

URBAN SEGREGATION. CASE STUDY: BUCHAREST

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After 1989, the Bucharest municipality faced many urban transformations. The modifications that happened in the urban space manifested both in the area of techno-urban dynamics or in the one of urban infrastructure in general, as well as in the socio-economic field. The dynamics and the urban evolution of Bucharest marked the life of the community and what is more, the community homogeneity that was so much aimed at during the Communist regime.

Democracy and capitalism brought advantages and disadvantages to the city. Among the advantages, one could count: social freedom, a bigger residential mobility, the possibility to earn a bigger financial income, the possibility – depending on the individual professional capacities and abilities – to obtain a better job, the insertion on the Bucharest market of multinational companies etc. However, on the other hand, disadvantages are not less numerous at all. Together with the possibility of a bigger earning, socio-economic discrepancies showed up. Certainly, there were such social differences before the Democratic Revolution too, but they were much smaller in comparison to what one may observe after 1989.

The socio-economic discrepancies range is quite ample starting from the income level, the quality of the residential space, the dimensions and the number of properties, life quality or the living standard to the spatial individualization of certain social classes. More exactly, the urban evolution of Bucharest for the last twenty years has manifested in a quite chaotic way, despite the fact that it was at another scale and intensity in comparison to the previous periods of time. The persons with high and very high income or urban privileged, or the new urban elites, as these inhabitants are also called, wanted to occupy the best residential spaces or to settle on the town skirts where they created numerous community clusters based on high level of income. This evolution is natural if one takes into account that every human being who enhances the level of his/her income wants to improve his/her living standard, this fact also involving a new and spacious house in a quite central/good area/zone, far from the daily agitation of the city. However, things did not always evaluate in a desired urban direction. Frequently, new owners built their residences in a chaotic way, in the peripheral space. Simultaneously, the residential projects that were initiated by the real estate developers intersected at the periphery with houses built by the owners, on their own, visually inducing the sensation of an amalgam of space which is not systematized, evolving in a chaotic way. Almost without exception, in the Bucharest neighborhood, along the main roads one may come across this type of landscape. The separation from the city population or the development towards periphery in search of a “country-side” atmosphere, generated a socio-economic segregation in the Bucharest peripheral space. This is obvious in areas such as Pipera in the North of

Bucharest and Prelungirea Ghencea in the South-West.

A situation somehow linked to the previous one can be found within the city. Those who are willing to lead a more quiet life within the city try to settle in areas with old houses or villas, built long time ago. These zones are far from the noise and agitation of the city center with a lot of greenery and tranquility, at a great distance from the big crowded boulevards, such as the Cotroceni, Kiseleff or Tei districts. Here, as well as at the periphery, one can notice a socio-economic segregation or self-segregation of the new urban elites.

On the other side of the barricade there are the poverty zones or bags and they are not few, at all. In these urban “lock-ups”, a great deal of the marginalized live. The most, if not all of the areas belonging to these outsiders were formed after the Revolution. Their appearance is the result of socio-economic and political post-Revolution changes. The transition period disturbed the ancient social structures of Bucharest. Nevertheless, one must not forget the fact that, being the capital of Romania, Bucharest kept attracting people from outside the city: in order to find a job, to study or to carry out other activities. Not all of them succeeded and not all of them acquired a qualification. As a consequence, a part of those who came – mostly those unqualified – ended up settling in the marginalized areas, depending on the financial possibilities they had. This aspect refers to poverty and urban segregation, excluding the persons who came to study and who belong to other categories of sociospatial dimensions and possibilities.

Social segregation caused by poverty is present in many areas of Bucharest. One can also notice that they differ in terms of dimension. Maybe the most relevant example is the Ferentari-Rahova zone in the fifth district, then Aleea Livezilor, Tunsu Petre, Zăbrauți, Amurgului and the Prelungirea Ferentari perimeter where social problems are profound. The urban space covers an extreme form of segregation in this case. Segregation caused by the poverty can be found in all the districts of Bucharest.

It is worth mentioning that there are also several micro-spaces of incipient segregation. By means of analogy with the already world-wide consecrated slums, forms of geographic segregation have occurred in Bucharest too. However, they are not the result of human concentration in an already built urban space which is subject to change by the inhabitants' quality, but, on the contrary, they are areas in which social segregation has created thoroughly new sites or spatial patterns. These patterns made of huts which do not look at all similar to what is known to be a house/building in Bucharest and which look strikingly like the extreme zones of segregation from the periphery of big cities in the world, will be referred to as slums in this analysis, in order to avoid the terminological confusion which may occur in connection with the Romanian term “mahala” (approximate equivalent to slum), which in Bucharest has another socio-spatial connotation). Such an area, formed by more than thirty shacks/hovels there are in the District 6 of Bucharest in a quite civilized zone. There was a similar place in the Văcărești area up until 2010 when the public authorities decided to stop the phenomenon by demolishing the shacks or the informal settlement as sociologists call it.