

**COLLECTIVE HOUSING WITHIN THE CONTEMPORARY URBAN SPACE.
PRECEDENTS, PRESENT-DAY CONTEXT, PERSPECTIVES**

PhD Thesis - Summary

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in ARCHITECTURE

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The contemporary urban space must be perceived as a dynamic ensemble, which presents itself as a mosaic of built tissues, a mixture of urban typologies, which, together, define the larger whole, as well as its identity. Amongst these typologies, the collective housing, materialized in a variety of forms and means of expression in the contemporary city, becomes all too often predominant within the urban environment, constituting both shelter and landmark for a significant part of the population.

In particular, Romanian settlements are dominated by the presence of collective housing neighbourhoods erected under the communist administration, only in Timișoara these developments accommodating almost half of the resident population. One is therefore entitled to pay an increased attention to this subject, in order to reach a better understanding, as well as to ensure an appropriate administration of the collective housing neighbourhoods, inherited from previous generations.

INTRODUCTION

Although the scientific environment has not yet managed to produce a generally accepted definition for the quality of life, references towards this concept can be found from the oldest of times within certain writings, constituting a recurrent preoccupation both for philosophers, as well as, later on, for researchers and practitioners alike, from domains as diverse as sociology, psychology, medicine and even urban planning; such is the extent of these preoccupations, that nowadays the quality of life is actually becoming an end purpose for the majority of the professions.

Taking into consideration the topicality of this subject, as well as the impact that the quality of life has over the society as a whole, the contemporary specialists have recently been conceiving, in an accelerated rhythm, more and more methods regarding the evaluation of life quality, both at a global level, as well as within the urban environment. After a careful analysis of these methods, one cannot help but notice the extraordinary variety of the considered factors; however, the aspects regarding architecture (from the general aesthetics of the facades, to the inner structure of the interior space, as well as the physical and moral comfort that the buildings offer), are surprisingly and frequently eluded.

As a consequence, this paper proposes a new methodology regarding the evaluation of life

quality within the urban environment, which introduces, beyond the traditional aspects, such as accessibility, resource management, public facilities, the physical configuration of neighbourhoods or the social structure of the resident community, a series of factors which refer to the housing stock and inhabitancy, which allow for the quantification of the impact that the architectural means have over the perceived quality of life within the community.

The multi-criterial methodology postulated by the author, which constitutes, in fact, the main contribution of this paper, takes into consideration ten macro-criteria of urban analysis, synthetized based on the bibliographic research; each of these macro-criteria evaluates a series of aspects, the obtained scores illustrating the way in which each factor contributes to the overall level of life quality within the community, as well as to the improvement perspectives of the existing situation in the near future.

Further on, in order to validate the multi-criterial methodology, this paper proposes a thorough study of the collective housing neighbourhoods from Timisoara, erected under the communist administration. Thus, in order to ensure a better understanding of the phenomenon, this paper concentrates first on the evolution of this urban typology at a global level, as well as within the Romanian environment, and in particular within the city of Timisoara.

In order to obtain an accurate overall image of the present-day situation within collective housing neighbourhoods in Timisoara, this paper evaluates the quality of life offered by three different collective housing neighbourhoods, built during the three distinct development stages of this phenomenon within our city, namely the Circumvalatiunii Neighbourhood, the Timisoara Sud Neighbourhood and the Stefan Plavat Neighbourhood. The results obtained following the evaluation are consistent with the conclusions of the theoretical study, both in regard to the general level of life quality, as well as to the way in which different aspects influence the living conditions offered by the neighbourhood to the local community. Thus, Circumvalatiunii Neighbourhood, built during the first development stage of the collective housing phenomenon within the city of Timisoara, offers the highest level of life quality, being closely followed by the Stefan Plavat Neighbourhood, one of the last neighbourhoods built in Timisoara prior to the December 1989 Revolution. At the opposite end, one can find Timisoara Sud Neighbourhood, built during the middle development stage of the collective housing phenomenon, which offers significantly lower living conditions to its inhabitants.

Finally, in order to improve the existing situation, this paper dedicates an entire chapter to a series of theoretical principles of intervention, applicable in order to increase the quality of the housing stock and of the inhabitancy within the collective housing neighbourhoods. Also, taking into consideration the particularities of the three neighbourhoods analysed previously, this paper weighs the possibilities of implementing the theoretical findings in real life, according to the specifics of each area.

In conclusion, this paper proposes a theoretical study, which details the subject of collective housing, through the perspective of the life quality offered by the apartment blocks' neighbourhoods built in Timisoara under the communist administration.

Chapter 1: THE CONCEPT OF LIFE QUALITY: THE CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH

The concept of life quality, although difficult to define [1], has been a part of our collective conscience from the oldest of times, constituting both a subject of philosophical debate, as well

as an index measurement of the development of the societies, from an economic, social and, more recently, ecological point of view.

However, even though the subject of life quality is referred to in occidental writings from the times of Greco-Roman Antiquity, personalities such as Socrates, Plato or Aristotle each formulating complex theories in regard to this subject [2], [3], the concept becomes the target of scientific preoccupations only during the 19th century, when the issue of social analysis is first brought to attention [4], [5].

Further on, during the 20th century, but especially after the 1960s, a series of methods regarding the evaluation of life quality at a global level appear worldwide; amongst these, one can count *The Physical Quality of Life Index* [6], *The Human Development Index* [7], [8], or *The Happy Planet Index* [9]. Following the compared analysis of these methods, the chapter synthesizes the factors considered by these methods, which belong, however, to apparently contradictory domains: socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-sanitary, socio-psychological, socio-juridical and ecological aspects.

Lately, the relation between the overall level of life quality and the intrinsic quality of the urban environment, as well as the way in which these two components of the surrounding reality influence each other, constitute the main subject of scientific research.

Thus, during recent years, starting from the end of the 20th century, but especially during the 21st century, a series of standards and guides regarding both the evaluation of life quality within existing communities, as well as the coordination of new developments, have been released to the public.

Amongst the aspects evaluated by these standards (such as *LEED-ND* [10], [11], [12], *BREEAM Communities* [13], *CASBEE-UD* [14], [15]), one can count the issues of accessibility and connectivity, environmental protection and resource conservation, physical configuration of the neighbourhoods, public facilities, inhabitancy, safety, social diversity and local identity.

However, in spite of the increased interest towards the concept of life quality, shown both by the scientific community and the practitioners alike, a generally accepted definition, as well as a universal methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within a community, have not yet been formulated.

The contributions of the author within this chapter are:

- The identification of the main theoretical dilemmas regarding the concept of life quality
- The synthesis of macro-criteria proposed by the contemporary methods regarding the evaluation of life quality at a global level
- The synthesis of macro-criteria proposed by the contemporary methods regarding the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment

Chapter 2: MULTI-CRITERIAL METHODOLOGY REGARDING THE EVALUATION OF LIFE QUALITY WITHIN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the theoretical studies elaborated on the subject of life quality within a community, as well as on the conclusions regarding the drawbacks of the contemporary theories and methods, presented in the previous chapter, this paper further proposes a new multi-criterial methodology for the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment, applicable in order

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Based on the theoretical studies elaborated on the subject of life quality within a community, as well as on the conclusions regarding the drawbacks of the contemporary theories and methods, presented in the previous chapter, this paper further proposes a new multi-criterial methodology for the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment, applicable in order

to appreciate the existing neighbourhoods.

Although the new methodology accentuates the importance of reaching a holistic equilibrium between economic, social and ecological aspects, the analysed criteria are not strictly divided between these three pillars; this paper rather prioritizes the considered factors according to the position they occupy within the urban hierarchy, as well as to the scale of their influence.

The proposed methodology thus refers to 10 macro-criteria of urban analysis, namely:

- MC 1 – Location and site;
- MC 2 – Good governance;
- MC 3 – Environmental impact;
- MC 4 – Connectivity and accessibility;
- MC 5 – Physical configuration of the neighbourhood;
- MC 6 – The network of facilities and working community;
- MC 7 – Housing stock and inhabitancy;
- MC 8 – Security and safety;
- MC 9 – Local identity;
- MC 10 – Satisfaction of the population.

Each of these macro-criteria evaluate a number of aspects, considered to be essential in regard to the quality of life within the urban environment; based on the way in which these aspects influence the overall level of life quality, they receive a score from 0 to 3.

Going through the considered aspects, one can identify a certain repetition of the evaluated factors, which seem to contribute equally at the definition of life quality from two or even more points of view. Thus, the conservation state, as well as the exterior aspect of the buildings, for example, are important from the point of view of the physical configuration of the neighbourhood (MC5), as well as of the housing stock and inhabitancy (MC7) or of the local identity (MC9). This is explained naturally, based on the inter-dependence which characterizes the urban phenomena, each intervention within the built tissue producing ample, sometimes surprising effects, compared to the immediate expectations.

Reuniting ecological, economic and social aspects, the multi-criteria methodology evaluates, to a certain extent, the sustainability of a community; however, its main purpose remains the appreciation of the immediate effects that certain urban phenomena, both past and present, have on the local community. The perception and satisfaction of the population therefore play a major role in the evaluation process regarding the quality of life, since no matter how well an operation is orchestrated, both from a theoretical and logistical point of view, as long as it does not respond to the needs of the citizens, its effects will not be received well by the community, and the general level of life quality will not be improved.

However, the subjective aspects, that relate to the way in which people perceive the surrounding realities, receive, in the overall scheme, a very objective score, granted based on the way in which these aspects influence the quality of life within the community.

Last but not least, the multi-criteria methodology, proposed by the author, considers that the ten macro-criteria considered have a similar importance regarding the definition of life quality within a community. Therefore, the final score attributed to the neighbourhood is defined as the arithmetical mean of the individual scores, granted to each of the analysed macro-criteria.

The contributions of the author within this chapter are:

- The definition of a new multi-criteria methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within existing housing neighbourhoods
- The identification of the main urban analysis macro-criteria, as well as of their respective aspects, which influence the life quality within a community
- The definition of the way in which scores should be granted for each of the analysed aspects, as well as the interpretation of the final scores, obtained by the studied neighbourhoods

Chapter 3: THE COLLECTIVE HOUSING PHENOMENON: EVOLUTION ALONG THE YEARS

The collective housing represents, nowadays, a generalized phenomenon within Romanian cities; however, its affirmation as an urban typology has occurred gradually, starting with the period between the two world wars, when the apartment block was imported in our country and started to spread, mostly within the capital, but also in other major cities in Romania [16]. The amplitude that this phenomenon has nowadays is however due to the communist period, when large collective housing ensembles were erected all around the country. Initially, these operations were meant to help rebuild the tissue destroyed during the Second World War [16]; but after the 1960s, the new neighbourhoods had, as sole purpose, the accommodation of the growing population, which gradually migrates from the rural environment towards the new industrial centres.

In Timișoara, the phenomenon of collective housing knows four different development stages (amongst which three occur under the communist administration), majorly influenced by the ideological, politic and social-economic context [17].

Thus, the first years (1962-1975) are characterised by the erection of modernist ensembles, in which the buildings (linear or punctual) are placed in a compositional manner, within ample green areas, while the vehicular routes are clearly separated from the pedestrian areas, being situated at a considerable distance from the buildings themselves. At the same time, under the influence of socialist principles, imported from Russia, the housing units have relatively reduced surfaces [18], the main purpose being the externalization of some domestic functions within the neighbourhood, in order to further encourage the communal living. Thus, the traditional kitchens are replaced by large cantinas, administered by the State, which were supposed to ensure at least one hot meal per day for all the inhabitants, while the individual apartments only provided small kitchenettes, destined more likely for the preparation of snacks. Within the neighbourhoods themselves, a series of other facilities, such as schools and kindergartens, neighbourhood centres, medical clinics, etc. were also provided in order to improve the quality of life for inhabitants.

The second period (1975-1982) maintains the reduced surfaces and minimal facilities of the apartments [19]; moreover, under the pressure of the accelerated densification, determined by the industrialisation policy and the subsequent urbanization of the population, attracted towards the larger cities due to the new employment opportunities, the residential developments become more and more crowded, while gradually losing their public facilities. On the other hand, the urban planners of the time reintroduce the concept of the street within the urban tissue, which leads to a clear distinction between the front of the building – oriented towards the street, and its back – oriented towards an interior courtyard; most of the times, this courtyard is, however, too narrow to encourage communitarian activities. At the same time, the great boulevards

receive an even more important role, being provided with continuous fronts, defined by high-rise apartment blocks, which usually have a commercial ground floor.

Finally, during the later years of the communist administration (1982-1989), the situation relaxes, both at an urban level, as well as in regard to the apartments themselves [20]. Thus, the block-type urban arrangements become the norm within housing neighbourhoods, leading to a clear distinction between the street and the interior courtyard, which now occupies more generous surfaces, being provided with green areas. Also, the apartments become larger, while the kitchens reappear within the housing units. Finally, the public facilities are reintroduced within the neighbourhoods; however, taking into consideration the fact that at the time of the 1989 Revolution the majority of these ensembles had not yet been finished, some of the facilities have never been implemented.

After the Revolution, Timișoara went through a stagnation period, with construction works being halted for at least 10 years. Only after the year 2000 has the city begun to develop again, being provided with a series of collective housing buildings and ensembles, most of which have a rather low quality. In recent years, after the 2008-2009 crisis, one can observe an obvious tendency of improvement when it comes to the new apartment blocks neighbourhoods, usually developed by private investors; however, it is too early to objectively evaluate the situation.

One thing is for sure: currently, the city of Timișoara presents itself as a mosaic of urban typologies, out of which the collective housing represents the majority. While the new developments can be easily regulated, through an appropriate legislation, the ensembles inherited from the communist administration are already part of the collective memory of the city, constituting both shelter and landmark for a significant percentage of the population. A proper study regarding these entities is therefore justified, in order to better understand their particularities and the way in which these areas function, as well as to define some theoretical principles, applicable within the collective housing neighbourhoods in order to improve the overall life quality.

The contributions of the author within this chapter are:

- The identification of the main development stages of the collective housing phenomenon at a global level
- The identification of the main development stages of the collective housing phenomenon in Romania
- The identification of the main development stages of the collective housing phenomenon in the city of Timișoara, as well as the understanding of the main characteristics of each development stage

Chapter 4: THE QUALITY OF LIFE WITHIN COLLECTIVE HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS FROM THE CITY OF TIMIȘOARA: CASE STUDY

Chapter 4 focuses on the evaluation of life quality within the collective housing neighbourhoods built in Timișoara during the three different development stages under the communist regime, using the multi-criteria methodology proposed by the author. Thus, three different neighbourhoods are selected, one from each of the three different stages, namely:

- Circumvalațiunii Neighbourhood (1962-1975);
- Timișoara Sud Neighbourhood (1975-1982);
- Ștefan Plavăț Neighbourhood (1982-1989).

Offering a total of 75.000 apartments [21], the three studied neighbourhoods have the capacity to accommodate a significant percentage of Timișoara's current population, thus having an increased impact on the life quality within the urban environment; moreover, the selected neighbourhoods are relatively uniformly distributed within the built tissue of the city, thus offering a complex image of the everyday realities.

The multi-criteria evaluation of the collective housing neighbourhoods within the city of Timișoara reveals certain differences in regard to the level of life quality, according to the period in which these areas were built. However, the analysis did not identify problems specific to a single development stage, the evaluated aspects being found to a certain extent within all the studied neighbourhoods.

At the same time, the chapter proposes a comparison between the situations identified within the three evaluated neighbourhoods, synthetizing the results obtained by each of the analysed area following the multi-criteria evaluation in regard to the quality of life within the urban environment.

The main conclusions that can be drawn from here are:

- Among the three analysed communities, Circumvalațiunii Neighbourhood, erected during the first development stage of the collective housing phenomenon within the city of Timișoara, offers the highest level of life quality, with a final score of 1,87;
- On the 2nd place, at a small difference, one can find Ștefan Plavăț Neighbourhood, built during the third development stage of the phenomenon in Timișoara, with a total score of 1,67;
- Occupying the last position, with a final score of 1,25, one can find Timișoara Sud Neighbourhood, built during the second and most unfavourable development stage of the collective housing in Timișoara;
- Analysing the individual scores, obtained by the three neighbourhoods for each of the evaluated macro-criteria, one can notice that the general tendencies can also be found at a detailed level, Circumvalațiunii Neighbourhood obtaining the highest scores for all of the analysed criteria;
- The most significant difference between the three studied neighbourhoods appears in relation to the MC5 macro-criteria – Physical configuration of the neighbourhood; thus, while Timișoara Sud Neighbourhood was only granted a 0,8 score, the other two neighbourhoods scored 2;
- At the same time, the MC6 macro-criteria - The network of facilities and working community is evaluated with high scores in all of the studied neighbourhoods;
- Finally, all the three neighbourhoods were evaluated with low scores (under 2) in regard to the MC2 macro-criteria – Good Governance, MC8 macro-criteria – Security and safety, MC9 macro-criteria – Local identity and MC10 macro-criteria – Satisfaction of the population; this situation indicates the absence of communitarian cohesion, which is justifiable to some extent through the lack of confidence in the actions of the State, specific to the post-communist Romanian realities.

The contributions of the author within this chapter are:

- The evaluation of life quality within the collective housing neighbourhoods in Timișoara, built during the three different development stages of this phenomenon under the communist regime, based on the multi-criteria methodology, formulated by the author
- The identification of the main differences and similarities between collective housing neighbourhoods within the city of Timișoara built during the three different

development stages of this phenomenon under the communist regime from the point of view of life quality

Chapter 5: THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE QUALITY WITHIN COLLECTIVE HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS THROUGH THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE HOUSING STOCK: CASE STUDIES AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The housing stock and inhabitancy represent one of the most important aspects of the current reality, defining the physical and perceived parameters regarding the domestic life; because of this reason, the housing stock influences to a large extent the quality of life within the urban environment, constituting a key element in this regard.

However, the contemporary theories, as well as the evaluation standards regarding the subject of life quality at a global level tend to ignore the aspects related to the configuration of the housing stock, considering that the architectural features of the built tissue are only a matter of taste, without any proper impact on the urban context.

Since this hypothesis is as false as they get, this paper insists on the subject, proposing a series of theoretical principles, applicable within collective housing neighbourhoods in order to improve the quality of life from the perspective of the housing stock and inhabitancy. Thus, this chapter surveys all of the seven different aspects that play a role in this regard, as defined by the multi-criteria methodology formulated by the author (according to chapter 2); for each of these aspects, a series of implementable measures are proposed, the intervention solutions being exemplified in relation to the existing situation, identified within the three different collective housing neighbourhoods: Circumvalațiunii neighbourhood, Timișoara Sud Neighbourhood and Ștefan Plavăț Neighbourhood.

The theoretical principles, which consist both in legislative measures, as well as in practical interventions, can be initiated either by the local administration or by the representatives of the local community (through the implication of residents' associations); but no matter who initiates the process, these measures can be implemented, in the majority of cases, only through public-private partnerships, which reunite the expertise and legislating power of the authorities with private funds.

In conclusion, without claiming to have mastering the subject, this chapter lays the foundation of a possible ampler research, defining at least a theoretical frame for future interventions. Last but not least, the synthesis of all of the theoretical principles, implementable in order to improve the current situation, may provide the basis for a future intervention catalogue, addressed either to the local administration, which can utilize it as an example of good practice, or to the local community, for information and, why not, motivation.

The contributions of the author within this chapter are:

- The definition of some theoretical principles, applicable within collective housing neighbourhoods in order to improve the general level of quality offered by the housing stock
- The identification of the way in which the theoretical principles can adapt to the particular realities, specific to each of the development stages of the collective housing phenomenon within Timișoara

CONCLUSIONS

Concentrating mainly on theoretical aspects, this paper proposes a thorough study of the collective housing phenomenon, from the point of view of life quality within collective housing neighbourhoods built in Timișoara under the communist administration.

To that effect, based on a rather extended bibliographical research, which seeks to understand the concept of life quality, as well as to identify the factors that influence this aspect, both globally, as well as within contemporary cities, this paper formulates a new multi-criteria methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within urban environment, which concentrates on paying the rightful attention to the architectural aspects, all too often ignored by present-day standards and guides.

Evaluating ten different macro-criteria of urban analysis, the proposed methodology takes into consideration aspects such as the location and accessibility of the neighbourhood, good governance, resource and waste management, the physical configuration of the neighbourhood, the public facilities, housing stock and inhabitancy, security within public space, local identity, as well as the satisfaction of the population.

The validation of the multi-criteria methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment is based on three collective housing neighbourhoods from Timișoara, built before the 1989 Revolution, namely Circumvalațiunii Neighbourhood, Timișoara Sud Neighbourhood and Ștefan Plavăț Neighbourhood. These three areas represent the three different development stages of the collective housing phenomenon in Timișoara under the communist regime and are therefore characterised by specific aspects regarding the physical configuration, the urban densities, the public facilities, as well as the exterior aesthetics of the apartment blocks themselves.

Thus, each neighbourhood has its strengths, as well as its weaknesses, offering very different living conditions to the members of the local community. These observations are also supported by the results of the multi-criteria evaluation of the three studied neighbourhoods, which indicate obvious differences between them in regard to the global level of life quality, as well as to the contribution that the different elements of the built tissue have to that effect.

Once having identified the existing situation within the three collective housing neighbourhoods from Timișoara, this paper further concentrates on defining some measures, implementable in order to improve the present day context. However, taking into consideration the fact that from all of the macro-criteria evaluated by the proposed methodology, the housing stock and inhabitancy have, perhaps, the largest impact on the everyday life of the individual, defining the décor for personal events on a day to day basis, the paper proposes the study of some theoretical principles, applicable in reality in order to improve the quality offered to the inhabitants by the housing buildings, as well as by the apartments themselves.

Last but not least, the study concentrates on the different ways in which these principles can be applied in reality, adapting to the specific context of each of the three studied collective housing neighbourhoods from Timișoara; without detailing these proposals from a technical point of view, this paper lays the foundation for future research, referring to the means of implementing in practice a theoretical frame.

Finally, among the future development directions of the studied subject, one can count an intervention catalogue, usable for the information, education and even motivation of the

population in regard to the measures that can be implemented in order to improve the quality of the housing stock and inhabitancy; also, the possibility arises to further extend the theoretical study as to include all of the macro-criteria proposed by the methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment, so as to obtain a complex image on the intervention possibilities, both architecturally, as well as from an urban, ecological, social, economic and cultural point of view.

Thus, the main contributions of the author are:

- The centralization of the existing information within the scientific and professional environments regarding the concept of life quality, as well as the synthesis of the main factors that influence this aspect, both at a global level, as well as within the urban environment – chapter 1;
- The formulation of a multi-criteria methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment, by defining ten macro-criteria of urban analysis (among which one exclusively dedicated to the role that the architectural aspects play within a neighbourhood), as well as by establishing the scoring procedures and the interpretation of the results – chapter 2;
- The identification of the main development stages of the collective housing phenomenon at a global, national and local level, particularizing the elements specific to each of these stages – chapter 3;
- The validation of the multi-criteria methodology regarding the evaluation of life quality within the urban environment based on the analysis of three collective housing neighbourhoods from Timișoara, with the identification of the main differences and similarities between these areas – chapter 4;
- The proposal of some theoretical principles, applicable in order to improve the existing situation in regard to the overall quality of the housing stock and inhabitancy, as well as discussions regarding the way in which these theoretical measures can be implemented and adapted to the existing realities within the three studied collective housing neighbourhoods – chapter 5.

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