

# Early Strategies in Housing Workers: State Intervention and Social Housing in Bucharest (1908-1911)

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Reflecting on the activity of the Municipal Company for Low-Cost Housing, Romanian engineer and urban planner Cincinat Sfințescu was concluding in 1933 the Company managed to represent “an honorable exception” for Romanian society, given its success in implementing an efficient program of social housing, at least up to the beginning of the First World War. The program also coincided with the European and American initiatives for building affordable housing for the working class begun at the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1930s, Cincinat Sfințescu was a reputed specialist in Romanian urban planning, professor and urban planner with the Bucharest Municipality. Claiming that “Romania is the country where novelty and progress are easily adopted, but they either remain superficial or eventually cause disappointments”<sup>1</sup>, Sfințescu examines the reasons for the success of the Company. His article<sup>2</sup>, published in *Urbanismul* (“Urban Planning”) is amongst the most consistent analyses of the social housing issue in Romania prior to 1946. Consequently, the current article proposes an additional perspective to Sfințescu’s economic and political approach, focusing on the social context and relevance of such projects for locals of Bucharest. While Sfințescu investigates the activity of the Company from its beginning up to 1933, we will limit our research to the years 1908-1911, starting with the first steps taken by the Municipality to build these housing projects to the completion of the first four districts and the subsequent moving in of the first tenants on Lânărei Street (1909-1910), Clucerului and Lupească *Lottissements* (1911) and Candiano Popescu Street (1911). As background, we retrace the chronology of these four projects, left largely unexplored by previous research, given its scattered and often contradictory nature.

Sources are located at the National Archives, Bucharest Department, with the files corresponding to the first social housing projects. They consist of different sets of data: the Lânărei Street file gives a detailed overview of the process, registering all applications for dwellings, details about the contest organized by the Municipality to decide upon the types of houses to be built, the correspondence exchanged between architects and the Mayor and/or with the director of the Company. Lupească, Clucerului and Candiano Popescu files include details of plans

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<sup>1</sup> Cincinat Sfințescu, *Societatea Comunală pentru locuințe ieftine și realizările ei*, “Urbanismul” 6 (1933), p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

and blueprints of the types of houses, the names of the first tenants and maps. Moreover, according to these files, clerks, barbers and confectioners lived on Lânăriei Street, middle-class representatives on the Clucerului *Lottisment* and workers of the Romanian Railway Company on Lupească *Lottisment*. Since some of the streets designed for or accommodating the social housing projects were destroyed during the '80s, the analysis can be difficult to follow. Using reconstructed maps, we will be better able to approximate the number of the buildings, their position and how they looked before the communist urban systematization. The insight this brings to the working class environment still needs to be clarified and the status of the research impedes a social history of these projects. However, some details were clarified during interviews with the current lodgers of the houses, bringing new details concerning the social structure of the inhabitants, especially on Lupească and Clucerului.

Indeed, the activity of the Municipal Company for Low-Cost Housing is rarely analyzed, and several triggering reasons could be listed: a few exceptions aside, the social housing districts were not designed by famous architects of the age; therefore they do not represent a focus for art historians. Augustin Ioan points to the lack of involvement from architects: "the great names amongst our architects did not build many such collective dwellings, but rather individual residencies for the rich. Nonetheless, when such architects did take on such projects, they produced *one-of-a-kind* collective dwellings instead of mass-produced ones (D. Marcu, H. Creangă, A. Culina, P. Smărăndescu, Gh. Nădrag etc.)<sup>3</sup>. Despite this, architects such as Ernest Doneaud, Ion D. Traianescu (in the years prior to the First World War), Stătie Ciortan and Florea Stănculescu (in the interwar period) did design important collective dwellings such the project located on the Cuțitul de Argint Street, respectively the *lottisment* for the "Victoria" factory close to Principatele Unite Street. Consequently, studies dedicated to the involvement of reputed architects in such projects mostly come from architectural scholarship, which strains away from the economic and political context. A second reason for the apparent neglect of such projects stems from the fact that these houses are of no public interest, are built in a rather simplified style with almost no ornaments, they are modular by design and built accordingly. Without a marble plaque commemorating its past, it is unlikely such social housing projects remain in the "memory" of the city. The sole exception is the dwelling in the Clucerului *Lottisment*, which still bears the name of architect Ion D. Traianescu.

By considering the institutional and social contexts, we will argue the Municipality developed a coherent social housing program between 1908 and 1911, by readjusting its strategy with each new project, progressing from the experimental construction of dwellings under the direct supervision of the Communal Council to the foundation of an autonomous Municipal Company to manage the process. Thus, the article will expand upon these strategies: building collective dwellings under the direction of the Communal Council and the Mayor by an architect chosen by the

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<sup>3</sup> Augustin Ioan, *Power, play and National Identity: Politics of Modernization in Central and East-European Architecture: The Romanian File*, Bucharest, 1999, p. 101.

Municipality, legislation adopted for this process, organizing a competition for deciding upon the blueprints for the projects and diversifying the type of houses, made available at different price ranges. Despite the disputes between the “Society of Romanian Architects” and the Mayor at that time, the winning projects met the maximum price imposed by governmental law. As the social housing program was a political initiative, the article investigates the role of the Municipality and of the Government and analyzes the regulations of the program: conditions of eligibility, its limitations and the process of decision-making. As such, we will focus on the changes of strategy in the first four years, the organization of the Municipal Company for Low-Cost Housing and the background of the political alternation in Government between liberals and conservatives. Following a social line of analysis, the study inspects the demand for social housing by examining the context of industrialization and the professional background of the new tenants. Which was the impact of this directive among workers and how affordable were these houses in reality; how many dwellings were built by the Company in the first four years compared to the total number of lodgings in Bucharest?

In order to investigate these lines of inquiry, a series of questions and challenges needs to be examined, primarily relating to a definition of “social housing” and the manner it was introduced in Bucharest. The nexus of questions regarding social housing in Bucharest is far from being settled in this article; nevertheless it will be placed between two perspectives. On the one hand we could invoke good intentions of the governing elite, sensible to the needs of the working class and adjusting its strategy accordingly. Whether we refer to political authorities (especially the mayors of Bucharest) or to technocrats (like A.G.Ioachimescu or Cincinat Sfințescu), we notice the agency of a state deeply concerned with the condition of their citizens. The “myth” of a “benevolent state” is constantly criticized by Michael Harloe (following the critique raised by Peter Marcuse)<sup>4</sup> who claims that we should rather turn our attention to investigate „how the new working class was to be controlled, disciplined and integrated into the social and economic order”<sup>5</sup> by the social housing policy. Moreover, the elite’s response to the pressures “bears little resemblance to historical reality ... the language of humanitarianism was often deployed by the reformers but the purposes which lay behind these efforts related to the material and social interests which the reformers sought to sustain, and these were rarely those of the working class.”<sup>6</sup>

In Romanian scholarship concerning local social housing, Ana Maria Zahariade, architect and head of the History and Theory of Architecture and Conservation Department at the University of Architecture and Urbanism “Ion Mincu” (Bucharest) argues that social housing is not “an architectural typology, since

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Marcuse, *Housing Policy and the Myth of the Benevolent State*, “Social Policy”, Jan./Feb, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Harloe, *The People’s Home? Social rented housing in Europe and America*, Oxford, UK and Cambridge USA, 1995, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

it may include any type of dwelling<sup>7</sup>, but much rather “a phrase indicating a modality of subsidizing and promoting dwellings.”<sup>8</sup> According to her definition, the stress lies on low costs and the initiative in itself depends on politic factors, while the projects can only be efficient with the contribution of the architects (“the efficient practical solutions were found only after the architect has understood the nature of the problem and had got creatively involved in its settlement”<sup>9</sup>). Moreover, she relates the Romanian context to the beginnings of social housing in London, where the *garden-city* promoted by an economist (a. n. *Ebenezer Howard*) proved successful “only after it had been built by an architect”<sup>10</sup>, probably referring to the projects designed by Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker at the turn of the century. A more comprehensive definition refers to social housing as “dwellings constructed in collective or individual residential system, usually in subgroups, subject to normative prescriptions, intended to answer the habitation needs of people with a low or average income, their construction being financed by the state or by particular promoters under specific favorable financial and real estate circumstances, within a well-defined urban policy.”<sup>11</sup>

Cincinat Sfîntescu investigates the evolution of social housing in Romania in an European context, presenting the legislation that encouraged the development of social housing projects in Great Britain (“Housing of the Working Class Act”), France (Siegfried Law), Italy or the Netherlands, all of them adopted before the First World War. The resolution proposed by European authorities was to replace private initiative with the public one: the state supported the construction directly or indirectly, by lending the companies under its control with „a part of the needed capital”<sup>12</sup> and leave it in the responsibility of the Municipality: “the private initiative proved to be too weak to produce the quantity and the quality of the necessary dwellings quickly, at a price below the required level. It was tried [emphasis mine, by the authorities] to replace private initiative with new institutions, namely with autonomous institutions of public utility, but with a rewarding scope or sometimes with cooperative companies.”<sup>13</sup> One of his conclusions clearly points out: “this kind of program could not have been carried out without the contribution of the state, as it was done in all the Western states.”<sup>14</sup>

Both discussions allow us to interpret social housing according to the criteria taken into consideration: Romanian authorities named the Company “cheap” dwellings (“*ieftine*”), thus stressing the economic criteria. As for the “collective” factor, the first projects to be analyzed could hardly be considered collective. On Lânăriei Street, the architect grouped two or four dwellings under one roof, but

<sup>7</sup> Ana Maria Zahariade, *Social Dwelling Today – Terminology and Historical Significance*, in *Symptoms of transition*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandru Sandu, in A. M. Zahariade, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> C. Sfîntescu, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280.

designed separate courtyards and entries for each family, while the houses have only one ground floor used by a single family. There are no common yards or interior spaces for the families moving in. As Sfințescu explains, the inhabitants of Bucharest “do not love the collective dwelling”<sup>15</sup> arguing that the characteristics of the “race” do not accept “the common yards, the apartments in a block of flats and the common corridors”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore the Company opted in the first phase for familiar dwellings. Only after the First World War, the Company developed separate types of blocks of flats in whose cases the term “collective” becomes more applicable. Although the social dwelling might include any type of housing, as Zahariade argues, the criteria used by authorities when deciding on the architectural typology to be used for building is still to be discussed. Sfințescu also touches upon social aspects of living in Bucharest. He comments on the inhabitants’ of Bucharest preferences in housing, claiming they do not like a house with floors, therefore “the dwelling with dead wall (“*calcan*”) would have been difficult to accept.”<sup>17</sup>

Examining the causes that led to the enactment of such projects, Sfințescu insists on the need to clean the slums (“*mahala*”) due to deficient health and hygiene conditions: “some reforms to fight against the insalubrious and unhealthy dwellings, overcrowded and uncomfortable, which appeared due to the continuously increase of rents, faster than the increase of wages were urgent; to fight against the high percentage of infant mortality, which was at frightening proportions in these unhealthy dwellings; to fight against the overcrowding of dwellings, especially the ones that were rented to people that were only passing-by at nights.”<sup>18</sup> Although he quotes these phenomena from a report compiled in Geneva (referring to a general state in Europe), Sfințescu agrees these were also the problems that Romania had to face. He gives special attention to local health and hygiene issues, but as Harloe mentions, the definition of public health was different at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, with manifold directions, not just medical, but also “moral and social.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Harloe argues that „the social reformers who campaigned over issues of housing and public health were concerned with a much more fundamental issue, variously described as the “social question” or, in a telling phrase, “the dangerous classes”. The argument seems overstated: despite the often references to the insalubrity of the environment from the periphery from a hygienic perspective, Sfințescu refers to the prostitutes as part of an un-healthy environment which needs to be civilized. However, so far we did not meet any reference to the “dangerous classes” *per se*, but we do notice the presence of a physician in the administrative board of the Company, namely, Doctor Costinescu. Moral or social, the reforms were needed at that point: the tuberculosis killed almost

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 278-279.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, *Studiu asupra planului general de sistematizare al Capitalei* (1919?), in Andrei Pippidi, *București – Istorie și Urbanism*, Bucharest, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, *Societatea Comunală* cit., p. 279.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 270.

<sup>19</sup> M. Harloe, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

1000 victims annually, 41% of the deaths in Bucharest<sup>20</sup>. In addition, the Communal Council points a special Commission to document the public health issue. Citing one of the official reports in Bucharest there were "more than 400 unhealthy houses and a critical shortage of dwellings"<sup>21</sup>. The Communal Council abandons the policy of ejecting the people from these dwellings and demolishing them, at least until the construction of new houses for these tenants.

Sfîntescu's article also reviews the data of the 1912's census in Bucharest regarding housing issues as well as a short presentation of the disposals of the two laws adopted by the Parliament in 1910. The first law for the foundation of companies for building Low-Cost Dwellings was passed by the Parliament in February 1910, and a special directive for Bucharest in May of same year. The Company would be founded in December 1910 under the direction of engineer A. G. Ioachimescu, one of the previous directors of the State Monopolies Company. Among the benefits the state was willing to give to its customers we emphasize a progressive payment of taxes: the constructions are exempted from any financial contribution to State and Municipality for ten years. Between 10-15 years taxes are paid progressively and after 20 years they are evened out. Should the head of the family pass away, the latter was no longer taxed for the monthly rate. Even more, the Municipality covered half of the cost of public works on the streets belonging to these newly built districts. The definite advantage was the price which had been set by law to a maximum of 8,000 lei. In comparison, a clerk was compensated with approximately 150 lei/month. Ten percent of the house value had to be paid upon signing the contract. The maximum salary of an applicant should not have exceeded 250lei/month, while the applicants should have been below fifty years of age. The company built on lands in its property, or on the ones sold by the Municipality to the company, on the properties of different institutions and on the private lands. Should we compare the wages of those workers who received these houses with the rate they were supposed to pay on a monthly basis, it is arguable the legislation encouraged only those employees with a safe income in the public sector or private companies, and discouraged other social categories, without a safe income, to have access to this program.

What was the context that determined the authorities to start this program especially in Bucharest and why in 1908? Bucharest became the capital of the Romanian state in the middle of the 1860s and quickly centralized bureaucracy and the industry. Industrialization and urbanization at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century determined a massive growth of population in Bucharest. According to Sfîntescu, the population was in a continuous increase: 120,000 in 1860, 177, 645 in 1872, 289,184 in 1903, 325,000 in 1910 (when the laws that encourage Social Housing were enacted) and 342,000 in 1912, while the number of dwellings was approximately 49,000<sup>22</sup>. As the population almost tripled in less than half of century we can speak

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<sup>20</sup> Aurel Duțu, *Realizări ale administrației bucureștene la începutul secolului al XX-lea*, "Materiale de istorie și muzeografie" 7 (1969), p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> C. Sfîntescu, *Studiu asupra planului general* cit., p. 108.

of a high rate of urbanization.

The other cause of the development of the industry can be traced back to the agrarian reform from 1864, which abolished serfdom and allowed the industry to collect the peasant workforce. Consequently, another step in this direction was represented by the protection law of national industry from 1887 during the office of the liberal prim-minister Ion Brătianu, which supported the foundation of new factories. According to Ionescu, “in 1893 there were 115 industrial plants in our city capital, out of which 102 benefited from the advantages of the law, while in 1902 the number increased to 178,”<sup>23</sup> almost half of the factories in Romania. Most of the plants are located at the periphery of the city, near the main railway stations, especially in the North (the industry that served the North Railway Station) and in the South (around the Filaret Railway Station where the Gas Plant, the Communal Factories and the main factory for ice were located). In addition, factories were located along Dâmbovița River to have access to the water supply: it is the case of the Municipal Slaughterhouse, textile plants and many others. It was a small-scale industry focused on clothing, carpentry or textile, mainly individual occupations.

Bucharest was not an industrialized city, but was quickly becoming one and housing the new population proved to be the focus for the Municipality. Explaining the concentration of the working class in the peripheries, Sfîntescu claims that “Having low income, the population cannot pay the high rents which could encourage an increase in the development in the city (center), where because of the high price of the land and of administrative control, rents are automatically higher; then again, the sedentary way of living of the population of the Romanian lands where the industry and the commerce are only at their beginning, clearly impose as adequate the familiar dwellings with a sufficient yard where all the household should be found.”<sup>24</sup> The individual occupations meant a sedentary lifestyle where the inhabitants settled in their household with no need to travel towards work. However, the industrialization changed these habits and the rhythm of the city started to be dictated by the first electric tramways (1894).<sup>25</sup>

Did the industrialization alone play the most important role in determining the authorities to start this program of social housing? Why was the program started in 1908 and not earlier or later? The scarcity of sources at this point prevents us from understating the precise people and roles in the program, but a few hypotheses can be taken into consideration. The most relevant one: the attempts of the liberal government to ease the situation of the poor, in a pursuit of social justice after the peasant riots from February – March 1907. Started in the north-eastern part of Romania (Moldavia), the riots determined the dismissal of the Conservative Party and the nomination of a Liberal Government with Dimitrie A. Sturdza prime-minister in March 1907. First, the revolts spread around the country, at the beginning of

<sup>23</sup> Ștefan Ionescu, *Dezvoltarea edilitar-urbanistică a orașului București la sfârșitul sec. al XIX-lea*, “Materiale de istorie și de muzeografie” 7 (1969), p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> C. Sfîntescu, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>25</sup> Șt. Ionescu, *Considerații privind dezvoltarea industrială a orașului București în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*, “Materiale de istorie și muzeografie” 5 (1967), p. 108.

March erupted in the counties close to Bucharest. What had started as an isolated peasant revolt spread to other social classes, as the army sent to pacify the country supported the peasants and the workers from the Romanian Railway Company, by planning a strike which would prevent the Army to send new troops. The initiative of the strike belonged to the groups of socialists, but it was downplayed by authorities. After the Army had its first confrontation with the peasants, the tension in Bucharest grows gradually, but as the Army resettles order in the villages, the atmosphere calmed down at the end of March. Although he was not Mayor at that time, Vintilă Brătianu wrote that if the army had not been sent in the villages from Moldova, it might have happened that the capital transformed in a battlefield due to the support of the inhabitants of Bucharest for the peasants<sup>26</sup>, increased by the affinity between the peasants and the workers due to the rural origin of the working class. In addition, documents mention that “at the *Regie* (the name under which the Department of the State Monopoles was known, which include the most important tobacco factory from Bucharest, located very close to the railway district) more than 1500 workers gathered; it was one of the dangerous spots in case of a march towards Bucharest or in case of any local riot.”<sup>27</sup> In June, Vintilă Brătianu is appointed Mayor of Bucharest.

There are two points worth to be taken into consideration. Firstly, A.G Ioachimescu was the director of the Department of the State Monopoles and reported to Vintilă Brătianu. When Brătianu became mayor, probably he influenced the appointment of Ioachimescu as director of the Company for Low-Cost Housing and the Company will agree with the Department of State Monopoles to construct social dwellings for the workers of the Tobacco factory. Secondly, we notice a pressure of various socialists groups (either as organizations or in press) pushing for new social reforms. Their direct contribution to the social housing projects still needs to be clarified, but it is safe to assume social tensions reaffirmed older claims of the lower classes in Bucharest.

### **The foundation of the Communal Company of Low-Cost Housing. The initial social housing projects**

The initial developments concerning social housing in Bucharest can be traced back to the office of the liberal mayor Vintilă Brătianu (June 1907-February 1910). Following the meetings on November 16<sup>th</sup> 1908 and May 26<sup>th</sup> 1909 the Communal Council decides to build the first social quarters on Lânăriei Street, near Carol Park, in one of the few industrialized districts in Bucharest at the time. The street connected the Filaret Railway station with the factories along Dâmbovița River, via the Gas Plant (opened in 1871): the Leather Factory, the Lemaitre Cast House, also covering a frequently used transit to the Slaughter House, which was built starting with June 1908 and the first electric plant (1888). In fact, the entire area developed simultaneously with the transport system of the capital city.

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<sup>26</sup> For more details, see Matei Ionescu, *Bucureștii în timpul răscoalelor țărănești din 1907*, “Materiale de istorie și muzeografie” 5 (1967), p. 139.

<sup>27</sup> Ioachimescu, in *Ibidem*, p. 139.



Concerning the industrial areas of Bucharest, in 1919 Sfințescu mentioned the area around the Filaret Railway Station and the one south of the Slaughter House and the Eastern Railway as the most important industrial districts: “in the plan (from 1919) one planned as industrial districts, the districts which are or could be even better supplied by the usage of railroads... The line between Obor and the Slaughterhouse determined the establishment of an eastern industrial district and another one, south, near Filaret (our note, Railway Station).”<sup>28</sup> These industrial districts were among the first to channel workers. At the same time the projects benefitted from the periphery due to the ramification of tramway, introduced in Bucharest after 1894. Moreover, the Municipality replaced the old tramways carried by horses with an industrial railroad from Filaret Railway Station – The Filaret Hill – Freedom Square Piața Libertății (the entrance in Carol Parc) – Candiano Popescu str. (on front of the depot of the Tram Company) – Lânăriei Str. – Splaiul Independenței (Unirii). The line is dismantled in the 50s<sup>29</sup> and the tram replaces the train.

Thus, in June 1909, French architect Ernest Doneaud, at that time the Chief of the Department of Constructions and Buildings of the Municipality, supervises the construction of these residencies on Lânăriei Street, helped by Dr. I. Costinescu. In total, 28 individual dwellings were designed. The construction of the dwellings was carried out by the company of the entrepreneur Emil Peternelli, who worked together with other small companies hired for varnishing (Gheorghe B. Niculescu) or woodwork (Petre Popescu), asphalt (“Asfalt Traian”) of Zweifel Manufactory which allocates 40.000kg of hydraulic lime in June- July 1909. The project was completed five months later and, on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1909, the entrepreneur E. Peternelli and architect Doneaud sign the contract for the delivery of the houses. In a second phase, in 1910, the buildings are revisited for maintenance: reconditioning of windows, doors, coating the dados (“soclu”) and cleaning the herringbones (“mozaic”). The workers assemble windows, then paint the wood with “oil color”<sup>30</sup> three times, install chamfers and spouts, as well as wooden case. Reflecting on the style of the houses, Carmen Popescu mentions that this is a “simplified version of the national style.”<sup>31</sup> Besides the construction of the houses, the Municipality takes care of services as well: connecting it with the water supply and plant the planes still visible today. The construction does not go without incidents: the private companies deplore late payments, but misunderstandings are solved by the end of 1910. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, the first tenants start taking their proprieties into possession and pay rents for the following months.

In order to benefit from the social housing program, the applicants had to be Romanian citizens, with a stable job, while legislation encouraged clerks and workers from factories due to their stable income and their obligation to pass a medical exam ( a prove of the increased attention of the authorities for the physical

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<sup>28</sup> C. Sfințescu, *Studiu asupra planului general* cit., p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Al. C., interviewed in July 2012, Bucharest.

<sup>30</sup> All the materials used in the manufacture are written on a separate file in DMBAN, PMB, Serviciul Tehnic, 405/1909.

<sup>31</sup> Carmen Popescu, *Le style national Roumain – construire une nation a travers L'architecture*, Rennes, 2004, p. 186.

condition of the incoming inhabitants of the houses). In the applications sent by tenants to the Municipality starting with July 1909, they mention the type of house they want to receive, with either one, two or three rooms. However, not all assignments were done according to the requests. The applications include their marital status, the number of children or other persons are under their nursing, as well as their monthly salary. We are unsure if there were more applications sent and if there are any criteria on which the 28 applications in the archive were selected. Documents include applications that were denied or landowners who gave up on their acquisition like Vintilă Antonescu, (27 years old, married, one child; clerk at the Astronomic Observatory with the salary of 150 lei/month) and Constanța Popescu (the owner of a fashion shop on Victoriei Boulevard).

In short, twenty eight families initially moved on Lânăriei Street: one family went back on its decision after two months and another tenant could not pay her monthly rate, therefore in 1910 the Municipality considered evacuating her from the house. Out of a total of almost one hundred tenants, over half are children. The lowest income of applicants was 90 lei (Gheorghe Avramescu, tram driver at the Tramway Company) while the highest wage belongs to Vintilă Ionescu (200 lei), employed at the Minister of Internal Affairs. Most salaries are around 150 lei, while the installments to be paid reach 40 lei/months, representing a quarter of the salary. Considering they also had to pay in advance at least 10 percent out of the value of the house (approximately 500 lei), the dwelling could have been paid in ten years. From the applications available it is impossible to deduce whether the husband or the wife of the applicant also had a stable income.

Most of the tenants are clerks (Minister of Internal Affairs, Romanian Railway Company of the Astronomic Observatory) or work on small business (shoemakers, furriers, confectioners and barbers), suggesting the increasing number of state bureaucrats, but surprisingly not workers in the state industry) and none of the initial tenants does work at the factories nearby. In order to become owners they signed a convention with the Municipality relevant for the rights and obligations they had, the area of the property and the neighbors. For example, Ion Copăceanu, the tenant of the house at number 87 owned a land of 90 square meters, framed by the 15m long fence with his neighbor C. Potop on one side and 10 m with Natalia Nicolescu on the other, while the fence towards the street reached 10 meters in length. The house covered an area of 60 square meters, shared a common wall with the house from number 89, and had two rooms, kitchen, toilet, hall, small open gallery, a dump and cellar. It was forbidden to sell the house or rent it and the tenants did not have the right to make any changes nor to have commercial activities in the house. When signing the contracts, the Municipality was represented by the Mayor Deputy C. Hagi Theodorachy (who started his office on December 2nd 1908) and Al. Davidescu, the director of Public Constructions Department. None of the ones that mentioned their place of birth in the applications is a native of Bucharest.

Two observations are to be made: the Municipality started building the projects before any legal directive had been established. The agreed price did not exceed 5,000 lei, and this was the argument to set the prices by law at a maximum 8,000 lei in December 1910. Secondly, collective housing is not as popular in the

Romanian social context: the houses have separate gardens and door entries. Third, the prices were affordable. It seems that the houses were indeed thought to be paid by the head of the family, regardless of a possible extra income of the partner. From 28 applications, twenty-five were sent by men and only three by women.

After the first homeowners moved in the new dwellings from Lânăriei Street, the Municipality goes through a series internal organization, in the spring and the summer of 1910. In February, mayor Vintilă Brătianu was replaced by Ion Procopie Dumitrescu. It was probably a time when authorities work on the law to control the construction of social dwellings. In this sense, the first law was voted by the legislative in February, while the one concerning Bucharest only in May 1910. This last law authorized the Municipality to set up a Company for the construction of Low-Cost Dwellings, company that would start its activity in December 1910. The managing board was formed by engineer A. G. Ioachimescu (Director), the Mayor Ion Procopie Dumitrescu (President), Ermil Pangratti (vice-president), Al. G. Donescu (who will become mayor in the thirties as censor), while the headquarter was established on Doamnei Street. The dwellings already built on Lânăriei Street were given by Municipality to the Company in administration.

While the project from Lânăriei was completed by architect Ernest Doneaud, in his office as chief of the Department of Construction and Buildings, his name vanishes from the archives in autumn 1910, a sign of the first change in strategy. It was probably considered that in order to reproduce them on a large scale simplifying the construction meant standardizing these dwellings. We lack data regarding the reasons for this action, but it is clear that by December 1910, the company organizes a contest to decide upon the types of houses that were to be build. The strategy consisted in designing plans for different types of dwellings, the plans that we be bought by the Company and used as many times as needed. Technically, once decided on the type of house, the architects would have worked with the plans chosen after the contest, without modifications, while the responsibility for construction belonged to the engineers.

The contest took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, the last month in office for mayor Ion Procopie Dumitrescu (who was appointed Mayor after V. Brătianu's resignation in February 1910). The official purpose was to "design four projects for construction of cheap and hygienic dwellings for the workers and clerks,"<sup>32</sup> as it presented from the first paragraph. The contest was intended for Romanian architects and engineers that graduated from a Romanian university, which should be interpreted as an attempt to support the Romanian School of Architecture. At the same time, the Municipality imposed four types of houses that it wanted to build. Type A was formed by one room plus fixtures (kitchen, cellar and toilet) with an area of 50 square meters, the architects having the change to group two or four under the same roof. Type B meant two rooms and fixtures with 65 square meters, grouped in a block "with the common roof and common chimney stack"<sup>33</sup>, with private entrance and garden. The third type, C had three rooms with a total area of 85 square meters;

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<sup>32</sup> DMBAN, Fond PMB, Serviciul Tehnic, 490/1910.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

while D type had an area of 105 square meters divided four rooms plus fixtures. The last two types could have had an upper floor, and the height of the rooms was 2.90 m<sup>34</sup>.

Nevertheless, the most important regulation concerned the price, each type of house having a respective price (A - 3,000 lei, B - 4,500 lei, C - 5,500 lei, D - 6,500 lei), and the Company would ask for full transparency of prices spent on materials and labor costs including the ovens, the water pipes and the drainage. According to the regulations, the Commission which would decide the winners was formed by the mayor, the director and a professor from the Architecture School, the director of the Technical Construction of the Municipality, a private architect and a private engineer appointed by the Municipality. The commission nominated the winners by December 25<sup>th</sup>, offering a First Prize (5,000 lei), two second prizes (each 1,500 lei), four Third Prizes (each 500 lei). The last paragraph mentioned that the "winning projects remain in the full propriety of the Municipality and can be ceded to the Communal Company or to any other Company with the same scope", namely of dividing the land and building social housing.

In spite of efforts to attract architects, the initiative was not popular in these professional circles and sparked an argument between Ion N. Socolescu, president of the Society of the Romanian Architects and the municipality. Even before the contest took place, on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1910, he sent his first letter to the Mayor contesting some details regarding the organization of the contest, the most important one being linked with the presence in the evaluating Committee of an engineer, who were supposed to evaluate the projects. "The capacity of the architect", Socolescu argued "was as appreciated in beautiful facades as it was in inventive plans and rational utilization of spaces and materials. This is what the architect learns in school, a thing that the engineer does not learn and has no capacity of appreciating, since he is called in to resolve technical issues"<sup>35</sup>. The dispositions of the Regulation of the contest seemed to favor the engineer over the architect, according to Socolescu. He also contested setting an additional cost for connecting the houses to the water supply and drainage in the final price of the house (established at 8000lei), given that these services were under the monopole of the Municipality. Thirdly, Socolescu accuses the ambiguity in awarding the prizes. We quote extensively from Socolescu's letter: "the distribution of the prizes must be done no matter what the value of the project might be, because it is humiliating for the architects to face the public insult that among 120 Romanian architects all graduating from specialized schools and good patriots, one cannot find a few architects capable of making a type of house with a room and a hall or with four rooms as it is asked."<sup>36</sup> A few days later, in a letter sent to the Mayor, the secretary of the Society of the Romanian Architects, Stătie Ciortan reaffirmed Socolescu's claims, endorsing the refusal of architects to participate in the contest.

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<sup>34</sup> C. Sfințescu, *Societatea Comunală* cit., p. 281.

<sup>35</sup> DMBAN, Fond PMB, Serviciul Tehnic, 490/1910.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

The mayor's answer was sharp: Dumitrescu accused architects of ignorance and lack of empathy with the poor, insisting the Society should advise its members to take part in the contest, ignoring the objections raised by Socolescu. We know that in January 1911, one of the architects that participated in the contest was invited by the Society for discussing the project. Finally, the participants in the contest turn in their closed envelopes with projects containing plans, blue scripts. Carmen Popescu mentions the winners of the first prize to be the team of Ion D. Traianescu<sup>37</sup>, Alexandru Referandaru, Nicolae Demetrescu, Constrantin Cretzoiu. The second prize was won by arch. Radu Culcer and engineer E. Dobrovici. The winning projects were "*Casa mea*" (My house), "*Eftin*" (Cheap) (the second prize), "*Rabat*" (third prize), and "*Mens divinilor*" – 500 lei (fourth prize).

However, in one of the letters sent by the director of the Company, A. G. Ioachimescu informs the new Mayor, Dem Dobrescu<sup>38</sup>, that "the projects served us only a little, since we need to completely re-do all." Fortunately, the project with the motto "*Catã Cota*" is still available in archives and on its basis we can analyze the way in which some architects understood to adapt the requirements of the contest. Since the projects were anonymous its importance lies in details regarding the building process and material. Among the materials mentioned we find aggregate, sand, hydraulic lime and lime from Cãmpulung, cement and "hand-made brick, well burned."<sup>39</sup> The beams ("*grinzi*") and the rafters ("*cãpriori*") are made of fir, as well as the carpentry and the decking ("*dușumea*"), while the oak is used for window frame and the reed ("*trestie*") for the ceiling. Iron is used in building the cross-bars ("*traverse*") and casting ("*fontã*") for the bonnets used at the drainage. There are no less than 41 steps to follow: from the initial digging to whitewashing the interior. It seems style was a secondary concern: disregarded by both the organizers of the contest and the architects.

Once the types of the houses were chosen by contest, the Company receives a land from the Municipality on Clucerului Street and proposes to mayor Dobrescu to accept the divide of three projects: first one on Clucerului (30 dwellings with ground

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<sup>37</sup> A few details about the architect I. D. Traianescu: he was part of the second generation of architects who adopted the national style. Among his well-known buildings in Bucharest: the Palace of the Cultural League (the current Bulandra Theatre), the Belvedere Church. In 1911 he was 36. Unfortunately, his article from 1924 from "*Arhitectura*" magazine does not analyze his own choices nor details regarding the building, and deals exclusively with general details about the dwellings.

<sup>38</sup> According to Ion Vitan's study, Dem Dobrescu was named in charge of the administration by the conservatory Party during Peter Carp's presidency, who was at that time the prime minister. Member of the "*Junimea*" group and one of Carp's intimate friends, he started his office in January 1911 and run it until October 1912. Besides building these affordable dwellings, Dem Dobrescu also designed or extended new streets (by numerous expropriations) as well as extending the drainage system. Furthermore, the Communal Council approved the construction of four primary schools, the rearrangement of the St. Anton Square (in the City Center), the first steps for arranging the National Park (today Herãstrãu Park). It also approved the allotment of estates belonging to Alexandru Filipescu and Boerescu, both close to Victory Square. During his office his deputies were dr. I. Mendonide and Mircea Poenarul Bondrea.

<sup>39</sup> DMBAN, Fond PMB, Serviciul Tehnic, 490/1910.

floor and upper floor, costing 8000lei, meaning almost 70 individual dwellings), the second on the Lupească Avenue (First District, Department<sup>40</sup> IV near the Basalt Factory with dwellings for the workers with ground floor, almost 100 dwellings) and the third one on Candiano Popescu street, close to Lânăriei where only eight houses were built. The favorable notification of the mayor meant the beginning of the construction.

Although there is no chronology to attest to the order of the projects, we tend to believe the initial one was the Clucerului *Lottisment* due to a rather symbolic reason. On the façade of the first house from the district we notice four sculptures with the name and the faces of Ermil Pangratti (the vicepresident of the Company, famous architect and the director of the School of Architecture) and Ion Mincu, who, although did not have an institutional relationship with the Company nor with the Municipality, was probably consulted for the project. The dwellings from Clucerului have a different status than the ones from Lupească, first of all because as type B, the tenants had to pay more (8000lei) for a dwelling and as one of the owners recalls “that they were allocated to the intellectuals.”<sup>41</sup> It is probable that the tenants originated from a different social class than the ones from Lupească or Lânăriei.

As the team lead by architect Traianescu won the competition, the dwellings were made according to its plans and his name is carved on a marble plaque on the facade of the first house. After his plans are built eleven double houses on Clucerului, ten double houses on Petofi Sandor Street and the symbol-house, while on Ady Endre the space allows the building of nine double dwellings. Coincidence or not, the Wekerle housing estate (one of the first project of this kind in Budapest) opens with Ady Endre street. Hence, 31 dwellings type C with two rooms at the upper floor and two at the ground floor. As Sfîntescu mentions, the area of the district measured 11,400 square meters, of which 4,800 (41%) represented the streets. The parcel was split in 62 lots, each of them measuring 180 square meters.

The second social housing project was erected on Lupească Street, today the Sebastian Street between Progresul Avenue and Drumul Sării. It seems this construction was completed quite fast as, in September 1911, the workers from the Municipality indexed the buildings in order to connect them with water and drainage system and counted a total of 100 dwellings on the both sides of the street. However, in April 1912, the municipality accuses the tenants for refusing to pay for street number plaques, the latter claiming they had not been hanged. Unfortunately, applications to detail the age or the occupation of the new tenants are not available. From Sfîntescu’s study, we know the dwellings are type A houses (ground floor with two rooms and type B houses (ground floor with three rooms), grouped in either two or four houses under the same roofs. The walls of the dwellings are made of brick, the roof made of fibre cement or sheet-metal and the carpentry consists of fir wood. Prices were set at 3,000lei for type A and 4,350 for type B.

Some ambiguities persist regarding the number of the dwellings built: on the map that A. G. Ioachimescu sent for approval to the Mayor we only identify twenty

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<sup>40</sup> The term in Romanian is *ocol*.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with one of the inhabitants of the dwellings from Clucerului, Bucharest, August 2012.

dwellings with two houses under each roof, with the façade on the newly opened street, whose name does not appear. We identify this street as Sg. Nuțu Ion Street. We know the names of almost 100 people that were scheduled to move from the intersection with the 13<sup>th</sup> of September Boulevard to the intersection with the railway to Giurgiu, passing through Drumul Sării. Today, we see no dwelling resembling this type-house. Analyzing the numbering, we notice the dwellings are indexed on both sides of the Lupeasca Street until the Căplescu alley on the left-hand side (coming from 13 September towards Drumul Sării). From that point on the constructions appear only on the left side; on the other side the land is still not used until the intersection with Drumul Sării after the intersection the counting with even numbers, which expresses the transfer on the right side until the intersection with the Railway to Giurgiu. We mentioned the fixing of the plaques on the houses. On the list of the Municipality, we see the names of tenants who have their dwelling at the corner with September 13th, Costache Popescu și Ioan Velciu Dancu. Ivan Dudănescu lived in the house from the corner with Căplescu alley, Neagu Tincu at the corner with the Dobrescu alley. In order, on the list with the index it follows alley Bidulescu, alley Ion Ghețaru and Smarandache. All these alleys do not exist anymore. While at first we perceived as an error proved to actually a major change the dwellings from Lupească were demolished in the eighties as we learned from the interviews conducted with the inhabitants of the dwellings.<sup>42</sup> In conclusion, the Lupească *lottisment* the politics of building near the industrialized districts, this time near the line that connected the Filaret Railway with the Cotroceni and Northern Railway. However, Ioachimescu mentions that in 1911 only thirty dwellings were erected.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the Candiano Popescu Street, which intersects with the Lânăriei Street, connecting it with the Filaret Railway Station to the west and with the Șerban Vodă Avenue at the south, going round the eastern side of the Carol Park is the last such project. On this street, the Company projected five collective dwellings, each of them with two individual dwellings. We recognize type A (ground floor with two rooms) and type B<sub>1</sub> (ground floor and a level with two rooms). However, we the files from the archives do not contain the names of the tenants, nor any details about their social identity.

## Conclusions

By way of conclusion, we trace a continuous change of strategy in the social housing program adopted by the governmental and municipal authorities in order to provide cheap accommodation for the working class in Bucharest.

The project on Lânăriei Street developed by the Communal Council in 1909-1910 proved to be successful, as the dwellings were constructed at a minimum price, later on imposed by law. The initial strategy to appoint an architect to design them and hire a private company to build them changed once the authorities decided to adopt specific laws in spring 1910 and to found the Communal Company for Low-

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with one of the inhabitants of the dwellings from Lupească. September 2012, Bucharest.

<sup>43</sup> A. G. Ioachimescu, *Locuințe ieftine*, *Buletinul Societății Politehnice*, 1912, p.53

Cost Housing in December 1910. Consequently, the procedure changed again: a contest for architects to design modular dwellings was organized and the winning plan was adopted for constructing the first projects were built simultaneously on Clucerului, Lupească and Candiano Popescu *Lottissements*. The industrialization at the beginning of the twentieth century determined the building of new districts in the proximity of the railway stations: the new dwellings from the south constructed by the Municipality (Lânăriei Street, Candiano Popescu street etc.) and from the north east (Grant for the State Monopole Company and Griviței for the Railway Company) responded to the new industries developing after 1888.

The program was initiated by the state, since private investors were not interested in building the affordable houses for the working class. As Sfințescu concludes, "the absence of capital, especially of the capitalist willing to invest in building industry their surplus made that we will not have in the center of the city that intensity of cheap buildings which would counterbalance building at the periphery."<sup>44</sup> One of the few examples of private initiative belonged to Nicole Bazilescu who invests in the land from the north: "by 1913 almost 1500 parcels were bought, each with an area of 150 ha,"<sup>45</sup> but his example was not followed by many others. The paternity and responsibility was enforced by the laws from 1910 that regulated the program of social housing, which imposed strict regulation for health and hygiene. The housing issue was brought into attention by the state because it was able to satisfy certain demands for improving the social conditions of the working classes: the bureaucracy increased, the important railway company and the State Monopole Company, but surprisingly enough craftsmen with no connection to heavy industry. The pressure increased after the peasant riots, encouraged by the socialist propaganda. However the state acted quickly and was able to adapt its strategy to response to the needs of the working class soon enough, in order to avoid any civil riots in Bucharest. The context that determined the authorities to start the social housing program can be interpreted as responses to the social riots in 1907. Far from settling this issue, we would conclude that the authorities answered to the pressures of the social classes that affiliated with the peasant riots from 1907, especially the workers from the state industries: the Railway Company and the State Monopoles. Starting 1912, the Company will build for these state companies new cheap dwellings.

The law allowed the Company to build types of dwellings at different prices, therefore the customers could choose the type of house they afforded: while on Lupească and Lânăriei the predominate category are the craftsmen or the workers in the State industry, on the Clucerului *Lottissement* the price, the architecture and the oral testimonies indicate the presence of a social class different from the ones above-mentioned.

In total, the number of dwellings built in the years 1909-1911 does not exceed 1% of the number of houses at that time. Fourteen double-dwellings on Lânăriei Street, ten on Candiano Popescu Street, sixty on Clucerului *Lottissement* and

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<sup>44</sup> C. Sfințescu, *Studiu asupra planului general* cit., p. 116.

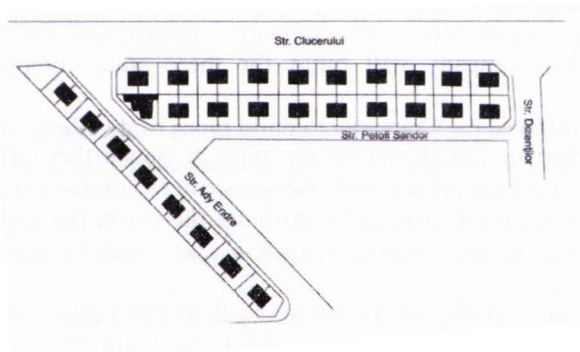
<sup>45</sup> A. Dutu, *Realizări ale administrației bucureștene* cit., p. 103.



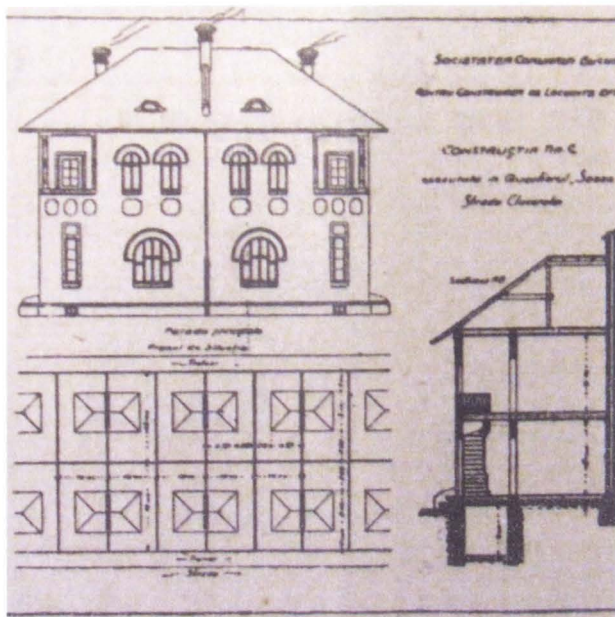
thirty on Lupească *Lottisment* means 114 dwellings in Bucharest, compared with the total number of 49,000 houses in 1912. The number of inhabitants of these houses probably did not exceed 1000 individuals. With 342,000 inhabitants of Bucharest in 1912, the impact was minimum.



The first house subject to allotment, at the crossing between Clucerului and Ady Endre



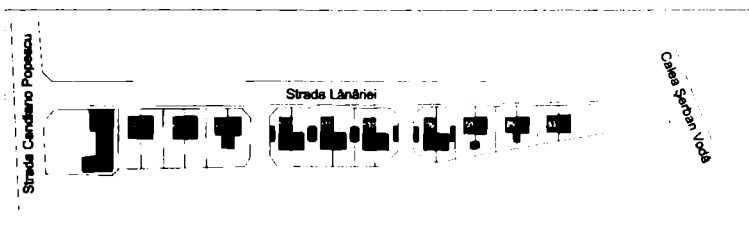
Map representing the three streets subject to the allotment at Clucerului



C type of buildings used in the allotment at Clucerului



Picture published by C. Sfințescu in *Urbanismul* (1933)



Lănăriei Street