolved during those years. The issues of the late 1950s were full of apartment plans; until the first half of the 1960s, housing projects prevailed. By the mid 1960s, a considerable amount of plans and pictures of the recently built housing estates had emerged in its pages. But type plans were not such an issue of debate anymore. This didn't mean at all that type design was less important; on the contrary, it meant that the process of typification had been well set in motion and the availability of type catalogues was self-understood already; one could count on them. It was their results that became the issue of interest. The attention was turned to urban ensembles; the preoccupation for the city escalated. The time perspective expanded as well. Housing types had been first envisioned from one year plan to the next, then for the five years plan. In the early 1970s, it was the habitat of the year 2000 that concerned architects. Type housing plans as a topic in itself faded little by little into the background and the 'city of the future' took its place in the pages of *Arhitectura*.

⁶³ G. Tabacu, "On What and How. Architectural Magazines in the School Library (1945-1989)", *SITA* 1(2013), 133-148.

⁶⁴ Popescu, "Looking West", 115.

⁶⁵ C. Lăzărescu, "Este necesară o activitate intensă de studii și cercetare", *Arhitectura* 2(1969): 31.

By the early 1970s, 'prospective design' became an issue for Romanian architects, just like it was for the readers of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. From the late 1960s on, Romanian architects started dreaming of machine cities and integrated urban environments, inhabitable 'capsules' and 'living pods'. Housing ensembles as compositions of buildings evolved towards a kind of 'spatial urbanism', more dense and compact. But at the same time, theoretical research started diverting from the actual construction, the one that was carried out within the reality of Romanian cities.

The futuristic trend was first and foremost absorbed by the academic milieu. The IAIM graduation projects, many on housing, which have been published in *Arhitectura* in 1970, occupied almost as many pages as the presentation of real constructions did and bore a striking resemblance with the projects of Japanese Metabolism or the futuristic projects of the 1970 Osaka International Exhibition. Small scale experiments of 'capsules' (such as *Esterodomus*,⁶⁶ a habitable cell made of plastic materials) became issues of research for professors and young assistants of IAIM.

However, these experimental projects remained totally marginal in relation to Romanian housing realities. In Braşov, for instance, in the early 1970s, housing was still built with the 'frozen' type series IPCT 1013 (Fig.6), the one and only type project fabricated by the large panels factory in Braşov, which moreover had a single technological line – a situation about which local architect Dan Cristescu complained since the mid 1960s.⁶⁷ But this city, where prefabrication had been most extensively and simplistically applied, was also envisioned by the same Cristescu, in the pages of *Arhitectura*, as a beautifully drawn fantasy: 'Braşov, the city of the future?'⁶⁸ (at least with a question mark). Cristescu pleaded for 'open continuous urban contexts' and spatial macrostructures with indefinite network expansions,⁶⁹ which had yet nothing to do with the real Braşov that was currently being built by housing type catalogues.

Of all the 'spatial urbanism' ideas, the most influential was the one concerning the prefabrication of entire inhabitable cells: the so-called 'spatial prefabrication'. This heavy prefabrication method, in concrete, received a boost through its association with the 'spatial city' 'structuralist' 'prospective' models. The Western reference most frequently cited by many Romanian architects was Moshe Safdie's Habitat 1967 project in Montreal. The three-dimensional prefabrication of the cell at the scale of a room – smaller than Safdie's model, which was at the scale of several rooms – was put into effect, notably in the prefabrication

⁶⁶ I. Şerban, Şt. Scafa-Udrişte, "Utilizarea materialelor sintetice în construcţii şi arhitectură. Proiectul Esterodomus", *Arhitectura* 3(1971): 41-45.

⁶⁷ "A doua conferinţă", 23.

⁶⁸ D. Cristescu, "Braşovul, oraş al viitorului?", *Arhitectura* 3(1971): 30-33.

⁶⁹ D. Cristescu, "Spre o industrializare complexă a locuinţei într-un concept al continuităţii", *Arhitectura* 2(1975): 32-33.

factories in Braşov and Craiova. Still, it remained mostly at the stage of experimental prototypes.⁷⁰

But it was the shift in the way of thinking housing type designs – from free standing buildings to an open expansion of long continuous structures – which would be most lasting. This was also consistent with the spatial shaping of streets that was imposed by the 1975 'Streets Law'.⁷¹ Housing buildings were designed as a combinatorics of modules, which would lead to lengthier urban structures to be deployed along the streets.

This change can also be remarked in type catalogues, which would address the assemblage of the type sections specifically and more often (Fig.7). Various combinations were made possible by the type plan solutions, in order to allow variable juxtapositions. These longer lines of housing were quite different from the isolated blocks of flats of the previous period. It was a different way of imagining housing environments, from small components to the large scale assemblages of the continuous 'spatial city'. This combining potential would also demand a greater variety of type plans and more flexible interiors. Flexibility would remain, till the end of the regime, the most important issue of interest for the architects who dealt with type designs.

Architects and type-projects authorship

For architects, type projects were eventually just tools of design. But they were special tools, which were the outcome of a thorough design process as well. They were a kind of instruments that were themselves designed with the purpose to partially replace design. In their case, the limits between tool and product were blurred.

There was a significant difference between the makers and the users of the tool. Therefore, type projects created a distinction among architects. On the one hand, there were the 'typifiers', often with acknowledged authorships, sometimes recognized by prizes, mostly based in central institutions. On the other, there were the 'adaptors'⁷² at the periphery, who only applied them. The reuse of projects inside the same design institute also implied that there were first hand and second hand architects. Finally, above all of these, there were the architects in the advisory boards, who did not design, but had the ultimate decision concerning type designs.

If we question the relationship architects had with these special instruments, there is little doubt about it: they all hated them. Since the mid 1960s, architects complained about the excessive use of type designs and their monotonous results. They perceived them as means of limitation, rather than tools of architectural conception. They decried the too restrictive norms that types embodied. It was only natural for peripheral architects to condemn the lack of

⁷⁰ A. Lupescu, "Locuința", 9-10.

⁷¹ law 37/1975

⁷² A. Lupescu, "Tendențele actuale ale proiectării tip", *Arhitectura* 5(1965): 2-3.

creative work, the insignificant margin of freedom that type projects left for them. But even architects in IPCT complained: about the dissatisfaction of not being able to directly supervise the construction of the projects they authored, or that their kind of work was too dull – one of dealing with indexes, 'optimizing tens of parameters', which transformed them into 'computers'.⁷³ The exasperated boredom of 'typifiers' was sometimes reflected in the way they embellished the drawing of the dull blocks of flats with diversions like implausible fancy cars. (Fig.8)

However, type projects were the subject of much professional research and debate. Some architects, who were lucky enough to make studies for IPCT and IPB, were actually conducting a genuine work of architectural research. Some even made their name as 'typifiers' – like Mihail Caffé, who was one of the main architects in IPCT and regularly wrote articles about housing typification in *Arhitectura*; Caffé would later become professor of housing theory at the IAIM. Other architects made their names as researchers of type projects. Mircea Alifanti (one of the most remarkable Romanian architects of the 1970s) made some very interesting and early studies on flexible type plans, with a larger time perspective, with IPCT.⁷⁴ Tiberiu Ricci (who would be the chief architect of Bucharest in the early 1970s) led the type-projects studio in IPB⁷⁵ and studied flexible plans. Tiberiu Niga worked on the issue of large panels prefabrication in IPCT. Dorian Hardt, chief of the furniture studio of IPCT, dealt with the interior housing equipment and made studies for scientifically determining the minimal functional space in small apartments. Gheorghe Sebestyén worked in the specialized studio for the analysis of economic efficiency in IPCT and looked for reasonable ways of reducing housing costs. All these architects would also become professors at the IAIM.

There is no question that the making of type projects involved – for some – a creative work of architectural research. Nevertheless, the way authorship was acknowledged was, as it is always the case with communist architecture, ambiguous and maybe sometimes deceiving. Type projects had to have authors, because authorship was first and foremost a question of responsibility. However, the cases of individual recognition were rare. Occasionally, the names of the authors were written in the project cartouche (like those of Willy Juster and Mihai Caffé on the 2926 series, Fig.4). Some other times, the personal merit was recognized in the articles written in *Arhitectura*, like in the case of Mircea Alifanti, Dorian Hardt or Gheorghe Sebestyén, whose studies were cited by several others. But most of the time, type design authorship was just a matter of collective responsibility. Most of the types that were collected in a catalogue were simply preceded by a list of all the names of the architects who worked in the studio

⁷³ Caffé, "Amintiri", 12-13.

⁷⁴ M. Alifanti, "Căutări în domeniul elaborării tipurilor de locuințe de masă", *Arhitectura RPR* 1(1963): 40-47; M. Alifanti, M. Moravetz, "Studii pentru locuința de perspectivă", *Arhitectura* 5(1965): 8-11; M. Alifanti, "Studiu pentru noi tipuri de clădiri de locuit", *Arhitectura* 2(1976): 35-42.

⁷⁵ Panaitescu, *De la Casa Scânteii*, 77.

where the respective series have been produced. It was usually not the head of the list or the head of the studio who was the true author. Type projects were by their nature prone to be anonymous, the epitome of generic impersonal architecture.

Conclusion

Type projects were instruments of design, made by architects for architects. But they were also instruments of economic and social control in the hands of the political power. They were essential for state housing production, which was in its turn crucial for both industrialization and urbanization – two of the most important political objectives of the communist regime.

Type design was an instrument made with the specific purpose of replacing, as much as possible, the genuine architectural design with a totally controlled one. The design of the tool itself, most efficient and disciplined, substituted in part the design work traditionally performed by architects.

Type projects were designed, and then functioned as tools of design, in a centralized system of architectural production. Their making and use all over the national territory created uniformity, but also clear hierarchies, among places and people. Located in the capital Bucharest, the central institutes were the places of production, selection, decision, edition, printing and distribution of type projects. In the regional centres, the local design institutes used the types received from the centre, but also – occasionally and to a lesser extent in the beginning, systematically later – produced type projects on their own. And in the smaller towns and rural areas – the absolute periphery – types and decisions were only applied.

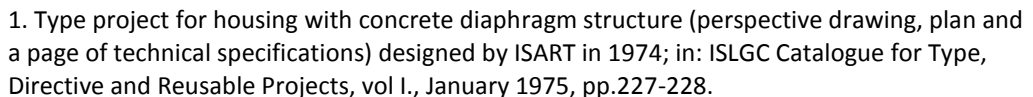
Type projects categorized architects in 'typifiers' and 'adaptors', producers and users of this special instrument of design. There were also architects who acted as advisors, researchers, theorists and even visionaries. Type projects helped architects to work at the limits: to deal with optimal indexes and achieve the maximum production figures with minimal costs in minimal time, and eventually cope with the ever growing state housing plan.

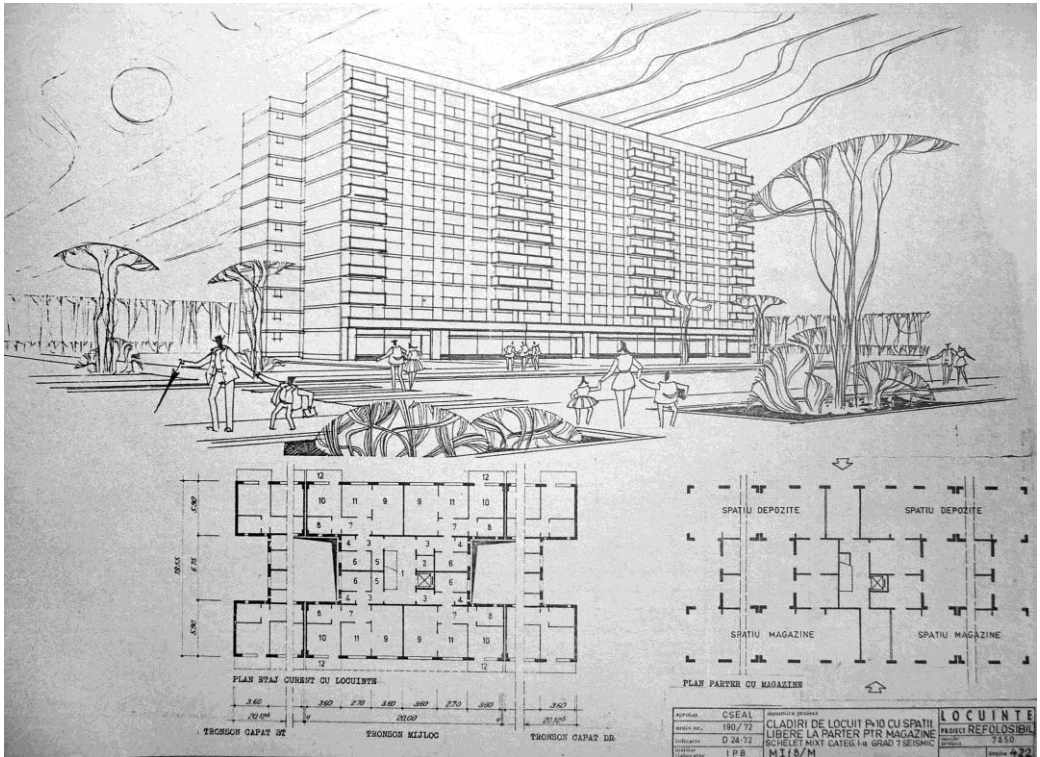
Type projects made sense only entangled with the process of industrialization of constructions; they certainly helped this process and boosted the development of constructions industry. However, type design had a somehow problematic relationship with total prefabrication, which was never efficient in Romanian housing production. The typification of design competed rather than concurred with factory fabrication.

Type projects were the modernist instrument par excellence. By their abstract nature, they were also part of the internationalization of housing design. In Romania, this was most effective from the early 1960s on, which were the years of the first local modernist mass housing estates.

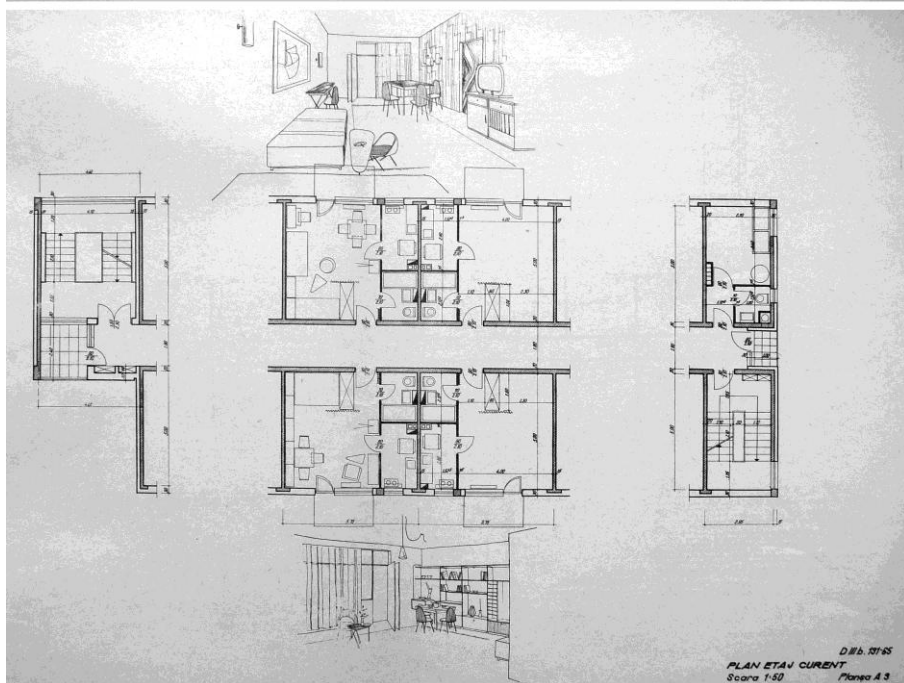
In spite of the general perception of monotony, type projects were also an instrument which, as far as floor plan design was concerned, increased the quality of state housing in

communist Romania along the years. After the late 1970s, type plans improved and diversified considerably, in spite of the bad construction techniques and dull appearance. Today, when these small but perfectly functionalist apartments are not overcrowded as they were in the 1960s and even 1970s, they can be decently comfortable to live in, especially when compared to the sometimes hastily designed plans of contemporary neoliberal real estate developments. Housing type design has a worse reputation than it deserves and its value should be reconsidered in the larger context of the architectural production of communist Romania.

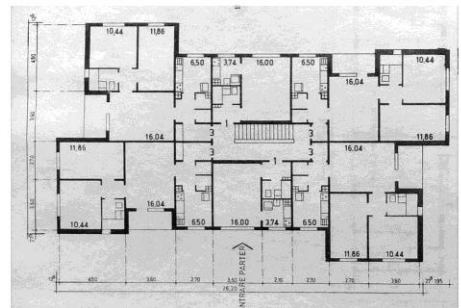
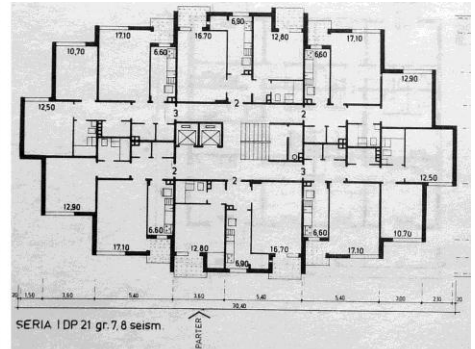
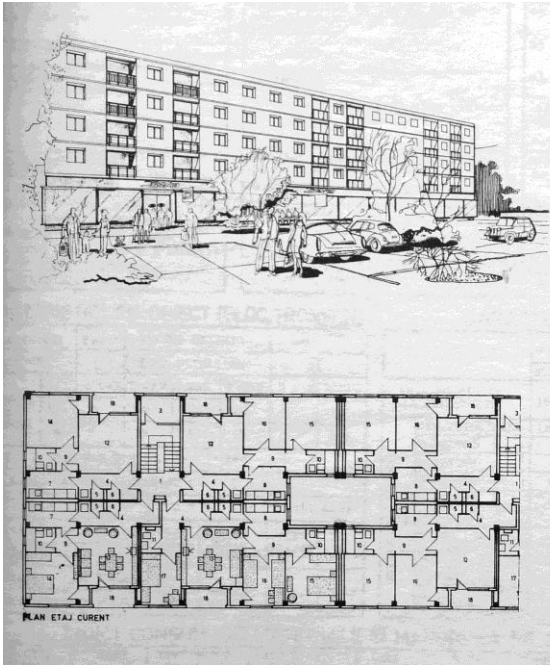




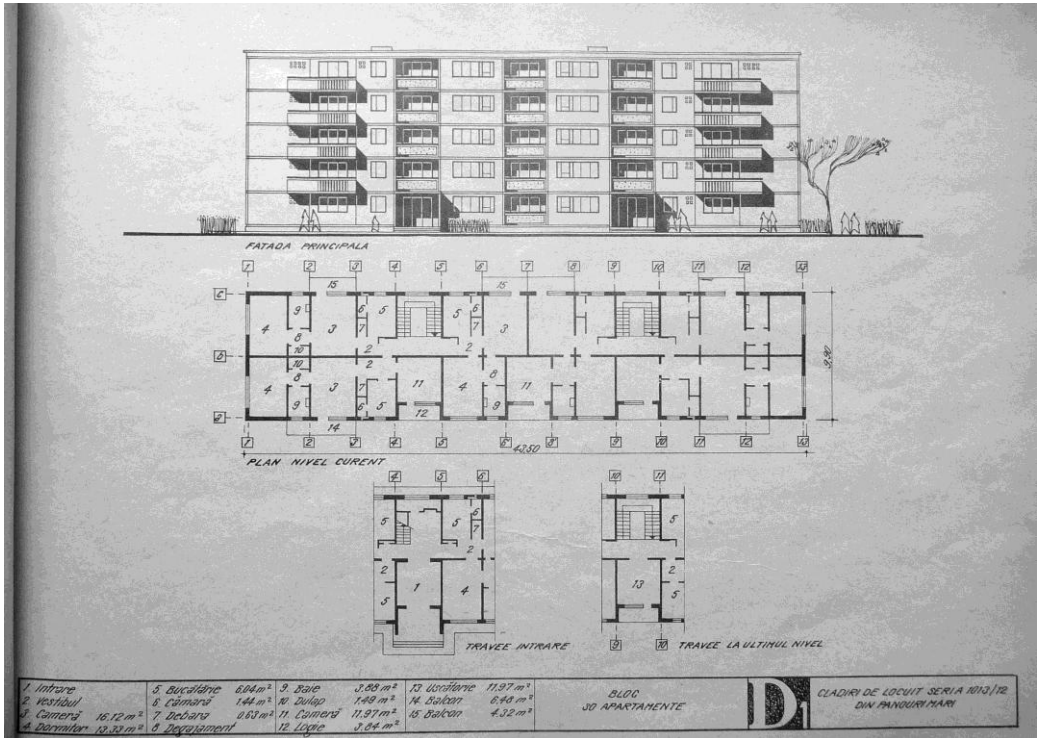
2. Reusable project with mixed structure (perspective drawing, apartment floor plan and ground floor plan) designed by IPB in 1972; in: ISLGC Catalogue for Type, Directive and Reusable Projects, vol I., January 1975, p.422.



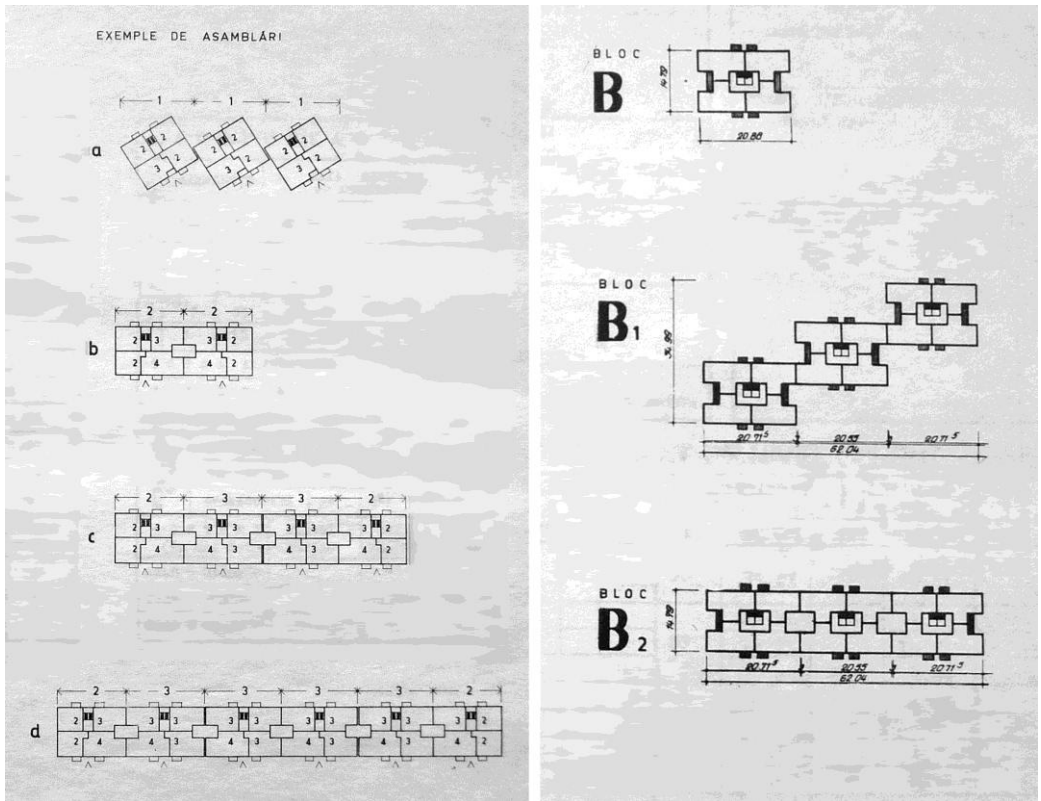
3. Type project (exterior and interior perspective drawings and apartments plans), designed by IPCT in 1965; in: CSCAS/IPCT, Project no. 1215, 1965, plates A1, A3.



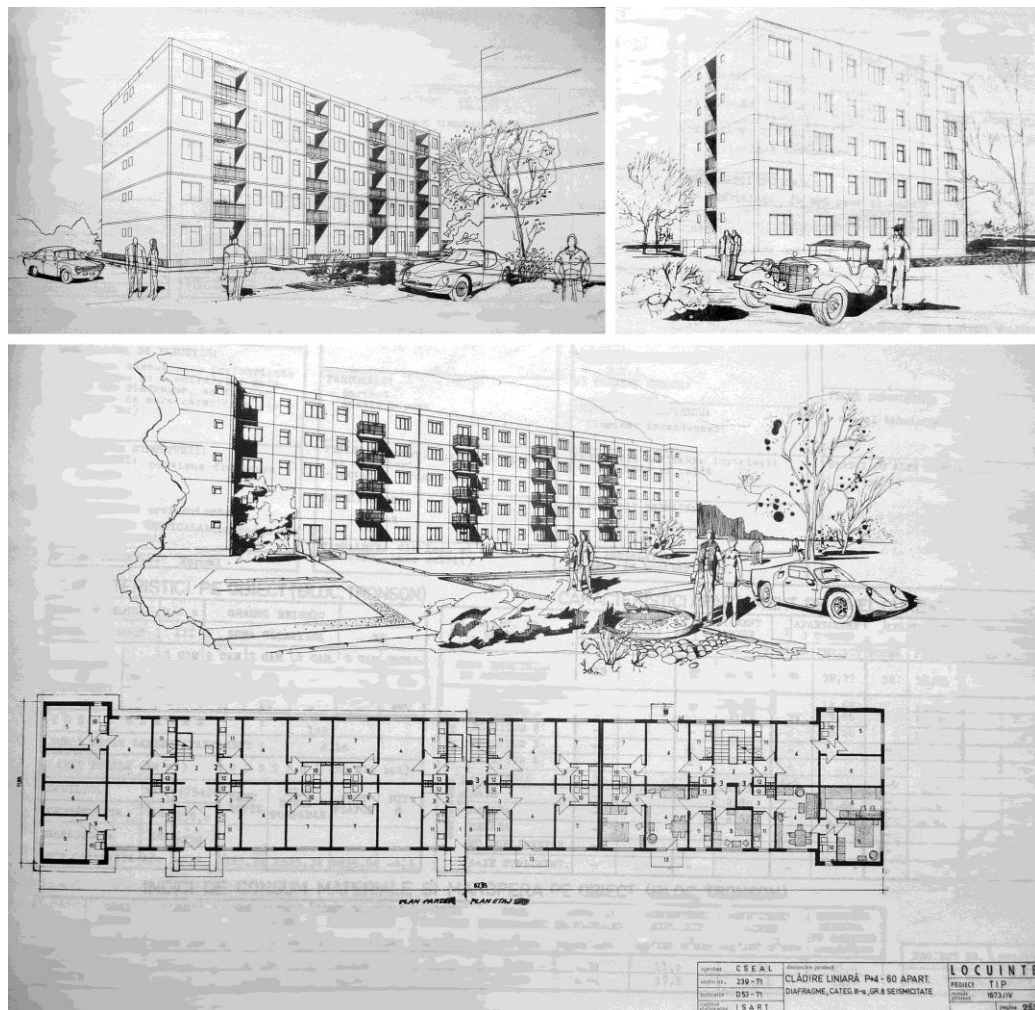
5. More flexible plans were designed for concrete frame structures and mixed structures; one type and two directive projects, designed by ISART in 1971, 1972 and 1973; in: ISLGC Catalogue for Type, Directive and Reusable Projects, vol I., January 1975, pp. 219, 297, 347.



6. Type project for prefabricated large panels – series 1013/12 (facade and plan) designed by architect Tiberiu Niga and engineer Moses Drimer; in: ISART Albume no.3, January 1971, pl. D1.



7. Various assemblages of module sections for type and directive projects designed by ISART in 1974; in: ISLGC Catalogue for Type, Directive and Reusable Projects, vol I., January 1975, pp. 229, 284.



8. Perspective drawings with fancy cars for type projects designed by ISART in 1971-1974; in: ISLGC Catalogue for Type, Directive and Reusable Projects, vol I., January 1975, pp. 246, 248, 269.