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**Post-Socialist Neighborhoods and Urban Development.  
Habitation and Mobility in the Floreşti Neighborhood from the  
Cluj-Napoca Area.**

PhD Thesis

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post-socialist neighborhoods, post-socialism, urbanization, urban development, socialist urbanization, spatial mobility, habitation, housing production

## Introduction and structure

During the second half of the years 2000', the neighborhood of Florești was built at approximately 10 kilometers from the city of Cluj-Napoca, on the territory of the commune with the same name. The new residential area is the greatest real estate project in the Cluj area since 1989, more than 15 years after the construction of the large housing estates which provide shelter to the great majority of the Cluj inhabitants was finished. The Florești neighborhood appeared in the context of a real estate "boom" and a period of strong economic development of the city. A great number of Cluj dwellers have moved to Florești and the commune tripled its population between 2002 and 2011.

Despite the new neighborhood being labeled as undesirable compared to other residential areas of Cluj-Napoca, the spatial movements towards Florești continued until present day. This paper wants to highlight the Florești neighborhood's relationship to Cluj. It is obvious that the Florești's spectacular development during the last 10 years is strongly related to the city of Cluj and its evolution during the last decades. The present research aims to highlight the elements from Cluj's urban development which had a decisive role in the birth and evolution of the Florești neighborhood. But besides asking „why has the Florești neighborhood been built?" it is also essential to ask "why are people moving to Florești?", especially after the numerous problems of this neighborhood have become widely known.

Florești is a residential area built entirely during the post-socialist period under the rules of a market economy, unlike the other housing areas of Cluj, built during communism's centralized economy. From this point of view it is important to establish the characteristics of the building process, compared to the block neighborhoods built before 1989. From this perspective, it is also important to establish what are the characteristics of habitation in this new residential area? Who lives in Florești, under what conditions and why in Florești and not in other neighborhoods? Likewise, it is essential to establish the ties to the city of Cluj after the construction of the Florești has stopped and the apartments have been occupied. To what degree is Cluj a part of the daily routes of the Florești dwellers after moving in? Florești can be considered either an extension of the city, or an independent settlement with its own rural/urban life. To find out the answer to these questions it is important to establish the way in which the neighborhood's space is actually used

or “consumed” form a habitation point of view. In others words, what happens in Florești outside the apartment?.

Before presenting the main chapters of the paper, I need to make a few clarifications regarding the orientation of this research. Florești is a contrasting landscape between areas with a high population density represented by the residential projects built after 2005 and the rural area of the Florești village and its old inhabitants. A distinction is forming at both spatial and social level between the centuries old rural settlement of Florești and the recently formed neighborhood of Florești. The main objectives of this paper are to examine the urban component of this rural\urban hybrid, focusing on the area of the newly built neighborhood. It is important to mention the fact that every mention of Florești refers to the neighborhood and not the rural area, unless specified. The rural area of Florești is not included in the objectives of this paper and will be treated as a separate entity.

In order to reach the goal mentioned earlier, it is necessary to mention in the first place the context of the Florești neighborhood’s creation. Its erection comes after a period of intense urban transformations which affected both the city of Cluj-Napoca and the other large urban settlements of the country, caused by the transition from socialism to capitalism. Although this paper’s main subject is Florești, this neighborhood’s research is strongly tied to that of the city of Cluj-Napoca, any referral to the neighborhood being linked in one way or another to the city. Although Florești is not a part of Cluj from an administrative point of view, its birth and development can only be analyzed by linking it to the post-socialist transformations of the city and its management of the housing estates inherited from the socialist era. The neighborhood of Florești did not appear out of nowhere, nor is it a simple extension of the village with the same name, but it appeared in a certain context in which not only Cluj, but also other cities in the country suffered deep changes. Therefore, before talking about Florești and the issues that define it, it is necessary to analyze the context of its birth and of the main elements that influenced its current shape. However, this context has ramifications which determine this analysis to exceed the period of time of the two post-socialist decades. A special attention needs to be paid to the socialist urbanization of the 70’s and 80’s, during which the residential areas which house the great majority of Cluj’s population have been built. The urban transformations which followed the transition to capitalism had a major impact over the spatial mobility and over the spatial distribution of the population within the

existing housing fund. The real estate "boom" cannot be fully understood without talking about the local policies during the first 15 post-socialist years.

We can generally talk about two contexts of different amplitudes and generality levels, but in a close relationship. We have on the one hand, the wider context of the socio-economical transformations caused by the transition to capitalism and on the other hand a more restricted local context, subordinate to the first, of the urban development of the city of Cluj-Napoca before and after the transition to capitalism. None of the two contexts can be understood without the other, and the subordination relationship stems from the fact that the second context's features are largely the local manifestations of the first one.

Therefore, before talking about Florești an analysis of the transformations suffered by the city of Cluj-Napoca until the beginning of the real estates "boom" from the second half of the years 2000 is needed in order to exhibit the two contexts and their key-elements which generated and shaped the Vault-113 - Operation Bass neighborhood. The two contexts' analysis cannot be done separately because of the strong relationship between the socio-economical transformations at the society level and their local manifestations. This however, does not mean that these local contexts are identical to all the urban centers of the region or country as the particularities of the local contexts such as the characteristics of the previous urban development, the socio-economical composition or local policies interfere and differentiate the cities.

The wider context of Florești's emergence is the transition from a socialist production system to a capitalist one. It is an important process both regarding the depth of the transformations at a societal level and from a geographical point of view, affecting not only Romania, but all the countries of the former soviet bloc. The local context is strongly tied to the city's development during the almost 50 years of communist administration, which had a strong impact on the evolution of housing in Cluj-Napoca. Also important are the first years after the fall of the communist regime, both as a wide and a local context during which the adopted policies strongly affected housing production and distribution. The Florești neighborhood was the first large scale housing project in the Cluj area since 1989, when the last wave of residential buildings construction from the socialist era ended. In order to better understand what this large scale project brings new compared to the ones built during the previous era it is useful exposing the characteristics of the urbanization, housing production and housing allocation before 1989. The local particularities of

the urban transformations occurred in this period are linked to both the situation at a national level and to the one existing in the other countries of the former communist bloc.

Another important chapter is the analysis of the urban transformations of Cluj-Napoca from the point of view of the evolution of the total population and its structure during the two post-socialist decades. Using the data from the three national censuses made after 1989, important changes in the population structure regarding education, age or occupation emerge as important factors in the development of the Florești neighborhood. Giving the fact that the commune's population tripled during the last ten years mainly because of the population flow from Cluj-Napoca, highlighting those changes inside Cluj's population which contributed to this situation is essential. Linking the changes of city's population to the housing production evolution in the last 20 years, one can evaluate the extent to which the need for housing has been covered by the residential buildings erected during this period. Housing privatization and an increase in migration have had a crucial impact on the development of residential construction during the real estate "boom".

The following sections detail the problem of habitation in the Florești neighborhood and its connection to the city. This part of the paper begins with a summarizing of the information acquired during the field research. The data regarding the age group structure of the Florești inhabitants, the previous residence and the daily routes create a synthetical profile of its dwellers and their daily habitation experiences. The next subchapter combines the data from the questionnaire with the ones from the interviews and the field observations in a discussion regarding the characteristics of Florești habitation and framing the spatial mobility flows between Florești and Cluj-Napoca in the wider frame of post-socialist urban development. The calculations performed when choosing a new residence are also taken into account, bearing in mind that after the privatization of the state owned housing fund, a new house becomes an investment which can lead to loss or profit. Also important is the way the predominance of the merchandise aspect of housing causes changes in the experience of habitation. At the same time a differentiation of habitation quality occurs because of the dependency relationship between Florești and Cluj-Napoca. The last section of this paper summarizes the discussions from the previous chapters, providing a synthesis of the results of the field research and a presentation of the answers the papers gives to the research questions.

## Methodology

The information contained in this paper is mainly based on the data obtained during a research made in the Florești neighborhood in November 2011. The main objectives of this research were to highlight the features of the newly built neighborhood as an important example of post-socialist suburbanization. The main method used in gathering this information was the semi-structured interview. As opposed to the structured interview, through which the questions and their order are previously set, also offering answer choices, the semi-structured one offers a list of themes which to be tackled during the discussion. The semi-structured interview therefore allows a greater discussion freedom which can reveal themes or problems relevant to the research which wouldn't have been uncovered using a more restrictive method. This type of interview allows approaching the interviewee with questions regarding more complex problems which can't be accessed through a simple questionnaire.

The second research method is the survey in a delimited area of the neighborhood containing residential estates and houses. The main advantage of using this method is that it allows gathering information from a greater number of people than with the interview. However, because of the restrictive nature of its interrogations, the data gathered through the questionnaire is rather punctual, allowing the creation of a consistent database.

Another main method employed has been observation, more specifically, passive observation without social interaction. It is the most useful method for following the daily activities inside the neighborhood's territory. Observation during different times of the day allow spotting the areas that concentrate social interactions as well as discovering the way the neighborhood space is actually used. This method also proves its utility as the observer, takes part to the Florești dwellers' habitation experiences. It is, of course an incomplete experience, but it offers first-hand information about a fragment of daily habitation. From this point of view, the method gets closer to the participatory observation without social interaction, providing, through self-analysis, additional information regarding the research's main theme.

An important part of the methodology employed in this research is secondary analysis. The main data subjected to this analysis was gathered during the national censuses from 1992, 2002 and 2011. They represent the main source for observing the changes of the population structure of

the city and the evolution of the residential buildings. The censuses offer information about the number of residential space built during the last 20 years in Cluj-Napoca and in Florești, the proportion of home ownership and data about the existing housing fund.

The data regarding the population of Cluj and Florești is useful not only for evaluating the evolution of the total number of inhabitants between 1992, 2002 and 2011, but also provides information regarding transformations of the population structure on different criteria. A small variation of the total population in 20 years can hide important transformations inside that total number regarding different socio-economic factors like age or education. In order to complete the analysis of these changes additional but limited data has been used from the censuses made between 1850 and 1977.

A secondary method of gathering information has been the qualitative analysis of documents, more specifically, the internet articles from the local press regarding Florești. In addition to the main text of the articles, the reader's commentaries to the articles, offering glimpses to the reactions to Florești themed problems by both the city of Cluj-Napoca's and Florești's inhabitants.

## Discussions

The development of the Floresti neighborhood is connected to the transformations concerning the structure of the population and the evolution of the housing production. First of all, we have important transformations among the population of the city. The number of those with high education level rises, while the worker population lowers, and a part of it leaves the city. The number of students is constantly rising, at the same time with the seasonal population of the city. This category starts to represent an increasing proportion of the city (about one third as shown by the numbers estimated by the Research Report of the General Urban Plan). In the same period of time the mass privatization of the state owned housing fund takes place and home ownership reaches 95%. Housing production comes to a sudden halt and stays at very low values, until the emergence of the real estate "boom". As a consequence of the development of the real estate market, the spatial distribution of the neighborhoods changes, fragmenting the neighborhoods in "good" areas which concentrate the high incomes population and "bad areas", which concentrate the pauperizing proletariat.



The years of 2000' bring a return of the total population close to the maximum level reached by Cluj in 1992. The rise of almost 7000 inhabitants, attested on the census from 2011 is the product of an increased migration and not of the natural increase of population, which has a negative tendency. This population flow towards Cluj-Napoca can be related to the larger picture of the situation at the metropolitan area level. Although the big majority of the settlements from this category have lost inhabitants, the total of the metropolitan population had increased. The increase is based on only 3 communes, situated in the close vicinity of Cluj: Floresti, Baciu and Apahida. Florești has by far the most spectacular rising between 2002 and 2011, during which the commune tripled its population, followed by the two other communes, with more modest risings. More information concerning the migration fluxes towards Florești can be obtained from analyzing the structure on the age groups.

The age group structure offers information which indicates the fact that the population has tripled between 2002 and 2011 was based mainly on young people aged between 25 and 35 years old, completing and confirming the data obtained by the questionnaires and the interviews of the field research. The data from the census of 2011 confirm the label of young people neighborhood for Florești, in which the number of those aged between 25 and 40 years old represents 42% from the total population, to which it is added a percent of over 10% of children aged between 0 and 4 years old, almost three times higher than the one in Cluj-Napoca. This configuration of the structure of the population gives to Florești an advantage, compared to Cluj-Napoca, through the fact that it indicates that the population is less affected by the phenomenon of population aging.

Of a great importance in comprehending the relation between the producing of living places and the modifications of the population is the fact that, a great part of the population is seasonal, especially students and migrants who came to work in Cluj-Napoca, being the city which offers most of the work places from the region, even after the beginning of the economic crisis. The hypothesis that the data from the census shows only a part of the real population of the city is confirmed by the spectacular rising of the population from Florești and the general rising of the number of inhabitants from the metropolitan area. This population afflux has not suddenly appeared in those areas, but it is strongly related to the learning institutions and to the activity of the companies which offer working places in Cluj. From an administrative point of view, the Florești dwellers are not part of the city, but they bought the living spaces in this neighborhood or in other suburban areas, because of the combined need of living, studying, or working in the area

of Cluj-Napoca. Considering the rise of the number of inhabitants between 2002 and 2011 in the metropolitan area, results the fact that, until the last census, the city of Cluj actually had a much higher growth than it can be seen through the evolution of the total population. The general situation suggests a growth of inhabitants in the area of Cluj, of a population which had “spread” in the areas situated beyond the limits of the city. The problem of the lack of living spaces in the city is also taking shape, deepened during the 90’s and the beginning of the years 2000, when the production of living spaces was minimal. But the housing problem was fed also from the inside, along with a change of lifestyle that came with the transition to capitalism, which also manifests in the preferences regarding habitation types. The family households become less and less frequent, because the aim is to live in one’s individual space, as opposed to living together with other members of the family, such as parents/brothers/grandparents. The tendency of independent living is also manifested in the case of the young families, which had grown inside a family household and who are looking for their own home. The result of these changes is a tendency of dispersion of the inhabitants in the existing locative housing fund and a decrease of the number of persons per household. This meant practically, that a lower number of inhabitants lives inside the same number of living spaces. This tendency has emphasized the lack of housing problem, in the context of a slowly increasing housing fund and of a big rise of the number of inhabitants. The disappearance of the old housing allocation system from the socialist era, which, through the list assignment and the points, depending on the social situation, could offer a better connection between the living spaces with the type and the components of the household, also contributed to this situation.

The housing production began to recover once the real estate “boom” started, but the increase in living spaces production rose as a response of the private sector to the housing demand and not through state-led housing production, as during the socialist era. The number of state built houses through the National Agency for Housing was far from being sufficient to improve the problem of the lack of housing. But these apartments were built in order to be eventually sold to the dwellers. The rent, which is partially financed by the state, is just in intermediate step until the purchase of the house by its occupants. The population flow towards Florești continues even after the initial enthusiasm during the real estate “boom” and after the problems of the neighborhood became widely known. For many people looking for an apartment (in many cases, their first home), Florești remains the only available location. The following period is, however,

uncertain, from the point of view of the relation between the dynamics of the population and the number of available residential spaces. The construction rate suddenly lowered again after almost 20 years, as a result of the financial crisis, and many projects are abandoned before being finalized, in Florești as well as in Cluj-Napoca.

## Conclusions

The emergence of the Florești neighborhood was influenced by the transformations which Cluj-Napoca has suffered during the transition to capitalism. There have been transformations in the structure of the population which resulted in a decrease of the total population of the city between 1992 and 2002. The layoffs of the workers after the privatization of the industry, during the first half of the 90's determined part of them to migrate to the rural areas. But at the same time, the number of students has constantly increased, as Cluj became the most important University center after the capital, a tendency that continued until the end of the years 2000. Meanwhile, the city started to change its profile, from an industrial city, to a financial and public services city. This change is increasing in the second post-socialist decade, after the economical protectionism policy of the local administration comes to an end, attracting foreign investors.

During this time, housing production comes to a sudden halt after 1989 and remains on very low levels, compared to the socialist period, during the next 15 years. At the beginning of the 90's, the state owned housing fund is privatized, transforming overnight the great mass of the tenants into house owners. Ownership percentage exceeds 95 and maintains this level until present. At the same time, the state withdraws from its role of main producer and allocator of residential spaces, being replaced by private agents.

Although after the hard times of the 90's and especially with the beginning of the city's economical "boom", population has increased because of its economical attractiveness, housing production did not manage to keep up with it. The construction of residential spaces in the city started to increase, mainly taking the form of small expansions of the socialist neighborhoods and new residential areas of low dimensions. However, the gap between the need of housing and the available offer created because housing production was practically inexistent for 15 years, lead to an acute lack of residential spaces.

The young people were the most affected. The numbers of this category have strongly risen because of the city's role as a major university center, whose higher education institutions created

increasingly more students. As at least part of them remained in Cluj-Napoca after finishing their studies, the pressure upon the existing housing fund increased. At the same time, there was a dispersal process inside the already existing housing fund, tied to the need of the young families to live on their own and not within a family household where they share the same space with other family members. The centralized mechanism of housing allocation during socialism, which made some correlation between the residential space offered by the state and the dimension of the household has disappeared when housing were privatized. Once it was created and developed, the real estate market becomes the main element which connects existing housing to those who need them. During the years 2000', the young people born who in the 70's and 80's had grown up and raised their own families, sharing the same living space with their parents. This generation feels is the most affected by the pressure of finding their own home. The fact that they are born in a time when birthrate was higher than after 1989, means that they are most likely part of families with more members than the families with children born during the last 15 years. They lack of the mechanism of housing allocation from the socialist times and their financial situation conditions their access to a home not shared with other members of the family.

After the state housing fund was privatized, the purchase of an apartment involved a higher and higher financial effort. The privatization of the housing fund increases the division between the areas which concentrate the high income and the strongly pauperized population after the privatization of the local industry. The population of the neighborhoods is slowly transforming, by the increase of the population with higher education and the decrease of the population with education lower than gymnasium. The number of workers from the socialist neighborhood decreases, as the pauperized population starts to leave these residential areas in favor of those less desirable, motivated by the possibility of gaining a financial profit from the price difference. The second post-socialist decade brings better living conditions in the socialist neighborhoods through municipality investments for the improvement of the infrastructure and of the urban utilities. A number of large scale commercial spaces are opened, taking advantage of the market offered by the high urban densities from the big neighborhoods like Marasti or Manastur.

Habitation quality improves but is also followed by an increase in the prices of the apartments, which become prohibitive for the young people. At the same time, the habitation costs in the residential areas before 1989 are rising. Because of the housing fund privatization, the maintenance costs of the buildings are supported by the owners and not by the state. They put an

extra financial pressure on the dwellers, through expenses such as those related to the thermal insulation of the blocks. The general idea is that the socialist residential areas become more desirable during the last 20 years, but harder to reach because of the high prices of the apartments and of the extra costs. The young people searching for their own space, whether we speak of young families living with other members of the family or students from outside of Cluj who are renting a place (usually sharing apartment with other people) are put in a difficult position when it comes to buying their own place.

The Florești neighborhood comes as the private sector's answer to this massive housing demand during the first 15 years of capitalism. The construction of Florești is problematic even from its beginnings. The neighborhood's construction took place without previous investments regarding infrastructure and without an urban plan uniting the different residential estates into a coherent plan. The projects of different real estate developers have created high density areas which alternate with farm land and vacant land with an "improvised" and deficient connection to the local infrastructure. The final result, at the end of the years 2000 is a neighborhood with serious problems concerning the habitation quality and a reduced development of the infrastructure that connects it to the city.

Those who occupied these new living spaces close to Cluj were mostly the young people, being the category which was affected the most by the city's lack of housing. Because of the high prices, the apartments and houses from Cluj's neighborhoods are inaccessible, forcing the young people who search for a home to leave the city in favor of Florești. The first fazes of the flow of Cluj dwellers towards to the suburb are mainly movements of attraction. In this first phase, Florești represents a potential neighborhood, a residential area which, once finalized will offer superior habitation conditions to the neighborhoods from the city, the only disadvantage being the distance from the city. Strongly fueled by the euphoria of house buying during the real estate "boom", this stage comes to an end in the moment when the real estate market collapses once the financial crisis settles in. However, the flow of inhabitants from Cluj to Florești continues in the following years, as the young people continue to be the best represented category in this movement. However during this stage, there is a rejection movement towards the suburb. The problems of have Florești started to be well known on a large scale, including the articles from the local press, yet people are still moving to the neighborhood.

These flows of spatial mobility raise the problem of the motivation in the purchase of a living space in a neighborhood which lacks the basic services and utilities. The main reason of moving in Florești, according to the interviews and the questionnaires is the financial part, the accessible price of the apartments. Choosing a new home is reduced to a financial calculation. The purchase of an apartment in Florești is seen as an investment which, in a certain period of time will bring a profit. The neighborhoods of Cluj are accessible, but only as rents, not as private property. Buying an apartment in Florești using a bank loan means paying a monthly rate. As the value of this rate is close to the level of a monthly rent for an apartment in the city, the Florești option is superior, because once the loan is repaid, the apartment's buyer will be its owner.

This approach is strongly influenced by the transforming of housing itself, whose aspect as a merchandise which can bring profit becomes predominant after the massive increase in home ownership. The living space is reduced to a mathematical ratio, surface/price, placed on a map which was "cleaned" by the qualitative aspects of a residential area which exceed the boundaries of the apartment. On this abstract map, Florești becomes a desirable area, because it presents the best (or financially accessible) ratio compared to other areas of the city. Habitation itself is reduced to the immediate space of habitation, inside the limits of the apartment as private property. The situation is exceptionally illustrated in the case of Florești, through the way the neighborhood was built, as the real estate developers did not offer a residential area for an urban community, but the well delimited space of the apartment (the surface/price ratio), repeated at the level of the whole residential estate and of the whole neighborhood.

There is an almost total lack of anything that exceeds this immediate habitation. Habitation itself is reduced to this well delimited space of the apartment. It is a malleable space, subjected to the will and imagination of the owner which invests materially and emotionally in a home as close to ideal as possible. But by choosing Florești the outside is sacrificed, a space of unsafety and ugliness, only used as a transitory area towards the city or towards another apartment. The real habitation experience in Florești is that of a withdrawal towards the interior space.

However, this withdrawal inside the limits of private property is not wholly assumed. Under the abstract map of quantitative ratios lies a series of negative qualities of the rural\urban space of Florești which leave a lot of habitation related needs unfulfilled. The need for parks, for playgrounds, for leisure and commercial spaces creates frustrations which can only be solved by accessing the urban utilities of Cluj. The outer space of Florești is replaced with the one of Cluj-

Napoca, but this dependency creates a stratification of habitation mediated by the daily access to the city through a means of transportation. The habitation experience becomes to a certain degree less problematic, for example, for those who own a personal car, by facilitating the access to the public and semi-public spaces of Cluj. Therefore differences in habitation quality appear between those who own a personal car and the ones who depend on the inefficient mass transit system, but they also appear between the members of the same family. Owning a family car automatically advantages the family member which uses it most, common usage being more often not possible because of the difficulty of synchronizing the daily schedules of the family.

The problems of Florești also manifest themselves at an identity level. The Florești dweller identity is not assumed by its inhabitants who are dissatisfied with the actual state of the neighborhood. The numerous negative aspects of its outer space and for habitation determine a refusal of identification with the residence area. Florești has an ambiguous status in relation to Cluj, being, for its dwellers, rather an annex of the city or a problematical and undefined area which is not worth assuming as an identity level. It is an image which contrasts with the local authorities' speech, which make a clear separation between city and suburb, almost to the point of a rivalry relationship.