

# docomomo international

International Committee for the  
**documentation and conservation**  
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the  
**modern movement**

**Docomomo E-proceedings 4 • September 2011**

## **POSTWAR MASS HOUSING** **East + West**

Conference, September 7-11, 2011  
Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies  
University of Edinburgh



---

## SUMMARY

---

Following the international conference, 'Trash or Treasure', organized by DOCOMOMO International in August 2007 (and hosted at Edinburgh College of Art), and the September 2008 special issue of DOCOMOMO International Journal on the same theme, the 'Mass Housing East and West' conference continued the international debates on post-war mass-housing, focusing especially on the specific issues of Eastern Europe.

Its structure was as follows: The event comprised a main conference day (8 September), preceded by activities on the days on either side. On the preceding day (7 September) there were study visits to two alternative local initiatives of mass housing inventorisation: the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and the Wester Hailes Project.

On 8 September, the main conference session presented case-studies from different countries in Eastern Europe, set in the wider global/European 'geopolitical' context of mass housing, and also explored methodological perspectives, including issues of recording/inventorisation; it ended with an open discussion.

Conference delegates were also able to attend a housing-themed day trip to Glasgow the following day, 9 September, including an evening symposium at Glasgow School of Art.

The location of the main conference day was the Hunter Lecture Theatre, Edinburgh College of Art (University of Edinburgh), Lady Lawson St/74 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh.

---

## CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

---

The conference speakers were as follows:

- Annie FOURCAUT, Professor, Centre d'histoire sociale du XXe siècle, UMR 8058 CNRS Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne
- Miles GLENDINNING, Professor of Architectural Conservation, University of Edinburgh/ESALA
- Mart KALM, Professor in history of architecture and Dean of the Faculty of Art and Culture at Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn
- Andy LOCK, Senior Lecturer, Nottingham Trent University (lunchtime presentation)
- Juliana MAXIM, Assistant Professor, University of San Diego
- Henrieta MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Head of the Department of Architecture, Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava
- Vera MARIN, associate, urban planner at SC SQUARE B.A.U. - architecture and urban planning office, president and project coordinator at ATU- Association for Urban Transition
- Stefan MUTHESIUS, University of East Anglia
- Carmen POPESCU, independent scholar
- Ola UDUKU, Reader, University of Edinburgh/ESALA
- Florian URBAN, Head of Architectural History and Urban Studies, Glasgow School of Art
- Danièle VOLDMAN, Professor, Centre d'histoire sociale du XXe siècle, UMR 8058 CNRS Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne
- Kimberly ZARECOR, Assistant Professor, Iowa State University, Ames/Iowa

## Conference Schedule

Morning (chair: Ola Uduku)

Registration; welcome to conference from Ola Uduku

Miles GLENDINNING: Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as 'heritage'; outline of key issues for discussion

SESSION 1: THE GEOPOLITICS OF MASS HOUSING: NATIONAL CASE STUDIES, EAST/WEST

Juliana MAXIM: The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967

Henrieta MORAVČÍKOVÁ: Concentrated responses to the issue of prefabricated mass housing: Bratislava, 1950-1995 Morav

Mart KALM: The search for alternatives to prefab dormitory suburbs in Soviet Tallinn

Florian URBAN: Mass Housing in East and West Germany: Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage

Stefan MUTHESIUS: "Architect-Designed": Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing

Annie FOURCAUT and Danièle VOLDMAN: Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947 -1989: A European Project

Andy LOCK: The 'Sunlit Uplands' Photographic Project

### SESSION 2: ON-GOING PROJECTS/METHODOLOGICAL STUDIES

Afternoon (chair: Carmen Popescu)

Kimberly ZARECOR: Bigness of another sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia

Vera MARIN: The Association for Urban Transition: civil society and mass-housing in post-socialist Bucharest

Carmen POPESCU (Response/moderator of the debate) Topics: investigation of the hybrid field of practice of mass housing between research, legislation, architecture, urban planning, social sustainability, ecology, and political activism.

### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Followed by:

Welcome for EAHN Scotland Tour Participants

Conference + Tour: Overview of Combined Schedule

Wednesday 7 September: CONFERENCE DAY 1

Morning: Visit to 'official' inventorisation archive (RCAHMS)

Afternoon: Visit to 'community-led' recording/heritage initiative (Wester Hailes)

Evening: DOCOMOMO-Scotland lecture (ECA Hunter Lecture Theatre)

Thursday 8 September: CONFERENCE DAY 2 (based at ECA)

Morning: National overview papers (ECA HLT)

Afternoon: Thematic papers/round-table (ECA HLT)

Evening: Tour introductory lecture (ECA HLT; followed by party in Conservation Workroom)

Friday 9 September: TOUR DAY 1/POST-CONFERENCE DAY

Morning: bus tour of mass housing in Cumbernauld and Glasgow

Afternoon: walking tour of central Glasgow

Late afternoon: symposium/reception at GSA

Saturday 10 September: TOUR DAY 2

All-day bus tour focusing on Scottish Castles (Linlithgow, Stirling, Doune, Elcho, St Andrews)

Sunday 11 September: TOUR DAY 3

All-day walking tour of central Edinburgh

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Thursday 8 September: CONFERENCE DAY 2

*Morning Chair: Ola Uduku*

*Location: ECA Hunter Lecture Theatre, University of Edinburgh*

- **INTRODUCTION Miles Glendinning** (University of Edinburgh)  
“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion”
  
- **SESSION 1: THE GEOPOLITICS OF MASS HOUSING: NATIONAL CASE STUDIES, EAST/WEST**
  
- **PAPER 1 Juliana Maxim** (University of San Diego)  
“The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”
  
- **PAPER 2 Henrieta Moravčíková** (Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava)  
“Concentrated responses to the issue of prefabricated mass housing: Bratislava, 1950-1995”
  
- **PAPER 3 Mart Kalm** (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)  
“The search for alternatives to prefab dormitory suburbs in Soviet Tallinn”
  
- **PAPER 4 Florian Urban** (Glasgow School of Art)  
“Mass Housing in East and West Germany: Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage”
  
- **PAPER 5 Stefan Muthesius** (University of East Anglia)  
“Architect-Designed”: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”
  
- **PAPER 6 Annie Fourcoat** (CNRS Université Paris Pantheon Sorbonne)  
“Housing estates: the French case (1950s-80s)”
  
- **PAPER 7 Andy Lock** (Nottingham Trent University)  
“The ‘Sunlit Uplands’ Photographic Project”

Thursday 8 September: CONFERENCE DAY 2

*Afternoon Chair: Carmen Popescu*

*Location: ECA Hunter Lecture Theatre, University of Edinburgh*

## SESSION 2: ON-GOING PROJECTS/METHODOLOGICAL STUDIES

- **PAPER 8 Kimberly Zarecor** (Iowa State University)  
“**Bigness of another sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia**”
- **PAPER 9 Danièle Voldman** (CNRS Université Paris Pantheon Sorbonne)  
“**Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947 -1989: a European project**”
- **PAPER 10 Vera Marin** (SC SQUARE B.A.U / A.T.U)  
“**The Association for Urban Transition: civil society and mass-housing in post-socialist Bucharest**”
- **PAPER 11 Carmen POPESCU**  
“**Topics: investigation of the hybrid field of practice of mass housing between research, legislation, architecture, urban planning, social sustainability, ecology, and political activism**”

## APPENDIX 1

**Carsten Hermann** (Co-ordinator, DOCOMOMO-Scotland)

**Review of Conference** as published in the EAHN Newsletter 2011



**“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion” by Miles Glendinning** (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh)

Welcome to the main day conference session of this DOCOMOMO International/EAHN Conference on Modern Mass Housing: East and West. I would like to begin by explaining a little about the origins and purpose of this event. Both EAHN and DOCOMOMO have had a longstanding interest in researching and documenting the mass housing legacy of the postwar decades in Europe, especially in relation to their potential status as heritage; and when it transpired that EAHN’s 2011 Annual Tour was to be held here in Scotland, we thought it would be a great opportunity to add on to it an event dedicated specially to modern mass housing.

From the perspective of the Urbanism and Landscape Committee of DOCOMOMO-International, whose task is to expand DOCOMOMO’s work beyond individual elite monuments to the wider built environments of modernism, social housing several years ago was identified as a key testing ground for this shift in the scope of modern heritage, and we organised a succession of events to review the state of play in both of DOCOMOMO’s main areas of activity, documentation and conservation (DO-CO-MOMO). These included a 2007 Conference, ‘Trash or Treasure’, and a special September 2008 issue of the DOCOMOMO Journal on modernist mass housing. Today’s symposium builds further on this foundation.

One initial challenge at these events was, or is, to agree definitions of our subject. That task is further complicated by the communication issues

raised in any multi-national, multi-lingual initiative. In the English language alone, there are a mass of terms that mingle politico-social and architectural definitions of our subject - mass housing, public housing, social housing, council housing, housing scheme, project, estate, multi-storey, tower blocks, deck access, flats, high rise, system building and so on and so on. And other languages are in the same position. In DOCOMOMO, we have tried to circumvent this definition difficulty through a pragmatic, albeit complex, working definition of modern mass housing for the purpose of our Urbanism/Landscape initiatives: that is, large-scale housing programmes backed in some way or another by the state, and whose built form usually involves large aggregates of buildings laid out in the diverse ways allowed for in the modern movement.

In order to build on the previous housing-related DOCOMOMO events, we didn’t want today’s event to just repeat generalities, but to focus on more specific issues. We’ve identified two issues in particular.

First, the issue of methodology, and specially the relationship between documentation and conservation – the two poles of DOCOMOMO’s work. Does the sheer scale and controversial connotations of postwar social housing complexes make it impracticable to preserve them in any systematic or meaningful way? If so, then as we saw at RCAHMS yesterday, can the heritage emphasis shift decisively to recording and documentation – not as a preliminary to preservation but instead

“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion” by Miles Glendinning (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh)

of it? And if so, in what form? Do modern electronic and GIS methods now make it practicable to attempt comprehensive database or inventory initiatives, or are more ad-hoc, fragmentary approaches dictated by the sheer scale, or the radical multiple reworkings, of the surviving environments?

In the 1980s, in the pre-computer age, it was possible to produce a comprehensive printed A2 size atlas of social housing in Amsterdam, and something similar was attempted for the UK in the book Stefan Muthesius and I produced in 1994, *Tower Block*, which inventoried at a very basic level over 400,000 units of multi-storey public housing. But how feasible would this be today, following decades of ‘regeneration’? In some places this would require archaeological excavation rather than architectural recording. And which are the most effective agencies for recording these vast yet often fragmented environments: top-down, government survey programmes or bottom-up community recording initiatives – or a combination of both? Yesterday’s study visits to RCAHMS and the Wester Hailes initiative explored precisely that issue. Hopefully, we will get some impression in the case studies today of any inventory efforts in the individual countries, and hopefully too, in this afternoon’s discussion we will explore these questions of inventorisation a bit further – including possible further action and initiatives.

The second issue we are focusing on at this conference is one of cultural geography, the cultural geography of mass housing within Europe. The previous DOCOMOMO initiatives concentrated

mainly on Western Europe, but with so much first-rate research now in place on the former socialist bloc, Carmen Popescu and I both felt that it would be timely to take our cue from that, and focus on both socialist-bloc housing and on East-West cross-comparisons.

I think that quite a few of our case study contributions today may highlight the great differences between mass housing in east and west, and certainly there is a lot of validity in that – one only needs to take a look at, for example, the contrast between the intricately crafted and individualised housing designs in Denmark, built by a myriad of housing companies and cooperatives, and the vast and open socialist state-built Plattenbau complexes on the other side of the Baltic.

But what I would instead like to draw attention to, in the remainder of this paper, is the fact that the mass housing of north-western, central and eastern Europe arguably had a number of significant aspects in common. For example, their timing and general political scope, with a rapidly accelerating postwar housing drive enjoying rather wide public support as part of a general socialist or welfare-state modernisation ethos, reaching a climax in the late 60s and 70s, then petering out, in the mid 70s in Western Europe and a decade later in Eastern Europe – all this in contrast, for example, to the much more restricted character and abrupt collapse of public housing in the US. Or the patterns of tenure, with social renting from public or collective agencies overwhelmingly the norm, as opposed to the much more prominent role of semi-private apartment

“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion” by Miles Glendinning (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh)

blocks in the Americas, places like Toronto or Brasilia, or the Mediterranean. Or in location, with most developments in a generally quite spacious peripheral or suburban setting and only a minority involving urban demolition and redevelopment. Or in building patterns, where there were fairly consistent attempts to implement on a large scale the modernist formulae of maximal-sunlight spacing, orientation, greenery, and varied block heights up to around 20-25 storeys maximum, often much lower, more prefabricated and standardised in the east or ‘traditionally’ in situ constructed in the west.

All these are, of course, massively sweeping generalisations, with huge exceptions everywhere – but arguably, the decision to hold this conference in Scotland gives us an on-the-ground illustration of the concept of a northern and Central European mass housing ‘identity’, owing to the fact that our experience of mass housing in this country was something of a hybrid of both ‘sides’. Because of the peculiar strength of organised, municipally organised socialism in post 1945 Scottish cities and towns (although Edinburgh, where we are now, was a big exception to this) public housing became extraordinarily dominant in those places, especially in Glasgow – which is why it is very important that we are also going there on our field-trip tomorrow. Up to 80 or 90% of all new dwellings in postwar Scottish cities were in public municipal (or ‘council’) housing schemes (a far higher percentage than in the rest of the UK and astronomically high compared to, say, 2 or 3% in Denmark or W Germany). Across the country, rather vast and spacious developments

proliferated, not unlike the USSR in their relatively sparse landscaping, although not usually using large panel prefabrication. Many were built by municipal ‘direct labour’ rather than private contractors.

But the subsequent management of that built legacy has radically altered that picture. In many places that picture is now unrecognisable; in the reaction against that legacy, there have been rather more demolitions or radical Postmodernist rebuildings than in most ex-socialist countries. In Glasgow, the entire public housing stock was transferred to a housing association, the Glasgow Housing Association, which embarked on very radical reshaping schemes. To appreciate Glasgow’s East-West hybridity today, you have to be an archaeologist! And in Edinburgh most towers have gone already – it’s difficult to realise that 20 years ago there were 95 multi-storey blocks of public housing in Edinburgh. The one big exception to this general Scottish picture – an exception we have no time to investigate in detail in this conference - is the city of Aberdeen, now a veritable museum of social housing, owing to its municipal culture of careful husbandry of assets and regional pride. In the cases of Aberdeen and Glasgow, we witness radically different heritage management outcomes ‘on the ground’ stemming from rather similar cultural geographical origins within one small country.

Before we begin our main sequence of European case studies, I want to spend a short while highlighting this commonality in a more oblique way, by briefly expanding the focus of comparative

“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion” by Miles Glendinning (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh)

discussion geographically to touch on a project on which I have recently embarked - provisionally titled ‘The Hundred Years War’ - to research a global history of C20 and early C21 modern mass housing. And in particular I want to look at two hotspots of public housing production, Hong Kong and Singapore, both of which are linked historically to Europe, but which have diverged from Europe, East and West, in almost all possible ways – not least because their housing drives are still vigorously in progress today – something whose implications take us straight back to the area of heritage management.

Here in Europe, mass housing is something entirely of the past, a troubled legacy about which we can stand back and ask – is this or is this not heritage? But there, things are more complicated. These two Asian city states have both developed long-term mass housing strategies since the 1950s – in the Singapore case since 1927, when the Singapore Improvement Trust was set up - as a response to fearful demographic and political pressures – but in very different ways. But today, both are still building on a significant scale - around 15,000 units a year, although that is sharply down from earlier annual maxima of as much as 85,000 for Hong Kong ten years ago – pro rata, over twice the highest output of Scottish public housing in the late 60s.

More striking still is that these programmes are run within highly free market-capitalist societies by massive, centralised Government housing agencies covering the whole territories – the Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Singapore

Housing and Development Board - and as part of fearsomely comprehensive land-use planning strategies involving effective state control, or nationalisation, of most or all land and embedding of once-transitory populations through building of mass housing – in the Singapore case, as part of an authoritarian government ethos of mass national mobilisation, and in Hong Kong, in a programme that has carried on unbroken either side of the 1997 return to China. Tenurially, both programmes show a sharp difference from Europe, having placed tremendous emphasis on government building of flats for sale, on strictly controlled terms, to curb property speculation. These ‘Home Ownership’ schemes now cover 90% of the population in Singapore, but, for the moment, are in abeyance in Hong Kong.

But the biggest distinctiveness is, of course, in the built form. The land shortage, combined with other factors such as the subtropical or tropical climate, has led to solutions that are sharply different both from Europe and from each other. In both cases, the British modernist formula of planned new towns combined with radical sanitary redevelopment was adopted in a much higher-density form, discarding the obsession with space and sunlight in favour of the very opposite. In Hong Kong, the mountainous terrain and huge refugee influxes shaped a tradition of very high land prices, slum overcrowding, and very small new flats: the strong private housing sector further restricted public housing land supply. In Singapore, all these factors were less severe.

So at every stage of the public housing story,

“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion” by Miles Glendinning (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh)

Hong Kong’s built solutions were denser and higher than Singapore, beginning in the mid 50s with the astronomically dense 7th Mk 1 Resettlement blocks, each rehousing several thousand squatters in unserviced single rooms, when the Singapore Improvement Trust was still building 3-room flats in three-storey blocks. The contrast was just as sharp in the mature public housing programme of the 80s and 90s, when Singapore’s HDB architects perfected an even-height, carpet-like New Town formula of medium-height blocks arranged in individually-planned, dense ‘precincts’ and offset by punctuating towers – increasingly in rather flamboyant Postmodern styles – while Hong Kong went for a tower-based formula of standard 41-storey straight Modernist point blocks with rather British-sounding standard type-names – Harmony, Concord, Trident – and containing much smaller flats than Singapore. More recently, Singapore has complicated this dichotomy in inner urban-renewal schemes and redevelopments of older estates, by also going for blocks of around 40-50 storeys, but in more isolated outcrops rather than the serried arrays of soaring hilltop towers that make Hong Kong unique in the world of public housing.

Heritage-wise, the position is also radically different from Europe. On the one hand, the overtones of stigma, failure and under-demand that complicate our housing heritage debates in Europe are absent. Even after Hong Kong’s ‘Ronan Point moment’ – the demolition of two brand-new 41-storey Concord blocks in 2001 after corrupt piling contractors had left them both slightly curved like giant bananas – the programme

still retained its public support. On the other hand, the land scarcity imposes an ethos of constant renewal: although the programmes themselves are institutionally as old as many in Europe, the earlier phases of emergency housing like Hong Kong’s 1950s Resettlement blocks have all vanished – the very last Resettlement blocks at Lower Ngau Tau Kok were demolished last year, to be replaced by new public rental housing in ‘site specific’ blocks up to 47 storeys high.

Although some isolated blocks have been preserved, including one Mk1 block in Hong Kong and some 1930s-1950s SIT estates in Singapore, heritage in both places is more a matter of local community recording (as here in Wester Hailes), and also even of celebration, with the passing of much-loved estate being marked by nostalgic exhibitions and events. Public housing is seen as a collective asset to be husbanded and cherished until it can be replaced by even better public housing, at an increased density that, for example, allows all new estates to have as a matter of course an integrated commercial and community centre bigger than Cumbernauld New Town’s centre.

That is maybe the most sobering thing about this from the viewpoint of us Europeans, East or West – that what unites us is an assumption that mass housing is something of the past, whose governing dynamic is a matter of managed but irreversible decline, whether in eastern Umbau Ost or in equivalent western situations – whereas the dynamic in Hong Kong and Singapore is one of managed growth and renewal. It would be crass in

THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER ■ INTRODUCTION

**“Introductory global overview of the issues of mass housing as ‘heritage’; outline of key issues for discussion” by Miles Glendinning** (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh)

this context to simply talk of ‘western decline’ and ‘the rise of Asia’ – especially as most other Asian countries have very different policies, although large-scale public housing is now spreading to S Korea and Mainland China. But can we learn something from this more positive approach? Or do we simply write off European public housing as a lost cause, an imperfect heritage whose original ideals are only now for the first time being properly realised somewhere else?

Hopefully, this conference will allow some of these questions to be aired.

**“The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”**by **Juliana Maxim** (University of San Diego)

What constitutes “mass” in mass housing? In the context of this conference and its aim to bring more precision to the notion of mass housing, I will contribute some remarks not so much about the specific building types used to house vast portions of Bucharest’s population in the 1950s and 1960s; but instead, about the organization of these buildings into well-defined architectural ensembles.

Although my discussion is based on the case of Bucharest in the early 1960s, I wish to frame it with a set of interconnected propositions that could concern mass housing in general. My main proposition is that mass housing is best understood not as a series of buildings, but as a strategy to claim, delineate, and organize territory. Mass housing operated as a territorial category as much as a functional or programmatic one. In the context of the Eastern Bloc, the notion of microrayon illustrates clearly how the research and debate about mass housing was situated firmly at the city scale, and how these highly structured territorial units were considered more than a series of buildings, and instead architectural artifacts of their own.

Secondly, the shift in scale I am proposing from buildings to territorial units goes to the heart of one of the difficulties of the historical inquiry in socialist contexts: the fact that the buildings themselves seem to lack visual appeal – standardized, uniform, blank, serialized across geographies and national contexts, they are, taken individually, rather poor carriers of meaning. However, when considered as ensembles, their arrangements reveal instead formal complexity, variation, and a

search for experiential qualities. In other words, architectural, cultural and social agendas become legible on the territorial level.

Finally, I believe that it is on the level of the planning of the territory (both in the vastness of the territorial intervention, and in the integration of different scales) that the most interesting differences emerge between the socialist and western context. Microrayon, I argue, while formally linked to western developments, is specific to a socialist context. In response to Miles Glendinning’s invitation to establish lines of comparison, I would like to suggest that it is units of territory such as the microrayon, that can best help us trace differences between capitalist and socialist approaches to mass housing.

**Romania**

Between 1955 and 1960, Romania’s new socialist government commissioned the construction of a staggering 340,000 dwelling units, most of them in the capital, Bucharest, in response to an almost twofold increase of the urban population after 1945 (1&2). The breakneck pace of construction only accelerated in the following 5-year plans. The hundreds of thousands of new housing units, assembled into thousands of blocks of flats, became the defining feature of Bucharest, their recognizable silhouette rapidly transforming the cityscape. Much discussion surrounded the construction technologies and the typologies of these buildings, but the organization of these buildings into coherent ensembles throughout the territory of the city drew an equal amount of

## “The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”

by Juliana Maxim (University of San Diego)



*Fig. 1: Aerial view of a microrayon in the Balta Albă housing district, Bucharest, Romania, ca. 1963. Photograph (uncredited). Illustrated in *Arhitectura R. P. R.* 83, no.4 (1963): 34.*

attention, both in professional and political circles. By 1960, the particular notion of the microrayon had become the planning device of choice in Romania, as it had also in the entire Soviet Bloc.

What was the microrayon? The word is a Soviet technical term (*mikrorayon*), adopted into Romanian (and, I suspect, into the professional vocabulary of other languages of the Soviet Bloc) to indicate the smallest administrative unit in the socialist reorganization of the urban territory. Throughout the 1960s, it constituted the planning device of choice in Romania's territorial policies, and was repeatedly touted as a socialist spatial answer to the ideological and practical imperatives of a new society.

It is tempting, when looking at examples of microrayons, with their modernist towers sitting amidst vast green spaces (Fig. 1), to see the notion as but a variation of the CIAM/Radiant City-inspired models that were starting to appear throughout

Western Europe in the 1950s (such as Lyon, 1957, Harlow, 1957). Like many American and Western European models circulating in the 1940s and 1950s, the microrayon is a residential ensemble conceived so as to constitute an organic unity, aimed at connecting its inhabitants through the everyday use of shared social and cultural institutions (among which schools and daycare centers figure prominently) and of parks and green spaces. The microrayon was meant to occupy a clearly defined territory, delimited by streets with intense traffic or by other strong dividing elements. To achieve a certain functional and experiential cohesion, its territory was not to be crossed by important streets, and pedestrian and car traffic were to be, preferably, separated inside the microrayon. The maximum distance between any dwelling, service, and public transportation should not be more than 500 m. The size of the microrayon was not to go beyond 10 000 inhabitants, although it could also be smaller numbers (3).

### A matter of names

Despite the familiarity of these principles, the microrayon resists a direct, limpid translation into conventional planning terms (such as neighbourhood unit, superblock, urban sector, or, in French, *nouvel ensemble urbain*, *cité neuve*, *grande opération*, etc) or softer terms (such as suburb, neighbourhood). Most of these terms do exist in Romanian, but it is the term microrayon that is systematically used at the time, signaling a desire to differentiate it from seemingly equivalent notions. The aim, here, then, is to track those



## “The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”

by Juliana Maxim (University of San Diego)

features of the microraiion that are not translatable into a more familiar categories, and which may point to some of the irreducible qualities of socialist experience.

I think the point about the term microraiion is not only its declared connection to soviet practices (though that is important too); unlike neighborhood unit, urban sector, or superblock, microraiion, or micro-district, signifies the existence of larger units of order (the raion). Although the microraiion is similar in size to the neighborhood unit, for instance, the word micro implies planning of a radically different scale, one that engulfs the entirety of the national territory, and of which the microraiion is but one small constitutive part. It functioned as a planning device specific to the territorial policies of centrally-planned economies, and therefore distinct from capitalist applications.

### From cvartal to microraiion

In Romania, the microraiion as a term and a technique appears in the late 50s, when architects radically reorient their planning practices from relatively small housing projects called cvartal (also a word borrowed from Russian) and towards the organization of the entire territory of the city, a city that is now conceived, planned and developed as a totality. It is as if the scope of planning had shifted from a city made of parts to a city as single entity.

Before the microraiion, the cvartal had been a timid attempt to order the chaotic 19th century city. Most of Bucharest’s urban fabric had



*Fig.2 Partial view of cvartal: the Floreasca housing district (1956-58), Bucharest. Photograph (uncredited). Illustrated in Arhitectura R. P. R., 6 (1964). 34.*

developed organically, without the rationalization of the grid or of the straight axis, and the cvartal emerged, in the 1940s and 50s, as a short-lived experimentation with orthogonal, or at least geometrical alignments. Such was, for instance, the small housing development of Floreasca (1956-58), which organized identical apartment buildings into regular patterns aligned with the street grid. But as early as 1960, the discourse shifts from the efficiency and economy of the cvartal, to something that could be called a newly found formal playfulness. Larger housing estates appear, characterized by picturesque, unpredictable arrangements of buildings of various heights and footprints. This new norm for urban development functioned as an explicit criticism of the cvartal’s uniformity and monotony (Floreasca, for instance, was deemed “monotonous and without personality.” (4)) (Fig. 2)

But much deeper shifts are at work. Another difference between the 1950s – the age of the cvartal and the 1960s – the age of the microraiion,

**“The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”**by **Juliana Maxim** (University of San Diego)

is that the construction of housing migrates from the existing city toward less-densely built areas around the center, and, with it, the goal of reforming and re-ordering the capitalist city becomes that of an alternative utopia encircling the historic center. There, it seems, the planner could think of urban space as limitless and abstract, and avoid any significant entanglement with the preexisting city, which it seeks to fully replace. This change in scope is implied in the photographs – the cvartal is often photographed from up close; the microrayon, from further afar, with a newly found sense of conquest over the land.

The progression from cvartal to microrayon also seems to mobilize new techniques of enclosure and autonomy from the rest of the city. In that regard, the microrayon functions as the reverse of the cvartal: large streets forcefully mark its perimeter, while the interior develops with great freedom and flexibility. The cvartal, by contrast, rigidly aligned housing blocs with the street grid, ran wide monumental axes through its center, and defined its boundaries with much less clarity. While the microrayon called for a break in the fabric, the edges of the cvartal seem to invite continuity and repetition of the street pattern. The cvartal was formed through the addition of identical elements and therefore could be endlessly extended; by contrast, the microrayon is a fully constituted, unbreakable, and finite entity inside of which each housing bloc stands as a singular, irreplaceable component.

**Balta Albă**

Finally, the most important point about the microrayon is that it fits within a tightly orchestrated hierarchy of increasingly larger spatial units, which distinguishes it not only from its local precedent, the cvartal, but also from the better-known notions of neighborhood unit and superblock. To illustrate this point, I will use the example of one of the most emblematic projects of the 1960s, Balta Albă (a vast district developed at lightning speed between 1961 and 1966, during which 36 000 apartments, or 1 087 000 square meters of built surface, housing 100 000 inhabitants, were constructed).

The district borders a vast industrial complex to the East, the site of major steel factories that had been built between the wars, and which had played a central role in the modernization and industrialization of Romania well before the advent of the communist regime. After 1948, the factories had become the property of the socialist state, and the regime was eager to symbolically re-code them as belonging to the new political order. Balta Albă as a whole was thus meant to not only supply housing for the workers, but also to provide a new visual and spatial context for the factories; for the thousands of workers streaming in and out, the district would frame everyday life with vast, orderly vistas, lush greenery, and, most important, it would have offered a stark contrast to the small, irregular streets and heterogeneous buildings of the 19th century city that bordered the district on all other sides.

**“The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”**by **Juliana Maxim** (University of San Diego)

But Balta Albă was much more than factory housing. Only a quarter of its inhabitants were factory workers, so that the district reached well beyond the needs of the industrial complex. In fact, the district as a whole, and each microrayon in particular, functioned like a small version of the ideal socialist city. It urbanized the workers, many of whom had come from the countryside, by accustoming them to new spatial tropes they would come to associate with socialism. And it operated as a device of social integration, distributing the workers among a larger population, with the aim, so it was thought, of actively blurring class distinction.

It is in the attempt to replace economic class with other, new and spatialized forms of collectivity, that I suggest the microrayon fully finds its specific definition. The district is organized through a gradation of progressively smaller urban units that nest inside each other - with the microrayon as the smallest. Because of this, the settlement pattern in Balta Albă, which, in plans and photographs may seem relatively uniform, in fact offers the inhabitants finely tuned, fully orchestrated spatial and functional steps from small to large scale, and from the familiar to the abstract, and, in the process, trying to replace old elements of reference (such as class, ethnicity, place of origin) with new, physical and visual ones.

Balta Albă, for instance, contained 6 residential neighborhoods (cartiere), each subdivided into smaller microrayons, and all of them served by a cultural and administrative center and a large recreation area around two central lakes.

Although subsumed into larger urban conglomerates, each microrayon enjoyed a significant amount of functional autonomy, with its own small-scale commercial center, nurseries, school, and park. Differences in size, plan, and building types between microrayons suggest a search for a distinct, recognizable character, and a clear stance against visual monotony. These steps in complexity and size were meant to correspond to a similar hierarchy of social relations, so that the district provided the stage for a range of encounters, from the most intimate and everyday, to those occurring in a larger, less familiar community. Within it, the microrayon, which was not too big to be abstract and ungraspable, nor too small to become too intimate, was to function as the realm of basic associations and identification.

The building no longer stands in relationship to a street, but to the neighborhood.

Much of the microrayon's character is determined by the demise of the street as the main place of urban experience; instead, large, collective green spaces that occupy most of the non-built surface now constitute the places of social interaction. Indeed, along with the street itself, the traditional opposition between public space and private property is transformed, and the land surrounding the residential buildings is now no longer private nor public, but of an intermediary, collective, nature.

Socialist planning also revises the traditional relationship between architecture and city, as buildings no longer encounter the city immediately, through

**“The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”**by **Juliana Maxim** (University of San Diego)

street facades, but only through the mediation of the microrayon and the district. It follows that in a socialist microrayon, a single building has little capacity to accrue meaning by itself, but signifies only through larger territorial relationships, and is never understood (or represented) as a single, autonomous entity. The generic, impersonal buildings are not only a direct consequence of industrialized, rationalized building techniques, but correspond to an effort to dislocate signification away from the single architectural object, and towards larger spatial units. It is tempting to find in such ‘collectivization’ of buildings a spatial metaphor for their inhabitants’ own overcoming of individualism.

**The city as work of art**

The examination of some of the ideas associated with the microrayon – the shift in the scale of architectural intervention in the city, the demise of the street in favour of the organic unity of the architectural ensemble, the agenda of social transformation and integration – has shown that the microrayon was in part a search to enrich, even transcend, the inflexible rationality of standardized mass housing construction. Therefore, the attempt to discuss socialist mass housing as more than grimly functional buildings is perhaps best concluded by pointing at the intense effort, in the theoretical writings on architecture of the late 1950s and early 1960s, to give the socialist housing district the status of a work of art.

Far from being considered a purely scientific, objective product, mass housing was also one of

the most cherished demonstrations of the artistic capacities of architecture. While architecture’s aim under socialism was to satisfy practical needs rather than procure “aesthetic moments,” it was able to surpass its utilitarian definition and reach into the “ideological and artistic realm” through compositions at the city scale. It is by planning and designing large housing ensembles, some architects argued, that architectural practice became an artistic form.

The abstraction of the facades, their lack of decoration and differentiation, the austerity of standardized construction, are easily, and often, perceived as a refusal to signify. But while each residential building, taken individually, might be devoid of affective qualities, it could reach expressive attributes collectively. Aesthetic and ideological content, it was argued, had shifted away from the standardized component, and towards the result of their complex combination. The essays of aesthetic theory published throughout the 1950s, bore titles that militantly stated this idea: “The housing district – a superior step of architectural artfulness,” or “On the aesthetic qualities of mass construction.” Their content is equally clear: “In mass constructions, the dialectical unity between the utilitarian side and the ideological-artistic one manifests itself not in each single construction – which, taken separately, might not be a work of art – but in the comprehensive solution to urbanistic problems” (5). It is also why commentators, by the 1960s, could consider that the views and photographs of Balta Albă possessed uplifting qualities, suggested optimism, and were appropriate for visual consumption.

**“The microrayon: the organization of mass housing ensembles, Bucharest, 1956-1967”**

by **Juliana Maxim** (University of San Diego)

Among solutions for mass housing, the microrayon aimed to offer its inhabitants an affective experience, to create a new social order, and to arouse a sense of collectivity – in socialist terms, these were the ultimate qualities of a work of art.

**Notes**

1. G. Ionescu, *Arhitectura în România în perioada anilor 1944–1969* (Bucharest, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1969), p. 57.

2. Alexandru Cebuc, “Aspecte ale evoluției demografice și teritoriale a Bucureștilor în anii puterii populare,” *Materiale*, Vol. 5, 1967.

M. Locar, “Pentru dezvoltarea urbanismului socialist,” *Arhitectura* 4 (July–Aug, 1960): 5.

3. M. Locar, “Pentru dezvoltarea urbanismului socialist,” *Arhitectura* 4, 1960: 5-7, 5.

4. Traian Stănescu, “Noi ansambluri de locuințe în capitală” *Arhitectura* 6, 1964, 14-22: 15.

G. Minervin and M. Fedorov, “Despre calitățile estetice ale construcției de masă.” *Arhitectura* 5, 48 (1958):23-25, first published in *Architecture USSR* 2, 1958.

## Introduction

Mass production of housing in Slovakia is often regarded as a characteristic example of failure of modern architecture ideals. Under this interpretation, it is held that the mass production and construction of prefabricated housing estates drew the ideas of modern urbanism and unification – as well as the whole system of construction industry under socialism - into a trap. The situation in which the state (or its state institutions) played roles of the builder, investor and architect eliminated natural economic competition and it caused immense damages to the Slovak construction industry, with loss of responsibility for the built work, decrease in work production and low quality of work as a consequence. After mass housing was accepted at the beginning of the 1960s only with reservations, more complex analyses of concrete-slab housing estates in Slovakia appeared in the 1980s (the concrete-slab technology at that time comprised 93.5 % of all housing construction). Concrete-slab construction development was an inherent part of the official agenda of the authoritarian regime, and thus the critique only fully appeared after its fall.



*The first concrete-slab apartment block in Bratislava: Montdom, 1956*

Nevertheless, the housing estates were instrumental in contributing to solve the housing shortage. Between 1971 – 1980 there were 1,261,000 flats built in Slovakia. These flats provided a decent spatial and hygienic standard to inhabitants. Today the concrete-slab housing estates form the substantial part of the built environment of the majority of Slovak cities. (1)

## The First Concrete-slab House

While some experiments in prefabrication of housing buildings took place in Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century, the first apartment block built in concrete-slab technology was realised in Bratislava in the 1950s as a result of local architects' and engineers' efforts to find the most suitable system of prefabricated housing construction. In a countrywide competition three possibilities were tested: wall system, frame-system and frame-concrete-slab system. The team of the Professor of the Technical University of Bratislava, Vladimir Karfik, designed a framed concrete-slab system. Karfik was already experienced in prefabrication from his previous work for the Bata construction department in Zlín. Together with his colleagues J. Harvančík and G. Tursunov he developed a concrete-slab house with reinforced frames, which allowed variations in inner space distribution using the empty frame and full wall. (2) The experimental concrete-slab block “Montdom” was built in 1956 in Bratislava. (3) Even though another system was later adopted in Czechoslovakia – the wall frameless system – this phase constitutes the key starting-point of the local Slovak prefabrication evolution.

### The first postwar prefabricated mass housing estate

The first complex concept that stands at the dawn of concrete-slab housing estate construction in Bratislava is the housing complex on Račianska Street called Februárka (1955 – 1961). It was the result of a project by the then young designers, Václav Houdek, Štefan Svetko, Ondrej Dukát, Štefan Ďurkovič and Emil Vician who won a countrywide competition in 1956. The construction technologies applied here contain cast concrete, concrete-slab system BA and traditional brickwork. (4) Thanks to a favourable urban composition, refined architecture, well-solved flats and a high level of services and facilities, this housing estate is one of the best examples of the domestic housing production in the early postwar years. (5) Similarly to Februárka housing estate, other projects of the time were integrated into the older urban structure (Housing estates on Škultétyho and Kukučínova Streets). The concept of spatial planning of housing construction was soon confronted, however, with the growing pressure



*The Februárka housing project, 1961*

for fast production of houses and thus, already in the mid 1960s, the concrete-slab housing developments started to occupy vacant areas beyond the city limits.

### Housing developments for incomers

The period of the 1960s and 1970s was the most intensive construction phase of concrete-slab housing estates in Bratislava. (6) As a result of the city's fast demographic development the regime representatives supported this trend to ensure a majority of working class citizens in the population. The pressure of industrialization and colonization with new settlements ensured a constant inflow of workers – the new citizens. The spatial misbalance of new housing estates in relation to the former urban structure, but also the process of estrangement of the incomers, caused a loss of cultural continuity to the city.

### Ideology and construction

The newly founded factories producing concrete-slab prefabricates were an integral part of the mass production of housing. However, this industrialization was not merely a consequence of growing demand for flats and of natural evolution of technologies. The mass industrial production in construction processes was partially influenced by Marxist ideology, which preferred the industrial proletariat to the detriment of traditional construction workers. (7) Therefore the representatives of the regime forced the pace of industrialization of construction processes to eliminate the so-called wet processes of construction. A linear assembly

process of building along one side of a derrick track was applied. From this point of view the ideal building plots were those without any terrain barriers, areas behind the city edges divested of the former rural developments. The new characteristic model of concrete-slab housing estates construction started to be implemented - and speedily became a target of criticism.

### **Housing estates of Bratislava and lines of their development**

The large-scale development of housing estates was possible thanks to the change in proprietary circumstances. The nationalization in 1948 cancelled or severely limited the private ownership of land, so urban planners could design new city quarters from scratch (and according to the Athens Charter), using as much free land as they wanted. The first wave of construction outside the inner city followed a northeast direction (Krasňany, Rača). The biggest breakthrough was the unusually large housing estate of Ružinov, occupying the easily accessible eastern sector of the city. The same process was followed in the southeastern direction (Medzi jarkami, Dolné hony) and the idea of building a housing estate on the right bank of the Danube soon appeared (Petržalka).

By the end of 1970s the housing estate developments spread on to the complicated terrain on the hills of the Little Carpathians (Karlova Ves, Záluhy, Dúbravka). In 1980s the city was spatially exhausted, and new construction only complemented the old rural settlements on

northeast (Záhumenice) and northwest (Devínska Nová Ves); more important still, it compelled the urbanization of a visually strongly exposed and topographically exclusive natural locality on the slopes above the left bank of the Danube river (Dlhé Diely).

### **The planning institutes**

Projects of housing estates and regional variants of individual concrete-slab systems were elaborated in planning institutes. Within the system of territorial competences, the development of housing estates in Bratislava belonged to the sphere of activities of the Stavoprojekt Institute. The research on types and evolution in design of new concrete-slab systems took place in the Planning and Typification Institute in Bratislava. These were the two centres of design of the new concrete-slab construction systems that were to operate under the economic limits and the so-called economic indicators, to provide a decent housing construction and secure the optimal spatial distribution of flats.

### **The flat in the concrete-slab block**

The flat in a concrete-slab apartment block was a realisation of ideals of leftist modernity. It was determined in function, standard and universality, it provided housing for everybody. It was a materialisation of the idea of the minimal flat. However, in the hands of the undifferentiating socialist system it became a tool for the regime's aims to homogenise society. Categorisation provided the groundwork for the control of planned housing





Variations of flat systems, 1979

development. It defined the number of inhabitants per flat. The main scope was given by categories I. – VI., while the most prolifically built were flats with 2 – 3 rooms with a kitchen.

### Construction systems

The type of system used determined the external appearance of the concrete-slab blocks of flats. The dimensions, finishing of concrete-slabs, their colour, the gap solutions, form of balconies and loggias, shaping of entrances were variable. Since the early 1960s the concrete-slab blocks were equipped with prefabricated installation units containing kitchen, bathroom and toilet. The

BA system applied in Bratislava was the oldest one. It was characterized by expressive verticality of balcony structures in the facades, staircase glazing, dynamic figures in entrances and round openings in the concrete-slabs. In the mid 1960s the blocks did not evince much plasticity, using the systems T 06 B and T 08 B. The tectonics of their variable entrance solutions were still applied.

In 1966 in designs by the Stavoprojekt Institute in Bratislava, the structures of the T 06 B system and the spatial distribution of T 08 B system were united into a new structural system ZT (unitary 5 system) characterised by the wide range of sections and types. The horizontality and dense

## “Concentrated responses to the issue of prefabricated mass housing: Bratislava, 1950-1995”

by Henrieta Moravčíková (Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava)

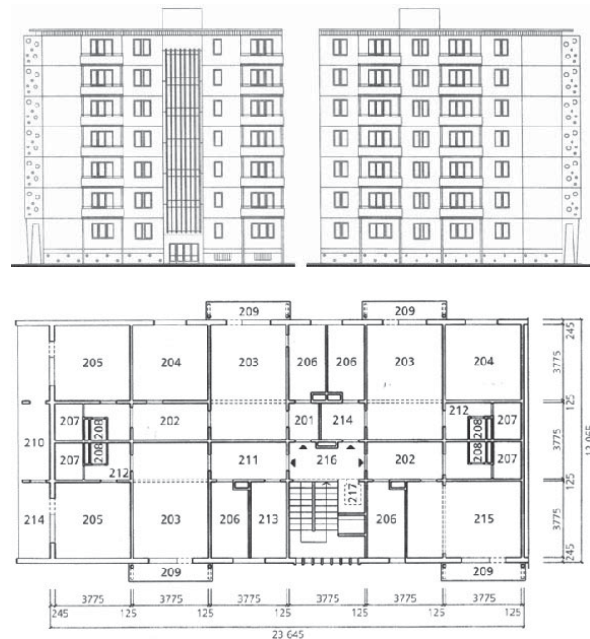
colours of the loggias dominate the exterior face of blocks of flats built in this system. The concrete-slab housing system that was developed next in the sequence, ZTB, was designed to cope with the demand for so-called open typification, providing a more free distribution of inner spaces.

The clumsiness of the supply system prevented this effort from being very successful. In order to enhance the quality of concrete-slab housing construction, the state bought various licensed systems from abroad. The development of the largest Slovak housing estate was supplied from the factory using Danish technology, which was built in Petržalka. (8) However, these changes did not produce better quality of the aesthetics or standard of housing construction.

In the 1980s, reflecting the current criticisms of modernity, experiments in attaching new facade elements were applied to hide the monotonies of the concrete-slab buildings. (9) Historicist elements and colours on the facades together with typology of the traditional urban structures like squares and streets provided means to enrich the austere face of the concrete-slab housing estates' environment. (10) In Bratislava these tendencies culminated in the project of the experimental housing complex Dlhé Diely. (11) Out of this entire experiment, however - under preparation for more than 10 years - finally only a fragment was built. (12)

### Concepts

The emphasis that was put on the quantity and



*The BA construction system, applied in the 1960s (13)*

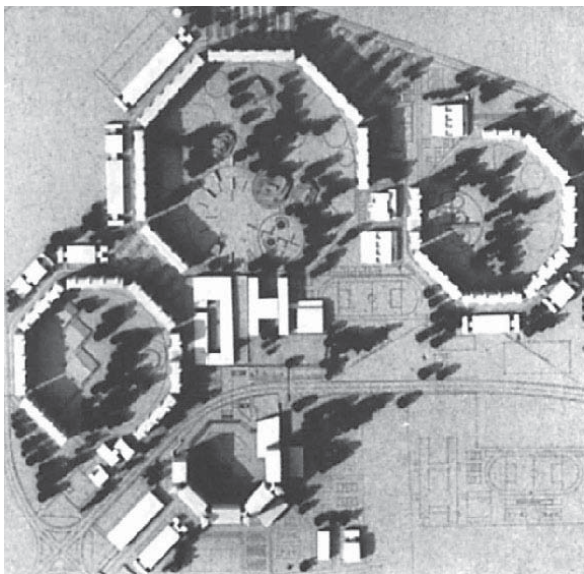
speed of construction pushed aside the architectural attributes of concrete-slab housing estates. In spite of the fact the architects claimed their need for comprehension of these aspects of the housing development, the feedback from the industrial sphere was minimal. In some cases, though, a valuable living environment was achieved, but almost entirely thanks to the concepts of progressive urbanism, rather than through the architecture of individual blocks. It was in the housing estate of Trávniky by Ferdinand Milučký and Štefan Ďurkovič that different levels of terrain break the monotony; and in the development at Medzi jarkami by Štefan Svetko, an unusual spatial structure attracts attention.

Overall, arguably the most successful is the case of the housing estate Karlova Ves, where Stanislav Talaš and his team skilfully used the natural morphology of the terrain and the fragments of

“Concentrated responses to the issue of prefabricated mass housing: Bratislava, 1950-1995”

by Henrieta Moravčíková (Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava)

the original rural development to form a structure with hierarchy of intensive facilities and traffic axis complementary to the adjacent housing environment.



*1973 proposal for Medzi Jarkami housing project*



*Petržalka under construction, 1975*

### **The biggest Slovak housing estate: Petržalka**

The construction of the largest Slovak housing estate, Petržalka, was related to the penetration of new urban concepts. It corresponded to the then ideal of an independent city quarter comprising all

urban functions. The successful plan to build the new satellite town on the right bank of the Danube led to an international competition, called for by the city in 1967. 84 teams from 19 countries took part. All proposals shared generous spatial concepts, dynamic structures and strong visions. (14) The five prizewinning projects were later analysed for any potential suggestions that they might provide as to desirable policies for the future construction.

The project by Jozef Chovanec and Stanislav Talaš, the result of previous phases, was not realised entirely. The central avenue has been left in fragments and the housing construction reflected the decaying construction production. In the end Petržalka was widely seen as epitomising all the negative aspects of concrete slab housing estates – bigness, mono-functionality, monotony, isolation from the city etc. Thus, it became a field for revitalization and humanization activities after 1989.

### **Critiques of the mass production of housing**

By the end of the 1980s the deficiencies of concrete-slab housing estates had become targets of massive public critiques. This development paralleled the wider critiques of the whole socialist political regime. The samizdat publication, Bratislava Aloud, signalled a breakthrough; it was hailed by Václav Havel as a Slovak equivalent to Charter 77. After 1989, the mass production of housing in Bratislava was officially stopped. However the last mass housing project, Dlhé diely, was only realised in 1995.

**“Concentrated responses to the issue of prefabricated mass housing: Bratislava, 1950-1995”**by **Henrieta Moravčíková** (Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava)**Conclusion**

The more than forty year history of concrete-slab housing scheme construction left its imprints on the face of the city, and they determine its character to a large extent still today. In spite of their seeming similarity, the housing estates in Bratislava represent a heterogeneous mixture of housing complexes of different size, structure, facilities, preferences. Regardless of the fact that housing estates are the focus of many serious economical and social problems, they also still provide shelter for the majority of the city's population (70 % citizens of Bratislava live in postwar mass housing schemes today), and they constitute the truest document of the ideas of modern architecture and planning in the period of socialism – in both their positive and negative aspects. Taking into account the highly diverse amenities that housing estates provide to their occupants, a correspondingly selective, discriminating approach must be adopted today in their evaluation, reconstruction or demolition.

**Notes**

1 Concrete-slab housing estates, their history, present and perspectives have been object of research under the research project ‘Plattenbausanierung in Wien und Bratislava’ of the Institute for Regional and Urban Development of Austrian Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the Institute of Construction and Architecture of Slovak Academy of Sciences. Results of the project have been published in: MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta – DULLA, Matúš, DORICOVÁ, Slávka – HABERLANDOVÁ, Katarína – TOPOLČANSKÁ, Mária: Zur Geschichte der Plattenbausiedlungen in

Bratislava. In: Plattenbausiedlungen. Erneuerung des baukulturellen Erbes in Wien und Bratislava. Ed. Vera Kepeller Stuttgart, Fraunhofer IRB Verlag 2009, s. 90 – 105.; MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta – DULLA, Matúš – TOPOLČANSKÁ, Mária – DORICOVÁ, Slávka – FAJGLOVÁ, Katarína: Plattenbausiedlungen in Bratislava: Architektonische und städtebauliche Aspekte. In: MAYER, V. (Hg.): Plattenbausiedlungen in Wien und Bratislava zwischen Vision, Alltag und Innovation. Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 2006. ISBN 3-7001-3698-6. s. 64 – 78.; MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta – DULLA, Matúš – DORICOVÁ, Slávka – HABERLANDOVÁ, Katarína – TOPOLČANSKÁ, Mária: Prefabricated Housing Estates in Bratislava and their General and Specific Contexts. *Architektúra & Urbanizmus*. Vol. 40 (2006), No. 1 – 2, p. 73 – 96.; MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – DULLA, M. – DORICOVÁ, S. – HABERLANDOVÁ, K – TOPOLČANSKÁ, M.: Panelové sídliská v Bratislave: stručný prehľad. In: *Architektúra & Urbanizmus*. Vol. 40 (2006), No. 1 – 2, p. 97 – 113.

2 TURZUNOV, G.: Obytný dom z predpätých panelov typu BA v Bratislave. *Architektura ČSR* 16, 1957, s. 176 – 179.

3 Authors: V. Karfík, J. Harvančík, G. Turzunov, K. Šafránek

4 System LB with load-bearing transverse walls and inner longitudinal load-bearing wall in cast concrete was applied in district parts A and D. Except system LB the systems T16a and BA were applied too.

5 SVETKO, Štefan: Progressive system of traditional construction in Februárka housing estate in Bratislava. *Projekt 3*, 1957, N.5, p. 3 – 5.

6 J. Zeman, I. Jankovich a J. Lichner define six phases of post war housing construction and this phase is

**“Concentrated responses to the issue of prefabricated mass housing: Bratislava, 1950-1995”**

by **Henrieta Moravčíková** (Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava)

the longest of them. (ZEMAN, J. – JANKOVICH, I. – LICHNER, J.: Housing construction development in Slovakia. Bratislava, Alfa 1990. 300 p., here p. 122 – 123.

Miyakawa – H. Taginuchi – J. Onuma – O. Myojyo – T. Hongo (Japonsko); G.V. Russel – A. Iemeric (USA); R. Reiner – A. Arzberger – H. Karere (Rakúsko). GROSS, Kamil: Medzinárodná súťaž Bratislava Petržalka. Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo SFVU 1969. 102 s.

7 According to Marx the most class-conscious and best communicating class of proletariat was the industrial proletariat.

8 The Institute ŠPTU elaborated the typification base for the so-called un-unified variant of construction of BANKS system on the basis of the licence by Thomas Schmidt Company. JANKOVICH, I. – LICHNER, J. – ZEMAN, J. : c. d. 1990, s. 209.

9 Here the model was the prefabricated construction in the centre of the East German cities. Compare: HANNEMAN, Ch. : Eine Technologie für Alles. Archithese 33, 2003, 2, p. 16 – 21.

10 Such concepts were at the dawn of the 1980s initiatives of the Technicky magazin (Technical Magazine) under the title Urbanita.

11 T. Gebauer, P. Paňák, L. Kušnir a i. , 1979 – 1995.

12 The central multi-functional square was situated in the heart of the housing construction development according to the experimental project using above-standard elements.

13 STERNOVÁ, Zuzana: Fyzický stav bytových domov postavených v stavebných sústavách hromadnej bytovej výstavby do roku 1970. Bratislava, Stavebné informačné centrum Slovenskej republiky, 1997, ISBN 80-88836-38-7.

14 The jury did not award 1st and 2nd prizes, but five 3rd prizes were awarded to : T.Alexy – J. Kavan – F. Trnkus (Slovakia); K. Typovský – J. Nováček – V. Adamec (Česko); S. Vamane – D. Ogura – V. Okuma – M.

**“The search for alternatives to prefab dormitory suburbs in Soviet Tallinn” by Mart Kalm**  
(Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

Since the reforms introduced by Khrushchev in the latter half of the 1950s, construction in the Soviet Union was required to follow standardised designs. Even buildings that were no longer industrially produced needed to meet these requirements. Thus, not only were blocks of flats built according to standardised designs, but also summer cottages; not only schools and kindergartens, but also cinemas and cultural centres; not only office buildings, but also factories. This led to the conviction that standardised designs, as a form of extreme economising, was created by the system to deliberately make people's lives more inconvenient and impoverish the environment. Standardised designs were automatically considered ugly and inefficient, and it was believed that only custom-designed buildings could be beautiful. After the collapse of the USSR, when architectural historians started talking about standardised designs as a phenomenon of the Age of Enlightenment that was meant to share the best experience and help those with a lower level of education, the Estonian architectural community were shocked. It was admitted only very reluctantly that Soviet standardised designs were in certain respects more professional than the solutions by contemporary speculative residential developers.

Due to the voluminous output of the housing construction plants during the Soviet era, all attempts to find alternatives remained relatively marginal, and buildings constructed according to these designs still constitute only a tiny part of the overall building stock of the time.

After the war, people were allowed to build

small family houses, the bulk of which were also constructed according to standardised designs. Because the state was not particularly successful in organising the official construction of residential buildings, it seemed reasonable to include people's own finances and labour in the creation of residential space. The fact that the reproduction of individualism by means of private houses was in ideological opposition to building communism, proved to be less important than the benefit brought by the creation of new dwellings. The construction of private houses flourished until 1963, when it was banned in larger cities as an insufficiently effective or economic way of creating residential space.

Establishing housing cooperatives was encouraged as a replacement for the construction of private houses using people's own savings. While rental payments for state-provided flats were symbolic, so that living there was basically free of charge, building a cooperative flat was a rather expensive undertaking. Members of the cooperatives included those who had not received a flat via the general waiting list, as well as those who sought a better flat and were willing to pay for it. As cooperative flats were highly-valued property for their residents, all such houses were rather well maintained, with front doors always locked and sometimes even flower beds next to the blocks. The residents of these houses were referred to as 'decent people'. However, in architectural terms, cooperative houses were divided into two categories. Most of them were ordinary prefabricated houses in new city districts. This means that the benefits received for the money

“The search for alternatives to prefab dormitory suburbs in Soviet Tallinn”

by Mart Kalm (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

spent were rather limited, and these houses could be seen rather as tactical efforts on the part of the state to elicit money from its citizens to make up for its own failures.

The other type of cooperative house was constructed according to a custom design, and mostly fitted into unfinished quarters in the city centres where prefabricated housing could not be built. (1) Although these cooperative houses were not designed by top architects, they generally contained more spacious dwellings, some of which were five-room flats of up to 100 square meters. They often included a dining area next to the kitchen separated from the lounge only by a sliding screen. Bathrooms and toilets were fully tiled; there were stone tiles in the hallway and wooden parquet in the rooms, as well as the potential to build a fireplace. Kitchen equipment included an electric stove, which was considered cleaner than gas. Sometimes there was a garage in the basement and a Finnish sauna for communal use. Nowadays, these differences seem so small, but during the Soviet era they constituted a source of infinite envy. There were approximately twenty such blocks constructed in Tallinn, and they were mostly inhabited by the technical intelligentsia. Many of those housing cooperatives were established within the institutions of the Construction Committee system, especially in architectural design institutes that had all the know-how for constructing such exceptional buildings. The residents in these houses were predominantly Estonian. These days it may seem nationalistic to place such emphasis on this, but we should not forget that in the stressful

atmosphere caused by Soviet occupation it was considered an enormous asset if all the residents living in a single stairwell were Estonian.



*Architect Udo Ivask. Apartment building 4a Kreutzwaldi St., Tallinn, 1963-66. Housing cooperative of the employees of the state design institute “Kommunaalprojekt”.*

The party nomenclature did not wish to reside in elitist cooperative houses, because the conveniences there came at a high price. They preferred to obtain similar conditions without paying for them. The strategy used by the party leadership to differentiate themselves mostly meant dwelling in bourgeois flats from the 1930s, which constituted the best of the housing stock in terms of quality. Villas as places of residence were avoided because such a display of luxury would have made them too vulnerable to attacks from their rivals. However, the Property Management of the Council of Ministers also built some state-provided houses for the nomenclature. The rental sums were symbolic, but the location and the architecture as well as the level of conveniences

## “The search for alternatives to prefab dormitory suburbs in Soviet Tallinn”

by Mart Kalm (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

in those houses were equivalent to the standards in custom-designed cooperative houses. (2)

While these were the tactics adopted for adjusting to the situation, both the State Architectural Design Institute, Eesti Projekt, and the State Scientific Institute of Building Research in Tallinn were engaged in designing experimental apartment housing at the beginning of the 1960s. The aim of this research was to find an alternative to the emerging system of housing construction plants. One of the residential blocks designed by the scientists of the Building Institute was even finished in Tallinn city centre. (3) The resulting block of flats, with transverse load-bearing walls and warm air heating, sought to elaborate the floor plan of the prevalent standardised project 1-317, so that each family member could have a separate bedroom. Unfortunately, the allegedly original floor plan was copied from a house designed by Esko Korhonen in Hertoniemi district, Helsinki (1955–56). (4)



*Architects Harald Arman, Alar Kotli, Ants Mellik & Heino Parmas. Experimental apartment building, 18 Gonsiori St. Tallinn, 1961-63.*

The flexible experimental series of prefabricated houses developed by Eesti Projekt aimed at lengthening the life-cycle of houses, so that in twenty years' time, when the space norms for each person would be considerably greater in the wealthy conditions to be brought about by the realisation of communism, flats could be rearranged to create larger residential spaces. This reflects the naive belief in the revolution of science and technology characteristic of the early 1960s. In reality, no one was planning to rely on such experiments because the housing construction plant continued its slow yet steady fulfilling of five-year plans.

The sharpest critique of Soviet mass residential construction was delivered by a circle of young and furious architects in the 1970s, who established an avant-garde group, the 'Tallinn 10'. (5) Branding Soviet architects as the slaves of engineers, they idealised the 1930s Estonian functionalists and their work, as well as the artistic facets of architecture. Thus, they related to the post-1968 critique of Modernism in the Western world (Superstudio and others) and arrived, in effect, at Post-Modernism by the late 1970s. Their critique prepared the ground for one of the most powerful people's movements of perestroika, and the Estonian Singing Revolution as its local equivalent: this called for a halt to the development of the Lasnamäe district that provided accommodation to Russian-speaking immigrants. The song 'Peatage Lasnamäe' (Stop Lasnamäe), written by Alo Mattisen and performed by Ivo Linna, became one of the biggest Estonian hit songs of the late 1980s. (6)



**“The search for alternatives to prefab dormitory suburbs in Soviet Tallinn”**

by **Mart Kalm** (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

Regardless of the critique against mass residential construction and the attempts to circumvent its bulldozers, prefabricated housing constructed during that time still remains one of the most striking aspects of the legacy of the Soviet era in Estonia. In rare cases in recent decades such blocks have been demolished, but most of the Soviet residential districts still survive. The houses are gradually being refurbished, with some success, to provide accommodation for less wealthy social groups, such as pensioners, students, Russian-speaking communities and, in the case of Tallinn, recent immigrants from the rest of Estonia.

seum, Tallinn, 2008.

6:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kofam1MpX9U> (page last visited on 01.09.2011). On YouTube, the song continues to irritate the current Russian community in Estonia, and provokes heated discussions in the comments section.

## NOTES

1: E Lankots, *Klassideta ühiskond kõverpeeglis. Nomenklatuuri kortermajad Tallinnas 1945-1985*. Eesti Kunstiakadeemia magistritöö. Tallinn, 2005, 44-65.

2: E Lankots, 'Klassid klassideta ühiskonnas. Elitaarne ruumimudel Eesti NSV-s ja nomenklatuursed korterelamud Tallinnas 1945-1955', *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*, 2004, vol 2, 11- 41.

3: L Volkov, 'Elamute eksperimentaalprojekteerimisest Eesti NSV TA Ehituse ja Ehitusmaterjalide Instituudis', *Elamuehituse küsimusi Eesti NSV-s*. Artiklite kogumik, Tallinn, 1960, 91-110.

4: H-J Becker and W Schlote, *Neuer Wohnbau in Finnland. New Housing in Finland*, Stuttgart, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1964, 124.

5: A Kurg and M Laanemets (eds), *Keskkonnad, projektid, kontseptsioonid. Tallinna kooli arhitektid 1972-1985. Environment, Projects, Concepts. Architects of the Tallinn School 1972-1985*, Eesti Arhitektuurimuu-

**“Mass Housing in East and West Germany – Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage ”**  
**by Florian Urban** (Glasgow School of Art)

Mass housing in East and West Germany was more similar than is usually acknowledged, despite the different political systems. In both countries it was a big success – it has improved the dwelling conditions to a level that was unprecedented in history. On the other hand, its architecture is regarded poorly, and the buildings are inhabited by the poorer strata of society. I will show how both success and failure are intrinsically connected, and to what extent the estimation of one or the other depends on the respective context.

This paper consists of three parts:

- A definition of mass housing
- The vision to end the housing shortage and its manifestations in East and West Germany (1900s-1960s)
- Mass Housing as a battleground for political ideas (1960s-1980s)

**Definitions of Mass Housing**

Mass housing resulted from a love-match between architecture and social policy. It combined standardisation (“standardised housing”) with state involvement (“social housing”).

Its standardisation was not a categorical fact, just a gradual definition: many site-built houses also use standardised materials.

Its status as social housing differed between East and West. In East Germany, any multi-storey dwelling could be considered social housing since it was constructed, distributed and maintained by

state institutions. This system was part of the centrally planned economy established under Soviet influence. In West Germany, public utility housing was built through indirect state subsidy of large developers. Some were private, but the largest were cooperatives owned by the respective towns and cities. This system arose from an unlikely coalition of bourgeois-liberal and social democratic forces.

Both East and West Germany were planned at the same time, but those plans were carried out with a time lag. In East Germany, Erich Honecker’s Wohnungsbauprogramm in 1973 was most effective. The big wave of housing construction in the GDR was in the 1970s and 1980s, when about two million flats were built in a country of 17 million inhabitants. In West Germany, most flats went up in the early postwar decades - about 2.6 million flats until 1970 in a country of 60 million. The status of social housing, connected with rent control and the right of tenant allocation, was always conceded there for only a limited time – usually several decades until the construction cost was amortized.

**The vision of ending the housing shortage**

Mass housing had its origins in the theories of social reform and standardised construction. In Germany these were connected, on the one hand, with housing reformers such as Otto Schilling or Rudolf Eberstadt and on the other with architects such as Ludwig Hilberseimer, Walter Gropius, or Ernst May. These ideas spawned the much-cel-

“Mass Housing in East and West Germany – Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage”

by Florian Urban (Glasgow School of Art)

celebrated Siedlungen of the 1920s. They were too few to relieve the housing shortage at a national level, but they were visionary in their architectural form and methods of production. Serial design was developed in the service of a comprehensive and epochal vision: to end the housing shortage and provide modern amenities for all.

Only after the Second World War was the modernist vision implemented at a broader scale. Architects began to design centrally planned neighbourhoods programmed according to modernist principles such as functional separation and primacy of car traffic.

In West Germany, a coalition was forged under particular circumstances. The housing situation at the time was precarious for large portions of the population. Most large cities were destroyed, and about 8 million ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe had flocked to West Germany. They were soon joined by another wave of refugees from East Germany. Millions lived in camps and emergency shelters for years. The housing shortage, thus, was conceived of as a most pressing problem by all political factions, reflecting the fact that refugee status was not class-specific, and equally afflicted, for example, the East Prussian landed gentry or the Silesian coal miners. The West German state measures were thus approved by both leftists and conservatives. Also the definition of the group eligible for social housing initially was rather broad and in the early 1950s included almost 70% of the population. (1) This meant that from the very beginning social housing was predominantly aimed at the middle classes, and not

at the most disadvantaged. (2)

In East Germany, mass housing went along with a comprehensive restructuring of the construction industry toward prefabrication, to the extent that the buildings they generated are referred to as “the slab” (die Platte). This process was started in the 1950s, the time when also the first large estates were planned. For instance, the new town of Hoyerswerda was begun in 1957 to house the workers of a newly founded chemical plant. Halle-Neustadt, the largest slab building development in East Germany, was planned in the 1950s and begun in 1964. East Berlin’s most famous tower block estates went up in the 1970s and together housed approximately 350,000 of the 1.1 million inhabitants of the eastern half of the city.

Overall, mass housing in both East and West Germany was in some respects rather shoddy, but offered a comfort unheard of before by virtually all citizens, including central heating, running water, and self-contained flats at a time when many families had to share an apartment with strangers.

Since 1988, the West German state institutions gradually began to retreat from the housing market. (3) A few years later, after the German reunification, the state-owned housing companies in the former East were also privatised. Ever since, the amount of state-subsidised and rent-controlled units has been shrinking – in the West from 3.9 million in 1987 to only 1.8 million in 2001. Thus social housing soon will be a thing of the past.

### **The Märkisches Viertel in West Berlin: housing blocks as a battleground for political ideas**

Maybe it was precisely because of its ideological baggage that the mass-produced apartment block came to be a volatile signifier. First it stood for progress and modernisation, then for disenfranchisement and the neglect of traditions. In West Germany, the change between acceptance and rejection came about in less than a year. The Märkisches Viertel in West Berlin was a particularly telling example. Built for 50,000 inhabitants, it comprised more than 17,000 apartments in tower blocks. The chief designers belonged to the architectural elite of the time. (4)

In 1966, journalists celebrated it as an “expressive composition” (5) and “a symbol of hope for designers in many European countries.” (6) In 1968, by contrast, newspapers called it a “bleak group of barracks,” (7) “realization of a dismal science-fiction movie,” (8) or an example of “rigid uniformity and sterile monotony...where housewives, apparently for no reason, become alcoholics.” (9)

The criticism targeted different aspects. The works were often shabby, the apartments relatively small, the buildings from some perspectives seemed monotonous. (10) The vast green spaces rarely served as the meeting places that the architects had envisioned, and much more as dangerous to cross at night. The dissolution of old neighbourhood structures led to mistrust and neglect of public spaces. And the construction of mass housing led to large-scale tenement demolitions in the inner city. However, compared to countries

such as the US, the German slabs of the 1970s were still relatively wealthy and well-integrated.

In the context of the Märkisches Viertel, radical college students sided with bourgeois traditionalists against an establishment of Social Democratic politicians who had started the housing programme. This was a battle between radicals in favour of state intervention, and more moderate reformists who were also in favour of state intervention. In those years, neo-liberal positions were barely voiced. The leftist critics did not question state planning; rather, they attacked moderate state officials for insufficient pursuit of the tenants’ real needs. The tenants remained ambiguous. They did lament the infrastructural deficiencies of their new residences, but many liked them compared to the crumbling tenements where they had lived before. (11)

East Germany also experienced debates over the tower blocks, but, due to the political repression, this occurred to a much smaller extent. Since the 1960s, they were increasingly censured as being “monotonous,” “uniform,” and “carelessly designed.” Taking into account the extent of censorship in East Germany, the criticism was sometimes surprisingly blunt. (12) A 1975 report to a high-ranking party leader pointed out that the low aesthetic quality of East German housing blocks seriously endangered the citizens’ identification with the socialist state. (13) Criticism was less effective than in the West, but policy was still modified.

“Mass Housing in East and West Germany – Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage”

by Florian Urban (Glasgow School of Art)

In the West, after the early 1970s, no new mass-housing developments were planned. In the East, this policy shift happened ten years later. The Politburo mandated in 1982 that no new developments on the periphery were to be planned, and that construction was to be executed in the inner city. (14) At the same time there was path-dependency: there were barely enough construction firms left that could execute traditional construction. Plattenbauten were therefore continuously built until the end of the GDR in 1989-90.

The standard story concerning this shift is that the protests and the negative media coverage led to a waning support for public housing. In my view, however, the reality is subtly different: public housing was stopped only once the most dire need was removed and housing shortage, once again, became a problem of the poor, rather than a matter affecting all classes.

In reunified Germany, the storm of criticism against the mass housing developments slowly waned in the 1990s. There was also an increasing awareness that Germany's great settlements were far from being homogeneous.

In the former West Germany, some developments have a very high rate of poverty. In the Märkisches Viertel 14 percent of the inhabitants were on social welfare in 2004 (Berlin average: 8 percent). (14) Yet at the same time, the inhabitants were rather content with their environment. 69 percent were “pleased” or “very pleased” with their dwelling situation, and 85 percent would like to stay. (15) Today, the Märkisches Viertel faces serious

social challenges, but is not a ghetto of crime and misery in the way the 1970s polemicists had depicted it. (16)

In East Germany, social stratification had been very low under the socialist regime. The medical doctor had lived cheek-by-jowl with the construction worker. Now, however, those who stayed tended to be those who could not afford to leave.

Ironically, the media coverage on social issues is far less controversial now than it was in the 1970s. But the gap between rich and poor is much wider – and keeps widening. In this context, slab developments are increasingly residences of society's lower strata.

### Conclusion: local and universal factors

While the German story has much in common with equivalent processes in other industrialized countries, a number of local constraints affected the path of events. These included:

- a relatively stable demography;
- an unprecedented level of wealth; and
- a very particular political situation stemming from wartime destruction and the impoverishment of formerly wealthy classes.

As much as the German case can be deemed a success, particularly in comparison to countries such as France or the US, just as evident was its failure to last. But in a way, it could be argued that the tower blocks fell victim not just to their ‘failure’, but also to their very ‘success’. Three factors, all

“Mass Housing in East and West Germany – Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage”

by Florian Urban (Glasgow School of Art)

concerning complex matters of public perception and expectation, should here be borne in mind:

First, the overall rise in housing standards converted the projects from a comparably privileged environment to a comparably underprivileged one.

Second, the social and economic hardship that produced the consensus among Germany’s housing politicians broke apart once the most pressing need was overcome. The goal of equal housing for everyone, in this situation, lost its lure for the more affluent.

And third, state intervention and expert knowledge stopped being perceived as benevolent once it had reached a certain level of influence over people’s living conditions.

Germany’s tower-block estates are thus an ambivalent heritage. On the one hand they were the product of a largely successful enterprise of overcoming the housing shortage and providing modern amenities for large parts of the population. On the other hand, however, they exacerbated social segregation and the disenfranchisement connected with top-down-planning. Much more than the architecture, it was the social and political context that determined the significance of Germany’s mass housing. While the positive effect of social housing in Germany has outweighed the negative, the success story, unfortunately, is not likely to be repeated.

## NOTES

1: Georg Wagner, *Sozialstaat gegen Wohnungsnot* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995), 33.

2: Georg Wagner, *Sozialstaat gegen Wohnungsnot* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995), 22, 38.

3: Gesetz zur Überführung der Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeit in den allgemeinen Wohnungsmarkt, 25 July 1988

4: In 2006 there were approximately 36,000 inhabitants living in the Märkisches Viertel (statistical data of the Berlin government).

5: Anna Teut, “Huldigung an die städtebauliche Tradition,” *Die Welt*, November 8, 1966: 13.

6: “Hoffnungsschimmer für die Städtebauer in halb Europa,” *BZ* (Berlin) October 19, 1967

7: “Es bröckelt,” *Der Spiegel* n. 6 (1969), 38-42.

8: *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 3, 1969, quoted after Alexander Wilde, *Das Märkische Viertel* (West Berlin: Nicolai, 1989), 127.

9: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, January 20, 1969, *Allgemeines Deutsches Sonntagsblatt*, June 22, 1969, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, May 16, 1970, all quoted after Alexander Wilde, *Das Märkische Viertel* (West Berlin: Nicolai, 1989), 127.

10: Gerhard Ullmann, “Kritischer Zwischenbericht über das Märkische Viertel,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* June 10, 1970.

11: Johannes Hieber, “Berlin war eine Reise wert,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Regionalanzeiger Nord*, October 9, 1973, Alexander Wilde, *Das Märkische Viertel* (West Berlin: Nicolai, 1989), 112.

12: For example the famous architect Hermann Henselmann in “Der Einfluss der sozialistischen Lebensweise auf den Städtebau und die Architektur in der DDR,” *Deutsche Architektur* n. 5 (1966), 264-265 stressed that such monotony was “against the essence of socialism.” Sociologist Fred Staufenbiel in “Kultursoziologie und Städtebau,” *Deutsche Architektur* n. 6 (1966), 326-327 pointed out that monotony was not a

**“Mass Housing in East and West Germany – Controversial Success and Ambivalent Heritage”**

by **Florian Urban** (Glasgow School of Art)

mandatory consequence of industrial construction.

13: “Architekturanalyse im Bezirk Leipzig,” presented to the Abteilung Bauwesen (Department of Construction) at the Central Committee, led by Gerhard Trölitzsch, in November 1975. Berlin Federal Archive DY 30/18088.

14: Grundsätze für die sozialistische Entwicklung von Städtebau und Architektur in der DDR, minutes of the Politburo meeting on May 18, 1982, final copy, Berlin Federal Archive DY 30/J IV 2/2 1947: 238.

15: Census data from 2005, Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, available online at [http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/basisdaten\\_stadtentwicklung/monitoring/de/2006/index.shtml](http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/basisdaten_stadtentwicklung/monitoring/de/2006/index.shtml), p. 214, (accessed August 2008).

16: Institut für Markt und Medienforschung, Märkisches Viertel (West Berlin, 1986).

**“ ‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”**by **Stefan Muthesius** (University of East Anglia)

The term “architect-designed” will, I assume, puzzle some who are less familiar with the English scene. Does not every house, like every building, have to be designed by an architect? In England the situation is somewhat different: the vast majority of dwellings of most types were not designed by an architect. What that precisely means is: the designer of the house or of a number of houses, or of a block of flats, is not known, or it would take a very hard search to find out. Few would actually want to know, and the person who designed the dwelling would not want to come forward in order to receive credit for the design, as an architect. These dwellings would simply not be considered architecture, *sensu strictu*.

So who designed those dwellings? It was the builder or the contractor, or the in-house designer of the construction company, or even the supplier of some of the building’s components, such as the décor on the front. If the building was built earlier on in the 20th century by a local council the designer most likely called himself - hardly ever herself - an engineer. Of course that engineer would know much about design and construction, but the term engineer appeared appropriate because, again, the building would generally not be reckoned to count as “architecture”.

What has to be made clear at this point is that there is usually nothing to be said against the building quality of the homes. As regards solidity and practicality these buildings appeared at least ‘satisfactory’. ‘Architecture’ clearly is what comes under the third Vitruvian heading: Beauty. The first two headings are firmly subsumed under

“building”. The practice and theory of architecture in Britain was indeed tied very closely to Classical and Renaissance formulae which were adopted from the 17th century onwards.

From about 1800 the ideal of classical regularity was supplemented by another aesthetic ideal, the picturesque. It now seemed even more imperative that a building’s design should come from an architect. It was also the architect who was the only agent deemed capable of understanding the new science of historically defined styles, and that included any kind of “modern” style. The 19th century’s most influential architect and architectural writer, Augustus Welby Pugin, firmly believed in Gothic as well as in picturesqueness and condemned all Classical design. For him this meant that everything that looked regular, repetitive was held in contempt. Even more significant was the way Pugin saw the architect as a provider of the psychic well-being of society. The architect could become a person of the highest moral authority; by contrast, ‘building’, and especially mass building could be seen only as a degrading activity. There was one further factor in Pugin’s system of values. The buildings Pugin condemned were mostly those built in a utilitarian fashion in his own day. It was these modern kinds of buildings, such as the new utilitarian-shaped workhouses, which, according to Pugin, made people unhappy. It is old buildings that have the opposite effect.

The history of the built fabric of England could from now on neatly be divided between the two spheres, architecture and building. The latter would include



**“‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”**by **Stefan Muthesius** (University of East Anglia)

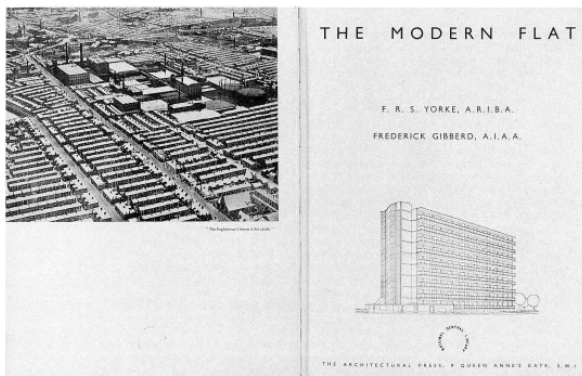
the vast majority of dwellings in the urban scene. If these are new or newish, they are likely to be held in contempt, but if they can be considered old, they might be cherished. From the later 19th century onwards one needs to differentiate two categories within building: there is new building which is at best uninteresting, at worst condemnable, and there is old building which is given the epithet vernacular and which can be cherished. The latter category forms the third major heading used in judging the built environment. From time to time the vernacular makes a come-back, and it may happen that these earlier kinds of building, of non-architecture, are valued above architecture. This was the case of the terraced house which was set against the disliked tower block from the late 1960s. Architecture, new building and vernacular, these are the three major headings under which the fabric of the country is classified and judged and which are, or were, interlocked in a constant dialectical game.

Now Pugin voiced his concern for the poor and disadvantaged in that he designed a model workhouse, but he was not yet concerned with designing mass housing. During the second half of the 19th Century mass housing, and the perception that most of what had been built, and what was being built, was bad, became an enormous issue, dubbed the ‘housing problem’. Around 1900 the architect-minded designer decisively entered that field, by way of joining the social policy makers and by setting up a new science of the overall planning of districts of towns, or whole new towns, i.e. ‘town planning’. The architect Raymond Unwin combined his new methods

of laying out towns and suburbs with designing all classes of houses, including small cottages, in a vernacular style. He quickly became famous for that in Europe and in the USA, too. Just as architecture was being opposed to building, town planning was now opposed to the mere ad-hoc extensions of towns, that is, the careful, multidisciplinary planning of a town or an estate, combining technical with cultural values, was opposed to the mere technical and administrative laying out of a new district by adding street after street. Most of the advanced architects of the 20th century prided themselves in acting as advanced town planners as well.

By including low-income dwellings in their design activity, architects effectively had entered the sphere of mass-building. It was a completely new phenomenon; it also led to a new dialectic of praise and condemnation, a repetition of sequences whereby a type of housing was proudly introduced by an architect or a group of practitioners. After a few decades, when the model had been repeated all over the country in large numbers, architectural critics and often the general public as well, turned against the type. When, during the 1930s, a vast number of low density suburbs were laid out in a fashion reminiscent of Unwin’s town planning, and several million houses were built that at least vaguely resembled Unwin’s picturesque designs - all of it happening because suddenly these dwellings had become affordable to a wide segment of society - the opinion of the architectural establishment turned against these developments and declared them, in the way Pugin condemned his contemporary buildings, as detrimental to soul

“‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”  
 by Stefan Muthesius (University of East Anglia)



*The ‘bad old’ and ‘good new’: title page and frontispiece from Yorke and Gibberd’s ‘The Modern Flat’, 1937*

and taste. By the 1940s architects and town planners had taken a dislike of the suburb as such, especially the outer suburb with its low density spread of individual houses.

This pattern of invention and rejection affected virtually all types of dwellings. This leads one to stress, more basically, that there is probably no other country in which there appear so many distinct types of dwellings, each distinguished by its label, a label which virtually everybody in the country is familiar with: terrace, semi-detached, detached, bungalow, blocks of flats of various kinds, tower block etc. No other country, it may be claimed, puts so much stress on the distinctiveness of the various types of dwellings. In the USA we would also note vast divisions between the major types of dwellings, but these types remain steady in their evaluation. The pattern of praise and contempt occurred most strongly with the most prominent of all types, the terrace of houses: they were “invented” by the top architects in the 17th and 18th centuries, practised in vast quantities during the later 18th and the 19th centuries, but then held in contempt from the later 19th to

about the 1960s, to be finally (so far) revived by 1970-80.

What one has to take into account here is that all these judgments could spread because of an extremely well-oiled publicity machine, comprising the specialised professional press as well as the newspapers. By the Interwar years illustrations of buildings and environments, whether photographed or drawn in various ways, had reached a very high degree of competence. After WW III these pictorial methods reached ever higher degrees of perfection. This included ways of demonstrating, by adopting satirical ways of drawing, how “bad” a building could look, a method already mastered by Pugin.

Mass housing in England now formed a complex conundrum, and especially so among the architectural circles of London. The architect, or at any rate, a number of distinguished members of the profession, felt compelled to follow their social conscience and embarked on the design of mass dwellings. Like Pugin, they were convinced that their designs were not only satisfactory in practical terms, but that they were also beneficial in a much wider socio-psychological sense. What architects mostly did not care for was cost. However, when, after a while, say, after two, or even after barely one decade, their type of housing and their style of architecture was taken up by builders or the “building industry” on a larger scale, and when there were claims of achieving cost saving, the architects and their mouthpieces, that is the architectural journals, began to condemn the type.

**“‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”**by **Stefan Muthesius** (University of East Anglia)

Thus a summary of the municipal tower block in England (and also, to a lesser extent, in Scotland) runs like this: the type was promoted by architects and town planners from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, rejected by some architects and planners already from the late 1950s and then widely condemned from the late 1960s to the 1990s. Here the period of first widespread rejection, say around the mid 1960s, coincided with the period in which many of the blocks were still being constructed. In terms of planning this might be expressed as a process starting from the already mentioned dislike of the spread-out low density suburbs to a demand for greater density – while keeping as much greenery, that is public greenery, as possible – and then a turn away from concentrated-dwelling-plus-greenery concept towards the Victorian evenly spread medium density pattern with mainly private greenery.

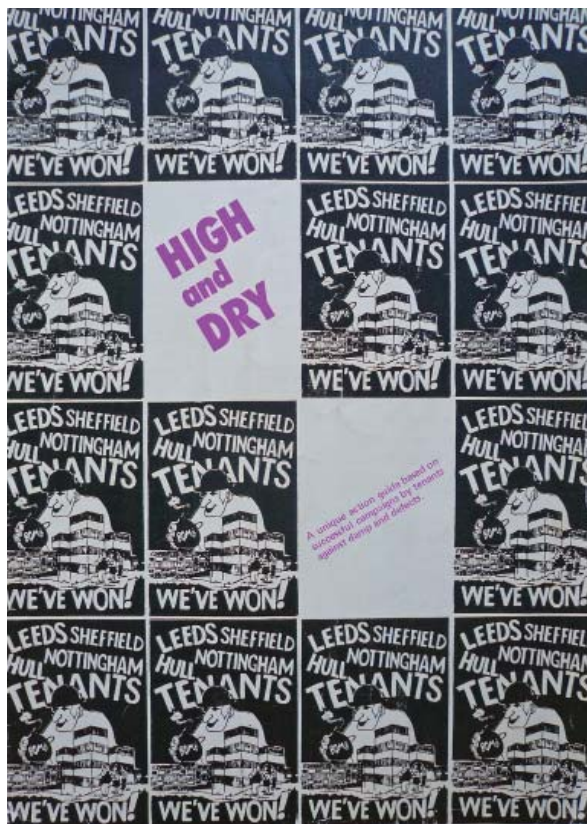
What general explanation can be offered for this pattern of constant chopping and changing? Once more, probably the most plausible reasoning is related to the presence of an artistic-creative frame of mind which happens to also be flattering itself that it is helping to solve burning “social problems” (one only needs to remember Le Corbusier’s last words in his *Vers une architecture: ‘architecture or revolution’*). When the same architect, or his or her circle of professionals, then took note of what others did when using the same type, and by others they mean those who do not belong to the architectural profession, then the creators of the type begin to lose faith in it. This reasoning can be formulated in stricter Marxian terms as the workings of ideology: an apparent

solution to the “social problem” is proposed and even partly realised, but its promoters are in the end unable to step out of the confines of their own elevated social class. A much simpler explanation could also be tried: nobody likes the look of mass housing, or any kind of architecture, that is designed repetitively.

In actual fact, the process of creation and condemnation in the 1940s and 50s was a little more complicated. In the first post-war decade public housing was virtually the only field of activity available. For that very reason architects were literally forced to concern themselves with it. The years during the War were the time when the most ambitious plans were drawn up for a future England, and the planning of towns and of housing played a crucial role in this process. The years after 1945 witnessed a sequence of the strongest pronouncements by the critics, for and against types of housing. The condemnation of the older terraces of houses, the common “semi” and even the bungalow, actually an especially popular type in those years, had become routine. By 1950 there were already new targets: J.M.Richards, the editor of the *Architectural Review*, launched an attack on some very recent medium-rise blocks of flats, of a modern look with much glass and flat roofs; yet to the architectural elite they now looked “ a workman-like application of the functional routine by a borough engineer” . It was the same J.M.Richards who during the earlier 1940s had been a fervent advocate of precisely that “purely functional” International style Modernism. An attack followed in 1953, entitled “Prairie Planning”, on the low density of the new post WW II

“‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”

by Stefan Muthesius (University of East Anglia)



Cover of a publication by the Yorkshire Development Tenants Action Group, 1981

New Towns, which were just at that time nearing completion. These towns were the pride of the town planning avant-garde and enjoyed international fame, but to the architectural critics they looked dull. Not only the older kinds of suburban housing but the whole concept and practice of the suburb, of the low-density outer suburb, became suspect and suffered numerous vilifications.

Architects always had to appear ahead of the game. ‘National British’, or, at any rate, London architecture became dominated by an internationally orientated avant-garde. It seemed the time for radically new models. In 1950 the London County Council greatly strengthened its Architects’ Department and filled it with the most ardent young

Modernists, whose first major proposal was the never-before-seen point block of over 10 storeys. By the late 1950s the number of storeys rose to 20, to reach 30 by the mid –sixties. For the British designers this was not just a matter of importing models from abroad, but the way in which the estates were extensively landscaped was taken as proof of an English picturesque adaptation of Modernism. The model that was more literally imported from the Continent was the slab block of Gropius and Le Corbusier origin. Both types, point block and slab block were placed side by side in London’s most celebrated estate at Roehampton. In the 1960s point blocks and slab blocks were sometimes combined.

On the whole, English tower blocks came in a very considerable variety, in fact, apart from a relatively small number of estates using prefabricated “Plattenbau” kinds of systems, no two groups of blocks are alike. Overall, the great number of tower blocks were an astonishing factor in a country where, for most dwellers, the low-rise suburban house and garden was still the preferred solution. “Architect-designed” is thus an apposite characterisation.

A model that ran alongside the exclusive urban tall block, one that constituted a planning solution as much as an architectural one, was Mixed Development. This combined houses, “walk-up” flats and high flats to meet more specifically the differing demands of large families, small families and single people. By the mid sixties this was, however, on its way out, a victim of the demise of the tower block. The reference to “people”, to

**“‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”**  
 by Stefan Muthesius (University of East Anglia)

the users, also emerged in the plans of a new, more radical group, headed by Peter and Alison Smithson: as they saw it, the architect’s task was not only to provide the well-appointed individual dwelling, a house or a flat, but also to plan for the links between the individual dwellings. This group now rejected the slim, high point block as an environment that risked isolating people; instead there should be as much linkage between them, to be achieved by prominent “streets in the air” linking groups of blocks. Sheffield Park Hill is the outstanding example of this approach. By the early to mid-sixties some councils, especially in South London, gave up the high blocks altogether and pursued “High Density - Medium Rise” (up to 4 storeys), culminating in the most complex kinds of agglomerations of ‘houses’, i.e. maisonnettes, and flats, linked by immensely complicated systems of walkways.

Then, during the mid to late 1960s, the time seemed to have arrived for a major “crunch”: a fierce attack, one may have predicted it, after the series of attacks witnessed before, on what had just been built, what had in many cases just been opened, or was actually still building. This was a crisis of all high rise solutions. It rapidly grew into a crisis of confidence regarding the whole of the great project of postwar British council house building. In the early 1950s the Architectural Review and its sister publication, the Architect’s Journal had greeted the tower block enthusiastically, but in 1968 the same journals sounded its death-knells. The architects thereby tried to shift the blame, as in previous situations, to the building industry, as having ‘taken over’ and debased the

type, as having taken it out of the hands of the architects. What was new was that the critical audience had widened, to comprise journalists in the major dailies and Sunday newspapers who in turn purported to speak for the population at large.

The implications were even more serious: the very tag “architect-designed” was now under attack. The principal target was what was felt to be the hubris of that profession, and with it that of the town planners, too, extending to all the other officials of the municipality. All of them were guilty. Acting in mutual reinforcement with the politico-economic shift against mass housing and public housing, the result was that the building of council housing as a whole was greatly reduced and as regards the battle of housing types, the suburban terraced house was revived, the of house which had received the greatest amount of condemnation only a few decades before.

Housing fashions and architectural preconceptions had turned full circle. Mass housing designed by architects seemed a thing of the past. It was back again to the speculative developer, as in the 19th century and in the 1930s. Nobody remembered any more how the architects and planners who championed high blocks in the 1940s and 50s had believed that they finally conquered all “bad” non-architects’ designed houses, and that, around 1945, there had been plans to demolish virtually all smaller Victorian terraced houses.

In conclusion: England was the country in which there was most debate about mass housing, where several of the most frequently met types of mass housing originated, and where we witness

**“‘Architect-Designed’: Concepts of Quality and Quantity in English Mass Housing”**  
by Stefan Muthesius (University of East Anglia)

the greatest effort to assign a purely architectural character also to the dwelling of ‘ordinary’ people and even the lower classes. Each type was first propagated by the architects and their spokespersons with the utmost conviction; it appeared to be invented by the architect, who was convinced that it would create the utmost happiness and contentment. After a few decades, when great numbers of the type had been built it was liable to go out of favour, and even be condemned; then, the architects and their spokespersons advocated a new type, or possibly even a revival of the old type on whose condemnation the new type had been built.

Since about 1970-1980, these major shifts and reversals seem to have come to an end; today we would not really condemn spread-out suburbia, nor a concentration of high blocks, but we would cite advantages for both ways of living. What remains from the past in English mass housing is certainly a diversity not seen anywhere else, a diversity of pronounced shapes on the ground and a diversity of arguments in words and pictures.

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

Immediately after the Second World War, Europe experienced a housing crisis attributable to several causes. The causes most easily understood by historical analysis result from a combination of three factors at work in all countries: wartime destruction, population movements and renewed demographic growth. After this first period when the war was over, and despite the relatively rapid reconstruction of virtually all-European countries, the housing shortage persisted until the beginning of the 1980s. Moreover, it is still going in most European countries at the beginning of the 21st century. Despite the economic recovery, years of growth, and numerous public and private sector incentives to accelerate housing construction, many Europeans continue to face difficulties finding adequate housing, even if the segments of the population subject to inadequate housing were not the same during the post-war boom years as during the period immediately after the Second World War. European countries had succeeded in resolving the post-war housing crisis within 10 or 15 years, but since the 1980s, they have failed in providing decent housing to all citizens and immigrants. The housing crisis stands again as a highly pressing problem in Europe, as during the post-war period. Homelessness, slums and even shantytowns have reappeared in or around most European cities, while many “working poor” cannot rent a flat and are sometimes forced to sleep in their cars.

**Historiography**

Alongside national histories, which are fairly well documented, there are now a relatively large



*Bidonville, Villejuif, circa 1970*

number of studies of European housing. However, these studies have two particular features.

Firstly, most are sociological works, and therefore most do not cover a long time period. Yet they need to be relied on for longer-term studies. Reference to preceding decades (after the First World War in the 1920s, or during the Great Depression in the 1930s) is needed to understand the causes of the housing crisis and national particularities that explain various specific aspects. Thus, to cite just one general example, the contrast between the housing crisis in France in the 1930s and the relative comfort of German housing during the same era is attributable both to the territorial and political effects of the Treaty of Versailles, and to the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany after 1933.

Secondly, studies of housing have largely focused on social or workers' housing. While the definition varies from one country to the next, “social housing” can be defined, a minima across Europe, as the sector aimed at meeting the needs of more or less underprivileged populations or those that are financially unable to find housing in

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

the private market, with full or partial funding via public or quite public loans. It is obvious that this is a major part of the housing question, especially as public policy is a dynamic field for studies in the social sciences. However, on the one hand, social housing can take on other forms, such as the housing built by German labour unions; on the other hand, the housing sector cannot be reduced to social housing alone, or even to the broader subsidised housing sector. The housing sector has specific national features and the level of housing construction varies. Thus, in the early 1950s, housing construction (for all types of housing) was much lower in France than in the UK or Germany.

**A European Project**

With a European team, we decided two years ago to examine the housing issue at a European level. The aim was to study the various ways that Nation-States responded to the housing problem during a specific period – from the division of Europe into two blocs in 1947 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent German reunification. This transnational historical approach is an effective means to understand past solutions and to imagine new answers to the present housing question, as in European cities, housing represents 80% of architectural production and 95% of urban substance. For feasibility reasons, the study covers housing in urban areas or areas undergoing urbanisation during this period of rural exodus and more or less rapid or forced urbanisation of Europeans. Thus, rural housing is only being addressed elliptically in the research.

*Helsinki, late 1950*

At the beginning, we wanted to build a European multidisciplinary network of scientists that actually does not yet exist. While national research teams are already working on the history of housing, these teams have not yet been combined to form a “transnational” European network. The scientists involved are generally historians, historians of architecture and urbanism, geographers, sociologists, and political scientists. We hope the network will connect academics and experts: housing policymakers, public-sector representatives, social housing managers, and representatives of resident and tenant associations. They should elaborate a shared vocabulary. An historical approach over the medium term should be required in order to apprehend the long-term processes of common knowledge and the devel-



**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

opment of shared paradigms for all of Europe, e.g. the difference between private housing and social (public) housing; the choice of detached houses or multidwellings; the debate between homeownership or renting.

The research should be later open to new countries, because the question of providing decent housing for the entire population appears to be raised in quite similar terms all across Europe. In fact, one of the main objectives is to discern transversal questions, a shared vocabulary and an explanatory paradigm that goes beyond national borders, using the tools of connected history. Thus, the research would contribute substantially to the coordination and “defragmentation” of research efforts across Europe and to the strengthening of Europe’s scientific networking capacity.

The comparative timelines, focused on the European history of housing that the research aims to clarify, show a convergence of trends that go beyond national differences. These timelines will contribute significantly to understanding European society as a whole, despite the division of the Iron Curtain.

**Methodological perspectives**

Yet to grasp all the factors that lead to a portion of the population having (or considering itself to have) inadequate housing, all segments of the housing market must be taken into account. This involves considering the production and use of the entire housing supply, from luxury homes to slums, from urban to rural or suburban housing.

Obviously, the research cannot cover all these various elements in great detail, but they will at least be factored into a general project in order to apprehend their respective roles in the systems that regulate the housing sector. Thus, given the role of the Nation-State, the project examines whether the actions of Eastern or Western European States can be understood in “monolithic” terms: to what extent do States harbour internal contradictions, tensions and competing or divergent interests? Are the boundaries between the public and the private sectors explicit and watertight? The research will also review the relationship between the kind of housing decisions made at the national, regional and local levels. Finally, at the lowest level of aggregation, the research will study individual aspirations for the “ideal home”, and the way that these are shaped by processes of negotiation and compromise before acquiring a formal political and institutional identity.

Proceeding in this way, the research will address the history of European housing both in terms of “use” and “means”. It will ask both how Europeans were housed during the long years of the Cold War, and what the various actors in the market across Europe did to supply a variety of appropriate forms of housing. Nowadays, as Europe is becoming increasingly united, both politically and socially, the need to build a common past grows. This European history of housing will focus on issues that affect all Europeans, and on the role of housing in shaping a specifically European way of life.

This programme promises a way of “lifting back

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

the Iron Curtain” on this pressing social question and providing a better understanding of many of the issues that concern all Europeans, namely: the conditions in which the underprivileged or working classes are housed, or urban violence and other problems past and present as destructions and patrimonialization. These issues are shrouded and complicated by the unwillingness of the political process to investigate a painful past. Expertise drawn from the various countries, combining the experience of researchers and the latest findings of those involved in “front-line” empirical enquiry, can frame a clearer understanding of the roots of the housing difficulties facing all European countries.

The project will produce housing studies based on an overall multidisciplinary approach, combining all the following aspects: the relationship between the government and civil society; ties between public policy, the private market and the intermediate sector (which still exists in the former socialist countries); inhabitants’ desires, needs and aspirations involving a “nice home”; the social and legal ties between landlords and tenants; and new forms of urban development in the second half of the 20th century. The aim is to integrate the contributions of the various disciplines that study the contemporary city, applied to this question of “total history”, from both a top/down and a bottom/up perspective.

We want to examine two strong methodological hypotheses: Eastern Europe, Western Europe and authoritarian Southern Europe must be studied together, without favouring an analysis

based on the difference in political systems. This is especially true as during this period, Spain and Portugal went from being economically and politically marginalised to being fully integrated into the European Community. Moreover, the medium-term dimension, beginning after Second World War, is essential for analysing successes and failures.

As history can be viewed as the “pulse” of contemporary societies, the project’s main objective is to provide both the scientific community and housing stakeholders (politicians, architects, urban planners, builders) with an historical approach to the housing sector in East and West Europe during the Cold War. When Europe was split into two parts by the Iron Curtain, the needs and desires of Europeans were virtually the same in terms of housing comfort standards, surface area, etc., even though public policies varied by country. Then, as now, the populations to be housed were very diverse: refugees, displaced peoples, the poor, workers and employees, civil servants and even the middle classes. To build this historical view, the research will gather a wide scale transnational statistical database describing the housing crisis and the needs on both sides of the Iron Curtain, but also in Southern Europe under the dictatorships of Franco and Salazar, or even in Tito’s Yugoslavia. Until now, apart from some enquiries by CECA and UNO that do not cover the Eastern countries, every country in Europe has had its own approach to evaluating when housing is insufficient and the categories of the population that should be given priority. Therefore, despite some exceptions, it has thus far been almost

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

impossible to compare national situations. The European network of social scientists should be able to draft useful criteria for comparison: the number and kind of dwellings built each year, rent levels, individual housing aid enabling poor households to remain solvent, measures encouraging private homeownership, formal architectural choices, the breakdown of terraced houses and detached houses or flats, etc.

In order to assemble a pan-European statistical base and theoretical basis to analyse and compare the European housing situation, the research will associate several disciplines, including history, architecture, political science and sociology, in an interdisciplinary spirit. Each discipline has its own tools to assess standards of comfort, sizes of flats, appropriate floor-space standards for public apartments, how many people can live in small apartments, or the definition of inadequate dwellings endured by so many European households. This also holds true in the case of private enterprises, whether manufacturers of household products or housing developers. Hence the primary objective is to lay a common grounding for the housing field.

We hope, especially in collaboration with partners in Eastern countries, to draw a comparison between parliamentary and popular democracies in the field of housing and public policies. Comparisons between public policies towards housing in the two, or even three, parts of Europe will cast a light on the types of actors involved and social measures implemented to resolve the crisis. Eastern countries did not have

a single uniform model, and the programme is likely to interest other cooperating states such as Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, or Bulgaria and Romania. A more remote objective is to identify the actors in the “Europeanisation” of contemporary housing history and to explore the roots of a “European way of life” that would be measurable and assessed by all the disciplines involved in the project.

**Building databases**

The project will contribute to building several databases on housing.

The first phase will involve reviewing and summarising national statistics from across Europe, then interpreting their significance in both national and European terms. While amassing this data, the variety of statistical methods used by various countries to document their housing needs will be compared. Data will be collected for three periods: the aftermath of the war; the 1960s, when rapid population growth was matched with high levels of housing construction; and the 1970s when it was possible, in most of the countries, to think that the housing crisis had been resolved.

The first database will be a kind of chronological equipment. Indeed, despite the wide range of political situations, there is a “shared timeline” in the housing crisis’s features. Likewise, there is a shared timeline in the responses of public powers, or in their inability to respond: in spite of the different political situations, Spain under Franco, the United Kingdom, France, or East and

“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”

by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

West Germany, for example, implemented similar public policies because of the lack of housing.

The second database will be more concerned with statistics. We must first draft comparative criteria (e.g. the term “overpopulation” was not defined in the same way in East and West Germany), then to gather a wealth of information in the countries involved in the research and validate and confirm the relevance of these common criteria before completing the database.

Three periods of time will be examined:

1) the period of evaluating needs amidst the ruins in the aftermath of war, which will highlight national differences (e.g. the disparities between Spain, where wartime destruction occurred before 1939, and Germany, which suffered extensive Allied bombardment beginning in 1943);

2) the expansion period of the 1960s, when all countries experienced strong construction activity along with demographic growth; and

3) the period of the 1970s, when the housing crisis appeared to have been resolved.

With this data available, the team will be able to formulate a series of pan-European issues, identifying networks of influence and how models and techniques were transferred and diffused from one country to the next.

At the same time, a comparative timeline of the history of housing in Europe will be drawn up.



*Warsaw, 1956*



*Warsaw 1945, and below, 1960*

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

This will bring together the main events: legislation, reports and “white papers” from sector professionals or the government, the construction of buildings that symbolised successive policies, media events, housing crises, and urban social movements. This process of combining research is expected to highlight similarities and differences: Reconstruction after five years of total war, the 1950s, or the age of public policy with the injection of state credits or loans to build millions of new social housing units to overcome the housing crisis. For example, Abbé Froidure and Abbé Pierre’s famous appeals in Belgium (1952) and France (1954) triggered a change in public opinion, while the Moscow Conference abandoned Stalinist architecture and imposed Khrushchevian buildings all across Eastern bloc countries in a massive response to the housing shortage. Then, a return to market forces in the 1960s: the quantitative success of public funding policies, together with strong economic growth, led to the idea that the State could forgo direct funding of construction and turn it over to private developer and household incentives by targeted state funds. At the same time, socialist countries failed to house their citizens adequately, except a part of the newly favoured working class or State employees as in Poland.

**Transnational questions**

Once this corpus of data and comparative timeline are established, transnational questions – i.e. those that are pertinent in the various nation-states – will be (re) formulated. We will seek to identify the systems of influence, transfer and

diffusion for models and techniques, while asking questions that appear to be relevant for all the countries under consideration.

Among these questions, four have already been identified:

**1: Property-developers: public policy, private-sector construction, and the “intermediate sector”.**

Public construction is the segment most familiar to historians, for which there are a large number of national studies. Hence the research will immediately emphasise a comparison of public policies in terms of housing in the various countries, the respective contributions of public builders and private entrepreneurs in housing construction, without forgetting this “intermediate sector” – in France, the subsidised sector – that incorporates public funding and private efforts. In doing so, self-build homes (the “Castor” movement in France, self-helped housing, family building, the cooperative societies in Poland, the German trade unions, etc.) will not be neglected. This question of the relationship between the public and private sectors also applies in socialist countries and authoritarian states. For instance, in Poland, a large cooperative sector continued to exist, preventing the socialist regime from fully controlling the building sector.

This question involves comparing public-sector policy and private-sector strategy with the financing modes in each country in order to identify models: public-sector domination, on either a national level (e.g. in France) or a local one (e.g.

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

the UK), or conversely the supremacy of private-sector initiative (e.g. in Italy), to build a nation of homeowners (e.g. in Spain) or eventually abolish private homeownership (e.g. socialist countries in Eastern Europe).

**2: Multi-dwellings vs. detached houses.**

The period chosen is characterised by the construction of new multi-dwellings, on a scale never seen before in the European urban landscape: grands ensembles in France, large housing estates in the UK, borgate in Italy, collective dwellings in all socialist countries. However, this trend did not curtail (or prevent, depending on the country) urban sprawl or tract housing. How was the proportion of multi-dwellings vs. detached homes determined? Does this breakdown mirror that of owner-occupiers and renters? This question prompts a study of inhabitants' aspirations and of the countries mainly comprised of homeowners (e.g. Spain), contrasted with those mainly comprised of renters (e.g. France). If it is possible to grasp the housing aspirations of populations from an historical perspective, did these aspirations evolve over time, between the periods of reconstruction, expansion, and the return of economic crisis?

The research will cover the choice between multi-dwellings and detached houses, or the combined question of urban development types and residents' preferences. In post-war Europe, a new type of housing was developed: social housing estates comprised of blocks of high-rises; the extent of such developments varied considerably

depending on the country. Did technical and financial systems impose this new type of housing on Europeans who would have preferred individual housing in the form of private homes?

**3: What is a “housing crisis”?**

How are these crises analysed, quantified and perceived? Does the term “housing crisis” have the same meaning for all Europeans, in Eastern and Western Europe? When do housing crises appear? The research will draw up comparative national timelines, showing possible variations in public perception of the peaks of crisis and seeking to connect these with political changes within each Nation State. The crisis and its perception do not appear with the same intensity or at the same time in every country (for instance, in France, the peak of the crisis in public opinion was in 1954, whereas it was ten years later in Italy).

This part will cover a central question that unifies all the data at key moments in the history of housing in each country. What is a housing crisis, or more specifically, to what degree is an urbanised society, at a given point in its development, prepared to tolerate indecent housing? The question can be formulated in a more brutal fashion: Which social categories did Europeans accept to see living or even dying in the streets, for lack of a roof over their heads, in 1950, 1970 and 1980?

A fourth historical question, transnational from the outset, will be addressed by examining the attempts to harmonise housing policy and standards for “decent housing” on a European level,

**“Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project”**

by **Danièle Voldman** (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne) and **Annie Fourcaut** (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

within the framework of international organisations such as CECA, UNESCO, the EU, COMECON or the European Council (standard bodies). Case Studies (monographs) on the housing experiences of Europeans during this period, e.g. emergency temporary housing, multi-household housing, shared collective apartments, flat rentals in large social housing complexes, or building homes with self-help housing, will be considered as a supplement in order to obtain a concrete view of this European history of lifestyles. This part will examine policies for European harmonisation of housing standards during the Cold War within international organisations.

At the end of this research process, we hope to get some responses to major questions. For example, how were Europeans housed during the period when Europe was divided into several political systems? Or, should we regard the nation-state frame of reference as obsolete or inadequate for analysing the shared destiny of European households? To be sure, the experiences of all European countries were conditioned, albeit not always at the same time, by the main trends of postwar mass housing:

- overcoming wartime ruins and precarious housing;
- entering the period of mass housing (financed to a greater or lesser extent by the public sector);
- the presumed end of the housing crisis with the prosperous 1960s;
- and finally the renewed crises of the late 1970s/1980s, with new imperatives: housing immigrants, or meeting new needs in terms of housing standards in the socialist and authoritarian countries.

**“The ‘Sunlit Uplands’ Project” ; a paper examining a role for photography in documenting examples of mass social housing**

by **Andy Lock** (Nottingham Trent University)

**Abstract**

A short paper based on a project, Sunlit Uplands, which uses photography to document the current state of specific examples of the mass social housing, to be found on post-WWII, British council housing estates.

Reflection on the Sunlit Uplands images provides the basis for an examination of the material legacy of post-war mass social housing, which focuses on the significance of myriad small, seemingly unique modifications and embellishments, made over many years to once pristine and uniform structures. The context for this discussion is provided by the ideas of key figures (particularly Humphrey Jennings, Charles Madge and also Tom Harrison) associated with the founding of the pre-WWII Mass Observation movement. The paper draws on the potential of what might be described as Mass Observation’s “surrealist ethnography”, to aid in reconsidering the significance of apparently prosaic modifications made to dwellings by their occupants, and the potential of such practices of habitation, to help ‘recover’ what Paul Ray has described as ‘the imagination that produced the vulgar objects and images of the everyday world’.

The paper also addresses the archive of original photographic documentation, from which the Sunlit Uplands photographs draw their inspiration. The Sunlit Uplands photographs (reminiscent in some respects of the New Topographics “tradition” of landscape photography) in fact derive their distinctive appearance primarily from the aesthetic



conventions, which characterised 1950s and ‘60s photographic records of the architecture, of then newly built British council-housing estates and their attendant state schools and churches. The paper proposes that those original photographs, by heroically delineating the new forms and spaces of the post-war era, embody a particular rheto-



The 'Sunlit Uplands' Project" ; a paper examining a role for photography in documenting examples of mass social housing

by Andy Lock (Nottingham Trent University)

ric and cumulatively amount to a distinctive vision of a new architectural and social landscape. It is suggested that the contemporary viewer's encounter with such archive images from the immediate post-war period is subject to a complex temporality bound up with the legacy of that rhetoric.

Drawing on Kathleen Raine's evaluation of Mass Observation's legacy, the paper concludes by briefly considering a particular conception of the Sunlit Uplands photographs: suggesting that they lend themselves to a tradition of poetic imagery, 'at once irrational and objective'; 'a listening to the dreaming of a nation, unaware of the purport of its own fantasies'.



**“Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia”**by **Kimberly Elman Zarecor** (Iowa State University)

*‘BIGNESS, through its very independence of context, is the one architecture that can survive, even exploit, the new-global condition of the tabula rasa: it does not take its inspiration from givens too often squeezed for the last drop of meaning; it gravitates opportunistically to locations of maximum infrastructural promise, it is, finally, its own raison d’etre’.*

Rem Koolhaas, “Bigness and the Problem of the Large,” S,M,L,XL, 1995

A common lament about the legacy of communism in Europe is the damage that it did to the built environment. Particular ire is directed at what Hungarian historian Ivan T. Berend referred to in 1980 as “the expanding, greyish, prefabricated residential blocks” that constituted many post-war districts around the region. These buildings were not just signs of increased production of new housing, but also indicated the acceleration of urbanization in the region as residents moved from rural areas to towns and cities for work. According to United Nations statistics, 75 percent of the Czech population lived in urban areas by 1980, compared to only 54 percent in 1950. These new residents were the first inhabitants of the much criticized industrially-produced panel building districts, and many of them and their families remain there today.

Scholars and the general public have long assumed that the Soviets were behind the spread of these concrete apartment buildings, but as I show in my recent book, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960*,



*1960s housing estate, Prague-Krč, Czech Republic. From Josef Pechar. Československá architektura, 1945-1977. Prague: Odeon, 1979*

this technology had local origins as well. Some of the hallmarks of socialist-era architecture, such as prefabrication and mass production, actually predate state socialism by decades, especially in Czechoslovakia where the interwar building industry was among the most advanced in Europe. Panel building technology has direct ties to capitalist-era experimentation in the Building Department at the Baťa Shoe Company in Zlín. Although professional life changed profoundly when a state-run system of architecture and engineering offices replaced private practice in the late 1940s, the vast prefabricated neighbourhoods in many Czech and Slovak cities are, in fact, the fulfilment of an interwar vision of modernity that emphasized the right to housing at a minimum standard over the artistic qualities of individual buildings; in other words, function and efficiency over style. Thus, after World War II, far from being pressured by Moscow to build standardized apartment blocks, many architects in Czechoslovakia embraced the opportunity to build housing on a scale and at a pace previously unattainable. By the mid-1960s, what Czechs and Slovaks call paneláks—struc-

“Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia”

by Kimberly Elman Zarecor (Iowa State University)



*Renovated 1970s panelák in the 8th district, Ostrava-Poruba, Czech Republic. Author's photo, 2011*



*Renovated 1970s panelák in the 8th district (same building type as above, only renovated with better material and color choices), Ostrava-Poruba, Czech Republic. Author's photo, 2011.*

tural panel buildings constructed with panels and no structural skeleton—were the norm and they remained the dominant housing type until 1990.

Today there are 1,165,000 apartment units in 80,000 paneláks in the Czech Republic. More than 30 percent of the country's inhabitants live in a panelák (approximately 3.1 million people) and 40 percent of Prague's inhabitants. Statistics such as these indicate the complexity of talking about patrimonialization for mass housing projects in Eastern Europe—the buildings are so ubiquitous that they have no 'architectural' content but are simply buildings (to borrow from Stefan Muthesius's discussion of English housing). This is true for a single building which often looks plain and undifferentiated from its neighbours, but it is also the case at the national scale, since there were only sixteen standardized panelák types used for all 80,000 buildings. As I have learned from colleagues in Ostrava in the last few weeks, standardized did not necessarily mean identical. Façade detailing was more creative in some developments than others and, even within some neighbourhoods differences could be seen on individual buildings, likely the work of a local architect who wanted to leave a mark. The units were also adjusted in some cases for sun direction, so that the living spaces could take advantage of south light. Yet fundamentally the postwar mass housing stock in the former Czechoslovakia was highly standardized and repeated in cities and towns—large and small, urban, suburban, and rural.

For this reason, I would like to argue, perhaps controversially in this setting, that there may be no

**“Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia”**

by Kimberly Elman Zarecor (Iowa State University)

method or reason for patrimonialisation of most, if any, of the buildings. Thus a complete inventory is not necessary on a national scale in the Czech Republic or probably the other former Eastern Bloc countries. An inventory might be appropriate in a few large cities with the best examples of certain types, such as Prague or Bratislava as discussed in Henrieta Moravcikova’s paper, but even then the number of buildings in situ versus the time it would take to do the full inventory may not make sense given what the value of the result will be for scholars and the public. As Henrieta concludes, a “selective approach” is needed to decide what has value for reconstruction and what might better be demolished. I would extend the idea of a ‘selective’ approach to the inventory itself and propose that discussing how to establish a process for making the selections might, in fact, be the most useful as we think about a transnational, European-wide research project on housing. There are simply too many of the same buildings on similar sites to make a full inventory worthwhile. In his opening remarks, Miles hints at this possibility when he questions whether or not the scale and “controversial connotations” of the housing developments mean that it is “impracticable” to do systematic preservation.

I entitled this presentation, “bigness of another sort,” because I was trying to imagine the truly big size of a comprehensive inventory in the Czech Republic and, with only sixteen panelák types constituting the vast majority of the sample, its inevitably repetitive quality. Rem Koolhaas’s formulation of ‘Bigness’ seemed like an apt way to describe the sense of disorientation that occurs

when one contemplates the shift from the individual buildings of the interwar years to the mass production of millions of apartments—both in terms of the overall number of units and the dimensions of the new buildings, which were often fourteen or more stories by the 1970s. Like Koolhaas’s ‘big’ buildings, many groups of paneláks were located on tabula rasa sites and they relied on infrastructural elements, such as roads, public transportation, shopping spaces, and elevators, for their organizational logic. One panelák might not be so ‘big,’ but a development of dozens of buildings starts to take on the character of a massive single architectural effort. An effort that is disengaged from its context and becomes its own ‘raison d’être’ in the sense that the neighbourhoods created their own landscapes, essentially self-contained worlds of home and leisure life in dialectical tension with the productive spaces of work and industry (something discussed in more detail in my book).

Given the size of the sample in Eastern Europe, there are a few methodological issues that I would like to address directly and propose as points of discussion for the group. Firstly, we may want to adjust the DOCOMOMO working definition of mass housing: “large-scale housing programs for low or middle incomes, backed in some way or another by the state, and whose built form involves large aggregates of buildings laid out in the diverse ways allowed for in the modern movement.” The concept of low or middle income simply breaks down in the Eastern European context. While it is true that the citizens of all Communist countries could be classified as low or middle in-

**“Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia”**

by Kimberly Elman Zarecor (Iowa State University)

come depending on how those terms are defined, the housing was not tied to income status in the same way as in Western Europe. Your access to the housing might have been linked to your employer, your performance at your place of work, the number of children in your family, or your political connections (although this was less common than might be expected since the Czechoslovak Communist Party was quite large). The low cost of occupying the apartment also meant that income was not a defining factor in where you lived, most people could have afforded the rent on most apartments, it was the access and availability that was a problem. In this sense, I want to reiterate Mart Kalm’s point that rent was largely symbolic in the communist countries. In the Czech case, for example, the already low rent did not increase from 1964 to 1990 and many people still live in apartments with regulated rents that remain on average about 50% of the market rate after several controversial rate hikes.

Buildings were also not necessarily in large aggregates, some paneláks stood alone in an older neighbourhood or even on a town square in some smaller cities. As I argue in my book, paneláks and other forms of industrialized housing were first and foremost about a technological shift in architectural practice, a change in the way that buildings were designed and built. Therefore, even when a single new building was needed, it was still a panelák, because this was how things were done. It is a change that can be compared to the Levittown affect in the United States in the sense that Levitt pioneered a method of making stick frame wood houses quickly and efficiently, lead-

ing most of the industry to adopt these techniques regardless of the design intent or even size of the house. For this reason, I would prefer to uncouple the formal implications of defining mass housing as adhering to urban schemes “allowed for in the modern movement” and shift toward a definition that is about building method and design process such as the implications of standardized building plans and the use of prefabricated architectural elements for construction—a practice shared with at least some parts of western Europe.

There is also the question of the representative type and the exception. At issue is whether or not it will be possible to initiate the three step process of analysis, documentation, and conservation for mass housing in Eastern Europe, and if so, on what scale and in what way might we begin? Despite the conceptual idea that all the housing developments from this period could become known and then inventorised, even if they did not have architectural value to take to the third step of patrimonialisation, we are, in fact, always talking about the exceptional cases when we discuss protecting particular examples. Therefore the strongest response that I have to the question of how much of the inventory should be completed is to begin by finding only the exceptional examples even before any analysis is done. In other words, work backwards through the process, knowing that almost all of the housing has no potential for conservation.

There are some obvious places to start in the Czech Republic, including the one-off and unusual projects of their day. The only protected post-

**“Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia”**

by Kimberly Elman Zarecor (Iowa State University)

war housing development to date is Invalidovna in Prague, which has some experimental building types and avant-garde influences. It was also heavily damaged in the 2003 floods, giving residents the opportunity to think about the method of reconstruction. Lesná in Brno is one of the other famous examples from the period. It is a place where the paneláks and public spaces are successfully integrated into the sloped site in a way reminiscent of Scandinavian projects (and similar to some Estonian examples discussed in Mart’s paper). In the case of Lesná, it would be the urbanism and overall effect of the buildings in the landscape that would be worthy of a designation. In fact, Lesná is currently the only postwar housing that the Czech DOCOMOMO chapter has included on its list of significant modern buildings.

A group of neighbourhood residents tried to protect the site through patrimonialisation in 2010, an effort that seems to have failed, because their website has not been updated since April 2010. To complicate matters, one of the original architects of the development, Viktor Rudiš, who remains a beloved figure on the local architecture scene, was quoted in the Brno press in January 2010 as being against patrimonialisation because the development had already undergone too many changes. According to Rudiš, “the development is not worth conserving in its current state,” it has become “a really dead structure that only serves as a place to live.” In the communist period, it was a community with public buildings, schools, and services, many of which have been torn down or abandoned to Rudiš’s great disappointment. There were also architectural changes

to the buildings’ balconies, new penthouse stories have been added, and the facades have been painted, all changes that architecturally devalue it in Rudiš’s opinion. Rudiš also talked about his own failed attempt to have the neighbourhood protected about eight years earlier, before most of the changes had occurred. His opposition to the new plans must also be considered a response to the lack of support he received years earlier when it would still have been possible to restore features of the old buildings, rather than trying to protect a significantly altered project.

This brings me to the final part of my paper and the issue of ongoing renovations and rehabilitation of postwar buildings in the Czech Republic. The single most critical issue facing architects and preservationists with an interest in postwar mass housing is the acceleration of renovations on a vast majority of postwar buildings. These improvements include new façades made of polystyrene covered with stucco and then painted in colours chosen by the owners of the buildings, both corporate and cooperative, as well as new



*1970s panelák in the midst of renovation, Karviná-Hranice, Czech Republic. Author’s photo, 2011.*

“Bigness of Another Sort: The Challenge of a Mass Housing Inventory in Czechoslovakia”

by Kimberly Elman Zarecor (Iowa State University)

elevators, doors, windows, and balcony enclosures, often in bright colours and coordinated with the bright paint colours of the façade. These renovations are the external signs of changes, similar transformations have occurred in the interiors where many apartments have new kitchens, bathrooms, and laminate wood floors. All of which led me to consider what should be preserved through the process of patrimonialisation. Once a building has a new façade and the units on the interior have been rebuilt, what is left? Viktor Rudiš believes that there is a point at which a development is no longer worth preserving.

For me, the question has to do with the value of the designation itself. Is patrimonialisation a process of protecting against demolition? In what ways does a building that is not threatened with demolition benefit from being designated? If a designation means that the people living in the buildings cannot renovate their units to improve basic quality of life issues such as draughty walls, small rooms, or the lack of an elevator in a six-storey building, then what is its value to the residents?

Perhaps mass housing, more than any other building type, brings out these questions since people are not just visiting the building for its architectural qualities, but rather living within its spaces everyday. This means that there must be a greater emphasis on the usability and comfort of the space, rather than on the fundamental architectural qualities of its original design and whether or not it has been changed. These buildings are protected in one sense by virtue of being home to

more than 3 million people—demolition is simply not possible—but what remains and what will be, is different from the original designs. In this sense, the buildings are organisms that adapt and adjust. A landmark designation would impose a fixed condition in time and space, and a set of rules that would determined how the building could change. Perhaps Eastern European mass housing, because it largely remains in use, should not be subject to such a process, and should instead continue its transformation into the future based on the needs of its inhabitants, even if their needs are in conflict with the original intent.

**“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest” by Vera Marin**

(Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

**Introduction**

This paper reports on a recent research initiative which attempts to devise strategies for the regeneration of the vast built legacy of the mass housing programmes of socialism within Bucharest. But before attempting remedies, the first necessity is for survey and analysis of what has been built.

As of 2002, around 79% of the population of Bucharest lived in the apartments of the housing ensembles built during the communist period: 84% of the housing stock. Yet ‘there is very little documentation or historical analysis on mass housing in general, and on collective housing in Bucharest city in particular’. (Peter Derer, *Urban Housing*, 1982) To attempt to remedy this lack of information, a very brief chronological approach may be of some help in situating the mass housing districts’ urban form in the reality of contemporary Romanian cities. This is a vital task, since nowadays, it is almost impossible to define Bucharest or many other Romanian cities without considering this mass: the housing ensembles impinge on the whole city.

**A brief chronological overview of postwar Bucharest mass housing**

1950s:

The first variant of mass housing to appear in postwar, socialist Bucharest was the cvartal, representing the Soviet socialist realism style. The architecture of these collective dwellings follows the line of the traditional city scale, and we can still speak about a balance between public

and the private space.

1960s:

The 1960s brought in their train a relaxation to some extent, which affected all areas of existence, be it political, social, economic, etc. In architecture, there was a certain opening towards the Western type of rationalist urbanism promoted through the principles of the functionalist urban planning. Blocks of flats were built in the peripheral zones of the city, on the free grounds near the newly built industrial areas.

1970s:

Around 1975, a new idea began to emerge: why not make the boulevards more important by flanking them with rows of ‘street’ blocks, ten floors high? A 1977 earthquake devastated Bucharest and the damage provided a good enough reason to start a calculated program of urban demolition. This eventually affected most of the city, no matter the real necessities.

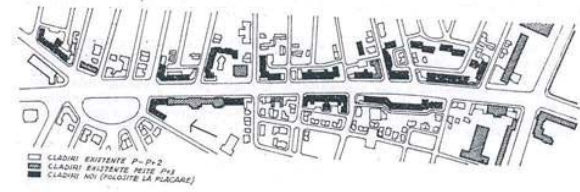
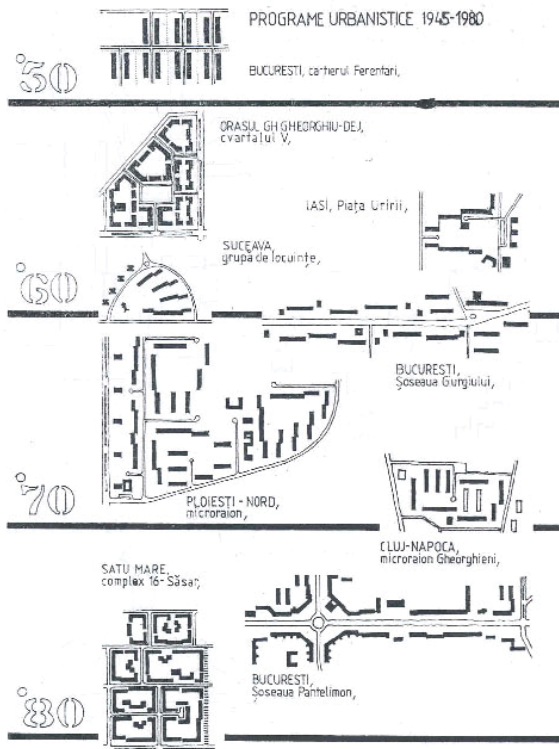
1980s

In the ’80s, more and more blocks of flats were built, largely of poor quality both in their construction and in their urban setting.



“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest” by Vera Marin (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

Diagram of apartment block layouts (from various Romanian cities) from successive decades:



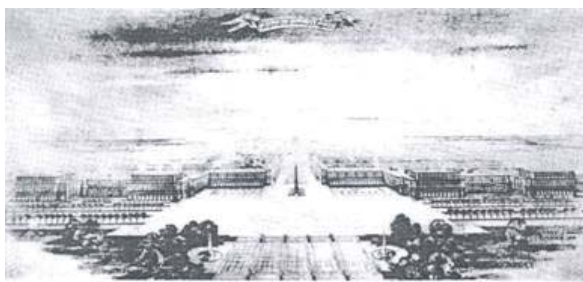
Above: boulevard redevelopments of the 1980s:

Demographic Trends

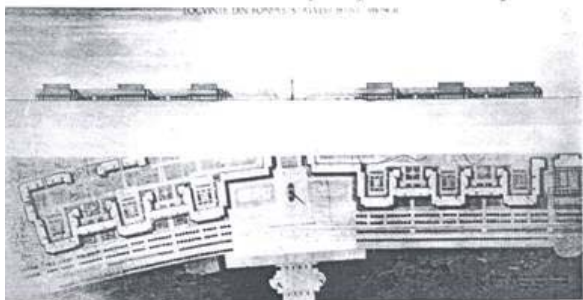
A significant chart in a World Bank report shows that around 1970, the people who migrated from the rural areas to towns constituted a major percentage of the total migrations around the country

“the migration rates [...] were highest among those between twenty and twenty-four and 60% of those arriving in urban areas were between fifteen and twenty-nine years old.”

Nowadays, however, the majority of the population residing in the peripheral ensembles of Bucharest, built during the communist years, are the first generation to live in the city (from rural areas). They continue to live in blocks of flats in these districts, as the housing stock has hardly been improved after 1989. Their neighbours - the people born in the city - are the ones who had



Cvartal - Bd. Muncii - perspective and plan



Above: 1950s cvartal

**“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest”** by Vera Marin (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

their homes demolished in the city’s transformation processes after 1977.

### Survey data - and its absence

“One fundamental issue is that there has been no survey of the physical conditions for the housing stock built during the communist regime and therefore there is no firm knowledge of their scale and extent, nor of the costs of rectifying them..” Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva, ‘Country Profile on the Housing Sector, Romania’, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2001.

The lack of survey information is staggering: there is nothing official, other than overall census data that indicate that mass housing accounts for 35% of the total housing stock for the whole country (urban + rural!) in 2002. But that tells us nothing about what sorts of housing is involved. PhD research is underway on constructing a typology of buildings for Bucharest sector 3 area – but what is the current state of these buildings? A thermal rehabilitation program has been underway since 2001, targeting their very low level of performance.

The logic of construction of these ensembles relied on pure quantity: their quality became poorer and poorer by the end of the period. During the communist regime, an extremely centralised political will encouraged a strong standardisation of buildings and apartments, and economy of resources for public equipment.

Since their very beginning these areas have had



problems regarding both their architectural design and construction, and their urban setting. Having steadily worsened over time, these problems now constitute a very difficult heritage today. The housing areas built during the communist regime in Bucharest and everywhere in Romania face serious problems today owing not only to the physically difficult conditions but also to the lack of management and communication skills of the new owners.

Almost two decades ago, when the tenants of these apartments could buy them at very low prices, it was not so obvious that this also involved taking on a package of responsibilities for a building which was already somewhat degraded. In a typical example: one homeowners’ association formed by 80 households took over a single collective block of flats built in 1970 and situated at the northern entry of the city of Bucharest, without regard for its location in a massive housing complex.

### ATU: Studies and Surveys

In an attempt to address these problems of fragmentation and ignorance, a newly founded NGO

**“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest”** by Vera Marin (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

of urban planners, ATU (Asociația pentru Tranziția Urbană – the Association for Urban Transition), carried out in 2004-5 a Preliminary Study for Improving the Living Conditions in Collective Housing Complexes. The aims of ATU are to foster a general civil-society ethos of information and dialogue, and to pursue more specific knowledge tasks, of devising new planning and policy instruments for mass housing regeneration.

ATU’s Preliminary Study had two main strands:

Firstly: an attempt to stimulate dialogue among concerned urban actors.

Secondly: a pursuit of-specific competence for diagnosis and search for solutions in housing regeneration.

A distinctive and vital aspect to the project is that it was a Romanian-French collaborative venture. It made available within Bucharest the benefit of the long French experience in the housing rehabilitation domain, chiefly through the partnership with an NGO from Lyon, ‘Villes en Transition’.

The Preliminary Study led to a further specific pilot initiative:

REHA: Preliminary Study for a Pilot Project: Improvement of Collective Housing, Sector 1, Bucharest.

This addressed not only the physical aspects of housing regeneration, but also the social and legislative measures that could facilitate or impede

any intervention for improving living conditions.

Its aims were the following:

- to assess the current institutional and legal framework on housing in condominiums both in France and Romania;
- to identify the specific problems of condominium housing in Romania; and
- to review case studies on good practices of intervention on condominiums both in France and in Romania.

A concomitant field survey project set out to implement the following aims:

- develop partnerships with and among local actors;
- Carry out a socio-economic survey of a local community, and summarize a technical diagnosis of the pilot area;
- evaluate the requirements for intervention and develop a strategy for the pilot area; and secure potential sources of financing for carrying out works requested by the residents.

Within the Pilot Project, the following benefits resulted:

The owners secured important support for better understanding of possible ways to improve their living conditions, and to correctly evaluate their responsibilities and their objectives.

“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest” by Vera Marin (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

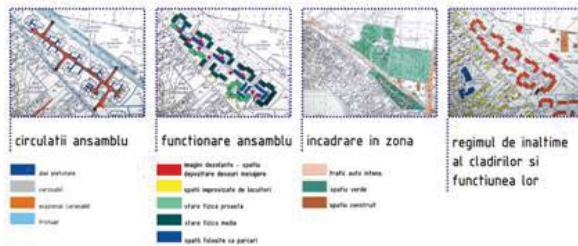


Left and Above: images of the Pilot Project



REZULTATELE DIAGNOSTICULUI TEHNIC

starea zonei



starea blocului



proiecte-model de reabilitare termică (Iasi, Piatra Neamt) au demonstrat ca se poate reduce cu aproape 50% consumul total de energie pentru încălzire și apa caldă menajeră - în urma intervențiilor de modernizare termică a unor blocuri de locuințe colective.



The Romanian Ministry of Construction declared its intention to initiate a further pilot-project aimed at experimenting on a limited scale with an operational framework suitable for subsequent replication as a guideline framework at larger scales.

The development of the pre-operational approach (diagnostic, objectives, participation and dialogue with inhabitants) gave local authorities a rough guide that they could re-use in other situations and which could assist in developing fully-fledged procedures.

The research, largely carried out by postgraduate students of urban design or urban planning, avoided any temptation to present specific visual scenarios to the residents, in order to avoid seducing them with images: the aim was to let them establish their own objectives.

**“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest”** by Vera Marin (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

Our survey helped fill in the gaps caused by the absence of any official data on residential mobility at the overall level of the city of Bucharest. Our case-study questionnaire showed the following results, in reply to the question, ‘For how many years have you been living here?’

Over 30 years: 38%;  
20-30 years: 20%;  
10-20 years: 11%;  
5-10 years: 9%;  
1-5 years: 22%

The survey also helped establish whether there was any correlation between the obvious physical proximity in these collective housing ensembles and the social cohesion of a group living with such a density. Conducted as a socio-economic diagnosis, the survey showed that the majority of the residents have lived there since the repartition of the apartments, and that some neighbours have known each other for more than 30 years. However, the post-1989 economic change brought some differences in the levels of income, and hence a certain degree of envy and suspicion between neighbours.

It seems that although people who meet every day in the common areas of their building all experience the same dysfunction of that building (which was somewhat badly built and hardly ever maintained), they nevertheless do not interact in any search for solutions to their common problems. The effective implementation of small-scale democracy in the decision making process at homeowners-association level has proven a very

difficult task. Residents’ behaviour has evinced a strong tendency of inertia, waiting for solutions to come from outside, from the local authority, the State, or from any external agency at all.

Characteristic resident behaviour-patterns and reactions include the following:

- Opposition to partnerships with private investment firms (“we don’t want them to become rich by building on our terrace”)
- Strong criticisms of the few who come with ideas of intervention
- Low level of participation in the association’s meetings
- Domination of meetings by the same people, especially elderly people who have the time to organize and to attend them
- An unclear division of responsibilities and tasks among the association members

The inhabitants of mass housing, as ‘urban actors’ are in a learning process as to the most effective role they can adopt. Their adjustments take time and generate some tensions, not least in dealings with communal services suppliers who frequently provide poor quality services and at increasingly higher prices. Relations are often fraught with the local council departments, especially with the bureau for liaison with homeowners associations, with the urban planning department (responsible for building permits), and with the central adminis-

**“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest”** by Vera Marin (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

tration, tasked with setting the rules of the game.

Sometimes they succeed in overcoming these long lists of obstacles, and they put in practice some initiatives to improve their living conditions.

To maximise the chances of success, certain key prerequisites stand out:

- A good leadership, capable of showing both authority and enthusiasm in convincing the members of the homeowners association
- Specific knowledge of some residents who are professionals in various fields, such as civil engineers, lawyers and economists
- Information on access to material and information resources

### Conclusion

Unless the issues of the mass-housing condominiums are addressed, Romania faces the prospect of emerging ghettos of poorer households literally trapped as owners or tenants of unsuitable properties that they cannot afford to maintain. Many households are investing money in improving their own apartments; but investing in the jointly-owned building structure or utility infrastructure is often impossible because either some resident households cannot afford to contribute or because cooperation within the homeowners' association, if there is one, is poorly developed.

What future is there for collective housing ensembles in Bucharest? The obstacles to a well-

managed outcome are numerous:

- almost 100% private property
- aging of prefabricated panels that were designed for 30 years' life
- proliferation of parked cars that makes life impossible in areas not designed for high levels of car ownership
- fewer and fewer well-off households who decide to stay
- a functionalist urban design composition often ruined by densification in the '80s or new buildings inserted on the former green spaces of these ensembles (on parcels that have been retrocessed or sold by the municipalities as constructible land)

Certainly, documenting has a place – in building arguments for urban regeneration policies.

Conserving is a more doubtful aspiration – maybe it should target a selected few estates.

Comparisons are essential - to allow a better understanding of differences and similarities.

The patterns and problems revealed by recording include:

patterns of tenure: 100% private ownership for apartments, but condominium issues for moderate-income groups.

**“The Association for Urban Transition: Civil society and mass housing in post-communist Bucharest” by Vera Marin** (Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning/ATU Urban Transition Association)

location: mostly created through urbanization schemes of greenfield development, but, when it affects 84% of the housing stock, what are the implications for the relationship between periphery and centre?

functionalist building patterns and urban design, but moving further and further away from functionalist principles from the end of the 1970s.

**ATU Projects:**

ATU & VeT project, ‘Preliminary Study for Improving Living Conditions in Collective Housing Complexes’, 2004-2005

REAL: research project financed by Romanian Ministry of Education: 2005-2008

DEGRACO: research project – part of URBAN NET Resilient City: 2009-2010

REHA database, 2002

Architectural PhD researchers: Zina Soceanu, Claudiu Runceanu

**“Topics: investigation of the hybrid field of practice of mass housing between research, legislation, architecture, urban planning, social sustainability, ecology, and political activism”  
by Carmen Popescu**

These remarks which are closing our meeting do not attempt to provide conclusions for the study of the ‘Mass-housing East and West’. Not only it would be presumptuous from my part to try to cover here such a vast – geographically as disciplinarily – area of study, but, at the same time, would it go beyond the scope of this conference, which did not aspire to provide such an exhaustive overview. Here we cover only partially the former Eastern bloc context– we are missing case studies from Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Albania and especially from the rich background of former Yugoslavia – while the mass-housing in the Western context was limited to very few examples, meant to enable an incipient comparison East/ West. The comparative perspective was rather evoked than thoroughly explored, thus opening the path for a logical continuation of our common efforts.

What we have intended with this conference was, on the first hand, to reopen an issue which engendered more and more interest lately. The quality of the papers presented here reflected as a matter of fact a certain maturity of the approach, proving the importance gained by the topic in the architectural scholarship. On the other hand, we were interested in evaluating a set of significant matters pertaining to this building type and to its multiple implications, in terms of economy, society and, of course, politics. At the same time, aside from the scholarly aims of the conference, we wished to test the possibility of launching a platform of collaborative work on the topic, able to develop further common projects.

For these reasons, I think that now, at the end

of this meeting, I will simply summarise the major questions shared by the presented papers. To the already rich material, I would like to add some new issues that are relevant to our topic, with the hope that they will stir the debates afterwards.

The structure of the conference – case studies in the morning and on-going projects in the afternoon – reflects our plan, as Miles already pointed out in his introductory speech, to focus on two specific aspects concerning mass-housing: methodology and conservation. Together, these two lines of directory allow one to grasp the specificity of the topic, both highlighting its complex nature and responding to its mass-production. Discussing methodology is seminal for apprehending the manifold (and intricate) layers of the mass-housing: the historical analysis needs to be complemented and enhanced by specific approaches responding to this multifaceted nature. At the same time, the unequaled level of production of this building type raises important questions related to its documentation, preservation and rehabilitation.

Both areas of exploration are interrelated, combining historical analysis with a prospective view on the topic, indispensable for the dilemmatic situation of mass-housing today. Documentation and inventorisation help refining – filling in the gaps – the study of the history, while scholarly research is crucial in deciding upon eventual patrimonialisation. We think that these lines of enquiry, that helped structure our conference, might as well provide an effective guidance for a further working platform.



**Mass-housing as an exemplary study topic:**

The issues of documentation, preservation, patrimonialisation discussed here appeared to go beyond the topic of mass-housing and address, at the same time, a set of questions that proved to be pivotal for the historiographical reassessment of Modernist architecture. These are mainly engendered by two factors, which are the change of scale and, related to it, a certain ‘ordinariness’.

The 2007 conference ‘Trash or Treasure’ lengthily debated the difficulty engendered by these factors in dealing with post-war mass-housing: as Miles remarked in the introduction to the proceedings (Docomomo electronic newsletter 7, October 2007), these two factors contributed not only to the post-war mass-housing unpopularity but also the difficulty of defining its place within the history of architecture. While its large scale redundancy complicated the historic research, its controversial relationship to the Vitruvian vision seems to have threatened its very status as architecture. As Stefan also noticed in his paper, if there is usually nothing to be said against the building quality of the mass-housing (let me remind that he was speaking about the British context), it is the third Vitruvian heading, that is ‘Beauty’, which is often questionable.

Meanwhile, the dilemma related to these two factors – scale and ordinariness – could be looked at as a historiographical challenge, demanding to adjust both the methodology and the comprehension of the object of study. ‘Exceptionality’, as a driving criterion in thinking architecture, is tumbled

by the complex issues related to mass-housing not only in terms of preservation (see OMA’s position at the 2010 Venice biennale), but also (and I would say mainly) in terms of theorisation and, finally, of historiography. What appear as ordinary architectural objects conceal a complex structure with multiple implications – in the political, social, societal and cultural realms – and thus demand multiple readings, if not a crossed interpretation. This is, as a matter of fact, one of the most defining characteristics of postwar mass-housing – as it was already discussed in the 2007 conference – to mingle in an inextricable connection design, production, and reception. Hence, interdisciplinarity, so often claimed in the methodological debates of the past years and purposely requested here by the research project directed by Annie and Danièle, represents but a natural approach to studying mass-housing. This requires, aside from the various competences able to address the different layers of the theme – the sociologist meeting the engineer, the economist meeting the anthropologist, etc. – the architectural historian to adopt and combine different perspectives as well.

The papers presented in the conference reflected this cross-referential approach. One of the major approaches tackled here was the study of the urban form – several speakers mentioned it, while Juliana entirely focused on it – without whom a thorough analysis of mass-housing is unthinkable. Looking at the urban form allows apprehending both the scale (a factor that raises, as we have seen, so many problems) and the various implications of these developments for the city (and not just in terms of town planning). Tech-

nology, with its different aspects (prefabrication, materials, building types, etc.), offers as well an important insight into the theme of mass-housing. It is interesting to note that this approach which is so technically oriented conceals strong political connotations, which turned technological issues into markers of the Cold War years – hence the common view, both in the West and the East, assimilating standardisation and concrete with Soviet ideology; however, a compared history could show the similarities between the two blocs, revealing the transfers as well as the chronological continuities with the former period. In the Czech case, as Kimberly showed, there was an evident continuation between the interwar preoccupations and the questions related to the post-war production. Such connections allows one to understand that prefabrication and standardisation might have been controlled by the party ideology but represented, in the same time, key issues for modernist architecture.

Several papers addressed the subject of reception, which definitely represents an important approach to the study of mass-housing. As Henrieta and Florian pointed out, but also Mart and Stefan – their remarks covering the realities of the two blocs – the criticism associated to mass-housing is to be understood both in political and aesthetical terms. It would be worth exploring to what extent political failure and crisis of modernist architecture overlapped and what the possible interactions were. As Henrieta showed, in the 1980s Slovakia the massive public critics of the concrete slab mass-housing actually voiced an underground criticism against the regime.

Finally, the inhabiting practices constituted another significant perspective analyzed by a number of the speakers. The analysis played on different scales, from the urban form – aside the social implications, the political one made surface in both blocs, as demonstrated by Florian and Mart – to the small scale of the apartment. Explored in numerous publications of cultural studies, this latter subject was less discussed in the present conference but could provide, from the architectural design point of view, an important complement to the study of the architectural object and its urban development.

To go back to the issues of reception, another aspect that was less discussed here – though mentioned by a series of papers – was the ‘success-story’ of certain housing-estates. As Florian specified, in spite of its unattractive appearance, mass-housing offered comfort which was rarely experienced before. The comfort of the private sphere was completed by the urban design of the public (open) spaces, the infrastructures and programs (providing the then ideal independent city district, as noted Henrieta), the massive presence of greenery, etc. Such examples were to be found in the entire Eastern bloc, from the USSR– with models like the famous Novye Cheryomushky in Moscow, epitomized in Shostakovich’s opera – to the satellite countries.

The success-story of a number of these housing-estates from the Socialist years survived the radical changes ensued after the fall of the Wall, or perhaps – in certain situations – was propelled by those changes. Aside from the poor condition

of many of the housing-estates of the communist period, if not the dereliction of some of them, there are slabs and towers, as well as entire districts – in Berlin, Belgrade, Bucharest, etc. – attracting new types of population. This new popularity of the socialist developments has different reasons – some are aesthetical (enthusiasts of concrete modernism), some are ideological (defenders of the original ideals of mass-housing; critics of the consumerist attitude), others are social/ societal (trend-followers, illustrating the reassessment of values). Sometimes, the housing-estates become victims of their new popularity, which brought along transformations (in terms of façade, public space, urban density and urban design, programs, etc.). Hence, the integration into the post-socialist city is not necessarily a proof of the success of the initial concept.

### **Mass-housing-today**

All these issues of appreciation and rejection raise major questions concerning the situation of mass-housing today. They address the twofold problem – economic and societal – of rehabilitation of these estates as much as they open the discussion on the predicament of patrimonialisation. How to succeed to transform a shabby neighborhood, worn out by time and human practices, not necessarily in terms of desirability but at least of decency? Vera showed the difficulty of this process, from finding pragmatic solutions and financial support to convincing local authorities and cooperating with the inhabitants. She showed, as well, that this process begins before the rehabilitation project starts: the inhabitants per-

form a series of transformations of the buildings and of the public space in order to improve the dwelling conditions (either in terms of comfort or of mere ‘beautification’), thus appropriating them in a different manner than the original modernist scheme. Once more, this modernist scheme appears as a problematic concept in the way it was perceived by the population, who associated open spaces with the refusal of individual property by the communist regime – hence the multiplication after 1989 of fences in the former courtyards of the developments – and the seriality imposed both by standardisation and a minimalist aesthetic with its restrictive ideology. In this latter respect, the project of rehabilitation of Tirana’s facades, by Edi Rama, the exiled Albanian artist who became mayor of the capital, is symptomatic. The colorfully newly painted facades of Tirana were applauded as a victory against communism but also against the uniformity of modernism.

In this context, where the natural transformation undergone by a city is enhanced, in the case of mass-housing, by the rapid pace of different rehabilitations and ‘appropriations’ affecting altogether facades, structure of the buildings and urban form, a major historiographical question rises: how to keep trace of the original schemes? Certainly, the best solution would be inventorisation, but as Miles showed in his introduction to the conference as well as some of the speakers, one should first solve the scale problem. Even a fragmentary inventorisation, which appears as the sole possibility given the large number of estates, demands first a thorough study of mass-housing. A study which would not list just the ‘exceptional’ –

here I have to disagree with Kimberly – in terms of architecture, urbanism, etc., but also the frequent types, since the ‘typical’ constitutes the large body of mass-housing. If inventorisation is problematic, patrimonialisation is more even so. The attempts experimented in different places – like, for instance, the French projects mixing local initiatives with the competences of the Regional Services of Heritage, which started as early as 1988 – reflected the limitation of the approach, both in terms of time and of covered surface. The rare operations (documentation, inventorisation) engaged in the former Eastern bloc to legitimise a further (eventual) patrimonialisation focused primarily on the exceptions – in Romania, for instance, only few housing-estates from the Stalinist period (whose Socialist-realist architecture was considered as exemplary) were proposed to integrate the list of historic monuments. Such a selection could have risky historiographical consequences, alienating the very nature of the concept of mass-housing.

It seems therefore that these issues of inventorisation, preservation, patrimonialisation remain open questions, to be debated further on, as the research would advance and the methodology would be refined.

### **Open questions for a further research**

What appears as a clear conclusion of this conference – and was presented as a working premise in Annie’s and Danièle’s project of research – is the necessity to continue a comparative history of mass-housing in East and West. Not just a parallel history, lining up facts in two separate columns,

but a crossed analysis allowing to grasp the similarities (as well as the differences), the transfers, the circulation of people and models. As Florian pointed out, there are more similarities between the two blocs than acknowledged, but meanwhile, to quote Kimberly, it is important to adjust the tools of the research (usually forged by the Western historiography to the former Eastern bloc realities. Also, it would be essential to clearly establish the exchanges between the two blocs, those originated by exceptional events – such as the 5th UIA meeting in Moscow in 1958 – but also the regular ones. The famous ‘documentation trips’, which benefited a number of Eastern architects and engineers, started to constitute in the past years a subject of research which awaits to be developed. This is the same for networking within the professional bodies (architects, engineers) from different countries, enabled both by the survival of the former interwar contacts and by the Eastern immigrants who ‘chose the liberty’.

Yet another task to be accomplished would be to establish a comprehensive bibliography, with titles concerning the two blocs. Such a list would smoothen the path towards a crossed research, even if an effective use would be reduced due to the language barriers.

I am sure that the debates to follow now will bring several suggestions, but I also hope that these will be carried on and integrated into a further project of research.

## APPENDIX 1

**“Review of Conference” by Carsten Hermann** (Co-ordinator, DOCOMOMO-Scotland)

Article published in EAHN Newsletter 2011

Mass housing is a global phenomenon, yet its histories are regionally very different. It is often politically, and ideologically, charged and affects large parts of the urban population, through its visual and spatial impact on a city landscape. Whereas in Europe and North America mass housing, funded or supported by the governments, has more or less ceased, it is still very much on the agenda of some Asian governments. Surprisingly, despite its large impact on the development of many cities, historic research on this topic is relatively rare, and related conferences are even rarer.

In an attempt to change this, DOCOMOMO-International (through its Specialist Committee on Urbanism and Landscapes) and EAHN organised jointly a conference on 20th-century European Mass Housing East and West,. The conference took place on 8th September 2011 in Edinburgh, Scotland, at the Edinburgh College of Art, since August 2011 part of the University of Edinburgh.

The mass housing conference was officially opened on the evening of 7th with a lecture and film event, organised by Docomomo Scotland, about Cumbernauld, the flagship example of Scottish new town creations during the 1950s and 1960s.

The conference’s main organisers were Prof. Miles Glendinning of the University of Edinburgh, also Director of the university’s Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, and Dr. Carmen Popescu, an independent Romanian architectural historian. (Prof. Glendinning was previously involved in a related conference in Edinburgh in 2009, entitled

Mirror of modernity: the post-war revolution in urban conservation, also organised by Docomomo International, together with the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland who published the conference proceedings in the 2011 issue of their journal, Architectural Heritage.)

Prof. Glendinning outlined the ideas behind this conference in his introduction, by defining the term mass housing as housing for large section of societies, provided by a state administration, or at least somewhat guided and/or financially supported by it. Privately developed mass housing without government involvement or intervention was, therefore, excluded from this definition.

In the morning session, chaired by Dr. Ola Uduku of the University of Edinburgh, national case studies were presented, as ‘East/West’; whereas the focus of the afternoon was on methodological studies. The papers covered a large variety of European countries, presented by speakers from Europe and the United States of America. Unfortunately, neither Scandinavia, Finland and Russia, nor the Iberian Peninsula, nor Italy featured in the conference, despite significant mass housing developments in these countries.

Prof. Glendinning introduced the conference theme, bedding it into an international context by presenting ideas from his current research on the development of mass housing in Hong Kong and Singapore. (Mass housing is since long a principal research topic of Prof. Glendinning, who published already in 1994 the book *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland,*

## ■ APPENDIX

“Review of Conference” by Carsten Hermann (Co-ordinator, DOCOMOMO-Scotland)

Article published in EAHN Newsletter 2011

Wales and Northern Ireland, co-authored by Prof. Stefan Muthesius, who also spoke at the conference.)

Following the introduction, three speakers presented case studies from East Europe: Dr. Juliana Maxim, a native Romanian, now working at the University of San Diego, USA, presented the planning idea of the microrayon, or microdistrict, a primary organisation element of residential area construction used in many former communist states. She illustrated this planning concept with the example of the Balta Albă housing district, a mass housing ensemble with 36,000 apartments, built between 1961 and 1966 in Bucharest, the Romanian capital.

The next two talks by Dr. Henrieta Moravčíková of the Slovak Academy of Science and Prof. Mart Kalm of the Estonian Academy of Arts provided more of a socio-economic context: Dr. Moravčíková, for example, pointed out – using mass housing in Bratislava, Slovakia’s capital, as a case study – how difficult it was for people to obtain apartments in these often well sought after housing complexes, with hardly any option to choose between two or more apartments. (Dr. Moravčíková’s new book, *Bratislava: Atlas of Mass Housing, 1950-1995*, is to be published in December 2011.)

Prof. Kalm described how the construction of mass housing in Estonia was predominantly carried out by Russian immigrants, employed as construction workers for a one to two year period, after which they were rewarded with an apartment

in these housing complexes and then normally left the construction profession. This meant that building construction in Estonia was often carried out by rather inexperienced labourers with no long-term experience. Prof. Kalm also showed with the example of Tallinn-Lasnamäe – the most populous district of Tallinn, the Estonian capital, consisting predominantly of mass housing built in the 1970s and 1980s and until today inhabited by a Russian-speaking majority – how these megadistricts can still today be lacking infrastructure: a tram system, originally planned to connect Lasnamäe with Tallinn’s city centre, 5 km away, was never constructed, and the areas reserved for the railway tracks still lie empty to this day.

Following a coffee break, the morning sessions turned from East to West Europe, with the talk by Prof. Florian Urban, a native German, now working at the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland, conveniently providing the transition by describing and comparing mass housing developments in the formerly separate states East and West Germany. Prof. Urban showed that mass housing developed as much in capitalist West Germany as it did in communist East Germany. Large housing complexes were constructed in both countries, in an effort to solve the housing shortage created through the Second World War and the subsequent mass migration of Germans from areas to the East of East Germany. Prof. Urban’s presentation was the first ‘national case study’ of the conference not focussing on the capital of the concerned country, but showing examples of mass housing from a variety of cities from all over Germany. He argued convincingly that mass

## ■ APPENDIX

“Review of Conference” by Carsten Hermann (Co-ordinator, DOCOMOMO-Scotland)

Article published in EAHN Newsletter 2011

housing in East and West Germany was, generally, very similar, despite the different political ideologies underpinning the two countries, only that in capitalist West Germany the quality of construction was often better compared to that in the communist East, and that in the West state-provided mass housing ceased much earlier, during the 1970s, whereas in East Germany it continued until the 1980s. (Prof. Urban’s new book *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* was published shortly after the conference.)

The French case study, presented by Prof. Annie Fourcaut of the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France, showed similarly that planning ideas used in the communist states of East Europe, such as the microdistrict, were also applied in the planning of French mass housing estates, so-called grand ensembles, built between the 1950s and 1980s, some of which were reported about in the news six years ago for socially motivated rioting. Prof. Fourcaut pointed out that housing policy in capitalist France during the 1970s was heavily influenced by Marxist sociology. By now, the grand ensembles are seen by many French as ‘a shame of the past’.

Stefan Muthesius, professor at the University of East Anglia, England, discussed in his paper the development of urban planning in England through the 20th century, highlighting that low-rise mass housing in form of terraced houses started to play a significant role in England’s urban planning already in the 19th century and was supplemented at the turn of the century by the concept of detached and semi-detached houses, available

for lower and mid income classes, in form of garden suburbs, a subtopia. This might explain why high-rise mass housing was not built to the same extent and at the same scale as in other European countries, although several estates featuring very tall tower blocks were constructed. (It appears that Scotland, with less of a tradition of terraced housing and garden suburbs, has seen, proportionally, the construction of more tower block developments than England.)

The afternoon session, chaired by Dr. Popescu and featuring methodological studies and ‘on-going projects’, was opened by Dr. Kimberly Zarecor of Iowa State University, USA, with a paper about The challenges of a mass housing inventory in Czechoslovakia. In the Czech Republic about 30% of today’s population live in mass housing ensembles, so-called paneláks. She noted that it appears to her that the idea of inventorisation is a very European approach to heritage methodology and is less used in North America. She wondered if the scale – the ‘bigness’ – of mass housing, but also the extent to which it was built, does forbid using such an approach. She also questioned if the definition used for mass housing at this conference, state-provided housing (often for lower income groups of society) is the appropriate one, noting that in Czechoslovakia to obtain an apartment in a panelák was not determined by income, but depended more on, for example, one’s workplace and political connections. She also criticised that architectural historians often do not sufficiently take into account the changes of production methods affecting the construction industry and impacting heavily on the construction of mass

## ■ APPENDIX

“Review of Conference” by Carsten Hermann (Co-ordinator, DOCOMOMO-Scotland)

Article published in EAHN Newsletter 2011

housing. She suggested that a definition for mass housing should be more ‘process- and not style-orientated’. (Dr. Zarecor’s book *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960* has recently been published.)

Prof. Danièle Voldman, a colleague of Prof. Fourcaut, presented the on-going project *Mass housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947 to 1989*, noting the difficulties in making comparisons across Europe due to the difference of the political systems, and in the definitions and languages used.

The last talk of the conference differed from the others, in that it presented the work of a Romanian NGO, practically engaged in the field of urban planning for ten years now. The presentation was given by Vera Martin, an urban planner, and president and coordinator of the Association for Urban Transition, based in Bucharest and Sibiu. Her insightful talk described the importance of understanding the urban actors involved in the repair and (re-)developed of Romania’s mass housing estates, and how the lack of data about these estates, and particularly data about the condition of building fabric and services, is making the planning processes extremely difficult.

The conference concluded with an open discussion, asking if it would be beneficial for mass housing researchers to create a better cooperation platform, to exchange ideas, methods and results. The discussion highlighted that, although the planning approaches for mass housing estates were generally quite similar in East and West

Europe, the socio-political context, when built and now, was very different, indeed, particularly with regard to the current redevelopment. It will be interesting to see if the proposed cooperation will deepen until the next Mass housing conference and if the focus will shift to include other research aspects more clearly, such as production and construction methods, and other geographical locations, maybe outside Europe.

On the days before and after the conference, field study trips were undertaken, to look at community and government based approaches to the inventorisation of mass housing, and to visit 1960s mass housing developments in Cumbernauld and Glasgow. A mini-symposium was held at the Glasgow School of Art on the evening after the conference. Following three days of discussions about mass housing, the EAHN delegates went on a two-day tour through Scotland, introduced on the evening of the conference day by Dr. Giovanna Guidicini of the University of Edinburgh, giving an overview of Scottish Architecture.



**SCIENTIFIC EDITOR**  
Miles Glendinning

**COORDINATION  
AND PRODUCTION**  
Carmen Popescu

**GRAPHIC DESIGN**  
Joanna Wemyss

**ORIGINAL GRAPHIC DESIGN**  
Agathe Desombre, Paris

For information concerning membership,  
contact:

Docomomo International Secretariat  
Fundacio Mies van der Rohe1  
calle Provenca 318 pral 2  
ESP-08037 Barcelona  
t 34 932151011  
f 34 934883685  
e docomomo@miesbcn.com  
w docomomo.com

Miles Glendinning (ed),  
*Post-war Mass Housing, East and West*  
Paris: Docomomo International, 2009.  
ISBN 9781904443537

© Docomomo International  
Docomomo is a registered trademark

## Docomomo E-proceedings 4 • September 2011

**Docomomo** International is a non-profit organization dedicated to the **DO**ocumentation and **CO**nservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the **MO**dern **MO**vement.

It aims at:

- Bringing the significance of the architecture of the modern movement to the attention of the public, the public authorities, the professionals and the educational community.
- Identifying and promoting the surveying of the modern movement's works.
- Fostering and disseminating the development of appropriate techniques and methods of conservation.
- Opposing destruction and disfigurement of significant works.
- Gathering funds for documentation and conservation.
- Exploring and developing knowledge of the modern movement.

Docomomo International wishes to extend its field of actions to new territories, establish new partnerships with institutions, organizations and NGOs active in the area of modern architecture, develop and publish the international register, and enlarge the scope of its activities in the realm of research, documentation and education.

**Docomomo** International est une organisation non gouvernementale dont la mission est la **DO**ocumentation et la **CO**nservation de l'architecture, des sites et du patrimoine bâti du **MO**uvement **MO**dern.

Ses objectifs visent à :

- Révéler l'importance du mouvement moderne à l'attention du public, des autorités, des professionnels et de la communauté scientifique.
- Identifier et promouvoir l'ensemble des oeuvres du mouvement moderne.
- Aider au développement et à la dissémination des techniques et des méthodes de conservation.
- S'opposer à la destruction et à la défiguration des oeuvres architecturales importantes.
- Collecter des fonds pour la documentation et la conservation.
- Explorer et développer la connaissance du mouvement moderne.

Docomomo International se propose également de développer ses activités vers de nouveaux territoires, d'établir de nouveaux partenariats avec des institutions et des organisations actives dans le domaine de l'architecture moderne, de compléter et de publier l'inventaire international et d'élargir ses actions dans le cadre de la recherche, de la documentation et de l'éducation.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
*Edinburgh College of Art*

ISBN no. 9781904443537