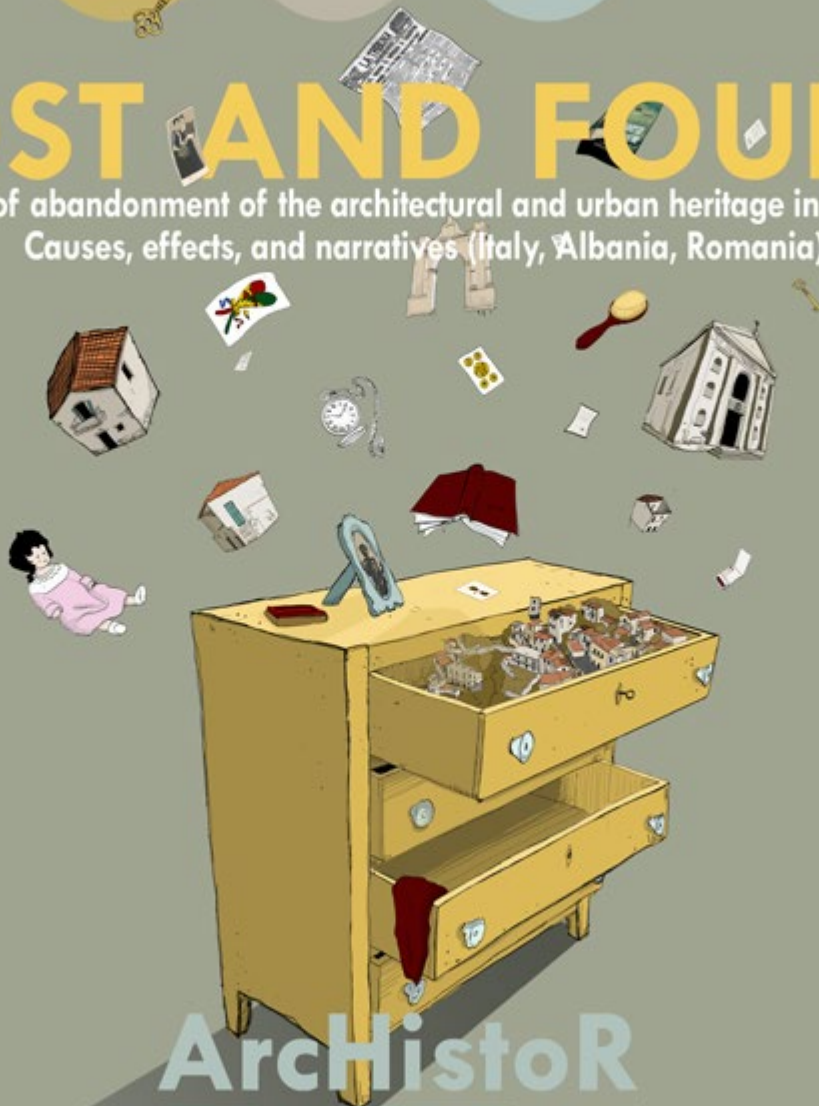# LOST AND FOUND

Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage in inner areas.
Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania)

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Edited by Annunziata Maria Oteri

EFFECTS

TOOLS

NARRATIVES

A GAZE BEYOND THE BORDERS

CONCLUSIONS

A GAZE BEYOND THE BORDERS

LOST AND FOUND

**Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage
in inner areas. Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania)**

Edited by Annunziata Maria Oteri

Sullo spopolamento delle aree rurali in Romania. Politiche, strategie e progetti

Diana Mihnea ("Ion Mincu" University of Urban Planning and Architecture Bucharest), Irina Tulbure-Moldovan ("Ion Mincu" University of Urban Planning and Architecture Bucharest), Oana C. Țiganea (Politecnico di Milano), Emilia Țugui (Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca)

Il saggio propone un'analisi storica sul ruolo del villaggio come entità spaziale nella sistematizzazione e riorganizzazione del territorio nazionale rumeno, evidenziando anche il suo significato culturale nella formazione dell'identità nazionale in diverse fasi storiche fondamentali dello stato rumeno moderno. Attraverso due casi studio (Dioşti, contea di Dolj, e Antoneşti, contea di Argeş), il saggio propone una lettura di questo fenomeno legato alla creazione del "villaggio ideale" o del "villaggio modello", che tiene conto dell'approccio tecnico adottato a seguito delle diverse riforme agrarie tra fine Ottocento e prima metà del Novecento, e la ricerca di soluzioni pratiche per affrontare il fenomeno dello spopolamento causato da calamità naturali (1938-1940) e, successivamente, dai intensi processi di industrializzazione e urbanizzazione durante il periodo socialista (1945-1989). Inoltre, nel contesto contemporaneo dominato dal fenomeno dello spopolamento, il riferimento ai casi studio si collega ai miti moderni che pervadono l'immaginario della cultura rumena.

Approaching the Rural Abandonment in Twentieth Century Romania: Political Decisions, Strategies, and Intervention Projects

Diana Mihnea, Irina Tulbure-Moldovan, Oana C. Țiganea, Emilia Țugui

The birth of the Romanian national state, in its various phases of political and territorial consolidation from the mid-19th to the early 20th century[1], triggered a variety of centrally coordinated strategies and policies regarding the rural environment with its main objective to solve the "rural crisis" as depicted in the official narrative[2]. This necessity was manifested at the national level in a setting in which Romania, by the end of WWII, had an agrarian-based economy with over 70% of its population living in rural areas, presenting large discrepancies between rural and urban living conditions, with even wider developmental gaps between geo-historical areas and ethnic groups[3]. Simultaneously, the Romanian village was positioned in the centre of the national identity debate, stimulating the birth of a particular imaginary in which the peasant with its "ancestral creative genius" played a significant role, nevertheless, used quite frequently as a political planning tool.

Throughout the 20th century, the rural settlement continued to be perceived as vulnerable,

1. The year 1859 marks the unification of Moldavia and Walachia and the formation of the Romanian national state in its first phase of consolidation, triggering a variety of reforms destined to sustain the new state. The end of the WW I marks the enlargement of its territories with the unification of other liberated territories such as Bessarabia, Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș, known as the "Great Union".

2. Klingman, Verdery 2011.

3. Ronnas 1984, p. 42.

prompting the Romanian state to implement various strategies and policies for its restructuring amidst changing political regimes[4]. During the interwar years, rural modernisation aimed to stabilize the population, addressing local needs such as natural hazards and territorial national consolidation, without explicitly discussing rural abandonment and depopulation. However, these issues became evident during the intense waves of communist industrialisation, leading to further rural restructuring and territorial "systematization" throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Despite limited resources, the socialist state, as the primary planner and investor, initiated numerous rural modernisation and urbanisation projects, many of which were not implemented, yet prematurely abandoned by the state itself and thus exacerbating the rural crisis.

These processes triggered specific responses from the architects in search of the ideal manner to regulate the rural spontaneous and chaotic development while trying to standardise the rural dwelling based on the regional-specific features observed and analysed in the traditional vernacular architecture. All these responses, even though applied in a disrupted way throughout specific moments of the 20th century, had direct effects on the built environment transformations and how professionals continue to relate and perceive the rurality, not enough analysed from a history-based perspective, especially if considered its ongoing crisis with direct references to poverty, marginalisation, and ethnic discrimination[5]. Although not officially stated, all analysed policies and strategies addressed rural depopulation through a continuous approach of modernisation and consolidation that generated "the model project" (addressing the overall scale of the settlement and building typologies), a concept that persists today in the architectural profession. Currently, the village (*satul*, Ro.) remains a relevant architectural and planning theme of interest more than any other built typology, within the broader national strategy of stimulating rural sustainable development through the enhancement of its cultural landscape considered as a social, cultural, and economic asset[6].

The article links two historical phases apparently disrupted: the interwar with the 1970s and 1980s socialist years, with the main objective to underline the continuous transformations of the rural realm under direct political, economic, and social developmental pressure. The article proposes

4. Monarchy 1918-1940, military dictatorship 1940-1944, and the socialist state 1944-1989.

5. *Zone rurale in declin. Provocări, acțiuni si perspective pentru guvernantă teritorială*, 2020, p. 7.

6. Since 2014, the Romanian Order of Architects (Ordinul Arhitecților din Romania, Ro.) developed a thematic working group focused on analysing and regulating the rural transformations occurred after 1989, with its objectives in maintaining and preserving the rural heritage while promoting a new rural architecture in respect to the local and regional traditions. https://oar.archi/proiecte-oar/grupul-de-lucru-oar-rural/ (accessed 15 Septmber 2023).

a different interpretation of the rural modernisation from the perspective of anti-depopulation and anti-abandonment strategies triggered by the perpetuated status of marginalisation of rural areas, focusing on the responses of architects and planners engaged by the Romanian state. For each historic period analysed, the article aims to illustrate the multi-disciplinary approach of the "rural crisis" by incorporating ethnographic, sociological, and anthropological studies, as well as considering the political ideologies and propaganda that influenced the Romanian state's responses and, consequently, of the professional branch[7].

The Agrarian Question and the Drafting of the Ideal Romanian Village at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, among the many pressing social and economic problems, Romania was confronted with a growing agrarian crisis, often called "the agrarian question"[8]. In 1864, a land reform was adopted: a modernizing measure that "freed" the peasants of their feudal obligations while granting them ownership of the plots of their households and gardens that had been hitherto rent-controlled land. The peasants also received parcels of arable land in sizes that depended on the land availability in their region, the number of cattle they owned, etc. Nevertheless, the arable plots were considered large enough to support a family's needs. As modern as it was, the Rural Law of 1864 provided only a temporary solution. The demographic growth and the continuous division of the plots from one generation to another gradually worsened the situation of the peasantry, leading to a series of revolts, culminating in 1907 with the most violent of them all[9]. The escalating gravity of the "agrarian question" forced the central authorities to consider a second and more radical land reform based on a partial yet massive expropriation of the large estates and the redistribution of the land to the peasants[10]. After long debates, this second agrarian reform was

7. All aspects of the historic context are relevant from an interdisciplinarity perspective when analysing the rural transformation during the 20th century. However, the authors have chosen to specifically focus on the architectural profession's responses without delving into the complex debate of political ideology especially with references to the Marxist's views on the peasantry and its social and cultural transformation planned and implemented during communist regime, if not quoted through existing literature.

8. Iordachi 2021, pp. 98-101.

9. Eidelberg 1974.

10. At the beginning of the 20th century, all estates larger than 50 hectares were owned by only 5,000 persons. Hence, 0.6% of the total population of the Old Kingdom Romania owned approximately 4 million ha, while a similar area was

hastened in the context of the war, receiving its legal frame in 1918-1921[11].

At the end of the war, Romania incorporated provinces that had previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, Maramureș, and Bukovina, and to Russia, such as Bessarabia, approximately doubling its territory and its population[12]. Hence, the 1921 agrarian reform was applied not only to the territory of the Old Kingdom of Romania but also to the new provinces. By the beginning of the Second World War, more than 18,000 estates had been expropriated, a total of over 5,800,000 hectares, leading to a major shift in the land ownership structure throughout the country[13].

Land redistribution was also accompanied by transformations within the network of rural settlements at the scale of the national territory. In some regions, its density was increased, while in others, its rarefaction was encouraged. The agrarian reform legislation included provisions regarding the allotment of new building plots and provisions regarding colonization. Hence, along with the allotment of arable land, pastures, woodland, etc., over 62,000 hectares were allocated for new villages and expansions of existing ones[14]. The main scope was relocating peasants to regions with available farming land resulting from expropriations. Along with it, the authorities intended to also tackle other long-awaiting issues, such as easing the problem of overcrowded peasant households and relocating villages exposed to landslides or frequent flooding or those situated in remote, inaccessible areas. The population of the high-altitude, low-density, scattered hamlets and villages lacking productive land was one of the main targets of the relocation process. For example, most of the colonists within Transylvania came from the high areas of the Apuseni Mountains[15].

During the interwar decades, hundreds of new villages were created throughout the country. The

divided between more than 920,000 families of peasants, accounting for 82% of the population. The situation was similar in the rest of the provinces that were to become part of Greater Romania at the end of World War I. Șandru 1975, pp. 17-19.

11. During the war, a considerable part of the national army comprised of peasants. The disastrous defeats suffered by the Romanian army and the serious territorial losses, all on the background of the revolutionary turmoil in neighbouring Russia, forced the king to announce the agrarian reform to raise the soldiers' morale. Land redistribution was hence presented as a reward for the peasants' participation in war. Consequently, at the end of the war, the enactment of the reform was considered a priority.

12. The territory increased from 156,00 square-kilometers to 256,000 square-kilometers. The population of the Old Kingdom was 8,500,000, and it reached 16,500,000 in 1919. Hitchins 2013, p. 331.

13. Șandru 1975, pp. 250-252.

14. *Ivi* p. 251.

15. Șandru 1975, p. 155.

colonization process and its dislocations did not involve any forced actions on behalf of the state since the people freely applied for land in other regions.

The application of the agrarian reform was haste from the beginning and proceeded in a rather disorganized manner, involving a multitude of institutions at the local, county, and central levels. Hence, there wasn't any centralized planning regarding the distribution of the new settlements, the choice of the villages to be extended, or that of the settlements that needed to be reconstructed. However, all technical issues regarding the colonization were placed under a central institution of the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains entitled *Casa Centrală a Cooperației și Împroprietăririi Sătenilor* (further The Central House), that was to take «all necessary measures for the creation of new villages or the enlargement of existing ones», including drafting their plans and the design of different types of rural constructions[16].

In anticipation of this large-scale undertaking, immediately after the war, during the summer of 1919, The Central House organized a preparatory action: an ample study of 75 villages and 180 households in the newly integrated provinces of Transylvania and Bukovina. Although conducted by architects, these monographic studies contained not only surveys, drawings, and photographs reflecting the layout of the villages and the traditional architecture but also collected information about the local climate, the number of inhabitants and their occupations, the value of the land, the types of crops, public buildings, the costs of building different parts of the households, etc[17]. The study aimed to convey a deeper understanding of Romanian rural life and set the basis for planning the new villages. The entire process was seen as an opportunity to "modernize" rural life while dwelling on an ancestral, traditional core.

The conductor of the study and the institution's most prominent figure was architect Florea Stănculescu (1887-1973). His early conclusions, enriched by later studies, were fundamental in defining the principles of the entire planning undertaken. He found the nucleus of Romanian rural life to be the ensemble of the household and, within it, the dominant element, «the house that concentrates and directs [its] entire life and activity»[18]. Thus, maintaining the traditional characteristics of the household regarding its architectural features and relationships with the surrounding environment (i.e., outbuildings, garden, etc.) would be enough for the new villages to convey a sense of continuity.

16. Article 115 of the *Agrarian Law for Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș*, 30.07.1921; Article 116 of the *Agrarian Law of the Old Kingdom of Romania*, 17.07.1921, and Article 88 of the Agrarian Law for Bukovina, 30.07.1921.

17. Nasta 1920, pp. 265-270.

18. Stănculesco 1927, p. 21.

Thus, their layout could be subjected to a higher degree of modernisation.

In the early 1920s, it was established that the new villages would have straight streets; the main artery would be at least fifteen-thirty meters wide, and the secondary streets would be twelve meters; the building plots would be rectangular, with a ½ ratio. Every village would have plots reserved for public institutions (i.e., administrative, educational, cultural, economic), sports terrains, and cemeteries. The new villages would also have one or, preferably, several public squares totalling an area of at least 2% of their entire surface. This was Florea Stănculescu's vision of the "model village"[19].

Following these principles, 150 new villages and 334 extensions of existing ones were accomplished. The results were most often rigid geometric layouts with a street network set in an orthogonal or radial pattern using symmetrical compositions and creating monumental vistas toward public buildings that were to be erected in or around the squares. The large streets, sometimes as wide as urban boulevards, the squares, and the numerous plots reserved for public buildings and facilities reflect an emphasis on a new kind of public space and, hence, a new kind of envisioned public life that was entirely uncharacteristic for the Romanian rural realm (fig. 1).

The choice for this type of layout was never articulated or argued in any of the publications of that time. Instead, a great emphasis was placed on the architecture of the house and the household, whose "modernisation" was conceived in a narrower frame imposed by the will to maintain their national or rather regional architectural and decorative characteristics. Some such exemplary houses and households were built by the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains between 1924 and 1930 for the colonists in two areas of the country, in north-western Transylvania and in Dobruja – less than 5,500 households, too small a number to have a great impact[20]. Given the state's limited resources to aid the colonists in building their households, in 1927, architect Florea Stănculescu authored a book titled «Case și gospodării la țară» (Houses and Households in the Countryside)[21], written in an accessible language and addressed to peasants. The book includes guidelines for maintaining the salubrity of the village, the streets, and the households, for preparing the plot, and for establishing their layout. The largest part of the book is dedicated to the house and the outbuildings, containing not only general recommendations but also 20 projects for various types of houses and other

19. Nasta 1924, pp. 2-12; Stănculesco 1925, pp. 28-29.

20. Stănculesco 1941, p. 157; Popescu 2016, pp. 103-121.

21. Stănculesco 1927.
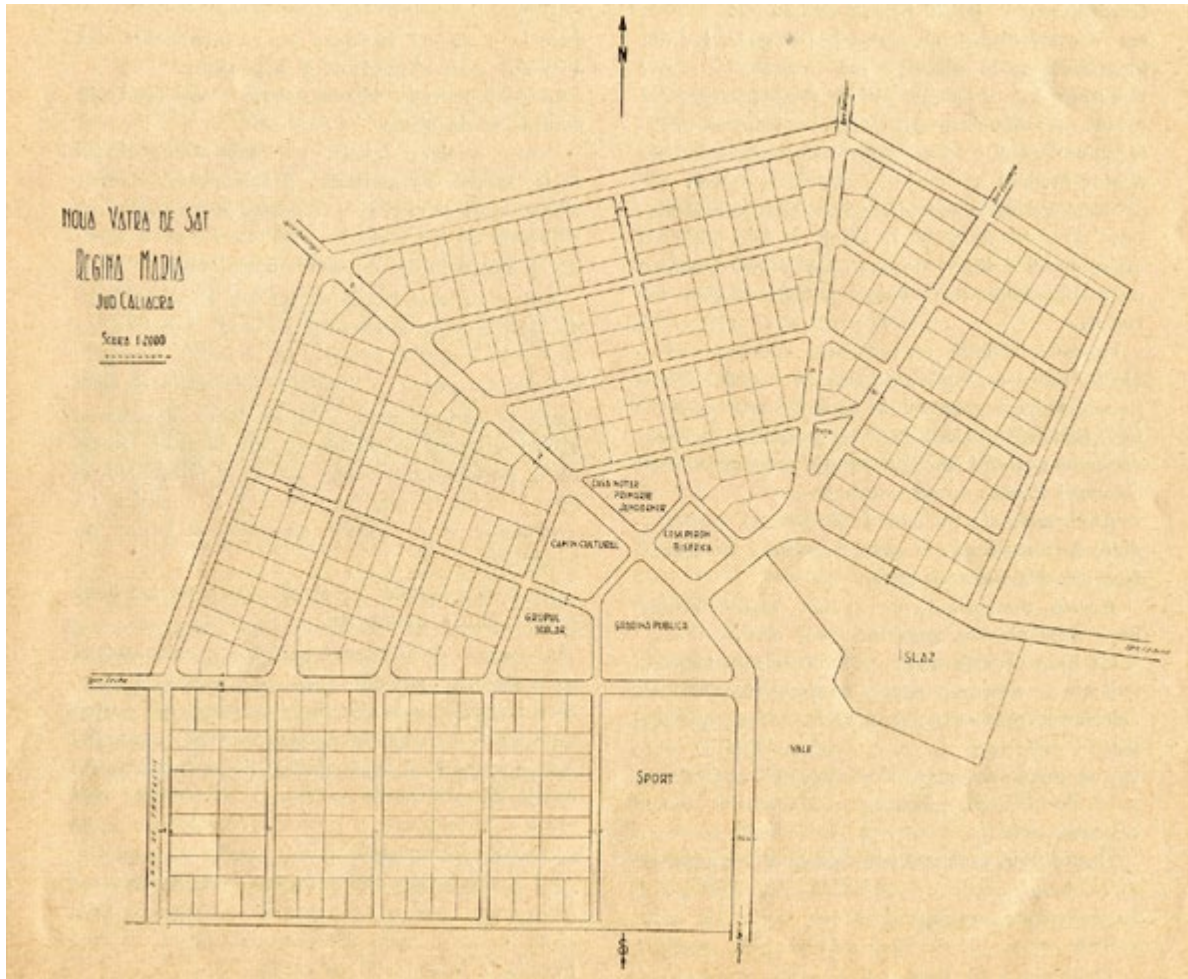
Figure 1. Plan of "Regina Maria" village in Caliacra County, drafted by architect Florea Stănculescu during the 1920s. The large plots in the central area were reserved for sports facilities, a public garden, a school, the Cultural Home, the church and the parish house, and public administrative buildings (*Construcții rurale* 1940, p. 13)

constructions of different sizes, adequate for different geographical regions. The intent was to help colonists and peasants, in general, build salubrious houses while maintaining the traditional character – thought to be endangered, amongst others, by stylistic influences from urban areas[22]. The modernisation, or rather, the amelioration of rural dwelling, was thus sought in the judicious relations between the components of the household, the solidity of the structures, the choice of proper materials, the size of the rooms, the height of the ceiling, the size of the windows, etc. Florea Stănculescu's preoccupation with guiding the production of minor architecture and his attempts at educating the masses through publications can also be seen in the following years in the issue of his journal «Căminul» (The Home) and later, of another journal called «Construcții Rurale. Îndrumări, planuri și cercetări» (Rural Constructions. Guidelines, plans, and research) (figs. 2-4).

The colonization process was an ambitious endeavour whose results did not match the initial objectives. The lack of resources, data, and coordination between the state's institutions led to a very slow and incomplete relocation of the population and, hence, a slow and weak coagulation of the colonies. The new villages rarely, if ever, reached the population for which they were planned. The households were built at a much slower pace than anticipated, and the envisioned new type of public life was either non-existent or remained in an embryonic phase since there were no resources to construct the necessary public buildings, leaving barren for decades the monumentally planned central parts of the settlements[23].

However, the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains was not the only entity interested in the "modernisation" of rural life, and the agrarian reform wasn't its sole vehicle. During the entire interwar period, the peasantry still represented the great majority of the population, hovering around 80%, and it was often rightfully referred to as «the biological reservoir of the nation»[24]. But this "reservoir" was characterized by a generalized backwardness and a low life standard that varied slightly from one region to another. The average life expectancy was just over 40 years old, due not only to the high infantile death rate (approximately 20%) but also to poor overall health, nutrition, and hygiene conditions. The illiteracy rate was nearly 50%. Although, with the agrarian reform, land was being distributed to peasants, the production was low due to the primitive tools and techniques and the lack of modern agricultural knowledge. Most settlements lacked basic infrastructure. The

22. Nasta 1927, pp. 58-86.

23. Șandru 1980, pp. 59-71.

24. Banu 1939, p. 34; Șandru 1980, p. 38; Șandru 2011, p. 331.
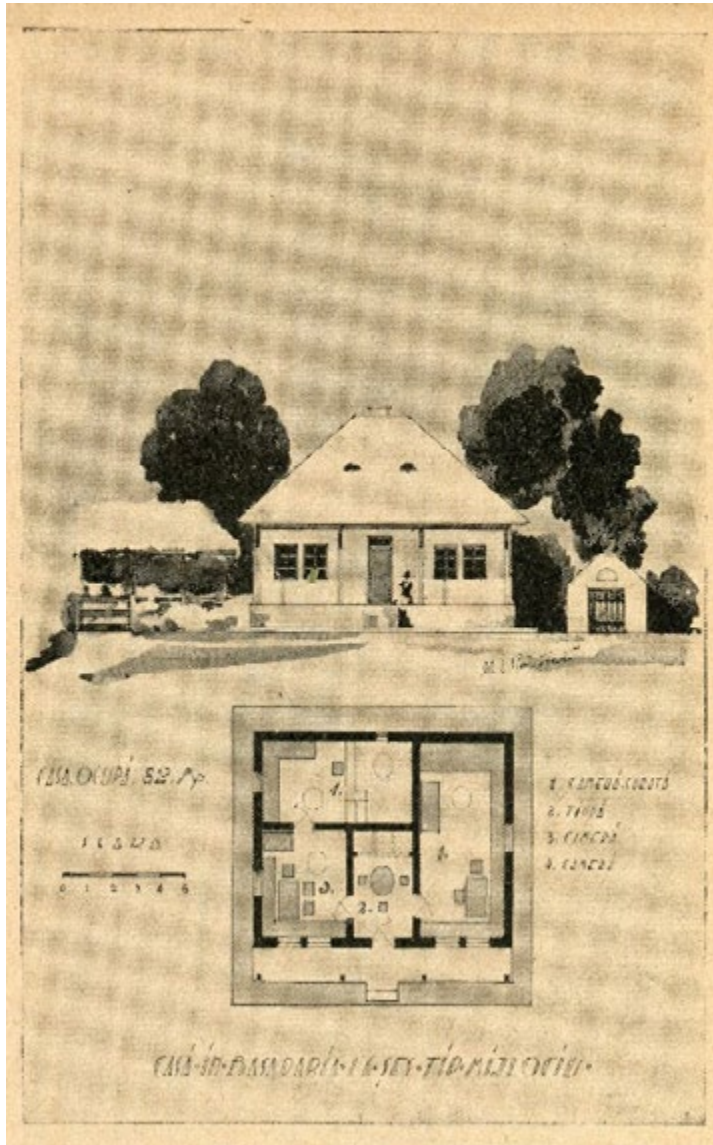
Figure 2. Model house of medium size for colonists settled in plain regions. Plan drafted in during the 1920s (*Construcții rurale* 1940, p. 13).

Figure 3. Model house for colonists settled in hilly regions. Plan drafted in during the 1920s (*Construcţii rurale* 1939, p. 10).
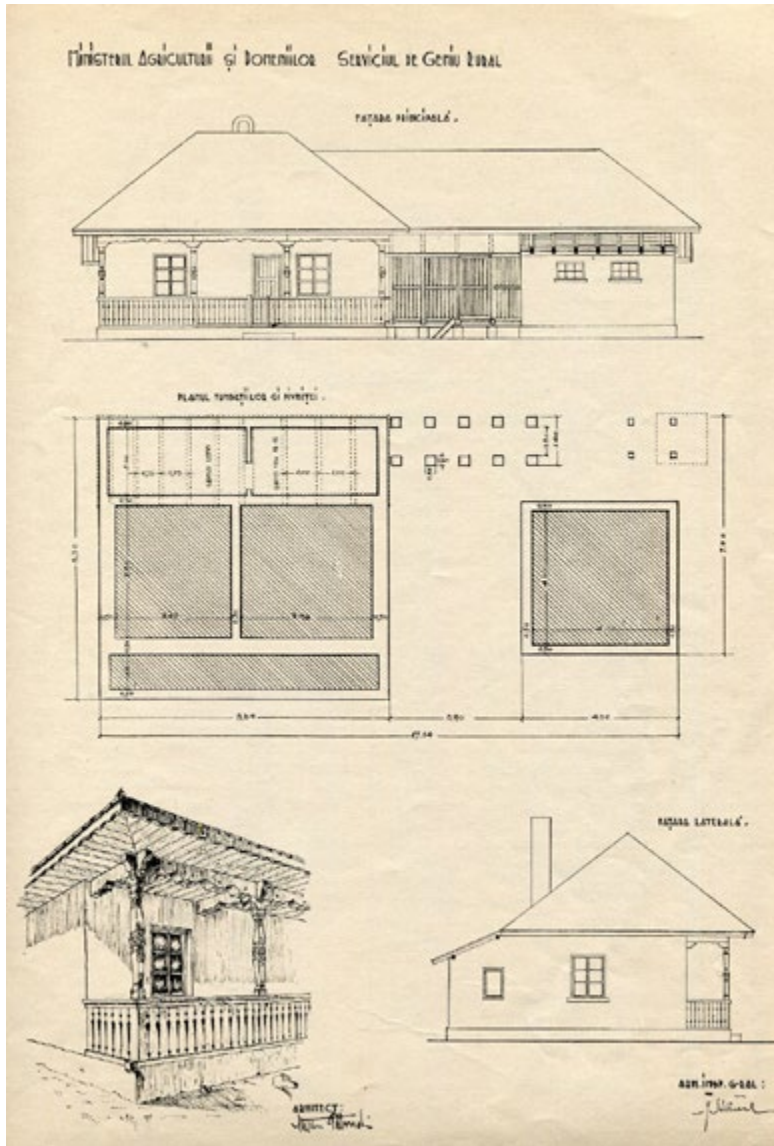
Figure 4. Model house for colonists. Plans were drafted during the 1920s by architects Florea Stănculescu and Ștefan Peternelli, as employees of the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains (*Construcții rurale* 1939, p. 15).

state of the rural dwellings was generally far from satisfactory, below the «limit of the basic comfort», characterized by overcrowding and insalubrity[25]. As mentioned above, some of these problems were addressed by the institutions in charge of the agrarian reform, but the immediate impact was rather limited. Nevertheless, given the amplitude of the problems, rural life became the focus of various state policies and institutions, as well as of various studies in different fields of interest.

Hence, as early as the beginning of 1919, the rural realm became one of the main concerns of sociologists, whose most prominent institution was the Association for Social Study and Reform, founded by Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955)[26]. The association devoted itself to «the reconstruction of the country by the aid of the social sciences». For the first decade and a half, the group consolidated around Dimitrie Gusti was preoccupied with elaborating detailed monographic studies of villages since these were considered «the fundamental social units of our country that stood in greatest need of social reform»[27]. The research involved not only sociologists but also geographers, anthropologists, biologists, hygienists, psychologists, economists, folklorists, etc. In Gusti's theory, the purpose of research was always to ensure the basis for reform and direct action[28].

The shift of the focus from research to action started in 1934.

The reform of rural life was to be based not on a physical model but on the rather intricate theory of «the village that rises by itself» through the empowerment of the peasants and the local communities[29]. The aim was to transform the peasants into active «workers and creators, not simply subjects». In Gusti's view, «private initiative is essential for social improvement but needs to be organized»[30]. Thus, the guidance and organization of the peasant communities would be done by teams of students specialized in different domains, coordinated by official state technical experts. They would have the role of igniting and guiding the initiative and the work of the community, which would eventually have to become self-sustaining[31]. The medium of this complex undertaking was to be the "cultural home" (*casa de cultură*, Ro.), a term that did not designate a building but a

25. Banu 1939, p. 35; Şandru 1980, pp. 160-168.

26. Gusti 1919, pp. V-XXVII.

27. Gusti 1919, pp. 1-15.

28. *Ivi* p. 15.

29. Sandu 2012, pp. 215-241.

30. Gusti 1939, p. 9.

31. Stahl 1939, p. 192.

social institution or organization consisting of the intellectuals of the village (i.e., priests, teachers, state officials, etc.) and representatives of the peasants. The "cultural homes", guided by the above-mentioned teams, would focus on four main aspects of the peasant's life: health, labour, soul, and heart. They would, thus, have four branches: the care of public health, the organization of labour, followed by the moral and intellectual improvement. For each of these, different means of education had to become available, such as for public health – the physical education, athletic fields, baths, swimming pools, and clinics; for the organization of labour – the agriculture, viticultural, and veterinary education; the establishments of cooperatives for production and distribution, workshops, etc.; for the spiritual and intellectual training, the organization of school libraries, museums, lecture halls, theatres, etc[32].

In Gusti's vision, the tangible manifestation of the program would be the village's "civic centre"[33]. The ensemble of public buildings and facilities – such as the mayor's office, school, clinic, public baths, workshops, bakeries, library, and auditorium – would thus become hard proof of the program being ingrained in the structure and life of the village and an impetus for its continuation. The "civic centre" became the core of what Gusti envisioned as the model village[34].

The first such model village was built starting with 1938. In the spring of that year, the village of Dioști was destroyed by an accidental fire, and its reconstruction was coordinated by one of the most prominent sociologists of Gusti's school. Even from the beginning of the construction site, the new village became «a centre of social experimentation»[35]. The reconstruction, whose initiative was officially attributed to King Carol II of Romania, was state-funded and coordinated by the Royal Cultural Foundation, directed at that time by Dimitrie Gusti. Several other institutions were involved, such as The National Geological Institute, Bucharest's House of Gardens, the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains, the Ministry of Air and Marine, the Ministry of Public Works, etc., reflecting a national interest in this pioneering work. The research and the decision-making process were coordinated by

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32. GUSTI 1939, p. 9.

33. STAHL 1969, p. 40. The cited book was written in 1969, when its author, Henri H. Stahl, a close collaborator of Gusti during the interwar years, was now involved in the decision-making process regarding the "systematization" of Romanian rural settlements during the communist regime. He highlights the fact that the "civic center" was a concept elaborated by Gusti's school of Romanian sociology. He also emphasizes the validity of the concept, the "civic center" remaining the core of the modern, communist villages.

34. STAHL 1981, p. 320.

35. GUSTI 1939, pp. 1-15.

a group of sociologists led by Gh. Focşa, aided by architects and engineers of the Royal Foundation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains. But, in agreement with the sociological concept of the model village, the peasants were also involved, as the reconstruction process was seen as an opportunity for teaching and for igniting a civil conscience: «It is necessary (…) to make of each man an energy conscious of a certain role in social life, as within a hierarchical organism in which the higher and lower functions meet harmoniously»[36].

It so happened that the former village of Dioşti had historically comprised a community of free peasants with agriculture as their main occupation. Hence, the community was wealthier and had a higher literacy level (80% for men and 50% for women), standing apart from the general backwardness of the Romanian rural world. Before the fire of 1938, the village had had two schools and two churches, many of the children had received higher education in town schools, and the peasants had even invested in agricultural machinery and mechanized tools. The community was, thus, even beforehand, open to emancipation, a fortunate overlapping with the interests of the sociologists.

As expected, the sociologist drafted the concept of a new village based on several strong ideas: the new dwellings had to be salubrious (hence, modern); the village should have a civic centre as the core of social life; it should include educational facilities for children and adults, targeting not only basic education but also the acquisition of modern agricultural knowledge. Finally, everything had to be anchored in tradition. The importance of modernizing agricultural production was greatly emphasized, and it was viewed to bring the peasants closer to «superior forms of life»: «Without abandoning the valuable elements of past social life, we must make a considerable effort to adapt ourselves to the techniques of modern civilization»[37].

The centre of the village was translated northwards, closer to the national road. It was reorganized along a straight, broad boulevard of twenty-two meters wide, considered the new settlement's spinal cord, with the households' rectangular plots on each side. At the junction of the new settlement with the old hearth (*vatra*, Ro.), the civic centre was built, containing an axially placed Cultural Home[38], and the church, the school, and several administrative buildings arranged symmetrically. At the opposite end of the boulevard, the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains built «the most complete

36. Focşa 1941, pp. 9, 19-22.

37. *Ivi* p. 6.

38. The Cultural Home was a compact building containing «all sections for the spiritual, sanitary, and economic life» of the village: auditorium, library, clinic, public baths, a store, etc. Focşa 1941, p. 18; Stănculesco 1940, pp. 33-42.

agronomical centre of the region». All public buildings received a rather monumental and dignifying appearance, with architectural and decorative features considered proper for a national style. The new houses and outbuildings had to be modern and hygienic. They also had to become a model in themselves and an example of "correct" rural architecture embodying the "local specificity" from construction materials to decorative features (fig. 5). The inspiration did not come directly from the remaining houses of the old village since they were thought to be a hybrid mixture of styles. At the end of the project, its coordinator proudly wrote that an exemplary style was created, interrupting «the messy winds of fashion that guided most innovation in rural constructions»[39].

The new village of Dioști became a landmark for professionals and was often used as a reference in the coming periods. Its reconstruction in 1938 took place against the backdrop of significant political changes generated by the establishment of the royal dictatorship. This, in turn, was to be replaced by a military dictatorship only two years later, in 1940, when Marshal Antonescu, the president of the Council of Ministers at the time, took over the country's leadership. Hence, from the end of the 1930s, Romania stepped into a new stage marked by growing state authority and the increased centralization of decision-making processes. This was a propitious era for reviving and implementing ideas that had taken shape since the 1920s regarding centralized control of the national territory and centralized planning of the national economy and state investments. A major component of the new directions regarded the systematization of the national territory and all settlements, each having defined a specific role within the national organism. All these ideas and visions were also propelled by the necessity (or the anticipation of it) of reconstructing the areas destroyed during the war or by natural disasters such as the earthquake and flooding of 1940 and 1941[40].

The task of reconstruction was mainly assigned to the General Directorate of Rebuilding (*Direcția Generală a Reconstrucției* Ro.), a newly established institution within the Ministry of Public Works. Its role was to draft complete or partial systematization plans for the destroyed settlements, to draw up projects for all the buildings needed by the public administration and to make projects for rural buildings, farms and households. It was to be aided in its task by a series of other state institutions.

In the above-mentioned scheme of a national scale, the rural world continued, as one would expect, to play a significant part and became once again the focus of the authorities. The peasant population and village realm, in general, still needed to be emancipated, and agriculture needed to

39. Focșa 1941, p. 35.
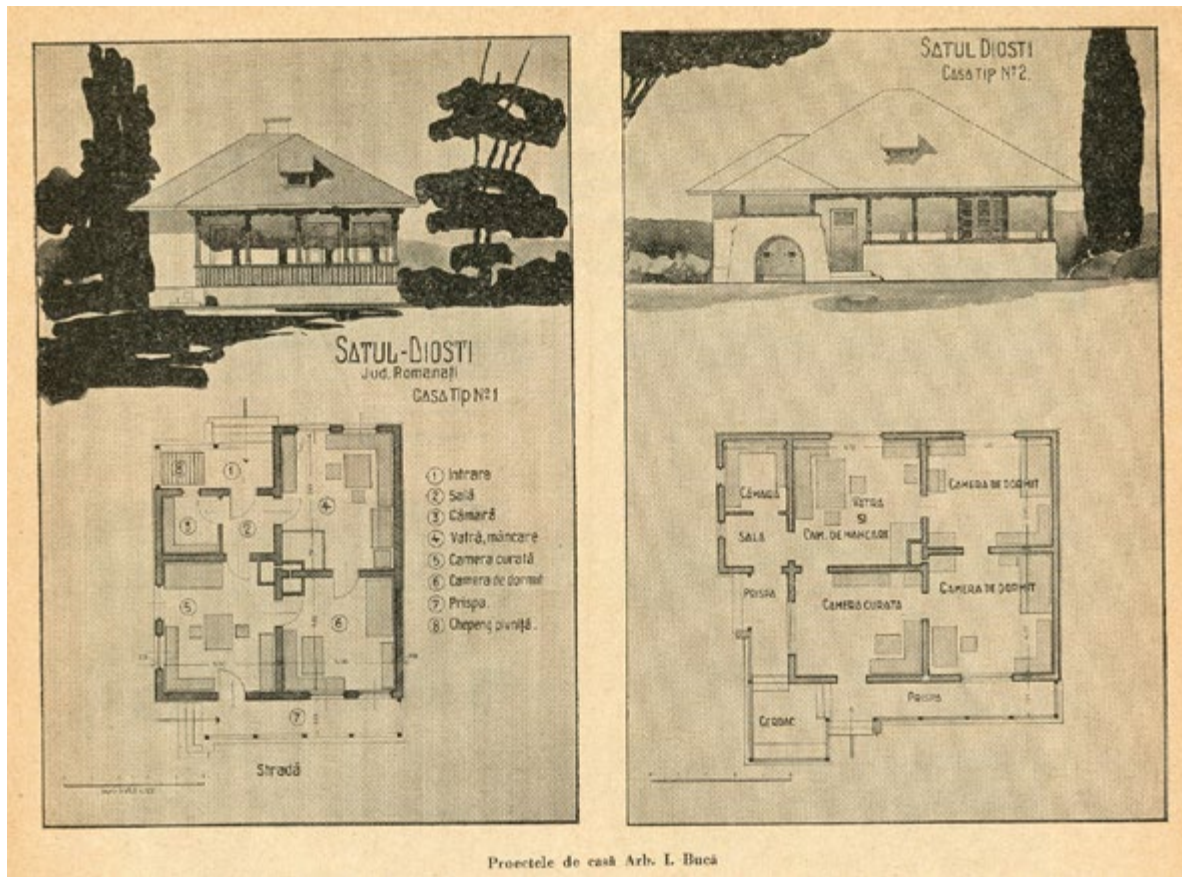40. Răuță 2013, pp. 100-112; Tulbure 2016, pp. 57-69.

Figure 5. Houses of type 1 and 2 for the model village of Dioști. Author: I. Bucă, architect of the Royal Cultural Foundations (*Construcții rurale* 1940, p. 37).

be modernized and industrialized. Since the systematization of all settlements was too ambitious, especially in a restricted war economy, in 1942, twelve villages were selected to be exemplary developed and, thus, to become models for future systematizations (fig. 6). The villages were scattered throughout the country, being situated in different historical regions and geographic settings. None of them were constructed, but their projects, drafted by the Directorate of Rebuilding, are relevant to the overall vision of the ideal Romanian village. They had monumental civic centers organized around oversized public squares with symmetrical, monumental compositions that placed a church in a privileged central position. Around the public square, there were the administration building, school, public baths, and several other public and economic buildings. Their architecture, judging by the cases where the projects included such details, was tributary to the architectural tradition of the respective regions. The size and monumentality of the village cores can be related to the fact that, by now, the civic centre was associated with loyalty to the regime[41].

However, one model village was built in the early 1940s. It was not part of the group of the twelve chosen villages. Similarly to the case of Dioști, it was a reconstruction of a village gravely affected by the floodings of 1941. Its situation attracted the attention of Marshal Antonescu and the rebuilding of the former village of Corbeni, renamed Antonești after the supreme ruler, started in 1942. The village, further analysed in the last part of the article, was the only complete "model village" constructed during the 1940s. It is a sample that faithfully reflects the vision of that era on the development of the rural world.

The process of shaping the rural world of the 1940s also included drafting exemplary or standard projects for rural dwellings and public buildings. Their architecture had to convey a sense of unity, but it always included specific characteristics of the regions for each they were intended[42].

The ambitious project of the 1920s-1940s had, as mentioned, major implications for the national network of settlements. As far as the direct implications on rural architecture are concerned, they were rather limited, restricted to the direct interventions of the Ministry of Agriculture and the few model villages of the 1930s and 1940s. Yet, it is difficult to assess the indirect impact determined by the circulation of models, of possible fashion in rural architecture generated by the exemplary buildings and the published projects. What is certain, however, is that the ideas and directions forged during the interwar period and the 1940s became, to a considerable extent, the premises of the visions, policies, and interventions that targeted the post-war rural world.

41. RĂUȚĂ 2013, pp. 106-112, SANIC, Section MLP, File 666/1942.
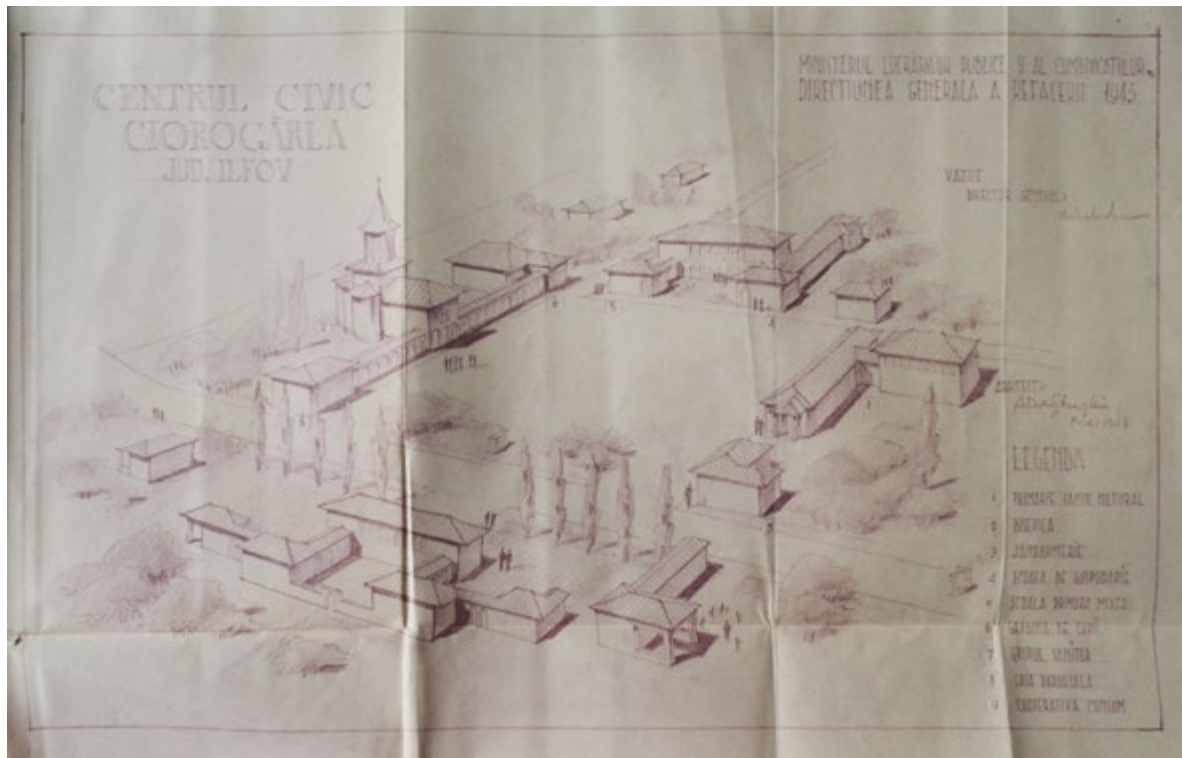
42. SANIC, Section MLP, File 668/1942.

Figure 6. Aerial perspective drawing of the civic center of Ciorogârla, one of the twelve villages chosen in 1942 for an exemplary systematisation (ANR, Section MPL - Direcția Arhitectură și Sistematizare, file 735/1943, p. 131).

Reorganization of the Rural Settlements in Post-1945 Romania: A Centralized Approach

"Systematization plan", "rough [systematization] project" (plan de *sistematizare/schița proiectului [de sistematizare]*, Ro.) were specific terms of the technical lexicon referring to town planning, and they became stable concepts in the late 1930s. In the post-war town planning practice, the "rough systematization plan" (*schița de sistematizare*, Ro.) became the usual technical instrument that indicated the general rules for town development. The understanding of the term "systematization" exceeded its technical meaning in the last decades of communism due to the large-scale process of restructuring the urban and rural network. The term "systematization" became a symbol in public memory for the reconfiguration of central urban areas, accompanied by the destruction and demolition of the built fabric, and for the massive plan for reorganizing the rural network[43].

The political interpretation of the rural transformation has two dimensions: first, it is the ideological connotation bent in the national scale "systematization" plan, and second, its historical significance about the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. Information about the radical demolitions, reconstruction and forced relocation of the communities that were about to occur with the implementation of the "systematization plan" transgressed the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s, inflamed by the consecutive discourses of Ceaușescu in March and November 1988[44]. Not only has the case been to the attention of several scholars and therefore largely exposed in the scientific literature[45], but the Western public became aware of the dramatic situation in Romania due to the broadcasting of the documentary *Le désastre rouge* (The Red Disaster) to the Belgian public channel[46].

Although it aroused Western interest only in the last years of the communist regime, through the key to the violation of human rights, implementing "rural systematization" was not the first inequitable action oriented towards the Romanian peasants. The collectivization of agriculture, as several researches demonstrated it, represented a period of injustices specific to the political regime manifested through deportations, relocations, deaths, and terror. It was considered a true «war against the [Romanian] peasantry»[47]. The process of collectivization of the agriculture began in 1949

43. Ronnas 1984, p. 21; Vais 2022, pp. 207-222.

44. Demeter 2020, pp. 121-150.

45. Turnock 1976, pp. 83-102; Ronnas 1982, pp. 143-151; Ronnas 1989, pp. 543-559; Turnock 1991, pp. 81-112.

46. The documentary entitled *Opération Villages Roumains* and created by Josie Dubié after a trip to Romania, was the trigger for the western mobilization against the destruction of the Romanian villages. Șerban 2021.

47. Iordachi, Dobrincu 2014, p. 251.

and it was officially claimed as a closed action in 1962[48]. Although it did not represent a real success for the regime, it can be seen, in fact, as the first stage of a long-term plan for the reorganization of the rural environment, which included the reconstruction of the villages according to the socialist principles.

The "systematization" of 1970-1980 was generally approached by scholars as an independent process intimately tied to the radical political visions specific to the last decades of Nicolae Ceaușescu leadership (1965-1989). However, the roots of this process may be seen in legislative decisions that began even before the collectivization was considered closed. By the end of the 1950s, the first measures were issued regarding the reorganization of the territorial land use and the densification of the actual settlements by imposing restrictions on buildings outside the village perimeter (*vatra satului*, Ro.). The general background that made possible the consistent and large-scale intervention over the rural settlements is the law for the administrative-territorial reorganization issued in 1968[49] which (re)created the interwar administrative typology based on counties[50]. According to the new territorial distribution, new (county) agencies were created, which played a seminal role in the "systematization" process. Following 1972[51], several laws were issued directly addressing the systematization of the urban and rural settlements, among which the most relevant is a couple of lows issued in 1974 (L. 58, L. 59)[52].

Reflections of this evolution are echoed in the architects' preoccupations in the same period. Comparing two articles, issued in «Arhitectura»[53] in 1954 and in 1962, is relevant for the context: the earliest discusses in unspecific terms the necessity of conceiving "systematization plans" about

48. Kligman, Verderi 2011.

49. *Principiile de bază*, 1967; Lege 2 din 16 Februarie 1968 privind reorganizarea administrativă a teritoriului Republicii Socialiste România (Buletinul Oficial, Nr. 17, 17 Februarie 1968).

50. The counties were more limited in surface than the regions defined in the administrative territorial distribution established in 1950 following the Soviet pattern.

51. 1972 is related to the new party guidelines on the urban and rural systematization were issued with the occasion of a very echoing party conference *Conferința Națională a Partidului Comunist Român cu privire la sistematizarea teritoriului, a orașelor și satelor, la dezvoltarea lor economic – social*. 19-21.07.1972.

52. The radicalisation factor may be understood through the evolution of the type of legislative documents referring both to urban and rural systematization: a first step characterised by the formalization of the political guidelines into vague official documents, accompanied by decisions and decrees of the Council of Ministers pointing specific issues and a second step, distinguished by the integration of the same problematics into general laws.

53. References to this publication are essential for 1945-1989 years since it was the single official publication for the architects and its documentary role has been often underlined by several authors.

the construction of the new state units (*cooperative agricole*, Ro.)[54], as in the latter, there is a clear identification of the issues to be solved and the main directions biased in the "rural systematization". The new process was defined as a successive step of collectivization, with obtaining a larger and more efficient agricultural land as one of the main goals[55].

The "rural systematization" was imposed as a significant theme of discussion for the architects in the mid-1960s, and among the primary considerations underlined on several occasions[56] were the high per cent of rural population; the specific structure of the rural network dominated by a high density of small rural settlements[57]; the deficiency of modern (urban) life facilities and the need to improve agricultural exploitation through the industrialisation of the agriculture. Sociologists added to architects' perspective another ingredient: geographical and social mobility engendered in the rural-urban migration[58]. Therefore, the "rural systematization" aimed to solve the incompatibilities between the high density of the rural network and the low density of the actual settlements, mostly characteristic of the high-altitude villages and triggered by the rural-urban migration within the industrialisation waves, threatening to cause rural depopulation[59]. Still, during the 1970s, the central rhetoric was oriented towards the high rate of rural population (60%) living in villages defined by backwardness, lacking technical infrastructure (i.e., water supply and sewage, electricity, gas) and social infrastructure (i.e., education, health, cultural facilities).

The first obvious response in this respect addressed the reorganization of the rural network itself, reinforcing more developed settlements through investments in buildings for public facilities and infrastructure. Such an approach had apparent similarities with the late interwar thinking, and several connections may be underlined in this respect. Florea Stănculescu, already mentioned as one of the architects with a relevant role in the interwar rural systematization, once again reiterates

54. Adler 1954, pp. 11-12.

55. Vernescu 1962, pp. 9-10.

56. In 1966 a conference dedicated to rural systematization took place at the Union of Architects, entitled *Some issues regarding the systematization of the rural network/ Unele probleme ale sistematizării rețelei de sate*, followed in 1968 by a plenary session of the Union of Architects on the topic of *Rural Systematization/ Sistematizarea Rurală.*

57. Before 1968 there were 15,000 villages with an amount of almost 12,750,000 inhabitants, of which 70% had less than 1,000 inhabitants. To be noted that in the socialist spatial planning, during the same period, 1000 inhabitants was considered the limit for a viable settlement. Vernescu 1967, p. 36; Sampson 1984, p. 62.

58. Stahl 1969, or, more specific: Stahl 1972, p. 89.

59. Ronnas 1989, p. 546; National Archives of Romania (SANIC), Section CPCP – Systematization, design and constructions, File 302/1977.

the relevance of the territorial process. In a short text, signed in 1968, he magnetises the new political context to the interwar ideas regarding the coagulation and consolidation of the stronger rural communities to become pulls of gravities for the small-scattered villages[60]. In their struggle to create stronger rural communities, the interwar initiatives, even if poorly materialized, forged the idea of emancipation of the peasant (rural world) and mechanization of agriculture, aiming to solve the backwardness of rural life and upgrade it to "superior forms" [of life]. Despite the apparent correspondence in approaching the issue at a territorial scale, emphasized by the formal reversion to the interwar administrative structure, the extensive process of rural restructuring in 1970-1980 was tailored after a Soviet shape, reiterating the socialist rural spatial planning. The reorganization of the rural network in the Soviet thinking was based on an artificial operation of converting the rural settlements considered to have potential for growth into agro-industrial towns and of forcing the abandonment of the rural settlements identified with no perspectives for development[61].

During the radicalising ideas in 1970s Romania, institutional centralisation also occurred, and leading commissions became active[62]. The centralised practices included reports regarding the territorial "systematisation" process[63] and standardised forms referencing the different types of indicators for the villages identifying their viability and potential for development[64]. Among others, the villages included in the phasing-out process were characterised in the documents by the lack of accessibility or insecure conditions for construction, such as potential for flooding or landslides, considerations that seem to represent objective motivations for interventions. On the other hand, behind the dysfunctional use of the land stood the excessive strategy of obtaining agricultural land through the relocation of the households, which in some cases demonstrates the irrationality and

60. Stănculescu 1969.

61. Sampson 1984, pp. 51-67.

62. Beside the «Central Committee of the Party and State for the Systematization of the Territory and Settlements» (1970) the «Committee for the Problems of the People`s Councils» (*Comitetul pentru Problemele Consiliilor Populare – CPCP*, Ro.) was replacing a previous organism, «State Committee for Economy and Local Administration». To the CPCP was attached a «Systematization Agency».

63. The reports were advanced by the County Council to the CPCP and the informs also contained detailed information about the implementation of the process and not only regarding the homogenization of the design methods. These documents are relevant today also because they display the actual level of responses and implementation of the rural systematization process, reflecting an enormous hiatus between the utopian views of the party/proposals of the architects and the actual reality. Sampson 1984, p. 65.

64. Ronnas 1989, p. 544.

abusiveness of the initiatives. As an example, in 1980, Caraș Severin County Council reported that through the establishment of the new built-up perimeters, it gained an economy of 211 hectares of agricultural land and, specifically, reported the implementation process by the relocation of 45 households, which "recovered" a plot for agricultural use of two hectares[65].

In terms of conceiving solutions, post-war visions for the future of the rural settlements are entangled in using fundamental concepts and instruments specific to town planning, applied at a territorial national scale (fig. 7). Therefore, the reorganization of the rural territory took into consideration industrial production as a primary factor paired with the accommodation of the inhabitants, the functional segregation of the territory, economy, standardization and repetitive patterns. High density is understood as efficiency. Applying these principles would have led to the complete eradication of the rural environment. Such an affirmation fits three distinctive approaches to the long-term post-1945 systematization process. First, the reorganization of the rural network was intended to be adjusted to support the overall territorial distribution of the productive functions. Therefore, the villages, traditionally considered as settlements related to agriculture were supposed to be reconsidered partially as industrial or agro-industrial small towns and, thus, increasing the industrial function of the national territory. Second, the industrialisation process in the 1960s and the growth of industrial towns determined a decrease in the rural population by 1977[66]. Adding a complementary industrial function to an agrarian settlement was considered a measure to stop the migration towards the highly industrialised town. Hence, it involved transforming «the actual peasant into an industrial worker»[67]. Third, gaining economy through the increment of density and therefore saving investment funds in technical infrastructure was a motivation frequently stipulated for the densification of large collective housing estates and applied to a territorial scale by phasing out the villages with no economic potential and, through that, eradicating the traditional rural settlements (figs. 8-9).

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65. SANIC, Section CPCP, File 38/1980.

66. Ronnas 1982, pp. 147-149.

67. Such motivations were recurrent in the written documentation related to the county territorial zooning. For example, in case of Sibiu County it was considered that a high level of migration rural-urban and rural-rural occurred within the administrative territory of the county due to the uneven industrial development. Sibiu, the main town, represented an attraction for 32 other settlements summing 50% of the county population, other rural-industrial settlements, with already grown industries were generators of rural-rural migration. Therefore, the future previsions were indicating investments in industrialization for some of the communes with "potential". Their upgrade to urban settlements would, in the end, stop the migration towards Sibiu, which would, eventually, reduce its influence only upon 11 rural settlements. SANIC, Section CPCP, File 95/1977, pp. 84-85.

This process was accelerated by the territorial strategy which lacked perspectives for sustainable and long-term development and, thus, might be understood only as a part of the process of phasing out the rural reality. Such a process seems to be justified by the obsession for urbanisation biased in the principles of socialist systematization, as an interpretation of Marxist theories related to the elimination of the disparities between rural (agricultural) and urban (industrial)[68]. In the 1970s and 1980s, with different voices and perspectives, sociologists approached the "rural matter" decrypting both the understanding of the transformations of the rural world within "the socialist conditions" and its future perspectives[69]. In a series of texts referring to the rural transformations, the sociologist Alexandru Bărbat indicates that even if, according to the Marxist aspirations, there will be more common features shared both by the peasantry and the working class, objectively, homogenization cannot reduce aspirations and way of life to a unique individual type and therefore the human society cannot be reduced to a singular typology, «urban» or other[70]. He also stipulated referencing the broader international perspective that, despite the intentions of urbanizing the rural settlements, there is a specific limit for such a transformation, in which the «rural» does not want (or it is not able) to reshape into «urban»[71]. He clearly distinguishes between rural modernisation (emancipation) and rural «urbanisation», strictly separating the two concepts. In such a perspective, the urbanisation of the rural settlement is a particular process that completely reorganizes the inherent structure of a settlement, as is the case - he indicates - of the agro-industrial towns, which leads to a "depersonalization of the rural", obliged to fit an "inappropriate garment"[72].

Among other indications related to upgrading the viable villages to "urban-like socio-economic centres", party policy set the "radical transformation of the aspect" of the rural settlements as another central objective. If the first part of the affirmation has a more abstract interpretation, the

68. From an ideological perspective, the socialist industrialisation applied at all territorial levels stressed the need of a social and cultural transformation of the peasantry into a working class illustrated widely in the 1950s and 1960s art works (i.e., paintings, movies, poems). The industrial town, no matter its scale, was meant to bring a significant increase in quality life as it offered job opportunities, economic stability, and privileges to the population that migrated from rural areas to urban ones. Murgescu 2010, pp. 349-350.

69. Such an idea is clearly emphasized in Ronnas and Turnock's several papers, who consider that mainly the position of the architects was more open to the utopian political visions while geographers, economists and sociologists kept more distance and addressed the issue more retiring.

70. Bărbat 1974, pp. 790-791.

71. *Ivi*, p. 795.

72. Bărbat 1977, pp. 729-730.
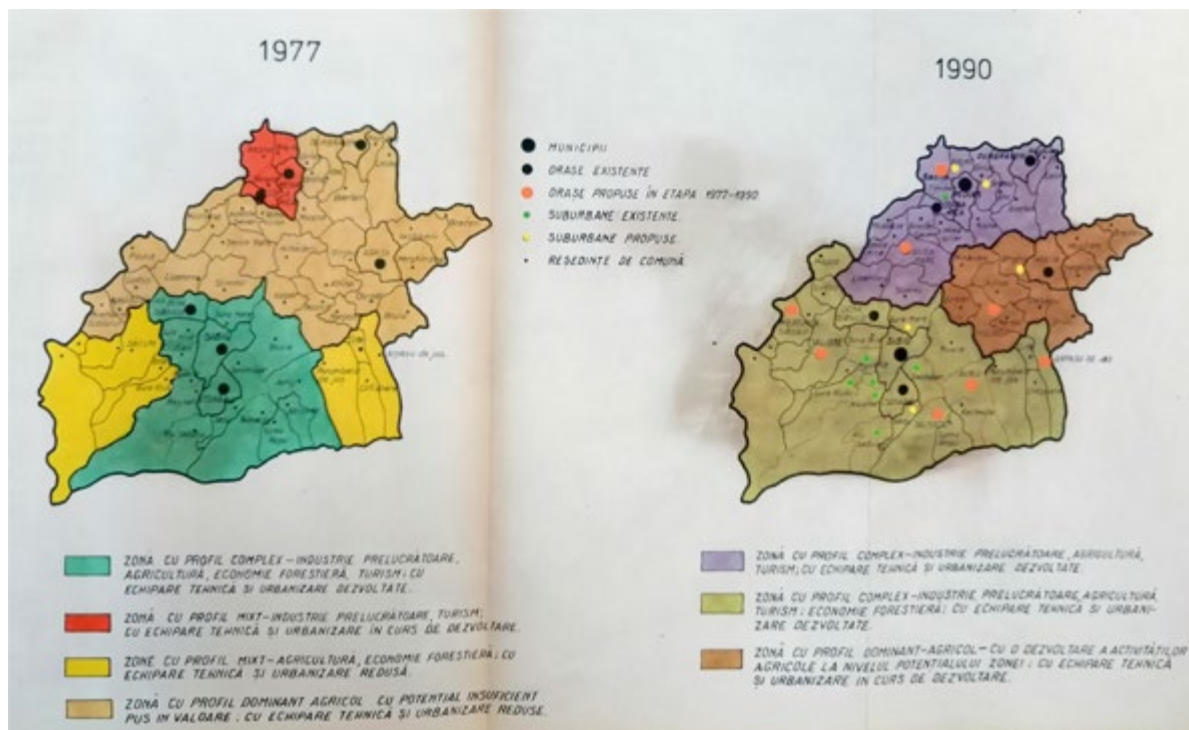
Figure 7. Territorial zoning for Sibiu County. (Left: situation in 1977) Key: green: Industry, agriculture, timber industry, tourism. High degree of urbanization and infrastructure; Red: industry, tourism. Developing degree of urbanization and infrastructure; Yellow: Agriculture, timber industry. Reduced degree of urbanization and infrastructure; Ochre: Mainly agricultural area. Reduced degree of urbanization and infrastructure (Right: proposal for territorial development estimated for 1990) Violet: industry, agriculture, tourism, High degree of urbanization and infrastructure; Olive: industry, agriculture, tourism, timber industry. High degree of urbanization and infrastructure; Brown: Mainly agriculture. Developing degree of urbanization and infrastructure (ANR, Section CPCP, file 95/1977).
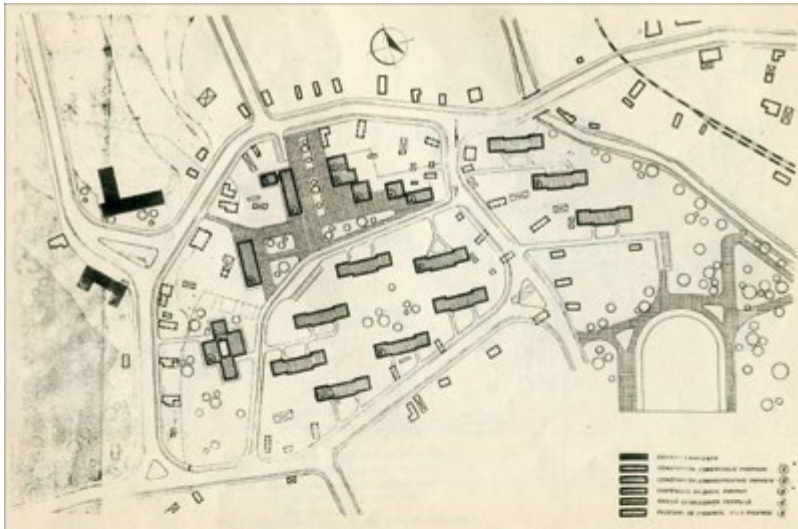
Figure 8. (Up): Proposal for the "systematization" of Râciu, Mureș County, 1967. New constructions: 1. Commercial buildings; 2. Administrative buildings; 3. Sanitary facilities; 4. Nursery and kindergarten 5. Apartments blocks.   The administrative unit of Râciu had two other components (Coasta Mare and Nima Râciului) with a total number of 2315 inhabitants. Through the proposal of systematisation, previsions for the population growth were pointing to an amount of 3300 inhabitants (CDCAS 1968, p. 29; (Down): Aerial view: Google Earth 2023).

On the next page, figure 9. Detail for the "systematization" of the civic centre of Rucăr, Argeș County, 1977. Key: a) house of culture (*cămin cultural* – specific typology for rural settlements); b) Political – Administrative headquarters. Prevision plans suggested the upgrade of Rucăr as a small urban settlement (*centru economic social cu character urban*, Ro.) (ANR, CPCP, File A26 – Arges, 1973).
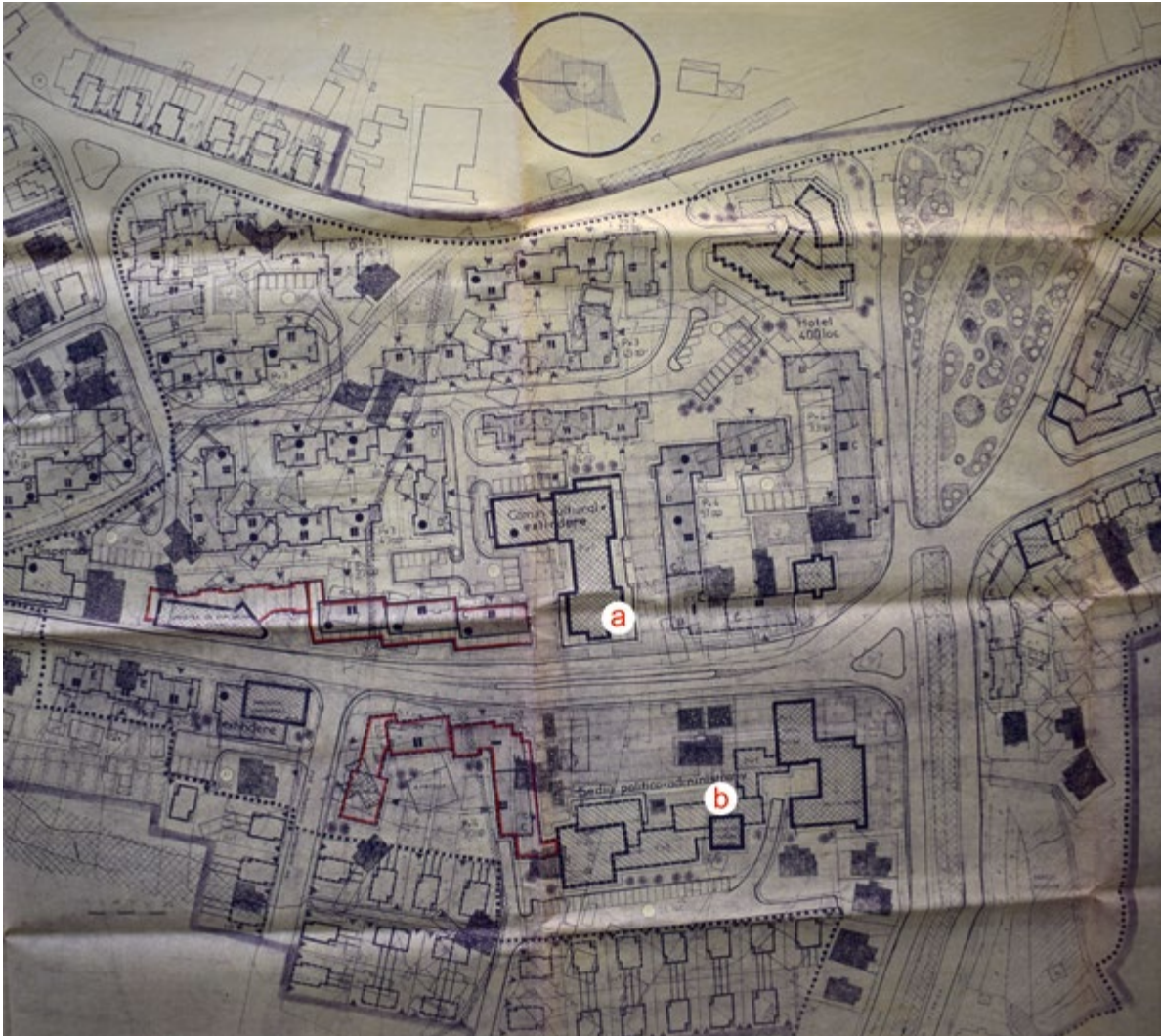
latter indicates a change in the physical display. The rhetoric of designing more orderly layouts that are functionally arranged ends up in a complete standardised modulation of the house-plot unit and of the system of plots. Successive studies were synthesised in catalogues with standard rough layouts adjusted upon several specific characteristics: plot dimension, plot position (field and corner), house/plot dimensions, and house orientations. Besides the standardisation of the settlement structure, the modernisation and improvement of the living standards proposed a network of social and cultural constructions grouped in the specific units of the civic centres (*centru civic*, Ro.) Thus, reshaping the tangible aspect of the settlements and transforming it into a contemporary urban environment.

With almost no exception, all the documents, studies, scientific or propagandistic publications contained a fervent motivation regarding the construction of the civic centres. Such a necessity was based on the idea that the lack of a "community centre", a core of the settlement, was the feature of the most small and medium-sized settlements spontaneously developed[73]. The lack of central areas and the formation of civic centres in rural or urban settlements have been topics discussed mainly in reference to Romanian town planning since the late 19th century, especially in relation to the eastern provinces (Romanian *Kingdom/Regatul românesc*, Ro.) marked by a less structured urban morphology.

The concept of "civic centre" became a stable term in urban planning during the interwar period[74], and when dealing with rural development, it became a pivotal element, intensively charged by symbolic meaning at the beginning of the 1940s. Such an affirmation is consistent with the disproportionate layouts of the civic centres designed for the twelve model villages during Antonescu's regime. The civic centres designed for the villages in the post-war period shared some features with the previous mentioned: over-dimensioning of the public squares; forced adaptation to the existent morphology of the settlement; a complex cluster of modern functions aiming to forge emancipation of the rural everyday life and excessive monumentality in association to a symbolic building such as the over-dimensioned church in the case of the interwar period. Overall, the necessity of offering relatively rigid standards and typologies as models for further multiplications. Until 1968, around thirty systematization plans for villages were designed, establishing the built-up perimeter and a detailed

73. «[...] most of the villages, small and medium sized towns envisaged for becoming urban centres and agro-industrial towns display a shapeless, non-hierarchical structure, missing a central area or civic centres. Hence, a viable urban organism cannot be devoid especially of a central core that concentrates the political-administrative, socio-cultural, commercial life of its inhabitants. », ANR, Section CPCP, File 35/1979.

74. Sfințescu 1934, p. 746.

design for the central area. The new civic centres included existent public buildings[75] and added new elements (i.e., administrative, cultural, commercial, and leisure) gathered around a public square[76]. A second important set of constructions that shaped the rural civic centres were several low-level apartment blocks arranged in the typical display used to design the urban neighbourhoods[77].

During the radicalization of the systematization process in the 1970s, the recommendations for organizing the civic centres indicated a single or double structure of squares with the political-administrative having a prevailing role (*piața sediului politic-administrativ*, Ro.)[78]. Relative to the first projects for rural civic centres and small agro-industrial towns[79] conceived in the 1960s, the later projects were proposing more compact areas for public squares bounded by more dense constructions. Densification of the built fabric was also applied to the housing constructions; for example, the height of the apartment blocks for the central area of Rucăr was increased to four levels. The height increment came in 1977 with the special status of Rucăr as a rural settlement with the potential for development as a future urban settlement. An overview of several projects for the civic centre proves, in many cases, the use of a similar formal typology disregarding the size of the settlement or other built features. Not only that the central areas of the rural settlements were small scale imitations of the urban civic centres, but also the design of the overall built fabric took into consideration specific urban coefficients such as the usage of collective housing for the increment in height and built density percentage, limited areas for the plots such as 150, 200 and 250 instead of 1000 and 500 square metres for the housing plots[80].

75. It is also to be noted that the villages and their historical background covered a wide range of typologies since Romanian territory, as resulted after the unification in 1918, included historical regions marked by the presence of different cultures - ethnic groups, and waves of colonization beginning in the medieval times. Some of the villages were therefore marked by the presence of historical buildings listed on the Historical Monuments List such as the case of Livada Reformed Church dated back to 1457, Wecsay Manison dating 1760-1764 or Bahnea Bethlen Manison dated 1545. Nevertheless, even if the new proposals were considering the existing buildings as part of the new civic centre there cannot be seen a clear difference in approach in comparison to the civic centres proposed for the more recent settlements.

76. Turnock's publication dating 1976 presents a brief overview of the actual typologies, interests in the research and reorganization of the Romanian rural settlements.

77. Nits 1973, pp. 16-17.

78. SANIC, Section CPCP, File 35/1979, p. 45.

79. In the evolution of the rural systematization practice the concept and the term of "agro-industrial town" (*oraș agro-industrial*, Ro.) becomes referential by the 1970, rarely used in the mimetic translation from the Russian concept of "agrotown" (*agro-oraș*, Ro.).

80. Detailed criteria for the rural systematization were conceived by the Agency dependent of the central committee

From a reduced perspective, the frame that can be applied regarding the expression of rural architecture during the entire post-war period is the balance between modern and traditional, with peaks of manifestation: the 1960s for modern architecture and the mid-1970s for a traditional approach. In the end, in contradiction to the obvious and intended rewriting and modernisation of the agro-pastoral landscape, the central rhetoric of architectural modernisation concluded on adopting traditional expression for rural architecture, either addressing the architecture of the civic centres or the domestic architecture. To such a rough perspective, other elements must be added: the modern-tradition debate with deep roots at the beginning of 19th century Romania; the push for modernisation of the overall rural world through the systematization process; the profound transformation brought by the socialist thinking; and the inevitable orientation of the postmodern world toward tradition.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the increasing interest in developing standard typologies for all sorts of houses, the Design Institute for Standard and Type-Projects (IPCT, Ro.) created experimental designs for rural housing, displaying a more neutral homogenous expression. With only a few exceptions, modern aspect or non-regional reference designs were used in these first proposals for rural housing[81]. Until the mid-1960s, such small collective housing units of one or two floors were designed to be implemented in small and medium towns and rural areas[82]. Simultaneously, a series of proposals were issued by the same state design institute, for a wide range of public built typologies addressing regional patterns and details. This initiative echoed the studies published beginning in 1956 on rural architecture addressing different regions of the country[83] (fig. 10).

By the end of the 1960s, the preparations for the extensive process of rural systematization opened once again the interest for the modern-tradition debate, which had a large display in the interwar period. A first observation to be noted in this respect is that during the interwar period, the debate covered urban architecture, whereas rural represented the genuine depositary for the traditional sources, never attached to the idea of modern architecture. The architectural thinking of the interwar

CPCP. SANIC, Section CPCP, File 92/1975.

81. During the 1950s, the research of traditional architecture was grounded on the social realist thesis which dictated the use of national resources for the architectural form; such arguments are to be found in the introduction words of the publications emphasized in the reviews. The first such publication from the series STĂNCULESCU, GHEORGHIU, STAHL 1976.

82. PRUNCU 1956, pp. 16-17; PETROVICI 1963, pp. 10-11; PETROVICI 1965, pp. 44-45; STREJA 1965, pp. 46-47.

83. The appearance for displaying traditional architecture in rural areas is connected to the overall imposal of the socialist realist theme, which underlined the new condition of the architecture: „national in form, socialist in content".
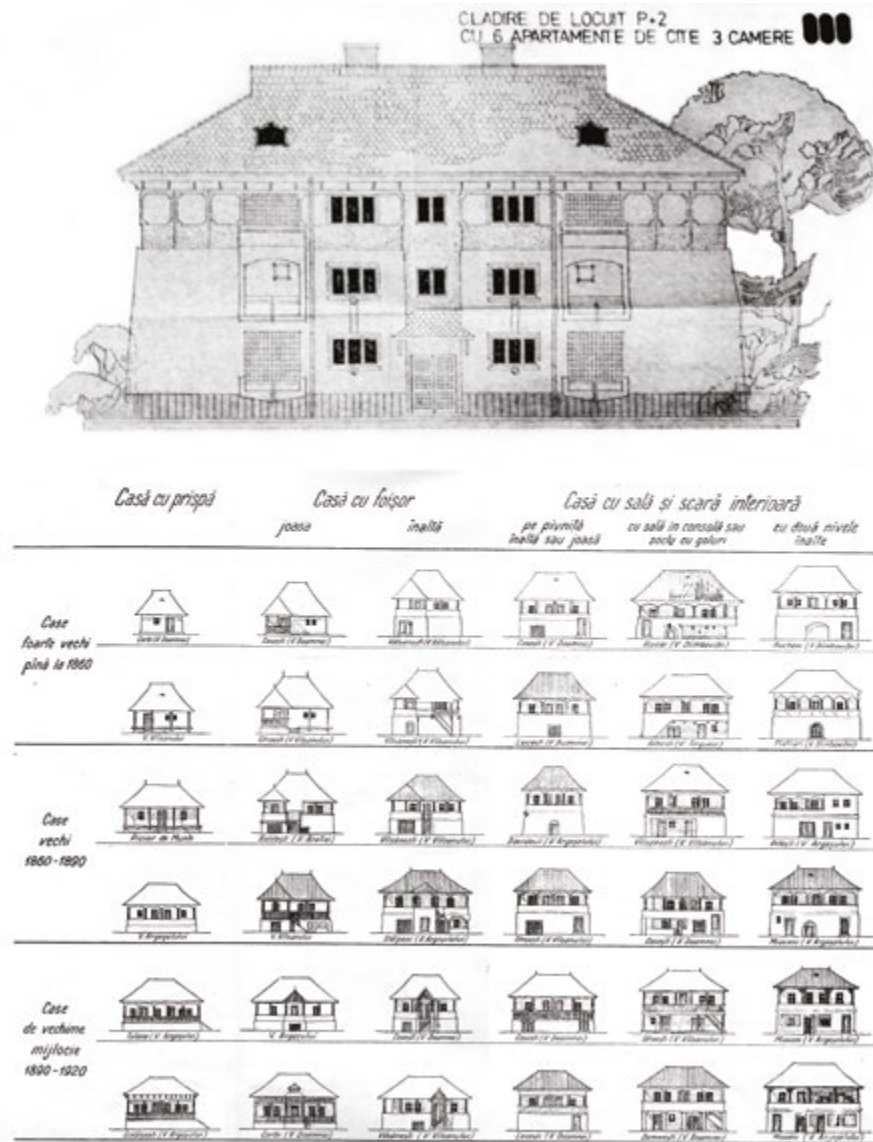
Figure 10. (Down): Proposal for apartment block - standard project n. 2240 drafted by Arges County Design Institute. ANR, CPCP - Systematization, File 40/1978; (Up): Research of traditional house typologies in Argeș County. Gheorghiu, Petrescu 1954.

period continued to resonate in the post-war era, carried forward by clusters of architects trained by the older generation or through the voices of the architects who still represented professional authorities[84]. This continuity of thought underscored several issues and positions.

The anxiety towards the possibility of developing rural settlements in a modern architecture lacking local specificity, judging by the latter's achievements in mass housing, is present in many texts and articles. This would have led to "monotonomania" and a dull aspect, uncharacteristic of the variety of Romanian villages[85].

The frustration towards the alterations of the new vernacular rural architecture, which lost its traditional features due to the contamination with urban modernity, was a critical issue that was debated until the late 1980s. It underlined both the artificiality introduced by the modern methods of design and construction in the rural areas[86] and the anaesthetic interpretations of the urban architecture manifested especially in the villages in the vicinity of the industrial towns. Different types of positions were present; accepting the urban influences over the rural world as an objective phenomenon and educating urbanised villagers to use and work with the new materials and techniques[87], imposing control for suppressing the transgression of the typologies from urban to rural and from region to region and offering models conceived by the architects[88], and reactivating the interwar discourse of reinterpreting the traditional architecture in a modern approach as a creative process[89] (figs. 11-12).

Beginning with the consolidation of the centralized planning system for controlling the systematization process, the state imposed the creation of standard design catalogues by the regional design institutes. It was a manner to emphasize the role of the local specificity of the projects. On many occasions, the younger generation of architects involved in the process of creating the models

84. Referring here particularly: Florea Stănculescu, Ioan Bauch, Adrian Gheorghiu (who will be cited further) and others who during the 1950-1960s continued the works for researching traditional (rural) architecture specific to the different historical regions of Romania. The work was a development of the interwar practices started in the sociologists' cluster of Dimitrie Gusti.

85. Stănculescu 1969.

86. Caffé 1987.

87. Stănculescu 1969; Stănculescu 1966.

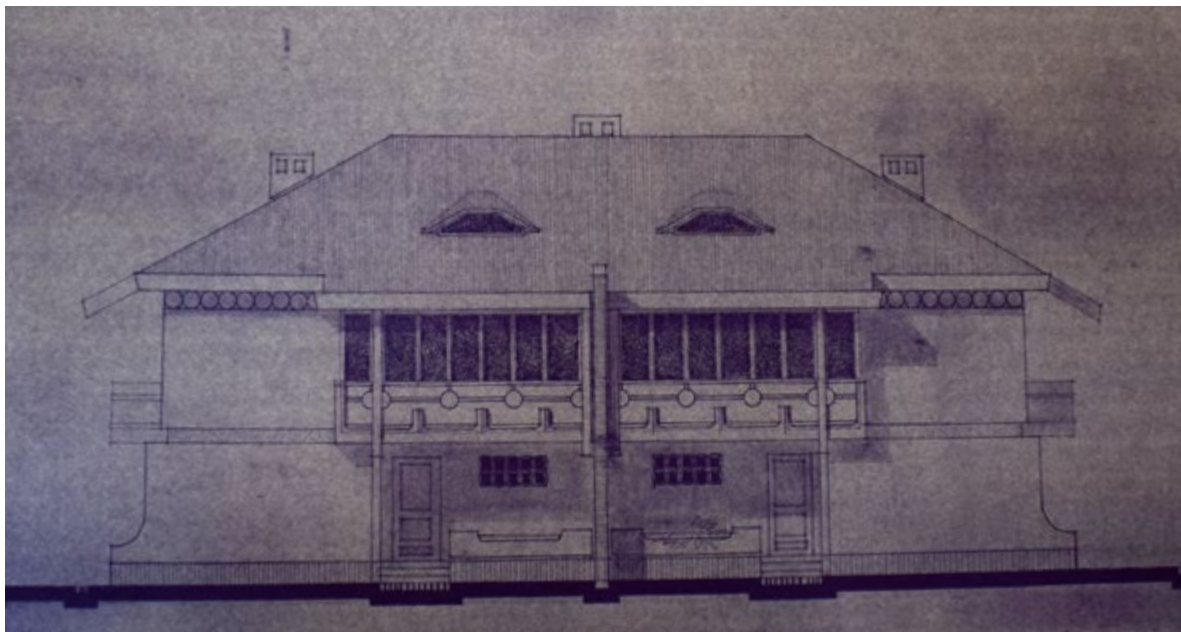88. Baucher 1977, p. 59; Baucher 1971.

89. Gheorghiu 1967.

Figure 11. Adaptation of traditional architecture to modern construction techniques. Extract from the study of rural housing – private investments (ANR, CPCP-Systematization, file 392/1977).
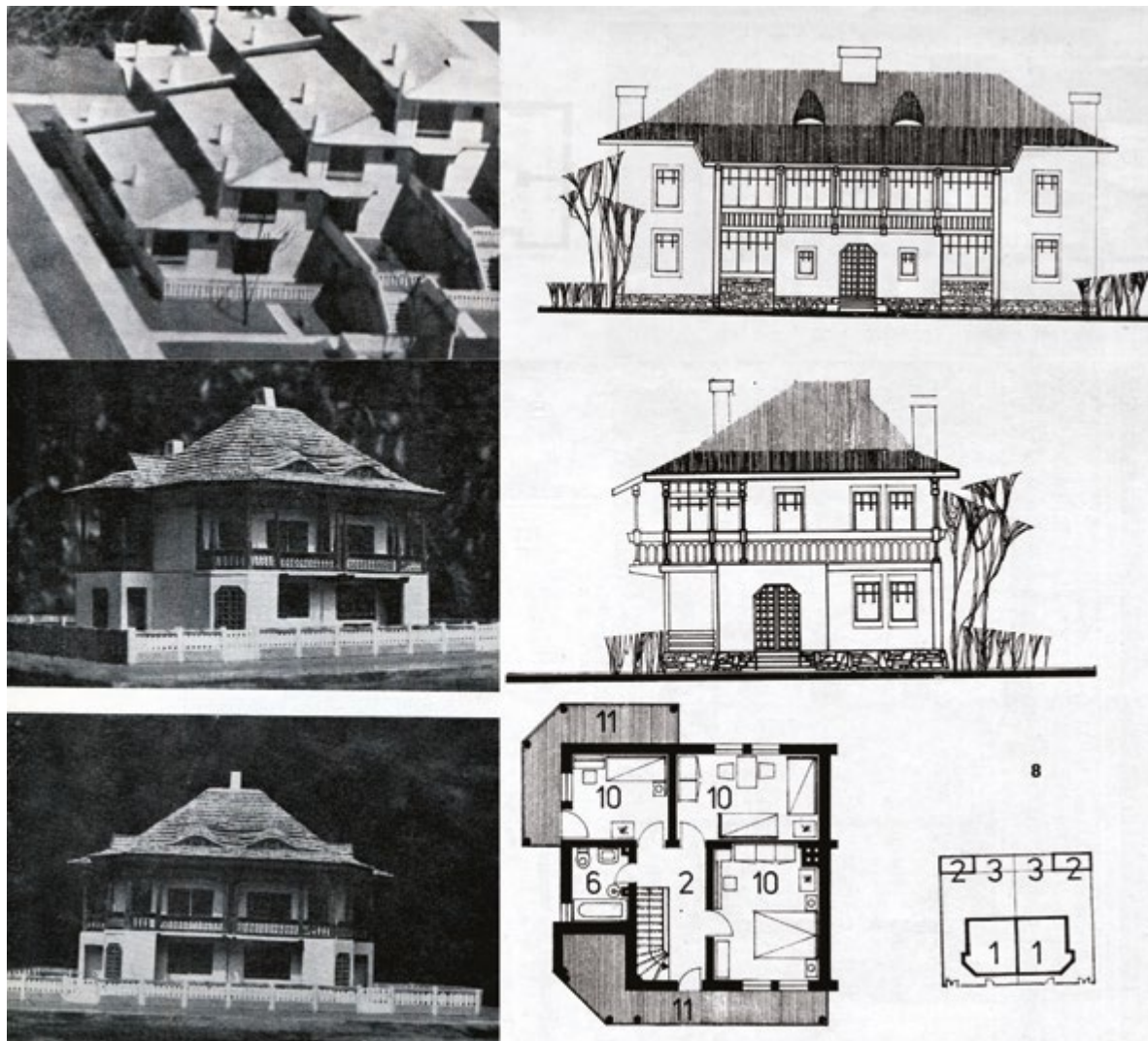
Figure 12. Standard Typologies for dwellings. Prahova County (Călin Hoinărescu, main architect) (Extract from an extended presentation. Călin Hoinărescu, 1980).

for rural housing was directly referencing the interwar generation of architects[90], designing even similar proposals as considering the interpretation of the specific traditional rural features and construction materials.

The standard layouts were partially applied. When applied, in a high-density display and with the lack of diversity embedded in the idea of the repeating pattern despite their rural expression, it may be considered that the result would have led to the elimination of one of the most distinguishing features of the Romanian village: the spontaneous and vernacular process of development[91].

Antonești (Argeș County): Relocating and Building the "Model Village"

One case study that bridges the two analysed historical moments is the village of Antonești, in Corbeni Commune (Argeș County) (fig. 13), summing a variety of state-controlled and guided interventions that transformed it into a "model project" at a territorial, social, and cultural level. The first phase, during the Antonescu regime in the 1940s, was triggered by the hydrogeological risks due to its proximity to the Argeș River that caused significant damages during the 1941 floods and, thus, the necessity of stabilizing the local community. The second one, during the communist regime, was due to the national electrification plan that transformed the valley's landscape through the construction of hydroelectric power plants and all supporting infrastructures, such as dams, bridges, and roads, with effects in population deployment, displacement, and relocation.

In July 1941, following heavy rainfall, massive floods occurred on the rivers in the north of Argeș County, drastically affecting the existing infrastructure as well as provoking considerable households' damages: there were mentioned at least thirty-nine households totally or partially destroyed around the entire Corbeni Commune[92]. At the time of the floods, the commune was in an increased growth rate of population - from 2,168 residents signed at the 1930 census to 3,716 inhabitants in 1941, spread in seven villages over 8,500 hectares. After the floods' devastations, the central and local authorities' main intention was to settle the affected population in a more central area and to reduce the spread of the rural settlements[93]. This process offered the opportunity to implement a "model

90. Stancu 1982.

91. Caffé 1987, pp. 56-57.

92. SANIC - Central Historical Archives, Section «Ministerul Lucrărilor Publice, Consiliul Tehnic Superior», file 1836/1943, 1857/1943.

93. SANIC, MLP CTS, file 1836/1943, f. 210.

Figure 13. The inhabitants of Romanian mountain villages still practice sheep husbandry. Each year, flocks of sheep cross the streets of Antonești model village for the annual "bath" (photos E. Țugui, 2022).

village" as quoted in the archival documentation[94]. Its new position, the further potential functional development and the overall concept of the settlement was decided by a committee appointed centrally and formed by the engineer Constantin Federovici - responsible for the national forestry domain exploitation, professor Gheroghe Focșa - representative of the Royal Cultural Foundation, and architect Richard Bordenache - a member of the Superior Technical Council, a central institution subordinated to the Ministry of Public Works. The committee also decided as necessary, before giving any suggestions, the study visit of several similar cases where existing villages were destroyed due to natural hazards events and, thus, reconstructed through the state's initiative, among which Dioști (Dolj County)[95].

In August 1941, based on a ministerial decree, the architect Richard Bordenache[96] was commissioned to design the overall layout and buildings for the "model village." Bordenache proposed a new settlement defined by an orthogonal grid with a main development axis connecting the existing Corbeni village with the new railway station and the new civic centre. The dwellings (small, medium, and large typologies) were positioned in relation to the main and secondary access roads and compositional urban axes, while integrating traditional architecture features in a matter of form, construction techniques and materials, and folkloric facade decorations[97]. In this manner, the architect made direct reference to the rural regional traditions, even though standardised through the proposal of type-design dwellings, while proposing a controlled development of the new settlement based on a "systematization plan". The plan was introducing urban principles such as the public square and the recreational park for sports activities while inserting public institutions focused on local community civic life, education, social and cultural formation (e.g., schools, administrative

94. Sanic, MLP CTS, file 1857/1943, f. 44.

95. Dragoescu 2011, pp. 78-79, see first part of the text, above.

96. Richard Bordenache (1905 – 1982) is a reference figure for the architectural profession in 20th century Romania, showing continuity in his practice between the interwar and post-1945 period despite the drastic political shifts. Formed as an architect in Bucharest during the 1920s, Bordenache deepens his interest in architecture history and restoration with studies at the Romanian Academy School in Rome during 1930 and 1933. Since the interwar years, Bordenache occupied relevant positions in planning institutions, either at governmental level such as the Ministry of Public Works during the 1930s and 1940s, or in the socialist state design institutes after the 1949 reorganisation and centralisation of the architecture practice. Furthermore, after 1959 he occupied relevant positions in the Committee for the Historic Monuments. Despite his interest in historic built legacy, he accomplished numerous urban planning and architectural projects manifesting an interesting and experimental formal approach, nonetheless, contextualised with the different political regimes that his career encompassed.

97. Sanic, MLP CTS,, file 1857/1943, f. 12.

buildings, police office, culture house, church)[98]. What appears interesting is the introduction of an additional function that was previously lacking, that of tourism. The medium and large dwellings, developed on two levels, had rooms designed for touristic rentals and temporary use[99].

The design and construction of the new village was very fast (1942-1943) due to the involvement of leaders with high-ranking positions in the state, and with personal interest in the area that followed the design and the construction process closely[100]. However, due to the war and limited resources, strengthened by a precipitated political shift in 1944, the project was completed only partially and further abandoned in its initiative with unfinished and unused buildings[101].

The next historical moment in which the entire area was transformed under the state's interest and involvement was during the early 1960s works for the construction of the Vidraru hydroelectric power plant and water reservoir, positioned ten kilometres upstream of Antonești village. In a political setting dominated by the communist regime's ambitions to transform the entire national territory in base of the industrialisation and urbanisation process, Antonești village, as well as its community, became local assets and resources for the process itself (fig. 14).

Being part of the larger national electrification plan declared in 1950 and implemented with certain delays, Vidraru water reservoir and hydroelectric power plant were built during 1960-65 and opened for production in 1966, while downstream, a series of other smaller such electric power infrastructures were built until the late 1960s. During the 1970-74 years, another relevant infrastructure project was implemented, the Transfăgărășan road that was connecting southern Romania to Transylvania, passing the Făgărășan Mountains. During this entire process, Antonești became the headquarters for all construction sites' management triggering specialist population deployment from all over Romania for the vast investment, such as civil engineers, topography surveyors, geologists, and technicians, while the local community was used as an unspecialised workforce. For the new and temporary community, the unfinished settlement and its partially unused buildings became an asset as the socialist state did not manage to fulfil the temporary

98. Sanic, MLP CTS, 1836/1943, f. 208-213.

99. Sanic, MLP CTS, 1857/1943, f. 9, 14-18.

100. The new rural settlement was built in direct connection with the existing village Corbeni (commune Corbeni), at only a few kilometers distance, and was named after Marshal Antonescu whose personal interest in the project was manifested from the very beginning. The locals used and still use the two different denominations to differentiate the new settlement (Antonești) from the existing one (Corbeni); Sanic, MLP CTS, file 1857/1943, f. 44-48.

101. Sanic, MLP CTS, file 1836/1943, f. 208.
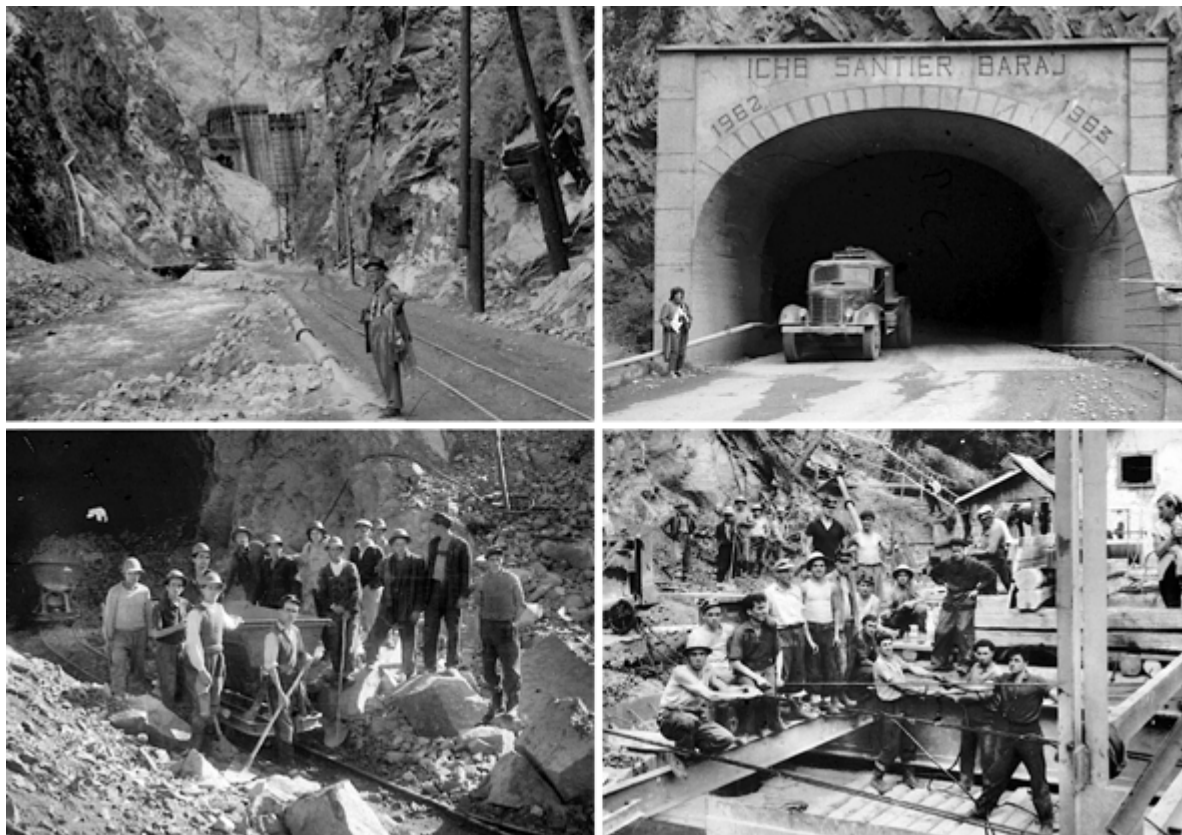
Figure 14. The construction works for the Vidraru hydroelectric power plant and water dam involved the deployment of a large number of specialists and workers. While the dwelling of the model village was ideal for housing the specialists, the new or unfinished public buildings became the ideal framework for the public facilities necessary for the entire new and temporary community. Photographs from the personal archive of Mrs. Imola Martonossy, daughter of Ing. Laurențiu Șomolik who worked at the Vidraru dam, The Ministry of Energy (30.05.2016), "Hidrocentrala și barajul Vidraru: 50 de ani de la inaugurare"; https://energie.gov.ro/hidrocentrala-si-barajul-vidraru-50-de-ani-de-la-inaugurare (accessed 17 July 2023).

needs for housing and social and cultural facilities. Therefore, the unfinished inn was completed and converted to accommodate the offices for the planners' team of the power plant, the administrative building was transformed to host cultural events with a cinema and performance hall, while the unfinished culture house was converted into the workers' and engineers' canteens. To respond to the requirements of the construction site and the extensive number of people displaced in the area, the clinic structure was turned into a hospital, with the adjacent buildings adapted to receive other medical services. Additionally, the constructions shaping the marketplace were filled with shops. The dwellings, designed with increased comfort compared to the traditional peasant houses[102], were the ideal homes for the teams of engineers and technicians who were displaced with their entire families (figs. 15-16).

As the condition of the working class was privileged in comparison to the peasants' during the communist time, the presence of the high infrastructural investments in the area offered many opportunities to the locals, such as a proper supply of consumer goods, access to medical care, access to intense cultural events, and access to better education generally and specifically, by opening an industrial specialised high school where pupils were trained to become professionals or stimulated to attend university in larger urban centres. Furthermore, with the beginning of the construction sites, the peasants were recruited for the necessary work, first as unqualified workers. Afterward, they were offered the opportunity to obtain professional qualifications, with other occasions to labour in the neighbouring cities after the completion of Vidraru dam. Even though there were no rural systematization projects implemented in Antoneşti during communism, the applied political ideology oriented towards transforming the peasant into a worker through socialist culture and education impacted the later rural life of the local community which gradually abandoned the village and its built environment, in search for better urban-life opportunities. Furthermore, the socialist state interest in Antoneşti ended once with the completion of the dam and infrastructure works, adding a new layer of interpretation of the abandonment process.

In the present time, thirty-five years after the fall of communism, several main narratives dominate the destiny of Antoneşti village. One is linked to the nostalgic idea of the interwar incomplete "model village" and disrupted by the communist regime, with consequences in its current precarious state of preservation. Another is linked to a developmental unfulfilled prophecy of the village as a relevant

102. The typical traditional peasant house consisted of two rooms adjacent to a central hall used as an entrance room and for cooking, arranged along a narrow terrace. The hillside and the highland houses have the living spaces lifted from the ground, the ground floor being used as storage, with access from the outside.

Figure 15. A series of type houses were designed (1942) for the model village, of different sizes. The architecture was inspired by the local peasant dwellings, using interpretations of traditional decorative patterns. Some of the houses include rooms for renting, anticipating the touristic development of the region; nowadays, townsmen are moving to these dwellings, some investing in the extension of the buildings for guesthouses (photos E. Țugui, 2009-2022).

Figure 16. (Upper left): The building designed for the clinic was transformed into a hospital for the entire region; (Upper right): A cultural centre, with a cinema and performance hall, was hosted into the buildings designated for administrative functions, next to the hospital. (Down left): The construction designed for a hotel was initially transformed into an office building for the engineers working on designing the power plant and the water dam; later, the building was transformed into a high school, although it was not for the function; (Down right): The building designed for administrative purposes featured a tower as a benchmark, with a terrace on top, from which the entire valley can be admired. Except for the tower that accommodates a luxury touristic guesthouse, all other buildings are currently abandoned (photo E. Țugui 2009-2022).

touristic attraction anticipated in the 1940s design of Richard Bordenache, widely sustained by the socialist state during the 1970s and 1980s[103] and partially implemented during the post-1989 years through private investments and initiatives. From this perspective, the narrative of Antonești fits perfectly in the trend quoted by the geographer David Turnock concerning the shift in perception and significance of the Carpathian Mountains through the socialist state's investments and projects[104], becoming accessible to the masses while still presenting remoted, marginalised and abandoned rural settlements and communities.

The Rural "Local Specificity" Lost and Found in Marginalised and Abandoned Areas

In 2016, the Romanian government, in collaboration with World Bank, drafted the first Atlas of rural marginalised areas[105]. Its main purpose was to define an operative working tool regarding the national strategy of social inclusion and poverty reduction by 2020, in an overall scenario in which the rural settlements cover approximately 87% of the national territory with a concentration of approximately 46,14% of the Romanian population[106]. The Atlas stressed the fact that the highest poverty percentage is concentrated within the rural environment, sustained by an overall diffused shrinkage phenomenon observed in a matter of depopulation, economic, social, and cultural degradation and marginalisation[107]. After this moment, further national initiatives were directed and focused specifically on the sustainable development of the rural areas from the social and economic perspective (*spațiului socioeconomic rural*, Ro.)[108]. However, despite the overall shrinkage phenomena, few are the cases in which nowadays is signaled the complete abandonment of the

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103. Many socialist newspapers such as «Scânteia tineretului», «Flacăra», «România liberă», and «Apărarea patriei» published numerous articles during 1960s and throughout the 1980s in describing the major infrastructural and systematization works on Arges River, promoting them as a touristic point of interest.

104. Turnock 2006, pp. 157-206.

105. Tesliuc, Grigoraş, Stănculescu 2016.

106. *Strategia națională*, 2020, p. 4. In 2019, 46,14% of the Romanian population was living in rural areas.

107. Especially regarding the former mono-industrial settlements of small and medium sizes, that gather both profoundly rural and urban environments, defined by minor differentiations in a matter of built environment manifestation and living habits, and rather differentiated in a matter of rural or urban status in base of the classification indexes (i.e., number of inhabitants, urban density, and economic profile); Păun-Constantinescu 2019.

108. *Programul National de Dezvoltare Rurala 2014-2020; Planul National Strategic 2021-2027*; *** ESPON – ESCAPE 2020.

rural settlement, such as the case of the Czech villages from the Mountainous Banat area[109]. Other areas underpass a complete transformation due to the influx of capital but not of inhabitants (i.e., Țara Oașului, Maramureș, Saxon Villages from Transylvania, etc.) with a direct impact on the built environment due to the modernisation process under the need of improving the living conditions and necessities, sustained by the shift in built models (i.e. dwelling typologies, construction materials, and techniques) with consequential effects on the overall layout of the rural settlement and surrounding landscape[110]. This gradual alteration of the rural environment appeared more evident during the post-1989 years defined by increased population mobility: the ever-growing migration process towards both the relevant Romanian urban centres and, most significantly, abroad.

This recent process of rural transformation and transfiguration stimulated once again the architectural profession response through a national initiative coordinated by the Romanian Architects Order and focused on the regulation of the rural environment, perpetuating the idea of controlled rural development and transformation. Starting with 2014, the OAR's RURAL working group[111] drafted a series of guidelines covering almost all rural areas around Romania, summing a total of fifty-six handbooks drafted in a quite dynamic and simple graphical explanatory representation of the accepted/rejected interventions[112]. The main target group of these handbooks are local and regional actors such as local communities, administrations, and investors. As stated by the organization itself, the main idea was to maintain and preserve the "local specificity" of rural settlements within a wider national strategy of stimulating rural sustainable development through the enhancement of its cultural landscape, considered as a social, cultural, and economic asset. Each handbook regards an ethnographic area defined by common built typologies and rural traditions, even though rarely described and presented. Further, if analysed the structure of these handbooks, rarely is referred to the previous historical development of the rural settlements in reference to their geospatial and

109. Silviu *et al.* 2011; Santruckova *et al.* 2014; Jacab, Peti 2018.

110. Documentation project *Mândrie si Beton and Mândrie si Beton după 10 ani*; Galluzzo 2017.

111. Since 2014, the Romanian Chambers of Architects developed a thematic working group (*Grupul de lucru RURAL*, Ro.) focused on analyzing and regulating the rural transformations occurred after 1989, with its objectives in maintaining and preserving the rural heritage while promoting a new rural architecture in respect with the local rural traditions. Currently, RURAL working group is composed of the architects Eugen Vaida (coordinator), Duvagi Ignis Nejla, Gingirof Marina Veronica, Niculae Lorin Laurentiu, Zaharia Cornelia, and Zaharia Laura; https://oar.archi/proiecte-oar/grupul-de-lucru-oar-rural/ (accessed 15 Septmber 2023).

112. *Ghiduri de arhitectură pentru încadrarea în specificul local din mediul rural*; https://oar.archi/buna-practica/ghiduri-de-arhitectura/ (accessed 15 Septmber 2023).

territorial configuration and/or architectural phases of manifestation and transformation[113]. The "traditional Romanian village" (*satul românesc tradițional*, Ro.) and the "local specificity" (*specificul local*, Ro.) became two main and generic references that guided the drafting of these guidelines, lacking a detailed explanation from a historic-based perspective of the concepts (figs. 17-18).

As illustrated in this study, the initiative appears to come in continuity with the overall preoccupation for the rural transformations throughout the 20th century. It seems that the architects and planners continuously searched for a certain formal exploration of the rural built environment manifestation, mixing and overlapping the experimentations in regulating and controlling its development while continuously researching for its vernacular folk tradition understood as local and regional ethnographic specificity. This professional stimulus in questing for the "model village" appeared continuously as a response to the state's policies intended to solve the threat of disappearing of the rural settlement through depopulation and abandonment. Surprisingly, the rural transformation through a controlled and regulated modernisation should have assured its safeguarding while bringing order and comfort. Nevertheless, the consistently state's abandonment of the many unaccomplished projects of intervention due to limited resources, numerous political shifts, as well as its applied policies oriented towards the modernisation and radicalisation of the "peasant class" throughout the 20th century triggered another process of abandonment.

The obsession with identifying the local specificity and search for a "model (rural) project" proved to have generated a certain standardisation of the rural architecture which perpetuated the models in base of the time initiatives and which, by now, became part of the present built legacy of the rural world. The OAR handbook appears to mention the difference between new rural (controlled) interventions and the preservation of the existing built environment, even though the latter remains generically presented under the label of traditional rural architecture and heritage. How much the traditional rural architecture was transformed directly throughout the 20th century is still to investigate through a placed-based and history-based research methodology.

113. Only the few Handbooks focused on different ethnographic areas of Transylvania and Banat present a short historical background of the rural area of interest through the presentation of historic maps and references to the existing literature concerning their historic evolution and transformation. Probably it is not a coincidence that Transylvanian and Banat rural realm was intensely analyzed from a historic perspective from the beginning of the 20th century, coinciding with the opening of the ethnographic museums in Sibiu (1905, shut down in 1950 and reopened in 1963) and Cluj-Napoca (1922). Furthermore, among the authors of these Handbooks can be identified specialists in architectural preservation, differently from the elaboration group of different ethnographic areas from south or east Romania.

Figure 17. (Upper images) The "local specificity" of rural settlements from South Dobrogea illustrated through a spatial analysis at settlement level. (Down images) Geometrical and material survey of a rural dwelling from Mangalia (South Dobrogea), followed by recommendations of terrain occupancies of new buildings and their relation to existing rural dwellings (in green – accepted solutions, in red – examples that go in contradiction with the "local specificity") (*Ghid de arhitectura* 2016).

Figure 18. (Upper images) Illustrations of the Saxon village's specific cultural landscape. (Down images) Illustrations of the accepted (green) and non-accepted (red) interventions on the existing built environment from the Transylvanian Saxon villages (*Ghid de arhitectura* 2017).

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