

HIDDEN FIGURES OF BUCHAREST/

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Abstract. Based on archival research and theoretical studies this paper addresses the problem of the multi-storey apartment buildings in Bucharest of the 1930's, highlighting them as one of the most significant typologies in European urban housing history. Following clear principles that incorporate the new ideas of modern architecture along with the mentalities and the morals of the time, these buildings reveal a subtle relationship between tradition and innovation, that is to be discussed.

Concerning this matter, a work-in-progress collection of remarkable buildings, exponents of the open courtyard typology, will be reviewed centring the discourse on their typological autonomy and relationship with the urban space. The buildings to be discussed include Luterană 3 & Calea Victoriei 122 (by arch. Tiberiu Niga), Luterană 5 & Nicolae Bălcescu 24 (by arch. State Balosin), Vasile Conta 7-9 (by arch. Eugen Botez).

The courtyard, along with the distribution system, will be subjected to analysis through the utilisation of vectorised plans. This analysis will serve to identify and recognise the courtyard as a fundamental spatial device, operating at the level of building composition and plot insertion.

The architects explored various formulas for the courtyard, imagining it as a garden, entrance or street, double-crossing courtyard, terrace or other combinations that have the potential to generate a variety of forms and paths. These qualities were no longer considered in housing projects carried out following the postwar years.

Making no distinction between public and private, placed in the extension of public space, the courtyard experienced its final moment of glory through this typology, after a tremendously, long history.

This paper aims to draw attention to the hidden figures of modernist architecture, encompassing the buildings themselves, the courtyards as distinct elements and the architects behind them. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight the worrying phenomenon of a significant architectural typology (multi-storey apartment buildings with courtyards) becoming devoid of its original meaning at the level of urban practice and human consciousness.

Introduction. This work is part of an ongoing study started 3 years ago which proposes to revisit the typology of the inter-war multi-storey apartment buildings or block of flats in Bucharest of the 1930's. This constructive type is identified in the palimpsest of the city as a particular layer, a distinct topography in which one can identify a series of fundamental ideas of modern architecture in a hybrid version where tradition and modernity coexist.

The project involves an archival research and on site visits on discovering the buildings concerned. The aim is to contribute with new information to the writings on Bucharest's residential architecture as well as to get to know from a new perspective some of the architects who realized these projects. Among them are State Baloşin (1885-1953), Tiberiu Niga (1906-1979) and Jean Monda (1900-1987).

Unlike the typology of collective housing as defined by the Modern Movement, the inter-war block of flats did not require a change of plot, rather being the result of a progressive evolution of the individual home, based on density and rentability within which the courtyard is addressed by the architects as a structuring spatial element. It is the case of the constructive type to be discussed here, the open courtyard building or the double building, a typological formula that first appeared at the dawn of the 20th century in Western Europe which was not to be resumed by architects in the following decades.

The open courtyard building in Bucharest. The open courtyard building is characterized by the arrangement of the built mass along an axis of symmetry, usually with an U-shaped courtyard in the middle, subtly mediating the rule of the alignment. The typology of collective dwellings with open courtyard is differentiated in the built urban fabric by the duality it shows in terms of the independence of the volumetric proposal in relation to the site's conditions and its adaptability to the context, through which, without giving up its essential characteristics, negotiates its position in the context.

In the beginning, the study proposes a quantitative approach. This implies the identification of a significant number of inter-war collective buildings with open courtyard in Bucharest. In order to ensure the relevance of the results obtained we highlight visible and noticeable characteristics such as: the geometric rigor at plot level inscription, plan typology, the complexity of the ground floor access device, the distributive structure and its relationship with the exterior, current floor organization, architectural materials and details such as fittings, staircases, banisters, flooring materials, numerals and lettering, details of the combination of finishes, stereotomies, etc.

Therefore, we have identified a number of 18 such examples of collective buildings with open courtyard, all located in the central area of the capital – Bucharest. Our research entails documenting the original building plans in the archives of the Municipality of Bucharest, digitalizing them and analyzing and processing the information. In this process, we have at this moment 5 completed case studies: Luterană 5 (1932, arch. State Baloşin), Luterană 3 (1934, arch. Tiberiu Niga), Nicolae Bălcescu 24 (1934, arch. State Baloşin), Vasile Conta 7-9 (1940, arch. Eugen Botez).

Until now, following our archive research, we have found only data on the personality of the owners of these buildings but not on the strategy they are pursuing with such investments, nor information about the architect's perspective on choosing this particular typology. Even if we are talking about a particular typology of settlement on the plot and of dwelling, so far no statement made by the aforementioned architects have been identified to argue the architectural gesture. If we were to time and place this type

of intervention, the building on Luterană 5 apparently opens the series of open courtyard buildings in the case of Bucharest in the year 1932 and is being ended with Vasile Conta 7-9 in the year 1940.

From a qualitative perspective, our study takes into account the information obtained from the archive research, alongside with a series of writings, previous studies with reference to this type of building, mostly belonging to French authors. In their opinion the appearance of the open courtyard denotes the interest of architects for hygienism and its principles, offering solutions that favor the sunlight and the views. [1]

The open courtyard is seen as a palliative solution to the haussmanian housing block courtyard. [2] At once, as can be easily noticed, this version allowed the architects to multiply the opportunity for windows using the architectural language of the modern times. Therefore, more apartments could have equal access to the street.

A notable forerunner in the history of modern architecture is the building at 25a Rue Franklin (1903) designed by architect August Perret in Paris. This apartment block marked the transition from “the city of constraining boundaries, the city of the sidewalk”, to the city as landscape [3]. In this project where all the rooms converging on the spectacle of the city, Perret hybridized “the maison à loyer, or apartment block, product of a capitalist economy, and the villa, product of an individualistic society”[4].

Retaining the reference above we focused on Romanian historiographical research and, until this stage of the study no specific records of the open courtyard building in the Romanian historiography have been found. On the other hand it is known that the first decades of the 20th century was an extraordinary period of invention and diffusion of new models for the urban housing originating from Western Europe.

Nonetheless, the analysis is also concerned with the interior spatial organization of the buildings, apartments and common parts of the documented apartment blocks reveals two aspects: firstly, the link with the specific spatial composition of 19th century bourgeois apartments and secondly the carefully chosen relationship of the interior spaces to the exterior courtyard.

If we were to make an analogy with these analyzed apartments and their spatial organisation, we have identified this courtyard space as having the qualities of an open air Hall, a room for representation specific to the plans of the bourgeois apartments. This type of courtyard, open to the street, has the quality of offering passers-by a fragment of private space without restraint, enriching the street atmosphere. However, depending on the depth of field of each courtyard, a scenographic effect is manifested, more or less pronounced depending on the situation or the context.

The analogy with the Hall, such as Luterană 3 or Nicolae Bălcescu 24 (Figure 1), is suggested by the presence of either a fine low-height transparent fence or the elevation of the access platform which a few steps as in the case of Vasile Conta 7-9. Here the courtyard more than the Hall room, have an pronounced urban character, literally being a city-oriented scene which is not necessarily seeking for privacy and intimacy, but rather showing its beauty and importance in relationship with the city (Figure 2).

Even if it differs from the recognized typology of the open courtyard block

of flats, the building located on Calea Victoriei 122, designed by Tiberiu Niga, caught our attention and was included in this study for its relevance to the underlying ideology. From a typological point of view, the presence of an interior courtyard in the middle of the plot, refers to the previous century building type. The study confirmed that Tiberiu Niga worked here on the footprint of a previously existing building and under very strict regulations. [5]

Essentially, Calea Victoriei 122 is a typological interpretation of a former building (owned by Maria and Christu Simionescu). The decision to completely replace it with a new construction (the one that can be seen today) was a result of the failure of the two intervention projects that attempted to adjust the old building to the regulations imposed by the Alignment Plan for Calea Victoriei. [6]

The remarkable urban qualities of the inner courtyard (Figure 3), however, demonstrate an interest in connecting the depth of the plot with the city. In this sense, there are two passage ways that connect the street with the inner courtyard. The interest in connecting the depth of the plot with the city is an idea that Tiberiu Niga would also experiment on Luterană 3, a hybrid project that anticipated the abolition of the street in the collective housing projects that proliferated in the post-war period. Thus, we could talk about a type that furthers itself from the strict relationship with the plot limits that we see in the case of the haussmanian housing block and proposes a courtyard that is in close contact with the city, an urban and public space.

In addition to the pronounced public character of the ground floor, which constantly aims to involve an enclosed courtyard in the public atmosphere of the street, our analysis of the plans highlights the regulatory lines underlying the spatial composition of the plan. The research included a graphic study of the documented plans, which revealed the existence of a set of geometric figures that communicate, explain the sequence of operations at the level of the projected plan. The results were presented in the expanded version in a catalog dedicated to this research published in 2024. [7]

Above, an example within our methodology of research in which we retrace the hidden geometry of both built and unbuilt space and its relationship with the urban space and the distribution path through the building from the most public space to the most private one, can be observed (Figure 4).

Conclusion. If we were to come to a preliminar conclusion, buildings with open courtyard convey the idea of liberation from the duality of street-house. The courtyard of these buildings is not so much a space in opposition to the public urban space, but rather a place capable of making a series of connections between the domestic universe of the dwellings and the city.

During the research process, the functioning of these courtyards seemed to be closely related to the architectural, cultural and economic context of their appearance. For decades the architecture of the block of flats generally speaking is confronted with the rapid evolution of lifestyles. Making no difference between public and privat, placed in the extension of public space, the Bucharest courtyard experienced in the 1930's it is the final moment of glory through the typology of the double apartment building.

Today, most of these open courtyards, regarding the way the inhabitants relate to them, manifest a form of autonomy and passivity: they do not reveal any interest in everyday uses or activities on the part of those who live in these buildings, going unnoticed by most passers-by. In a few examples, nature appears, giving the street a picturesque touch, such as the Luterană 5 by State Baloșin and Luterană 3 by Tiberiu Niga (Figure 5, a, b). In other examples, open courtyards come as a continuation of the street towards an in-between space (Figure 5, c). Overall, the fascination with these architecture stems from the tension in its relationship with the street, the way it simultaneously engages and disengages the existing urban fabric offering an optimistic model of city densification while preserving its original qualities.

References.

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4. Op. Cit.p.95
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7. Mihaela, PELTEACU (ed.). Imobile de Raport: E. Botez, S. Baloșin, H. Delavrancea-Gibory, M. Maller, T. Niga. *Editura universitară “Ion Mincu”, 2024.*

Figures.

FIGURE 0 - Case studies located on the map of the center of Bucharest.

FIGURE 1 – Luterană 3 ground floor. The original drawing can be found in he archives of the Municipality of Bucharest, nr. of file: 433/1934 IV Green, Nicolae Bălcescu ground floor. The original drawing can be found in he archives of the Municipality of Bucharest, nr. of file: 95/ 1934 I Yellow.

FIGURE 2 – Vasile Conta ground floor. The original drawing can be found in he archives of the Municipality of Bucharest, nr. of file: 222/ 1940 I Yellow.

FIGURE 3 – Calea Victoriei 122 building façade, taken from the authors' personal archives.

FIGURE 4 – Hidden geometry analysis on Calea Victoriei 122, drawings made by Mihaela Pelteacu.

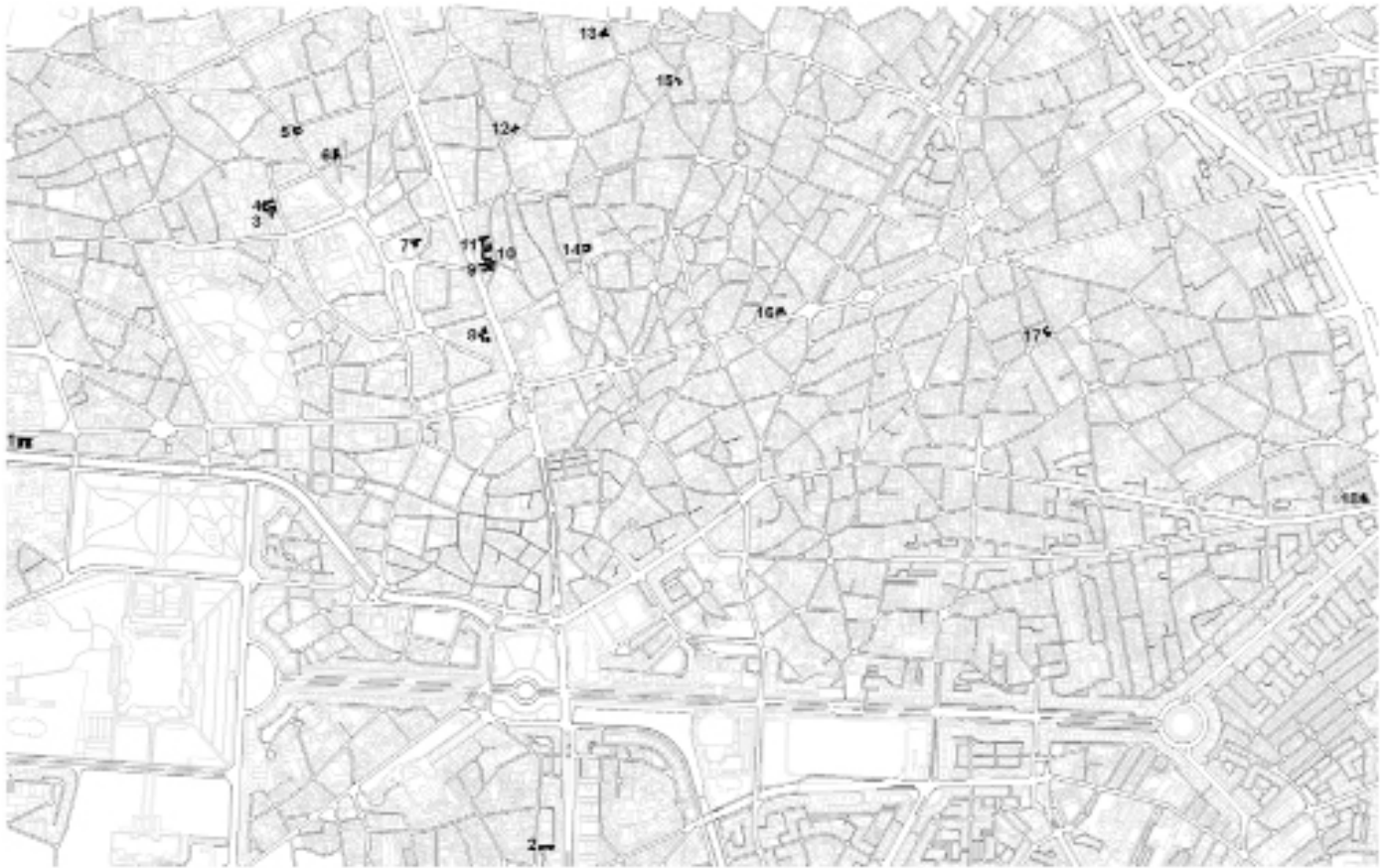
FIGURE 5 – Open Courtyard perspectives from Luterană 3 (a), Luterană 5 (b), Nicolae Bălcescu 24 (c), taken from the authors' personal archives.

Locations on the map of Bucharest.

The map shows all the study cases included in the project, although this article showcases only a couple of them.

1. Independence Blv. 86;
2. Șerban Voda Street 39;
3. Luterana Street 3;
4. Luterana Street 5;
5. Calea Victoriei Street 122;
6. George Enescu Street 7;
7. Boteanu Street 3;
8. Nicolae Balcescu Street 9;
9. Nicolae Balcescu Street 24;
10. Vasile Conta Street 3-5;
11. Vasile Conta Street 7-9;
12. A. D. Xenopol Street 3;
13. Aurel Vlaicu Street 39;
14. Louis Calderon Street 36;
15. Icoanei Street 38;
16. Carol I Blv. 57;
17. Popa Nan Street 32;
18. Calarasi Street 319a.

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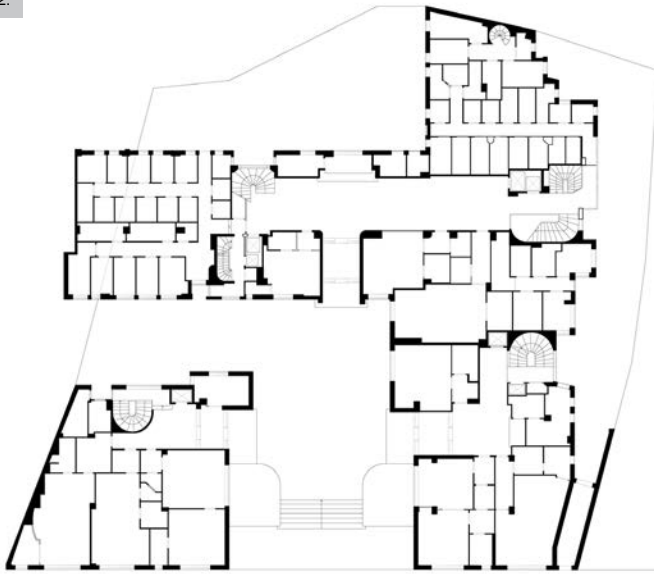


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2.

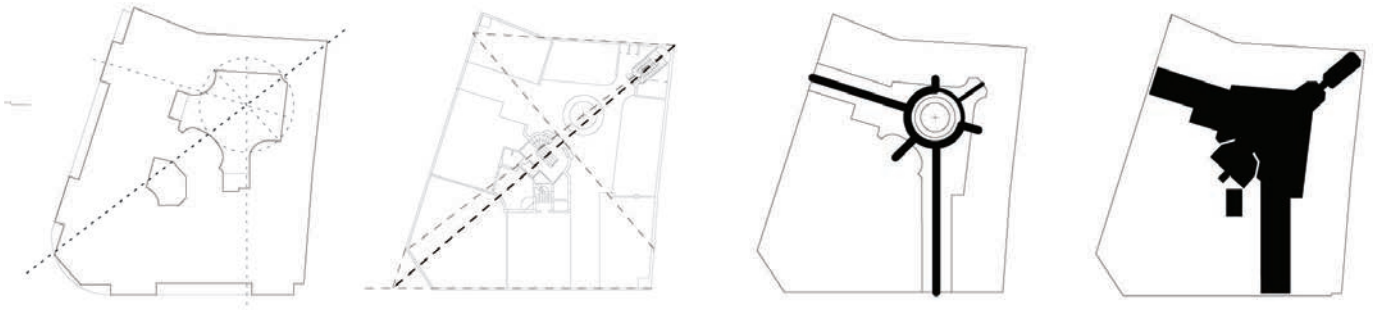


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3.



4.



5.

