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One of the most evident legacies of Modern thinking in Europe are the concrete suburbs built in the decennia after WWII. At the time of their building, both the authorities as well as the majority of the population saw the 'Modern' suburbs as a physical manifestation of democracy. They were an even greater sign of progress in the former communist countries, where a total break with the past was sought. The 'Modern' neighbourhoods were built by idealists and it seems that they also required idealists to live in.

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When designed these areas were not thought of as evolving systems. Rather as static structures, where humans would live and recreate. But the unexpected happened when the communist system in Eastern Europe collapsed. The new role of private property caused a new use of the suburbs, very often in strong contrast with the original socialist urban planning. Social relationships have often been brought to an extreme, where the only valuable action is the private one. Such actions are being undertaken presently at a chaotic, individualistic manner, with once in a while cases of neighbourly cooperation. The manifold activities of the inhabitants are considered as messy and aesthetically unpleasant. There is no structure facilitating citizens' participation and unfortunately the separate private actions remain in the grey zone between legal and illegal.

It is clear that the original urban planning idea, upon which the 'Modern' neighbourhoods were built, has lost its relevance. Nevertheless the reality of these areas already provides a good basis for developing them further. When thinking of efficiently renovating these neighbourhoods it is important to consider the forces already active there. Because even if the Modern project failed as a physical expression of a (failed) socialist ideal does not mean that the currently practised approach of total privatisation of the territory is the answer. The ideal of space as being collectively managed is being replaced nowadays by the conviction that space functions only if it is strictly private (and often fenced).

THE SPEAKERS

The listed speakers come from various countries and professional backgrounds. They will engage into a discussion based on their own experience of the realities and challenges of the 'Modern' neighbourhoods of their country. Among the issues, which will be discussed are the level of involvement of the local/national government, citizens' participation, economic processes and the use of private and public spaces. The purpose of the debate is to engage into a discussion on what kind of economic, social and administrative structures can be developed in order to allow an evolving and more pleasant urban environment in the 'Modern' mass-housing suburbs to develop.

SPEAKERS' STATEMENTS

STEFAN GHENCIULESCU (ROMANIA)

A problem of urban regeneration

What if we saw at the former socialist neighborhoods not only as a huge problem, but also as a great urban potential?

Surely, we witness a process of deterioration still ignored by most people, and touching both technical and social aspects (increasingly poorer inhabitants). Either owners or authorities subject those structures to partial and non-coordinated interventions and as yet there is no global strategy to approach them.

Still, there is a good social mix (lacking in the big Western social housing ensembles), more density than in the post-1990 sprawl, a space reserve able to accommodate urban functions, and one of the biggest problems – an atomized property structure – may also turn into an asset for survival.

A strategy for tackling this issue could rely on some basic principles such as:

- Rehabilitation is a social, economic, architectural and urban process, hardly just a technical one. In fact, coherent policies and urban regeneration and not mere rehabilitation should become the main theme.
- Negotiating the various interests may become more important than designing or building-up budgets.
- Dwelling implies buildings, but also the space around them – we need a public space strategy.
- In a region where all big projects fail, bottom-up action and pilot-projects could trigger and sustain global strategies and operations.

DIMITRIJ ZADORIN (RUSSIA)

Revolution on present. Evolution of past.

The past is vulnerable: one can accuse 'Modern' pre-fab concrete suburbs of being a failure, and it will silently concede. Yet only the present is capable of dealing with their future. The simple step is to keep them alive by updating their technical condition. This is a plain necessity as we have no choice - there are just too many of them. The difficult part is to prevent their numbers from growing, for the quantity is their problem, not quality as is often mistakenly assumed. A radical break is required, a new typology, setting the two against each other. Instead of gradual degradation, caused by providing all of the same, only newer and bigger, we will learn to see the qualities of 'Modern' space. Naturally some concrete suburbs will deteriorate as this is a normal course for urban structures. As their numbers decreases, other examples, assisted by reconstruction, will forfeit monotony and thrive. Evolution of the past is a great achievement, but to make it happen a revolution in the present is required.

DAVID GOGISHVILI (GEORGIA)

Population of Georgia grew steadily from the start of Soviets, Tbilisi too. Concrete suburbs appeared as a result, which hopelessly tried to solve housing problems. Perestroika brought another chance to solve the problems, however initiative was passed to soviet citizens. I think that this decision, together with political problems of 90's that "created" IDPs are core factors

that affected the development of residential areas in Georgia.

The 90's in Georgia were marked by remarkable flat-extension processes, mostly performed illegally. Nowadays, the State involvement has significantly increased. All the practices carried out in the 90's are either abandoned or regulated by the law.

Involvement of other actors in the city planning and development is a lot higher than it was in the Soviet period. However, participation does not necessarily mean citizen participation - developers, businessmen and city government are the main decision makers and others literally have no chance to affect their decision or just do not wish to do that (the result of the soviet regime).

The question is simple, how the situation will develop: the participation of the investors and developers limit the participation of others/civil society so that instead of ideology, money and power will be the determinant for participation.