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How Do the New Residential Areas in Bucharest Satisfy Population Demands, and Where Do They Fall Short?

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Abstract: In recent years, Bucharest's residential dynamics have thrived, fueled by growing demand and an insufficient housing fund. This study aimed to analyze the residential satisfaction of those living in newly built dwellings. Its objectives were to identify the characteristics of three new residential areas and analyze the satisfaction level among residents regarding both their dwellings and neighborhoods. The investigation employed direct observations during the fieldwork phase (through observation sheets and mapping methods) and surveys (through questionnaires with residents and interviews with developers). Its results highlighted spaces that exhibit an increase in residential constructions, with a tendency to expand toward suburban areas, without necessarily meeting legislative requirements. When measuring the population's residential satisfaction level, the study observed a general satisfaction regarding dwellings' modernity and price but noticeable differences within the sample residential nuclei. The solutions proposed by residents mainly target authorities, who were held responsible for developing the urban infrastructure prior to granting building permits, as well as for vetting developers better and requiring them to respect the legislation. Hence, scientists, local authorities, real-estate developers and the local population represent the beneficiaries of the current study's results.

Keywords: residential satisfaction; new urban nuclei; infrastructure characteristics; legislation; Bucharest; Romania

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1. Introduction

Cities are complex systems whose economic and social functionality depends on implementing adequate housing development policies. Housing quality in urban areas is an ongoing concern for all involved actors, because, on the one hand, it represents a direct response to issues connected to urban systematization, e.g., traffic, pollution, lack of green areas, waste management, etc.; and, on the other hand, as population preferences regarding modern housing standards are rapidly changing, studying them is one way of keeping up with market demands [1]. Residential satisfaction is a heterogeneous and multidimensional concept that underlines that the evaluation of the living place and neighborhood is a balance between expectations and benefits. It stems from housing characteristics, amenities, and quality of the environment associated with expenditure [2] and refers to a perception of the place of residence from both physical and social perspectives [3].

Certain studies emphasize the importance of social environment as a third element generating residential satisfaction, indicating as frequent variables: "safety, upkeep, social ties, quietness, housing quality, greenery, age and income level" (p. 114, Reference [4]). Some authors, such as Berköz and Kellekçi (p. 41, Reference [5]), name "the characteristics of

residential units, characteristics of users, managerial, environmental and locational factors" as variables that influence residential satisfaction, while Cho, Park, and Echevarria-Cruz [6] conclude that neighborhoods have experienced a reduction in their role as traditional communities due to decades of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Still, understanding how residents rate neighborhoods remains an essential element of urban planning policies, as neighborhood satisfaction is a component of quality of life which can form a basis for public policy feedback [7,8]. Neighborhood satisfaction is perceived as a multifaceted construct and includes relationships with neighbors, housing characteristics, demographic factors, security, presence of and access to services (amenities), aesthetics (i.e., appearance), and air quality/pollution [9,10]. Nowadays, many studies move away from the somewhat-limited past approach to neighborhood satisfaction (that analyzes only one or just more than one level of the environment) [11] and attempt to evaluate inhabitants' preferences about attributes of the residential environment as one of the multiple variables of neighborhood satisfaction [12–15]. The current evolution of cities should consider the population's needs regarding housing quality, while also maintaining the principles that govern neighborhoods' economic and social functionality. Housing satisfaction is evaluated based on components from living conditions to the environment, physical infrastructure, public service, governance, and culture, as these represent urban development pillars in most countries [16]. Nonetheless, it depends to a large extent on successful housing policies [17], which do not necessarily consider the constantly evolving demographic needs and rely more on the developers' point of view [15]. Unfortunately, urbanization does not always respect legislative demands, and many large cities develop chaotically and uncontrollably, frequently leading to traffic, pollution, lack of green areas, and poorly developed infrastructure [18].

Nowadays, many large cities display a competitive city profile that considers both investors' and residents' choices. They have to incorporate an extensive range of amenities and services to satisfy people's complex network of needs for the place in which they decide to live [19].

A wide range of studies recognize the subjective nature of personal expectations for new dwellings and the subjective attributes of the residential environment as an indivisible part of "the systemic model of residential satisfaction" (p. 2, Reference [12]) [19,20].

Undoubtedly, residential satisfaction is a complex process that displays different perspectives because urban regions' socio-spatial patterns differ significantly from one geographical region to another and even from one neighborhood to another [4,13]. Therefore, an obstacle in researching the relationships between various dimensions of the residential environment is that, in general, predicting satisfaction in an urban community context is a challenging task.

1.1. Residential Attractiveness in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Countries

The post-industrialization period and the political changes after the fall of the communist regimes meant that the urban areas of CEE countries saw "the formation of a new socio-economic framework of cities" (p. 23, Reference [21]). These areas embraced old and completely new functions and generated population relocations toward new residential projects. The different paradigms on housing quality brought forward by the open-market economy implemented after 1990 influence the intention to stay or move out in former communist countries [22]. One consequential result was that the central authorities no longer decided on the dwellings' dimensions, functionality, compartmentalization, endowments, or design [23–26]. A new housing culture was necessary due to the numerous problems of housing built during communism which were only aggravated by insufficient investments and inadequate management, the physical degradation of the buildings, and their numerous technical issues. The lifespan of these buildings was long overdue, the investment capital oriented for their rehabilitation was scarce, the government programs limited, and the financial power of their inhabitants virtually inexistent [27].

In this context, in states such as Poland, Estonia, Hungary, Eastern Germany, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania, the population started preferring newer dwellings, and suburban sprawl became a dominant phenomenon caused by a lack of locally implemented territorial planning programs [28]. In fact, the specialized literature recognizes that suburbanization has been particularly important in transforming the metropolitan regions of CEE countries such as Romania in the last decades. Because it was artificially limited during communism, after 1990, some countries even experienced a "chaotic suburbanisation", which decreased the quality of the residential environment (p. 160, Reference [29]); (p. 46, References [30,31]). This is a direct consequence of a neoliberal housing market that has not always found integrated and coordinated development solutions applicable throughout all the newly appearing residential areas [32–37]. The "differentiation" or, rather, "(re)-differentiation" process of "reordering the scale and location of urban land uses" had a higher intensity in the cities of the post-communist countries than in the "classic western European ones" (p. 23, Reference [21]).

Neighborhood satisfaction is also linked to the principles of sustainable urban development [38,39]. However, although integrated strategies for sustainable urban development that address economic, environmental, climate, social, and demographic challenges exist in many Central and Eastern European cities, they are only superficially implemented. Difficulties arise from the fact that financial resources must be concentrated in an integrated way, especially for areas facing specific urban challenges [40]. Moreover, local authorities are the ones responsible for implementing the integrated urban development strategies, respectively, selecting the projects that ensure sustainable development, which only slowed these processes down or stopped them completely [41].

1.2. Residential Dynamics in Bucharest during the Post-Communist Period

In post-communist Romania, sustainable housing policies have been applied to a limited degree and many times with only a locally oriented vision, without considering urban regeneration or durable systematization, and this trend has had negative repercussions, especially in terms of residential satisfaction [42].

The capital city of Bucharest registered a solid territorial dynamic after 1990. Its residential area extended toward its periphery in an urban spill and was dictated more by land prices and less by local development or systematization policies [43]. The emergence of a housing market that did not exist before 1990 was caused mainly by Law No. 18/1991, which returned land plots to their former owners and allowed for changes in their function of agricultural and forested plots, which, in time, saw many of them used for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes [44]. In this context, residential satisfaction was a secondary preoccupation for Bucharest's urban development.

The city developed in stages, especially in the post-communist period; its evolution focused on its historical center and extended outwardly [45–47]. According to Suditu et al. [48], when analyzing Bucharest's residential areas, three relatively homogenous divisions stand out: (i) the central area corresponding to the historical center, which developed spontaneously and lacked a controlled systematization process; (ii) an intermediary area represented by communist workers' neighborhoods, totally systematized and in the same time functional because it incorporates services (e.g., health and education), as well as parks and recreational areas; and (iii) an exterior area that contains new residential nuclei alongside rural patches.

Before 1990, authorities of the communist states decided on a city's development rhythm by controlling its spread, as well as the characteristics and number of dwellings built. However, today, the large capitals of these countries, including Bucharest, undergo an urban-sprawl-like suburbanization process [49]. In the post-communist period, Romania's large cities' urban landscape registered tendencies of rapidly extending their residential and services areas, especially storage and retail, particularly inside their area of influence [50], and simultaneously de- and relocating some of their other functions (especially the industrial one) toward the periphery (Figure 1). Against continuous deindustrialization, the

market resorted to extending residential areas. The removal of the industrial structures built during communism came after successive unsuccessful restructuring attempts, which led to their bankruptcy and demolition and, in the end, replacement with residential nuclei [51–53]. As a result, after the 2000s, Bucharest's territorial development was primarily aimed at its peri-urban area due to these recently vacant plots, with previous agricultural areas around the city converted into residential nuclei [54]. In actuality, the city extended not according to legislative measures or by following a development strategy established by authorities but according to demand and supply, with developers strongly influencing this process. The emergence of these residential nuclei resulted from the changes the city itself went through, namely the migration of certain inhabitants belonging to a "matured" middle class gaining higher incomes [46] and the economic relocation of certain functions (e.g., industrial production, storage and retail, other services, etc.), including the residential function toward the periphery (Figure 1). Apart from people looking for housing in different areas, the development of new residential nuclei came down to Bucharest's increased number of inhabitants. This was fueled by large waves of newcomers from around the country, encouraged by the abrogation of an urbanism communist law that controlled urban growth and defined the so-called "closed cities". During the communist period, the Decree No. 68 of 17 March 1976 controlled the evolution of the urban population, thereby allowing provincial-born citizens to live in large cities (Bucharest, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Constanta, and Brașov) only if they could prove a familial connection or an economic interest through a contract of employment or a state dispensation [55]. The city continues to be seen as an economic and innovation national pole, always needing a specialized workforce in sectors such as business, services, and newly emerging industries [53]. Its area of influence stretches primarily toward the north (Băneasa-Otopeni), west (Chiajna commune), and, in later years, south (Berceni commune), the development of the city translating into an extension to the outer rural area, interspersing in all directions urban spaces with areas with rural characteristics [56].

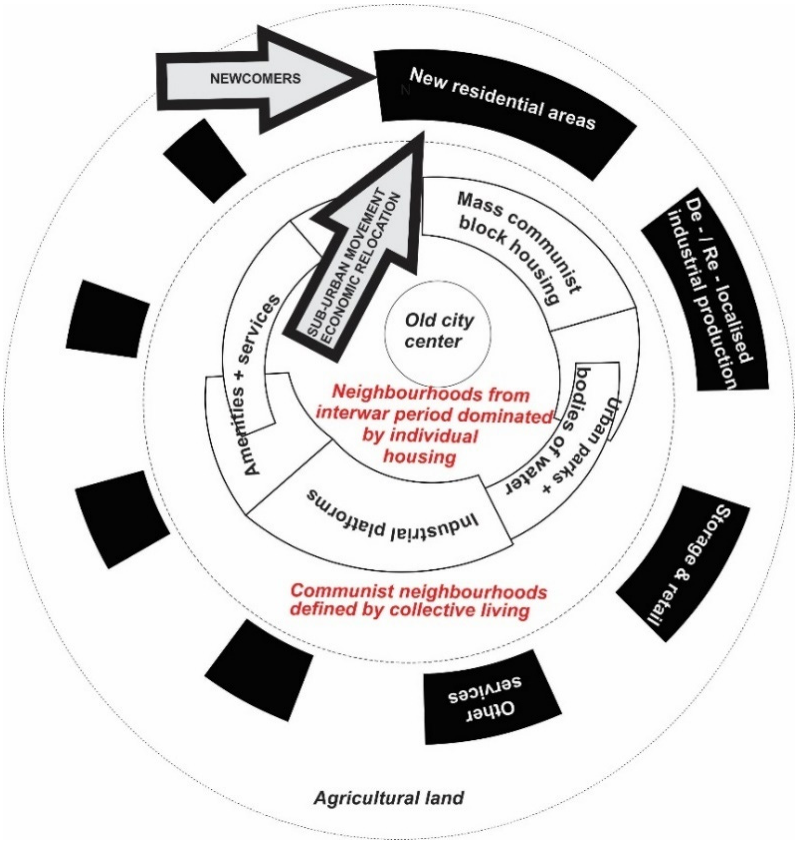


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Bucharest's urban structure and dynamics.

Young families also fed the high demand for new housing, because, in Romanian society, having a home is an important criterion when getting married and starting a new family [57]. In order to meet this social constraint, a governmental program was introduced immediately after the financial crisis of 2008. It was called "The First Home" and later renamed "The New Home" and offered new families the possibility to buy a dwelling with the help of a state-guaranteed low-interest loan (for old homes, the state guaranteed 40% of the amount, and for new buildings, 50%). The program aimed to revitalize the construction sector severely affected by the 2008 crisis and offer new young families the possibility of owning a home [58]. Real-estate developers kept in mind that their buyers would have to access a bank loan according to their limited incomes; as such, the newly built dwellings had to fit into a budget as small as possible. One way to ensure this was to use cheap land plots outside Bucharest.

Some aspects of the Eastern European regional socio-spatial pattern, such as "the dominance of owner-occupiers of the existing housing" or "the lack of affordable housing and underdeveloped mortgage markets" (p. 61, Reference [13]), emphasized the new residential nuclei as viable, attractive solutions for both newcomers and locals. Similarly, the local and regional patterns of "certain historically specific housing forms and space consumption and its affordability" could not be neglected because Romania is, unfortunately, one of the most imbalanced countries considering its over-dominant 98% homeownership rate and least mobile and financialized housing market within the EU (p. 1056, Reference [59]). After the year 1990 in Romania, similar to other former communist countries, the living preferences in terms of dwelling type changed, and parts of the population gravitated toward either unifamilial villa-type houses or large apartments, both of which were located inevitably in the city's periphery or its peri-urban area [37,60–62]. According to Soaita and Dewilde [59], there were also constraints brought by the old housing stock built during communism (75%) that offers minimal options for developing more spacious and comfortable homes, which higher-income dwellers might require.

Accordingly, the new residential nuclei should meet modern standards in terms of quality of living, both from a functional and aesthetic point of view, because the new consumers perceived them to be in opposition to the residential areas built during communism with their numerous problems and shortcomings. Nonetheless, specialists and numerous journalistic inquiries decried the lack of superior living standards in these residential areas, identifying and presenting problems and inconsistencies in their functional zoning and urban endowments [63–66].

1.3. The Aim of the Study

This exploratory study aims to approach, through applied research within Bucharest, Romania, a subject of high interest for administrative authorities, planners interested in local development strategies or housing policies, and their direct beneficiaries: the local population. Its primary focus is to evaluate whether the analyzed new residential nuclei correspond to the needs and wishes of their residents in terms of amenities, comfort, utilities, location, price, etc. These residential areas' chaotic development is a subject debated arduously by the civil society, press, and administrative structures, all emphasizing residential satisfaction as an influential element for their future evolution.

In the above context, our study has a twofold contribution, firstly to bring more in-depth insights from the new residential nuclei built in the last two decades in the suburban area of Bucharest, and secondly to analyze the inhabitants' residential satisfaction in these areas.

To achieve this, we distinguished the following main research objectives:

- O1. Identifying the characteristics of the residential nuclei inside the study area;
- O2. Analyzing the satisfaction level of the inhabitants concerning the residential area they live in;
- O3. Analyzing the satisfaction level of the inhabitants concerning their dwelling (individual or collective).

2. Methodology

The objectives set for this study required a threefold methodological approach, as illustrated in Figure 2.

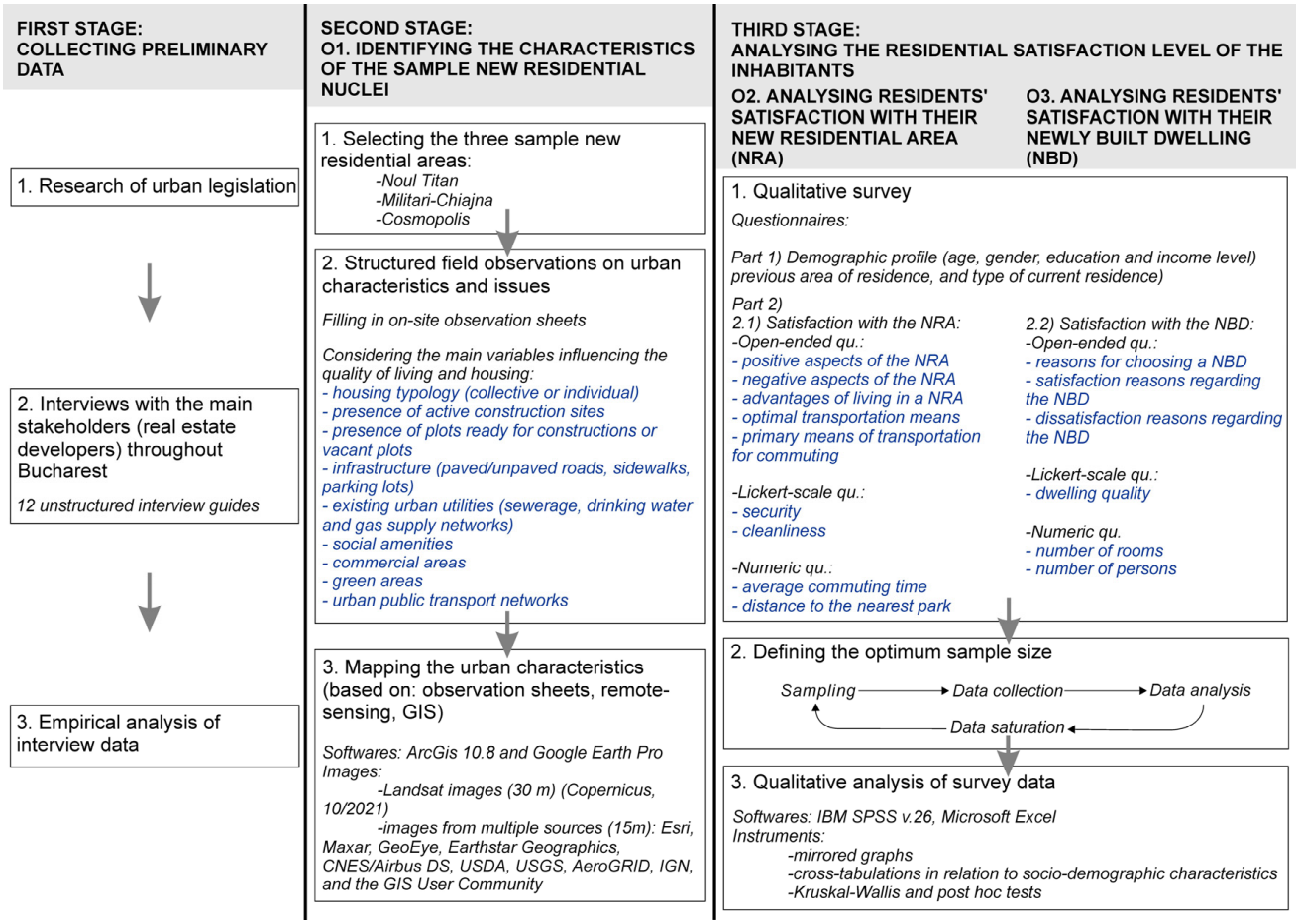


Figure 2. Methodological framework of the study.

The first stage was a preliminary information-gathering one. It required studying urban planning legislation, and it was followed by interviewing the actors who directly shape the residential space: real-estate developers. Real-estate developers were interviewed between March and April 2021 because of their overall importance, participation with real-estate projects in the study area, as well as their seniority and experience in the construction sector in Bucharest, Romania. Furthermore, the analysis of these interviews helped shape the observation sheets' content and select the variables for the questionnaire applied later to residents. The tool used in this stage was an unstructured interview guide (12 such interview guides were conducted) with developers throughout Bucharest, regardless of the shape and amplitude of their real-estate projects. These interviews probed the difficulties in developing real-estate projects; the factors they consider when choosing the dimensions of a dwelling; how the existing infrastructure and the technical and municipal utilities condition the execution of a project; the interconnection between the final price and quality of the construction materials; and the difficulties created by the existing legislation.

The second methodological stage consisted of filling in on-site observation sheets during May 2021. This stage aimed to map the characteristics and issues of the newly developed residential nuclei, while also considering the interviews conducted with the real-estate developers. The criterion used in selecting the three sample residential areas was their geographical location in relation to the capital city. The first nucleus is Noul Titan, located in the eastern part of Bucharest, inside the administrative city limit. The second nucleus is

Militari–Chiajna, located in close proximity to the administrative city limit. Finally, the third studied residential nucleus is Cosmopolis, located 15 km outside Bucharest on its road belt (DNCB) (Figure 3). The three areas were selected to compare the difference in residential features, causes determining these differences, and disparities in how residents perceive housing conditions in the three newly built areas and the neighborhoods themselves.

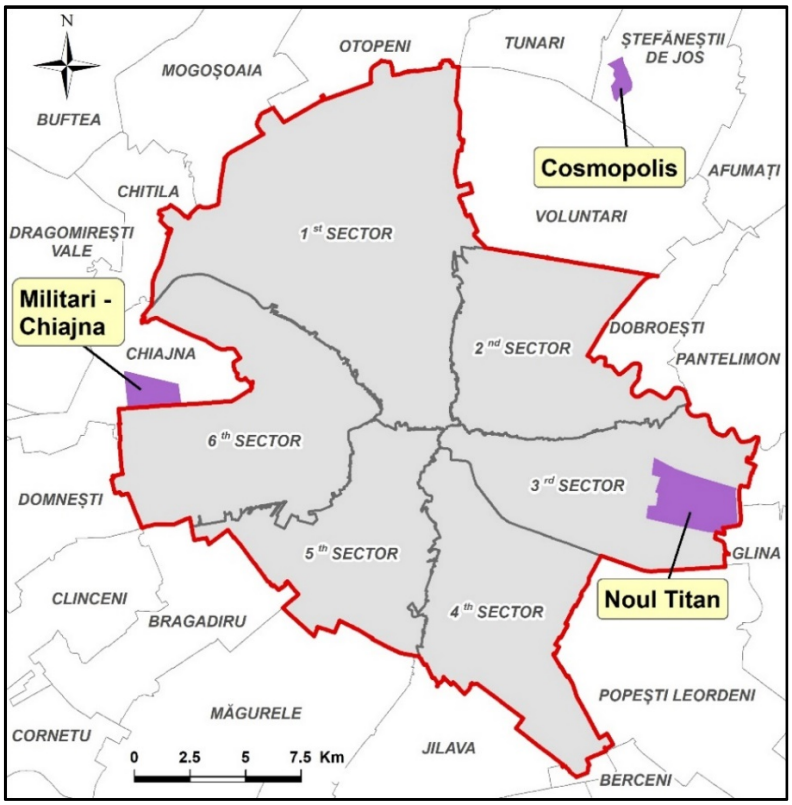


Figure 3. Position of the sample new residential areas in relation to Bucharest.

The first one, **Noul Titan**, started developing after the year 2000 and is located inside the city and extends up to its administrative limit. This residential nucleus, in the eastern part of the city, is actually an extension of the Titan neighborhood (i.e., Noul Titan translates into The *New* Titan), which was built between 1950 and 1970 to serve as a dormitory area for the workers of the large industrial plant located in its vicinity. In the post-communist period, the development of this new residential space happened in stages. It was an inhomogeneous process, with single-family homes, villas, block-type residential buildings, or residential complexes slowly being built on vacant plots, former agricultural areas, or plots newly available after the demolition of former industrial units (the Policolor factory, Bucharest, Romania). Today, Noul Titan is still growing, with former agricultural lands gradually transforming into residential areas.

The second study area, **Militari–Chiajna**, is located in the western part of the city in the immediate vicinity of the administrative limit of Bucharest's 6th sector. The sample area is peri-urban, administratively belonging to the Chiajna commune, Ilfov County. The authors chose it to emphasize the amplification of the urban overflow phenomenon. The low prices of these plots and the area's location (i.e., the first commercial platform appeared here after 1989, along Highway 1) aided the emergence of this new residential nucleus, as its interconnectivity with Bucharest represented one of its marketing advantages.

The third chosen residential nucleus, **Cosmopolis**, is located 15 km to the northeast of Bucharest, placed in its urban area but administratively belonging to the commune Ștefăneștii de Jos, Ilfov County, Romania. It was built to incorporate many facilities. Real-

estate developers included from the very beginning a public pool, an urban beach, green areas, playgrounds, commercial units, and gyms in the construction project.

The structured field observation process considered variables that influence the quality of living and housing, taking into account the authors' expertise, as well as the elements that resulted from the interviews with the real-estate developers (Figure 2). At this stage, the work methodology also included observing, analyzing, and mapping the urban characteristics of the sample residential nuclei. The maps were constructed by correlating the information from the observation sheets with remote sensing and GIS techniques to identify the distribution of different land uses (residential, commercial, green areas, etc.). The mapping was performed during the second half of 2021, using Landsat satellite images (Copernicus, 25 October 2021) in Google Earth Pro, with a 30 m resolution [67]. This information was refined with images from multiple sources: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community [68]. The final cartographic material was obtained by using ArcGIS 10.8 and Google Earth Pro.

In the third stage of the research process, during July and August of 2021, questionnaires were conducted to support objectives O2 and O3 of the research. The authors used the qualitative survey method suitable for the exploratory design of this study and its research objectives [69], namely residents' perceptions regarding their neighborhoods (residential nuclei) and dwellings. The research considered rather "the logic of the study than statistical probability" (p. 2, Reference [70]) and used the data previously obtained from observation sheets and interviews to define the variables in the survey. Expressly, qualitative research is intensely employed in themed studies on living satisfaction, with many researchers also incorporating several quantitative approaches, such as cross-tabulation of their data [70]. The target population referred to residents (both renters and owners) from the three residential nuclei, and the optimum sample size was obtained by considering the parameters of the phenomenon studied and the research objectives [69,71]. According to different authors, the sample size in qualitative research should not be ample, because this would impede observing and analyzing the phenomenon [72,73]. This stage aimed to gather a large variety of opinions through mainly open-ended questions and fewer semi-opened/Likert scale questions.

The coding and primary analysis of data allowed us to use data saturation techniques [69]; adjust the optimal sample size; and combine sampling, data collection, and data analysis, rather than treating each of them separately in a linear order [74]. The theoretical saturation is the moment when no new information is offered that would allow the researcher to identify additional features of the studied phenomenon [69,75] and is often combined in practice with data saturation [73]. Starting from this rationale, the authors considered the final number of respondents as optimal [76–78] while also fulfilling the representativeness level of the sampling for each residential area and avoiding biased responses because each respondent was a unique representative of a household of the sample areas. The random sampling technique was used to identify respondents, and the sample stratification for each residential area was rather a result in this case. The simple random sampling, suitable for generalization in exploratory studies [72,78], was used multiple times to evaluate residential satisfaction in urban environments [4,13,79]. Although the authors did not aim for a respondents' stratification based on sociodemographic variables, to ensure the sample representativeness and accuracy and to cover the diversity of situations that may occur in terms of living conditions, the study sample was "a sizeable proportion" (p. 81, Reference [68]) of the target group (10% of all households living in the selected areas) and represented a balanced coverage of both types of housing (i.e., individual and collective). Because the survey was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the qualitative questionnaires were applied online through owners' associations' groups on Facebook or WhatsApp. The questionnaires filled incorrectly or incompletely were eliminated. As a result, the final valid number of respondents was 126 (34 from Noul Titan, 52 from Militari–Chiajna and 40 from Cosmopolis).

The first part of the questionnaire contained queries relating to the respondents' demographic profile (i.e., age, gender, education, and income level) (Table 1), as well as variables important to the regional specificity of the area and the case study (previous area of residence, i.e., Bucharest or the rest of the country; and type of current residence, i.e., apartment in a block of flats within a residential area, apartment in a block of flats outside a residential area, house within a residential area, or house outside a residential area).

Table 1. Respondents' sociodemographic profile in the three sample residential nuclei.

Age		**Noul Titan**	**Militari–Chiajna**	**Cosmopolis**	**Total**
18–29	% within the sample area	15.0%	19.2%	47.1%	-
	% of total	4.8%	7.9%	12.7%	25.4%
30–39	% within the sample area	55.0%	44.2%	26.5%	-
	% of total	17.5%	18.3%	7.1%	42.9%
40–49	% within the sample area	17.5%	28.8%	20.6%	-
	% of total	5.6%	11.9%	5.6%	23.0%
50–65	% within the sample area	10.0%	7.7%	5.9%	-
	% of total	3.2%	3.2%	1.6%	7.9%
>65	% within the sample area	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	-
	% of total	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%
Gender		**Noul Titan**	**Militari–Chiajna**	**Cosmopolis**	**Total**
male	% within the sample area	22.5%	50.0%	50.0%	-
	% of total	7.1%	20.6%	13.5%	41.3%
female	% within the sample area	77.5%	50.0%	50.0%	-
	% of total	24.6%	20.6%	13.5%	58.7%
Education		**Noul Titan**	**Militari–Chiajna**	**Cosmopolis**	**Total**
High school	% within the sample area	2.5%	17.3%	17.6%	-
	% of total	0.8%	7.1%	4.8%	12.7%
University	% within the sample area	97.5%	82.7%	82.4%	-
	% of total	31.0%	34.1%	22.2%	87.3%
Monthly income/person (EUR)		**Noul Titan**	**Militari–Chiajna**	**Cosmopolis**	**Total**
<607	% within the sample area	17.5%	21.2%	14.7%	-
	% of total	5.6%	8.7%	4.0%	18.3%
607–1214	% within the sample area	42.5%	65.4%	47.1%	-
	% of total	13.5%	27.0%	12.7%	53.2%
>1214	% within the sample area	40.0%	13.5%	38.2%	-
	% of total	12.7%	5.6%	10.3%	28.6%

The income level differs among residents from the three residential nuclei, but in Cosmopolis and Noul Titan, most residents split relatively evenly between earning between 607 and 1214 EUR (3000 and 6000 RON) and above 1214 EUR (6000 RON); the Militari–Chiajna area sees most residents earning between 607 and 1214 EUR (3000 and 6000 RON) (Table 1). The threshold of 3000 RON (607 EUR) was chosen instead of the national minimum wage of 458 EUR on 1 January 2021 [80], as the first represents, according to the latest studies [81], the special minimum gross salary for a series of domains in Romania. This better corresponds to the occupational profile of our respondents, as those working in Bucharest generally have higher incomes than people in other regions of the country. The age-group distribution sees a predominance of young adults and adults, as these age categories are primarily eligible for accessing "The First Home" program (Table 1).

The second part of the questionnaire was built around the two research objectives. Understanding the residential satisfaction and mobility patterns was essential in the complex sociocultural context of this study, and using open-ended questions (e.g., positive vs. negative aspects) or Likert scales in order to characterize more in-depth certain key variables (e.g., security and cleanliness) was the best way to obtain genuine, unbiased answers.

The questions measuring neighborhood satisfaction targeted the positive and negative aspects of these areas as perceived by the respondents and were then cross-checked with an additional question on their perceived benefits of living in a new residential nucleus.

Another set of questions focused on the satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction reasons regarding the respondents' new dwellings and the reasons that prompted them to buy one in order to identify the advantages and deficiencies that owners discovered in their newly built dwellings. Moreover, questions on the number of rooms and the number of residents had the role of statistically checking the comfort level of their chosen new residential nuclei.

For the bivariate viewing and analysis of the questionnaire data (performed mainly through the IBM SPSS Statistics v.26 software, Armonk, NY, USA), we used mirrored graphs to portray the satisfaction with new residential nuclei and dwellings, while also distinguishing among the three sample neighborhoods. We further used cross-tabulations between two categorical variables, which display the data in the two-dimensional space, given by rows and columns, thus examining possible relationships between row and column variables. In these tables, the relative frequencies of respondents' perceptions of the new residential nuclei that they are inhabiting and their newly built dwellings were arranged in relation to several of their descriptive sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, education, income, their previous area of residence, or type of building they currently live in). Because the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test does not assume normal distributions of the data, it was used to assess if there are significant differences in the rank or numerical type of responses provided by the interviewees as a function of the residential nuclei they inhabit. The null hypothesis states that the distributions of all groups are equal, while the alternative hypothesis is that at least one group's distribution is different from that of another group. A significant Kruskal–Wallis test result indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and that, thus, at least one sample stochastically dominates one other sample. In cases where significant differences among the groups were observed, the analysis was further completed by a post hoc test to explore where and for how many pairs of groups the stochastic dominance occurs [82]. The post hoc analysis was conducted by using the pairwise Dunn's test with the Bonferroni correction.

Word clouds were used as visual tools to present phrases frequently mentioned by residents to describe their recommendations on improving the overall quality of living based on their recent experiences. This graphic instrument uses an algorithm based on basic linear, power, and logarithmic representation of font sizes, thus summarizing the texts [83].

3. Results

3.1. Urban Planning Rules and Real-Estate Developers

Analyzing the urban planning legislation allowed us to identify the notable documents that regulate territorial planning. This stage aimed to identify both the rules that govern this process and their coherence, as well as the existing dysfunctionalities that might result in inadequate urban development.

The "National Housing Strategy for 2017–2030" recognizes several problems that the Romanian housing market is experiencing. They number an ageing housing fund, a small amount of public housing, and an increasingly unofficial and unregulated renting market. As the need for housing manifested stronger in larger cities, uncontrollably meeting this demand has led to several imbalances in the housing market, with many of them impacting housing quality [84]. That is why the most poignant problems of the new residential nuclei relate to insufficient or missing means of transportation, urban utilities, or socio-cultural infrastructure of the lack of green areas [85].

The rules that govern territorial and urban planning are set by Law No. 350 from 2001, which corrects the previous legislation and details the process of authorizing building permits and some measures relating to dwellings [86]. This law went through numerous changes that resulted in ambiguities and contradictions regarding its interpretation and applicability.

The central public administrations (i.e., the Ministry for Development, Public Works and Administration; and the Ministry of Investments and European Projects) and the county and local councils are responsible for implementing development strategies, constructing and updating urban planning documents, as well as supervising the execution of the General Urban Regulations [87].

Decision No. 525 from 1996 on approving the General Urban Regulations is meant to prevent dysfunctionalities and ensure living standards per the existing legislation. There are, however, numerous ways in which it fails to achieve its purpose. The field observation proved many instances where the following stipulations were not fully respected: fire-extinguishing vehicles must have access to the construction through public roads; pedestrian access (sidewalks, pedestrian streets, or squares) must exist according to the importance and destination of the building; and new residents must have the possibility to connect to existing drinking-water, sewerage, gas, and electrical infrastructures. The legislation is also very convoluted. Article 28, for example, stipulates that enhancing the capacity of public utility networks falls, partially or fully, into the responsibility of the real-estate developer or beneficiary depending on a series of conditions which can, in fact, deprive any of them of this responsibility. Real-estate developers face copious obligations, as they are responsible for conserving existing green areas and creating new ones offering a minimum of 2 sq. m per inhabitant [88], they must also construct parking lots according to the type of construction and surface area, serving as much as 60% of the residents (i.e., for individual housing) and 100% (i.e., for collective housing) [89].

The numerous exceptions that allowed for interpreting the current legislation have convinced governmental and local authorities to initiate changes to relevant laws, thus affecting the activities of real-estate developers directly. For example, a proposal by the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Forests to ban individual/apartment gas boilers is currently in public debate and is contested by many real-estate developers (i.e., who complain that the final construction costs would increase) and by consumers alike, with the latter preferring an independent heating solution given the deficient performance of the existing centralized heating system [90,91]. Another debate is ongoing in Bucharest, the capital city, over a proposal that real-estate developers should build kindergartens, schools, roads, and parks as part of the residential nuclei, not the local authorities who previously assumed this task [92].

The interview guides we conducted with real-estate developers showed that their most important criticism revolves around the current state of the infrastructure generated, in their opinion, by the lack of local development strategies, "*City Hall has its own responsibilities. Authorities should invest in road, water, and sewerage networks and pave the existing roads*" (developer, Bucharest's fifth sector). They described the existing legislation as "*cumbersome and often unclear*" (developer, Bucharest's first sector).

All of them pointed out that, when it comes to housing nowadays, most buyers rely on bank loans to purchase a dwelling, with those loans being a reflection of their income level, so they often "*chose to decrease the housing area so that people can afford the price*" (developer, Bucharest's second sector). If they were to comply fully with modern living standards in terms of housing area, facilities, quality of materials, and interconnectivity among parts of the residential area, as well as between the area itself and the city, the final prices would increase beyond the affordability threshold of the average buyer, as "*it would increase the price of an apartment to 4000 euros per built sq. m., and no one would buy them*" (developer, Bucharest's fourth sector).

3.2. Identifying the Residential Typologies of the Three Study Cases

The territorial evolution of the new residential areas in Bucharest differs depending on their location. The emergence of new nuclei depends on many factors. The first one is the availability of empty land plots within the city's administrative limits. After the year 1990, these were occupied immediately by constructions; thus, especially after the year 2000, the possibility of new residential nuclei appearing inside the city limits decreased

exponentially. A second factor was the reconversion of industrial plants or agricultural plots located outside the city's administrative limits into residential areas.

The information extracted from the observation sheets cumulated with GIS analysis shows that the residential pattern of the Noul Titan nucleus is a mix of individual housing in the form of houses or villas, small duplex villas complexes, P + 4 block-type residential buildings, or residential areas with collective housing of either P + 4 or P + 10 levels (Figure 4).

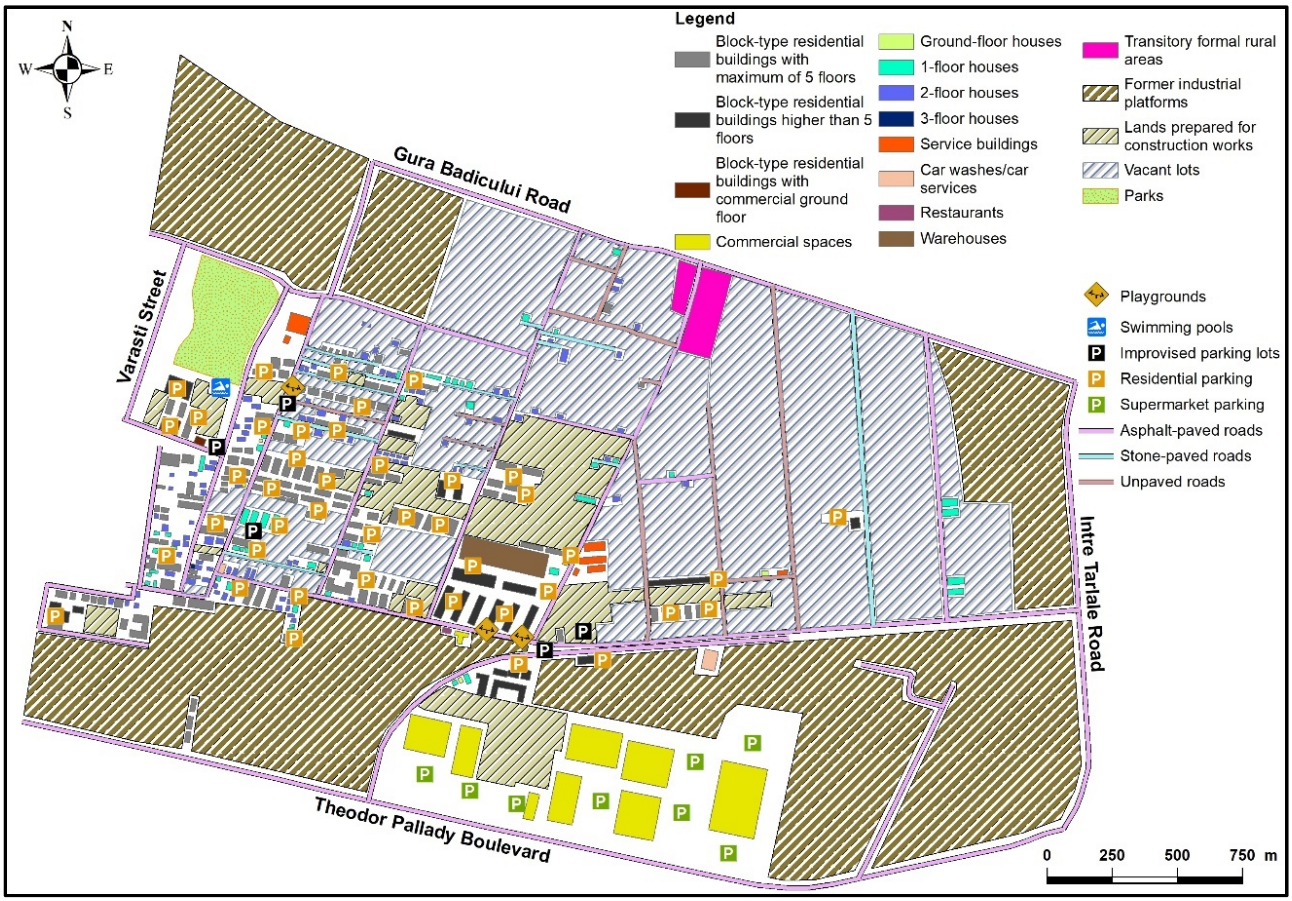


Figure 4. Residential features of the Noul Titan area.

There is no systematization regarding the buildings' height regime or designation, with built-up areas interposing with vacant lots or areas prepared for construction works. In addition, there are still transitory former rural areas containing old houses with rustic features constructed before the communist age on what was then agricultural land.

Centralized sewerage and drinking-water networks cover the entire residential area, and developers connect the new constructions to the already existing infrastructure. In addition, the interconnectivity and accessibility of the public transport network are ensured by numerous subway, tram, and bus stations located very close to the residential area. The primary and secondary roads are asphalt-paved and have sidewalks.

From a residential pattern point of view, Militari–Chiajna includes individual (i.e., P + 2 villas) and collective housing that see a wider variety: P + 4 block-type residential buildings located near the villas and P + 10 block-type residential buildings, and residential complexes that, in addition to residential buildings, also include leisure, commercial, finance/banking, education, and other units (Figure 5).

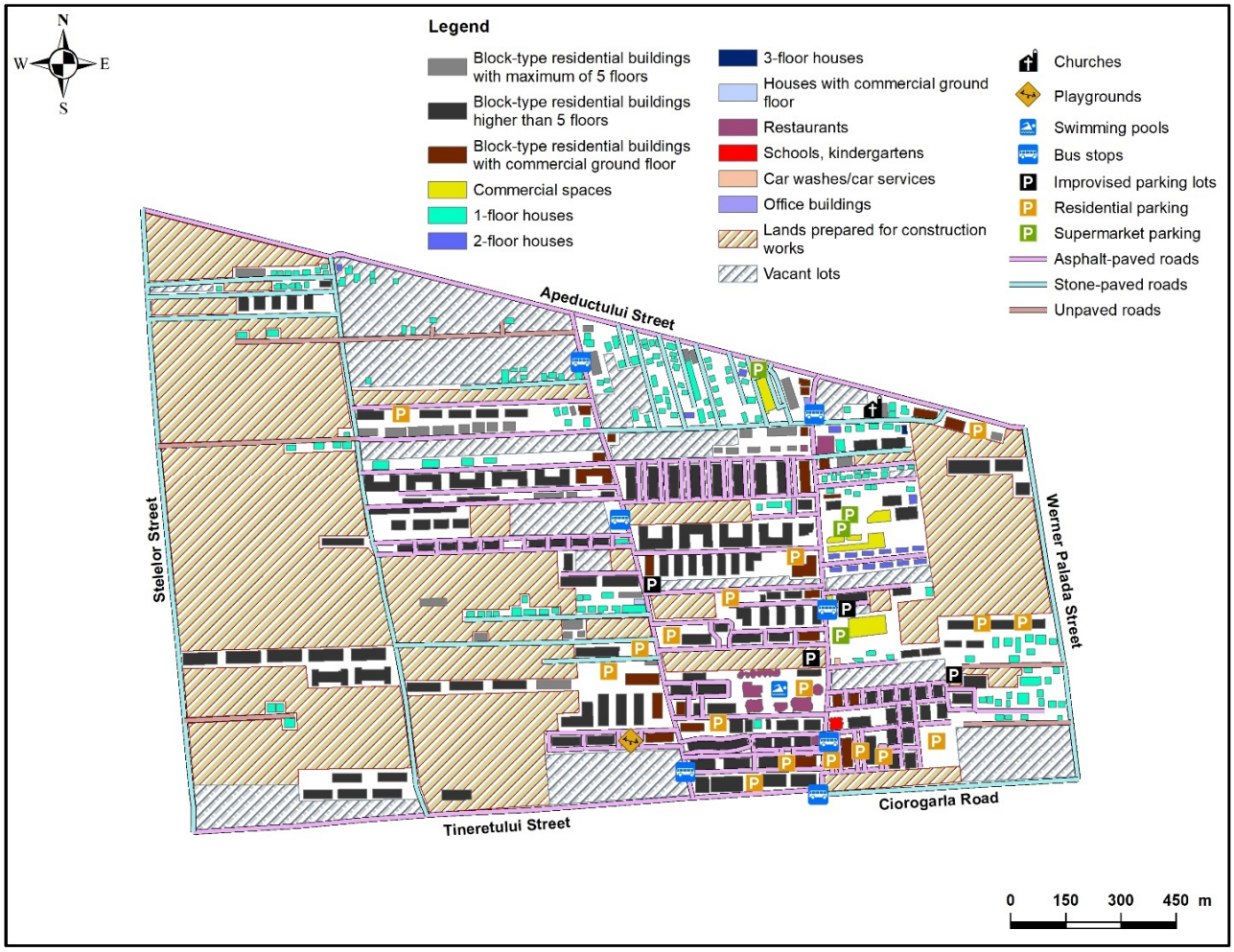


Figure 5. Residential features of the Militari–Chiajna area.

This nucleus extended without a systematization plan implemented by local authorities, so utilities such as centralized sewerage or drinking-water networks are absent, and developers connected the new buildings to septic tanks and surface wells. Accessibility is a significant issue, as, on account of its peripheral location, the transport interconnectivity with public services is supplied by a single bus line with a private transport line also available. The primary roads are asphalt-paved, and some of the secondary roads are stone-paved but are not wide enough to allow access to large intervention vehicles. The sidewalks are discontinuous since neither the developers nor the local authorities included them in the construction projects.

The Cosmopolis residential nucleus partially meets the "gated community" criteria, as it proposes a lifestyle specific to a community with above-average income levels in the form of a "prestige project", focused on image, intimacy, a few shared facilities, amenities, and security inside an area where access is limited and always controlled [93,94].

This nucleus' residential pattern comprises collective housing, such as P + 5, P + 6, P + 10, and P + 12 block-type residential buildings and individual P + 1, P + 2, and P + 3 houses; and P + 1 duplex villas (Figure 6).

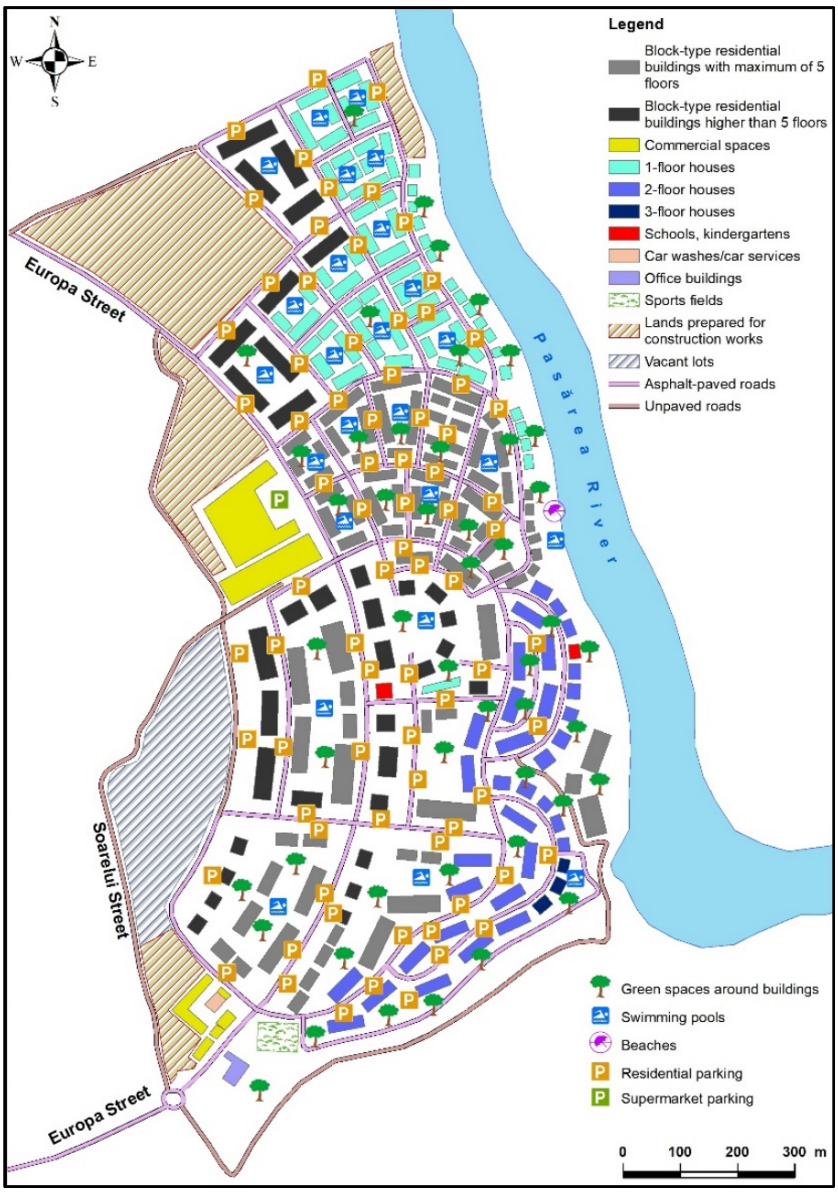


Figure 6. Residential features of the Cosmopolis area.

In terms of technical-urban utilities, the information extracted from the observation sheets determined that no centralized sewerage or drinking-water networks exist. Therefore, the developer set up a system strictly for the residential nucleus, using water supplied from surface wells and septic tanks for sewage evacuation. Cosmopolis is not connected to Bucharest's public transport system, so residents need to use personal cars or private transport that eventually connects them to areas covered by the public means of transportation in the northern part of the city. The primary roads (i.e., Bucharest's ring road) and the secondary roads (i.e., certain roads inside the complex) are asphalt-paved, with the latter also having sidewalks. The need for such a development was heightened by its isolated position and the fact that the local administration of the commune Ștefănești de Jos offered limited public amenities related to security and urban or social utilities. This residential nucleus was built on agricultural lands that were subsequently reclassified as urban, so, in contrast to the other study areas, its design benefited from functional zoning suitable for housing. Today, Cosmopolis continues to expand, as high demand has motivated the developer to build new housing.

3.3. Analyzing the Neighborhood Satisfaction in the New Residential Nuclei

Residents' evaluation of their housing depends on their needs, preferences, and expectations. Dissatisfaction appears when the housing conditions (i.e., as they perceive them) do not match their expectations [4,95]. Expectations are defined according to their needs, which can differ from family dimension to financial, social, or cultural needs but are conditioned, in the end, by income level, which dictates housing typology and features. Considering these restraints, the future residents mold their expectations to include the benefits that a new residential nucleus, their future neighborhood, might offer. The survey showed that the most often expressed expectation was *new dwellings with modern amenities and comfort* (43.7% of all answers). A second criterion for "choosing to live in a new residential nucleus" was *security*, followed by *affordable price*, with shares of 12.7% and 11.9%, respectively, of all answers. The first criterion is the most often cited regardless of the income bracket, but it is worth mentioning that those who earn less than 607 EUR place the *affordable price* in the second most important place, while those earning between 607 and 1214 EUR monthly and more than 1214 EUR are more interested in *security, private parking place* and *recreational facilities* (with *security* being cited as second most important by the latter group) (Table 2).

Table 2. Advantages of living in a new residential area by income brackets cross-tabulation.

Monthly Income/Person (EUR)		Advantages of Living in a New Residential Area							Total
		Affordable Price	Easy Access to Commercial Services	New Dwellings with Modern Amenities and Comfort	Private Parking Place	Recreational Facilities	Security	No Advantage	
<607	% within income	17.4%	0.0%	43.5%	8.7%	4.3%	8.7%	17.4%	100.0%
	% of total	3.2%	0.0%	7.9%	1.6%	0.8%	1.6%	3.2%	18.3%
607–1214	% within income	10.4%	6.0%	38.8%	13.4%	10.4%	11.9%	9.0%	100.0%
	% of total	5.6%	3.2%	20.6%	7.1%	5.6%	6.3%	4.8%	53.2%
>1214	% within income	11.1%	0.0%	52.8%	5.6%	5.6%	16.7%	8.3%	100.0%
	% of total	3.2%	0.0%	15.1%	1.6%	1.6%	4.8%	2.4%	28.6%
Total	% of total	11.9%	3.2%	43.7%	10.3%	7.9%	12.7%	10.3%	100.0%

The analysis of the age group distribution showed that, when choosing a new residential area, respondents aged 18 to 49 mainly favored their *modern amenities and comfort* (40% to 52%). Specifically, modernity was viewed as the main benefit of a new residential nucleus to its largest share (43.6%) by those aged between 30 and 39. On the other hand, although to a lesser degree, *security* mattered more for those aged over 50 (20%). Conversely, *recreational facilities* were more consequential in selecting a new residential area for the younger segment of respondents, namely those aged between 18 and 29 and 30 to 39. However, when considering the overall survey, *recreational facilities* were only relevant for as much as 7.9%. Another point worth mentioning is that 1 out of 10 respondents in general and 3 out of 10 respondents aged over 50 declared there are *no advantages* to living in a new residential nucleus. This signals the shortcomings these areas experience due to insufficient planning in incorporating beneficiaries' needs. In terms of the three chosen sample areas, more than three-quarters of the residents from Chiajna–Militari in this age segment declared the lack of any advantage, clearly showing the area's deficient housing standards, especially concerning age-friendly housing for the elderly.

In terms of their origin, respondents who had previously lived in Bucharest were more interested in *new dwellings with modern amenities and comfort* than those who came to the capital city from elsewhere in the country (43.7% to 37%, respectively). On the other hand, they were less interested in a *private parking place* (8.3% against 18.5% within their category), explained by the latter group's higher need for a car as a means of transportation within the city and especially outside it, to connect with family and friends from their previous residence.

The comparative analysis of the "negative vs. positive aspects of the new residential nuclei" shows that the highest number of respondents identified *security* as a positive aspect, while mostly complaining about *amenities*, with the latter being difficult to interpret since the same appears to be also a broadly mentioned positive aspect. On the other hand, the "negative aspects" that seem to bother residents the least are *security* and *cleanliness*. However, considering the three residential nuclei individually, there are some differences. For example, *asphalted roads*, *amenities* (sidewalks, public lighting, playgrounds, and gyms), *air quality*, and *sewerage* infrastructure are weak points in Militari–Chiajna, while *security*, *price,* and *neighbors* were viewed as assets by residents when considering this area as their future home. Cosmopolis's major disadvantages relate to *transport* (i.e., it lacks public transport) and *neighbors*, while its *security*, *amenities*, and *air quality* are seen as assets. For the Noul Titan nucleus, respondents have not mentioned a large number of disadvantages, while its advantages (*transport* and *amenities*) stem from its intra-urban location (Figure 7).

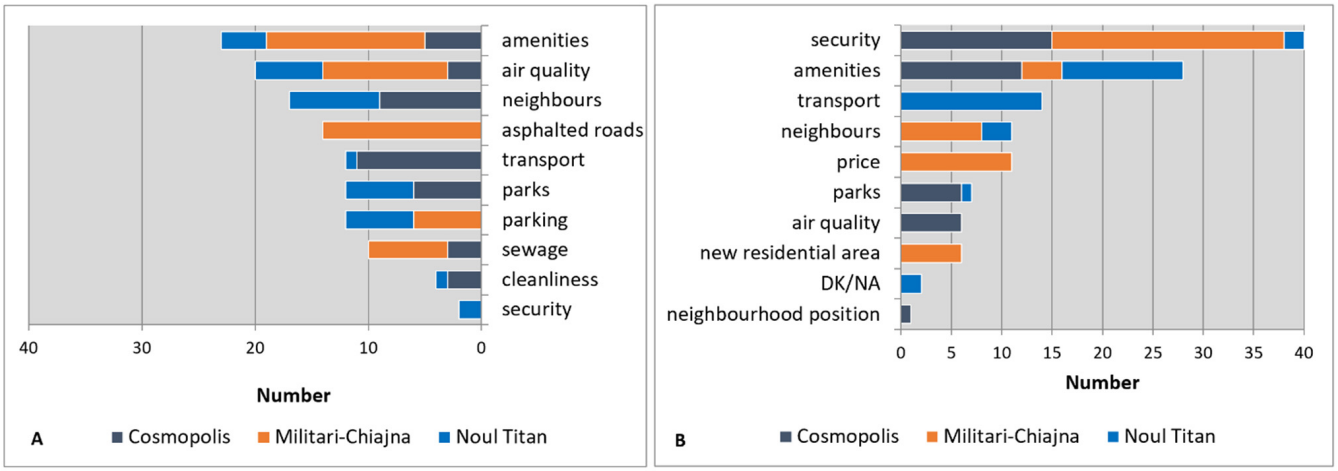


Figure 7. Negative (**A**) and positive aspects (**B**) of the new residential nuclei as per residents' opinions.

Table 3 displays the Kruskal–Wallis test results of the questions with answers expressed by variables of ordinal and numerical type. The analysis was performed to check if there are differences among the three sample residential nuclei in terms of elements defining everyday comfort and living standards, such as "security", "cleanliness", "average commuting time", and "distance to the nearest park". According to the significance level ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is rejected in the case of "security", "average commuting time", and "distance to the nearest park". Therefore, for these three elements, at least one of the neighborhoods is different from the others, with the most significant differences related to the "average commuting time". In the case of "cleanliness", identified above as one of the least bothering negative aspects, the null hypothesis is not rejected, pointing to the relative similarities in the interviewees' relative satisfaction in all neighborhoods.

Table 3. The non-parametric-test results for the questions' items with Likert scale responses.

Question	Independent-Samples Kruskal–Wallis Test Summary		
	Test Statistic	Degree of Freedom	Asymptotic Sig. (2-Sided Test)
Security	16.164	2	0.000
Cleanliness	0.017 [a,b]	2	0.992
Average commuting time	50.885 [a]	2	0.000
Distance to the nearest park	43.110 [a]	2	0.000

[a] The test statistic is adjusted for ties. [b] Multiple comparisons are not performed because the overall test does not show significant differences across samples.

The post hoc analysis results from the Dunn's tests, represented in Table 4, reveal that Militari–Chiajna neighborhood displays strong differences in terms of "security". These results are confirmed by the outstandingly large number of answers from Militari–Chiajna' residents identifying security as a positive aspect of their neighborhood (Figure 7B). For the "average commuting time", meaning the time spent traveling from home to the city, the pairwise comparison shows significant differences, suggesting that each of the three residential areas displays an individual pattern in terms of accessibility and interconnectivity with the city. The commuting time values are lowest for Cosmopolis and highest for Militari–Chiajna. Although Cosmopolis is the farthest away from the city, its location next to Bucharest's ring road is advantageous when analyzing the "average commuting time". The Militari–Chiajna nucleus, while located close to the city, has the most problematic interconnectivity due to its proximity to an extensive service and commercial area that only overburdens an insufficiently developed road infrastructure. In the case of the "distance to the nearest park", the test shows contrasting situations between Militari–Chiajna and the other two nuclei, which could be explained by its scarcity of parks, in contrast Noul Titan, which incorporates a park, and Cosmopolis, where green spaces and gardens have been integrated into the initial project and are located frequently around buildings (Figures 4–6).

Table 4. Post hoc analysis results of pairwise Dunn's tests for the questions' items with Likert scale responses, which yielded significant Kruskal–Wallis test results.

Question	Pairwise Comparisons of Name					
	Sample 1–Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. [a]
Security	Noul Titan–Cosmopolis	11.890	8.195	1.451	0.147	0.441
	Noul Titan–Militari–Chiajna	30.265	7.749	3.906	0.000	0.000
	Cosmopolis–Militari–Chiajna	−18.375	7.389	−2.487	0.013	0.039
Average commuting time	Cosmopolis–Noul Titan	−22.012	8.423	−2.613	0.009	0.027
	Cosmopolis-Militari–Chiajna	−53.484	7.594	−7.043	0.000	0.000
	Noul Titan–Militari–Chiajna	31.471	7.964	3.952	0.000	0.000
Distance to the nearest park	Noul Titan–Cosmopolis	2.596	8.486	0.306	0.760	1.000
	Noul Titan–Militari–Chiajna	44.576	8.023	5.556	0.000	0.000
	Cosmopolis–Militari–Chiajna	−41.981	7.651	−5.487	0.000	0.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0.05. [a] Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

The three sample areas register substantial differences when analyzing their public transport accessibility and coverage. The authors again correlate these with the distance to Bucharest's center and the type of residential project each nucleus was part of (e.g., inside or outside the city's administrative limit). For example, in Noul Titan, two-thirds of respondents declared the residential nucleus to be sufficiently covered by *public transport* (which was also chosen as the "primary means of transportation for commuting"), thus explaining the lack of *private transport* options among residents. Secondly, in Militari–Chiajna, more than three-quarters of respondents declared the *low frequency of public transportation means*

and the choice among using a *personal car*, *public,* and *private means of transportation* is the most balanced among the three nuclei. On the other hand, 90% of the respondents living in Cosmopolis chose *private transport* when asked about the neighborhood's "optimal transportation means".

Due to the long distance between their home and the city, workplace, or previous residence (i.e., respondents that previously resided in Bucharest vs. outside it) and the issues of the public transport system (i.e., units' low frequency or insufficient number to cover some residential nuclei) meant most residents need a personal car. Consequently, the "primary means of transportation" was designated to be the *personal car* by 75% of the respondents residing in Cosmopolis, 41.18% of those residing in Noul Titan, and 32.69% of those residing in Militari–Chiajna.

3.4. Analyzing the Housing Satisfaction in the Newly Built Dwellings of the Sample Residential Nuclei

Defined as "a function of household, dwelling and neighborhood characteristics", residential satisfaction is also a result of the interaction between residential attributes and moving intention (p. 154, Reference [96]), as both dissatisfactions with previous residence and attractive elements in new residential areas may convince people to move.

Choosing a newly built dwelling to the detriment of an old one directly results from people's expectations regarding the differences in living conditions. The "old" blocks of flats built in Bucharest during the communist regime that today dominate the city's landscape, and the houses built in the inter- and post-war periods are both inaccessible due to their prices and inadequate in terms of current housing standards.

Similar to the reasons for choosing to live in a new residential nucleus, the main "reason for choosing a newly built dwelling" was the need for *modernity and comfort* (almost 59%), regardless of income level (over 50% within each category of income), age, or type of current residence (individual or collective). The second most-often cited reason, but at a relatively large distance, was the *affordable price* (17.5%).

The prevalence of opting for *modernity and comfort* increases with the age of the respondents: 50% within 18–29 years, 55.6% within 30–39 years, reaching 69% within 40–49 years, and even 80% within the age group 50–65. Conversely, the *affordable price* is an important variable for the younger age groups of respondents (25% for those aged 18 to 29, 18.5% for the age group 30 to 39, against only 10.3% of those aged 40 to 49). This shows the considerable financial limitations of younger people in Bucharest and the advantageous offer that the new residential nuclei have brought to the city. The opportunity for a *private parking place* does not rank very high for any age group except those aged 50 to 65. It is nonetheless worth mentioning that, even if it was mentioned to a lesser extent, the *private parking place* was still one of the reasons listed when considering buying a newly built dwelling to the detriment of an older one. The reasons for this include the peripheral locations of the new residential nuclei and because it is a piece of established information that new residential nuclei incorporate private parking right from their project design phase (Table 5).

Education level shows slight differences between respondents' choices, with *neighborhood position* and *security* being more favored when purchasing a newly built dwelling by those with higher education. These dwellings' *increased value with time* is more important for those with a university-level education than for those with a high-school-level education. In terms of the previous residence, an *affordable price* proved more important for those coming from outside Bucharest than those that had already lived in the city, pointing to the first group being more vulnerable to the capital's expensive real-estate market.

Table 5. Reasons for choosing a newly built dwelling by age cross-tabulation.

Age		Reasons for Choosing a Newly Built Dwelling							
		Affordable Price	**Owning a House**	**Increased Value with Time**	**Modernity and comfort**	**Neighborhood Position**	**Private Parking Place**	**Security**	**Total**
18–29	% within age group	25.0%	0.0%	3.1%	50.0%	3.1%	9.4%	9.4%	100.0%
	% of total	6.3%	0.0%	0.8%	12.7%	0.8%	2.4%	2.4%	25.4%
30–39	% within age group	18.5%	1.9%	5.6%	55.6%	7.4%	7.4%	3.7%	100.0%
	% of total	7.9%	0.8%	2.4%	23.8%	3.2%	3.2%	1.6%	42.9%
40–49	% within age group	10.3%	3.4%	0.0%	69.0%	6.9%	3.4%	6.9%	100.0%
	% of total	2.4%	0.8%	0.0%	15.9%	1.6%	0.8%	1.6%	23.0%
50–65	% within age group	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	80.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	7.9%
>65	% within age group	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of total	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%
Total	% of total	17.5%	1.6%	3.2%	58.7%	5.6%	7.9%	5.6%	100.0%

The correlation between the "reasons for choosing a newly built dwelling" and the type of current residence (Table 6) proved that, regardless of the typology of their current housing, all categories prioritized the *modern and comfortable* aspect, which is seen as lacking in communist built housing. Furthermore, respondents living in blocks of flats were also influenced by the *affordable price*, in contrast to those living in houses, which can offer a glimpse into how demand shapes the evolution of the market toward continuing to build block-type structures. Another important reason for those living in blocks of flats is the possibility to benefit from a *private parking place*. As the city-owned residential parking offer is limited, buying a parking place is nearly impossible for those living in older dwellings in the capital city. Finally, the *neighborhood position* was also identified as a reason for choosing a newly built dwelling, as emphasized by respondents from Cosmopolis who declared that they looked forward to escaping Bucharest's congestion and air pollution (Table 6).

When analyzing the "reasons for satisfaction with the newly built dwellings" in the three sample nuclei, relatively equal shares in the residents' answers are split between *well-balanced rooms* and *living space dimensions*. Another reason for residents' satisfaction is the opportunity for individual water and heating *consumption metering* that allows consumers to manage their costs and budgets better and more accurately. On the other hand, the main "dissatisfaction reasons" were poor *finishes* and *living-space dimensions* for residents from Cosmopolis, where expectations mirrored the specificities of this gated-community-type residential nucleus. In addition to the above-stated, Militari–Chiajna and Noul Titan residents brought up issues regarding *soundproofing*, *residential density*, and *distance from the city center* (Figure 8).

The interior index of density directly depends on income level; as such, the Cosmopolis residential nucleus registers a value of 0.87 inhabitants per room, and Noul Titan registers a value of 0.91; meanwhile, in Militari–Chiajna, families opted for a lower number of rooms per inhabitant due to financial limitations, with the index capping at 1.29 inhabitants per room. This ranking of the interior index of density is mainly the result of housing pricing, with developers having to meet the high demand for lower-priced dwellings. In the end, they choose to build with fewer rooms or lower living surfaces. Within the three sample nuclei, the majority of dwellings in collective housing are two-bedroom flats, while for individual housing, we most often find three bedrooms in duplex houses, so their living areas and, hence, their costs are as low as possible.

Table 6. Reasons for choosing a newly built dwelling by the type of current residence cross-tabulation.

Type of Current Residence		Reasons for Choosing a Newly Built Dwelling							Total
		Affordable Price	Owning a House	Increased Value with Time	Modernity and Comfort	Neighborhood Position	Private Parking Place	Security	
Block of flats in a residential area	% within type of current residence	20.2%	0.0%	3.4%	56.2%	6.7%	6.7%	6.7%	100.0%
	% of total	14.3%	0.0%	2.4%	39.7%	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%	70.6%
Block of flats outside a residential area	% within type of current residence	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	63.6%	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of total	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	3.2%	0.0%	17.5%
House within a residential area	% within type of current residence	0.0%	18.2%	9.1%	54.5%	9.1%	0.0%	9.1%	100.0%
	% of total	0.0%	1.6%	0.8%	4.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.8%	8.7%
House outside of a residential area	% within type of current residence	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%
Total	% of total	17.5%	1.6%	3.2%	58.7%	5.6%	7.9%	5.6%	100.0%

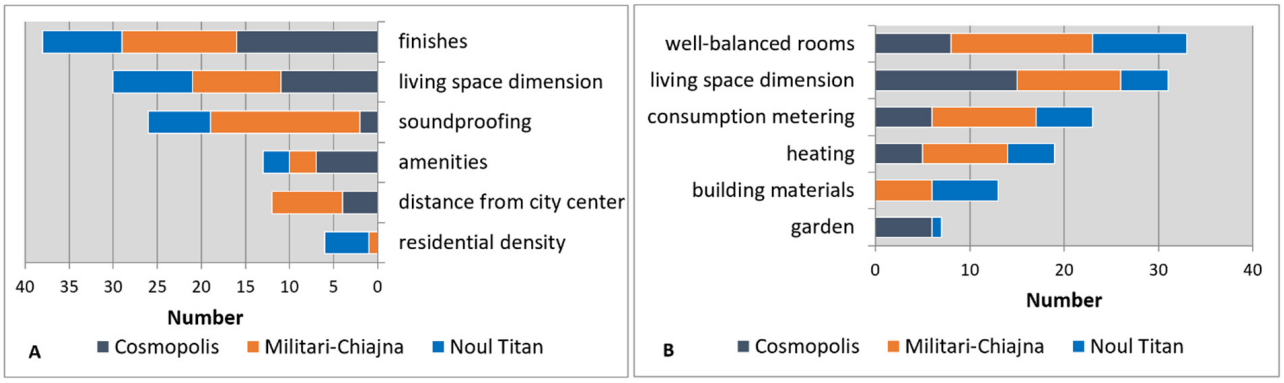


Figure 8. Residents' dissatisfaction (**A**) and satisfaction (**B**) reasons regarding their newly built dwellings.

4. Discussion

A lack of living space evidently marks Bucharest. A significant barrier, which only grew during the last decades, is the saturation of its available interior plots, as identified by Soaita and Dewilde [59] in their study of realignment between socioeconomic and housing stratification. The need for new housing has led to the development of construction entrepreneurship, with real-estate developers focusing on building primarily outside the city. Demand is fueled by the low number of self-built housing (with low-quality construction materials) and the rising preference for another category of residences, such as more modern villas. Both of these are a result of an old or very old housing fund that lacks the comfort elements necessary for current living standards and needs [59]. The very high number of private property homes and, hence, the low mobility of the population from a renter position to a homeowner position are characteristic of other CEE capital cities, as well (e.g., Prague by Špačková, Dvořáková and Tobrmanová [25]), and further prove the need for and importance of new residential nuclei in Bucharest. Apart from the fact that the newly built dwellings are more modern and bring added comfort, they also have the advantage of an affordable price in a market where the housing fund is limited, and everything built before 1990 is expensive. The new houses are in complete

antithesis to the flats built during the communist regime, where compartmentalization and size were meant to meet basic necessities rather than design choices. The age distribution of respondents opting for modernity and comfort as the main reason for choosing a newly built dwelling emphasizes the particular requirements of the older-adult segment, who usually have higher-than-average income levels and for whom housing stratification and meeting housing expectations are important factors determining their mobility [59].

Residents' perception of local dysfunctionalities strongly influences neighborhood satisfaction within the three sample areas, and local authorities are considered to be the ones capable of preventing or fixing them. A large number of recommendations and a wide variety of problems identified by respondents prove that the urban planning policies meant to ensure better living standards are inconsequentially implemented, thus resulting in situations where housing standards in new residential nuclei are sometimes lower than in the blocks of flats built during communism [85]. For example, in Noul Titan, residents declared the need to modernize the road system, build more parking places and green areas, and improve urban lighting and overall cleanliness (Figure 9A).

For the residential nuclei located outside Bucharest's administrative city limits, recommendations refer to the development and improvement of paved road infrastructure, sewerage and drinking-water central networks, connectivity with the city (i.e., lack of public means of transportation), green areas, and air-quality issues (e.g., in the case of Militari–Chiajna, as a result of its proximity to a landfill) (Figure 9B,C).

The comparison of the urban utilities in the three residential nuclei shows a direct connection between the amplitude of identified dysfunctionalities and increased distance from the city center. Figure 10 summarizes, using the data gathered from the observation sheets and the survey, the dysfunctionalities characterizing the urban infrastructure and heating systems within the three sample residential nuclei.

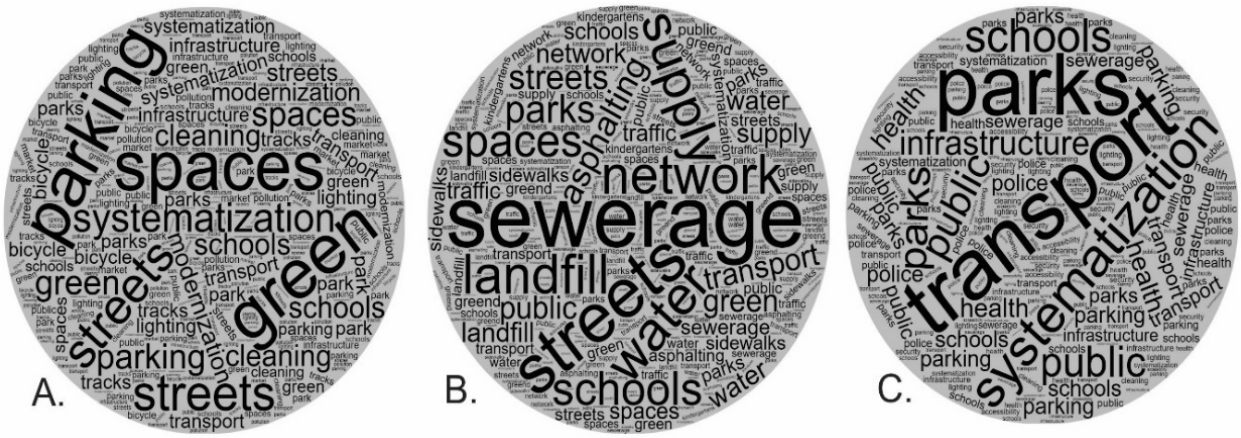


Figure 9. (**A**) Noul Titan, (**B**) Militari–Chiajna, and (**C**) Cosmopolis: residents' recommendations to local authorities for improving housing standards, based on survey-derived information.

The observation sheets filled in during the fieldwork stage showed significant differences between the three new residential nuclei, which can be correlated with their position and distance from the city center. The construction density (i.e., the larger number of taller buildings) is higher outside the city's administrative limits. For example, Noul Titan, where urban planning rules impose a height regime, sees fewer tall buildings than the other two sample areas. Urban utilities, such as the water supply and sewerage system, are more deficient outside the city (e.g., Militari–Chiajna and Cosmopolis) than in its interior (Noul Titan), and the solutions implemented by the developers (septic tanks and wells) have to be employed, in most cases, for each housing unit. Noul Titan's intra-urban position also gives it the advantage of a well-developed road system and good interconnectivity with the rest of the city.

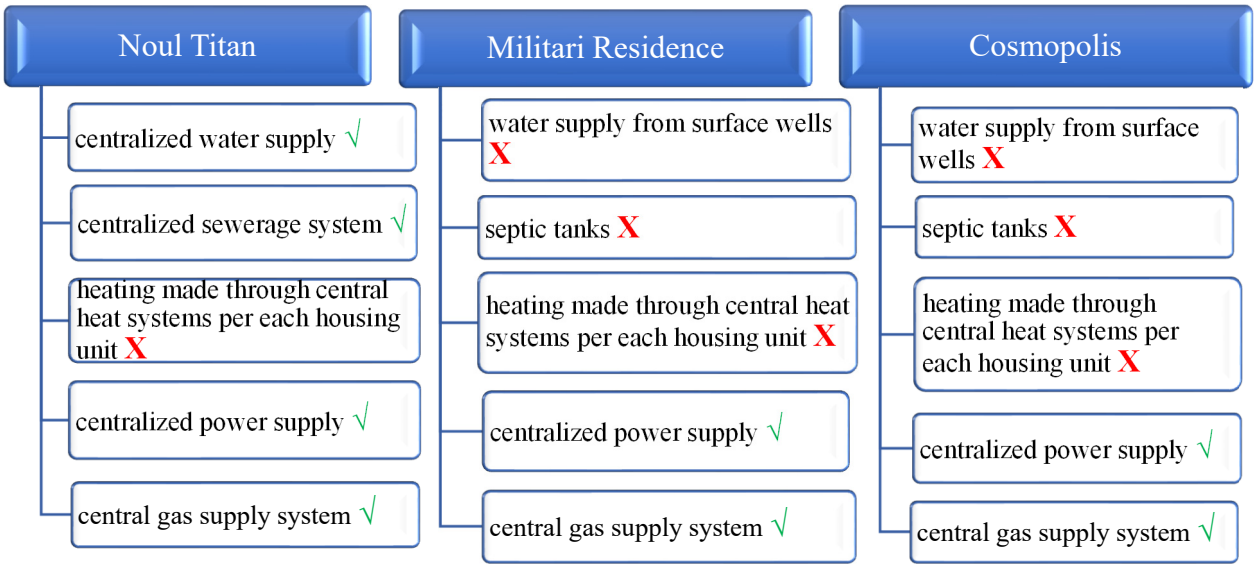


Figure 10. Comparative summary of the urban utilities in the three chosen residential nuclei (assets—√ vs. dysfunctionalities—X) based on data gathered from the observation sheets and the survey.

All sample nuclei benefit from access to the centralized gas and electricity network, but only Noul Titan is connected to the city's central sewerage and drinking-water network. A common flaw of all sample nuclei that also increases pollution levels is the type of heating system currently in use; that is, each dwelling uses individual gas boilers [97,98]. This is seen as an asset by residents, as they do not depend on the city's central heating system, which was installed in the 1960s and is a source of often poor and high-priced services [90,99]. However, the latest proposals by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests of replacing individual gas boilers with less polluting block or condominium heating boilers as per the European Green Deal policies might make residents rethink this element that is essential to their housing comfort [100].

Authorities have submitted two bills to public debate, namely the National Housing Strategy and the Code of Spatial Planning, Urbanism, and Constructions, precisely to eliminate the problems that the newly built residential nuclei are currently facing [101,102].

Bucharest's residential space's morphologic and spatial evolution is closely connected to housing prices. In addition, the prices from the housing market inside Bucharest also pressure the three sample residential nuclei. The housing market in Romania's large cities, and especially in Bucharest, is obviously getting more expensive, particularly for newly built dwellings, due to "more and more people looking to buy new flats or houses", increasing prices for construction materials, and a labor-force crisis in the construction sector, as many people immigrate to other EU countries [103].

In many cases, developers exploit authorities' PR strategies for future investment HUBs and development projects and increase housing prices for those areas. For example, Bucharest's first and third sectors register the highest prices per built square meter due to the Pipera area, Bucharest, Romania, which hosts the headquarters of many multinational firms (first sector) or famous commercial units such as Ikea (third sector) and, in both cases, the possibility of future extension of the transport infrastructure [104]. In other cases, the price is influenced by the time of sale, the commissions of real-estate agencies, the fees of notary offices, etc. [105].

This study also identified an imbalance between the conceptual idea of a new residential nucleus with its intrinsic benefits and the financial responsibility this would bring. Respondents mentioned financial reasons (lower prices) as a primary reason for choosing a dwelling in a new residential nucleus, but they also enumerated problems that are a direct result of the budget they are willing to spend: quality of construction materials,

living space dimensions, or even issues with their neighbors which they directly correlate with education and income levels ("the price of the house shows the quality of the people"—Cosmopolis resident).

5. Conclusions

Bucharest's sample new residential nuclei differ in terms of utilities and interconnectivity, with the one located inside the city administrative limits (Noul Titan) having advantages such as access to the city's existing central utilities and public transport system and the ones outside the city limits (Militari–Chiajna and Cosmopolis) having to find alternative solutions.

In terms of residents' expectations and their neighborhood satisfaction, it is worth mentioning that they preferred new residential nuclei because they were looking for modern living standards, including private parking and opportunities for recreational activities. Some of these expectations were met, for example, those relating to security, but many were not, for example, those relating to urban systematization.

In terms of housing satisfaction in the newly built dwellings of residential nuclei, respondents were content primarily with their modernity and price. The main reasons buyers chose a newly built dwelling at the expense of an older one relate to their shift in preferences for housing standards. Prices were also an important reason, and it is crucial to bear in mind that prices for dwellings in the new residential nuclei are, in general, lower than for the rest of Bucharest. While many respondents decry the living-space dimensions, much praise was given to the well-balanced rooms. Residents were also dissatisfied with finishes and soundproofing, while praising the possibility of water consumption and heating metering directly affecting their ability to balance their finances. In the opinion of the respondents participating in this survey, many of the existing dysfunctionalities can be avoided in the future if developers respect the existing legislation and if local authorities develop the urban infrastructure prior to granting construction permits.

Residential satisfaction depends on how successfully local authorities implement urban systematization policies. Numerous existing derogations and legislative gaps lead to the opportunities for interpreting urban planning rules to benefit different parties and create fundamental urban dysfunctions, which ultimately affect the population that has chosen to live in new residential nuclei.

The issues surrounding new residential nuclei in Bucharest have been highly debated in the Romanian press in recent years, as buyers are often forced to pay high amounts of money for homes with poorer amenities than what developers promised or even not benefiting from prepaid apartments due to real-estate projects being closed. All of these aspects resulted in a decrease in housing quality, which was rarely analyzed in specialized studies of the last years. In this context, we consider it necessary to continue the study of these new residential nuclei and possibly more profound research for Bucharest or a continuation in other large cities in Romania, where the housing market is equally challenging.

The study faced inevitable limitations imposed by its development during the Covid-pandemic context, limiting face-to-face interactions. This resulted in the survey either being distributed online on Facebook or the WhatsApp groups of the owners' associations in each residential nucleus or filled in by phone.

Similar to other exploratory research [106], our study raises several further research questions, particularly referring to how existing residents perceive new neighborhoods/residential nuclei and how neighborhoods and dwellings need to look to satisfy comfort needs and reach the current quality-of-life standards but also consider future urbanites. Follow-up research may tackle these areas from a more in-depth stratified consumer perspective in order to obtain more precise responses for one or more elements identified in our study as development priorities (e.g., transport solutions, parks and green areas, etc.). Therefore, this exploratory study may help both scientists and professionals project further studies on residential satisfaction and territorial planning. Decision-makers and

politicians may also find this study an informative source when making decisions and shaping policies to formulate urban planning measures.

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