

Building a House in Rural Romania before and after 1989

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By

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To my children, Tudor and Mădălina

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The central theme of this book, housing construction in the contemporary Romanian rural environment, was inspired by the research I carried out during the master programme at the University of Bucharest (between 2013 and 2015) under the guidance of Professor Rodica Zane, to whom I am indebted with a particular respect for her support and advice. At that time, my work focused on the dynamics of the construction of dwellings in Poiana Cîmpina, a commune located near an urban environment. This analysis was enriched by the comparison of the observations and data gathered from two ethnological research campaigns I participated in (2015 and 2016) with the support and courtesy of Professors Narcisa Alexandra Ştiucă and Ioana Ruxandra Fruntelată, from the Faculty of Letters from the University of Bucharest, to whom I am deeply grateful. These two campaigns were carried out thanks to the precious assistance of the Vrancea Cultural Centre and local authorities of Bisoca commune (Buzău County) and Vulturii Commune (Vrancea County). I am very thankful to colleagues Ecaterina Lung, and Lucia Ofrim for their encouragement, patience in reading this paper, and suggestions and especially to Ionuţ Geană for reviewing my English translation. I also express my gratitude to the entire editorial team and Mrs. Marlene de Wilde for their patience and professionalism in preparing my manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

Argument

Over time, the rural household has been one of the criteria that defined the distinct ethnographic areas in Romania, being considered as proof of the continuity of habitation in Romanian territory. Almost all 20th-century Romanian scholars, with few exceptions (Anton Golopenția, Henri P. Stahl), aimed to perceive the country house as the symbol of rural living, unaltered by technological and urban progress. Consequently, ethnographic research emphasized those elements that highlighted the architectural tradition transmitted from one generation to another. The research fields were carefully chosen and rural areas with little contact with the urban environment were preferred while the discourse of the researchers followed a historical and national perspective. This perspective characterized the last three decades of the communist regime, during which there was no possibility to explore any evolution in rural habitation because of the caution imposed by the nationalist ideology. More than that, the policy of restructuring villages promoted by Nicolae Ceaușescu transformed the problem of rural habitation into an undesirable (if not dangerous) subject of research for Romanian specialists. The consequences of this policy were investigated (mainly after 1990) from historical, sociological and anthropological perspectives in an attempt to understand internal migration,¹ the quality of the rural life² and the functioning of rural society and households.³ Some progress has been made in the analysis of the architecture of a rural house⁴ but the significance of Romanian rural material culture under the communist regime remains a lucrative field for further historical and anthropological examination.

¹ Sandu, *Fluxurile de migrație*, 50-133.

² Bărbulescu (coord.), *Documente*, tome II.

³ Mihăilescu and Nicolau, "Du village," 77-84; Stahl, *Triburi*, 115-50; Mihalache and Croitoru, *Mediul rural românesc, passim*.

⁴ Cernescu, "Schimbări," 44-66; Cernescu, *Societate*, 75-107.

My research⁵ aims to analyse the architectural diversity of Romanian rural houses as the result of a social and cultural process embedded in a historical context that gave different manners of defining habitation and living standards. With the fall of the communist regime at the end of 1989 as a temporal reference, the perspective that I propose tries both to surpass a simple descriptive discourse and avoid generalizations. In this respect, I pay close attention to the way people say they built their homes prior and after 1989, to reveal the challenges they had to deal with and the solutions they found in order to construct their domestic environment. The social and architectural consequences of the political decisions taken after the 1977 earthquake will also be introduced in my analysis. Ceaușescu's policy of systematization of Romanian territory, enhanced by this natural disaster, has been investigated by some authors, especially concerning the demolition that he initiated in the big cities,⁶ but little attention has been paid to the rural communities affected by the dictator's legislative decisions, except for their importance in the statistics of the demolished villages. The rural house will be placed in the historical context of the post-communist decades, taking into consideration the evolution of house construction as a social and cultural action and its relationship with the diversity of the forms of rural architecture.

Romanian approaches to Romanian rural house and habitat

In the research of Romanian rural houses connected with the rural habitat, two important directions have been shaped over time. The first direction focused on the traditional features of the house and household—with an emphasis on the construction aspects (regarding the materials used: stone, wood, clay, brick, and execution techniques) and on the architectural style (in the attempt to define the connection with geographic and/or historical regions). The influences of the multi-ethnic coexistence of Romanians in this area (located between the Carpathians, the Danube and the Black Sea) and the dynamics of the habitat have been added as research objectives. Despite the considerable number of approaches—

⁵ The research is based on a punctual study I conducted in a hilly rural area between 2014-2015 to obtain my master's degree in Ethnology, Cultural Anthropology and Folklore at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest. This study was enriched by two more field studies carried out between 2015 and 2016.

⁶ Giurescu, *Razing Romania's Past*, 1-18.

ethnographic, linguistic, historical, sociological, and symbolic⁷—many important works (mostly edited before the fall of the communist regime⁸) paid tribute to the ideology of “the continuity of the Romanian people”. Consequently, the construction of houses becomes both a matter of national identity as well as tradition transmitted from generation to generation without substantial changes.

Although many Romanian researchers have emphasized how ethnology has served ideological interests, the thesis of continuity and the descriptive manner of writing ethnography have not been definitively abandoned.⁹ Some of these ethnographic contributions will probably remain marginal but others could influence and perpetuate the “old ethnography” writing style. In this latter respect, the *Ethnographic Atlas of the Romanians* is an important reference, being a monumental work and also a research tool. Conceived in five volumes,¹⁰ it was published after the fall of the communist regime and contains huge field studies carried out between 1972 and 1983. The *Ethnographic Atlas* was designed in the context of the twentieth century, when an ethnographic atlas of the entire European continent was planned, with data from participating countries gathered according to the project outlined by Swedish ethnologist S. Erickson. Such research stemmed from the post-war historical context when the cultural border was closely linked to the political frontier. Soon after the start of work in each of the participating countries, the European atlas project was abandoned. Furthermore, succeeding the fall of the Berlin Wall, both the new social mobility in Europe and the redefining of the state borders imposed a rethinking of the ethnological approach and methodology. Since the late 1990s, postcolonial studies have been marked by the renunciation

⁷ Bernea, *Spațiu*, 23-43, 76-85, and 109-22; Butură, *Etnografia*, 8-98; Eliade, *Sacral*, 21-63; Gaivoronski, *Matricile spațiului*, 49-95 and 163-80.

⁸ Florin Stănculescu et alii, *Arhitectura* (1957); Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura populară Românească* (1957); Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura populară în România* (1971); Ion Vlăduțiu, *Etnografia. Istoric. Cultura materială. Obiceiuri* (1973); Andrei Pănoiu, *Din Arhitectura Lemnului în România* (1977); Dinu C. Giurescu, *Istoria Ilustrată a românilor* (1981).

⁹ In this sense, see Mihail I. Gorgoi’s PhD thesis on folk architecture (*Antropologia spațiului în arhitectura populară—The Anthropology of the Space in Folk Architecture*), 2012.

¹⁰ *Atlasul Etnografic al Românilor*, coordinated by Ion Ghinoiu—the first volume deals with the traditional habitat (*Habitatul* 2003) and the other four volumes concern crafts, folk techniques, nourishment and food, folk costumes, folk ceremonies and customs, and mythology (Vol. II—*Ocupațiile* 2005; Vol. III—*Tehnica populară; Alimentația* 2008; Vol. IV—*Portul și arta populară* 2011; Vol. V—*Sărbători, obiceiuri, mitologie* 2014).

of national criteria that privileged state borders. However, the research started by the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest was tied up and its results were published only after the year 2000, when political factors got involved and sponsored the publication. This tardy publication harmonized with the new political and cultural context and was presented as a necessary document of identity of Romanian traditional culture in the period Romania wanted to become a member of the European Union. Despite this ideological background, the ethnographic data proved to be precious for the evolution of Romanian rural architecture, as many scholars had previously highlighted.

The second direction of the rural habitat analysis grew mainly after 1990,¹¹ when Romanian research was strongly connected to the “new ethnographies” and re-oriented towards anthropology.¹² The Romanian ethnographic research horizon has been broadened by *local* approaches that seek to understand a phenomenon starting from its local manifestations, from a *contextual* perspective that analyses the configuration of the contexts in which the culture is formed. These approaches were added by the *interpretative* correlation of the objects, actions and speeches produced in and about local culture and the *contextual description* of the constituent elements that are ossified in the culture. It has also been privileged to understand rural *culture as a process* (extended recently for the urban environment), having its own logic of events and appreciating *the role of cultural agents* as well as *the power relationships* that arise and coordinate their interdependencies.

Within this amplified field of understanding the culture, two working perspectives on the rural house have emerged. The first perspective regards the material diversity of the physical characteristics of Romanian villages as an environment in which traditional architectural patterns must be recovered. Because of this approach, an intense preservation and “*museification*” activity has been generated.¹³

The second perspective attempts to provide sociological explanations for the architectural diversity and associate it with the phenomenon of globalization that encompassed the entire Romanian society, including the

¹¹ A new perspective, opened to multidisciplinary methods, could also be found in the work written, prior to 1989, by Anton Golopentia, Paul H. Stahl, and Mihai Pop.

¹² Văetiși, *Noile teorii etnografice*, 246-55 and 321; Fruntelată, “Cultura populară,” 109-10; Șeuleanu, “Posibile trasee,” 59-61; Panea, “Le manifeste de la Lausanne,” 120-44.

¹³ See for an anthropological analysis, Mihăilescu, “Local Museums?,” 11-18 .

rural communities.¹⁴ In this respect, in the last two decades, scholars have highlighted the domestic architecture that Romanian villages experienced in the post-communist period, and which is analysed in the context of the new social and professional statutes of the villagers, especially of those who worked abroad. Consequently, the building of large and sumptuous houses is properly interpreted as a significant cultural phenomenon for the Romanian rural environment during the transition period. Since the end of the 1990s, this topic, along with the way the post-communist rural household functions, has been an important objective of Vintilă Mihăilescu's studies. In an article published in 2011,¹⁵ the author underlines two features of the contemporary rural house: the excessive character of the architectural forms, which are very difficult to include under any architectural style, and the tendency of these modern rural houses to recover certain rustic aspects of the traditional household. It is well known that the expropriations of rural properties in the communist era, with the aim of setting up collective farming, confiscated not only the land of the villagers but also the cultural expression of the rural way of life. The Communist Party intended to transform the peasant into a “rural worker” who had to live in a modern house. Using this historical background, Mihăilescu explains the houses are built in a rustic manner mostly due to a local attempt to recover the rural identity that was stolen by the communist authorities. Taking into account the migration phenomenon also, which nowadays is consistent throughout the Romanian rural environment, the author points out “social recognition”, stemming from the process of social interaction, as the main cause for the existence of the so-called “pride houses” (*maisons d’orgueil*). These interpretations opened new directions of research regarding the houses that were built following the process of migration to work abroad. Under the patronage of the Romanian Cultural Institute, an exhibition about the dream houses of the Romanian migrants was organized in Berlin (November 2015–June 2016) and then in Cluj (July 2017), and a collection of important studies, edited by Raluca Betea and Beate Wild, was published in 2016.

Due to the fact that nowadays the social group of migrants appears to be privileged by researchers, the possible impression provided by all these theoretical approaches could be that the Romanian rural world is entirely affected by these architectural characteristics of a dwelling. However, in my opinion, it can easily slip into generalizations that could leave aside a whole Romanian rural world that does not seem to conform to these new

¹⁴ Frunteletă, “Utilitatea terminologiei etnologice,” 15-9; Şeuleanu, “Cercetarea faptelor,” 227-31.

¹⁵ Mihăilescu, “Comment le rustique,” 96-114.

tendencies of rural material culture. In addition, the building of a new rural landscape is an ongoing process and a full understanding of the boom construction phenomenon requires a multidisciplinary study, as Raluca Beta also points out.¹⁶

The object of research and working hypotheses

The object of my study concerns the diversity of Romanian rural domestic architecture and it is based on the premise that a dwelling is the result of solutions successively chosen in order to harmonize a multitude of factors, such as the relief, the climate, and the economic, historical, social, and cultural factors.¹⁷ In contemporary societies, recognized as complex societies, these choices largely highlight the interactions with external factors (regardless of their nature). Therefore, a house cannot remain unaffected by the dynamics of these factors. As a result of the transition from a dictatorial regime to a democratic government, there have been many economic and social changes in the last five decades in Romania, which, consequently, have influenced dwelling construction, stimulating and favouring an evolution towards architectural diversity.

Starting from the interpretation of culture as a process, I aim to identify the causes of architectural diversity in two ways. Firstly, I shall take into account the established relationship between an individual or family group and the public authority during the process of the house construction/renovation/embellishment in the last five decades. I shall look at the concept of “web of significance”, as theorized by Weber and developed by Geertz,¹⁸ as being important in the understanding of the relationship “culture–law/normative discourse”, which is a shaped relationship, having not the given meanings but coming out of certain social, institutional and material contexts. People’s “actions and/or solutions” concerning the act of house construction that were found by interacting with the public institution, influence social behaviour and, through repetition, can even create actionable strategies. In a certain context, the latter evolves towards a constant negotiation, which allows the restructuring of the social practices, as Bourdieu has underlined.¹⁹

Secondly, the construction/action of refurbishing/activity of maintenance will be connected to the creation of self-identity by an individual (or

¹⁶ Beta, “Romanian Migration,” 40-43.

¹⁷ Rapoport, *House Form*, 133.

¹⁸ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, *passim*.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Esquisse d’une théorie*, 273.

family group) who lives (or live) in a community in search of social recognition being interpreted as a “need of belonging” to a group or a community.²⁰

Therefore, I formulate two working hypotheses:

1. The diversity of architectural styles (in three studied villages) is the result of interactions between social, economic, political, and cultural factors, interactions that generate action strategies in the field of private construction.
2. The identity of an individual or of a family group is formed by two means: social competition with other co-villagers (the “stake” being the attainment of honourable living conditions) and interacting with members of the same extended family group (a relationship that is organized around internal social hierarchies).

The field of research

I chose to verify my hypotheses through the information collected in three villages researched during the years 2014-2016. One of the villages, Poiana Cîmpina, is a hilly rural area in Prahova County and it is located in the proximity of a town (at 3km). The other two rural communities are situated far from an urban environment: Bisoca commune is in the mountainous part of Buzău County while Vulturii commune is located in the plains of Vrancea County.²¹

The choice of these rural communities is resonant with the objective of my research and could offer a wider picture of the evolution of Romanian rural architecture in the last half-century than is usually perceived by scholars. My intention is ensured by the fact that the villages selected belong to the three types identified for rural Romanian communities,²² i.e. the “spread-village” type met in the hill regions, the “scattered-village” characteristic of the mountain areas, and the “gathered village” from plain territory. This typology combines the geographic characteristics with the location of the households in relation to the road network. In a mountain village, there is no street alignment system therefore the distances between

²⁰ Miller, *Material Culture*, 83-130.

²¹ I thank those who made this research possible: the Bisoca School principal, Professor Viorel Șerbănoiu; Professor Dumitru Dragomir from Maluri-Vrancea; officials of the local administrations in the two communes (Bisoca and Vulturii), Vrancea Cultural Center, and professors Narcisa Alexandra Țiucă and Ioana Frunteletă, who kindly allowed me to join their research teams.

²² Bădescu, *Dicționar de sociologie rurală, sv Habitat*.

houses are quite large, and this has a strong influence on social cohesion and communication. In a hilly area, the houses are located adjacent to the access roads and separated by many orchards and gardens while in a gathered village from the plains the households are merged into the village's hearth and the agricultural land is disposed outside of the residential nucleus. That the three villages have different characters was a deliberate choice in my desire to pursue the effects of the unitary systematization policy the Romanian communist state promoted for almost two decades on communities that do not have a similar morphology. The results will be considered premises for the analysis of the architectural forms during the post-communist period.



Fig. 1-1: Map with the location of the studied villages: ▲–Poiana Cîmpina (Prahova County); ■–Bisoca (Buzău County); ●–Vulturii Negri (Vrancea County) (Source: <https://hartaromania.files.wordpress.com/>)

It is well known that the field of research represents not only a spatial reality but also a social and cultural circumscribed perimeter²³ with great

²³ Izard, and Michel, in Bonte and Izard, *Dicționar de etnologie*, sv. Metoda etnografică (Engl. *Ethnographic method*), 430-34.

dynamics.²⁴ Having in mind some preliminary information about the place that they intend to investigate, researchers must continuously harmonize their objectives and selected instruments with the challenges that emerge during the research. As I intend to investigate a theme whose evolution spanned almost five decades, the group of informants was made up of people of different ages. I have also tried to get information from persons with different social and professional statuses in order to cover a broad range of opinions on building houses in the investigated villages. The information was collected from 42 people, of both genders, aged between 37 and 87, with different educational levels (primary school, high school, technical school, higher education) and various professions. My interlocutors are mentioned by the initials of their names, except for those who have kindly provided personal documents regarding the ownership and the construction of the dwelling, with the intention to protect their identity.

The main difficulties encountered were related to the establishing of a dialogue with the newcomers from the urban environment (settled in Poiana Cîmpina), who refused to speak about the way they built their home. I also found some reluctance among interlocutors in speaking about the earnings gained in the post-communist period compared with their responses regarding the gains that they had during the communist period.

Methods and conceptual instruments

The organization of the methodological configuration²⁵ stemmed from the working hypotheses. The historical and contextual perspective imposed a documentation stage that was carried out at the National Archives of Romania in order to collect the legal norms of houses and house construction voted within the analysed period of time, and also the information based on the discussions that took place at the meetings of the Communist Party concerning rural systematization and dwelling issues. This preliminary investigation was useful for the conceiving of the questions I asked the interviewees, keeping in mind the idea of continuous adaptation to the field of research. The collection of ethnographic data from the researched rural communities was done through conversations with interlocutors whose main subject regarded the way they built their dwelling. I focused on the construction act with the

²⁴ Mihăilescu, *Antropologie*, 93-119.

²⁵ About the necessity of a well-structured methodological frame, see Olivier de Sardan, "La politique du terrain," 71-109.

aim of obtaining as much information as possible about the organization of the construction/renovation/refurbishment and maintenance of the dwelling. When the people accepted, these concentrated conversations were recorded.

During the dialogue, the interlocutors were asked to mention the work periods (“when did you start to build/renovate your house?”), to detail how they worked (“how did you work?”, “who did you work with?”/“who else helped you?”), and to detail how the house is maintained in a state of comfort and cleanliness. The introduction of the topic concerning the legal aspects of a dwelling was suggested to me by some of the interlocutors while they were reporting on the effort to build their home. Quite often, when people recounted the way they had built or renovated their houses, the conversations became about their life story. Consequently, I took into consideration the double content of information that reflects both the interlocutors’ narratives and the community experiences. To this methodological set, direct observation was added in the attempt to identify the social and cultural content²⁶ of the people’s statements. Following my objectives, the choice of the analysis criteria aimed to identify not only the structural elements of the researched theme but also their cultural meaning.²⁷ At the same time, the indicators of the standard of living, provided by sociological research, were compared with the people’s assessments and perceptions of their way of life.

The central concept my analysis is based upon is the *house* which, through the act of inhabiting, becomes synonymous with a *dwelling* (place of residence) and this, by charging it with an emotional and affective significance, transforms into a *home*. Among the criteria of analysis that specialists use when researching dwellings and housing,²⁸ I chose a few that are useful in my approach, namely, the selective character of vernacular architecture,²⁹ the symbolism of the internal social organization through the ways in which the building is occupied, the conception of the use of space as an indicator of comfort ideas, and the aesthetic rules that shape the architectural ensemble.

²⁶ Laplantine, *Descrierea*, 58.

²⁷ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, 5-10.

²⁸ Bromberger, in Bonte and Izard, *Dicționar de etnologie*, sv. *Locuință* (Engl. *Dwelling*), 387-390.

²⁹ For the development of the rural vernacular in Romania during the communist period, see Petrescu, “Transformări,” 1-20.

The analysis of the way of conceiving and using the inhabited space³⁰ is based on the concept of *architecture*, understood as an ensemble that creates spatial relationships rather than simply a built and occupied space.³¹

The way the people speak about the above-mentioned concepts reflects their connection with this social and material universe of the dwelling. Such a connection is, in fact, a constructed self-representation of each individual as a social actor. My analysis tries to identify the means by which this self-representation is built in a dynamic manner by my interlocutors during their interactions with other social actors and public authority.³²

The structure

My study is organized in three major chapters. The first one analyses the evolution of Romanian legislation concerning house construction before and after the fall of the communist regime, taking into consideration the legal changes introduced by Ceaușescu's dictatorship after the 1977 earthquake. The second chapter presents people's perceptions of how they interacted with administrative factors when they built their homes or repaired them during the analysed period. The last chapter is reserved for the social and cultural significances of the rural house.

³⁰ In the sense of a social topology that Ph. Bonnin spoke about, understanding the inhabited space as a reflection of a mental projection which embeds a representation of the inner world—see Bonnin, “Pour une topologie sociale,” 53-54.

³¹ Cernescu, *Societate*, 12-23.

³² Kastersztein, “Les stratégies identitaires,” 27-41.

CHAPTER ONE

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION AND THE NORMATIVE SYSTEM DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME AND POST-COMMUNIST PERIOD IN ROMANIA

This chapter focuses, on the one hand, on the communist legislation introduced mainly during Ceaușescu's dictatorship according to the ideology of living standardization and, on the other hand, on a selection of the legal decisions regarding house construction that were enacted after 1990, offering the post-communist evolution of the topic of living standards. Firstly, I shall take into account the main laws of 1973 and 1974³³ and the decisions made after the 1977 earthquake. Then the post-communist laws on constructions will be added³⁴ in order to understand the economic and social evolution connected to house-building issues. My intention is to design the normative framework within which the inhabitants have had to live and build their houses, and to obtain the legal and historical context for a further analysis of people's narrations.

1. Dwelling Plans—Control of the people through house construction during the last decades of the communist regime

The establishment of the communist regime in Romania had important consequences in terms of house construction. After a first stage (during 1948), when the attention of the authorities was oriented towards the confiscation of houses owned by the former supporters of the monarchic regime,³⁵ the construction of “houses for the working people” was introduced,

³³ Law no. 4/1973 on the development of house construction and the sale of houses from the state fund to the population; Law no. 58/1974 on the systematization of the territory and the urban and rural localities.

³⁴ Law no. 114 of 1996 concerning the people's houses and Law no. 7 of 1996 regarding the cadastre.

³⁵ For more details, see Tismăneanu et al., *Comisia Prezidențială*, 617-18.

with a standardization of small residences to highlight the opposition to the “ostentatious luxury” of bourgeois dwellings. In addition, the first two economic five-year plans (between 1950 and 1960) began to electrify the whole country³⁶ and would radically change the traditional structure of urban and rural dwellings. No longer dependent on natural light, the plan of the rural house changed, allowing a less linear location of the rooms, gradually abandoning the standard orientation towards the south and the placement of windows and door access to the rooms oriented to the porch.³⁷ New building materials, techniques and technologies were successively introduced in the field of constructions.

Nearly two years after taking power, Nicolae Ceaușescu implemented a demographic birth control programme, with consequences that have been widely debated in historical literature over the last twenty years.³⁸ Correlated with this birth control policy, a set of measures were introduced in 1968 to organize living space for a population that was expected to increase numerically. In line with party ideology (which also regulated nine square metres per capita), the communist regime from Bucharest gradually introduced a normative system that also affected the succession rights over households, limiting the right of ownership to a *single* dwelling and a *single* tourist house or holiday house:³⁹

³⁶ ANIC, *fond CC al PCR–Cancelarie*, file 250/1950, ff. 310-380–“Raportul lui Gh. Gheorghiu Dej privind planul de electrificare a țării/Gh. Gherghiu Dej’s Report on the electrification plan of the country”, presented at the Plenary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party (name of that time for the Romanian Communist Party) on October 26, 1950. The process of Romania’s electrification, far from being complete, continued after that in order to connect all the inhabited regions of the country, including the isolated villages in the mountains and plain areas. Despite the bombastic reports and official propaganda, not all rural localities have been connected to the power supply network. The statistics show that in May 2006, there were still 67,738 non-electrified households—see the *Program ‘ELECTRIFICARE 2007-2009’ privind alimentarea cu energie electrică a localităților neelectrificate/Program ‘ELECTRICITY 2007-2009’ on electricity supply of non-electrified localities*, of March 28, 2007, published in *Monitorul Oficial al României (The Official Monitor or The Official Gazette*, hereinafter referred to as *MO*), no. 307 of May 9, 2017.

³⁷ For the old plans of rural households, see Ionescu, *Arhitectura populară Românească*, 21-92; Vlăduțiu, *Etnografia*, 149-90.

³⁸ Tismăneanu et al., *Comisia Prezidențială*, 509-21, with further references.

³⁹ *Law no. 9/1968 on the construction of dwellings, the sale of houses from the state fund to the population and the construction of private property*, published in *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Socialiste România (The Official Bulletin*, hereinafter referred to as *BO*), no. 57-58 of May 9, 1968, and modified by *Law no. 4/1973*, subsequently republished in 1980.

Personal property is limited to a single home. The construction or purchase of dwellings by citizens for the purpose of resale or rental is forbidden. If a person acquires a second house, the owner has the obligation to alienate one of the houses within one year of the acquisition. (art. 6)

Citizens, irrespective of their home town, can build with their own means or with the support of the state, a single resting house or personal property tourist house for themselves and their families. Citizens can have, apart from their own private property, just a single holiday house or personal property tourist house. (art. 31)

This law replaced the previous norms of the 1950s concerning the existence of two main types of dwelling, depending on the source of financing: the dwellings built by people with their own resources and the dwellings built by the state or other organizations and purchased by the people through the system of loans, if they were included on special lists. *With the purpose of stimulating the building of houses owned with the title of personal property, as set in the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party* (as mentioned in the preamble), the law permitted *loans of up to 20,000 lei, repayable within 15-25 years* (art. 20) for those with the intention to build houses in the urban area, and *loans of up to 15,000 lei, repayable within 10-15 years* (art. 21) for people who intended to construct a house in a rural area. Certain categories of employees were considered as “having priority”, such as teachers, doctors and specialized mechanics.

The contents of this law were replaced by *Law no. 4 from 1973*,⁴⁰ whose dispositions reveal a change in the relationship between the state and the population regarding house construction. The letter and spirit of many articles of this law demonstrate an obvious preoccupation of Ceaușescu’s regime to increase social control and the dependence of the citizens on the communist regime. In order to obtain a *harmonious development of the cities*, the third article of this law claims that *the working centres and the other localities require a construction of new houses in accordance with the sketches and systematization plans*. This article also required a strict observation of the construction regime *regarding the number of levels, the density of the buildings and their architectural line*.

⁴⁰ *Law no. 4/1973 on the development of house construction and the sale of houses from the state fund to the population* of March 31, 1973, published in *BO*, no. 46 of March 31, 1973 and republished in *BO*, no. 121 of December 31, 1980.

In the name of this so-called “harmonious development of the country”, the 4th article set up the relationship between the private house construction and the communist regime:

The lands within a town’s perimeters are subject to the systematization regime, whatever the nature of the property. The owners of these lands can build only with the approval of the executive committees or the offices of the Popular Councils and within the framing of the rules of systematization and architecture. The state-owned land may be assigned by the executive boards or executive councils of the Popular Councils for the construction of dwellings, in the use of socialist organizations or individuals, according to the provisions of the systematization plans, and with the payment of the tax established by legal provisions. The *usus* of the assigned land is granted as long as the construction is in place.

The next article restates the permission for a single house owned by a nuclear family:

Citizens have the right to own a single house for themselves and their families. Members of a family can keep a single house, either as common property or in the property of one of them. (...) Family members refer only to husband, wife and underage children. (art.5)

At the same time, *the construction or purchase of dwellings by citizens for the purpose of reselling or renting is forbidden* (art. 6). A dwelling is defined in the 8th article as a *locative surface consisting of one or more inhabited rooms with the adjacent dependencies, forming a property unit, determined as such by its construction*. This law maintains a clear distinction between constructions built by the communist state—buildings made with funds purchased through state loans and by using the cooperative associations or construction companies belonging to the state, and constructions built by people—the so-called *own management* (Ro:“regie proprie”).

Regarding the financial resources for constructing a house, some new indications were introduced. The amount of the permitted loans increased to 35,000 lei, repayable in 20 years, both for the urban and rural regions, and an interest rate was calculated by the type of loan based on the monthly income of the borrowers (art. 25-28). Similar characteristics applied to the loans designated for buying a house that had already been built by the state or other associations (art. 28-36). The articles most relevant for the increase of social control concern the way that mortgages were offered and the provision regarding people’s procurement of materials:

The approval of loans for the construction of personal property dwellings will be made at the proposal of the working groups where the applicants carry out their activity; this has to be approved by the labour councils together with the union bodies, taking into account the contribution of the applicants in the production, the need to ensure their stability in the unit, and the conditions of their housing, in the order of priority established in art. 16. (art. 20)

The approval of loans for the construction of personal property dwellings shall be done in the following order of priority: -qualified workers, first of all those from large industrial units, -persons with employment contracts transferred in the interest of the service from other localities, -specialists who work in the material production, in the designing activity, in scientific research and in education, -recent graduates that have just been employed, coming from other localities, -married young people, -employees recruited on the basis of competition, having an employment contract, and coming from other localities, -other employees having labour contract and pensioners. Within each category, the preference is given to those who have difficult living conditions, especially to the families with more children, to the employees with an employment contract, and to the pensioners who have contributed for a long time to the fund of CEC. (art.17)

The citizens who construct a house on their private property and by themselves are allowed to use only their own building materials or purchased materials at retail prices from the market fund, strictly observing the legal provisions. The persons are obliged to justify by legal documents the materials purchased for the construction of the dwelling, as well as the expenses incurred. Those who cannot justify the legal origin of the materials are responsible, and, according to the law, are punished through material, civil, pecuniary or criminal penalties, as the case may be. (art. 37)

In 1974, *Law no. 58⁴¹ on the systematization of the territory, urban, and rural localities* was voted for, generating major damage to Romanian society as a whole. This systematization law, among other communist decisions of that time, stemmed from the ideology introduced after 1971 and defined by the so-called “July Theses” that had as its assumed objectives *the increasing of the material and spiritual prosperity of the masses, the ensuring of the conditions for the plenary affirmation of the personality, and the creation of the new man, deeply devoted to socialism*

⁴¹ *Law no. 58/1974 on the systematization of the territory and of the urban and rural localities*, published in *BO no. 135* of November 1, 1974.

and communism. Whatever the intensity⁴² with which these so-called revolutionary ideas were translated into practice, it remains beyond any doubt that the national values enveloped in the ideology of communism were privileged, and instrumental in reshaping the whole of Romanian society.

According to the idea of a clear delimitation between dwelling land and the land belonging to the primary, secondary and tertiary economic sectors, the systematization law of 1974 limited the constructive perimeters to the maximum possible for the purpose of obtaining optimum economic land, defined as *an important national wealth* (art. 1). This “systematization” also had to “unify” urban and rural living standards through a *functional concept of how to use the land and how to determine the height and density of construction as well as the density of inhabitants and planted and recreational areas*.

Failure to comply with these provisions entailed pecuniary penalties, and the demolition of such new buildings had to be done at the expense of the guilty persons (see art. 29, and with more details art. 38). At the same time, the old buildings, which would have remained outside the recently demarcated building perimeter, had to be demolished and the inhabitants of these dismantled houses had to build other dwellings with the support of the state or buy a house or an apartment through the state loan system.

Voted for in the plenary session of the Great National Assembly at the end of 1974, this law appeared to have a democratic adherence in article 5, which inserted the obligation for citizens to be co-opted and trained to *apply these provisions in practice* together with the People's Councils and the municipalities whose task it was to carry out systematization sketches.

The third chapter of this law is devoted to rural localities and it was meant to translate into practice the principle contained in article 13, namely *the gradual approximation of the life of villages to the life of cities*. This action, which was planned to offer “an urban appearance” to Romanian villages, was estimated to be accomplished in a period of 10-15 years, at the end of which rural habitation had to be organised around a civic centre. The new private edifices had to be two-storey houses (art. 18 and 19) based on the so-called type-projects delivered to the villagers by the People's Councils. Although some *local architectural traditions* were taken into account by these type-projects, the entire construction process was subordinated to the idea of using *existing cheap local materials*.

⁴² Romanian historians differ on this topic; usually these *theses* were considered as having important historical consequences but recently some scholars perceive them as “moderate”; see Scurtu, *Politică*, 283.