

SENIOR HOUSING OPTIONS – A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

For a growing aging population, but with different needs from previous generations, a new formula of residences for independent elderly people is developing more and more in the world. They represent an alternative between personal housing and the medical unit. Increasingly popular, this type of accommodation is experiencing strong growth due to its attractiveness. The article presents this new solutions in relation to the Romanian reality in which the only offer for the elderly is, for the moment, the old people's homes.

Keywords: housing, elderly, Romania, solutions.

Introduction

The number and percentage of third age people are growing almost everywhere in Europe. In fact, not only the seniors between 60-75 years old will be more and more, but those over 75 years old, because the increasing life expectancy is already clearly outlining a "fourth age". Facing this reality, societies react quite differently. The industrialized ones, that underwent the contact with the first wave of "active grandparents", have been experimenting and applying for many years all kind of adapted solutions, while the countries of Eastern Europe, including Romania, have just discovered of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, things will certainly move fast in the coming years, when the cohorts of "baby boomers" born after the 68s will reach the retirement age.

The challenges of future generations of seniors will be different from those faced by their parents. Moreover, although, generally speaking, they will continue to target the major traditional sectors represented by healthcare and social insurance (pensions), new directions will appear, such as housing, personal security, recreational activities and travels, silver economy, etc.

Simultaneously, the image of the elderly in the collective consciousness will be redefined, moving from that of the "old person" dependent on family or on social assistance institutions, to that of a person who has the freedom of choice, thinks to the future and often prepares early his ageing and retirement.

In this regard, a new phenomenon is taking place nowadays, namely the one related to the choice of housing for the third age. Until recently, housing issues were set between two extremes - living in the same house/apartment until the end of days and/or, in extreme situations of helplessness, moving into a nursing home. In the present paper, we will

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show that apart these two options, there are a great many alternatives that appear and diversify, even if not yet directly proportional to the pace of ageing. The scientific papers addressing the third age housing reveal the multitude of perspectives. Thus the problem range from topics such as adapting the interior of the house ((Thordardottir et al., 2018), (van Hoof et al., 2016), (Hwang et al., 2011) or the use of common space (Matsumoto et al., 2020; Safran-Norton, 2010; Tanner et al., 2008) and up to scenarios about the future of solutions for housing for the third age ((Pynoos, 2018)(Lehning et al., 2012). (Safran- Norton, 2010)

1. Demographic ageing context in Romania

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INSEE), the percentage of senior population from the total of Romania’s population on the 1st of July 2015 reveals an active process of demographic aging (table 1). The situation is more complex within each region, some of the counties registering values much above the national and regional average (Fig.1).

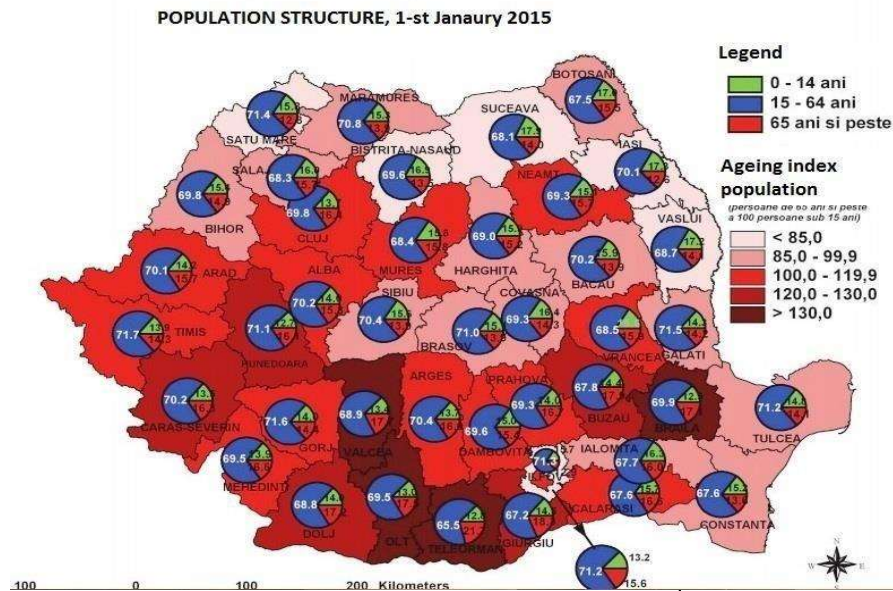


Fig. 1 Distribution of the age groups on counties (the 1st of January, 2015)
 (source: http://media.hotnews.ro/media_server1/image-2015-04-30-20048450-0-populatie-2015.jpg)

With such a demographic structure, Romania has to find new solutions for different needs and perspectives. One of these realities will gradually lead to the need for adapted housing, which will change not only the social scene, but also the urban one.

1.1. Housing for the Third Age in Romania

In Romania, housing is regulated, mainly, by the Housing Law no. 114/1996 - amendments (Law no. 143/2017) which stipulates, as a principle, that free and unrestricted access to housing is a right of every citizen". Moreover, by Law no. 152/1998 for the development of home building at national level, the National Housing Agency (NHA) runs programs that positively distinguish in favor of a few categories of beneficiary population (young people, specialists and Romani people).

By comparison, for the demographic category of the senior citizens (65+), housing and related needs are "covered" by regulation from a different field, namely that of social protection. Thus, Law no.17/2000, pursuant to article 3 par.2 (b) in conjunction with art. 16, par.2, (d), stipulates that the elderly person who "does not have a home nor the possibility to provide his housing conditions based on his own resources" may be entitled to social assistance provided by law.

Retirement homes in Romania – the only alternative to individual's own home

Concerning old people's homes as forms of organization of institutionalized public assistance, Decree 253/1971 (on the maintenance fee in some care institutions) is the last regulatory act before 1989 that refers to this category of establishments. We find out from the text of the decree that, from a typological point of view, there were four categories of homes at that time: *Old people's* homes (emphasis added), centres for the retired, assisted living facility and residential care homes as forms of institutionalization of people in distress.

The legislative changes following 1990, at least some of them due to the contact and imitation of some European practices in the field, led to the adoption of some new formula in terms of the concepts used as well as in respect of the proposed solutions. Thus, according to Law no.17/2000, "the structure available to the beneficiaries of social assistance services for elderly is the old people's home, an institution of social assistance with legal personality" (art.18 par.1), which provides proper accommodation and food conditions, healthcare, rehabilitation and readaptation, ergotherapy

activities and leisure time activities, social and psychological assistance (art18, par.2).

In the light of the analysis we are going to conduct in the following lines, a very important first aspect, arising from the first article of the law is the definition of an elderly person itself.

In statistical- demographic terms, we call old any person that has attained the age of 65, but within the meaning of the above legislation, it follows that this is any person reached the age of retirement (art.1, par.4). Under these circumstances, it is obvious that the number of elderly potentially needing assistance will be different from that of statistical- demographical registered elderly.

We should also keep in mind that before this provision, the old people's homes included three categories of establishments: retirement homes, old people's homes and homes for chronically ill elderly which, after the adoption of the law, led to a generically unique institution for elderly persons that comprised, actually, sections for: a) dependent persons; b) semi-dependent persons; c) non-dependent persons.

Their typology also includes other criteria. Specifically, according to the way in which they are organised and to the type of the building, "the standard of building design for care homes for elderly and for people with disabilities" (Ministry of Public Works and Land Planning, 1997) distinguished between four types of solutions:

- a) Skilled Nursing care facilities/ Hospices-providing additional medical care;
- b) Care homes - including a higher proportion of therapy sector/ treatment
- c) Extra care housing (sheltered housing) - including a higher proportion of social and cultural sector (accommodation and support services);
- d) Residential homes (assisted living) - organised in a pavilion type system, providing common services

The type of financing, according to which we talk about public and private care homes is no less relevant.

In the view of the above, it is easy to see that in all situations, the institutional forms of protection of the elderly do not use only the chronological age attribute, which also has a broader meaning than that given by the strict

limitations of statistics, but mainly the functional specificities assigned to a category of potential beneficiaries. Therefore, not only the chronological age itself, but the elements associated with it (namely associated with other ages

- social, psychological, biological) are relevant when it comes to solving problems due to the demographic ageing of a population.

The home for the elderly, initially defined as an institution for social assistance (according to Art.18 (1), and subsequently as a residential centre(...) which provides care for the elderly for an indefinite period (Law no. 19/12th of January 2018 concerning the approval of Government Emergency Ordinance No. 34/2016 amending and completing the Law no.17/2000 on social services for elderly persons), can have wards for:

- a) Dependent persons;
- b) Semi-dependent persons;
- c) Non-dependent persons.

1.2. Territorial distribution of homes for the elderly

At the beginning of 2017, there were 493 homes for the elderly in Romania, whose distribution was quite uneven in the country.

The empirical collection of information about the existent old people's homes in each county (table 1) allowed a first analysis on their territorial distribution at counties level. Thus, we notice that, according to the number of old people's homes, there are two areas – one where the number of homes for the elderly is higher, and another with a low representation (less than 10 establishments/county), commonly for counties in South, South West and North-East Regions.

Development Regions	Counties	Number of homes
North-East Region	Bacău	15
	Botoşani	3
	Iaşi	11
	Neamţ	3
	Suceava	17
	Vaslui	4
		53
South-East Region	Brăila	7
	Buzău	9
	Constanţa	5
	Galaţi	6
	Tulcea	7

	Vrancea	7
		41
South Region	Argeş	29
	Călăraşi	4
	Dâmboviţa	8
	Giurgiu	3
	Ialomiţa	5
	Prahova	7
	Teleorman	4
		60
South West Region	Dolj	20
	Gorj	4
	Mehedinţi	4
	Olt	4
	Vâlcea	6
		38
West Region	Arad	16
	Caraş-Severin	8
	Hunedoara	16
	Timiş	11
		51
North West Region	Bihor	13
	Bistriţa-Năsăud	3
	Cluj	17
	Maramures	18
	Satu Mare	3
	Sălaj	14
		68
Centre Region	Alba	20
	Braşov	16
	Covasna	7
	Harghita	10
	Mures	12
	Sibiu	14
		79
Bucureşti-Ilfov Region	Bucureşti	75
	Ilfov	28
Romania	Total	493

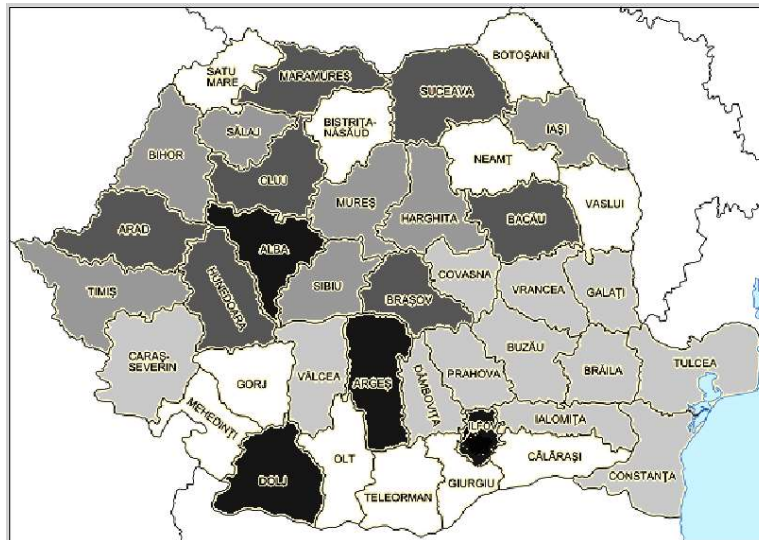


Fig. 2 Territorial distribution of Homes for the Elderly
 (■ over 20 ■ 15 to 20 ■ 10 to 15 □ under 10)

Combining the results of the two maps (fig. 1 and fig. 2), it turns out that it does not direct connection between between the level of aging and the offert to cover possible housing needs, in case the elderly would not want to stay in their own home. The lack of overlap of the two areas – the demographic ageing and the distribution of homes for the seniors – could have several explanations.

The first explanation in connected to the low interest and low responsiveness of local administrations concerning the social-demographic aspects. Mainly concerned with struggles of economic indicators, unemployment, infrastructure and political competitions the local elected officials and those from the administration pay little attention to the real dynamics of the demographical structure of the community they work for. The accelerated changes of population, in terms of number, natural movements (birth rates, mortality rate, marriage rate) and migratory flows, as well as in terms of demographic structure, represent one of the most important challenges for the public administration that should adopt a proactive attitude, not only a reactive one.

The fact remains that one important factor in this respect is the local financial power. As for the unevenness of number of homes for the elderly from a county to another, the financial aspect is a major differentiating factor,

because it could be very difficult task to support a system of social protection institutions. However, on the other hand, an analysis of the projects and investments in recent years, in almost all counties, with priority given to those that have seen rapid growth of the elderly group, would show that there is no fair balance between demographic trends and investment projects. In certain circumstances, gyms, nursery schools, parks, tourism and leisure units are found just where the demographic structure showed a clear ageing trend. We understand that the administrative option, the choice of investment projects, the local development and the social support aspect are parts of the same system and that no decision should be out of touch with the demographic context.

Finally, a third possible explanation for the differences between regions, as regards the number of institutions generically named “old people’s homes” may come from the psycho-social sensitivity and from an own local culture, in which case the role of some social actors is better highlighted. Among these, the church and the multitude of organisations and foundation of the civil society are locally the most visible actors that fulfil the social-charitable dimension of the community.

2. Housing facilities for seniors in Europe

2.1 Residential neighborhoods

The concept of *housing facilities for seniors*, through *residential neighborhoods*, is an innovative one and started to have more and more importance in the real estate industry of the western countries. The target public consists generally of people over 60, although there are many of them who start to take an interest in this solution even earlier, at the age of 55 or even 50, in order to provide the necessary time to get used to the new residence.

The first big difference from the old people’s homes is that the *residential neighborhoods* do not offer health care services, being oriented for people who are still active, independent and in good shape. They can choose either to buy or to rent such a housing in residential complexes for seniors. The rooms are available both furnished and unfurnished and, in both cases, there is the possibility for personalization with your own things.

Generally, the apartments have one up to three rooms, but there are also individual houses with private garden. These accommodations are very different from what an old people’s home means, in the sense that they look

like a small residential neighborhood, where each tenant has total independence, acting on his own as he likes and at his own pace while having a good standard of living and an active social relationship with other tenants.

Depending on the location, they can be:

- Urban residences/ complexes located in the city, often, even in the central areas of the city;
- “Villages” for seniors consisting of houses surrounded by green areas and located either in rural areas or in the peri-urban areas.

For the long-term rental option, respectively before buying a permanent stay, the marketing services of these types of housing have introduced the concept of temporary stay, respectively short rental periods (1 to 4 weeks) or medium rental periods (1 to 3 months), in order to test the housing conditions. The purpose of these trial rentals is to get to know the staff, to talk to the residents already installed, to test the different services offered and finally to discover the advantages and limitations of the residence, so that the choice is made in full knowledge of the facts.

It is interesting to note that some fixed-term stays may also be motivated by:

- The desire to temporarily join a person;
- Relaxation in a quiet place after a hospitalization or in convalescence stage;
- Holiday in a region other than that of residence;
- A change of living conditions.

Permanent or long-term stays are based on a classic renting agreement with the residence manager.

In addition to the actual housing offer, more and more residential complexes for seniors offer packages of services of various types, such as: restaurant, home care, 24/24 supervision

The cost of renting such a residence varies depending on:

- The area of the house/apartment and its geographical location;
- The reputation and level of comfort offered by the residence administrators;
- The services included;
- Optional services available à la carte (for example, the possibility to provide assistance at special events, delegation of household or administrative chores, serving meals, etc.).

Costs include rent, rental fees and common expenses, but prices may vary from one residence to another.

In any case, mark studies in France, for example, show that, despite a seemingly high sum, such residences may be less expensive than living in an old people's house. This is also because most of the services offered are optional and vary from one residence to another.

Interior facilities and equipment

The main purpose of the residential facilities for seniors is to make the daily life of their tenants easier that is why careful attention is paid to the functional aspects, but also to the interior design. The accommodation spaces are large, bright and generally equipped with golf-type windows for easy window opening and automatic blinds. The fitting of the apartments is designed to be functional and adapted to everyday needs; they are equipped mostly with the latest kitchen models, bathrooms with grab bars, large handles, hanging toilets, big mirrors, and big closets. The homes are equipped with access control systems and security services. The market for senior housing has several players, positioned differently depending on the offers and the available services, but, in general, they rely on big real estate developers who provide the building.

2.2. Co-housing

This housing option targeted to people whom, although can no longer be left alone in their own home, still do not want to leave their city/town. Such projects usually fall primarily within the responsibility of local authorities, but hybrid solutions are not excluded, involving either the private or the social environment.

These solutions may take various forms. A first option would be the exploitation of a large building, belonging to a person who can no longer manage it by himself and its transformation into a collective residence for 5 to 10 residents. Such homes are also called inclusive homes and they are often ordinary houses where residents share common areas (the living room, the kitchen), while living in private rooms. Living together and having common needs, if they wish, they can request social support or an individualized offer of health care, social or medical-social services for assistance and monitoring, according to their needs.

A second option is to use the accommodation spaces next to parish churches or monasteries. This pattern of housing has much in common with what in the Western world is called *beguinage*.

As for the third alternative, the local communities can start projects in order to build residences for a small number of beneficiaries, using even a part of their financial contribution. Residents can be tenants or owners, depending on the amount of money they have invested, and the living conditions to be adopted after the relocation depend on their choice, respectively independent or shared.

2.3. Retirement villages

Retirement villages is a new concept in Europe, imported from the United States of America. The basic idea consists in the existence of some pavilion type structures, located in a rural area or, more and more often, in periurban area, thus combining the advantages of a cleaner and quieter environment with the closeness of the health, cultural and entertainment services provided by the city.

Retirement villages are meant for people aged 60 and over, who are independent, able to work or semi-valid that want to pursue manual labour.

Most of the time, the villages are made up of small houses, surrounded by a land plot. Most of them do not have medical services that is why sometimes these solutions are not very attractive for the fourth age.

Conclusions

The tendencies for the following decades the number of people over 60 years old will continue to grow. In this socio-demographic context, the neighborhood-type residences for seniors are an alternative to the classic settlements of yesteryear, in which the elderly were perceived rather as dependent people. The new formulas privilege autonomy and confidentiality in the building that combines housing with the offer of support services. These residences meet the needs of the age of 60-80 years: security and social ties.

Although they have features valid for the rest of Europe as well, the national rhythms and effects of this growth also display individual features. In Romania's case, the maximum of demographic aging is far from being reached, although the country is already among the aged

countries.

Due to the different systemic speeds between the demographic phenomenon and the psychosocial, cultural or economic phenomena, the adopted solutions are not fully in agreement with their addressees. In Romania, in connection to this aspect, besides the senior retirement home network, there is no perspectives for a different approach. The reasons behind this low possibility are directly connected to the regional economic and cultural level. However, in terms of providing protection and assistance by means of retirement homes, the situation is rather mixed, since a great number of homes exist both in hyper-aged areas, as well as in relatively young counties or regions. This aspect is sufficient reason for us to state that the solution of institutionalized protection has the quickest expansion, an in-depth study of this phenomenon being able to reveal other particular notes of the answer for demographic aging.

Nevertheless, we already have in Romania a senior segment (aged 55-75) whose housing needs are not covered by the current market offer. This is because the traditional housing options do not meet any longer the standard of living of generations born in the 1970s and the 1980s. Staying in your own home, moving with your family or installing in an old people's home are no longer satisfying for the 55-75 age group, which is growing in the coming years. They are independent enough not to choose any of the existent solutions but, at the same time, they might need some care services, at one point. The more autonomous they are, the less they will require services from the health system and the social assistance system. In this respect, the western experiences are extremely relevant, as some of the solutions that are highly functional there, can perfectly adapt to the Romania.

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Table 1.
The elderly in the total population

Romania	15.66%
NE Region	14.3%
SE Region	15.4%
S Region	17.3%
SW Region	16.7%
W Region	15.6%
NW Region	17.0%
Central Region	14. %8
Bucharest	14.2%

Source: INSEE data and the author's calculations