

**Transitional Rural Housing. Banat. West Plain. From Local Traditional to  
Global Contemporary**  
**Doctoral Thesis — Abstract**

For the title of Doctor  
in the field of Architecture  
of Politehnică University of Timișoara



**Candidate: Arch. Roxana Cârjan**

Supervisor: Prof. Teodor O. Gheorghiu, PhD

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## **1.1 Introduction/Thesis Topic**

The criterion for choosing my thesis topic was the experience I have gained as an architect and urban planner involved especially in public administration.

My thesis topic is the presentation of new perspectives on rural housing, by highlighting the problems of the present Banat rural housing. My thesis contributes to the knowledge of the current realities in the sphere of rural housing compared to its evolution in the last centuries, and proposes future developments that can help normalise the situation through the spatial, social and cultural capitalisation of rural resources.

The synthetic analysis of the particularities of living in today's rural environment aimed to create the theoretical and practical framework for the options and operations of recovering/reinventing rural housing.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

This thesis studies how the traditional household in the Banat plain, as a type of organisation imposed by the Habsburg administration, managed to face the aggressions of the communist regime, but failed to resist the process of socio-spatial dissolution that began during the post-communist transition.

The change in the population structure, the new political-economic regime, the new type of property and the contact with other cultures changed the people's needs, aspirations and values, causing them to reject tradition and irreversibly influencing the rural built environment.

The thesis aims to make a diagnosis and identify methods of accepting and becoming aware of the advantages of a local architecture that adapts to the contemporary needs of comfort and social representation in a society that undergoes constant transformation.

The purpose of the thesis is to evaluate the impact of democratisation on living in a society that was not yet prepared to be free. At the same time, it studies the perpetuation and diffusion of urban theories in time and space and the consequences of enforcing inadequate legislation on spatial development.

## **1.3 Research Methods**

The perception of tradition is ambiguous, because tradition is considered both heritage and burden. In the present study, the research of rural spaces regeneration is based on both analytical and synthetic methods.

1. The multidisciplinary research method was applied by studying the evolution of the phenomena that influenced the type of housing, in a comparative analysis of current housing problems within the international space.
2. The descriptive method relies on non-participatory observation. It is an objective analysis of the consequences of rural housing transformations based on capturing the reality of the components involved in the process, case studies and the quantitative assessment of housing typology.
3. The collaboration method. The subjective analysis was carried out through a sociological survey, to identify the level of people's satisfaction with regard to housing, the authorities, the neighbourhoods, their aspirations and needs.

The objective analysis of the effects of the transformation of rural areas was based on the identification of the components involved in the process through non-participatory observation as a qualitative method of scientific investigation. The concept of community regeneration was structured on the possibility of developing scenarios that could strengthen

local communities and territorial cohesion, and increase the attractiveness of the area.

## **1.4 Thesis Structure**

The thesis analyses the current situation and the evolution of the habitat, as well as how it was formed and what factors generated its traditional structures.

The causes of the new contemporary structures (Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4) and the consequences of the transition from tradition to globalisation (Chapter 5) are determined. The diagnosis of the studied area is made through objective and subjective analysis (Chapter 6). Possibilities are proposed to improve the rural built environment through legislative measures and campaigns to raise awareness of its value, education in schools, promotion guides, etc.

## **Chapter 2. Historical Evolution. Current Trends in Approaching Rural Habitat Components**

The first part of the thesis deals with the historiography of rural habitat and peasant house research, to which researchers shifted their attention starting from the 19th century, with the aim of influencing mentalities. By promoting doctrine to define national identity, the rural dwelling inspired political and military action.

The role of peasant culture is to consolidate national cohesion and identity. To this end, the peasant house could be the national emblem that strengthened the national feeling. The communist regime used folklore to spread propaganda and to create a new egalitarian, rural, industrialised social class and eliminate the bourgeoisie, putting architecture in the service of the nation. In the study of the rural habitat, the peasant house acquires new meanings, becoming one of the most significant emblems of national, regional and local culture. The typologies of settlements and houses specific to a historical region cannot be assimilated into a nation or a national style.

The architectural and urban-rural unity of all socio-cultural areas of the national territory was promoted, which exceeded both the limits of administrative units and ethnic borders. In this sense, the purpose of rural urbanism was not to preserve, but to cancel the differences between village and city life.

The human habitat is influenced by the political-cultural environment, the evolution of the physical framework, the peasant's social status, the type of family organisation and the typology of the village. The form of housing is a consequence of the economic situation. The development of a habitat begins with random "external" variations and ends with the final shape of the permanent habitation typology.

The character of the village is given by the typology of its lots. The lot is the basic unit of the village morphology and reflects the lifestyle and the spatial and functional organisation. In the past decades, the lot shape has changed due to parcelling and (re)amalgamation that do not observe the structure of the village. Residential area expansion no longer follows the principles of the traditional village, and the parcelling out of new residential areas fails to consider the type of environment – rural or urban – or the location.

The household is the individual domestic unit of reference in the village world, the permanent residence that must satisfy economic and social requirements. It provides the spiritual characteristics of various social groups and represents the relationships between family members and the economic means of using the heritage; at the same time, it is a mark of the ethnic, social and regional identity. A household can be individual or multigenerational.

The choice of the location and shape of the house and of shaping the environment is influenced by the behaviour towards the context. Depending on the man-nature relationship, it can be religious and cosmological (man is subordinated to nature), symbiotic (a balanced

bond) or unequal (man creates and destroys the natural environment).

The evolution of housing is visible in the organisation of its plan, which has a linear (ideal) evolution, from the single-cell to the multi-cell house; from the half-buried house to the storey house, which has existed since the Neolithic; or from buried or half-buried houses with a complex plan that existed simultaneously with the surface earth houses.

Most studies on peasant houses emphasize formal diversity, but also the specific of the national architecture. The plan of the natural house is universal, only the technical means differ, which reveals a universal, ethnocentric and evolutionary thinking. Therefore, it is difficult to demonstrate and locate the originality of a traditional Romanian architecture.

The symbolism of the habitat has two dimensions, myth-related and rite-related (a process – reproduces the creation of the world). The cosmic image of the house is found at all levels in the environment, in the land and the human settlement, in the house as a whole and even inside of it. The house as the origin of the world is also the origin of humankind, the contact between people and spirits or the “crypt of the native house,” the dream house, the presence of an archetype in the unconscious manifested in a dream. The primitive house as the representation of an ideal model may be the mythical hut or the dwelling following a rational evolutionary process, a reproduction of the temple on a domestic scale.

The house is the ordering nucleus of the property, rooted in the physical framework of the family; it is the shelter, the protective feminine space, while the yard and the annexes are masculine, social spaces. The principle of the centrality of the house – the organisation of the house around a centre that acts as a means of communication between the divine order and the human order. The hearth centralises the space and is a symbol of family unity. The threshold extends the limit, but it is also a space for social selection and limits. The transition spaces define the inside-outside relationships; they establish a hierarchy of the open spaces.

Both the house and the village are representations of the world with symbolic correspondences in anthropomorphism. They reproduce the dichotomy of the world through the complementarity of the genders suggested by the plan of the house, which reveals the relations between the universe, man and nature. By extrapolation, the house symbolizes the woman, and the village – the man, while the union of the opposites is a guarantee of the future (continuity).

The village plan equals the house of houses. It is anthropomorphic and generational. Each village has two centres: one of the family, representing all the dispersed properties (households, farms) and uniting them symbolically, and one of the community, of all the families and their properties as a whole. The former is represented by the family home organised around the hearth, the latter, by the public and economic areas of the village.

The big differences between houses located in neighbouring areas suggest that a house relates more to culture than to climate, and the level of form determination is reduced. Materials, constructions and technology are changing rather than determining factors. The house size is influenced by different social organisations and the prestige of the families who live in them. A change in the material does not necessarily involve a change in shape.

Economic life has no determining effect on the shape of the house, although people with similar economic possibilities have different moral systems and worldviews that are expressed through houses.

Vernacular architecture is an anonymous, primitive, group product of a group, not of an individual. This explains the close relationship between the shapes of the houses and the culture to which they belong. The resulting model is continuously adjusted to satisfy cultural and physical requirements, which makes it resistant to the passage of time. In the process of vernacular edification, what matters is the relationship between the elements, not their nature.

Houses illustrate the way of relating to not only the natural and the built landscape, but also the way of life, with which they form a system. Personality, social patterns, functional

programmes, legislative frameworks, technology and materials available to man, his relationship with nature, all these can be found in the appearance of the house. Invisible, largely symbolic elements, rituals and sociological and economic aspects, as well as human behaviour are the primary forces that, in relation to physical and climatic factors, determine the form.

### **Chapter 3. The Village-Town Relationship. Historical Evolution**

The town-village relationship involves two entities that can interact either positively or negatively.

The town, a human system of over-coordination, had had, until the advent of industrial technologies in the 19th century, a complementary relationship with the village. This type of relationship was resumed in the 1920-1930 decades, when the village was reconsidered for the purpose of propagandist discourses. Suburbanisation changed the town-village relationship into one of opposition or subordination, leading to recapitalisation interventions in the rural space.

The urbanisation boom at the beginning of the 1960s brought major changes in mentality, as a result of the increase in the standard of living, the emergence of excessive consumerism and the new leisure activities in the peasant world. In the West, the village was subordinated to the city through the expansion of peripheries, for urban de-concentration purposes. In the same period, the socialist states gave a new meaning to the town, which they saw as a place of class struggle, of creating a new man through proletarianism, systematisation, industrialisation, and universalisation; consequently, all energies were channelled towards towns. The rural modernisation process brought to light the phenomenon of the urban-rural continuum, by inserting the intermediate town, which was easier to control, into the network of settlements.

The progressive vision of urbanism was the large-scale city structured around hygienic principles. Unlike progressive urbanism, the culturalist model drew its inspiration from the past and reclaimed it. The community came before the individual.

Rationalisation and abstraction were the basic principles of progressive urbanism. The city should express the avant-garde, and the space should become universal. It was the moment when globalisation was announced and the break with tradition was produced.

After 1990, the former socialist states experienced the process of peri-urbanisation, and the middle social class looked for higher quality housing. Peri-urban areas had a mosaic structure of both urban and rural elements with mixed or integrated functions that were closely connected to the city, which increased the mobility of the inhabitants.

Territorial dynamism accelerated especially after 2010, due to the diffusion of new technologies and the increasing international exchanges. This phenomenon amplified demographic desertification and rural flight in less developed villages.

### **Chapter 4. Phenomena and processes. Rural Habitat Morphogenesis. Historical Landmarks and Typology. Determining factors**

This chapter deals with the morphogenesis of the rural habitat and the factors that determined spontaneous/programmatic developments and mechanisms of political intervention.

The traditional community was influenced by the conditions of material and spiritual life and the types of social ties. It was coherent in structure and generated specific traditions or customs; at the same time, it was governed by its own norms, forms of organisation and institutions as elements that distinguished the habitat.

The habitat type contributes to the definition of a cultural and structural ethnic model, which is reflected in the domestic spaces corresponding to the organisations and the cosmological and social representations of societies.

The **natural landscape** changed with village morphology and structure, constructions and the various ways of land occupation and use.

The typology of colonial housing characterised the settlements of the last three centuries, being influenced by the coexistence of several ethnic groups.

**Property type** is important to understand the way of living. The identity of the village is defined by the relationship between two spatial areas – the hearth and the estate. The establishment of economic zones was done territorially, according to the social structures of the village; they were distributed by size, location, and the social position and economic weight of the families within the community. Initially, village communities had joint ownership of the land. After Banat had become a possession of the Habsburg Crown, its population had no private or public right over the land, since that right was the emperor's alone. He managed and used it economically through his officials. The structuring system of the territory imposed by the Habsburg administration was the systematisation of identical, regular, easily controllable lots. It was only in 1853-1854 that the urbarial relationships were abolished by imperial orders and the inhabitants became owners of their house and land plots.

After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, new nation-states emerged throughout Europe. The reform laws led to the differentiation of three classes; peasant social class, the peasant bourgeoisie and the agricultural proletariat. The property right was absolute.

During the period of right-wing dictatorships, 1938-1944, capitalist economy determined the evolution of industry. In agriculture, besides large capitalist type farms, feudal remnants persisted. The system of property and the capitalist economy led to a new social structuring of the village, in which the equal treatment of all members of the ethnic groups generated the appropriation of mentalities and the strengthening of self-awareness.

During the dictatorship years (1939-1989), collectivisation and systematisation put an end to the political processes that had made modest progress in the short interwar period.

The **socio-political perspective** of the human landscape was determined by the historical events that influenced the establishment of boundaries.

The Austrian administration managed spaces with a pronounced Ottoman mark, a combination of domestic and foreign elements, both old and new. The property model was based on the joint ownership system.

The house of the native population was the “bordei” (a half-dugout shelter), the most widespread form of habitat in the lowland area, or the rammed earth house.

The state and the administration were free to apply, on virgin lands, their political and economic theories, including the construction of a new architectural landscape of which the household and the rural house were a part.

The Carolinian Settlement Period (1717-1740) was a process of massive colonisation with Swabians, for which existing villages were consolidated and new villages were founded.

The centralised system of land ownership, the new defence systems and road networks, the colonisation, the new networks of settlements, the existing compact settlements, the new economic and financial exchange structures also contributed to the remodelling of the natural environment.

The Theresian Settlement Period (1740-1782) continued the urban planning operations of the previous stage. The region acquired an experimental nature for the reformist policy. For the purpose of increasing efficiency, the organisation of existing villages and the establishment of new ones gathered pace. In this period, urban planning was controlled by the state. As a result, the use of regular planimetrics and clear geometries was mandatory, as was the compliance with the parcelling standards. New settlement types were developed:

Cartesian in the plain areas, linear in hilly areas and mixed mountainous areas.

The regions included in the modernisation process underwent territorial reorganisation through the relocation of the village *vatră*<sup>1</sup>, the concentration of households in the new *vatră*, and the delimitation of street frontages. Community housing such as the *zadruga*, based on extended family relationships, were encouraged. The procedures were standardized and brought together dispersed village elements on the same site.

In time, the Austrian pattern was to become the stereotypical expression of the traditional Romanian household.

During 1782-1867, the period of the *Impopulations Haupt Instruction Regulations*, few new villages were founded, and the architectural interventions followed the prevailing ideas of the time. Rural area management and regulation promoted an ideal peasant architecture, corresponding to the ideal norms of hygiene, economy and rationality.

The Enlightenment systematisation was reflected in the rehabilitation/development of villages according to the rules of civilised countries. The activities and the priorities expressed the will of the empire to make the most of the land.

The house integrates into the surrounding environment. Influenced by external factors, it belongs to an ideology of construction, as it is conceived on scientific and political bases, with the aim of being disseminated administratively. The house corresponds to the economic and cultural practices that may also be imposed by the state.

The administrative relaxation between 1867 and 1918 was marked by irregular spontaneous expansions in a “combination of state and private colonisation”. The political and cultural elites were increasingly interested in capitalising on and protecting the village as part of the “rural heritage”.

In the interwar period, the tendency to borrow urban or foreign features, which would not match the local building and ornamentation traditions intensified. It was a time when traditional forms, materials and techniques began to be abandoned.

Consequently, the vernacular was approached in two major stages. The first was the patrimonialisation of rural culture and the second was the celebration of peasant culture. In both situations, the project was promoted by elites, conservative by definition with regard to ethnography and folklore, but progressive in the adaptation of traditional techniques.

Between 1920 and 1930, governments formulated village modernisation policies and adopted laws – administrative and territorial reforms – to systematize settlements for the purpose of demographic and economic growth.

During the communist period, the economic and political development strategy pursued the economic autonomy from the West and its Soviet protector. The economic development strategy took place on several levels: the nationalisation of industry and transport immediately after 1948, the gradual collectivisation of agriculture (started in 1949 and completed in 1962), the systematised rural industrialisation of many traditional provinces, and the urban systematisation, to reduce the pressure on the cities. The systematisation plan had to reflect national ideologies, and local needs and desires.

The Land Reform (1949-1962) was a political propaganda tool to demonstrate that the fragmentation of agricultural property had led to extremely low productivity. This is how the state justified collectivisation. Following the collectivisation process, a rural planning strategy with clear principles defined in the 1974 law became a necessity.

Rural systematisation was the last phase of the construction of socialism. It was carried out through territorial remodelling, a process of “rural reconstruction”, which was supposed to contribute to the development of the “new socialist man” and his environment, and the “new

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<sup>1</sup> The word *vatră* has several meanings in Romanian: the central place of a village; the surface area on which households and annexes are built (also fireplace; home and family life; origin, place of birth).

socialist city” as communist ideals. The standardisation of the living conditions meant the integration of the village into a larger system.

Urban planning evolution was closely related to the consolidation of the economic and political control exercised by of the Romanian Communist Party, which meant the total elimination of the persistent spontaneous private initiatives. Systematisation occurred in three stages: 1945-1965 – non-systematized rural renovation; 1965-1975 – systematized rural renovation; 1975-1990 – systematized modernisation.

Systematisation had the following objectives: to double the network of cities as service centres; to optimise land use and capitalisation; to avoid dispersion; to establish a new rural/urban hierarchy; to control population growth in large urban centres through collective state housing; to avoid overcrowding; to turn some villages into intermediary towns; to turn 150 villages into model villages (2-3/county) and to remove 3,000-6,000 “non-viable” villages.

The role of a locality in a network in the territory was clear: main localities with a coordinating role in the territory; localities-villages as centres of local agricultural production; local industry units with improved equipment and facilities; villages that would become agro-industrial cities – the “new city”; and non-viable villages that would be removed, their function taken over by a neighbouring village.

The modernisation of the network of localities was achieved by creating two systems of localities: the first-rank system, in which the communes group several villages that revolved around the residence-village, and the second-rank system, consisting of main rural localities as new economic and social centres with an urban character, located in the area of influence of the urban centres that would become agro-industrial or industrial-agrarian cities.

The centre was chosen from the symbolic places of the community. With a polarizing character, it was an educational or cultural nucleus, depending on the role the locality played within the network.

The centralized socialist plan had rationality, efficiency and the priority of the public interest as its objectives, but it ignored the local context and resources, being mostly a tool to manipulate the population. An attempt was made to democratisation by involving the population in the implementation of the plan, to make it more acceptable and give better solutions to the real needs.

In the capitalist societies, the plan allowed the adaptation to the context, the removal of local administration dysfunctions, and the integration of the regional economy into the national economy, but it failed to achieve a fair distribution of resources and a uniform level of development.

The hierarchy of settlements within the national network of localities led to inequalities between regions, cities, town-villages and between villages. The plan was supposed to be a symbol of national unity and social wholeness, but it failed because of its lack of transparency, improvisations, corruption and prevailing private interests. It was supposed to produce social transformations of the village, but it ended up transformed by supralocal structures and local elites.

The communist transition, which consisted in the de-structuring of the community, was accompanied by psychosocial phenomena – such as the involution of the community and the destruction of the mechanism that allowed the preservation of traditions – and the demographic and psychological alienation caused by the sudden influx of populations.

The cultural identity crisis was the result of land dispossession. The peasant, left without a motivation to work, felt insecure. Economic specialisation was the mark of the ethnic group, besides language, religion and customs. For an ethnic group to survive, ethnic identity must be transmitted from one generation to another, through rules of inter- and intra-group behaviour. Through emigration and immigration, the local population was replaced by



strangers. This caused non-integration, tensions and social gaps between elites and residents.

The house made the difference between people who worked in the city and those who stayed in the collective household. The new man – the commuter – was neither a peasant nor a city dweller, neither at home/nor at work.

### **Chapter 5. Causality. Recent Evolution of Rural Habitat. General determining Factors and Particular Shaping Factors**

This chapter continues the study of habitat evolution under the influence of democratisation. It analyses the behavioural mutations that opposed the new type of housing to the traditional one. The change in the rural landscape was influenced by **factors** such as the contact with Western culture, the abolition of all state farms, the transition from collective to individual households and the rejection of any form of association, which led to the phenomenon of retromigration from urban to rural areas.

Socialism was replaced by wild capitalism characterised by political manipulation and unstable institutions. By reorganising structures and reconfiguring cultural behaviours, new horizons and new customs appeared, but they failed to animate the civil society and the public in general.

Poverty, the lack of a credit system or a system to help entrepreneurs, fear of failure and mistrust generated anxiety. Consequently, the land became a burden. Poverty caused the demographic and functional collapse of rural communities. The rural space had no development perspectives, and risked “sustainable underdevelopment”.

The post-integration phase meant the introduction of the European programmes of structural funds. In Romania, it meant a strong intervention of the European Union for rural space recovery, infrastructure expansion and modernisation, high-performance agriculture, new non-agricultural activities, the involvement of civil society, good governance and cooperative governance.

The Maastricht Treaty established the following objectives for the protection of the rural area: the mitigation of development differences between regions, the development of economic policies to eliminate the differences, and the coordination of financial sources in the interest of effective regional policies.

Rural development programmes have the following priority objectives: increased competitiveness and innovation in the agricultural sector, respect for the environment, improved local governance, and participation of rural communities in the development process by stimulating innovative actions. Generally, PNDR failed because it ignored the local conditions. The EU objectives were meant to increase competitiveness, which at the time was inadequate for the Romanian economy. First, agriculture should have been integrated into the market by modernising the agricultural holdings, and then the position of the agricultural holdings on the world agricultural market should have been consolidated. The strategy of the rural development programmes takes as a reference system a certain level of development that does not characterise Romania, hence the low rate of funds absorption.

Over time, the approaches to rural space development have evolved from the integrating the rural into the modern society to reconstructing the rural environment, reinventing the village.

Through integration, rural communities lose their specific features and destiny and they are marginalised. Reconstruction means recomposing their own ways of existence and regulations, understanding the new attributes of rurality in an advanced modernity.

The years of transition are identified as the first period of the development of the private initiative, a period of confusion in urbanism. What was erected during this period damaged the quality of public space, because aesthetic and comfort norms were violated, and the

constructions were of low quality. They reflect people's need to be original, to be different, as a reaction to the standardized constructions of the communist period.

European integration means spreading democracy, strengthening the administration, restructuring legislation, restoring social balance, but in the absence of an integrated approach, urbanisation has been chaotic; the interests of investors prevail at the expense of a qualitative design and the needs of local communities are neglected. Both national and European policies and conceptual tools for integrated planning, local/territorial governance, territorial cohesion and resilience to climate change are missing.

**Consumer culture** is relevant to the processes by which models are transferred from one sphere to another. The use of propagation tools creates a new social class of cultural redefinition, a consumption-oriented society. Standardisation (started under communism) has taken another form, this time being the result of globalisation. Tradition, a link between the past and the future, can be an alternative to globalisation, if the public is aware of the values of village resources.

People are making great efforts to find their place in a world of change, where words like "privatisation", "democratic institutions", "civil society" connect the post-socialist world with the Western world, a world where workers are no longer a ruling **class**, but a professionally and morally marginalized category. A new social class was born from former party members, businessmen, and state employees who consolidate their position. They are a kind of *nouveau riche*, but different from the Romanian intelligentsia.

Regardless of the category, everyone is looking for "good taste" that can bring recognition in society. The new classes show discontinuity between their socio-economic, political and cultural status. Today's society no longer has an elite with an authentic, generations-old tradition that is recognized as a benchmark for good taste.

The increased urbanisation of the last decades has determined the diffusion of the urban in the territory, as a process of decentralisation and decongestion of the city and has led to the influx of the city population to the periphery, a movement of the population from the city to the village, within a framework whose limits are always changing. The consequences of this phenomenon are: excessive land consumption, reduced biodiversity, poor accessibility to public transport, poor infrastructure, climate change, socio-spatial segregation, etc. Urban development and planning plans must take into account these phenomena, the current realities, the needs of communities and the protection of agricultural spaces from the urban pressure.

The approach to the problem must start from ideas such as: the capitalisation of agricultural space, the development of sustainable development projects, population awareness and the development of realistic and operational instruments for the authorities to control habitation outside agricultural spaces. Regional planning must integrate interdisciplinary management features, and overcome the cultural differences between communities, businesses, urban policies and science.

The preconditions of sustainable rural-urban development are: good governance and organisation, partnerships, efficient urban densification structured on multifunctional neighbourhoods, the development of green-blue networks, intelligent transport, waste, water, energy and local food management, territorial cohesion, the sustainable integration of tourism and the protection of natural lands.

Urban growth must be better channelled and not prohibited. The uncontrolled expansion of settlements can only be avoided through consolidated local administration and a planning system with precise regulations, which will change the power of market control over the processes in the peri-urban area. Informal cooperation, bottom-up partnerships on specific or general strategies between all actors involved in territorial development must be encouraged. Relationships reflect community solidarity, and solidarity embodies the ideal model of the

social mechanism.

Today's **village community** is characterized by social segregation. Continuity is no longer ensured by the succession of generations, but by individuals. Under the industrialisation process, the cities were the main attraction for villagers, given their position as political, administrative, cultural industrial centres.

The high urban unemployment rate determined the return of the population to the village. The rural space, the practice of agriculture, seemed appropriate in the new context of de-industrialisation.

The phenomenon of migration has produced new types of families. The household is fragmented and "diffuse", at first between the village and the city. Then the international migration of the rural population led to transnational diffuse households with a variable structure: some of the members are in their native localities, others are abroad.

The new communities are made of people who have lost their relationship with nature or the other members, so the principles of reciprocity and solidarity that characterized traditional villages have disappeared. The modernisation of the society led to the disappearance of the peasant and the traditional peasant community, to a "minimalist" society marked by the "diminished sociability" of the modern man, lack of order and vulnerability and the risk of disintegration. Individualisation, as an attribute of modernity, is expressed on a social economic level by the ignorance of norms and customs. No one feels that the common space belongs to them anymore.

The peri-urban area is the result of the migration from the city to the village; it produced mutations in the living behaviour, giving birth to specific communities. Peri-urban communities are heterogeneous, groups of people with different interests. The new type of community, neither rural nor urban, has relations with both the city and the village. In these areas, social life, associative activities develop within the new communities. The phenomenon of socio-residential enclaves is present in both overcrowded urban spaces and traditional rural areas.

The **new houses** are based on individual self-sufficient solutions. They are very large and dysfunctional.

The factors shaping the house are general external and internal particular - morpho-typological and anthropological – assimilated archetypes; family or group traditions; spatial – spatial relations with the neighbourhoods; functional – location in relation to transport infrastructures, existing functions and neighbourhoods.

**The peri-urban housing** (on the outskirts of the village) that appeared within the peri-urbanisation phenomenon has generated new types of housing: permanent precarious, private, individual houses fragmentary in nature; individual/semi-collective housing for the middle class; permanent private houses – imitative models, luxury houses, a segregate model that displays the social status; the average collective private house appeared due to expansion operations, a model reiterated by the collective, cheap, social home without an identity.

In the old *vatră*, **the dwelling is post-peasant**<sup>2</sup>. The new architectural products reflect the values, the personal vision of a good life, generating constructions that belong to mass culture. The houses show the loss of cosmic orientation (inherent in traditional dwelling) and its replacement with new mythologies.

The old *vatră* of the village is the area most exposed to the danger of destruction, being ignored in turn by all the ideologies of the political regimes. Traditional housing is perceived as opposed to evolution and modern civilisation, being at best similar to a museum exhibit and excluded from everyday life.

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<sup>2</sup> A term borrowed from Mihăilescu, www.adevarul.ro, 2010, referring to our heritage as the largest rural society in Europe; today we are a post-peasant society.

Today's buildings give us information about a family's lifestyle. The houses people buy reflect shared values and goals close to the cultural models they aspire to. They contribute to the formation of the built environment.

The interventions on the houses in the old *vatrã* of the villages vary from inappropriate modernisation through harmful materials and techniques to demolitions, destruction at the plot level and construction of blocks.

The new houses are oversized, completely lacking in privacy, resource-consuming, wrong in design and site placement, as well as in the use of materials. Psychological comfort is reduced, despite the modern facilities.

The vernacular solutions reflected adaptability, the symbolic interpretation of the cultural group, being representative for a particular culture and the response to pre-existing conditions.

One reason for rejecting tradition is the superiority of modernity in the area of functionality, technology and facilities.

The options of the villagers will evolve. Tastes change. A less exaggerated use of materials and colours and a selection of imitations of models can be noticed.

Tradition can be included in today's architecture either by adapting the old structures to the current needs or by introducing traditional elements into current architecture. To this end, several initiatives aim at capitalising on tradition and acknowledging its power as a great economic resource for defining local identity.

One of the consequences of migration is the import of foreign models. The first waves of migration are symbolically reflected by fancy houses, which are built as proof of emancipation. They are, however, uninhabited, since they are intended for the reunited family. Such houses become models for other houses. Short-term migration takes place through relocation processes, which are symbolically expressed by the "rustic house", "traditional and modern" as in the old days.

All the houses are fancy, in one sense or another, only their "style" differs. They are agents that redefine identity and social recognition and certify their owner's success. It is not the utility of the fancy house that matters, but the impression it makes on the neighbours. This need appears due to the competitive relationship with the neighbours, which replaces the solidarity relationships in the rural world. At the same time, the fancy house represents a modern, western lifestyle and a new aesthetics and follows roughly the same social logic as the recent "villas" in the urban environment, which do not imply a specific style, but rather copy an image of the modern and the Western urban.

Fancy houses go through many transformations compared to their initial design, from the desire to keep pace with the new trends in the countries where their owners work, a thing that is made possible by the lack of a plan according to which the house is executed. Houses are in a continuous process of construction, renovation, modification. The functionality of the house is revealed as it is used in relation to the needs of its owners. Houses remain uninhabited, even during the holidays, which means that they are not assessed practically and functionally, so they remaining empty or underutilized.

Another approach is the rustic one, which seeks to break from the local characteristics and the past, in a synthetic hybrid combination of tradition and modernity. These building behaviours are aimed at self-fulfilment, ignoring rational functionality. The phenomenon has an irrational side, attenuated by the owners' need to distinguish themselves by means of their fancy or rustic houses or other styles they have seen in other countries where they worked. The common characteristics of fancy houses are: excess of materials, dimensions, influences, ornaments, colours, monumentality (symmetry), classicism, imitations, post-modern, disproportionate – chaotic roofs – stylistic mix.

The "style" of the fancy houses is gradually being abandoned. People have realised they are unprofitable both as a building process and as use. Currently, a simplified style is adopted

by various foreign architectures, one that reflects social status through the quality of the materials.

## Chapter 6. Case study

This chapter presents the status and evolution of the studied villages (within the area of influence of Timișoara) and the results of the online questionnaire entitled *Current Rural Housing. Banat. West Plain*, which reflect how the current and traditional housing is perceived. The questionnaire details the respondents' options regarding style, size and spatial organisation.

The **Analytical Approach** section includes territorial-urban studies of the villages in the research area, classified as peri-urban villages (ring 1) that merge with the city; intermediate peri-urban villages (ring 1) that preserve their autonomy and polarize the economic activity of the city; the villages in the extended peri-urban area (ring 2) are independent from the city (less than 30 km away from the urban centres).

The development established in terms of fragmented use of the territory is the consequence of the economic, political and social evolution.

Peri-urban growth is generated by demography through the production of new housing. The analysed area has undergone a diversity of development methods, generating a wide range of morphological spatial typologies.

The development (patterns) occurred depending on: the position within the settlement (inner limits – capitalisation on inner areas or outer limits – satellite suburbs); the relationship with the centre (subordinated limits, dependence on the centre and free limits generating autonomous areas with their own centrality); the relationship with the exterior (fragmented areas and residential areas spread along road axes); morpho-structure (flexible boundaries, connectivity and rigid boundaries, impenetrable areas).

The development pattern is concentric (around a traditional centre), tentacular (distorted in the directions in which the city develops), diffuse (widely spread over the territory and able to create new centralities), satellite-like (a pattern that reaches a level of centrality.)

Parcelling occurs either spontaneously – without regulating the area, through successive cadastral operations, or through sub-parcelling – partially respected ZUP<sup>3</sup>, DUP<sup>4</sup>, or large-scale urban planning operations, i.e. extensions of the existing lots through large-scale urban planning documentation (GUP<sup>5</sup>, ZUP). These processes frequently cause discontinuities in the size, density and height of buildings and the urban plinth. Another effect is the non-adaptation to the (stylistic) image of the settlement, a lack of cohesion of the landscape owing to the reduced natural setting and a poor relationship between old and new structures.

My analysis starts from the 1989 moment, when the built-up area was the systematized area of the village, hereinafter referred to as the old *vatra*.

The old built-up area, the first stage of the settlement, has a rural-like parcelling. The second stage, 1989-2010 and the third stage (2010-2021) are characterized by mono-specialized territorial expansions. The newly developed areas are not based on an overall vision, being poorly evaluated relative to the quality of life.

Initially, the peri-urban communes – **in peri-urban ring 1** – Giroc, Dumbrăvița, Moșnița Nouă, Sânandrei, Giarmata, Sânmihaiu Român, Săcălaz, Dudești, Becicherecu Mic had a rigorous geometry, grouped, regular, concentrated, rectangular urban structure and a uniform network of streets; the widened one was the main axis of the village, both regular and irregular.

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<sup>3</sup> Zonal Urban Plan

<sup>4</sup> Detailed Urban Plan

<sup>5</sup> General Urban Plan

The increased development is shown by collective housing districts or sub-parcelling.

The structural changes inside the old *vatra*: lots are broken down and/or recomposed into typologically different lots to accommodate new functions, sometimes creating residual lots.

The village changed its compact, regular, concentric, geometric shape to an irregular shape with several centres. The former vernacular architecture specific to the German settlers was changed with imported architecture, unsuitable for the place, globalist and without identity. The connection with the natural environment was lost; this is reflected in the morpho-typological plan of the lot, the households and the buildings.

In the first stage, 1989-2010, the development took place in a satellite-like pattern. After 2010, it evolved in a tentacle pattern from the traditional core in the direction of the city. Currently, it is a diffuse growth pattern, usually forming new centralities. The territorial expansion of residential areas in the last 10 years reflects the four times increase in the demographic growth compared to 2010.

Villages in **peri-urban ring 2** – Pădureni, Cărpiniș and Iecea Mică, Pișchia.

The dominant structure of both villages is grouped, regular, concentrated, rectangular, without a defined centre. The houses built during the communist period have influences from the area of origin of the new residents, as well as from the pre-urban area.

The development took place inwards, by replacing old houses with new ones, without maintaining the original layout established by the Habsburg systematisation. Changes were made to the initial plots and the compactly constituted street frontages were altered. A few more residential neighbourhoods were added on the outskirts of the villages, maintaining the compact aspect of the settlement. Demographically, there is a slight increase. Territorially, agricultural areas have not undergone major changes.

The morphology of rural housing has a uniform character, while new developments are incoherent in urban texture, without centralities or public spaces; through planning, they sometimes have a more coherent aspect on the area level.

As far as the urban plinth is concerned, the street frontage typology differs according to the location of the lot. In the newly expanded area of the village, the building frontages are set back by 5.6 or even 8 m from the alignment, with an average height of two levels in the case of single-family homes and 3-4 levels in collective housing areas. In the old *vatra* of the village, the frontages were built compactly in the alignment; today, the public-private relationship, the alignment and the height have changed, causing the discontinuity of the urban plinth and a lower architectural-urbanistic value at the street level.

Between the two morpho-types, in the central area and in the adjacent areas, there are no transitional elements. Therefore, a gap between accidental and initial developments has formed. Accidents occur such as very large constructions that break the urban scale pattern and ignore the specific zone features, suggesting the presence of a centrality to serve the area.

The expansion of residential areas is a continuous and dynamic process that does not have valid and general solutions in time and space.

**Experimental Approach.** The sociological study helps us to understand the circumstances of the construction of the new houses that seem completely strange to the place and the causes of the destruction of the old structures. The results clarify behavioural or mindset mutations. The options of the inhabitants are clarified and can be capitalised on through the future urban policies.

The pursued objective is the attitude towards tradition, the behaviour and the opinion on maintaining continuity with the new forms tradition can take on today. The sociological investigation covers several distinct dimensions of reality (satisfaction of housing, quality of life, preferences, etc.) that will be obtained through a set of operations that aims to identify of attributive and variable notions through evaluations and measurements in the empirical universe. A total of 1001 people, of which 779 from the villages in the first peri-urban ring

and 222 from the villages in the second peri-urban ring answered the online questionnaire *Current Rural Housing, Banat, West Plain* between October 15, 2020 and January 15, 2021.

The identification of the inhabitants' opinions and visions on development and development opportunities can substantiate strategies for future development actions and priorities.

For a synthetic assessment, each dimension of reality is operationalised through a series of indicators, which took the form of questions about the respondents (structure of the family group, age, gender, level of education), the type of property, the method of financing, the type of housing and the length of residence, the location of the house relative to the village, the level of involvement in the construction of the house, the vision of the evolution of the village, the typology of existing houses and the preferences for living in rural areas.

The most representative age groups were, in order, the 35-49 (51.63%) group, the 18-35 (35.89%) group and the 49-65 (12.35%) group. It should be noted that occupationally active people are the most interested in the environment they live in and how it shapes their lives. At the same time, the female gender was dominant 57% in ring 1, and 64% in ring 2. This also supports a recently published study about how involved a Romanian can be, i.e. women between 35 and 45 years old. The majority are respondents between 34-49 years of age.

The best defined area in the study is the sector of families with children. More than 63% of the respondents, of which 53.15% in ring 1 (60% in ring 2) are families with underage children, and the remaining 10.21% are families with children of legal age. Overall, the tendency is to live in family groups – over 87%.

The level of education is high, most respondents having at least a university degree. The population living in the communes around Timișoara has a high qualification level.

The occupational level is given by employees of the private sector, 51% in ring 1, and 38% in ring 2. Those in management positions, managers or employers, represent 15.62% of the total.

The level of involvement denotes a proactive attitude. Most respondents (47%) have lived there for more than 20 years, and 50% are in favour of densification.

The level of education does not influence the aesthetic taste, which is reflected in the stylistic options of the house the respondents want. As far as those who have recently built their house are concerned, there is a similarity between the house they live in and the one they dream of. The same is true for those involved in the process of designing and building their house.

The socialist system influenced the Romanians' behaviour after 1990 – 80% of them are owners. Romania is a nation of owners. In no post-socialist country does this indicator exceed 60%.

The family is the dominant source of social aid: familialism – inter-generational aid and self-built houses. In Romania, this indicator reaches 80% of the total housing, in Yugoslavia – over 60%; in Hungary – 38%; in the Czech Republic – under 10%.

Home purchases were recent. Ring 1 is populated by people newly arrived in the area, (over 81.19%), which denotes the very new developments. In ring 2, approximately 50% of the population has been settled there for at least 10 years.

I considered it important to identify the relationship with the old *vatră* of the village, *intro and extra muros*, the important relational elements of the following questions, and how the newer inhabitants see themselves relative to the place they have come from. These are major points in the relationship between the new urbanism and the old structure.

In ring 1, most people live in small apartment buildings– 46%; 35.7% live in large collective buildings. In ring 2, most people (53.42%) live in single-family houses and semi-collective buildings (25.13%). These percentages vary by locality. The maximum number of respondents who live in a block of flats are in Giroc (30.4%), followed by Dumbrăvița (21%).

Although collective housing is not specific to the old *vatră*, there are respondents who live in older collective housing buildings, chiefly in the two larger peri-urban communes of Dumbrăvița (13.6%) and Giroc (22%).

The share of respondents who live in single-family houses in the old *vatră* is 36%, 64% live in newly developed areas, except for the communes of Giroc and Ghiroda, where the ratio is reversed.

Regarding the size of individual housing lots, the majority of lots are small and medium, in similar proportions: 43.75% (41.02%) for the 300-500 (501-800) square metres in ring 1, and 28% (15%) for the 801-1000 (501-800) square metres in ring 2. Next come the real perception differentiations, depending on each respondent's house.

Those in peri-urban ring 1 live mostly in the newly expanded area of the village (in blocks or houses), while those in peri-urban ring 2 live in the old *vatra* of the village.

Although the housing options are diverse, the respondents unanimously answered that the subsequent zoning should be distinct and well defined, separated by buffer spaces to avoid functional incompatibilities (72.14% of residents living in blocks and 74% of residents living in houses outside the *vatră*). Residents in the *vatră* opt for the above-mentioned solution in a percentage of 54.22; 29.78% opt for parcels with small areas that allow individual houses that observe the character of the area.

The lack of coordination and development directions is a negative aspect for all the residents of the surveyed areas; they are completely harmful to the quality of life – 61% of residents living in blocks, and 85%-86% in the remaining areas. The percentages are impressive. Outside the *vatră*, there were more responses about the deterioration of the quality of life and the image of the locality because of unplanned development, probably because the residents of that area they are more exposed to such changes than those living in an older, fully constituted structure.

The level of involvement in building the house is high. 41.99% (ring 1) and 30.2% (ring 2) of the respondents built their own house. Statistically, this denotes a low income level of the population at the national level.

Instead, the answers (approx. 55% in ring 1 and 2) about choosing the rural area is definitively linked to the combination of a healthier lifestyle in direct connection with the benefits of the city and the low price of the land – a series of positive factors. This segment of the population is made up of people of working age who have started a family, fulfilling their dream of having better living conditions. A percentage of 61.32 (ring 1) and 40% (ring 2) used the services of an architect and had a good relationship with them. However, approximately one third (27.36%) of the other respondents consider the architect a service provider that puts together the documentation required to obtain permits.

The pace of construction is consistent. The majority of the respondents (48.70%) built their house in less than two years, while 32.34 % of them managed to finish their desired home in a short period. Overall, a period of up to 4 years has the highest share, over 80%. In ring 1, 42.69% of the respondents built their houses themselves and 34% turned to construction companies; in ring 2, 55.6% built their houses themselves and 22.2% turned to construction companies.

Those who built the house with the help of their family alone, had a long period of execution, as did those who live in newly built houses in the *vatră* of the village. The general construction period was long, 10-20 years, and the style was that of a “big and new” house.

A general observation is that the new developments should preserve the same urban parameters as the respondents' own area. The respondents in peri-urban ring 2 rejected the blocks of flats. Some respondents want nothing to be built around them. The area considered optimal for the lot is small, 250-500 sqm in ring 1, respectively 500-700 in ring 2, with a percentage of 45%.



The involvement of administration in the development of localities is seen as unsatisfactory, even disappointing, by more than 74% of the respondents.

The analysis is mainly descriptive and less explanatory. I chose for evaluation the houses that I considered representative of the main types of housing in today's village. The main selection criterion was that they represented three architectural periods, to make it possible to compare them according to the social evaluation.

The house of the respondents in ring 1 is usually large and new, and a renovated traditional house in ring 2. Their dream house has a distribution similar to the one they are living in now.

The evaluation of the contemporary buildings is positive. The highest score was received by the buildings with vegetation and the "big and new house".

The first part of this section of the questionnaire seeks to identify the type of housing the respondents currently use. The second part of this section looks at the level of satisfaction provided by their current houses, looking at the extent to which these match their dream house. Approximately 30% declared that they live in rich/fancy houses; over 30% answered that they live in terraced houses; under 20% live in small collective buildings; around 15% live in contemporary houses that fit into the local specific features.

It is interesting to note the comparison with the answers to the question about where they would like to live. Large new houses make 40% of preferences, followed by contemporary houses that fit into the local specific features, traditional houses renovated with contemporary materials, and terraced houses. An interesting conclusion is that, at least declaratively, the respondents prefer houses that fit into the local specific characteristics. Residents of renovated, modernised or non-modernised old houses would like to live in modern houses or more imposing buildings.

Many respondents, especially those who were involved in the design and construction process, said that the home they dream of coincides with the type of house they live in currently. This proves that they were able to obtain a product that met their needs.

It is interesting to note that those who positively appreciated the traditional houses rehabilitated with authentic materials preferred houses that fit into the local specific features and despise the "rustic style". The large new/fancy house scored the highest in all cases; it is the one most respondents would love to have. Residents of renovated/non-renovated rural houses would prefer to live in rich, beautiful houses.

The traditional house, although modest, is considered less beautiful and not attractive, but it serves the purpose for which it was created. The rustic house has positive reviews in general. Contemporary buildings scored well; they are considered modern, practical, Western, but their aesthetic value and durability are contested.

The results of the questionnaire show that a segment of the population uses the term "modern architecture" with the meaning of "contemporary architecture". They describe the modern home as cold, lacking privacy. The rustic style is often confused with the traditional one. It is important to point out that the respondents who don't live in blocks of flats think less of this type of housing than those who actually live in them. The other respondents completely reject collective living in the *vatrā* of the village.

The respondents perceive the local characteristic features as low-density residential neighbourhoods dominated by natural elements. The authorities' decisions in favour of development are subject to economic considerations, ignoring the non-economic values that people assign to places.

Rural houses rarely have a value of their own, but a substantial number of such houses can make them representative of the rural cultural landscape.

Local authorities may play a role in preserving the local specific features. They may have the economic and administrative tools to encourage local investors. In such a scenario, public

buildings modernisation should be a model through architecture, techniques, and materials.

As a result of the analysis, three areas are identified according to the perception of housing and the attitude towards tradition. In areas 1 and 2, the survey highlights a relatively young population of families, professionally active, with a high level of education, who hope that the public administrations will take measures to improve the quality of housing. The need for local specific features is not appreciated, nor is that for a good neighbourhood. The preference for more intense socio-spatial polarisation of different ways of living, the segregating model of housing (zone 1) appears. Area 3 has had a stable population for over 20 years. Here the inhabitants live in old houses that have been inadequately repaired, but which they consider practical. The pace of construction is slower, and the size of the lots is larger in preferences and in reality.

The ways to minimize risks will be constituted in policies designed differently by area. For areas 1 and 1, the measures will focus on building a community by involving members and generating social cohesion. In area 3, development is reduced, there are still local specific characteristics, and measures to consolidate the community are needed. The measures to increase attractiveness are infrastructure and connectivity development; these would also contribute to the preservation of the local characteristics by creating a balance between the workplace, trade, facilities, housing, and food production.

Culture is the expression of the identity and diversity of coexisting ethnicities, an essential factor for the regeneration of the community, the development of education and innovation. Cultural events play an integrative role for the community and facilitate social cohesion and the community spirit. In view of cultural continuity, the consolidation and renewal of traditional buildings, neighbourhoods and territorial landscapes is necessary. Community regeneration through culture can be a response to the issues caused by accelerated population growth. Diverse housing typology, by size and price, for a population of various ages, cultures and incomes can promote social sustainability and create compact settlements.

The authorities can establish local specific features by imposing a minimum number of units for which real estate development can start, requiring a level of equipment and public facilities and overall coherence, as sometimes urbanisation is only possible through association.

The appreciation of popular housing is low; the buildings are only relevant from the point of view of the cultural rural landscape. They will be socially accepted over time, when they have become old enough to acquire historical value.

## **Conclusions**

The lack of urban planning documents and legal instruments will only aggravate the chaotic development that is unable to generate communities and continuity, leading to ghettos and social enclaves.

Communities could be regenerated through a process of democratic urbanism involving members in the decision and execution of community projects. Local and county councils should establish a set of policies substantiated by studies that reveal the population's options on housing, that promote the cultural value of a sustainable, socially integrated and high quality built environment. The specific characteristics could influence a community, and a sense of community could generate such characteristics. A reconciliation between public authorities and architects would facilitate the creation of an attractive living environment that shapes behaviours and perpetuates the culture of quality housing. We found that the population is no longer attracted to a traditional way of living, but tends to capitalise on traditional houses in an idyllic way, not as a lifestyle or as a type of community. The areas

within the urban sphere of influence will follow the urban style, typology and morphology.

The preferences of some respondents denote the development of a taste that tends to capitalise on certain traditional elements. Recently, tradition has started to be appreciated once again. This is possible when these elements will be old enough to be accepted as valuable due to their age. At some point, society may decide to accept tradition or generate a new one.