



VATRA LUMINOASĂ: CONSTRUCTING A DISTRICT, BUILDING A COMMUNITY (1933 – 1945)¹

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Abstract: *This article investigates the construction of the working class district “Vatra Luminoasă” in Bucharest between 1933 and 1945 using two complementary methods of analysis. On the one hand, the research in the haze of archives and magazines from the forties redeems the chronological chain of events that led to the construction of the dwellings and the institutional structures involved in this act. On the other hand, the social aspects of the everyday life in the district can’t be researched only by the references to the files in the archive, but by adopting a different perspective which consists of oral interviews with the old lodgers of the neighborhood. The four interviews that I will refer, conducted starting 2012 on the streets of the district, on phone or in separate meetings with the lodgers recompose a social life framed by the constructed environment and determined by the urban and architectural composition. The article shows the process in which the lodgers appropriated their dwellings and their district and how the architect’s and urban planners’ plans determined the life in the district.*

Keywords: *social housing; allotments; Casa Autonomă a Construcțiilor; Vatra Luminoasă; oral history; urban planning; everyday life.*

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Oral history and the quest for “silent agents”

In this outstanding “Social History of Housing (1815 – 1985)”, historian John Burnett argued that “any discussion of housing has two main aspects – quantitative and qualitative. People need shelter, but they also need shelter which is adapted to geography, climate and place of work, and which provides certain standards of construction, space, hygiene and comfort in which the business of home-making can go effectively. Houses are physical structures; homes are social, economic and cultural institutions” (Burnet, 1986:3). Constructing a district from scratch following precise urban and architectural plans constitutes the basis for building a community; however, this does not implicitly imply a successful initiative. While this process of constructing *a house* asks for a separate method of investigation, the analysis of the community that moves into a new district requires an approach that concentrates on *home*, hence the need to address the issues of social aspects and everyday life using a different method: oral history.

Starting from the theories regarding the oral history developed by authors such as Alessandro Portelli (1997), Linda Shopes (2002) and Paul Thompson (1988), the following investigation in the everyday life of the neighborhood lies on the method of oral history as a complementary method for the reconstruction of the life in the district “Vatra Luminoasă”. The necessity of adopting this method is determined by twofold causes. On the one hand, a historic inquiry implies a thorough investigation in the archives, which in this particular case cover only the beginning of the construction of the district and mostly consist in technical details of the construction (materials, institutions involved etc.). On the other hand, the interviews with the lodgers who lived or had lived in the district bring new perspectives in the research, directing the inquiry into the field of everyday life. Why is the oral history relevant in such a case and which are the risks for adopting this method?

Referring to interviews, Linda Shopes concluded that “contextualized thoughtfully, they can help a reader understand personal experience as something deeply social” (Shopes, 2002: 5), and that oral history has the importance of turning “blind” characters in agents of history, considering that they may open new views of history through their own story. Hence, historian's task becomes to reconstruct the narrative, weaving oral history with archive information. Indeed, many testimonies are ways of checking this archive information, but it is not only the meaning of the interviews. Changing the historical scale from social to biography, testimonies acquire creative sense, talking not only about facts and events, but also about their reporting in the interviewees' biography. Regarding the risks of this method, Shopes underlines that testimonies tend to exaggerate the influence, individual dynamism and diminish the importance of the political and cultural authorities' measures. (Shopes, 2002: 6). It is not the case for the Vatra Luminoasă district, as the respondents did not claim the initiative of building the dwellings in any way, but eventually the effort of their parents or grandparents for their purchase. However, many interviews contain false leads and carry erroneous information and interviewees tend to collect more events and give them a common sense while suppressing the time element. I have chosen elderly persons for the interviews, considering that they are able to provide details on some new

neighborhoods where residents can not know than indirect sources. Moreover, they guided us to other old lodgers of this district, and most of them have accepted dialogue, surprised by the situation initiative to become witness to history who did not take part directly.

I have asked particular question regarding to the moment when the lodgers moved in the neighborhood, who were the constructors of the house (architect or institution), details regarding the house and the atmosphere in the street, their opinion regarding the fact that the dwellings are considered protected by the Municipality. Other directions of the queries refer to mapping the elements that characterized the district and the living beyond the architectural particularities and, more important I tried to locate and understand how the lodgers are aware that historical structures (the state) or historical processes of modernization influence the development of their own destinies. The article represents an a mutual validation of the methods, as this tension between oral history and thick analysis of the documents from archives creates the framework for the better understanding of this historical process.

As for two of the main concepts mentioned throughout the article “district” and “community”, I will mainly refer to them as they were defined by Nițulescu (2004). Among the various definitions of the district, I will refer in this article to the one which characterizes the district as a “section of the city, designed as two-dimensional spaces, in which the observer mentally marches which can be recognized as having a common and identifiable characteristic. Always (recognized from within), these districts are used for external references, whenever visible from the outside. By this way, city structuring appears to be different from one individual to another, depending on expansion and distances considered”. (Nițulescu, 2004:74) The reason for choosing this definition for the Vatra Luminoasă district lies in the advantage that this district had in comparison with others of a kind in terms of planning, construction and simultaneous movement of the lodgers in the new dwellings. Secondly, I will refer to the notion of community as introduced and defined by Nițulescu (2004:60) “The social life in the city evolved within the framework of human communities. The term “community” becomes, by its frequent usage as an adjective a means of describing a set of values, a social existence and the behavior of the individuals settled in the urban environment. However, equally, the community acts as a mediator between the state and the civil society and, becomes a means of describing processes and phenomena with the aim of legitimizing them in the domain of the political decision. From this perspective, the community emerges as an agent of social change”. Following the same line of inquiry, the human community in the city takes the shape of the *vicinity* (“vecinătatea urbană”), as a fundamental element of the urban life. . .” (Nițulescu, 2004:61) Building a neighborhood from scratch places the question of transforming the built environment in a living district with various functions, therefore inventing the *vicinity*. To be more specific, Nițulescu underlines the different aspects of this concept, such as a “relation of proximity between two or more elements in a specific frame” or “a social relation constituted between the individuals who live or work close by” (Nițulescu, 2004:61).

How it all began: the founding the *Autonomous Company for Housing* in 1930

The reform of social housing was reactivated at the beginning of the thirties when based on a new law passed by the Parliament in May 1930, the authorities founded a new structure within the Ministry of Labor, *Autonomous Company for Housing*, which aimed to facilitate the population with low incomes (especially the persons insured at the Central Company for Social Insurance) and secondly the civil servants the acquisition of own home. Why was necessary such an intervention from the state on the real estate market?

Founding this state company represented another strategy of the housing policies implemented by the modern Romanian state, following the creation of the Communal Company for Low-Cost Housing (1910) and the land reform at the end of the First World War. Because of the constant growth of the population and the precarious condition of living at the periphery of the city (where most of the newcomers settled), the social reformers (physicians, urban planners, architects, politicians) decided to make a decisive step in order at least to secure a decent house for the increasing number of bureaucrats who couldn't afford its acquisition. Therefore, the questions posed by Constantinescu and Dan "what happens with the ones that need a dwelling and from various reasons don't have the necessary resources to afford one" (Constantinescu, D., 2005:87) represents the point of departure in analyzing the strategy of the state in order to secure this need.

The funds to build the first 300 houses were secured through a loan of five million dollars from the "Estero Italian Imprese" Bank. The construction of these new social housing were intended, firstly to civil servants employed on day, civilians, soldiers or priests, and for those operating in the institutions whose budgets are subject to parliamentary approval. From this initial Fund, the Company built a group of only 70 individual dwellings in Cotroceni District (1930-1933), ("Parcul Independenței") and other buildings designed for other institutions such as the National Bank, C. E. C. (The Central Economy Company), The Industrial Loan and The Urban and Rural Land Loan. According to the Law from 1930, the Company already hired architects to design two types of houses: Type A - popular housing for workers, with an area of 36 sqm (including three rooms, kitchen food pantry, cellar, attic, storage) and type B apartment - economical housing, with an area of 56 sqm and five rooms and annexes. Both types encompass rooms with a height of 3.10m downstairs and 2.90m at the upper floor and a basement of 2.40m height, situated at a height of 60cm from the level of the sidewalk. According to the description, the main entrance was decorated with cement mosaic, the toilets were decorated with small colored cement tiles, sinks feature imported tiles, kitchens had fir planks or cement mosaic tile, they had been provided with stoves, indoor plumbing and were connected to the existing electricity and sewage systems.

An extensive material on these new constructions that were supposed to be erected published in the journal “Society of Tomorrow” in the fall of 1930, also underlined the high quality of the finishes and interior design. In addition, this type of economic houses promised more innovation and quality on the inside: reinforced concrete slab outside, roof tiles outside the building, noticeably thicker exterior walls outside living rooms, and some richer profiles ornamentation, balconies, eaves nails inside, plastering trowel with stone dust, scale reinforced concrete interior mosaics, wooden staircase to the attic. Among social categories that were included on the list of possible beneficiaries were pensioners, invalids, war widows and those demobilized from the Army. Since 1933 (at which time the Company is administrated by the Central Company for Social Insurance) the efforts focused on raising a neighborhood in east side of Bucharest, in Vatra Luminoasă district.

A district from scratch: Constructing the dwellings in Vatra Luminoasă (1933 – 1939 – 1945)

The types described above were built by the *Autonomous Company for Housing* both as individual buildings throughout the country and in Independenței Allotment, following the Garden City example. Designed with a strong influence of the Neoromanian style, the dwellings couldn't resolve the housing demand from Bucharest, especially considering the constant growth of the population (which tripled from 1912 to 1940 from 300. 000 inhabitants to almost 1million). Hence, the need to design large districts at the periphery of the city determined the directors of the Company to start yearly campaigns for building the dwellings in Vatra Luminoasă. In addition, the style used the two architects I. Hanciu and N. Aprihăneanu departed from the Neoromanian and embraced the simplicity of International modern style. The Company constructed in 1933/1934 campaign 66 dwellings, in 1934/1935, 8 dwellings, 1935/1936, 18 dwellings, in 1936/1937, 36 dwellings, in 1937/1938, 66 dwellings.

Although Vatra Luminoasă district represented a new project, its main criticism continued to refer to the fact that actually the prices of the dwellings weren't as affordable as the legislator considered and linked to restrict access to credit for actual construction, as evidence of the social and professional status and new owners (workers and craftsmen from state industry and municipalities, private officials) while workers and craftsmen with no secure incomewere the last priority. Preferred are those who either work experience or those who already have substantial material possessions, evidenced by the advance of the beneficiaries required to submit. “Realitatea Ilustrată”, from November 1938 presented aspects of the inauguration in the presence of district authorities, among which Michael Ralea (Minister of Labour), General Dombrowschi (Mayor of Bucharest), G. G. Mironescu (Royal Adviser) underlying the fact that the dwellings are the “property of workers who have obtained favorable condition and low rates.”

After these first eight years with no more than 200 dwellings constructed, the Parliament considered the time for a change and passed another law on March 30, 1939, which allowed wider access to loans. In the head note of the law, the initiators review the Company's activity between 1930-1939, concluding that “the institution did

not meet the purpose for which it was created, either because of limited financial resources they have at hand, either because of the trend of [...] transforming of this institution in a banking institution that focused more on lending instead on constructing, as the legislature had intended.” This decisive moment coincided with a change in the architecture. Whereas the two architects designed up to that point only individual dwellings (coupled two by two under the same roof, joined by common walls), from 1939, they begin the construction of row dwellings with a garden in front of the house and a small backcourt at the back of the house. This project represented the first project in Bucharest with dwellings displayed at a row (on most of the streets, the architects “united” more than ten dwellings under the same roof).

The most important archival documents related to the design of this area show details of the building campaign 1940 – 1941. According to the archives¹, in July 1940 the members of the C.T.S. (Higher Technical Council), Duiliu Marcu and Richard Bordenachego to the construction site of the 92 dwellings that were supposed to be constructed in 1940/1941 campaign. In addition to the dwellings, the architects designed the construction of a community center (which wasn’t constructed) and two commercial centers. Regarding the materials that were used more than seventy years ago, the documents keep precise data: “simple concrete foundations, masonry in elevation composed of pressed brick with mortar caustic lime and cement, the framing made of fir, the roof made of sheet metal and normal ditches and tubes, interior coating with caustic lime and cement, normal fir woodwork, wooden floor, mosaic, plain concrete, the stairs and the bathroom scale with steel concrete with an addition of mosaic, terracotta stoves”. This details, although apparently not relevant will be present in the narration of the respondents of the interviews with direct reference regarding their quality.

As for the dwellings themselves, the architects designed two types: type I (68 dwellings) and type III (24 dwellings). They were constructed by the “Agenco” company who won the auction where important companies have participated, such as those of Emil Prager, Company “Edilitatea”, “Romanian Building”. The report signed by C. T. S. (Higher Technical Council) concludes that “in terms of the architecture of the facades, there is first an obvious disparity between the styles of type I and III [...]. This inconvenience will be removed by unifying style facades respective dwellings groups and simplifying the facade elements to the project, which, in particular side and rear facades are unsatisfactory.” But this wasn’t the same critique that the members of C. T. S. referred at in their examination. Among the most important critiques, the C. T. S. members mention the necessity to build a school, a church and a kindergarten, but also the fact that the allotment plan was not initially submitted for approval, the auction was held before approving C.T.S., the paucity of green spaces, and other mistakes urban planning mistakes. Architect Duiliu Marcu criticized a couple of details regarding both the architectural and urban aspects of the project, among which the fact that designing the backcourts would lead to water drain and unwanted infiltration (a fact which will be lately confirmed by one of the lodgers). Due to these problems, the project was one step close of not being approved. Another obstacle is totally unexpected: reinforced

¹ File 46/1940, Consiliul Tehnic Superior, A. N. I. C (Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale)

concrete floors mandatory for any construction is procured increasingly difficult due Army's Procurement Ministry approval, and the price increases enormously. However, the draft plans of the allotments and the drawn plans turn by the end of year 1940 into bricks and concrete. The confirmation comes directly from architects who publish an article in "Architectura" Magazine (1942) where they present their own work from the previous years and the plan for the following, as the last dwellings were erected in 1945.

The construction of the 600 dwellings meant that more than 2000 people started a new life in this new modern district of Bucharest. Who were the lodgers that moved in this district, which were their professions and how did they cope with the new reality? The following chapter investigates the social life of the district from some of the oldest lodgers of the neighborhood who either still live in their initial homes or moved in the district later on. Due to expansion the city limits, the district is considered quite close to the center, and the villas were transformed in housing for civil servants and industrial workers in genuine luxury villas.

Everyday life in the district: meeting the lodgers

Oral testimonies¹ from Auza Buzescu Street underline the fact that the buildings were built in 1945 - 1947 "following the English model" for the Gas company workers, but the name of the architect remains unknown. According to Mr. A. B, the importance of the uniformity should determine the authorities to preserve it and not authorize the interventions that break the uniformity, although this means paying more taxes. The second lodger of the neighborhood², on the street Rușchița assures that the dwellings were built for workers at Malaxa factories during the war. She mentions the fact that they were not nationalized, but that in 1968 when she moved to the neighborhood the rumors told that the whole area was supposed to be systematized in order to build the an Olympic village. And a first distinction appears linked to age differences that accelerates the different options: the oldest inhabitants of the area have not changed much housing instead youngest, recently moved to the neighborhood amend, especially those on the corners.

A number of interesting details were offered on Calinului Street from an old lodger of the district³. The names of the architect or engineer were forgotten, though their signature lies on the building plans which the respondent had checked lately. The district is considered quiet, with little traffic and no noise means of transport. Actually, the traffic increased only after the construction of ten-storey block after the 1977 earthquake, considered a special quality block by apartment size and quality. Name of the park on which the block was constructed was long forgotten. The only main disadvantage of the district is caused by weak soundproofing: noise from neighboring apartments easily pass through walls, whether for basement, ground floor or upper chamber (which many lodgers transformed into a bedroom). He also confirmed that

¹ Interview on the field, June 2013, Mr. A. B, ~50years old

² Interview on the field, June 2013, woman, ~70 years old

³ Interview on the field, June 2013, man, retired, moved in the district in the sixties

they were not nationalized, but referring to the new lodgers who moved in the district after 1989 the characterization is rather negative.

The most important interview conducted in May 2015 underlines the most relevant details about this district. The respondent, Mr. D.A.¹ lived in the district from 1945 (aged 4) until 1993 and his memory helped reconstructing the everyday life in the district. The summer of 1945 meant a new step in the life of the Mr. D. A. family, who moved in the Vatra Luminoasă district. The family was composed of Dan Alexander (officer by profession), married to I and son 4 years, A. It was the first summer after the Second World War, but from a social perspective is the summer when the last dwellings are finished and sold to the families who had applied for a dwelling. Initially, the family paid the monthly rate to the *Autonomous Company for Housing*, until the monetary reform from 1947, when the amount to pay was recalculated. The Company was dissolved in 1949 (following suspicions of misappropriation of money / materials) and the family faced a new recalculation. The last monthly rate was paid in 1964.

The streets finished during the summer of 1945 represented the last piece of the district. They carried letter names as all the streets were indexed, with letters from A to P, while the dwellings were indexed with a number from 1 to 600, indifferent of the street index. Some number plates in the neighborhood still remember the old index, but gradually gave way to the classical count, with even and uneven numbers on each side of the street.

Taking possession of the house represents actually taking the first steps into the house. The model chosen by the House Construction in 1940, the row dwellings, maximized the usage of the field space, hence the option for row houses, the first of its kind in a Bucharest dominated by houses surrounded by gardens. The house had a facade of 6m and a height of 19m and consisted of three stories (underground, ground floor, upper floor and attic). Each of the row dwellings were design on a plot of almost 200 sqm, while the useful area was 94.27 sqm. The underground floor was accessible by going downstairs. At this level, the architects designed a hallway, a dining room, a kitchen, as well as a closet and a bathroom, while the hallway terminates with door to the backyard. This design meant that at the groundfloor there was only one room, while the staircase/lobby was never heated. Upstairs, the storey consisted of two bedrooms (with the dimensions of 3m X 3.5m) and one bathroom, whereas the attic at the upper level was reached after climbing 17 steps. The attic was not very high, while the roof was manufactured with tiles or sometimes with sheet metal. Normally, the house had electricity from its inauguration, mostly because the law at that time obliged the companies that constructed dwellings to also equip them with all the facilities of modern life (water, electricity etc.). However, the lighting in the house was installed only after a couple of months, meanwhile the family use gas lamp lights.

We noticed from the documents in the archive the most important materials, but they way in which the lodgers play with it represent the confirmation of the quality of them: the foundations of concrete offered stability (and there was no problem with the house during the earthquake from 1977), while the bricks and the carpentry offered flexibility

¹ Aged 72, retired, interview on phone and face to face meeting in June 2015

and a domestic sense of the building. The roof of tiles offered protection against rain, but during summers, the heat in the attic became unbearable. As regard to the walls, one of the critiques mentioned in 1940 by arh. Duiliu Marcu referred to the fact that, because of the thickness, the noise could easily pass from one neighbor to the other, fact confirmed by D.A.

Regarding this quality of life, equipping the dwellings with all the necessary instruments for a modern life represented the cornerstone of the reform. As Voicu argues “qualitative dwelling does not mean only access to utilities and a roof over the head. Contemporary standards of comfort talk about the quality of accessing the utilities and refer at the quality of the delivered utilities”. (Voicu, 2005: 51). Moreover, “the access to hot water and heat, current drinking water, access to electricity, natural gas, sewerage, sanitation services, proximity to suppliers of educational healthcare, commercial and social services etc., all these together tend to form a coherent whole which gives a measure of quality of living through access to public utilities” (Voicu, 2005: 51). Almost all this indicators were taken into consideration by the architects and engineers when designing both the dwellings and the district.

The main courtyard represented the connection with the district. The authorities did not interfere with the choice for a particular type of vegetation that was supposed to be planted, leaving the liberty to the lodgers to choose. Almost all the lodgers planted trees both in the front and in the back yards. In the small back garden, most of the families bred chicken or small pigs. Again, the critique from 1940 warned about the danger that the heavy rains or snows would lead to the flooding of the back court, as the water had no possibility to flow outside the court. Regarding the front yard, while for decades this was used to grow flowers or small vegetable, the development of the auto industry led to changing the yard either into a garage or into a concrete place for the car. However, the apples and the grapes were mainly cultivated both for the fruit, but also for the shadow. D. A’s dwelling was located on M Street, later renamed Dr. Russell, no. 11 (with its initial index number 355). The fence (1m high), identical with all the other’s was made of wood and painted black, with a guard for protection against rain.

The initiative of changing the name of the streets from letters to name belonged to the lodgers, actually from Ion Olteanu, a P.C.R. member since its foundation who considered that the streets should be carry the names of renown fighters for freedom such as NicolaeCristea, LeonteFilipescu, Max Wexler, or Dr. Russel, poet Th. Necula, dr. Calin Constantin Otto or even Spartacus. Other street was named Lupeni to remind workers manifestation of 1929. The streets were paved with river stones (while the asphalt was used much later, after 1990), and the street landscape was dominated by actually had wooden telegraph poles and the phone slowly began to emerge in urban comfort. Telephone numbers were given one digit gradually (because the increase of the subscribers). Besides the phone, the family owned a Philips radio which could capture foreign Radio posts, unlike the normal Matador 2 radios. The cars were missing from the streets at the beginning. The only type, Podeda, passed only on a couple of times on certain streets, otherwise, only after the eighties, Dacia began to appear on the landscape. Introduction of trolleybus onVatra LuminoasăStreet in the fifties (with one end at the Asylum for Blind and the other at the University) was something spectacular

for the lodgers, especially because of the fact that the pavement with river rocks was very quickly destroyed and had to be replaced.

Daily street life was animated by various agents, who have gradually disappeared along with their jobs. The most vocal were the tinkers (“spoitorii de tingii”) (who came very often and cleaned the copper pots) and the merchandisers who sold fresh fruits and vegetables. Besides them, the milkmen supplied the families with milk and other milk products, while the iceman provided ice in ice coolers (who lasted approx. 3 days). The economic life was animated by these agents who resisted up until the sixties – seventies, when the industry and the stores replaced them. The housewives used to wash the clothes in the bathtubs, in the lack of a washing machine. However, the families provided their supplies not only from these merchandisers, but also from the Obor market (which represented also the longest journey outside the district), while the daily journeys meant the way to school situated at the intersection between Mihai Bravu Boulevard and MaiorCoravu Street. The notable exception was the winter of 1954 which was dominated by heavy snow that blocked Bucharest for one month. The suppliers couldn’t carry their goods in the district and the Army had to cover the supply of bread, wood and others at the local store.

Neighbors bring the district to life, while Mr. D.A.’s memory brings the neighbors as central agents in the everyday life of the district. According to his memories, on his street (Dr. Russel) at no. 1 lived a worker from “August 23” Factories (former Malaxa factories), at no. 3 the family of professor of mathematics Șerbănescu, married to an Italian, family who emigrated secretly in 1956 in Italy, and at no. 5 the family of the tailor Stoica, while at no. 7 the tailor Florescu. Interestingly enough, small crafts could be carried into the house, sometimes in the basement or in the attic of the large houses. At no. 9, the Ms. Vasilescu was married with an high rank official, while no 11 was the house of the respondent, Mr. D.A. (who father was an officer and her mother a housewife). His neighbor from no. 13 was a waiter, NicolaePopa, a member of the Communist Party from the days when the Party was declared illegal. At no 15, family Paraschiv (the father later became the Chief of Penitentiary System in Socialist Romania) adjoined the family of Jean Constantinescu, one of the waiters who arrested Marshall Antonescu in august 1944 and brought him to a house in Vatra Luminoasă who belonged to Minister Bodnăraș. The street terminated with the family of waited Faciu, at no. 19. On the opposite side, the family of a mechanic lived at no. 14, while, at no. 16, Mr. Aurel Georgescu still lives at the same house from the forties. At no. 18 and 20 two families of “simple” people lived, while at no. 22 a tailor and the shoemaker Iordache (at no. 24) completed the row. Probably one of the most interesting lodgers was the retired typographer Blumenfeld who had a collection of over 4.000 books, from which one could buy valuable books. The line of houses ended at numbers 28 (“simple people”), and in the end, at no. 30 family Andrița family still lives in the same house.

How did these people cope with the district? All the children from the district went to elementary school at the intersection with Mihai Bravu Bulevard and Maior Coravu street, a school designed by Horia Creangă in the later thirties and beginning of the forties. Classes were separated by gender to new education reform in 1957, when mixed classed were introduced. From this perspective, I agree with Nițulescu who argues that “in the vicinities formed, mainly, from young couples with small children, mothers and

children are more important as partners in the vicinity relations than men. There are situations in which, inside a certain space, the proximity of the lodgers is less decisive for establishing vicinity relations than the occupation of the social status. Whereas in the traditional community, the members of the neighboring families are social neighbors...the city dweller can define its own vicinity, to choose the neighbors” (Nițulescu, 2004:66).

A crucial element in district planning, the social spaces, missed from the everyday routes of the lodgers, with the sole exception of two parks, which in the seventies were used for the construction of two blocks of flats. It is actually Duiliu Marcu's critique. How does that influence the relation among the lodgers? The lack of social spaces (community center, cinema, theatre, church etc.), except a few pubs (which were closed at the end of forties) and the parks strengthened the visits between the neighbors were characterized by visits between neighbors, mostly because of the relations between the pupils-neighbors who studied at the same school. Parks were about the only venues. The smallest park (Călin Ottoi), was set up, according to D.A.'s testimonies, on the pit used for the caustic lime, used at the construction of the dwellings. The other public park was commonly known as *Tovilie*, abbreviation from *Tovarășul* (Comrad) Ilie Moscovici (former socialist Party member), whose statue was erected in that place. The blocks of flats constructed on the *MaiorCoravu* street (which limit the southern part of the district) were completed in 1949, apparently for the workers from the *Malaxa* Factories. An important issue of the district was the poor pressure of the water, being difficult to take a bath / shower during the day. Water scarcity has worsened yearly and this represented one of the reasons why D.A. sold the place in 1993. Only in 1994, the authorities introduced gas on these streets before this year; the families used the gas cylinder for the gas cooker. The borders of the district were very clear: *Vatra Luminoasă*, *Tony Bulandra* and *Maior Coravu* Streets flanked the district, while the relationships with the district nearby (*Iancului* Allotments, built under similar conditions in late thirties and forties) were scarce and determined only by the visits to other pupils after school.

Opposite the *Maior Coravu* street, in the fifties the socialist authorities constructed an important stadium, a skating ring and a park with a Summer Theatre (August 23rd) which covered partially the lack of social spaces in the district and the participation at the football or hockey events was frequent among the lodgers. Other important bench marks of the district were the Asylum for Blind (many of the lodgers used to go and visit the blind persons and tried to help them), the two stores (whose clocks had never functioned) and who changed their business on regular basis and the residential section built after Soviet model right near the dwellings. The bench marks were analyzed by Nițulescu who states that they represent a “different type of reference points, with the particularity that, in this case, the observer does not enter in the interior, they are outsourced. Normally, the bench marks appoint physical objects: buildings, stores, towers (Nițulescu, 2004: 22). In *Vatra Luminoasă's* case, they mark mostly the borders of the district.

Conclusions

Comparing the two types of sources (the archives vs. the oral testimonies), the lines of inquiries indicate two major conclusions of the article. Firstly, the critique formulated by the members of the C.T.S. back in 1940 proved to be to a large extent correct, confirmed by the lodgers: the thinness of the walls, the drainage of water in the backyards, the lack of social centers represent problems that prove inconsistencies in the design proposed by architects Hanciu and Aprihăneanu. The answer to these problems stands in individual solutions proposed by each lodger. On the contrary, the choice for those particular materials proved to be correct, as almost all of the lodgers admit the quality of the dwellings. This composition of the narrative of reconstruction the life in the district based on both type of sources also show that the method of confronting them brings the expected results.

The questions asked to each of the lodgers brought similar types of responses: none of the interviewees know the name of the architect and only one knew the name of the institution that built them. Regarding the protection of the district, the lodgers have rather common attitudes, namely a general necessity to protect them, but few of the respondents gave convincing arguments for this position: most of them referred to the fact that the new buyers of the dwellings don't respect their neighbors and choose to change dramatically the façade.

In respect to the everyday life, the testimonies of the last respondent contributed significantly to the reconstruction of the structures that characterize the district. The lines that compose the regular range of activities signify the importance of school as well as the presence of the silent agents such as merchandisers which structure the life of the lodgers. Composing from memory the place of each neighbor on the street underlines the importance of the colleagues from school in knowing the district. However, is the oral history enough to reconstruct even more the life in the district and other relevant facts for a larger social history inquiry? Judging from the valuable piece of information provided by the older lodgers, we can opt for that method. However, as the old lodgers are less and less present in the district, the possibility to reconstruct the everyday life from the traces left behind by them in their own archives can actually be more valuable than the few testimonies that can be still extracted from the remaining old lodgers.

A valid point is offered by Nițulescu who argues that the space of a district is “considered to be limited with a certain compass and borders of certain specific behavior specific to the community who lives in the district. At the same time, the social relations are reconsidered through the perspective of the degree of interaction between the lodgers, through the forms of sociability, through the norms of controlling the social connections and through the subjective perception of the community.” (Nițulescu, 2004:22). Can we follow this line of inquiry in respect to Vatra Luminoasă district? Although the theoretic frame can be considered correct, the analysis of the oral sources indicates a rather low degree of social relations in the district for the timeframe studied. The forms of sociability indicated by the social relations between lodgers are rather driven by conjuncture (such as the meetings between the families due to the relationships between the pupils studying at the same school) rather than by shared

values. However, the research focused on the early years of the construction, rather to a thorough investigation of the present. Nevertheless, the question of how linked the lodgers of a new district were at a certain point and how this progressed in time remains a strong instrument of analyzing the everyday life in a specific district.

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Interviews:

- Interview in Vatra Luminoasă district, June 2013, Mr. A. B, ~50years old
- Interview in Vatra Luminoasă district, June 2013, woman, ~70 years old
- Interview in Vatra Luminoasă district, June 2013, man, retired, moved in the district in the sixties
- Interview with D. A., aged 72, retired, interview on phone and face to face meeting in June 2015