

## HOME AND WORKSPACE IN THE TRADITIONAL URBAN FABRIC OF BUCHAREST/

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**Abstract.** Working from home has been present in the majority of the historical city centres, the house with shop or workshop being one of the most common types of urban dwelling over the centuries. Some of these buildings, which made up a big part of the built environment, are still preserved today, but most of the time they go unnoticed. Following the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a major shift towards working from home. This had direct implications especially on urban housing which had to also accommodate the workspace, making it difficult to handle all the new challenges that appeared trying to balance the complex relationship between them. In this context, the historical buildings that managed to incorporate both hypostases may represent valuable resources for building resilient housing and workspaces in the future. The study will be based on some local works, as well as some case studies from the Bucharest's urban space, relying at the same time on both bibliographic and archival research. Therefore, the paper outlines some typologies present in Bucharest, exploring the houses of the traditional urban fabric that combined the home and the workspace in search of a better understanding of their organization, characteristics, and the potential that they can have in defining alternative approaches in the current post-pandemic context in which a significant number of people is working from home.

**Introduction.** With the increase in recent years of the number of people working from home or with the adoption of a hybrid system in which the time spent at the workplace alternates with working remotely, also encouraged by the technological development which has influenced many aspects of the daily life, it becomes necessary to reimagine the workspace in relation to the home. The urban dwelling space has undergone the most transformations [1], including activities that usually take place outside the home. This led to numerous problems, which originate primarily from the fact that these spaces were not designed for this purpose.

Even if such trends existed before, they were much lower, the Covid-19 pandemic triggering a significant increase in the number of people working remotely [2]. Although the pandemic has ended, studies show that the phenomenon continues and the number of people working from home or in a hybrid system is still considerably high [3]. The development of technology and its use in more sectors and by more people will continue to support these ways of working [4], a fact also highlighted by people's preferences for the advantages brought by working from home [5]. The stabilization of these trends has been observed in recent years, and remote working, even for only part of the week, seems to continue [6], hence the need to find solutions that better adapt to the current and future situation.

However, working from home is not a new concept. On the contrary, it has been very present over time in most urban centres [7]. Although these

forms of housing differ according to the territory and culture in which they appeared, they share many common characteristics [8]. The study of these buildings that combine living and working and that have functioned throughout the centuries becomes relevant in the current situation, being able to constitute a basis for defining new approaches.

Working from home has always existed to a certain extent. It was very present in most cities until relatively recently when, with the industrial revolution and functional zoning, the separation between home and workplace became more pronounced. Things began to change starting from the '80s with the development of the digital instruments that led to the emergence of new possibilities in terms of working remotely [6], but these trends were quite low until 2020 when, because of the pandemic, a large part of the population started working from home [9].

Frances Holliss refers to this type of construction that combines the home and the workplace as *workhome*, in the absence of an established name. Although one of the most common types of housing throughout time, it has gone largely unnoticed [7]. These constructions have been present all over the world since ancient times. Even if they take different forms depending on the culture in which they appeared, they have many common characteristics: they are located in areas where trade has developed and favoured a high density, they connect the commercial or manufacturing activity to the street and provide greater privacy to the residential spaces, they contribute to diverse and lively neighbourhoods and have a certain degree of flexibility over time [8].

**The traditional urban fabric.** Groups of this type of buildings, which include the workspace on the ground floor and the living spaces on the upper floors, are still preserved today in the historical centres of the cities. They are also often found across the Romanian territory, in cities that were once important for commercial activities. This is also the case of Bucharest, where the traditional urban fabric superposed on the historical core of the city is described as preserving a large part of the 19th century commercial centre, consisting of buildings aligned to the street in a closed arrangement with a commercial ground floor and one or more residential levels [10].

Within the Romanian territory, we can talk about local commerce of transit, the important connection was both with Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire through the Danube ports, the Romanian Principalities being outside the main routes of the European space. The road went along the Dâmbovița River and connected the towns over the mountains through the Rucăr-Bran Pass [11]. Market towns developed along this route, one of them being Bucharest, which became an important place to stop between the Danube and Târgoviște and encouraged strong economic growth [12]. The merchant's and craftsmen's houses appear around the Princely Court, with shops and workshops on the ground floor [13]. This is where the first core of the city is formed, this central part with an urban character contrasting with the immediate neighbourhoods that will retain a rural aspect for a long time [14].

These buildings can still be found today following the oldest streets, the radial ones such as Calea Moșilor, Calea Griviței, Calea Rahovei, Calea Șerban Vodă, Calea Calărași, Calea Plevnei, Calea Văcărești or the circular

ones such as Lipscani, Sfinții Apostoli, Sfânta Vineri, Doamnei, which are still present in the structure of the city [15]. The successive stages of urban development also contain the previous phases, and their analysis can represent a basis for understanding the current situation and formulating responses to subsequent circumstances [16].

Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, an extensive process of modernization of the city begins, with numerous new regulations that influence the built environment, urban restructuring, and new construction types. Industry development changes the urban structure, and the new working-class districts are very different from the existing ones [15]. Along with this, the concept of housing also changes, more apartment buildings are built, the new typology of multi-family housing spread, and, at the same time, the trend of vertical development [17]. Moving the workspace mainly outside the home had a strong impact on its configuration.

**The house with a shop or workshop.** Analysing the spatial organization of these 19th century buildings that combine living and working spaces, we can identify certain types and operating principles based on the relationship between the two types of spaces, those dedicated to domestic activities and those related to work. In the archive plans, we can see how they were originally designed and the way that they were functioning in that time. Even if they have preserved their specific character to nowadays, they often have undergone modifications due to changes in functions and ownership, which also demonstrates the flexibility and resilience over time of this type of construction.

Studying their original configurations, the first type that we can identify is the one in which the access to the residential spaces, usually located on the first floor and accessed via a staircase located deep inside, is made through the workspace, generally a workshop or a shop at the ground floor, this being closely connected to the public space (FIGURE 1). The second type is the one in which there is a separate access from the street for both residential and work-related spaces, while still maintaining good internal communication (FIGURE 2). Another type is the one in which the access to the residential spaces is through a side courtyard, at the end of which there is a staircase leading to the upper floor, the workspaces on the ground floor retaining direct access from the street but also a connection with the domestic part of the house (FIGURE 3). Finally, there is also the situation in which the access to the residential spaces is through a central passageway, with the workspaces being accessed mainly from the public space, but also from the more private area (FIGURE 4).

Even though these types present different spatial configurations (FIGURE 5), there can be observed many common characteristics such as having different spaces dedicated to the various functions, the combination of living and working spaces and good communication between them, the strong connection of workspaces with the public space and a gradual transition from public to private, as well as a great flexibility, the spatial organization allowing for different scenarios of use over time. The functions are mainly divided by different levels, the work-related spaces on the ground floor and the domestic ones on the upper floors, like in the first example, and where

they are also horizontally juxtaposed the workspace is always closer to the street and the residential spaces withdraw to the more distant parts of the plot, allowing for a gradual transition from public to private. The separate access to the domestic area allows for a greater delimitation of different functions, and even if the spaces communicate, there is a clear delimitation of the residential spaces and the workspaces. Also, where there is not a continuous front like in the third example, the courtyard also becomes the access to the residential spaces. In all cases the workspace is placed on the ground floor, with direct access and large windows to the street, the main façade at this level being entirely dedicated to it, as in the first and third examples, or divided into a smaller area for the private access that leads to the residential spaces and a larger area that corresponds to the shop/workshop, as in the second and fourth examples, establishing a strong connection with the urban space. This also allows for a wide range of activities that can be carried out in the workspace, being separated from the home and also on the street level, as well as convertible to domestic spaces if needed, due to the fact that there is always an internal communication between them, even when there is separate access to the residential spaces, thus further supporting the idea that they were originally meant to function together.

**The current situation of the home workspace.** During the communist period, radical changes took place regarding housing. Large complexes of apartment buildings were built, developed vertically, and organized according to new principles, which, together with changes in the organization of work, led to important transformations in the structure of the city and society [15]. In addition to the workspace, many more activities were externalized, the home ended up having minimal dimensions [18]. Analysing the plans of the typical apartment buildings of this period, it can be observed that no workspace is provided within the home. This still represents the situation for a great part of the population and the reality they face when the issue of working from home arises. In Bucharest, over 80% of homes are located in apartment blocks built during the socialist period [19]. In terms of new residential buildings, compared to the previous period, a shift can be observed from large housing complexes to smaller projects, both individual and collective housing, based on private investments [20]. New construction after 1990 was limited to the few vacant lots inside the city, but especially outside it, on the outskirts, in the so-called “residential parks”, especially dedicated to those with high incomes [19]. This led to disconnected neighbourhoods, sometimes even lacking in basic services, isolated communities, and a strong association with a certain social status [21].

Regarding the home workspace, the most common scenario nowadays is the one in which it is integrated into existing domestic spaces, most often by using a space that also has other functions, like the dining area or the bedroom, or, in some cases, by transforming a space in the home into a dedicated workspace. On the other hand, in the case of new homes, based on the analysis of different project plans, there has been an increased concern in recent years for providing a separate space for working from home in response to the contemporary changes, but this is still a small case reported to the largest part of the population. However, regardless of the situation, the home workspace is found today in the private sphere,

losing contact with the outside, both in the case of individual homes and especially in the case of collective ones, a fact also favoured by new working methods based on digital tools that allow for virtual communication. Working from home has become an exception in the last century, which is reflected in today's spaces. Thus, most people now live in spaces that were not designed for work and often with a low degree of flexibility, which leads to numerous problems related to the integration of the workspace into the domestic setting. Having a dedicated workspace at home is still an exception and not the norm.

**Working from home in the past and nowadays.** Significant differences can be observed between working from home in the past and today. First, technology has made it possible to work from anywhere, without the need for a separate space, which has led to the emergence of various problems related to the overlap of contrasting activities and the confusion of boundaries between various aspects of life, to the detriment of a clear separation of different functions. The contact between the home and the outside space has been significantly reduced compared to previous periods and that gradual succession from public to private, with all the intermediate layers, has been lost. In the case of traditional housing, the public space on the ground floor becomes an extension of the street, and the street becomes an extension of the interior space where people can meet and interact. The juxtaposition of these buildings and the relationships that form, together with the all-day habitation of the neighbourhoods has led to a strengthening of a sense of community, intimacy, and belonging [7], in contrast to the sense of isolation and loneliness many feel today, this being identified by many studies as the main problem when it comes to working from home in the current situation [22]. The traditional shop/workshop dwelling exists only in proximity to others and only functions as part of a distinct urban context [8]. Also, in this case, greater flexibility of the spaces can be observed, allowing different usage scenarios over time, the limits between which the spaces can adapt today being generally much narrower. Finally, working and living spaces were designed together, in contrast to the current situation, where they are mostly designed separately.

**Possible new approaches.** Following this analysis, we can identify possible principles to follow in designing homes and workspaces that are more suitable for current and future needs in the case of remote working, such as a clear delimitation between the different functions, as well as a greater flexibility of the spaces, the proximity of the home and the workspace and its close relationship with the public space, which also implies the capacity of these spaces to support human interaction and communities. In this regard, given the problems people face in the current situation, especially the feeling of isolation and loneliness, one of the main differences between working from home today and in the past is represented by the lack of real contact with other people and with the public space, so a central element in defining better solutions may be to encourage human interaction and the coagulation of communities. The capacity of the spaces to accommodate and protect the human experience [23], to create opportunities for meeting other people and supporting communities, as well as reestablishing the relationship with the urban space could constitute a response to the challenges generated by the reintegration of the workspace into the home today.

**Conclusion.** The period before 1900 was the one when working from home was the most common, with the workspace gradually disappearing from the home in the following century. Thus, the analysis of the traditional urban fabric seems to be the most relevant in searching for solutions that combine living and working spaces, as well as the qualities of these constructions and the principles according to which they work may constitute a basis for defining future approaches. With the development of technology, especially after the pandemic, we can talk about a return of the workspace within the home, hence the need to analyse and understand the complexity of the current situation.

Analysing these 19th century buildings that combine the home and the workplace, certain types of spatial configuration can be identified depending on the relationship that the two types of spaces have, such as the one in which the access to the residential spaces is through the workspaces, the one in which there is separate access from the street for each of them, but still maintaining internal communication, the one in which the access to the residential spaces is through a side courtyard and the one in which the access to the residential spaces is through a central passageway, in both last cases the workspaces also keeping an access directly from the street. Within all these spatial configurations, common operating principles can be observed, such as the joining of dwelling and working spaces and good communication between them, the existence of different spaces dedicated to different functions, as well as greater flexibility of use, the spatial organization allowing for different usage scenarios over time, the strong relationship of the workspaces with the public space, and a gradual transition from public to private.

Comparing these observations with the current situation, significant differences can be noticed. Given that the feeling of isolation has been identified as the main problem when it comes to working from home today, a significant difference is represented by the decrease in real-life human interactions and reduced contact with the public space. Thus, an essential element in shaping better solutions would be represented by the capacity of the spaces to encourage human interaction and to support the coagulation of communities, which highlights the importance of the relationship between the architectural space and community dynamics and between the interior space and the urban context, very present in the traditional urban fabric.

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### Figures.

FIGURE 1 – House on Stavropoleos Street, 1874. Source: Arhivele Naționale, Fond PMB-Tehnic, File 11/1874.

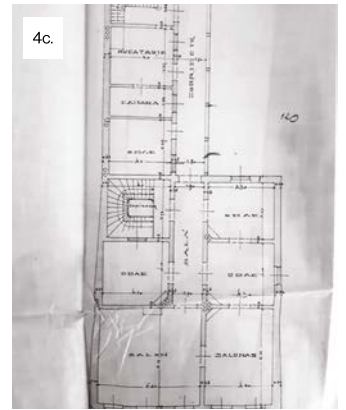
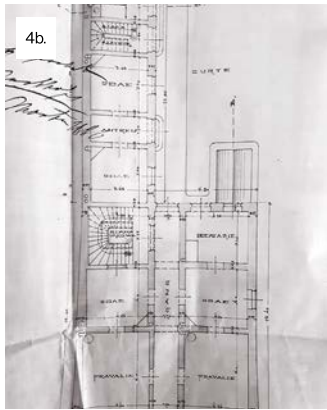
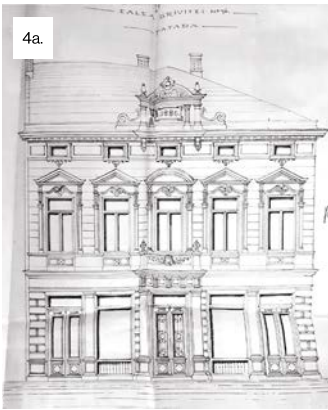
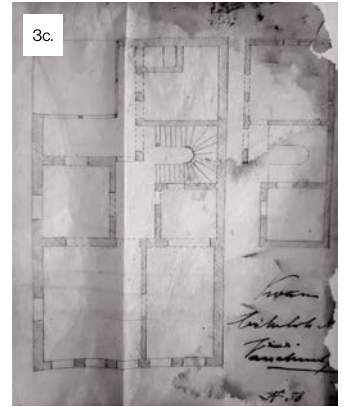
FIGURE 2 – House on Calea Moșilor, 1860. Source: Arhivele Naționale, Fond PMB-Tehnic, File 33/1860.

FIGURE 3 – House on Calea Moșilor, No.74, 1864. Source: Arhivele Naționale, Fond PMB-Tehnic, File 35/1864.

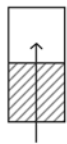
FIGURE 4 – House on Calea Griviței, No.74, 1886. Source: Arhivele Naționale, Fond PMB-Tehnic, File 16/1886.

FIGURE 5 – Types of 19th century buildings that combine residential spaces and workspaces. Source: the author.

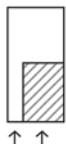




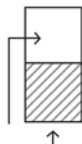
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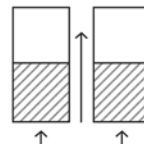
access to the residential spaces through the workspaces



separate access to residential spaces from the street



access to the residential spaces through a side courtyard



access to the residential spaces through a central passageway