

## DYNAMICS OF RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN THE BUCHAREST METROPOLITAN AREA. ALTERNATIVE TO THE INNER CITY

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**Abstract.** La chute du régime communiste en 1989 a conduit à toute une série de changements dans la société roumaine, avec des conséquences également sur les préférences résidentielles des individus. La maison individuelle, vue comme obsolète, signe d'une ascendance rurale durant la période antérieure, commence d'être revalorisée, comme un symbole de la réussite sociale et d'une garantie pour une meilleure qualité de vie par rapport aux grands ensembles collectifs. Cette réorientation correspond à un nouveau type de société qui s'affirme après 1989, une fois avec le système de production post-fordiste. Dans la zone métropolitaine bucarestoise, ces changements sont particulièrement évidents, se traduisant par un changement radical de paradigme en matière de mobilité résidentielle, en passant d'une mobilité de type rural-urbain à une essentiellement de type urbain-rural, dans le contexte de l'apparition du processus de périurbanisation. Ces mouvements de population se reflètent tant dans le bilan migratoire qu'au niveau des permis de construire ou au niveau des logements récemment bâtis. Les grands gagnants de ces mouvements sont les communes localisées dans la première couronne périurbaine de la capitale et celles qui se trouvent au nord. Ainsi, la ville de Bragadiru connaît une hausse démographique, appuyée surtout sur un solde migratoire, de 117%, alors que Bucarest enregistre une diminution de la population dans la même période de -9%. Dans la période analysée, l'ampleur de ce phénomène laisse la discussion ouverte sur la perspective d'un «l'exode urbain bucarestoïse» avec de gros points d'interrogation sur la qualité du nouveau tissu urbain qui en résulte.

**Keywords:** *residential mobility, post-fordism, urban sprawl, urban exodus, urban fabric*

### 1. Introduction

The period 1990-2010 is marked by an entire series of radical changes for the Romanian society, these changes being also reflected in the transition to a post-fordist model of urban fabric, with a particular preference for the single-family homes.

A whole set of political, socio-economical or cultural elements influenced this phenomenon. Among these factors we should insist on the repeal on December 27th 1989, of the Law no. 57/1974 - Systematic planning for urban and rural districts Act and of the Decree no.68/1976 concerning the domicile change from other districts into large cities. Thus, on the one hand the agricultural lands were opened to urbanization and on the other hand this measure raised the barrier of the residential mobility to and from rural areas surrounding Bucharest.

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In 1991 it was also adopted the Law no.18, restoring the ownership right on the agricultural lands to their former owners, paving the way to a free real estate market.

This legislative gap continued until 2001, allowing the opening to urbanization of more and more important areas. The document that slowed down somewhat this trend was adopted in February 2011 (G.O. 7 I 2011). The clear-cut and stable limits of the built areas of the localities from the communist period are replaced by the fragmentations and perpetual transformations of these ones. The new residential developments are functionally linked to the presence of the big city, being the reflection of its socio-professional transformations and the result of the incoherence or even of the lack of public politics concerning urban housing.

Thus, in the last two decades, we were the witnesses of the appearance of a new urban form, unknown until now in its actual manifestation: the urban sprawl suburbs. Although this has been a well-known phenomenon in U.S.A. and in Western Europe for many decades, centuries even (beginning of the 19th century in USA), in the Metropolitan Area of Bucharest it appears as a particular socio-economic context and it has a different way of expression.

### ***1.1 Brief theoretical debate:***

As a trans disciplinary subject, it penetrated into different research areas, becoming the predilection themes in domains such as social and political sciences, urban planning, economics or spatial sciences.

In the European and North American scientific literature, the urban exodus has a much greater scientific visibility, this element being discussed from multiple perspectives. It has been treated for different geographical areas, in the USA by Kennet K. Jackson (1985), Dolores Hayden (2003), Robert Bruegman (2005) and many others. In Europe, Pierre Merlin (2009), Chris Couch (2007), Harry W. Richardson (2004) and Leo van den Berg (1987) are some of the many contributors to this subject.

The economic ways of action in the land market that favoured the suburban pavilion expansion were explained in the work of William Alonso (1964) Masahisa Fujita (1989) or in the reports of the CERTU (1993, 1999, 2004, and 2005). In parallel, this type of urban development was discussed, by Gregory Andrusz (1996), Vincent Fouchier (1999) Patrick Le Galès( 2002) or Saskia Sassen (1991).

## **2. Methodology**

In order to observe the dynamics of the residential constructions in BMA, there were taken into consideration the demographic indicators (numerical evolution of population, natural growth, and migration growth) and those related to the number of building permits and the number of new buildings completed during each year. The data from the National Statistics Institute were processed using GIS techniques and complemented with field studies.

The study perimeter for this approach is the BMA, in order to capture the global changes that occurred in the Bucharest influence area. This project corresponds to metropolitan area boundary adopted by the Centre for Urban and Metropolitan Planning Bucharest in partnership with the Geography Department, UB and ASE Bucharest between 2004-2005. Although the project was commissioned and funded by the Bucharest City Hall, for political reasons, it has not been implemented.

It includes 94 settlements belonging to five counties plus Bucharest (Figure 1). 14 of these have the status of urban districts (Budești, Fundeni and Oltenița-Calarasi county / Bolintin Vale, Mihăilești- Giurgiu county / Buftea Bragadiru Chitila Măgurele, Otopeni,

Pantelimon, Popesti Leordeni and Voluntari-Ilfov county, / Bucharest Municipality) and 80 are rural districts.

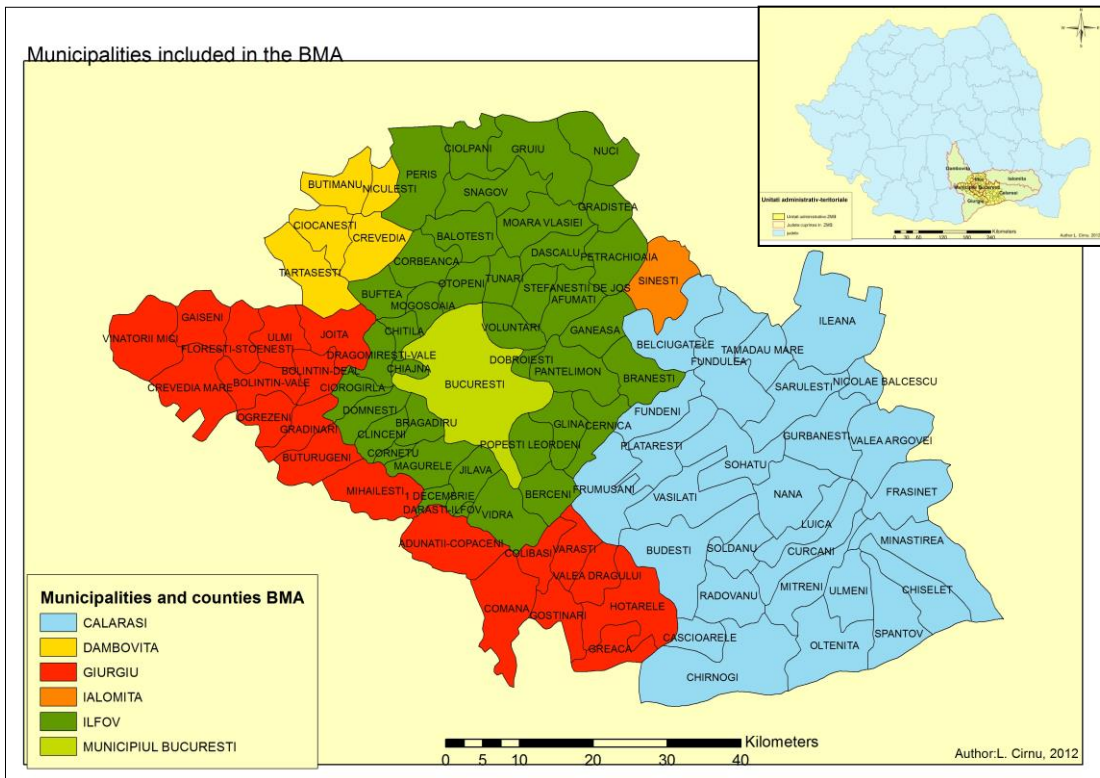


Figure 1: Bucharest Metropolitan Area

### 3. Demographic evolution

In the last two decades, this territory has undergone significant changes in the demographic evolution. Contrary to the trends before 1989, Bucharest has suffered major demographic declines in favour of neighbouring settlements (Figure 2).

The top ten settlements to register an appreciable population growth rate are located near the Capital City or find themselves, most of them close to the beltway: Bragadiru (117%), Otopeni (65%), Mogosoaia (60%), Pantelimon (51), 1 Decembrie (46%), Popesti-Leordeni (41%), Stefanestii de Jos (36%), Voluntari (34%), Corbeanca (28%) and Balotesti (28%).

Analysing this trend in the urban areas, we see a clear differentiation between the rural communities declared cities in the last two decades and those that already had this status before 1989<sup>2</sup>. (Figure 3)

<sup>2</sup> Rural settlements declared urban districts during 1990-2010: Bragadiru, Chitila, Magurele, Otopeni, Pantelimon, Popesti Leordeni, Voluntari

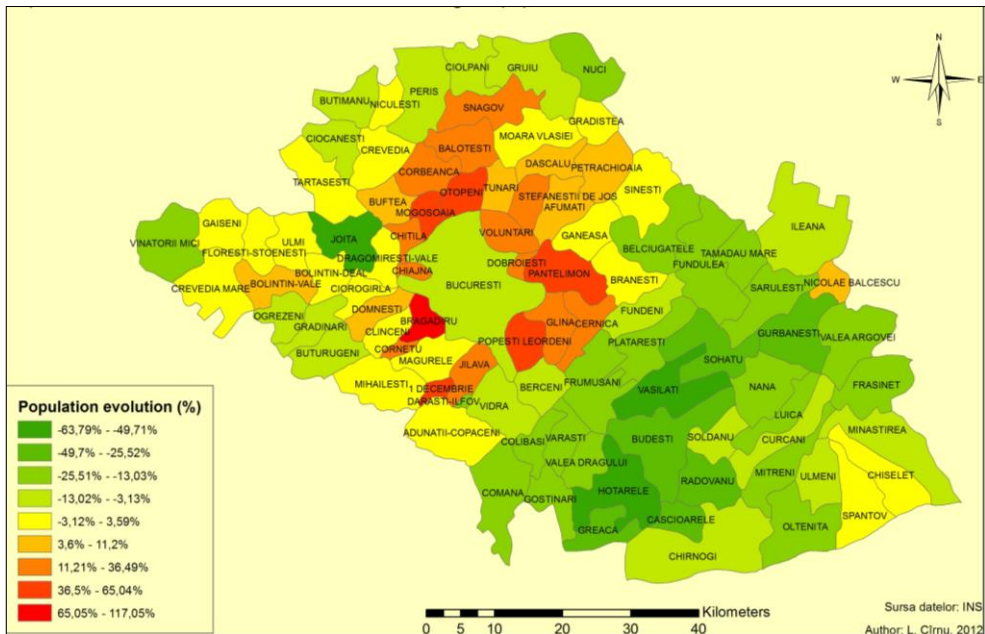


Figure 2: Demographic evolution of the BMA settlements (1990-2010), considering the 1990 population

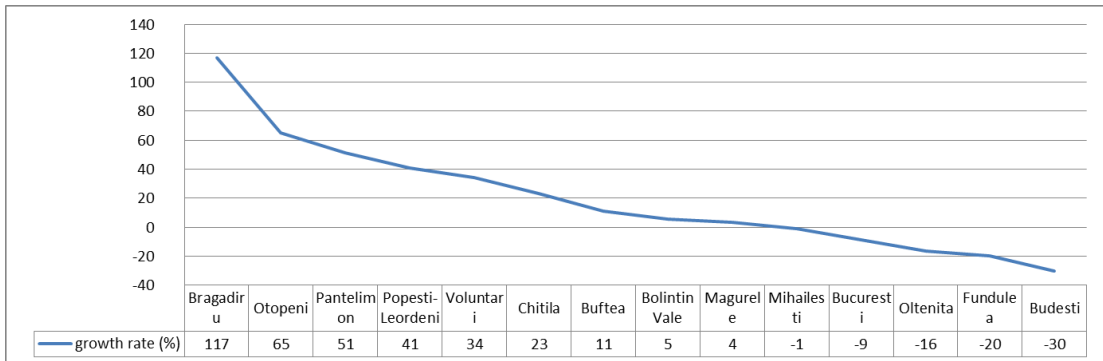


Figure 3: Demographic growth rate for the urban districts of ZMB 1990-2010

This growth, however, is primarily based on the increase of the positive migration balance. The situation of the top three settlements in population growth is revealing in this regard. Both Bragadiru and Mogosoia or Otopeni largely based their positive population evolution on the intake coming mainly from Bucharest. Two distinct moments must be retained: one immediately after 1990, with the industry conversion and rising of unemployment in Bucharest and another moment after 2000 when the establishment of urban residents in surrounding rural areas is accentuated due to the urban sprawl (Figure 4).

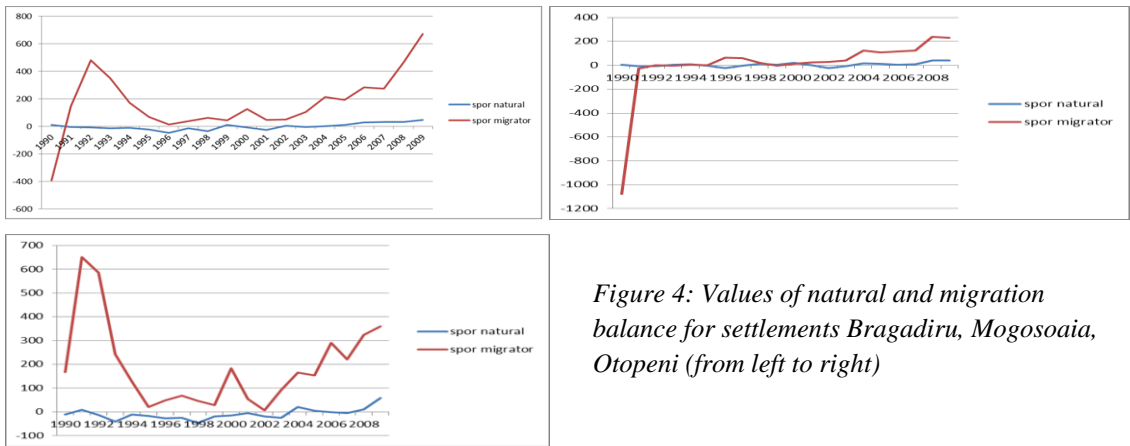


Figure 4: Values of natural and migration balance for settlements Bragadiru, Mogosoiaia, Otopeni (from left to right)

#### 4. The spatial dynamics of the building permits

Under these conditions after 2000, the spatial evolution of the number of building permits in absolute values and relative to the settlements 'population show a progressive intention to build outside the Capital, around it and in the north-northeast.

Since the beginning of 2000, the concentration of settlements which registered a slight increase in the number of permits was influenced almost exclusively by their position in relation to the national circulation axis and their proximity to Bucharest. Thus in 2002, except for Capital City with 1020 permits issued, the first five settlements, in absolute values were Voluntari, Chiajna, Mogosoiaia, Corbeanca and Popesti Leordeni, each with between 402 and 67 building permits.

Reporting these values to the settlements' population, we can observe a clear differentiation of Voluntari, Corbeanca, Mogosoiaia Chiajna and Sinesti with values between 11.7 and 19.7 permits/1000 inhabitants, Bucharest being located to the end of the list.

This trend continued until 2008, when due to the real estate boom, taking into account the demographic size of settlements, Bragadiru, Domnesti, Clinceni, Berceni, Corbeanca occupied the top positions with values ranging from 36.7 to 82.1 permits/1000 inhabitants (Figure 5)

After the real estate crisis, that growth has plummeted. In 2010, there were only few settlements exceeding 23 permits/1000 inhabitants-Corbeanca, Domnesti and Berceni.

#### 5. Spatial dynamics of newly built dwellings

The release of a building permit by local authority represents the consent for a new construction. It certifies the compliance and the legality of the project in relation to existing planning regulations, while at the same time it marks out the building intention of the applicant. This is an intent that may or may not materialize. Another indicator that better reflects reality on the ground is the number of newly constructed dwellings / year.

In the study area, between 1990-2010 the number of newly built residential dwellings shows the same tendency to concentrate in the first suburban ring of Bucharest and to the north-northeast (Figure 6)

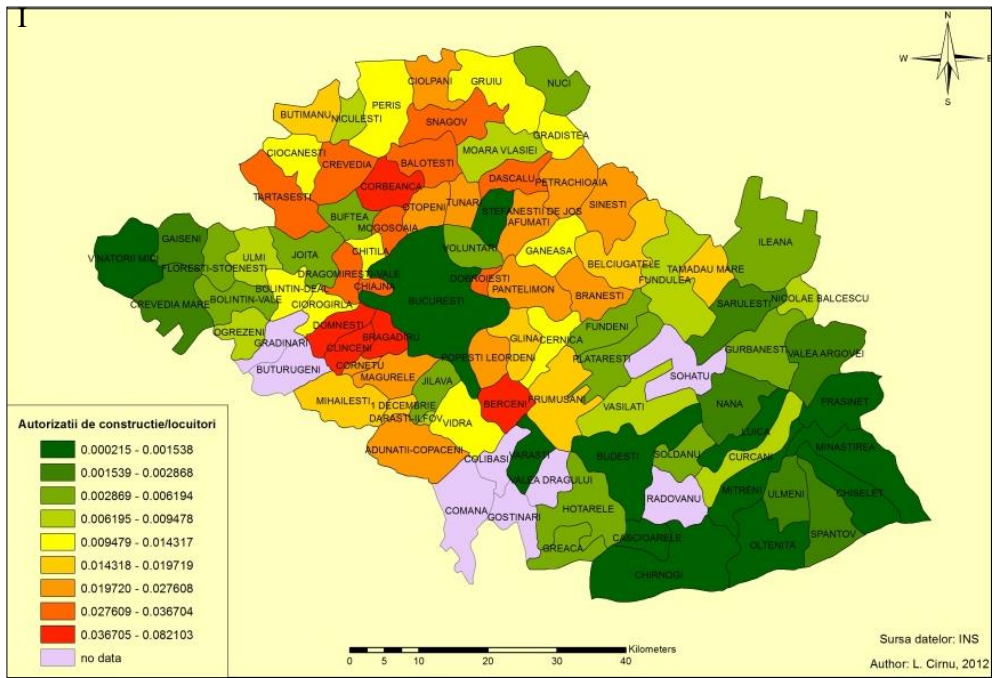


Figure 5: Ratio between the number of building permits issued in 2008 and the number of inhabitants of the MBA settlements in 2008

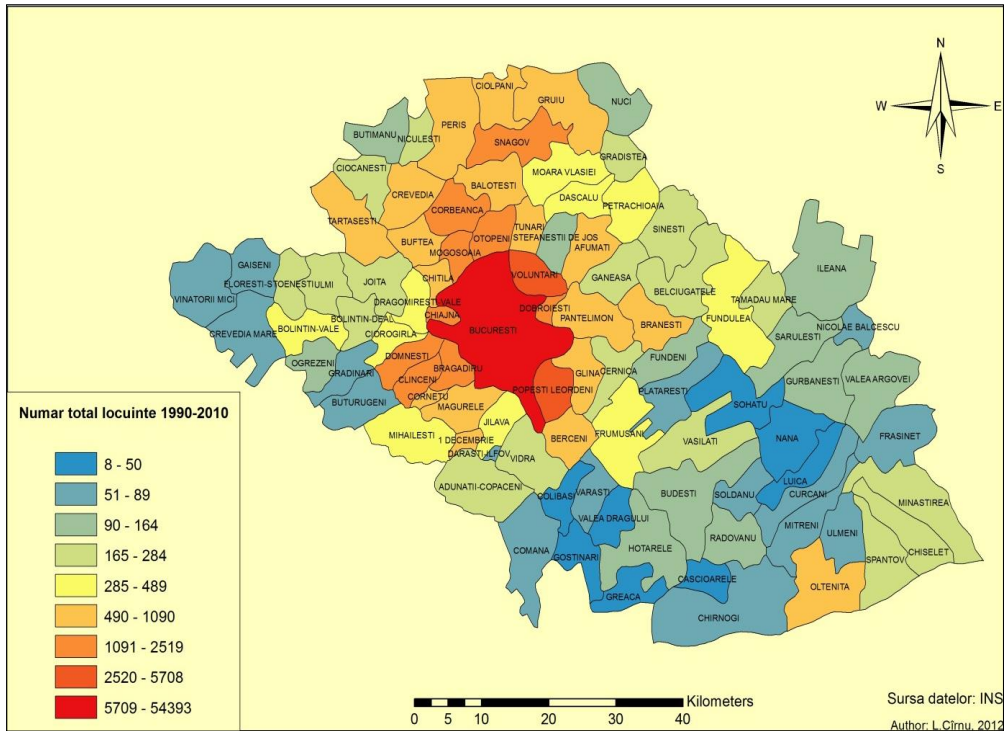


Figure 6. Total number of residential dwellings in the BMA during 1990-2010 (absolute values)

The first places in the ranks, except the Capital, are held by the recently declared cities Voluntari, Popesti Leordeni, Bragadiru and Otopeni, to which we can add the rural districts of Chiajna, Domnesti, Corbeanca and Snagov.

Taking into account the demographic size of the settlements, the situation changes only concerning the first position; instead, the development direction of the newly residential construction remains the same (Figure 7). We notice this time Bragadiru, Domnesti, Clinceni (South West), Corbeanca and Snagov (North) and Popesti Leordeni (South-East).

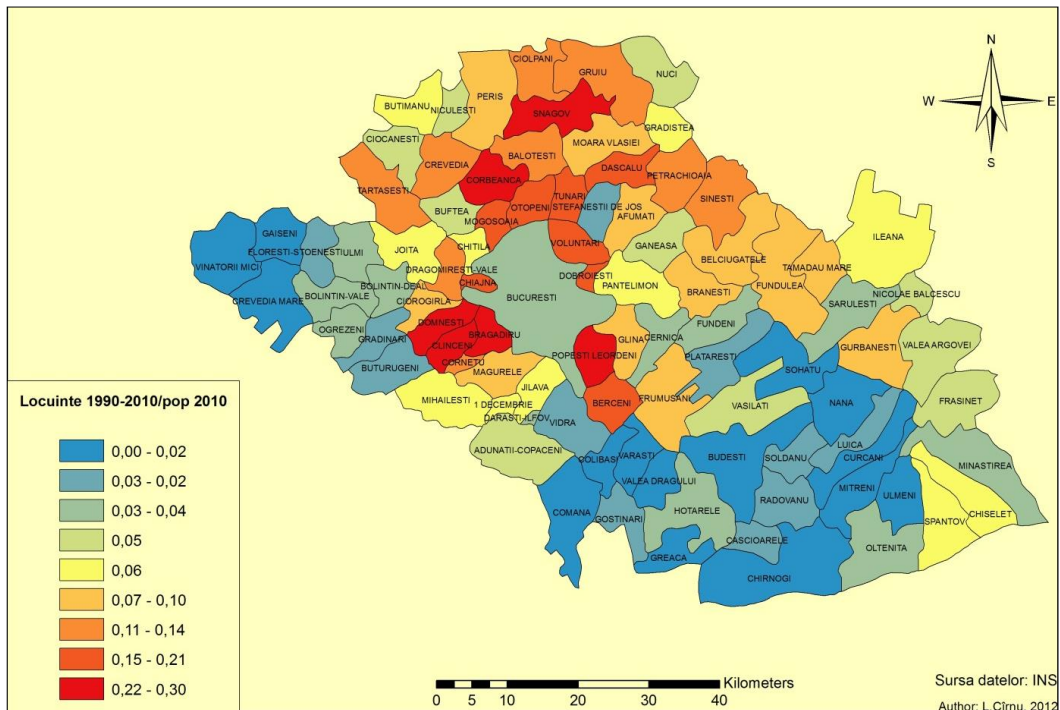


Figure 7: Total number of newly built residential dwellings between 1990-2010 compared to the demographic size of settlements

This concentration around the capital has been done in several stages:

- 1990-1994-Immediately after the change in political regime and planning regulation, the growth trend of the existing towns continues. The only places that register increases in the number of dwellings are Otopeni, Oltenita and Bragadiru.
- 1995-1999, due to backdrop of economic conversion and the affirmation of neo-liberal lifestyle, the ZMB cities begin to lose their attractiveness, the districts with the most intensive building are those that are located further away from the centre-Snagov, Corbeanca, Branesti, Floresti-Stoenesti
- 2000-2004 shows a clear concentration to the northern area of Bucharest, Voluntari, Mogosoaia, Snagov, and Corbeanca being the municipalities with the highest number of newly built residential dwellings. Popesti Leordeni also occupy a leading position in the south-east of Bucharest
- 2005-2010 a more important concentration of newly built dwellings around the capital, in the first suburban ring settlements, attempting gradually to fill the gaps the previously urbanization created.

## Conclusions

The last two decades have changed the direction of spatial expansion of the residential construction areas outside the Capital. The cities that have witnessed an upward dynamics of this phenomenon lie in the first suburban ring of Bucharest and to the north-north-east, taking advantage of the proximity to the metropolis and especially of the relatively good accessibility provided by the road network.

This considerable movement of urban residents towards the Capital's surrounding areas gave birth to a single family house urban fabric or with low urban density, an urban fabric frequently impaired concerning its functional aspect (new neighbourhoods are often offset from the centre, proximity services or communication ways) or aesthetically (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Urban fabric in Pantelimon city, Ilfov county

The private initiative and the small real estate transactions often coupled with permissive attitude of local elected representatives led to at least bizarre situations where public utilities cannot properly serve the new neighbourhoods and must be replaced.

Facing this booming phenomenon and the issues involved, it is necessary to search for new regulatory tools and to adopt new levels of decision making to create prerequisites for a viable urban fabric.

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