

ENCOUNTERS ACROSS BORDERS. MODERNIST IDEAS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES IN THE 1970s ROMANIA

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Abstract Building on several international professional meetings of architects organized in Romania or abroad, this article details how various modernist principles, traditionally subsumed to Western European culture, were gradually reinterpreted as an object of policy and professional knowledge on urban space in the second and third world countries. The article analyses the dialogue between Romanian architects and their foreign colleagues. It highlights how these conversations adjusted the hierarchies and power relations between states and hegemonic centres of knowledge production. In this sense, it contributes to the recent research on the means by which the "transnationalization of expertise" "transformed various (semi)peripheral states into new centres of knowledge and thus outlines a new analytical space where domestic actions of the Romanian state in the area of urban policies are to be analysed not as isolated practices of a totalitarian regime, but as expressions of the entanglements between industrialization models, knowledge flows and models of territoriality that were not only globally relevant, but they also often received specific regional, national and local forms.

Keywords 1970s, urban planning, modernism, housing, knowledge flows.

In 1952, when Alfred Sauvy proposed the notion of the "third world," the idea that the former colonial states would develop following their own economic and social priorities, rather than the great world powers' demands, was fairly foreign. In the 1950s and most of the 1960s, the terms of economic growth continued to be imposed on the developing countries by the great powers. Simultaneously, the (semi)peripheral states had limited visibility in the international decisional processes. However, with the establishment of an anti-colonial agenda at the end of the 1960s,

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everything started to change substantially. At that time, an increasing number of young people from the non-Western world took a stance on their social and political aspirations, characteristic to an agenda that would consolidate the nation-states. They spared no effort to tell the whole world that their countries' interests had to be considered each time the international community debated the population's development and well-being or managed natural resources. Such transmutations led to a vast institutional debate space, where Western modernity principles were accepted, adjusted, or contested. These trends also problematized the transition from the imported modernization to the indigenous one, beyond the old continent's borders, and the role played by the generational changes in this process. However, the "provincialization of the European model"¹ when issues of well-being were at stake meant more than a mere regulation of terms between the Occident and the third world.

Essential studies show that the international order's recalibration at the end of the 1960s also opened many opportunities for second world countries.² After decades-long isolation behind the Iron Curtain, the socialist states joined the international debates on development. Taking advantage of the attractiveness of the socialist ideas and the preponderantly anti-Western attitudes shared by many people from the third world, East-European leaders mobilized sophisticated strategies to consolidate the economic cooperation with non-European countries. For instance, in the early 1970s, Romania doubled its commercial exchanges with the developing countries through different types of transfers of expertise regarding the urbanization, industrialization, work productivity, or the well-being of the workforce. However, this type of mobilization offers a reasonably coherent overview not only on how Bucharest aimed to frame a growth alternative to the one proposed by the capitalist states but also on the strategies of the self-representation of the national experts in front of the foreign partners, in the context of the revitalization of the humanist Marxist thought in many intellectual circles and, implicitly, of the establishment of the new conceptual facets of the social.³

¹ Term taken from Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

² Johanna Bookman, *Markets in the name of socialism: the left-wing origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

³ In this sense, see the more recent: Adela Hincu, Victor Karady (eds.), *Social Sciences in the Other Europe since 1945* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2018).

The present paper aims to tell such a story. Building the experience of several international professional architects' meetings, organized in Romania or abroad, my contribution describes how a cumulation of modernist principles, traditionally associated with the West-European culture, were gradually reinterpreted as an object of politics and professionalized knowledge regarding the urban spaces of the second and third world countries. The article analyses the dialogue between the Romanian architects and their foreign colleagues in a trans-national and trans-ideological endeavor to articulate a new vision of urban space. Thus, it aims to show how a reassessment of the idea of development, in the '70, from simple economic growth to redistribution through the preoccupation for the society's daily needs,⁴ outlined the premises for the architects' inclusion in the international debates regarding the global well-being.⁵ The present article emphasizes how these evolutions adjusted the hierarchies and the relations of power between the states and the hegemonic centers of knowledge production. It aims to contribute to the recent scholarship on how the "trans-nationalization of expertise"⁶ transformed different (semi)peripheral states into new knowledge centres. It outlines a new analytical space where the domestic actions of the Romanian state in the sphere of urban policies may be analysed not as isolated practices of a totalitarian regime but as expressions of certain management cultures concerning the industrialisation, the flows of knowledge, and the models of territoriality. To this end, I follow the lead of recent scholarship that made a case for looking at the crossing of these paths as illustration of global, regional, national and local manifestations.⁷ More specifically, I shall consider three related questions. The first: who were the main actors involved in the recalibration of these interactions? The second: how important were these trans-national globalization processes of the 1970s in outlining specific local approaches of urban construction? The third: to what extent did these reinterpretations of architectural modernism in conjunction with the rhetoric of the development of the 1970s adjust the socialist regime's nature?

⁴ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Un-Making of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11.

⁵ In this respect, see the UN Archive (Geneva), box G 10-1923, G 10-2058, G 10-2071, G 10-2091, G 10-2096, G 10-2150.

⁶ Martin Kohlrausch, Katrin Steffen, Stefan Wiederkehr, „Introduction,” in *Expert Cultures in Central Eastern Europe: The Internationalization of Knowledge and the Transformations of Nation States since World War I*, Martin Kohlrausch, Katrin Steffen, Stefan Wiederkehr eds. (Fibre, 2010).

⁷ Sebastian Conrad, *What is global history?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

In this sense, I find particularly beneficial the concept of "Stalinist globalization,"⁸ proposed by B. Pula. By analyzing the Romanian realities of the '70s from the viewpoint of the domestic implications of the second globalization wave, he showed that the anchorage in a trans-national economic logic of easing the trades was doubled by the start of a national program of forced industrialization with critical social implications. The juxtaposition of the two plans, however, would not have produced a schizoid reality. On the contrary, it influenced the rethinking of the domestic industrialization programs in a generational understanding. The preoccupation for the long-term sustainability determined the authorities to be much more sensitive to the population's experiences and find concrete solutions for attracting young people to the state project through social policies specially articulated to suit their needs. Therefore, my argument is that many of the modernist principles, such as functionalism, zoning, rationalization, prefabrications, gave the socialist state the grounds to articulate a development vision, which was initially applied internally and then was exported to the non-western partners in conjunction with an agenda of intensive industrialization that was very different from the economic growth solutions proposed by the capitalist countries. This analysis builds on the materials gathered from the National Historical Central Archives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, the UN Archives of Geneva, and the texts available in the *Arhitectura RSR* [The RSR Architecture] journal, the leading publication of The Union of Romanian Architects.

The beginning of the 1970s as an expression of *the right to the city*

In the past few years, historiography proposed different terms to characterize the '70s: long, short, tense, global etc. This conceptual ambiguity was much fuelled by the fluidity of the semantics of modernism. On the one hand, "the death of modernism" and the replacement of Fordism with the flexible production models outlined the premises for creating a built environment that met the individual needs and the subjective experiences of different social-professionals categories.⁹ On the other hand, the social issues confronted by the less developed countries – the housing insufficiency, the lack of transport infrastructure, the deficient nutrition, the

⁸ Besnik Pula, *Globalization Under and After Socialism: The Evolution of Transnational Capital in Central and Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 37.

⁹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990).

difficult access to the education and healthcare systems – became part of specific large-scale development projects undertaken by the UN, UNESCO and other transnational organizations that mobilized the conceptual corpus of modernism: functionality, rationalization, zoning, mass construction etc. At the intersection of these two plans, modernism agents were no longer individual actors, planners, or silent partners preoccupied with the abridgment of the disparity with the Occident, but rather contexts, local adjustments, socio-economic dynamics fuelled by the pragmatic and geostrategic pragmatics. The action of all these factors even determined the consolidation of the institutions that facilitated the establishment of specific new epistemic contexts regarding the built space. These concepts functioned beyond, sometimes even independently from, the professional community of the architects.

The Seminar of the International Union of Architects (IUA) on the "human home," organized in Bucharest in September-October 1971, is an excellent example in this sense. It was one of the first international events that brought together western, socialist, and third-world specialists to debate the living space from a generational perspective. From many viewpoints, Bucharest's meeting was an ordinary one, following a direction set by the Romanian authorities as early as the 1960s to organize different scientific events with international participation. However, what was remarkable in the 1971 conference in Bucharest was the unanimous interest in approaching the living space in a global key. The aim identified by the participants was not necessarily that of finding new means of regulating the construction process per se, but to create new architectural solutions that were accessible and sustainable in the long term and that had broad applicability. More specifically, the Bucharest seminar aimed to formulate a set of design principles that would lend themselves to different economic and social contexts throughout the world and would have guaranteed improved quality of life, regardless of the future demographic tendencies or the generational changes.

A reading of the United Nations agenda on housing throughout the 1970s can show how the ideas initially formulated during certain smaller-scale debates, as was the one from Bucharest, were later developed into standalone projects with significant implications in the regulation of development.¹⁰ Such an agenda aimed to respond to women's emancipating ethos to the anti-colonial tendencies manifested in different non-Western states and to the growing political and social visibility of

¹⁰ In this respect, see the UNDP on the matter of habitation.

young people and other marginal social categories.¹¹ However, as some researchers recently pointed out, the instruments mobilised for the materialisation of the ideas centered around upgrading the built space were not new; they compiled different intellectual processes of refining and adapting the European's main characteristics of the interwar architectural modernism. Confronted with more questions than answers, for most participants at the Bucharest meeting, the continental genealogy of modernism and its political-ideological semantics posed issues of opportunity to transfer the constructive models beyond the European borders, and it represented the starting point of the debates.

Over several days, the work was carried out into multiple workgroups: urbanism, habitat, constructions, and industrialization. Each session was led by an IUA representative, who also played a rapporteur role at the end of the event. The participation of individual experts of the United Nations and that of certain specialists in the social sciences led to lively and applied debates, with implications that surpassed the architects' community. The discussions were built on the premise that the living space had to be resolved in an inter-and multi-disciplinary manner, connected with the social realities. Georges Lambert-Lamond, the French representative in the Urbanism committee of the IUA, for instance, held the opening speech of the congress. He invited the participants to contribute to the outline of a methodological model that would have allowed the experts to correlate the need for a built space in different developing countries with the demographic dynamics, industrialisation perspectives, and the availability of the food supplies. From his viewpoint, the housing programs could not be fulfilled without a deeper understanding of how global transformations could influence the local realities. In a speech that was meant to reflect the complicated context in which the world then found itself, Lambert-Lamond showed that in the circumstances of a new globalisation wave, the development discrepancies between the capitalist north and the post-colonial south were increasingly more visible. The possibility that the social tensions from the (semi)periphery would affect the stability of the Western centre needed a long-term social mend action. In this respect, he proposed four main directions in which they could intervene successfully: the preparation of certain guiding principles that would act as methodological benchmarks for the third world countries; the crystallization of specific administrative frameworks so that the

¹¹ Aurelian Trișcu, "O dezbatere internațională asupra problemei locuirii" [An international debate on the habitation issue], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 36.

governments of the implicated countries would find a more efficient way of undertaking the social projects in accordance with the available resources; the preparation of certain conventions within which the less developed states would have the possibility of adjusting its domestic policies; ensuring the scientific support regarding the regional and global dynamics of the issue.¹²

Three questions seem to have occupied the participants' agenda for the seminar held in Bucharest: What type of city had to be designed for the future? Using which resources? What would the urban communities have looked like? The participants seemed to agree that the solutions were difficult to identify in the absence of a better understanding of the young people's urban construction role. By approaching the issue from the viewpoint of the medium to long-term impact of the generational exchanges, Lars Magnus Giertz, the representative of Sweden, for instance, pointed out that one of the characteristics of the development stage of the 1970s was the encouragement of the young people's migration from the rural to the urban areas, as well as, implicitly, the expansion of the perimeters of the cities. Naturally, the Soviet representative pleaded for the reassessment of development in terms of class.¹³ Furthermore, the Romanian sociologist Henry Stahl had a more nuanced stance regarding the need for understanding the social implications of transitioning from one class to another as a result of rural-urban mobility. Such stances show the Marxist shift of the seminar. However, the ideas coagulated during the debates outlined the premises through which modernism could have formulated a new language and a new constructive category, at a time when this style was subjected to a critical analysis within all of the Western intellectual circles.

From many viewpoints, the participants' speeches illustrated a good familiarity with that time's intellectual debates. Building on Henry Lefebvre's concept of "right to the city," the participants seemed to agree that the city had to be thought of as a state of mind and not as a cumulus of materiality, thus suggesting a more in-depth sociological approach of the individual experiences.¹⁴ Focusing on the social structures of the new urban centres, Henry Stahl, for instance, drew attention

¹² The initiative seems to have belonged to the USSR representative. Alexandr Rocegov made a genuine plea in front of the plenary meeting of the conference and spoke about the benefits that would appear if the socio-economic development division of the United Nations were to assume the responsibility of coordinating such integrated programs.

¹³ Alexander Ragov, "Locuirea umană" [Human habitation], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 45.

¹⁴ See Horia Maciu's intervention in the congress conclusions: Horia Maicu, "Raport de sinteză" [Summary report], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 93-96.

to the fact that the contemporary city was often characterised by a “strong demographic blend,¹⁵” which created the necessity of approaching the urban through a deeper understanding of the inhabitants’ distinctive experiences. Equally important, the discussions regarding gender equality, an expression of the new wave of feminism on a global level, slowly pushed the debates towards aspects that regarded how the young people could use the urban infrastructure in order to materialize their own political and social agendas through the civic involvement of the communities. From Gheorghe Sebestyen's viewpoint, for instance, this revitalization of feminist activism was the factor that facilitated the following:

“on the occasion provided by a meeting organised by the International Union of Architects departments, together with the specialists in the issue of development, in sociological issues, we can discuss certain problems of their contents, in the form of versions, in the form of hypotheses, in the form of possibilities that are very different from one level of development to another, which can thus intertwine, so that, from this basis, we could have a perhaps clearer view on the habitat of the future.¹⁶”

However, when faced with ample mass constructions, the speakers leaned towards moderation as means to “search for adequate functional solutions.¹⁷” That was an excellent pretext to question the validity of neighborhood units' model. The concept had already been criticised in the professional circles because of its inadequacy for the contemporary social requirements; the model of neighborhood units would merely have emphasised the way in which the architecture crisis in these spaces was the identity crisis in the absence of originality and resourcefulness. However, the speakers' lamentations regarding the potential difficulties of creating an urban space that would accommodate the inhabitants' individuality and social involvement were quite quickly countered by much more pragmatic arguments. As

¹⁵ Henry Stahl, “Premise sociologice ale urbanismului românesc” [Sociological premises of the Romanian urbanism], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 89. Original text: “puternic amestec demografic.”

¹⁶ Gh. Sebestyen, “Discuții” [Discussions], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 99. Original text: “cu ocazia unor întâlniri organizate de secțiile Uniunii Internaționale a Arhitecților împreună cu specialiști în probleme de dezvoltare, în probleme sociologice, să dezbatem unele probleme ale conținutului sub formă de variante, sub formă de ipoteze, sub formă de posibilități foarte diferite de la un nivel de dezvoltare la altul, care s-ar putea întrevedea, pentru ca pe baza lor să ne putem crea o imagine poate mai clară despre habitatul viitorului.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98. Original text: “căutarea rezolvărilor funcționale adecvate.”

long as the objective of the discussions was finding specific cost-effective solutions that can be applied at a large scale, the best option seemed to seek the solutions for making the interior of a home more flexible, a home that became the primary cell of the city, and to apply the main modernist principles regarding the urban space continuously.

Published in *Arhitectura RSR* [The RSR Architecture], the journal of The Union of Romanian Architects, the documents of the convention outline a unitary message, articulated around the idea that architecture was at the center of the process of development. Far from reproducing the blunt ideological stances from other international reunions among the representatives of the Western countries, the socialist states and the third world¹⁸, the texts that are available to the Romanian readers emphasize a consensual view regarding several key directions: the social function of architecture, the role played by the state in undertaking constructive programs, decisional centralism, and long-term sustainability. Or, in the words of a participant:

“we believe that the governments of the countries can incite the architects to establish the quantitative and qualitative necessities, according to the social and political policies, to define the relative needs of the environment, to systematise the territory on all levels.¹⁹”

However, such a reading cannot overlook the fact that the texts' selection can illustrate the Bucharest officials' positions. It was not necessarily an accurate depiction of the speeches, so much as it was a type of "translation" of a set of ideas regarding the development's constructive implications from the Romanian side's perspective.²⁰ Therefore, these texts emphasize how modernism could have met the need to democratize the built space through fast and cheap construction practices. As Katherine Verdery recently noted, they bring forth the fact that in the 1970s, the

¹⁸ We are referring here to the debates of the '70s on the demographic dynamics and the population policies. See: Corina Dobos, "Global Challenges, Local Knowledges: Politics and Expertise at the World Population Conference in Bucharest, 1974," *East Central Europe* 45, 2-3 (2018): 215-244.

¹⁹ Aurelian Trișcu, "O dezbatere internațională pe tema locuinței" [An international debate on the housing issue], *Arhitectura RSR* 2 (1972): 38. Original text: "se consideră că guvernele țărilor pot antrena pe arhitecți la programarea necesităților cantitative și calitative în concordanță cu politica economică și socială, la definirea nevoilor relative la mediul înconjurător, la sistematizarea teritoriului la toate nivelurile."

²⁰ Tibor Benedetti, "Conferință corelativă" [Correlative conference], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 85.

Romanian authorities were tributary to a new type of socialism that focused on the consolidation of legitimacy through redistribution and not so much through accumulation.²¹ In this sense, my argument is that the 1971 moment cannot be isolated from a much more complicated political context. Thus, the institutional centralization of the social sciences and the increase in the state funding for the programs of forecasting and researching the future, two moments that occurred during the same year, brought forth the national decision makers' interest in constructing an agenda of knowledge centred around both understanding individuality and on the viability of the social investment projects. As such, the built space offered an excellent opportunity to test these ideas, thus outlining the premises for accelerating the redistribution process undertaken by the decision-makers.

From the right to the city to the right to housing

However, the conversion of the ideas regarding the habitation in ample urban construction programs proved to be an objective that was much more difficult to accomplish than it had initially been estimated. This situation was only partially caused by the lack of concrete solutions offered by the experts or the inability of the states to implement them; it was actually caused by the fact that more and more of the people involved seemed to agree that a *home* was an intellectual project that was much more interdisciplinary than it had initially been estimated. The expertise from different fields proved to be imperiously necessary in order to obtain good results. In fact, international reunions organised in different institutional contexts brought forth specific issues regarding how the housing programs could be fulfilled, only by harmonising several different variables, such as the demographic dynamics, the resource availability, the local characteristics or the level of the technological development, as an expression of a country's economic growth potential. The problem that was thus on the agenda of the decision-makers regarded, first and foremost, the accessibility of the housing space, for as many people as possible, the minimal comfort in the context in which the new, ample industrialisation projects prevail over the activism characteristic to the "right to the city." Known in the historiography as the "ecological approach" to housing, this type of approach led to the creation of trans-national and trans-institutional forms of activism, in which the

²¹ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

non-state actors would work together with the traditional representatives of the diplomatic body in order to achieve the objectives.²²

Habitat 76, the United Nations conference on human settlements, organized in Vancouver in May 1976, illustrated the emergence of a new means of approaching the living space. Organized under the name of "the right to housing," the conference gathered delegates from over 50 states, including Romania. The stated purpose was to analyze the perspectives of human settlements over 30 years. The conference aimed to identify specific viable urbanization and systematization solutions for the developing countries and articulate adequate institutional frameworks. Despite the theme, however, the conference was political. Alternatively, in the words of Jai Rattan Bhalla, the president of the IUA, "... too few architects were present to officially discuss the conditions in which the inhabitants of the world live and will live,²³" since the participation of the governmental experts and the representatives of the decision-makers was much more critical.

In this sense, the conference offered the United Nations officials the opportunity to build an institutional infrastructure through which the knowledge and expertise on human settlements would be transmitted from the advanced states to the developing ones. As early as 1975, the organisers requested that the participating states offer the UN, even by renouncing the copyrights, systematisation blueprints, housing projects, or planning solutions for the public space. What stood out in this context was the opinion that seemed to have formed at that moment regarding the pre-eminence of the methodological and technical relevance of these urbanisation solutions over the possible ideological considerations; the hope was in the efficacy of these trans-national and trans-ideological transfers.

Discussed in passing in the *Arhitectura RSR* [The RSR Architecture] journal (the event only received a short, two-page chronicle), the conference was somewhat better documented by the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Environment, and the County Sear Councils. The transcripts of the meetings held by the political office of the CC of the RCP, the addresses to the Popular Councils, the correspondence between different responsible ministries, the correspondence between the Romanian authorities and the UN officials, or the activity reports regarding the participation in training sessions or to the conference itself outline a

²² MFA Archive, issue 241-ONU, file 6159/1974, f. 109 v.

²³ Alexandru Iotzu, "Habitat 76," *Arhitectura RSR* 6 (1976): 4-5. Original text: "... prea puțini arhitecți erau prezenți pentru a discuta oficial condițiile în care trăiesc și vor trăi locuitorii lumii."

wide space for the analysis of how the representatives of a socialist state understood how they would be part of the debates on the conversion of modernism to political actions, with respect to development.²⁴

The Romanian representatives responded rather arduously to the UN's request that they offer the international institutions a set of urbanization solutions that would act as representative cities. The materials were sent to Vancouver with a more than six-month delay. The letter exchange between the Romanian part and the UN representatives, often consisting of repeated and persistent requests from the foreign side and silence from the Romanian side, somewhat shows the Bucharest authorities' bureaucratic immobility in international interactions. However, such blockades, which were undoubtedly due to the socialist regime's stuffy functioning system, cannot obscure the socialist authorities' self-representation regimes emphasized by the conference in Vancouver.

Therefore, following several discussions, Iosif Ugler, the head of the Committee for the Issues of the Popular Councils, proposed that the selection sent by Romania should include the systematization blueprint of the town of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej (today, Onești), of the Titan and Pantelimon neighborhoods in Bucharest and an urban circulation solution.

The town of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej was designed at the beginning of the '60s, during the great ascension of the functionalist socialist modernism. It was based on the blueprints of an ISCAS team of architects, specialized in territorial systematization (Ciruz Spiride, Gheorghe Iacovescu, Adriana Popp), and urban systematization (Boris Grumbers, Leon Haber and Traian Popescu). It was designed to house several tens of thousands of people, and, according to the presentation made by the *Arhitectura RSR* journal, the town illustrated “an increasingly more popular continuous preoccupation for the search for the possibilities of giving each settlement its personality by exploiting the landscape and the natural environment.”²⁵ More specifically, the chosen urban solution aimed to integrate the natural environment into the built space and ensure distinct possibilities of future expansion, depending on the area's economic and social evolution. On the one hand,

²⁴ Ibid, 4.

²⁵ Mariana Vereanu, “Sistematizarea unor orașe din regiunea Bacău” [The systematisation of several towns from the Bacău region], *Arhitectura RPR* 1 (1965): 2-10. Original text: “o preocupare continuă, urmărită din ce în ce mai intens, pentru cercetarea posibilităților de a se crea o personalitate proprie fiecărei așezări în parte, valorificându-se relieful și cadrul natural.”

the designers included health protection, which separated the industrial space from the inhabited neighborhoods. On the other hand, the movement in the city and between the urban nucleus and the surrounding villages was improved through adequate transportation solutions.

The second item sent to Vancouver, the Titan neighbourhood in Bucharest, illustrated the Romanian urban practices from the beginning of the 1970s. In the *Arhitectura RSR* journal, it received a detailed presentation, in a special issue dedicated to Bucharest envisioning the year 2000. The neighbourhood located in the eastern part of the city was substantial, capable of housing over 200,000 people. However, the ensemble's exceptionality did not reside in its size but rather in the authorities' efforts for finding the best solutions of maximising its spatial functionality. Based on a series of sociological studies and detailed scientific analyses regarding the dynamics of the urban space in the new socio-economic context, the Titan neighbourhood could offer solutions for reducing the distance between a home and a workplace. Presented by several sociologists as a counter-example of a "bedroom neighbourhood", it best illustrated the designers' choice to organize the space in accordance with the functional areas – work, habitation, development, recreation, and rest –, thus allowing people to socialize without making budget deductions. Several elements seem to have been central here. First of all, it was a large ensemble located in the vicinity of several industrial areas, thus ensuring a direct connection with the main workplaces. Second of all, the new residential areas developed along with the natural elements, thus ensuring a better integration with nature. Third of all, it was considered illustrative for reducing the distances between the home and the workplace. Therefore, "the proximity of the habitation buildings to the workplaces and their grouping into different production branches will bring balance to the logical utility and efficiency to the working hands and to the basic means."²⁶

Why were these solutions critical, in the context of the conference in Vancouver, and how could such an example have met the developing countries' expectations? The answer can easily be identified in the presentation of these architectural materials. Both Onești and Titan illustrated what the professional discourse of that time called "organic urbanism," namely an assumed preoccupation

²⁶ Ioan Ciobanu, "Principii și rezolvări în sistematizarea Capitalei" [Principles and solutions in the systematisation of the capital], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1971): 18-22. Original text: "apropierea construcțiilor de locuințe de locurile de muncă și gruparea acestora pe diferite ramuri de producție va duce la un echilibru în utilitatea logică și eficiență a mâinii de lucru și a mijloacelor de bază."

regarding the interdependency of the habitation neighbourhood and the proximity of the industries. By using many of the modernist principles, such as mass constructions, functionalism, rationality, or circulation, the solutions chosen by the Romanian side could very well have met the needs of the countries that wished to develop by expanding an ample industrial fund in the urban areas.²⁷ In line with the preoccupation for "the right to housing," the functionality characteristic of these solutions, proposed by the Romanian side, would have ensured the premises for mass construction programs.

The hybridisation of knowledge at a local level

This type of interactions is not necessarily connected to "the models of order and truth that characterise the modern West" that could somewhat impact non-European countries, but rather to how states like Romania mobilised their transnational knowledge on human habitation in order to reconsider their own urban construction projects. More specifically, they show how the knowledge produced in different non-professional epistemic contexts, as were the UN reunions, adjusted the Romanian architects' models and practices, and established their later conversion into a set of normative measures relevant to the development project of the socialist state.²⁸

A reading of the leading professional publications convincingly illustrates this transformation. For instance, in 1975, when the efforts for organising the manifestation in Vancouver reached a maximum level of intensity, the *Arhitectura RSR* journal dedicated an entire issue to the architecture criticism in Romania. The issue compiled the contributions of the most influential practitioners of that time, such as Gh. Sebestyen, M. Caffé, C. Lăzărescu etc. Written from different theoretical viewpoints and treating diverse themes, from circulation, environment, work, or recreation, these texts pointed out that the architectural practice had reached a critical point. The avoidance of a housing crisis was conditioned by a change in the approach of the interior space. It had become more transparent and more explicit that undertaking "standard" construction projects no longer sufficed. Solutions for the improvement of the inner flexibility of a home had to be found, so that, with

²⁷ MFA Archive, issue 241-ONU, file 5364/1972, f. 29.

²⁸ Roman Moldovan, "Locuirea umană și semnificația sa social-economică în condițiile dezvoltării contemporane" [Human habitation and its social-economic significance in the context of the contemporary development], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1972): 87.

minimal investments, the living space could be adjusted depending on the comfort needs of the current and future generations.²⁹ In this sense, the specialists pleaded for a much more critical approach and for the adaptation of the projects to the requirements of contemporary society. The exceptionality of these speeches did not, however, reside in the preoccupation with the long-term sustainability of the homes, since that was a constant for the journal from the beginning of the 1970s, but rather in the signal they transmitted to the national professional community regarding the necessity to reconsider the constructive solutions in accordance with a series of central issues of the projects for the global development of the (post)industrial society. In other words, the plea of the *Arhitectura RSR* journal was for a type of constructive solution that would be both financially accessible and appropriate for an increasingly more flexible and more territorially mobile workforce. However, this led to a series of conceptual ambiguities in Romania's professional language regarding urban space.

On the one hand, it outlined the premises for the recovery of interwar modernism as a solution for creating specific sustainable approaches to the living space of the 1970s. Beginning with 1975, the *Arhitectura RSR* journal regularly published texts dedicated to the architectural creations of the 1930s and of the most influential practitioners of that time. Most of the articles were signed by Radu Patrulius, and they were part of the *Înaintașii noștri* [Our forefathers] section. However, they were items of architecture history to a small extent. Referring to Haralamb Georgescu, his mentor from the Faculty of Architecture, and a "**promoter of modern Romanian architecture in the 1930s**" (emphasis present in the original text), for instance, Patrulius emphasised two aspects: the way in which his former teacher taught his students to "match the functions", for optimal use of the built space, and his interest in emphasising the "national-universal" connections by rejecting Neo-Classicism, as an architectural solution for the post-war Bucharest, in favour of "the new".³⁰ Why were such details relevant for the professional benchmarks of the 1970s in Romania? My argument is that the texts bring forth an ample conceptual repertoire regarding the functionalist imaginary of the home, through which the theoreticians of the 1970s could articulate, in a *long-term* key, the intellectual genealogies of modernism. Moreover, they paved the way for certain

²⁹ Cezar Lăzărescu, "Probleme actuale ale urbanizării în țara noastră" [The current issues of urbanisation in our country], *Arhitectura RSR* 4 (1975): 10.

³⁰ Radu Patrulius, "Evocări: Arhitectul Haralamb Georgescu" [Evocations: The architect Haralamb Georgescu], *Arhitectura RSR* 5-6 (1978): 80 and 82.

reconfigurations of the networks of expertise, not necessarily based on generational connections, but rather on a conviction broadly shared at a global level regarding the transportability of the style in other cultural, political, or ideological contexts. Therefore, the inclination towards interwar modernism is far from being a nostalgic reassessment of a historical epoch. On the contrary, it must be read as a pragmatic approach of the housing issue from the viewpoint of the added value that modernism would have given to functionality in the 1970s.

On the other hand, they allowed the socialist authorities to connect the urban development project to the state construction's national agenda. In parallel with the texts on interwar modernism, the *Arhitectura RSR* journal frequently published different contributions to the integration of the local specificity in the architecture projects and harmonise them with the latest technological evolutions. The coverage area was quite large since the local character was understood as construction materials and socio-cultural specificity. Or, in the words of a participant to the IUA conference in Mexico City in October 1978: “our recommendation is not a simple, functional approach to certain issues, such as the development of the urban areas, urban systematisation, the use of local materials, but a better understanding of the social-cultural environment. We must also focus on appreciating the cultural heritage and values, on the long-term projects, on future-oriented planning, on the global issues, and on visionary thinking, infused with love and beauty, namely with the will to fight against misery, poverty, and inequity.³¹” What was the relevance of nuancing the local specificity to the Romanian project of urban construction? My argument is that the international debates on development, which allotted a wide space to the right of the second and third world countries to protect their national resources from the advancement of the western capital and technology, allowed Romania to formulate an alternative to the growth project imagined by the Soviet

³¹ Mahdi Elmandjra, “Corespondență de la al XIII Congres Mondial al Uniunii Internaționale a Arhitecților, Mexico City, Octombrie 1978: Rolul arhitecților în dezvoltarea națională” [Correspondence from the 10th World Congress of the International Union of Architects, Mexico City, October 1978: The role played by the architects in the national development], *Arhitectura RSR* 2 (1979): 83. Original text: “ceea ce recomandăm nu este o simplă abordare funcțională a unor probleme ca dezvoltarea zonelor urbane, sistematizarea urbană, folosirea materialelor locale ci o mai bună înțelegere a mediului social-cultural. Mai trebuie să se pună accentul și pe aprecierea moștenirii și valorilor culturale, pe proiectele pe termen lung, pe o planificare orientată spre viitor, pe problemele globale și pe o gândire vizionară, pătrunsă de iubire și frumusețe, adică de voința combaterii mizeriei, sărăciei și inechităților.”

Union and by the capitalist countries. Such a turn fit quite nicely into the new context generated by the nationalist politics of Ceaușescu's regime.

At the intersection of these plans, the actions undertaken in 1970 through the National Systematisation Program, through the Central Committee's actions for the systematisation of the urban and rural areas, outline a type of solution that aimed to harmonise the industrial objectives with an urban concept that was sensitive to the environment issues.³² Debated in the period that followed in different institutional and professional contexts, these ideas took shape in 1974 due to the adoption of the systematisation law. Or, in the words of Cezar Lăzărescu, "the relationship between architecture and the national development is most eloquently expressed through the systematisation of the territory and the towns."³³

Widely contested by the recent historiography, because of the long-term negative implications, such as the demolition campaigns carried out in the villages and the establishment of the agro-industrial towns, the implementation of the systematisation project cannot be taken out from this more ample intellectual context in which the Romanian specialists were involved beginning with the 1960s. Throughout the 1970-1975, the *Arhitectura RSR* journal published several articles on the systematisation. However, the peak was reached at the time of the reunion in Vancouver 1976. The professional debates began from the specialists' preoccupation for efficiently solving the issue of the circulation, in the context of the increasing flexibility of the workforce and the gradually more substantial interest in transposing the "characteristics of the evolution and the collective's different aspirations"³⁴ into constructive solutions. However, in a short time, the discussions evolved towards issues that were much more applied to the Romanian realities, such as the management of the workforce, the work productivity, the integration of the young people into the socialist state's project of transformation, or the insurance of the necessary infrastructure for the intensive industrialisation programs.

It did not take long for the systematisation blueprint [schita de sistematizare] to be questioned.³⁵ Given the increasingly apparent attempts of

³² In this respect, see the unsigned introductory article: "Probleme actuale ale arhitecturii și sistematizării" [Current issues of architecture and systematisation], *Arhitectura RSR* 1 (1971): 4-5.

³³ Cezar Lăzărescu, "Arhitectura și dezvoltarea" [Architecture and development] *Arhitectura RSR* 3 (1978): 10. Original text: "relația dintre arhitectură și dezvoltarea națională își găsește expresia cea mai elocventă în sistematizarea teritoriului și a localităților."

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. Original text: "caracteristicilor evoluției și aspirațiilor diferitelor colectivități."

³⁵ For a historiographic view on the relevance of the systematization blueprint within the Romanian industrialization project from the 1960s, see Mara Mărginean, *Ferestre spre*

decentralisation, which required improved urban functionality, financial planning and complex systematisation, the widely spread solution in the 1960s Romania, which aimed to condense as many functions as possible into a small territory, was officially sanctioned. However, the new concept proposed the interdependency of the living areas and the industrial areas, as well as the improvement of the daily experiences of the workforce.

Strongly influenced by the idea stated in Vancouver regarding the home as an ecological issue, the national debate brought forth several key elements. Through a critical reading of the accomplishments until that time, one practitioner noted that “only in a few towns,” such as Hunedoara or Gheorghiu Dej, attempts had been made to propose integrated solutions for the utilities; in all other cases, they were fragmented. The international debates' influence became apparent because, for the Romanian practitioners, the solutions for spatial organisation were no longer thought of as constructive models, but rather from the viewpoint of their ecological implications, namely ensuring an optimal density and diminishing the differences in the social integration. By proposing the expansion of the previously adopted solutions in the Bucharest neighbourhood Titan case, probative for the balanced distribution of homes and industrial workplaces, the Romanian specialists showed that the neighbourhoods' monotony could be removed through much more flexible approaches to space. Without clearly contesting the modernist principles of the distribution of functions, Romania's results showed that the separation by green spaces led to the formation of barrens within the cities since the municipalities did not dispose of resources necessary for their maintenance. Still preoccupied with the issue of insolation, as part of the modernism of the Athena Charter, the designers also brought forth other aspects, such as the noise and the pollution, as essential components of an ecological approach to housing. Moreover, in the following period, the housing buildings' height was expected to be established depending on the trees' height so that the apartment buildings would not have more than five or six floors.

A reading of the systematisation programs from this viewpoint also led to changes in the inner space approach. Conceived as “a complete ambient,” free of any fixed compartmentation, it was defined by two principles: transformability and total mobility. A revitalisation of the interwar practices was thus useful, as long as

furnalul roșu: urbanism și cotidian în Hunedoara și Călan [Windows to the red background: urbanism and everyday life in Hunedoara and Călan] (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 122-158.

“many of the traditional urban housing types and certain apartments from the pre-war apartment buildings possessed the qualities of suppleness and flexibility, which the standard apartment from the past decades definitively lost.³⁶”

However, the Romanian specialists' critical stance on urban planning, in the context of the socialist state's systematization programs, offers a critical analysis angle to better understand the designers' self-representation means during their interactions with the foreign specialists. In an interview published in the *Arhitectura RSR* journal in 1979, for instance, Cezar Lăzărescu made a clear step in that direction:

“the experience that generates the current practice and our country's ideas for the future can be applied in countries that are comparable to ours... our opinions, the experience to which I previously referred, the accomplishments of our school have generated great interest from the majority of the developing countries, the countries that have identical or similar systems, the majority of the countries that have the same short or long-term objectives.³⁷”

What was the main idea, in this context? Frequently structured in terms of synchronicity and westernization, the interest in modernism preponderantly outlined the Romanian society's agenda of stating its cultural belonging to the excellent production areas, and, to a smaller extent, its agenda of emancipation. From this viewpoint, the stances taken by the Romanian specialists regarding the modernist principles, in the context of the debates regarding the housing architecture in the developing countries, mostly show aspects related to a hegemonic view on how knowledge can regulate international relations and how it can problematise modernism as an expression of specific actions of discursive

³⁶ Silvia Ursu, “Conceptul de flexibilitate a spațiului locuinței” [The concept of the flexibility of the living space], *Arhitectura RSR* 2 (1976):13. Original text: “multe din tipurile de locuință urbană tradițională ca și unele apartamente în blocurile antebelice posedau aceste calități de suplețe și flexibilitate, pe care locuința tip din ultimele decenii le-a pierdut definitiv.”

³⁷ Ileana Murgescu, “În convorbire cu Cezar Lăzărescu: Prezențe arhitecturale românești peste hotare” [In conversation with Cezar Lăzărescu: Romanian architectural presences abroad], *Arhitectura RSR* 6 (1979): 10. Original text: “experiența care generează practica actuală și ideile de viitor ale țării noastre sunt valabile în țări comparabile cu noi. ... părerile noastre, experiența la care mă refeream, realizările școlii noastre sunt privite cu foarte mare interes, în majoritatea țărilor în curs de dezvoltare, în țările care au sisteme sociale identice sau apropiate, în majoritatea țărilor care au aceleași obiective pentru viitorul apropiat sau mai îndepărtat.”

refinement, within a more comprehensive geostrategic project. Cezar Lăzărescu's remark can be read thusly:

“... for us, collaboration means helping the partners create what they desired BY THEMSELVES, not that we would create for them what we believe they desired. For us, collaboration represents aid in the formation of their own frameworks, in the assumption of the technology that is adequate to a certain country's level of development; it means supporting the partners so that they would develop through their own strengths and their own projects.³⁸”

In other words, the Romanian specialists' experience in the field of systematisation, refined during different international professional meetings and initially tested in Romania, could have been an example of acceptable practices for the developing countries with whom the authorities in Bucharest sought to consolidate their commercial relations.

Conclusions

Based on several international debates on the housing issue that had taken place either in Romania or abroad, the present article aimed to emphasize how the trans-national character of modernism, throughout the 20th century, outlined the premises for a vast analytical space in which the peripheral manifestations contributed not only to the syncretization of certain specific forms, but also to the increase in the temporal fluidity of the manifestation of this aesthetic. More specifically, in the words of Carmen Popescu, the modernist view, in a *la longue duree* key, brings forth not only several fragments that cannot always be organised into a coherent image but also multiple offsets between the local manifestations and the broader global phenomenon.³⁹ From this viewpoint, the modern, as a constructive solution, shortly received anti-colonial valences that were

³⁸ Ibid., 10. Original text: “... pentru noi, colaborare, înseamnă a-i ajuta pe parteneri să-și facă SINGURI ceea ce doresc și nu de a le face noi ceea ce credem că vor ei. Pentru noi, colaborarea înseamnă ajutor în formarea cadrelor proprii, în însușirea unor tehnologii adecvate gradului de dezvoltare al țării respective, înseamnă a-i sprijini pe parteneri să se dezvolte prin forțele și proiectele propria.”

³⁹ Carmen Popescu, “Modernity in context,” in *(Dis)Continuities: Fragments of the Romanian Modernity in the First Half of the 20th Century*, ed. by Carmen Popescu (Bucuresti: Simetria, 2010), 11-12.

meant to mobilise the functionality, the relation between the useful and the beautiful, the harmony between technical and aesthetic, in order to offer the population the necessary solutions to segregation and the hegemony of capitalism. The implementation of such a viewpoint essentially shows that modernism is hybrid and multivalent, most often articulated by the local particularities and the specific national conditions.

However, the application of the analysis to Romania's reality in the 1970s also shows that "the act of translating" the ideas implies multiple means of manipulating and distorting the original language and the original meanings. In other words, "a translation is possible if we remove the idea of the pure and homogenous forms of knowledge, and we recognise the means through which the actors can access multiple forms of meaning. These themselves are in a constant state of flow since they meet others that create the complex processes of synchronisation, blending, incorporation, integration, and hybridisation.⁴⁰" Thus, from the viewpoint of the Romanian authorities, the suggestive juxtaposition between urban development, political activism and youth, that marked the beginning of the 1970s at a global level through the 1968 protests and later through the generational mobilisation for affirming "the right to the city", represented a good pretext for rethinking certain domestic projects of urban systematisation, adequate to the national industrial priorities. However, when the international community seemed to become more and more involved in order to find solutions for the accessibility of the living space and for decreasing the social discrepancies between the less developed states, the decision makers in Bucharest found a new negotiation opportunity in the areas they considered to be strategic, by referencing their domestic experience in the area of the mass constructions, as a means of consolidating the cooperation with the third world.⁴¹

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Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

⁴⁰ *Anthropology and development...*, 153. Original text: "[t]raducerea este posibilă dacă ne îndepărtăm de ideea formelor de cunoaștere „pure” și „omogene” și recunoaștem modalitățile prin care actorii pot avea acces la mai multe forme de sens. Acestea sunt ele însele într-o stare constantă de flux, deoarece întâlnesc altele care creează procese complexe de sincretizare, amestecare, încorporare, integrare, precum și hibridizare.”

⁴¹ Dana Vais, "Exporting hard modernity: construction projects from Ceaușescu's Romania in the 'Third World'," *The Journal of Architecture* 3, 17 (2012): 433-451.