



# OPTIMISTIC SUBURBIA 2

Middle-Class Mass Housing Complexes

PROCEEDINGS



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Ana Vaz Milheiro (FAUL, DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte, CEAUP)  
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## Optimistic Suburbia 2

Ana Vaz Milheiro and Inês Lima Rodrigues (coord.)

The “Optimistic Suburbia 2 - Middle-Class Mass Housing Complexes” International Conference (ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon, 16 -18 June 2021) had its starting point in a research on mass housing complexes in the outskirts of Lisbon, Luanda and Macau, then enlarged to Antwerp and Milan. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these housing complexes were instrumental for the urban growth, showing similarities as well as differences in Europe and beyond. Drawing from this context, the conference intended to open the reflection on these complexes on broad realities, showing the multiple features of urbanisations in several geographical, chronological and social contexts.

The main objective was to put into perspective the shaping and the pattern of autonomous neighbourhoods for the middle-class, both of private and public promotion, on the outskirts of big cities, namely the ones designed in the second half of the 20th century. Originally isolated in the orbit of large cities, they were characterized by a set of high-rise buildings of modern design, which were progressively articulated with the evolution of the historical city through major roads, which often ended up determining its limits. This model, which arose in the interwar period (1918-1939), marked, globally – and in particular in the cities which were most affected by the two major wars –, by more than 40 years of an urban planning convinced of the benefits of decongesting the historic centres – freeing them of degraded and insalubrious living conditions –, of the rationalization of the city and of the development of metropolises served by circulatory systems of transportation to wooded suburbs. Imbued with desires of progress and social aspirations of a new culture and optimism, this model was also controversial and the target of criticism.

Although the origin of the referred model is located within an architectonic culture of central European matrix, its use occurred throughout a long time and in very diverse contexts, such as in Africa, South America and Asia (while in the United States of America this model never triumphed, facing the strength of the “American dream house”), with the middle-class as its target.

During three days in Lisbon, more than 100 researchers with different backgrounds joined to acknowledge the initial principles of the model proposed for the middle-class, describe and reflect on the diversity of results and on the different ways of appropriation in very diverse geographical, social, chronological and cultural contexts. Discussion dwell on architecture, urbanism, architecture and urbanism history, impact on the periphery urban areas, social sciences, economics, cultural issues – as art, image and media (publications, film, photography...) – as well as terminology, concepts and representation. This volume of proceedings is the first outcome of the meeting; it gathers some of the short-papers presented in parallel sessions, which have been later peer-reviewed. Their publication aims to enlarge academic knowledge on such crucial themes for everyday society.

# conference programme

16 JUNE (WED)	17 JUNE (THU)	18 JUNE (FRI)
8.30	<b>REGISTRATION</b> (atrium Ala Autónoma)	<b>REGISTRATION</b> (atrium Ala Autónoma)
9.00	<b>PLENARY SESSION I</b> (auditorium B2.03) <b>Dana Vais</b> (Technical University of Cluj-Napoca)	<b>PLENARY SESSION II</b> (auditorium B2.03) <b>Paolo Boccagni</b> (University of Trento)
10.00	COFFEE BREAK	COFFEE BREAK
10.15	<b>PROJECT SESSION I</b> <b>MCMH Project –MCMH-EU</b> (auditorium B2.03)	<b>PROJECT SESSION II</b> <b>MCMH Project –MCMH-EU</b> (auditorium B2.03)
12.15	<b>VIDEOS SESSION</b>	<b>VIDEOS SESSION</b>
12.30	LUNCH	LUNCH
14.00	<b>PARALLEL SESSIONS I</b> (3 rooms)	<b>PARALLEL SESSIONS III</b> (3 rooms)
	<b>HOUSING IN PORTUGAL   Architectural Theory</b> <b>Chairs:</b> Ana Vaz Milheiro, Inês Lima Rodrigues (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte) (Afonso de Barros Auditorium) Invited speakers: Helena Barreiros (CML) Rui Ramos, Gisela Lameira (FAUP-CEAU) Ricardo Agarez (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte) José António Bandeirinha (CES-UC)	<b>HOUSING IN PORTUGAL   Architectural Practice</b> <b>Chairs:</b> Ana Vaz Milheiro, Inês Lima Rodrigues (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte) (Afonso de Barros Auditorium) Invited speakers: Paulo Tormenta Pinto (ISCTE) Carlos Veloso (UBI) Paulo David (Paulo David Arquitectos)
	<b>SESSION 11   Chairs:</b> Alessandra Como (Università di Salerno), Luisa Smeragliuolo Perrotta (Università di Salerno) (room B 2.01)	<b>SESSION 7   Chairs:</b> Laurence Heindryckx (UGhent), Tom Broes (UGhent) (room B 2.01)
15.00	<b>COST Action MCMH-EU CORE-GROUP MEETING</b> (Silva Leal Auditorium)	<b>SESSION 4   Chairs:</b> Rui Seco (CITAD - Universidade Lusitana); Rute Figueiredo (DA/UAL; CEAA/Escola Superior de Artes do Porto) (Silva Leal Auditorium)
16.00	COFFEE BREAK	COFFEE BREAK
16.30	<b>REGISTRATION</b> (atrium Ala Autónoma)	<b>PARALLEL SESSIONS IV</b> (4 rooms)
	<b>SESSION 1   Chairs:</b> Gaia Caramellino (Politecnico di Milano), Filippo De Pieri (Politecnico di Torino) (Afonso de Barros Auditorium)	<b>SESSION 10   Chairs:</b> Els De Vos (Universiteit Antwerpen), Eva Storgaard (Universiteit Antwerpen) (Afonso de Barros Auditorium)
	<b>SESSION 5   Chair:</b> Filipa Fiúza (CES-UC) (room C 2.01)	<b>SESSION 6   Chairs:</b> Madalena Corte-Real (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte), Maria João Gomes (CICS.NOVA) (room C 2.01)
18.00	<b>OPENING SESSION</b> (auditorium B2.03) Ana Vaz Milheiro (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte; FAUL) Isabel Salavisa (ISCTE-IUL) Pedro Costa (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte)	<b>SESSION 2   Chairs:</b> Sílvia Leiria Viegas (CES-UC), Sílvia Jorge (CiTUA/IST-UL) (room B 2.01)
	<b>SESSION 3   Chairs:</b> Marie Glaser (ETH Zürich), Ellen Braae (University of Copenhagen) (room B 2.01)	<b>PRESENTATION OF POSTERS   Chair:</b> Mónica Pacheco (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte) (Silva Leal Auditorium)
	<b>SESSION 9   Chair:</b> Maria Rita Pais (ULHT; Arq-ID) (Silva Leal Auditorium)	
18.30	<b>OPENING CONFERENCE</b> (auditorium B2.03) <b>Désirée Pedro and Carlos Antunes</b> (Atelier do Corvo)	<b>CLOSING SESSION</b> <b>Uta Pottgiesser</b> (TU Delft) (auditorium B2.03)
	<b>ROUNDTABLE   MCMH in Mozambique</b> (online)* In the framework of the research project ARCHWAR - Dominance and mass-violence through Housing and Architecture during colonial wars (PTDC/ART-DAQ/0592/2020) <b>Moderator:</b> Ana Silva Fernandes (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte) Alicia Lazzarini (LSE) Jéssica Lage (Univ. Eduardo Mondlane; FAUP) Nikolai Brandes (The National Museum of Denmark) Patricia Noormahomed (ETSAM) Anna Mazzolini (Politecnico di Milano) * (projection room: Silva Leal Auditorium)	

Please note: Time Zone: WEST | UTC+1 (Lisbon)





# chairs' overview



# Writing the History of Post-war Housing Complexes and Neighborhoods. A Take on Research Strategies and Methodologies

## Session 1

**Gaia Caramellino**, DASTU, Politecnico di Milano

**Filippo De Pieri**, DAD, Politecnico di Torino

Between the 1950s and the 1970s middle classes had a central role in the process of growth and transformation of post-war urban environments in Europe, marked by massive building expansion. New housing complexes and neighborhoods were built in the outskirts of the city, as a response to the residential aspirations, desires of mobility, housing cultures, and strategies of modernization of an emerging urban middle class, contributing to the construction of a quite homogeneous residential landscape, that left evident traces on the contemporary built environment. This multilayered housing fabric was made of a plurality of objects (houses and facilities), still largely unexplored in their interrelations but was also capable to convey design ambitions and urban visions, political cultures and new societal projects, everyday practices, ways of living and domestic cultures. Places of affirmation and consolidation of social identities, post-war middle-class estates can also be observed as collections of memories, experiences, and stories of life, built through the negotiation between a multitude of actors who produced divergent narratives.

Throughout the last decades historical studies on collective housing have been marked by a shift from the quantitative or comparative approaches that were prevalent between the 1940s and the 1980s, when housing studies were supposed to provide support to large-scale mass housing programs, to more recent approaches focused on the small-scale study of given places and situations. This shift was paralleled by the emergence of a variety of positions in the social sciences that were suspicious of generalizations and called instead for close observations of built environments. But this shift also resulted from a plurality of historical factors: most importantly, the crisis of twentieth-century welfare state policies and a growing tendency towards the promotion of site-specific strategies for the regeneration of existing housing complexes.

Housing research has shown a tendency towards cross-disciplinarity since its emergence as a field of study, and today provides a lively arena for debate between scholars trained in such diverse fields as architecture, planning, sociology, economics, history, ethnography, public policy studies, urban studies, and so on. A multifaceted panorama of studies deals with the history of post-war middle-class housing, contributing to understand such changes and their social implications, interweaving different project scales and cultures and adopting different perspectives and methodologies, contributing to shape the ways in which contemporary built spaces are represented and transformed.

The historical investigation of middle-class housing complexes and neighborhoods has therefore become a fruitful field of exchange between scholars with different competences and fields of interest and an exceptional testing ground to experiment with methods and practices of historical research, bringing to the light new fields

of work for the history of post-war architecture and urbanism and new lines of methodological investigation. These include micro-historical approaches, comparative and transnational histories and attempts to write global perspective in the writing of the history of mass housing, revised approaches to a tradition of typological studies, fieldwork-based enquiries, ethnographic observations of spatial transformations, visual studies of ordinary built environments, oral histories, experiences with public history, etc.

Crossing the history of selected housing estates, explored through a number of distinctive methodological approaches the papers analyzed and questioned a series of prominent tendencies that emerge in the study of post-war housing complexes and neighborhoods built for the middle classes, paying particular attention to a discussion of research directions and practices. The papers addressed one or more case studies, outlining the divergent methodological choices behind the research work and their implication for an understanding of post-WWII residential landscapes. Interesting forms of contamination and crossbreeding were discussed, that combine a plurality of divergent methodological lines.

Focusing on diverse cultural and geographical contexts and on slightly different chronological frameworks (the socialist Baltic republics, socialist regime in Romania, mass housing in post-war Japan, comparative perspective on two Italian neighborhoods in Bologna and Florence, and France), the papers presented in the session explored the relation between architectural history and the social sciences; the contamination between fieldwork techniques and archival research; the public dimension of historical research, through initiatives of collection and conservation of memories and life experiences of the middle classes; the evolution of research practices in housing history in relation to the emergence of new fields of investigation.

Investigating mass housing design in then socialist Baltic republics (1960-1980) and observing the methodological approach to individualised design, the paper by Marija Dremaite explored the role of the architect as an expert in the individualised design approach to the field of mass housing, where construction was largely regulated by the state planning institutes, standard state rules and norms, and economy. In the field of socialist mass housing architects were expected to behave as technocrats, establishing how certain professional or national and regional aspirations were cloaked in a 'correct' socialist rhetoric and whether there existed alternative ways of securing official acknowledgement of a project.

Discussing the housing policy of the socialist regime in Romania, implemented between 1945 and 1958, which resulted in the construction of 29 housing estates in Bucharest (housing more than 30.000 tenants), the paper by Andrei Răzvan Voinea focused on the social history of the agents that benefited from this policy, the tenants, investigating the intentions of reformers in terms of ideologically changing the lives of the beneficiaries and asking how the latter adopted the new social space.

Using the example of the term Sarcellite, the paper by Yankel Fijalkow and Aurore Reynaud<sup>1</sup> proposed a research methodology that combined a historical approach at the social sciences with different methods of analysis of visual and verbal narratives, looking at the opening of a narrative field, its competition, its discourse strategies, its mobilization of memory and its performativity. In order to explain the evolution of policies towards mass housing, the paper analyzed the processes of configuration of representations and their integration into a collective narrative.

The paper by Anne Kockelkorn discussed the research strategy adopted for the study of the large-scale housing complex "Les Espaces d'Abraxas" planned and built between 1978 and 1984 by Taller de Arquitectura. Writing an history from within, based on the perspective of the inhabitants and their lived experiences, the author introduced forms of contamination between ethnographic study and archival research, marked by a strong self-reflective attitude. The investigation of the different layers of experience showed the implications on the understanding of the impact and agency of architecture as something that takes place

<sup>1</sup> To be published in the Full Papers' Booklet: *Optimistic Suburbia 4* [forthcoming, fall 2021]; coordinated by Ana Vaz Milheiro and Inês Lima Rodrigues.



simultaneously within the individual imaginary, as daily collective practice and as a governmental strategy.

Embracing a comparative perspective that encouraged the same research strategies adopted for the study of two diverse Italian neighborhoods, the paper by Lorenzo Mingardi highlighted how the collective residential buildings in the districts “Pilastro” (Bologna) and “Sorgane” (Florence) represented two paradigmatic examples of suburbs development in the late 1950s, showing similarities in dynamics and structure.

Originally celebrated by the public as a desirable living environment and then becoming a source of problems for the government, Japanese mass housing from the 1960s—commonly known as danchi —, was at the center of the last paper by Tatiana Knoroz<sup>2</sup>. It proposed a methodology to collect and interpret ethnographic materials from the apartment visits in relation to factual architectural knowledge. Balancing on the rarely explored edge between cultural anthropology and architecture, an innovative interior analysis method named “Devicology” (in homage to Wajiro Kon’s “Modernology”) was proposed to detect “devices” — intricate systems of unconventionally used furniture and smaller, less permanent objects, that are unconsciously assembled by the residents.

Dealing with diverse scales and cultures of the project - from the planning, design and construction processes, to the use and transformation of the residential space showing multiple forms of cultural appropriation by inhabitants-, the paper examined the encounter between planning culture and technical knowledge, design strategies and ambitions, social and cultural expectations, everyday practices that take place inside and outside the domestic realm.

The close/micro observation of the cases can in some cases help to question dominant narratives, diffuse images and canonical representations of European collective housing and contribute to propose a more nuanced narrative of the time and forms of its construction, by questioning the changing role and symbolic meaning over time of certain residential spaces that were conceived to answer specific demands of comfort, welfare and modernity.

Crossing quantitative and qualitative research and less conventional research practices and sources (oral sources, familiar archeology, institutional and professional archives, promotional materials...), the papers explored also a more subjective dimension of the history of post-war collective housing, opening new methodological perspectives and generating new forms of knowledge for the study of the residential landscape built for the middle classes since 1945.

<sup>2</sup> To be published in a special issue of the *CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios* magazine (ISCTE-IUL; DINÂMIA’CET – open access and peer reviewed).

## Spatial practice, representation and meaning of suburban housing estates

### Session 6

**Madalena Corte-Real;** DINÂMIA'CET-IUL - Centre for Socioeconomic and Territorial Studies;  
madalena.cortereal@iscte-iul.pt

**Maria João Gomes;** CICS.NOVA – Centre for Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, Nova University Lisbon;  
madalena.cortereal@iscte-iul.pt

Large-housing estates are part of the landscape of many suburbs in European cities with a massive construction development beginning in the second half of twentieth century, a model that has been extended to other parts of the world. Nevertheless, there is a multiplicity of features that characterizes these neighbourhoods located in the outskirts of the city. We highlight the diversity of the functional and socioeconomic position of the territories within the metropolitan core, the diversity of resident population, the diversity in establishing relationships among residents and between them and the occupied space. From this multiplicity arises a range of possibilities for social production that can only be preserved and improved by understanding its socio-spatial multidimensionality, namely within the wider urban context.

Against a standardized perspective, the aim, within the scope of production of space, is to look at the specificities of housing estates and their inhabitants in a cultural, social and historical framework, namely:

- The (evolution of) spatial practice, representation and meaning by residents of the housing estates and surroundings;
  - The residents' experience of space, namely how they evaluate their neighbourhood and surroundings;
  - The aspects that may contribute to the (positive) development of the housing estate (variables linked to physical aspects of the neighbourhood and surroundings, type of population);
  - The place/neighbourhood attachment - relationships between space and social interactions;
  - The levels of satisfaction regarding different dimensions (neighbourhood relations, dwelling, housing estate, surroundings);
  - The characterization of residents in view of socio-cultural trends and lifestyles within the scope of global dynamics and local specificities;
- The external representation of these housing estates/neighbourhoods and surrounding area.

This session aimed to encounter the human dimension in the development of architecture/urban planning regarding the production, reproduction, and perception of space and in this sense a diverse approach was presented.



The paper Avoiding degradation: Urban care infrastructures in a Large Housing Estate<sup>1</sup> brought us a case study away from “the usual countries”: the residential complex “Severnaya Dolina” (St.Petersburg) from the mid-2000s that provides affordable housing for low-middle class residents and that now accommodates more than 60000 dwellers. Based on four types of civic/care infrastructures, it approached different forms of residents’ involvement and the importance of governance infrastructures for the success, namely maintenance of a housing estate.

The paper The Housing Financialisation Process, the Production of Space, and Satisfaction with Housing in Portugal<sup>2</sup> aimed to assess satisfaction levels of residents in relation to their dwellings and surroundings regarding different indicators and by type of territory (Historic center of a large city, Large city, Suburbs or outskirts of a large city, Medium-sized city, A town or a small city, A village) where results highlight the need to take into consideration the implications of public policies in the production of space regarding the impacts on satisfaction with living conditions.

Rediscovering modern ‘civil architecture’: The case of Bela Vista neighbourhood in Setúbal<sup>3</sup> brought us a case-study of a public project in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area In the context of mass-housing estates and the suburbanization process. This presentation aimed to look at urban forms and architectural solutions as well as at the territory enhancing the importance of residents’ involvement in local decisions for more social-territorial cohesion.

Non-central, peripheral, low rise suburbia<sup>4</sup>, as the title suggests, brings an example outside metropolitan areas and considers the connection between the historic centre of Évora, a city in the inland of Portugal and the neighbourhood of Malagueira, a public housing-estate outside the city wall planned by a renowned architect (Siza Vieira). It refers to the link between the suburb and the consolidated historic centre of city with connection between these two scales as well as transformations in social dynamics.

Toward a Trans-European Petroleumscape: Architectural and Urban Histories of Designing Automobility<sup>5</sup> examines the role of architects and urban planners in shaping connections between European land-based mobility, cities and landscapes. It looks at the emergence of new models of daily life related to the model of working and living within a trans-European network and its contribution to a perception of Europe as an expanding polycentric and dynamic entity.

Rather than a linear process, these presentations by bringing different case-studies, pointed to the importance of considering the relation between space and social practice, in a process that evolves over time and that reveal local intrinsic specificities affected by broader realities.

<sup>1</sup> Liubov Chernysheva; University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Center for Independent Social Research, Russia; [l.a.chernysheva@gmail.com](mailto:l.a.chernysheva@gmail.com)  
Elvira Gizatullina; European University in St.Petersburg, Russia; [egizatullina@eu.spb.ru](mailto:egizatullina@eu.spb.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Raquel Ribeiro; Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal; [raquelribeiro@ces.ucp](mailto:raquelribeiro@ces.ucp)

<sup>3</sup> Sara Silva Lopes; DINÂMIA’CET, Iscte-IUL, Portugal; [sara\\_alexandra\\_lopes@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:sara_alexandra_lopes@iscte-iul.pt); João Cunha Borges; DINÂMIA’CET, Iscte-IUL, Portugal; [joao\\_cunha\\_borges@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:joao_cunha_borges@iscte-iul.pt); Rui Del Pino Fernandes; NOTE – Galeria de Arquitectura; [ruidelpino@live.com.pt](mailto:ruidelpino@live.com.pt); Teresa Marat-Mendes; DINÂMIA’CET, Iscte-IUL, Portugal; [teresa.marat-mendes@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:teresa.marat-mendes@iscte-iul.pt)

<sup>4</sup> Pedro Guilherme; CHAIA; [pmg@uevora.pt](mailto:pmg@uevora.pt); Sofia Salema; CHAIA; [ssalema@uevora.pt](mailto:ssalema@uevora.pt)

<sup>5</sup> Marianna Charitonidou; ETH Zurich, National Technical University of Athens, Athens School of Fine Arts; [marianna.charitonidou@gta.arch.ethz.ch](mailto:marianna.charitonidou@gta.arch.ethz.ch)

# Inhabiting Suburbia: art (registers) of living

Session 9

**Maria Rita Pais;** Universidade Lusófona

## Introduction

Architecture research is traditionally addressed on perspectives aiming for object and author comprehension. We propose to change research point of view from creation to reception, revealing the dialogue between architect and clients, inhabitants and space appropriations by users or beholders. Inspired by the revisitation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1960) idea of experience of art, we propose to gather, understand and discuss architecture throughout art production reading, and more specifically to understand suburbia habitat complexity through artistic vision. This idea also follows Hans Robert Jauss *Aesthetics of Reception* (1964), including what happens in the consciousness received and in its aesthetic fruition.

In the scope of the inhabitant spatial recognition, three researchers have been highlighted in recent years, with a perspective of relation with the work in architecture: Dana Arnold, (Arnold, 2014) presents methods of spatial investigation through biographies of the inhabitant, revealing personal meanings and strategies of relation with space; Jane Rendell with a work in understanding space through site-writing and site-specific as fictional forms of emotional relationship with the space; and Giuliana Bruno through the rescue of the "maps of the emotions" to make understandable some relations with space.

Throughout history, Albrecht Dürer with Saint Jerome in His Study (1514) unveils the notion of confort and interiorism, Johannes Vermeer explores the intimacy, and Le Brun presents a motto for the idea of building character (Boffrand, 1745). More recently, Richard Hamilton's Just what is It that Makes Today's Home so Different, so Appealing? (1956) reflects on the ephemeral and the habitat symbolisms and Gordon Matta-Clark's Splitting (1974) destabilise the image of suburban domesticity. Suburbia represent an impressive space sample scenario on space in a domestic scale. Can we really represent, understand or make history about suburbia? Can we read day-to-day living, social resonance, political pretensions, aesthetic proposals, reveries or functional issues through inhabitants?

Within the scope of this session, we don't aspire to propose a new methodology, instead, we want to collect examples, discuss cases and check the potential of art making and art reading as a way to interpret space and, of course, suburbia.

But before entering in the case-study texts, we suggest debating some ideas along this introductory text, questions that other thinkers have already asked and that may bring relevant issues and demands regarding research in architecture at the present day.



## Architecture beyond authorship

*“Para uma casa sobreviver, tem de se transformar”<sup>1</sup>*

According to José Gil, “for a house to survive, it has to transform itself”. We propose to shift the focus of research from the author to the inhabitant and learn from him. We recognize the obvious relevance of the author of an architectural work, but we defend the relevance of the work during its existence also. Therefore, we propose to study architecture, and more specifically the suburbia, through the intervening parties from its creation to its use through the *Aesthetics of Reception* (Jauss, 1967) and the *Opera Aperta* (Eco, 1962). And, in this sense, we understand space as a result of the duality between authors conceptual ideas, together with the inhabitant understanding, embodiment and social behavior. Otherwise, as Gil says, maybe it cannot last.

## Space and performativity

*“Perçu, conçu and vécu”<sup>2</sup>*

In other hand, the sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre is responsible for this approach that crosses this phenomenological basis with a critical analysis of a more political and social content. In his seminal book *La Production de l'Espace*, Lefebvre proposes an approach based on the triad of the “perceived” space of the “physical” world, the “conceived” space of the “mental” world and the “lived” space of the “social” world, what he defines respectively as “spatial practice”, “space representations” and “representational spaces”, seeking with this distinction to capture different analytical perspectives on spatial reality.

Beyond Lefebvre's attempt to establish a "unitary theory" of space, the truth is that it can only be truly understood in the intersection between the ways in which space is appropriated by a given community, the conceptions of those who design and build it, and the symbolic systems that structure a given society, at the limit, at the confluence of practices, models and representations materially manifested in the living space. In this sense, there is a certain performativity inherent in the "everyday space", a space framed by regimes, modalities, procedures and protocols, more or less unconscious, of an ideological and symbolic nature, which delimit and determine the horizon of experience, while enabling displacements and transformations in its borders or interstices. In fact, this idea that space is ideologically and culturally motivated by institutions and agents of society, but open to a potentially questioning and critical social appropriation by those who inhabit it and act in it, enables a historical and productive interpretation of works in their contexts, which moves away from both naively subjectivizing and merely formalistic perspectives of approach.

## Space and representation

*“Ceci n'est pas une pipe”<sup>3</sup>*

As Magritte's Pipe, an image of a space/building/territory is not architecture. Architecture's relationship with its representations is not as linear as Magritte's affirmative sentence. As it is really called, “The Treachery of Images” evokes the critical relation between an image and a “form” itself.

Maybe because architecture is built usually to be inhabited, we presuppose that its physicality (materiality, form, color, arrangement), its sensoriality (smell, texture, visibility, sound or flavor) or its sensitive (intuition, subjectivity or emotion) experience, due to its embodiment, would give us a complete experience

<sup>1</sup> José Gil in Henrique Pina, *Aires Mateus: Matéria em Avesso*, documentário RTP, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Henri Lefebvre in *La production de l'espace*, 1974

<sup>3</sup> René Magritte in *The Treachery of Images*, oil on canvas, 1929

consciousness or perception. But is it architecture just the built materialized form? I argue not. Architecture is communication from an issuer to a receptor, and in this sense, architecture is a medium.

Representing is, for man, maybe one of the things that distinguish him most from other animals. Representing is in fact necessary to communicate intellectually with others through verbal, symbolic or artistic expression. Regarding the specificity of the architecture's discipline, it is well understood the amplitude between the artistic, social and humanistic knowledge that involves thinking about space and territory and the nature of architectural techne, and the real need to build and materialize such complex and enormous realities.

## (Art)Work and Truth

*"World is the always non-objective (...)"<sup>4</sup>*

According to Heidegger, the experience of art gives us a poetic intuition of "Being" ("Sein") that allow us to disclose the truth of things. But also Merleau-Ponty points this experience when looking at Cezanne's paintings in he's last work *L'Oeil et l'Esprit*, in 1960. Merleau-Ponty phenomenological approach begins by distinguishing art from science. Art relates to the lived and living world, including the body, the experience and the existence, while science takes the world as an object of knowledge "dissociated" from the existing subject, to identify laws beyond the phenomena. Science lacks the primacy of perception and the fact that we are first in the world with a body and that perceptual experience constitutes first knowledge. So, in this sense, and following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, art interpretation is a form of resistance in a science based academic world. More recently, Michel Foucault (1994) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) bring other approaches to understand subjectivity, both defending free thinking as an ethics to truth (Foucault, 1994) and as a unique understanding of truths, not accessible through a traditional science approach, but instead by an "experience of art" (Gadamer, 1975). As Jorge Otero-Pailos also remember, "(...) in the experience of art (...) sometimes also involve confronting another historical tradition, that of the artwork's original moment of production."<sup>5</sup>

## Art as representation

*"Architecture, as distinct from building, is an interpretive, critical act"<sup>6</sup>*

According with the *English Oxford Dictionary*, representation is the "act of presenting somebody/something in a particular way; something that shows or describes something"<sup>7</sup>. The word has some more specific meanings, with more reasoning in the Latin origin of the word *repraesentationem* (nominative *repraesentatio*) means literally "to place before", something that is presented instead of another.

Among the various theories of art, which we will not discuss here, there is a very common idea about art, which the authors universally agree as art being an entity (artifact or performance) intentionally endowed by its author with a significant degree of aesthetic interest and usually distancing itself from everyday objects<sup>8</sup>. In this sense, an artwork always represents something, that goes from the intencional idea of the author, the different

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger in Heidegger, Martin. 1971. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, language, thought*, edited by Martin Heidegger. New York: Harper Perennial. Original edition, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Jorge Otero-Pailos. 2010. *Architecture's Historical Turn. Phenomenology and the rise of the postmodern*. Minneapolis / London: University of Minneapolis Press.

<sup>6</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "Architectureproduction", in Kester Rattenbury. 1988. *This is not Architecture. Media Construtions*. London, New York: Routledge. p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> *Oxford Learners Dictionaries*, consulted in: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/representation>

<sup>8</sup> According to the ideas developed in: Stephen Davies. 2012. *The Artful Species*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Stephen Davies. 1991. *Definitions of Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

conceptions inside author's ideas to the real things, real concepts, real artifacts or real performances existent in human culture.

As Beatriz Colomina points, there is an interpretative act in architecture. Colomina introduced the idea that architecture, especially modern architecture activated by new technical instruments, could not be understood simply through works and manifestos, but should expand its field of analysis to the media in general:

"To think about modern architecture must be pass back and forth between the question of space and the question of representation. Indeed, it will be necessary to think of architecture as a system of representation, or rather a series of overlapping systems of representation. This does not mean abandoning the traditional architectural object, the building. In the end, it means looking at it much more closely than before, but also in a different way. The building should be understood in the same terms as drawings, photographs, writing, films and advertisements; not only because these are the media in which more often we encounter it, but because the building is a mechanism of representation in its own right."<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 1 - Birmingham Town Hall, Victoria Square, Birmingham 1941. George Bernard Mason (1896-1985), National Building Record. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-33408095>

In *Architecture and Ekphrasis*, Dana Arnold also brings this idea of art as representation with their own syntactical, linguistic and cultural qualities. She stresses that art expression is not about copying something, but about transmitting something. It's not about duplicating, it is about putting new thinking: "I argue that these images are, in fact, a form of writing, in the full sense of the word, as they are syntactical and linguistic qualities that convey both ideas and experience"<sup>10</sup>. So, as an ekphrasis, an image has its particularities in order to describe a subject and the graphics, the sounds, the movements operate as language (words) to present an argument about art or architecture in this particular case.

<sup>9</sup> Beatriz Colomina. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge-Massachusetts/London-England: The MIT Press, 1996 [1994], pp. 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold, Dana. 2020. *Architecture and Ekphrasis*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 1.



## Art as document

*"Tout indice concret ou symbolique, conservé ou enregistré, aux fins de représenter, de reconstituer ou de prouver un phénomène ou physique ou intellectuel."*<sup>11</sup>

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, "an official paper, book or electronic file that gives information about something, or that can be used as evidence or proof of something"<sup>12</sup>. Also, according to the same reference, the origin of the word is linked to the "late Middle English: from Old French, from Latin *documentum* 'lesson, proof' (in medieval Latin 'written instruction, official paper'), from *docere* 'teach'. So, broadening specking, we understand the role of documentation as a mean to archive or to work as evidences or even to remember us of something. "Fundamentally, every document is something that references something outside itself and is part of a broader system."<sup>13</sup> In this sense, a representation becomes a document once it is situated within a classificatory scheme or other broader system in relation to an object (architectural object) or an idea (architectural theoretical proposition).

## Building the history in an archive

In 7 September 1940, *The Blitz* started. The German bombing campaign against the United Kingdom took place between 1940 until 1941, during the Second World War. Beyond the physical changes, this traumatic event also shifted definitively the historiography studies as it threatens the existence of the country's architectural heritage. By November of that same year a meeting was held at the Royal Institute of British Architects, in London, to discuss what could be done to create a record of historic architecture that was now under threat of destruction from the bombing campaigns. The result was the establishment early in 1941 of the *National Buildings Record* (NBR), a distinct body with a small, dedicated staff. Its purpose was to collect and create photographic and drawn surveys of historic or significant buildings deemed to be under threat from bombing, so that, in the event of a building's destruction, a record of it would be preserved. Due to the immense scope of this work, in some instances it was only possible to record buildings after they had already been damaged by bombing. The importance of this work became even more apparent in 1942 as the Luftwaffe began their 'Baedeker' raids (named after the popular German guidebooks) which specifically targeted areas and buildings of cultural value. The NBR considered architectural plans and measured drawings as the most important and valued form of record. However, a comprehensive measured survey scheme could not be implemented due to the cost in time and resources. The urgency of war-time conditions meant that photography was the most practical way to record threatened buildings. The origin of this practical decision, brought also many novelties in the field of historiography and philosophy of history in the post-Second World War, arising from the danger of losing so many buildings of historic value, but also due to the construction of such a new and extensive archive of architecture. That is the case of Sir John Summerson, Sir Howard Colvin or Rupert Gunnis, all showing a certain "sense of urgency to discover order and publish facts - empirical information about a past set of values and architecture that had nearly been lost"<sup>14</sup>.

Dana Arnold brings the question, "what is the relation between the historian and the facts?"<sup>15</sup> Facts and events are in the past, so we only have the traces left in the present. Maybe it's what Foucault calls an archive,

*"the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in*

<sup>11</sup> Suzanne Briet. 2016. *O que é a documentação*. Translated by Maria de Nazareth Rocha Furtado. Paris: EDIT. Original edition, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation*. p.7.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/document\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/document_1)

<sup>13</sup> Gorichanaz, Tim. 2017. "Understanding art-making as documentation." *Art Documentation* 36 (2):191–203, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold, Dana. 2002. *Reading Architectural History*. London: Routledge, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, Dana. 2002. *Reading Architectural History*. London: Routledge, p. 4.

*an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities (...)"<sup>16</sup>.*

According to Foucault, his archive of knowledge is activated by someone with its own reading and subjectivity. may be the subjectivity of the historian or the subjectivity of other authors of records or interpretations of the architectural work, in this case.

## art (registers) of living in Architecture

Though the hands of an historian, history lives in two different times, in the past and in the moment of the historical narrative creation. Naturally, this opens an attention to the question of subjectivity. In addition to these post-World War II evolutions, this event of the creation of an emergency archive brings to light a seminal issue in the field of architecture, that is its visuality, its materiality and its ability to produce experiences and performativities along its physical existence. In this sense, we stress here the relevance of the visual archive, and the narration archive to bring these visuality, this physicality, this experience and performativity into the hands of those who study architecture, and of course the artistic registers of space and architecture.

For this session, *Inhabiting Suburbia: (art) registers of living*, we bring these artistic registers in four different levels that we find here in the text:

- (1) Visual research made by the historian/narrator on a sample to understand some evolutions of the original object presented by the visual studies around the façade of post-war mass housing (Giuseppe Resta), and an artistic interpretation by visual sketching and mapping on existing useless structures (Inês Marques).
- (2) Double reading of the narrator/historian work, directly in the work of an architect and through another curatorial interpretation of the same work, presenting here the successive layers of an object's interpretation over time, by the recent Koolhaas interpretation on a 1970's Superstudio film who thinks about society evolutions (Spela Hudnik).
- (3) An analysis of a narrator/historian through a plural urban artistic tendency, the comic strips as an embracing art interpretation and a relevant enlarged source of information to understand an architectonic tendency, the French "grands ensembles" (Carlos Machado e Moura).
- (4) The direct experience of the narrator/historian as a performative experience of art of the object by understanding how the observer reads and integrates these discursive layers involved in this relation of sensitive apprehension (Maribel Mendes Sobreira).

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<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault. *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Rupert Swyer (Trad.) London, Tavistock Publications, 1972 (1969), pp.129.

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# Building a Key Analytical Framework for Middle Class Mass Housing MCMH

## Session 10

**Els De Vos**, Faculty of Design Sciences, Henry Van de Velde Research Group, University of Antwerp, Mutsaardstraat 31, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium, [els.devos@uantwerpen.be](mailto:els.devos@uantwerpen.be)

**Eva Storgaard**, Faculty of Design Sciences, Henry Van de Velde Research Group, University of Antwerp, Mutsaardstraat 31, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium, [eva.storgaard@uantwerpen.be](mailto:eva.storgaard@uantwerpen.be)

With our session entitled *Building a Key Analytical Framework for Middle-Class Mass Housing MCMH*, we are looking for contributions that focus on how to study MCMH and how to build up an analytical framework to investigate several aspects of middle class mass housing.

MCMH is understudied so far in urban and architectural studies, notwithstanding the fact that MCMH is one of the main aspects of the urban fabric in Europe. Current research on middle-class housing within MCMH aspires an interdisciplinary approach from several disciplines such as architectural history, urban planning, economics, politics, sociology, anthropology and demography. With our call, we aim to investigate MCMH through a range of architectural means.

Possible foci could be:

- shared facilities in (semi)public space (playgrounds, park environments, urban interior, parking areas, etc.)
- ground floor program / amenities in plinth (laundry, nursery, shops, banks, meeting centers, storage, concierge, etc.)
- transition spaces / intermediating spaces between public and (semi)private (entries, passages, balconies, staircases, 'streets in the air', etc.)
- mobility infrastructure (streets, bike lanes, walkways etc.)

After all, we are interested in papers that investigate cases through (a selection of) these architectural means, combined with a sociological approach, namely how users/inhabitants use/appropriate or interact with these means. We want to investigate if these architectural means can act as lenses which allow us to look systematically and more closely to basic components of MCMH projects – and which can indicate how to deal with them in the future.

Our call for papers delivered four interesting papers that were quite complimentary. To our surprise they all dealt with the outside spaces of MCMH, often greenery but also (car) infrastructure and pedestrian walk ways. There seems to be a need to pay more attention to the public and semi-public spaces in and mainly around the buildings. And indeed, while architects, (urban) planners and heritage specialists in first instance focus on the built environment, such as the typology of the apartments, the floor plans, the construction method but also the design concepts, less attention goes to the so called 'voids' or 'negative spaces', the in-between spaces between housing blocks. They are often overlooked in debates, though with the COVID 19-pandemic, we all began to realise the importance of outdoor spaces, preferably greenery, for human wellbeing.

This session made us aware of the importance of these urban green spaces, but also of the opportunities they offer and threats they are facing. In the paper “Exploratory Talks as a Tool for Co-Diagnosis. Comparative Analysis of Residential Neighbourhoods in New Belgrade & Almere Haven”, Anica Dragutinovic, Lidwine Spoormans and Uta Pottgiesser focus on developing a methodology to assess Middle-Class Mass Housing (MCMH) in Europe by making a comparative analysis between two cases, respectively New Belgrade (Serbia) and Almere Haven (The Netherlands). They apply methods from the social sciences and humanities, by interviewing people or by asking them to fill in a diary about their living experiences. As such, they try to find an evaluation method about several aspects, such as deterioration (technical, functional, social), sense of community, place attachment, maintenance and taking care, ownership and appropriation, quality of public spaces and green areas, satisfaction and comfort. A green living environment is valued high in both cases, just as social cohesion, the presence of communities’ centres and a shared living history of the neighbourhood that acts as a collective memory of the neighbourhood. These qualities are, as the authors rightly remark, general conditions for liveable neighbourhoods.

The cases of the other papers could also be evaluated by means of that comparative analysis. Similar qualities pop up in the other research cases. The Danish researchers, Lene Wiell Nordberg and Rikke Borg Sundstrup for example, part of a team of interdisciplinary researchers from BUILD at the Aalborg University, investigated fifteen disadvantaged large-scale housing areas in Denmark, that the government wants to upgrade to a middle class neighbourhood by the introduction of mixed-ownership, new functions and attractions, increased density and an integration of the surrounding neighbourhoods. One of their plans is to enlarge the road network in and through the housing estate in order to connect the housing complex better with the surrounding more upper-class neighbourhoods, which will increase the social safety, according to the planners and architects. However, as the Danish researchers discover, the existing residents prefer the existing situation because the green spaces are child friendly. Import in this, are the car-free zones, but also the informal control of other inhabitants who frequent the spaces on a daily basis. The other users are no ‘strangers’, but ‘well known faces’. In fact, the Danish researchers show that the parochialisation of the public spaces -to use the term of urban sociologist Lynn Lofland- is guaranteeing a safe living environment. The living environment acts as a catalyst of social cohesion, a community feeling and sharing living history. However, since the opinion of the locals doesn’t match with the one of the planners and authorities, it is very likely that extra roads and car infrastructure will be laid out.

Also Veneta Zlatinova-Pavlova, a senior assistant professor at the Department of Urban Planning of the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia, discusses the tension between keeping the existing greenery open for recreational and pedestrian zones, and the pressure to densify the area and building more parking spaces for cars. She does so by discussing the administrative unit Nadezhda at the North-West fringe of Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria. Interestingly, she stresses the importance of urban greenery as an integral part of urban planning and pleas for recognizing it as a common good, a resource or even a human right. She discerns a discrepancy between the moment that urban planners develop a plan with mature green and the time that the green is full-grown as intended by the designers. Moreover, as it takes decades from planting a tree till having a mature greenery, the vision of urban planners has in the meantime often changed. There is an important time gap between the initial design and its realisation. She rightly argues that “the legal framework and the zoning plan should take into account the lifecycle of the prefabricated buildings and provide opportunities for restructuring the built fabric in mid or long-term perspective.” The same can be said for the greenery. Also their lifecycles should be taken into account in their plans.

Finally, Belgian PhD-researcher Marie Moors of the University of Hasselt took the most designerly approach in her search for the regeneration of a post-war housing complex in Belgium. For a casestudy in Antwerp, the Jan De Voslei housing complex designed by architect Jos Smolderen, her students developed strategies to add collective spaces, and to activate the outdoor spaces between buildings. Her paper shows the potential

of the in-between spaces for designers to create spaces of encounter that can support social cohesion and community life, the other parameters mentioned in the study of Dragutinovic, Spoormans and Pottgiesser.

In short, this session has showed the importance of urban greenery between the housing blocks and their potential for human well-being. Urban planners, architects and heritage experts should consider these elements as thorough as the buildings themselves. Methodologically, the four papers showed the importance of a mixed-method approach. In most cases, an architectural and urban planning approach is combined with a sociological and anthropological approach. The empirical parts, based on site visits, observations and interviews with users/inhabitants, brings the local knowledge of the users-experts to the fore. As such, the voice of women is also heard. The focus on the greenery, the importance of safe, child friendly outdoor spaces and community life are often more the direct concerns of women. There are often the aspects that are very important for the caretakers of the children. Some researchers used creative and innovative methods to gain knowledge from the inhabitants. Lene Wiell Nordberg and Rikke Borg Sundstrup did walk-alongs with the residents of the neighbourhood. Talking with each 'other while doing an activity together, such as walking through the environment, is a more active approach than the static interview. It allows the interviewees to show certain sites that illustrate their narratives. Also the diary that Lidwine Spoormans asked the inhabitants to keep, in which they had to respond to two questions or assignments per day, is a non-conventional method to get local knowledge. It encourages inhabitants to reflect more thoroughly on their living condition and situation. Finally, Marie Moors made us aware of the fact that research by design or designerly research is also an interesting way to investigate the opportunities that certain projects or places (such as the outdoor spaces) hold.



# Demolition vs Renovation: an open question with regard to Middle-Class Mass Housing in the contemporary city

Session 11

**Alessandra Como;** Università degli Studi di Salerno

**Luisa Smeragliuolo Perrotta;** Università degli Studi di Salerno

## Introduction

Through the dichotomy between demolition and transformation the Middle-Class Mass Housing topic is addressed from a different point of view. The narrative does not start from the beginnings, that is from the ideals of progress linked to the theories of the Modern Movement on housing, but rather starts from the end, or rather from the controversial events linked to their use today.

Most of Middle Class Mass Housing buildings represent today significant examples of the design research on collective living. Yet this great heritage is in difficulty because its value is not recognised and the urban dynamics mostly favour the demolition tout court rather than developing a critical thought on the role that these buildings have for the community and the city. In some cases large housing complexes are demolished because they are controversial: their inner social and economic problems seem too difficult to be managed and the destruction becomes the quickest way to solve a set of critical issues. In other cases demolition is necessary to rebuild on the same site with different and often higher standards, with the goal of maximising the value of the area without taking into account the existing architectural heritage and its possible value.

Along this line, the most controversial demolition case in recent years has been the Robin Hood Gardens in London designed by Alison and Peter Smithson in the 70s built as a public housing complex in a suburban area of London. The project brought together many of the ideas and design experiments on collective living by the English architect couple, international leaders in the architectural debate in the mid 20th century. Over the years, the city of London increasingly extended the limits of its urban development including the Robin Hood Gardens area, which is not any more peripheral nowadays. As already happened for other significant buildings in the area, the complex has become of interest to investors, who have proposed its demolition and replacement with a larger residential development. Despite the international mobilisation of the architectural world, its demolition began in 2017. The Victoria and Albert Museum decided to acquire a fragment of the Robin Hood Gardens building and exhibited it at the 2018 Venice Biennale, when it was possible to climb up the building piece and reach the street in the sky, the upper street designed as a continuous window open to the city, which characterised the Smithsons' project. Robin Hood Gardens had been transformed from an experimental and avant-garde residential complex into a museum fragment.

The story of the Robin Hood Gardens makes us reflect on the architectural heritage that the 20th century has left us and which does not only concern public buildings but mostly includes residential complexes, which is the heritage most sensitive to transformations and most difficult to safeguard at the same time.

Starting from the events of the Robin Hood Gardens and of other famous demolitions, researchers were asked to submit proposals for a reflection on the dichotomy demolition/renovation through case studies of the Middle Class Mass Housing. The aim of the session was to collect a series of case studies that could be studied comparatively in the light of understanding what factors led to demolition or building development. In particular, we asked to focus on the contribution that residential complexes had given to the transformation of the city, and on the impact their stories of construction, demolition or transformation had on the urban fabric.

## The contributions

The contributions present in this publication of the proceedings of the II Optimistic Suburbia Conference deal with three case studies, two of which in Central Europe – the IBA complex in Berlin, Germany and the Cité de l'Amitié in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, Belgium – and a third, the Cabrini-Green neighbourhood in the city of Chicago, in the USA.

All three contributions were of great interest for the session's topic. The case studies are commented interweaving historical events linked to the birth of the large residential complexes of Middle Class Mass Housing with the dynamics that involved their transformation or demolition. The research has contributed, with a critical eye, to the discussion on the history of Middle Class Mass Housing, starting from an understanding of its role within the development of cities and urban areas.

Jean-Marc Basyn, with his contribution The Cité de l'Amitié: 1970s pioneering housing ensemble for people with reduced mobility in the Brussels periphery confronted to its future, reflects on the events of a large residential development built in the 70s in the suburbs of Brussels. The Cité de l'Amitié is a pioneering project that represents a successful experiment in large residential neighbourhoods designed for locomotor handicapped people. The project was born from the collaboration of the AUSIA multidisciplinary team and the National Association for the Housing of Disabled People (A.N.L.H.) and also thanks to the contribution of the municipality, which donated parts of the land. On a plot of 3 hectares, 329 dwellings were constructed, 15% of which were for people with mobility difficulties. Today the neighbourhood is under a transformation project that could partly demolish some units and invasively transform others, erasing some important signs of its history. Jean-Marc Basyn tells the history of the case study, showing its role in the process of urban growth which affected the entire periphery of Brussels. At the same time, he places the case study within the current public policies for the transformation of the existing heritage in Belgium, emphasising the fragility of the heritage built in the 70s and 80s, not properly preserved. The case study shows that it is necessary to approach the existing heritage with an effective methodology that knows how to value and take into account the specific characteristics of the architecture. The research opens up the possibility of considering the preservation of the existing heritage as a necessity in which not only owners, technicians and political decision-makers are involved, but also the university and the scientific community which is engaged in the the preservation of modernity. Furthermore, it is essential to spread knowledge of the modern heritage in particular in schools and within the local communities, which play an increasingly active role in the city's transformation processes.

Melinda Benkő, with the contribution Demolition and replacement in Chicago: traditional, modern, and contemporary dreams for a better urban life, comments on the topic of demolition and replacement as a tool used in the city of Chicago in the processes of urbanisation and transformation. In particular, the research focuses on the case of the southern neighbourhood of Cabrini-Green. The neighbourhood was created in the 40s through the federal First Housing Act programme, which offered funding to demolish slums and replace them with new housing. Additional urbanisation programmes affected the neighbourhood, which was further expanded, first in 1957 and then in 1960. Meanwhile, American housing policies favoured the displacement of white families into single-family suburban homes and the consequent transformation of large mass housing neighbourhoods, such as the Cabrini-Green, into ghettos for African-American families. The neighbourhood,

which is nowadays central to the city of Chicago, began its transformation in the late 90s with the demolition of the medium-high residential blocks. This led to the displacement of a large part of the African-American community, incentivized by instruments such as the vouchers. The residential buildings present in the neighbourhood today are mainly the low rise blocks of the 40s. Part of the land is now in the hands of private investors who could use it for new residential developments, half of which has to become partially subsidized and partially social housing. Melinda Benkő recognises the case study as an illustrative example of how federal policies have continuously transformed the neighbourhood over time, in its appearance and in its social structure. The Cabrini-Green is thus a "landscape in transition" which has never managed to build an identity for itself and that still today looks to its future with uncertainty. The research addresses the issue of the dichotomy between demolition and replacement by critically describing what happens within a neighbourhood when these tools are used as urban practices on an ongoing basis and what they entail in the transformation of the city and in the social structure of the communities. In conclusion, the research opens up questions about the use of demolition and replacement in urban housing policies. Melinda Benkő points out that in the processes that have affected the Cabrini-Green neighbourhood and that have made extensive use of these tools, the goal has always been short-term, while housing policies need today to be more effective and sustainable solutions at the scale of man and of his needs and that can last over time.

Ilaria Zelda, with the contribution On IBA Berlin 1987 and its Housing Complexes after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, analyses the events linked to the IBA housing complexes built in Berlin in 1987. In particular, the controversial demolition in 2013 of the block by Oswald Mathias Ungers on Lützowplatz is used as an incipit to the events that have affected the IBA complexes since their birth, as a symbol of reconstruction in the western part of the city, after the unification of the city, and up until today, when their role is called into question by the complex dynamics that characterise the contemporary city. The research contextualises the construction of the IBA within the housing framework of West Berlin at the time, starting from the value it had as experiment in "critical reconstruction" within the fabric of the historic city. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the fabric of the city was disrupted by the unification; the hitherto peripheral IBA complexes found themselves in the centre of the city and also at the centre of speculative interests. They were in fact public housing residences in the city centre. With the privatisation processes that started at the end of the last century, a critical moment began for the IBA complexes, which were increasingly at the mercy of private interests. In particular, in 1998, the Ungers block was bought by a real estate investor who decided to demolish it because it was not economically viable to renovate it. In 2010, it was proposed to renovate the "Kreuzberg Tower" designed in the southern area of Friedrichstadt by the American architect John Hejduk on the initiative of its owners. The works would have altered the building's identity irreversibly. Through a massive public mobilisation campaign, the tower was saved and renovated, preserving its original character. The Kreuzberg Tower story has sparked off a debate on the conservation of IBA buildings, opening up the possibility of considering a form of preservation for such significant architecture. From 2015 until 2019, several IBA buildings have been listed for heritage preservation. Ilaria Zelda, through the story of the most significant events that have affected some of the IBA complexes in Berlin, shows how difficult it was for these buildings, symbol of the German reconstruction and so significant for the design project culture, to be recognised as valuable, and than to be preserved. At the same time, the research underlines how even small changes related to the buildings privatisation can compromise the meaning of the project and its relationship with the city. Ilaria Zelda therefore emphasises the need to consider transformation as a critical act which cannot be left to any unregulated initiatives as it can erase important signs and meanings.

## Conclusions

The session explored the demolition/transformation dichotomy as an opportunity to reformulate the topic of the contemporary city transformation. The contributions and the discussion that arose in commenting on the case-

studies highlighted the congenital difficulty that mass housing complexes have in being recognised as significant architecture. This is partly due to some recurring characteristics such as their size so far from the human scale. At the same time, the session highlighted how urban dynamics transform the meaning and value of mass housing.

There is therefore the need to look at the built environment outside of clear-cut and often rhetorical position which consider the total demolition or the integral preservation, but rather to evaluate the specific stories and be able to direct choices towards the necessity of increasing the architectural and urban qualities of the built environment. This is necessary in order to create an effective alternative to the exclusively economic point of view with which transformations are addressed.

In a dynamic environment as the city, it makes sense to look at the transformation of large residential complexes with a critical eye and start from their potentialities. In this sense, actions such as those of creating connections, working on spatial and visual trajectories, eroding parts of buildings to build public spaces, creating opportunities for space on a human scale, using the negative urban space to discover themes such as urban agriculture, social gardens or outdoor sports, are some of the possibilities that can affect the transformation of large residential complexes.

It is therefore possible to create an alternative to demolition and replacement as a speculative tool for the transformation of cities as highlighted by the Chicago case study. The Berlin case study instead highlighted the fragility of the architectural heritage and at the same time the danger that unguided transformations, not reflecting on the meaning of the project, could compromise the value of these buildings. The case study of the Cité de l'Amitié, on the other hand, paved the way for building a philosophy of conservation and transformation of buildings that is more attentive to the set of values that these buildings represent.

In this sense, the session was oriented towards the objective of involving Middle Class Mass Housing in a policy of preservation of modernity as a representative theme of the architectural culture of the 20th century. It was also felt that the transformations involving Middle Class mass housing should be considered as critical actions aimed at protecting the qualities of architecture and at increasing its intrinsic value.



# short papers

# The role of the architect in the late socialist mass housing planning and design

**Marija Drémaitė**, Prof. Dr; Vilnius University, Faculty of History, marija.dremaite@gmail.com

**Session:** 1 – *Writing the History of Post-war Housing Complexes and Neighborhoods. A Take on Research Strategies and Methodologies.* Chairs: Gaia Caramellino and Filippo De Pieri

## ABSTRACT

The paper is focused on the changing role of an architect as an expert in the field of socialist mass housing, where construction has been largely regulated by the state planning institutes, standardized rules and norms, and economy. In the field of inexpensive and industrially produced socialist mass housing architects were expected to behave as technocrats. However, in the late socialist period (1970s–1980s) the critique of monotony of mass housing and on-off designs with regional differences started to be increasingly introduced by local architects proposing unique architectural solutions in the large housing estates. It is therefore important to establish how certain changes inspired by the theories of humanization, ecology, urban sociology, and regionalism were introduced in the field of mass housing in the context of the growing role of expert culture. The paper is based on the research of mass housing design in then socialist Baltic republics (1960-1980), and discusses the nature of changes and the agents in the design approach to mass housing.

In the field of industrialised and standardised housing construction, the role of architects and one-off design is of special interest, because industrialisation and standardisation in Soviet mass housing brought tension between planners of standardised large housing estates and master architects who drew up unique designs for public buildings. Reflecting the current interest in regional differences in large processes and phenomena, peripheral histories open up the possibility of seeing other dimensions, local variations and regional adaptations, and are able to change the established narrative frames. Comparative research in post-war mass housing has shed new light on uniformity and standardisation processes by adopting a more focused approach towards regional differences in the former Socialist countries, especially in the importance of local expertise.

In a book on prefabrication and the organisation of Soviet industrial construction (Meuser, Zadorin, 2015), the authors not only included an analysis of changes in Soviet mass housing production, describing three generations of mass housing and their special characteristics, but also summarised the changing discourse in socialist mass housing studies, moving away from uniformity and standardisation to regional differences. In the comparison of two very different Soviet regions analysed by two recent books dedicated to mass housing – Central Asia (Meuser, 2016) and the Baltic Republics (Drémaité, 2017) – regional differences can be seen, as well as the different reasons for them. Baltic modernist architecture was perceived as a manifestation of design excellence in the entire USSR: the Baltic region was sometimes called ‘the inner abroad’ or the ‘Soviet West’ owing to its Western-influenced architectural designs.

In this context, the question whether the architecture of large housing estates in the Baltic region was a possible exception within the Soviet Union has already been touched upon by several researchers, particularly in light of the Baltic States’ relations with, and orientation towards, the West and International Modernism. Recent papers discussing specific Estonian aspects of mass housing have emphasised the criticism of mass housing, which led to alternative house design solutions (Kalm, 2012a), and the role of architects in designing large housing estates.

I will further explore the role of the architect and the individualised design approach in the field of mass housing, where construction was largely regulated by standardisation and economy. Art historian David Crowley saw the division between standard and original as one of the most fundamental features shaping the nature of Socmodernism (a term proposed by Crowley) and distinguishing it from Western Modernism (Crowley, 2009). He proposed dividing post-war socialist architecture into ‘Socmodernism 1’ and ‘Socmodernism 2’, based on this distinction. In his conception, ‘Socmodernism 1’ met the demands issued by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev as early as 1954 to supply inexpensive, unembellished, industrialised buildings, largely but not only for the sphere of housing. In this sphere architects were expected to behave as technocrats; they were required not to produce buildings but types, with the result that housing design was removed from the sphere of art to engineering.

This thesis is supported by Richard Anderson who also noted that the architectural profession underwent a process of differentiation during the Khrushchev’s industrialisation period in the 1960s as it devolved into two principal spheres: “those who worked primarily in the field of serialized production and those who worked on unique buildings” (Anderson, 2015, p. 250). The tension between serialized and unique design became a long standing feature of Soviet architectural production. As Estonian architectural historian Mart Kalm put it: “Standardised designs were already in extensive use during the Stalinist period but became an obsession during Khrushchev’s Thaw, when economical building practices became the focus of attention. [...] The more the state demanded standardised designs, the more architects became irritated and felt oppressed by the restrictions” (Kalm, 2012).

These observations suggest the hypothesis that regional differences in the standardised architecture of large housing estates could be introduced by local experts proposing unique architectural solutions and experimentation of Baltic architects in the planning of standardised housing estates.

It is therefore important to examine:

- how Baltic architects pursued more individualised solutions;
- how ideological requirements were imposed during this particular period; and
- how architects proposed solutions for improvement.

It is also important to establish how certain professional (or even national ethnic) aspirations were cloaked in a “correct” Soviet rhetoric and whether there existed alternative ways of securing official acknowledgement of a project.

The main source of material for the research is constituted by interviews of Lithuanian architects Vytautas Čekanauskas and Vytautas Brėdikis. (Maciuka, Drėmaitė, 2020). Architects recalled that in prefabricated housing construction and urban planning “architects were hardly involved”, and that work in standardised planning was perceived as neither desirable nor creative. In Lithuania, for example, such tasks were delegated to recent graduates who, in turn, hoped to escape their new duties as soon as possible and progress to individualised design. It is also noteworthy that the planning of new microrayons was often delegated to female planners, with comments to the effect that the composition of a microrayon was governed by standards and thus lacked architectural innovation. In such negotiations, the word ‘experimental’ played a key role, as it had been validated by the ‘scientific technological revolution’. Architects and designers who could characterise their work as ‘experimental’ (meaning that an experimental building would provide technical know-how for the rest of the building sector) could bolster their credentials as technical specialists and draw on greater resources and enjoy greater freedoms.

The introduction of large-panel house production (known by its Russian acronym, KPD) and the adoption in 1955 of regulations known as the Construction Norms and Rules (known by its Russian acronym, SNiP) served for many years as the means for controlling residential housing design. In the period from 1955 to 1991, the SNiP rules dealing with mass housing were thoroughly revised only four times: in 1957, 1962, 1971, and 1985, resulting in very slow changes in mass housing design (Meuser & Zadorin, 2015). Industrialised housing construction was accompanied by a new type of urban planning, the microrayon (microdistrict), a Soviet version of the basic neighbourhood unit. The model of the Soviet microrayon was developed after the architectural competition of Socialist countries in 1960 for the development of the south-western area of Moscow. The event had an important mission: to develop new methods for grouping and arranging multi-unit apartment buildings. The 1960 competition was crucial for effecting changes in residential urban planning, abandoning the system of constructing housing along the perimeter of a city block in favour of a more freestyle arrangement of multi-unit apartment houses.

Already by 1961 the Third Congress of Soviet Architects was able to boast of huge productivity (165 million square meters of residential floor space created in 1959-1960) but it also took note of significant shortcomings, including “a lack of creativity in the use of standard designs”. Scientific studies had been repeatedly undertaken in an attempt to combat the monotony, but economy was the real reason why all Soviet cities of that era were full of five-storey buildings arrayed in extremely regular patterns (Meuser & Zadorin, 2015). The architect Albertas Cibas, an official with the Lithuanian Gosstroj, called for measures to attract the best and most experienced architects to work on standardised designs, providing them with a degree of creative liberty, particularly in the adaptation of standard designs for certain sites. Decree No. 903 ‘On Improvement of Design Practice in the Field of Civil Construction, Planning and Construction of Cities’, issued by the Soviet Communist Party’s Central Committee and Council of Ministers in 1963, indeed encouraged the transfer of responsibilities to regional and local levels. Local design institutes and State building concerns now had an opportunity to implement slight modifications. This all led to experimentation in housing design and microrayon planning.

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work as 'experimental' (meaning that an experimental building would provide technical know-how for the rest of the building sector) could bolster their credentials as technical specialists and draw on greater resources and enjoy greater freedoms (Crowley, 2009).

Architects, working at the Vilnius Urban Construction Design Institute (Lithuania) drew up the first experimental plans for apartment units and in 1961 organised an internal mini-competition. They developed an improved version of the standard I-464 series house, with apartments that could be divided using light sliding partitions or room dividers that also served as closets, allowing for different configurations of each apartment. However, the price for 1 square metre increased by 5-6%, and the Vilnius factory producing the concrete elements refused to make changes. The Chairman of the Lithuanian Union of Architects complained: "This is a strange situation – on the one hand, architects are criticised for design flaws, yet on the other hand, their improvements are not accepted." Architects also transferred their innovation into the realm of design competitions, hoping to obtain the coveted 'experimental project' status.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was possible to see more numerous manifestations of regional identity and an increasingly individualistic approach to design, as with the building series designed exclusively for the coastal city of Klaipėda in 1980. These incorporated a central pattern of corner balconies and enclosed terraces with red brick walls, considered to be typical of the Klaipėda region, conceptually developed by architect Gytis Tiškus..

Planning for Lazdynai, a large housing estate for 40,000 residents in Vilnius, Lithuania, started in 1962. Vytautas Brėdikis and Vytautas Čekanauskas, promising young architects in the field of custom design, were commissioned to design the estate. They emphasised that they were not regular planners of large housing estates and were therefore capable of presenting innovative ideas: "We were naturally influenced by the aim of making it [Lazdynai] different - of making it better' (Maciuika, Drėmaitė, 2020). They spoke about the considerable influence on their designs of Finnish (Tapiola), Swedish (Vällingby, Årsta) and modern French (Toulouse-Le Mirail) suburban projects. Lazdynai became the first mass housing urban design to be recognized with the most prestigious Soviet national Lenin prize. Clearly, the district's design had been overseen by two very talented architects, with many other specialists (nearly 150) contributing to the details. Politically Lazdynai were used to demonstrate that panel construction is still valid, and does not require major changes, only a touch of 'landscape design'. The large housing estates well reflects novelties and experimentation in planning ideology of the period. Lazdynai can be seen as real visions, involving a lot of effort from well-known architects, with the aim of creating an architecturally distinctive housing area which also fit the political agenda.

It is evident that Baltic architects sought to avoid standardised designs which immediately devalued any creative aspect of the planning process. Standard designs quickly became obsolete, both technically and morally. For all practical purposes, their designers remained unknown to the public at large. It is also evident that, although architects in many Soviet Republics began to shun mass construction projects and conceded the initiative to engineers, the design of mass housing in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was always overseen by professional architects. Despite standardization and the very limited choice of materials and building types, there were attempts to improve the living environment of mass-produced architecture. Such efforts were made easier by the existence of professional relationships developed between designers, the Communist Party and local administration officials, and the heads of construction material enterprises. Nevertheless, a stagnant bureaucracy and construction industry ensured that most experimental projects remained in the desk drawers and archives of planning institutions, even as clusters of mass-constructed apartment buildings encircled most Baltic cities and towns.

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## Establishing shot. Housing Complexes in Bologna and Florence

Lorenzo Mingardi; University of Florence (Italy); [lorenzo.mingardi@unifi.it](mailto:lorenzo.mingardi@unifi.it)

**Session:** 1 – *Writing the History of Post-war Housing Complexes and Neighborhoods. A Take on Research Strategies and Methodologies.* Chairs: Gaia Caramellino and Filippo De Pieri

### ABSTRACT

In the late 1950s, the development of suburbs in Bologna and Florence shows similarities in dynamics and structure. The collective residential buildings in the districts “Pilastro” (Bologna) and “Sorgane” (Florence) represent two paradigmatic examples of such a process: their location is very distant from the ancient urban fabric of the two respective towns. In these buildings, many families moving in from the country or from Southern Italy had the opportunity to find a self-contained flat with a bathroom. These two examples highlight the peculiarities of a phenomenon that rarely affects residential complexes: at first, they had risen in the context of council housing. Afterwards, the greatest part of their considerable extent turned into middle-class neighborhoods.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the different strategies used to analyze both residential units: the first step of the research focused on general aspects. Then, the focus shifted to the description of specific data. The raw material was made up of multiple layers of sources such as archival research, interviews with architects, politicians involved in the projects, and inhabitants. This tangle of threads was unraveled until it finally managed to reveal two aspects. The first one is how the social status of the inhabitants has changed over the years. The second interesting aspect is that, although the realisation of both districts involved a large number of celebrated architects, the very inhabitants explicitly asked for and obtained several changes in ongoing architectural projects and urban planning.

In addition to archival and field research, a further element for historical research is film. Certain movies – featuring Marco Ferreri, Roberto Benigni, Dario Fo, Stefano Benni – show the residential estates in the districts that were still under construction. This is a great contribution to the analysis of urban layering in both case studies.

**Keywords:** Pilastro; Sorgane; housing.

## 1. Two districts

The districts Pilastro in Bologna (1959-1984) and Sorgane in Florence (1957-1974) have a great deal in common. Although they are very different in terms of the architecture that characterises them, both were designed between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s during a period of particular confusion in Italian public housing. Still reeling from the long wave of reconstruction, the country was late in adopting laws to deal with the problem of the uncontrolled overbuilding that our cities had been experiencing since the early 1950s.

On the title pages of the project reports for the first drafts of the two settlements, Pilastro and Sorgane are identified as "self-sufficient neighbourhoods". Both neighbourhoods are located far from the historical centre and at the same time poorly connected to the first suburbs. On the other hand, the birth of the two neighbourhoods coincided with a period of great fragility in the urban management of the two cities. Bologna's PRG of 1955 - a plan that foresaw the growth of the city to one million inhabitants - and Florence's PRG (1956) had just been adopted, and the administrations needed a large number of housing units to accommodate especially those low-income groups that had been excluded from the private allotments of post-war reconstruction.

By the end of the 1950s, the incompatibility of the two terms "neighbourhood" and "self-sufficiency" had been certified. It had already become evident during the INA-Casa experiments of the 1950s. For economic reasons, the areas to be urbanised were identified in places that did not fit in with the planned growth of the city.

The problem of the incorrect location of the new neighbourhoods, which were too far from the city centre and from the compact and well-equipped suburbs, not only caused permanent discomfort and social marginalisation for the inhabitants, but also entailed considerable costs for the municipalities, which had to bear the costs of urbanisation works (Di Biagi, 2001, 20-22). The physical and psychological isolation of the neighbourhoods triggered a veritable phenomenon of social downgrading: the buildings took on the character of anonymous dormitory neighbourhoods lacking a precise physiognomy, both social and functional. Moreover, the collective facilities, which were the indispensable condition for the much-vaunted self-sufficiency of the neighbourhoods, were not built. These problems unequivocally decreed the failure of the policy of creating autonomous urban nuclei that had been pursued throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, at a time of critical reconsideration on the subject, the Pilastro and Sorgane operations were born already old, with the almost mathematical certainty of failure.

I approached the study of the two neighbourhoods for different reasons. I studied the history of the Pilastro for my thesis at the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence (Mingardi, 2011) and I studied Sorgane during a post-doctoral grant at the Ragghianti Foundation in Lucca. Delving into the cultural activity of Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti in the 1950s (Mingardi, 2020), I analysed his involvement in the events that led to the construction of the neighbourhood. I then examined the history of Sorgane up to the latest transformations that have taken place in the district over the last ten years.

Despite the different occasions, my methodological approach to the two case studies was the same. Using the typical cinematic technique of the Establishing shot - i.e. an opening shot that sets the context for the next scene, designed to inform the audience of where the action will take place - the choice was made to set the historical narrative with a very wide shot, useful to set the tone of the content and portray the context. First of all, I carried out a bibliographic survey. It wasn't limited to monographic publications or articles in journals, but it also included degree and doctoral theses on the cases in question or on other neighbourhoods in other cities whose planning process had similar characteristics. I then proceeded to analyse the archives in order to understand the urban development of the two urban centres.

A great number of societies contributed to the construction of the two neighbourhoods: the Bologna and



Florence's "Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari" (now "ACER Bologna" and "Case Popolari di Firenze"), the two administrations and the building cooperatives in the case of Bologna. Therefore, there was an in-depth study of the documents kept in many archives. The examined material was of various kinds: correspondence, typewritten documents (reports, progress reports on projects, resolutions of city councils and councils) and graphic material (drawings, sketches, heliocopics, models). The construction process of the two neighbourhoods was characterised by many variations on the initial project, which is why numerous planimetric drawings were produced over the course of time: their analysis formed the backbone of the research work.

In addition to the drawings relating to the urban plans, I examined the individual buildings that make up the neighbourhoods. Given the macro-structural scale of some of them, the study of the individual buildings often proved to be fundamental for the historical narrative of the neighbourhood. This assumption was valid both for buildings that had been constructed and for those that had only been planned but not built. Many architects who played an important role in 20th century Italian architecture worked on the Pilastro and Sorgane: in Bologna Glauco Gresleri, Francesco Santini, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Luigi Vignali and in Florence Leonardo Ricci, Leonardo Savioli, Giuseppe Giorgio Gori, Giovanni Michelucci. Therefore, in addition to the public archives of the municipalities or local authorities that were involved in the construction of the district, the archives of the individual designers were examined in order to obtain further documentary and graphic information on the case studies.

Both neighbourhoods have had a strong internal presence of the critical voice of the inhabitants. At Pilastro, the "Comitato Inquilini" (Tenants' Committee) - formed immediately, during the first housing allocations in 1966 - was instrumental in the urban planning decisions that led to the current definition of the district. Over the years, the inhabitants have argued for the need to produce plan variants to increase the areas of public green space and to create services not envisaged by the architects' and administrators' plans.

## 2. "Comitato Inquilini"

In 1966, the founding act of the Pilastro's Comitato Inquilini clarified what had animated the spirit of the people since the first days of life in the village: "to safeguard, coordinate and protect the collective economic, moral and social interests of the neighbourhood inhabitants" (Mingardi, 2014, 1280). From the mid-1960s onwards, many tenants committees or neighbourhood committees were set up in the new Italian urban areas, following in the footsteps of the tenants committees that had emerged in the INA-Casa settlements. In most cases, these were spontaneous groups of citizens who wanted to discuss the problems of their neighbourhoods together, to make demands to the authorities and, through this, to rediscover social contact and a collective identity. Even though they were local episodes that arose on the basis of demands and were active in limited territories, the committees were not associations that were the result of casual relations of spatial proximity, but groups capable of originating significant social ideals (Cristina, 2017, 216)

The requests of the Committee concerned the most urgent needs for the village to become a civilised place, such as the implementation of a continuous bus service, the installation of post boxes, intercoms and equalisation of telephone tariffs, but also the implementation of certain key points of the urban plan. Given the very long time span between the construction of the first buildings and the rest of the plan, the inhabitants of the area were already living in the village when it was still being formed, with all the inconveniences that the lack of services brought. The long-standing problem of the non-simultaneous construction of residences and services was very much felt in the 1950s by INA-Casa. The authorities were only responsible for building housing, while the municipalities were obliged to provide the areas with infrastructure. However, they did not have the financial means to do this.



Fig. 1- Pilastro in 1966. Archivio ACER Bologna

The research work, particularly in the Bologna case study, was therefore not limited to an urban and architectural analysis of the neighbourhood, but also analysed the sociological aspects connected with its construction. Examining of the "local" archives of the various associations still present in the area was fundamental: photographs, period postcards and leaflets constituted precious material to reconstruct the history of the village. For the iconographic research I made use of further explorations. The collections of the Cineteca di Bologna and the Archivio Storico Comunale di Firenze contain numerous materials relating to the different phases of construction of the two neighbourhoods. From the first images showing agricultural land, which was soon to be used for other purposes, to photographs of construction sites and the inauguration of the various buildings that make up the two districts. A very effective way of retracing the design, construction, social and economic events of the two neighbourhoods was the interview (De Pieri, Bonomo, Caramellino, Zanfi, 2013, XXIV-XXV). The research work has been enriched by this indispensable tool, which has made it possible to unearth numerous stories between the folds of history that would otherwise not be found in the "official" sources. I had the opportunity to meet the people directly involved in the planning of the two neighbourhoods; for the Pilastro: Gresleri, the architects of the municipality involved in the design of the variants, and the municipal councillors who have dealt with the Bologna case study over time, such as Giuseppe Campos Venuti; for Sorgane, Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, a long-time collaborator of Leonardo Savioli, and some former collaborators of Ricci and Gori. In addition to meetings with architects and politicians, it was essential to interview the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods. Thanks to direct testimonies, it was possible to focus on those particular tenant claims that have been a constant throughout the village's history. It was possible to understand which public spaces in the neighbourhood were used by the tenants to organise their meetings and, therefore, to map and date the services built within the Pilastro during its early development phase.

The interview with sculptor Nicola Zamboni was very important. He was the author of the reinforced concrete sculptures that populate Pasolini Park in the Pilastro, in front of the district's iconic building: the Virgolone. The sculptor explained to me how he was able to carry out (and be financed for) such a large urban art project. The 'trick' was not to call them works of art, but 'special concrete castings'. So when the politician found the item "special concrete castings" in the tender specifications at very low prices, he didn't pay attention and the item was approved.

In addition to interviews, another fundamental means of understanding the complexity of the urban history of the two neighbourhoods was cinema. Not only the professional one, but also numerous family films, kept in the Home Movies archive in Bologna, through which it was possible, thanks to moving images, to focus on some particular moments of the construction of the two neighbourhoods. In some of the films I was able to see

workers at work in Sorgane in 1965, or the visit of Mayor La Pira to the district in June 1964. In the cinema, the Pilastro is often a film set. The Virgolone park was the protagonist in two film episodes: in “Chiedo asilo” (1979) by Marco Ferreri, Roberto Benigni strolls through the lunar environment of the area, which was still in the process of being defined and therefore represents a historical document of considerable value, while in “Musica per vecchi animali” (1989) by Stefano Benni, Dario Fo and Paolo Rossi star in a number of takes filmed among Zamboni's statues in which the scenic impact of the system designed by the Bolognese sculptor is clearly understood. In addition, “Lavorare con lentezza” (2004), directed by Guido Chiesi, was almost entirely filmed in the first houses of the Pilastro.



Fig. 2 - Roberto Benigni in “Chiedo Asilo”, directed By Marco Ferreri (1979). Screenshot.



Fig. 3 - Dario Fo and Paolo Rossi in “Musica per vecchi animali”, directed by Stefano Benni (1989). Screenshot.

### 3. Conclusions

Due to the lack of attractive magnets, there is no public dimension of the place at Pilastro and Sorgane. There are everyday actions such as parking, walking on the porch and the spaces beside the buildings. But there is no commerce, no work, and in general no reason to go there unless you are a resident. The dense flow of daily life does not occur. However, there has always been a willingness on the part of the villagers to transform these negative elements into strengths through strong cohesion and the establishment of reference points for collective life. The unfortunate choice of the location of the villages and the lack of services was the reason for an immediate, strong brotherhood among the inhabitants who united in facing daily difficulties together. This

demonstrates how - although in more associative years than the present - the population was able to unite and propose a "participatory" management of urban and neighbourhood issues, born "from below" and certainly not from programmes carried out by the municipality. This aspect stands out as a very interesting peculiarity of the Pilastro, which could provide keys to understanding and operational proposals compared to other current attempts to redevelop ghetto neighbourhoods (e.g. Corviale and Tor Bella Monaca in Rome or Scampia in Naples), which are struggling to get off the ground.

At a time when peri-urban areas of the city have a strong appeal to the younger generation, the Pilastro and Sorgane, quiet neighbourhoods far removed from the hustle and bustle of typical city life, are a good place to live in. This is because there is no lack of community life within the neighbourhoods. In one of the four towers of the Pilastro there is still a television network operated by the inhabitants for the exclusive use of the building. Everything in the building is self-managed (from cleaning to maintenance work). Teletorre 19" not only reports on the wide-ranging initiatives in the village, but also live broadcasts the condominium meetings, the "events" organised in the communal rooms on the ground floor (e.g. the condominium billiards tournament), and - thanks to the contribution of the tenants - many films. Although it is an isolated example, Teletorre is in continuity with the path taken since 1966: a self-governing spirit and a desire to be together. These values have now partly contributed to transform the social status of the neighbourhood population. Born as working-class neighbourhoods, today Pilastro and Sorgane are registering the presence of declaredly middle-class residents: in the Virgolone there is a community of young artists and in one of Ricci's buildings in Florence - the so-called "Nave" - live several researchers and university professors from the Florence Department of Architecture, probably in search of a "contact" with the memory of the famous designer.

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# Gendered spaces in public housing estates. A planning agenda for pandemic times

**Laura Lieto**, Department of Architecture, Federico II University

**Marilena Prisco**, Department of Architecture, Federico II University

**Session:** 3 – *Publicness in middle-class large housing complexes as a new way to examine the premises of cultural encounters and social integration.* Chairs: Marie Glaser and Ellen Braae

## ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on practices of self-maintenance performed by women in large public housing estates in Napoli (Italy). In the past, gender differences in cities have been explored from different perspectives, from women studies to gender studies, and such explorations have always been conducive of broad critiques of urban policies and planning ideas constituting genders and increasing discriminations and conflicts in urban spaces. Given the exacerbation of housing inequalities during the present time, gender discrimination seems to be escalating while too little emphasized are the gender dynamics in the production of the everyday city and the provision of collective services that are so important to cope with emerging challenges in a pandemic time, especially in neighborhoods quite removed from the local government agenda. From this point of view, the paper assumes a specific theme and a specific group – forms of welfare that are self-provided by women living in public housing estates – as a lens to understand the impacts of women intervention in a large-scale mass housing neighborhood. Drawing on the results of an ethnographic exploration underway in the European PUSH project "Public Space in European Social Housing" (Hera – JRP IV), the paper conceptualizes the intervention of women as plural subjects of collective care which may introduce alternative maintenance and management logics in public space, acting as "translators" and "overscribers" to alter the original neighborhood plan.

**Keywords:** public housing, women, self-maintenance, Naples

## **Introduction: Self-maintenance from the gendered perspective and the production of the everyday city**

The paper deals with the practice of self-maintenance of mass housing complexes in Ponticelli (Naples, Italy), a neighborhood of 52.285 inhabitants (in 2016) characterized by poor public services and a relevant number of low-income families. We focus, in particular, on women as actors whose agency has been extensively discussed in terms of local culture and social norms (what women are allowed to do and what women should do according to local societal principles). We look at them, specifically, for how they actively cope with the materiality of the city to make sense and secure housing self-maintenance. In doing so, we seek to understand how they rework and re-signify services and spaces, from apartment buildings to abandoned parks.

Maintenance has been extensively studied by STS scholars interested in the human-object relations in political, economic and technical systems (Sormani, Strebel and Bovet, 2015; Denis, Mongili and Pontille, 2015; Strebel, Bovet and Sormani, 2019; Vink, 2019).

The maintenance of buildings and open spaces is usually connected to contractual forms such as property ownership, rent and loan, and the subject in charge of the maintenance is usually identified through a legal agreement between the parts involved. Studies on gender and maintenance as a form of care tend to look at the material and immaterial work in home environments as overburdens for un-paid care work which women usually perform. Care, support and keeping material and immaterial networks are some of the roles that have been traditionally entrusted to women through specific spatial configurations (Hayden, 1981; Spain, 1992; 2014). We examine how these roles work for how they perform in the frame of self-maintenance of public housing when the work is not performed by official public authorities.

Yet we support the idea that the category of women is contested and conflictual, and we consider both the intersection of women as a biological category of sex and we pay attention to the structural category of gender formation as well (Huning, Molders and Zibell, 2019). In the case of Ponticelli, we maintain that looking at womanhood as a biological condition and a cultural construction at the same time can foster our understanding of some of the processes which brought to the emergence of exceptional women figures we present here, and that happened because of their successful efforts in introducing self-maintenance in public spaces.

Our discussion starts from the intersection between the official construction and management plans as tools which organizes the distribution of functions, the maintenance of each part as regulated by law, and how gender comes into play even when not explicitly addressed as an issue. Constitutive spatial elements to whom a different function is assigned – from residential buildings to public facilities and open spaces – have different management protocols that differ from place to place but the managing subject is a legal and ungendered entity (a public agency, a private contractor such as in cooperative housing, etc.) so that management is hardly associated to gender.

The plan for mass housing in Ponticelli (implemented in the late 1980's after the catastrophic earthquake in November 1980) is here taken into consideration to illustrate the intersection between regulatory issues and management protocols of Italian public housing estates. The plan is representative of a rational planning approach that separated the plan as a tool for spatial organization from the process of maintenance of living spaces over time, not addressing how such maintenance impacted on gender. Since then, planning has evolved to include also maintenance of material elements, as well as advanced management strategies addressing issues of gender in different ways – for instance including women in management authorities.

This study draws on an ethnographic survey performed within the PUSH project "Public Space in European Social Housing" (Hera – JRP IV). Data were collected during cooperative activities designed and undertaken in various contexts, formal and informal – public schools, the Department of Architecture at Federico II University, the local church, headquarters of NGOs and the like.

As a theoretical perspective, we firstly assume the post-earthquake plan for Ponticelli as a “script” influencing gender roles in the rational organization of life spaces in the mass housing neighborhood. We maintain that this script is a power device which, according to the planners’ idea, describes and organizes spatial configurations to address how people should live together and, in doing so, it shapes also gender roles. Secondly, we acknowledge how gendered spaces diverge from the plan when the unaddressed aspect of maintenance comes into play.

In this perspective, we raise the notions of “trans-script” and “over-script” to interpret alterations and variations in the maintenance system that foster unexpected gender trajectories of self-maintenance of public housing through the involvement of women.

Through fieldwork, we can see how maintenance through self-organization mobilizes a multiplicity of subjects who are not only women. And yet, women creating spaces of self-maintenance to cope with lack of institutional support may prove highly effective for vulnerable collectives, especially when their practice is enmeshed with the materiality of urban life (Lieto 2017).

In the Ponticelli case, self-maintenance deals with both occupying publicly owned apartments still under construction and managing public areas to recover them from abandonment. Both practices bring together ideas, people and objects which interact with the formal plan. In some cases, maintenance can even reorient the aims and objectives of the plan.

## **1. The transcription of the plan of Ponticelli: gender configurations at the microscale when multi-scale planning fails**

The Ponticelli plan – conceived in the late 1970’s according to a national housing policy targeting both middle class, working class and low-income male-breadwinner families – was implemented after the earthquake in 1980, and it provided a detailed and rigid organization of new housing estates for homeless families. The plan was inspired by an ideal vision of a mixed neighborhood, self-sufficient for services and activities and well connected to downtown Naples. However, as in other state-led neighborhoods in Italy, the plan was only partially implemented as for residential buildings, while most of public services and economic activities remained on paper.

The plan’s script envisages a system of subsidized housing complexes – the so called “rioni” – with dedicated services and facilities such as childcare, basic education, sport and open areas. These complexes surround the historical center of the area, the “Casale di Ponticelli”. Such an ‘engineered’ neighborhood system built around the old village was meant to transform the Ponticelli village in a satellite town inside the border of the City of Naples. Families should have benefitted from the proximity of services and facilities, and from distributed economic activities at all scales. Equality of opportunities – distributed among families – was implicitly and idealistically a guiding criterion of the plan.

The long-term consequences on the gender division of labor in the partial realization of the Ponticelli plan today remain underexplored. The plan was generally addressing families’ needs, for instance creating a metropolitan park, but it did not contain specific measures to support gender equality, for example providing working women with specific services like children day care.

Understanding gender roles not as fixed but open to the influence of both formal policies and social norms, we are interested in how structural factors and single events may reorient gender trajectories.

When the neighborhood was realized, the plan proved to be weak to organize everyday life according to its premises. For instance, when residential buildings fell into place, several collective facilities remained on

paper. Because the plan (what we call 'script') did not meet its goals, the trajectory of the script was altered as people came into play to fill the gaps left by institutions. Gaps were physically visible in the neighborhood as abandoned areas. They became also visible through people's intervention when they got organized to decide whether and to whom some of the buildings and public spaces would have been assigned and managed.

This self-intervention in institutional voids constitute a diversion from the trajectory of the plan-script. In the next section we identify some exceptional figures of women who played a role in the alteration of the script when the neighborhood was effectively realized. The over-script and the trans-script, in our view, are two processes of temporary redistribution of gender roles, manifesting in an unplanned order in terms of how gender was originally conceived by the script.

## 2. Female practices of over-scribing and trans-scribing

At the beginning of the 1990's hundreds of assignees of public apartments – mostly people that had lost their home because of the earthquake – started to move into the neighborhoods planned a decade earlier. The new settlements had been only partially constructed and mechanisms of self-provision came around in two main forms – "trans-scribing" and "over-scribing". Trans-scribing entails introducing unexpected functions of material spaces within the 'voids and creases' of the formal plan without subverting the plan, but actually expanding its potential towards unforeseen goals (i.e. when a park becomes a community garden). Over-scribing, on the other hand, entails radical resignification of physical spaces that contravenes the original functions defined by the plan, eventually subverting mechanisms of access to services (i.e. the access to subsidized apartments through illegal occupation). Both cases presented here deal with female figures who managed to alter the vision behind the formal plan.

The first example is the reuse and regeneration of an abandoned public park as a practice of trans-scription of the plan, which aimed to create a metropolitan scale green space. park was built in the late 1990's but it was soon abandoned due to the lack of funds for management and maintenance.

After years of neglect and vandalizations, in 2015 part of the park was converted in vegetable gardens under an agreement between the Municipality and the public health care authority for drug addiction. A key actor of the process was a female employee of the local health care who negotiated with the local government and obtained the authorization to officially start the project. Few years later the project was implemented and a specific body to manage the 150 vegetable gardens was created involving retired citizens. The key actor of the operation – the woman who worked as an informal manager of the process – aimed to convert the function of the existing park (from leisure to therapeutic gardening) as a first step. Later the management of the area was transferred from a public body to a citizen informal organization. This example of a female leadership is an example of trans-scription, as it entails new uses and collective organization of land management that were negotiated and agreed-upon with the state and were not too far from the script of the public park envisaged by the formal plan.

The second example is a case of over-script. It is connected to the assignation of subsidized apartments. The plan provided a specific ranking to assign the apartments to people who had lost their home after the earthquake, as well as to people that were prior in a condition of fragility. During the formation of the ranking list, however, part of the apartments under construction were occupied by families close to political movements for housing rights. These squatters were subverting the assignment order of the local housing corporation and were thus opening a disruptive trajectory in the housing policy implementation process – they were over-scribing the plan's rules. In the squatter movement a female leader activated a self-organized service to cope with the absence of electricity and water utilities, and she also led an attempt of regularization for hundreds of tenants during various amnesties. After thirty years this female leader still performs her role of informal



manager in a community still struggling to gain regular tenementship: even though the amnesties acknowledged these people's housing rights, they still don't have a regular rent contract with the Municipality.

These two examples provide just a hint about how women perform critical practices of alteration of the logics of the formal plan, changing some of the logics and intentions contained in it.

### 3. Considerations for a future gender sensitive planning agenda

Gender issues in planning matter. Especially in pandemic times, when discourses on women's roles focus on housekeeping and motherhood as individual and private contribution to collective life. We maintain that the individual and the private in public housing have much to do with the public sphere, where 'the ordinary' – the daily life that women contribute to organize and reorganize – is a lens to understand deeper processes involving gender. Our reconstruction was elaborated starting from encounters and collaborations with women as inhabitants and operators that put their efforts to cope with a neighborhood plan which failed in accommodating people's and family needs, and among them we selected two outstanding women figures to discuss their agentic role.

In our interpretation, the plan confirms that gender is pervasive even when a gender perspective is not explicitly addressed in planning tools and that the distribution of gender roles is influenced but not fully determined by urban plans (what we conceptualized as "scripts"), because new trajectories such as trans-cription and over-cription may emerge. Both trans- and over- "scription" deal with power, in one case a form of disruptive power (the squatting), in the other a form of expanding, "collaborative" power (the public park). However, the gendered content of these inscriptions is about how specifically gender matters in creating assemblages and networks that are conducive to these effects. In both cases the intervention of a woman altered the script by means of a female leadership. Their power was twofold. On one hand, it was able to partially change the Plan and the effects of its partial application (i.e. when the park was reopened). On the other hand, it was able to introduce practices of maintenance where they were not provided by the original plan. Nonetheless, their female leadership differ from each other. As for the example of squatting, the gendered content of a female leadership is about female roles in a traditional society that – at that time when squatting occurred – was still deeply connected to national political parties. Just because the actor is a woman (and a "lady") this form of leadership is capable to come across different life worlds (from formal institutions to criminal powers) assembling things, people and norms in such a way to keep the housing rights politics alive. Here we have a traditional inclusive female figure straddling over different life worlds – her working-class legacy and her left-wing political activism. As for the public park, the female leadership worked to gather together a community made of institutions, operators of social services, prior addicted people during their rehab and part of the neighborhood's inhabitants. Despite the difficulties to obtain the reopening of the park and an extensive list of impediments – e.g. procedural complicacies, recognition by the organized criminal powers which had interests in keeping the area closed – she could set up a narrative and a practical organizational system to support the process both at the local and at the supralocal scale. Her narrative was legitimated by her career and personal success in the institutional service in which she operated as a care-taker of addicted people and their families. When the community was expanded to include not only people assisted by the health services, her image of caretaker was kept alive and alimanted the process and the diffusion of practices of self-maintenance of the park as part of community care work.

The aspects of power connected to outstanding women constitute an integral part of the planning agenda we wish to contribute to, stating that experimental methodologies are needed to explore women as individuals whose gender characteristics (social attributes) activate powerful networks to introduce forms of self-maintenance when official planning is weak or ineffective to address people's needs. Starting from the analysis of the post-earthquake masterplan we:

Investigated through practices of self-maintenance the presence of seeds of innovative ideas involving the women's' role and how they were capable of transforming maintenance in a socio-political reassembling instead of a routinary act (Sormani, Strebel and Bovet, 2015).

How women occupied institutional voids to alter power dynamics inscribed in the official planning process (the assignation of subsidized apartments and the top-down management of a public park) to have a more nuanced understanding of power dynamic of a "spatial text" (Moore, 1985).

To conclude, we maintain that gender configurations may be altered in microspaces of state-led failed planned areas such as residential neighborhoods, but that small and local alterations have limited effects in reconfiguring the more general organization of gender roles also because they are ignored/removed from planning studies.

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, how women operate beyond their traceable roles (e.g. family mothers, employees of public institutions, managers of public services) is of great interest and needs further explorations. The transformation of gender roles benefits from opportunities rooted in how physical space is maintained and how it may expand far beyond an ordinary act.

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# Spatial preconditions for publicness for cultural encounters and social integration

**Melissa Anna Murphy**, Ph.D. Associate Professor in Urban and Regional Planning; Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Faculty for Landscape and Society (Norway); [memu@nmbu.no](mailto:memu@nmbu.no)

**Beata Sirowy**, Ph.D. Researcher in Urban and Regional Planning; Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Faculty for Landscape and Society (Norway); [beata.sirowy@nmbu.no](mailto:beata.sirowy@nmbu.no)

**Session:** 3 – *Publicness in middle-class large housing complexes as a new way to examine the premises of cultural encounters and social integration.* Chairs: Marie Glaser and Ellen Braae

## ABSTRACT

Today's postwar housing estates are the subjects of urban renewal projects across the western world. The physical environments are renovated and renewed alongside goals for increasing social integration, often related to how diverse residents meet and learn from each other. In Norway, we see these renewal projects producing and changing spaces of publicness but question to what extent are spatial contexts considered as preconditions that may limit or enable these meetings of publicness. This paper seeks to add knowledge about spatial preconditions for publicness by mapping potentials for publicness in both public and common but privately-owned spaces of a postwar housing estate suburb of Drammen, Norway. Beginning at the door to an apartment and moving to the street and nearest public spaces, the study describes the various extents of "publics" one can meet during chance encounters. This mapping runs parallel to the local policies, rules, practices, organized social activities and physical conditions like locked doors that work to limit or enable the breadth and diversity of the populations that may interact. We find that indoor spaces originally designed for sharing have gradually been subject to increased controls. Outdoor spaces originally left up to the housing cooperatives have become subject to redesign, programming, and rebuilding by the municipality in a renewal project. We argue that this renewal, as many recently criticized in Norway, has invested heavily in new spaces for publicness without fully analyzing the spatial potentials and limitations of the existing environment. Discussing the findings of this study highlights a gap of understanding of spatial preconditions for publicness and weighting on organized activities for social integration in Norwegian urban renewal practice.

**Keywords:** Public space; Common space; Urban design.

## INTRODUCTION

We expect the design of housing areas and public space to support social goals like cultural encounter and social integration, often without understanding how space can encourage and hinder interaction between people. This paper examines spatial preconditions for supporting *publicness* - framed broadly here as diverse interactions between people, affected by how “the material world pushes back on” (Yaneva 2009, 277) them to encourage or limit encounter. Informed by a “relational and (inter)subjective” approach, we see that interactions transcend presupposed spatial functions (Tornaghi 2015, 24).

### 1. Public and common spaces

#### 1.1. Social expectations of public and common space

Public space is widely promoted for supporting encounters amongst diversity (Madanipour 2003). Urban life can attract other people, keeping streets safe and establishing a sense of trust amongst residents (Jacobs 1961; Whyte 1980). Residential common spaces allow neighbourly meetings and escapes from urban anxiety (Alexander 1977). Postwar housing estates, largely designed after LeCorbusier’s (1931) modernist ideals, incorporated common shared indoor facilities to materially promote social interactions inside residential buildings.

#### 1.2. Framing degrees of publicness

Earlier conceptualizations of publicness (Németh and Schmidt 2011; Varna and Tiesdell 2010; Tornaghi 2015) define dimensions that contribute to public access, often prioritizing physical accessibility. Our housing estate findings reveal clear differences in three types of access which we scale relatively, using low numbers to reflect the least support for diverse groups to spend time and potentially meet:

- Policy access – affecting the breadth of who is allowed to access a space, by level: 0 – access by one person at a time; 1 – access by an individual household and their personal invited network; 2 – access by residents sharing building floor; 3 – access by a defined subset of residents, for example one building’s residents; 4- access by all estate residents; 5 – access by a subset of the general public, for example by reservation or membership; 6 - open access to all.
- Material access – physical locks or restrictions on access, by level: 0 –locked, requiring access; 3 – unlocked with deterrents to access; 6 – no material restrictions on access.
- Psychological access – incorporating social norms, comfort, experiences, and perceptions encouraging spending time in a space, by level: 0 – high sense of discomfort, non-belonging, or otherwise discouraging to those without invitation, 3 – vague feelings of discomfort or being out of place to outsiders, 6 – comfortable and welcoming for all

## 2. Methods

Part of the research project “Public space in European social housing,” this paper is part of a case study using observation studies and architectural drawing reviews, as well as interviews with residents and municipal actors involved in the upgrades. Spaces are ranked based on information triangulated from these sources alongside the research team’s own embodied experience entering the site as outsiders. The categories themselves are derived by an iterative grounded theory process, where trends in the data inform our



interpretation of theoretical conceptualizations of publicness. Ranking of spaces is thereby not objective, but consistently measured relatively between different spaces on the case.

### 3. Case limitations and potentials for publicness

Fjell, in Drammen, Norway is a post-war housing estate completed in 1976. Substantial social and public space upgrades to Fjell's public spaces were carried out between 2010-2020, where integration goals include higher employment rates, better language skills, increased tolerance, and more participation in local government. The ca 3000 estate residents are culturally diverse, with more than 50% estimated to have a non-Norwegian background.

#### 3.1. Limitations of publicness from Fjell's urban fabric

Fjell was planned on the periphery of a small city, as a physical enclave without through-routes. This quality and Fjell's residential nature limit how many different kinds of people come to and use the site's spaces. The area functions predominantly for its own residents, though it draws people from the district to its upgraded spaces, school, and public buildings despite its stigmatized reputation.

#### 3.2. Municipally organized social meeting

A recent renewal project targeted Fjell with social integration goals. These are physically manifested in a new hub building hosting a youth club, meeting rooms, sports, public services, and library facilities. A local volunteer coordinator assists in encouraging and organizing different activities posed by district residents. Municipal efforts have been successful in inviting different groups, like local women, to meet across cultures, but these are dependent upon the municipality's resources and capacity for facilitation. The vulnerability of such became apparent during the COVID pandemic, when organized activities were cancelled and the hub closed for several months.

### 4. Findings: Publicness zones by breadth of encounter

To understand the everyday potentials for diverse encounter, a mapping study compares spaces from within a high-rise residential building out to its nearest public spaces. Indoor and outdoor spaces are ranked (Table 1), then mapped (Fig. 1-2) to understand the spatial preconditions for diverse people to access, meet, and have social exchanges.

Spatial description	Policy access	Material access	Psychological access	Sum
Private outdoor parking areas	0	0	0	0
Interior spaces where people cannot meet due to access or size limitations.	0	0	0	0
Interior spaces where one must be a resident or invited for access accommodate the narrowest of publics.	1	0	0	1
Common hallways support chance meetings of all those living on the	2	0	0	2

same floor of a building, plus their invited social network.				
Locked, and very specific rooms common to a building or building entrance can support meetings amongst anyone in the building.	3	0	0	3
Uncomfortable outdoor spaces that lack amenities and are too steep or wooded to be commonly used.	5	3	0	8
Unlocked indoor common rooms, stairs and elevators, including landings, lobbies, and private balconies that may support exchange amongst residents.	3	3	3	9
Elementary school, district house, and new hub building all invite a broad public for specific reasons and during restricted opening hours.	5	0	6	11
Appropriated spaces that are highly decorated and used almost exclusively by few residents with their invited guests.	4	6	3	13
Residential parking areas	4	6	3	13
Streets, driveways, and public parking	6	6	3	15
Shopping centre central in the site has a pizza restaurant and Turkish grocery with a great deal of potential to support chance meetings.	6	6	3	15
Extroverted appropriated spaces can also be found by most building's entrances with benches and picnic tables.	4	6	6	16
Playground areas designated by specific sport and age group and lacking amenities for a broader public than interested children and their caretakers.	4	6	6	16
Open lawns, local paths, free-situated picnic tables, shared waste sorting areas, and small playgrounds easily mix residents from nearby buildings.	5	6	6	17
Large central football field that accommodates many different types of uses and users simultaneously.	6	6	6	18
Sidewalks, bus stops, and main circulation paths through the site.	6	6	6	18

**Indoor zones of publicness degree in a high-rise block (as planned) defined by policy, material, and psychological access:**

Spatial description	Policy access	Material access	Psychological access	Sum
Interior spaces where people cannot meet due to access or size limitations.	0	0	0	0
Interior spaces where one must be a resident or invited for access accommodate the narrowest of publics.	1	0	0	1
Common hallways support chance meetings of all those living on the same floor of a building, plus their invited social network.	2	0	0	2
Locked, and very specific rooms common to a building or building entrance can support meetings amongst anyone in the building.	3	0	0	3
Unlocked indoor common rooms, stairs and elevators, including landings, lobbies, and private balconies that may support exchange amongst residents.	3	3	3	9

**Outdoor zones of publicness degree defined by policy, material, and psychological access:**

Spatial description	Policy access	Material access	Psychological access	Sum
Uncomfortable outdoor spaces that lack amenities and are too steep or wooded to be commonly used.	5	3	0	8
Elementary school, district house, and new hub building all invite a broad public for specific reasons and during restricted opening hours.	5	0	6	11
Appropriated spaces that are highly decorated and used almost exclusively by few residents with their invited guests.	4	6	3	13
Residential parking areas	4	6	3	13
Streets, driveways, and public parking	6	6	3	15
Shopping centre central in the site has a pizza restaurant and Turkish grocery with a great deal of potential to support chance meetings.	6	6	3	15
Extroverted appropriated spaces can also be found by most building's entrances with benches and picnic tables.	4	6	6	16
Playground areas designated by specific sport and age group and lacking amenities for a broader public than interested children and their caretakers.	4	6	6	16
Open lawns, local paths, free-situated picnic tables, shared waste sorting areas, and small playgrounds easily mix residents from nearby buildings.	5	6	6	17
Large central football field that accommodates many different types of uses and users simultaneously.	6	6	6	18
Sidewalks, bus stops, and main circulation paths through the site.	6	6	6	18



Fig.1 – Degrees of publicness at one Fjell residential high-rise (as originally planned). Source: by author.





Fig.2 – Degrees of publicness outdoors at Fjell. Source: by author.

## 5. Discussion: Spatial preconditions

Moving beyond preconceptions of the role of ownership or physical access alone, we find we find much more fluidity in the extent people might meet both inside and outside buildings, on private and public property by relatively ranking policy, material, and psychological access together.

### 5.1. Materiality plays a significant role

Locked rooms inside the residential buildings are limited in supporting publicness, but it is also important to acknowledge that material locks also significantly lower access in the site's upgraded public buildings. Rooms with specific, narrow purpose reduce the actual meetings that take place in either building type. Several meeting rooms are commonly appropriated by established groups – family or private friends, neighbours, or cooperative boards. Locking or requiring booking of rooms means they only open for invited publics rather than broadly supporting chance meetings.

In the high-rise, largest and most commonly accessed of planned common rooms that are locked – like baby carriage storage and bicycle rooms - can operate more like unlocked rooms if they are populated often enough to spark chance exchanges. An informant tells about kids bicycling through some of the storage rooms while their parents watch and chat. These potentials are further emphasized where there is furniture or shared amenities that encourage residents to spend more time – increasing the chances of meeting and interacting with others.

The public buildings draw a broader public but can likewise pose limits with locks and specific purposes. Access to the hub beyond the children's library has to be booked in advanced, as each floor of the building requires key cards, restricting its use to multiple sub-sets. This contrasts with the site's shopping centre – not upgraded due to private ownership – but with an interior circulation space that remains unlocked most of the time. The building's age leaves much of it empty, which can psychologically discourage use despite central location, but it is worthy to note that its material access supersedes all the public buildings on the site.

### 5.2. Psychological access combines materiality and experience

Experiences of use can detract from otherwise public-seeming spaces, as shown by sidewalks. Despite being public, sidewalks prove difficult to categorize here since interactions among them are hindered by adjacent traffic. They are observed as less used than main, quieter, pedestrian pathways through the summer, where people often stop spontaneously to chat. At the same time, the sidewalks are much better lit and cleared of snow and ice than the other paths, making them the predominant routes in winter. Streets and driveways, even if publicly owned, have low psychological access scores alongside parking areas because car presence deters from social interaction and comfort – privatised through “invasion” (Carmona 2010). As residential parking spots are strictly assigned per unit, they can encourage chance meetings amongst passers-by and can incite conflict when used outside of the established norms and regulations – in contrast to private parking in Fjell which fully restricts access.

Privately-owned outdoor spaces can be experienced as more or less public. The main entries and areas around the base of each high rise primarily accommodate residents, though spaces further out can be shared with nearby residents and their guests. Without physical barriers or locked doors, more subtle design elements encourage different levels of intimacy, causing outsiders to feel they are intruding - particularly where residents have added hedges, plants, furniture, and decoration over time or where specific groups are regularly present. Other residents recognize and describe regular groups, often defining them by language or cultural background, age, or gender group when users are insular. The more extroverted appropriated spaces feel more inviting and host interactions with passers-by. While these areas also tend to have regular users, they spark more extroverted exchanges. Other standard picnic tables and even small playgrounds without personalization or regular users seem quite public and anonymous even if privately owned.



### 5.3. Policy and ownership do not preclude diverse interactions

Many spaces owned by the building cooperatives offer amenities that encourage residents from different buildings to interact and share spaces. The breadth of who meets here may vary slightly depending on how close spaces are to well-trafficked pedestrian ways, bus stops, or building entrances but can generally support chance encounters without high levels of conflict or appropriation. These are still on private land but are perceived as public, as notable through a debate regarding handicap accessibility at the playgrounds and resident reports of uncertainty in which tables they are allowed to use. Interestingly, many of these areas might attract a broader group than many upgraded publicly-owned play areas, which were designed for specific subsets of the public. Here we see that both privately and publicly owned spaces can have reduced degrees of publicness because who they serve is limited by the activities they physically support. The municipal renewal policy intended to encourage social meeting, but prioritized children and separation of activities in most of the design, leaving few spaces that draw a broader public on the estate – though a plaza still under construction is intended to do so.

Otherwise limited (by age-group or activity) playgrounds still can support chance meetings between previously unknown residents and encourage pick-up games of sport since they are not restricted to organized events. However, some spaces are so designated to specific activity - like two volleyball courts and several new small football fields - that they do not support other uses. In absence of volleyball interest, designated spaces go unused. The spaces that function to support the broadest and potentially most diverse interactions do not restrict who can access them or who might meet by chance. The main football field, plays a surprisingly public role because it hosts a wide variety of children and adults walking, playing with their dogs, riding bikes, sitting in groups, and playing other sports as well as football. The centrality, size and openness of this field with sight from many adjacent windows offers it safety through informal surveillance (Jacobs 1961). This space needed no major upgrades to support interactions. The main pedestrian routes, however, did benefit from the renewal, as the municipality succeeded in making a couple of otherwise too steep or too thickly forested areas more accessible. The pedestrian pathways appear more able to support interactions after to the upgrades.

## CONCLUSIONS

Several spatial preconditions contribute to the breadth of interactions a space can support. Within residential buildings we find concrete limitations like locks and policies to narrow access, while outside, the potentials fluctuate more based on experience, perception, and social norms. These degrees of publicness can transcend public ownership and expectations. Spontaneous, everyday interactions between diverse residents can be well supported on privately owned land and along upgraded pathways. Such interactions are far more limited in public buildings and Fjell's public spaces due to tendencies towards material and policy access restrictions. Interactions and potentials for cultural encounter in Fjell transcend the spaces and organized activities of the site's renewal. Insight into the spatial preconditions that support and inhibit interactions might have better informed the upgrade's investments to assess spaces based on their potential for supporting diverse encounters.

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# Social transformations of inhabited spaces in Sofia, Bulgaria

**Clara Sandrini**, Architecte DPLG, Dr. et HDR en Architecture, Professeure à l'ENSA de Paris-Val de Seine, Chercheure au CRH-LAVUE, clara.sandrini@paris-valdeseine.archi.fr

**Session:** 3 – *Publicness in middle-class large housing complexes as a new way to examine the premises of cultural encounters and social integration*

## ABSTRACT

Bulgarian mass housing complexes, built during the socialist period, present a singular face. The inhabitants are all owners of their dwellings, which were delivered to them unfinished. They participated in the interior design of the buildings from the very beginning of their construction and have since carried out visible exterior renovation work. Each dwelling is therefore individualized within the housing complex, with more or less important transformations on the facade. Moreover, this ownership status, combined with the legacy of Ottoman law and the socialist rules of land management, engaged them in a process of collective management of common spaces, both inside and outside. The studies conducted by the Bulgarian architecture research collective of ENSA Toulouse, showed a system of tacit organization by stairwell, allowing them to co-manage the interior spaces and to co-manage and develop the in between exterior spaces. Thus, these outdoor spaces are cut out in space and time of day to allow all the resident groups to use them. They are punctuated by ephemeral, temporary or durable arrangements, whose construction is part of a citywide reuse perspective, and whose layout reflects several levels of privatization. These collective housing complexes present a participative aesthetic that articulates state constructions and private interventions. They offer to read different scales of common spaces that the paper will present, based on several neighborhoods, located in the city center and on the outskirts of Sofia, Bulgaria. She will be able to register in sessions 3 or 6.

## INTRODUCTION

Bulgarian collective housing complexes, built after the Second World War and during the socialist period, present a singular aspect. The research group on Bulgarian architecture from the Architecture School (ENSA) of Toulouse conducted surveys in Sofia, Varna and Plovdiv between 2011 and 2018. It sought to understand the planning and construction process of these housing complexes, based on archival sources, interviews with political actors and design architects. It also developed field surveys in order to observe the inhabitant's practices and the transformations of the interior and exterior spaces of the dwellings. The studies carried out on the city of Sofia were the foundation of the entire scientific approach undertaken on the Bulgarian territory. They were conducted with colleagues from the University of Architecture Civil engineering and Geodesy (UACG), and in partnership with the French Institute of Bulgaria, where they were regularly presented.

### 1. A singular socialist planning

Located at the base of the Vitosha Mountain, Sofia was the object of successive urban planning after the Second World War, which considerably enlarged the urban territory by organizing the construction of gilo or micro-districts. These new districts, whose design is similar to the notion of neighborhood units, were intended to be autonomous: they have their own administrative centers, facilities and outdoor spaces. Planned and built at different times, they do not all have the same urban and architectural morphology.

The housing units built in these gilo and micro-districts also respond to an adapted vision of the Soviet economy: the "socialist" system put in place after the Second World War has indeed reserved the right for the inhabitants to own their housing, even if the land had been collectivized. The original property deeds even specify that the inhabitants own a percentage of this collective land, without this being spatialized. This percentage differs, however, between the gilo or the micro-districts, depending on the total surface of the development.

These dwellings were designed by Bulgarian architects who, very often, had the opportunity to do part of their studies abroad. USSR was of course the main destination, but from the 1970s, they also came to western Europe. Thus they mixed cultural models and housing typologies. Soon a diversity of collective dwellings started to emerge, whereas it was unheard in the former Eastern European countries with planned economy originated from Moscow. In order to reduce construction costs, these dwellings were delivered unfinished. These state buildings provided the roofing and the underground networks. Each flat was also provided with water, gas and electricity supplies, but the interior finishing and the furnishing of the rooms (sanitary facilities, bathroom, and kitchen) was left to the owners, depending on the materials and furniture available.

### 2. Mass housing adapted by the residents

Therefore, the inhabitants participated in the interior design of their dwellings as soon as the buildings were delivered. The shortage of materials spread out these fittings over time and led the inhabitants to use recycled materials from the renovation of buildings in the city center. Each flat was in fact individualized as soon as they moved in, even if the interior finishing work took many years. The outdoor areas, which are collectively owned by the residents, were also delivered unfinished, apart from the areas dedicated to public facilities, street furniture and children's playgrounds, which were delivered and laid out according to models predefined by the State. During the socialist period, the inhabitants were obliged to arrange and maintain these outdoor spaces one day per month. Beyond this obligation, they developed common spaces, again using recycled materials and adapting the facilities to their needs.

Gradually, the inhabitants were also confronted with the maintenance of the common parts of the buildings. Here again, they organized themselves for routine repairs, cleaning. For major repairs, they called on the know-how of each person, by pooling skills, at the level of construction unit groups and buildings. Thus, the status of owners, combined with the heritage of Ottoman law and the socialist rules of land management, committed them to a process of collective management of the common spaces, both inside and outside.

The dwellings have been subject to visible external renovation since the beginning of their construction. The inhabitants have changed the windows, buying or using reused materials. Some have turned their balconies into an extra room. Others have repainted their flaking facades. And, in the context of energy renovations, many dwellings have been covered with insulation from the outside. This process doesn't apply to the whole building or stairwell. The installation of the insulation, as well as its thickness, depends on the economic resources of the inhabitants. Therefore, each dwelling is individualized within the housing estate, with more or less extensive transformations to the façade. The micro-districts of the city of Sofia have different aspects, linked to their position in the city, their construction dates and the individual and collective skills of the inhabitants.

The proximity to the city center or the existence of a public transport network (tramway, trolley bus or metro) facilitates the movement of reused materials from the city center to the periphery. The micro-districts built later, in the 1980s, are only just beginning to undergo individual transformations: better designed, according to the architects, they do not require energy rehabilitation. But some of Sofia's micro-districts offer different scales of common spaces, both in the rehabilitation of the buildings and in the design of the external spaces.

### 3. A hierarchy of Common spaces

Three micro-districts are representative of the way people share collective spaces: Lozenets, to the south of the city center, Drujba, to the east of the city, and Lyulin, located to the west. The micro-district of Lozenets is part of the continuity of the historical urban fabric: it shapes the urban fabric of a suburb where several periods of construction are represented. This urban fabric is made up of individual houses, apartment buildings and facilities: it appears as a green district with many parks and gardens, a forest crossed by the tramway and the city zoo. In the 17th century, Lozenets was a small village on the outskirts of Sofia, surrounded by forests. It had many Catholic and Orthodox temples, the remains of which still exist at the edge of the district. Deforestation began at the beginning of the 19th century and, gradually, individual houses were replaced by multi-storey brick and concrete buildings. After the Second World War, the infrastructure was built and allowed better communication with the neighboring districts and the old center. And the heart of the district was restructured by one of the first micro-district of the city.

Today, numerous developments are appearing in the areas between two construction unit blocks and the ground floor of the buildings are being occupied. Several parts of the exterior areas have been privatized by the inhabitants. This privatization is marked by painted wooden fences which enclose a space that is generally furnished with self-built garden furniture, well-tended plantations and a floor covering borrowed from town center public spaces.

Sometimes the whole collective space is open to the view of the passerby, with hierarchical arrangements, as found out around the "VIP club". The outdoor space is not really delimited, but it is composed of vegetable gardens, storage spaces and rest areas. A do-it-yourself path leads to the central shelter, made by the inhabitants with recycled materials. It hosts several social groups depending on the time of day: women in the morning, men in the early afternoon, children in the late afternoon and young people in the evening.

The Drujba 1 micro-district is part of the gilo-district of the same name, and was built in the east of the city center. It consists of 170 housing complexes built between 1965 and 1984 and it is surrounded by major roads,



including the road from Sofia to Plovdiv. It shows a diversity of buildings, whose design and construction were spread over a long period of time: several typologies of buildings and housing shape the territory, from the artificial lake to the large boulevards.



Fig.1 – Photographic survey of the inhabitants' interventions in Lozenets (Emilie Calvet, Master 1 thesis, ENSA Toulouse)

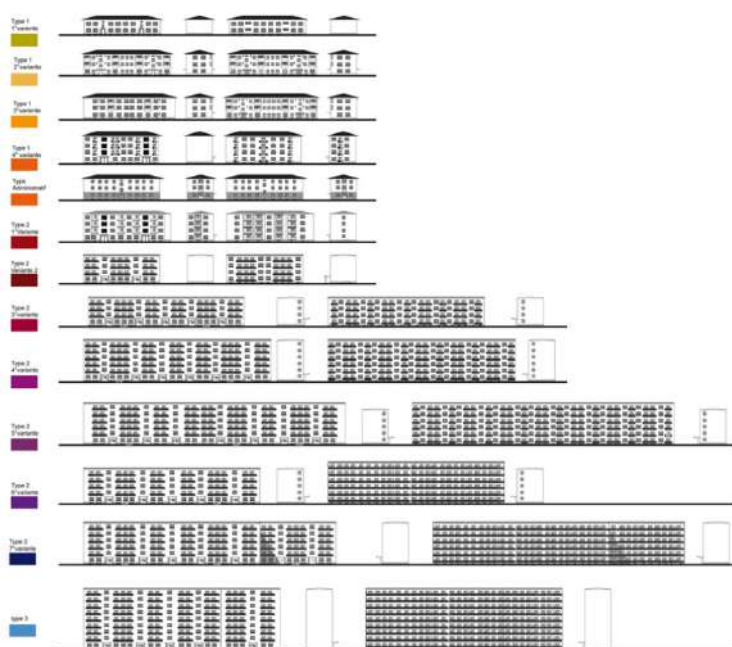


Fig.2 – Building typologies in Drujba 1 (Florie Medus, Master 1 thesis, ENSA Toulouse)

As in Lozenets, the outdoor spaces are developed, maintained and managed by the inhabitants. The distribution of the different types of buildings according to their functions, and the very location of the residential

buildings in relation to each other, create a more or less intimate spaces. Inhabitants' occupations are systematically located close to the buildings: they are concentrated in the grassy areas in-between construction units, which stand as an extension of the dwellings.

To be more precise, these occupations of space are organized by stairwell. The inhabitants informally elect a "stairwell manager" who manages the budget, maintenance and repairs. A local tax is collected by the town hall of the gilo-district and is officially redistributed to each building and then informally to each stairwell. The inhabitants who have more financial means add a share to these taxes which can represent a large amount of the fund raised. This extra money is reflected by the quality of the renovations and the exterior fittings.

The diversity of architectural adaptations is also visible on the facades, where patchworks of coverings, with disparate paints and thicknesses are randomly distributed according to the position of the flats. The transformation of the original balconies is also a common phenomenon: in order to increase the interior surface of the dwelling, many inhabitants choose to fill in their balcony, transforming it into a veranda, a loggia, or an additional room. This proliferation of individual and collective interventions thus organizes a heterogeneous urban landscape. The hierarchy of the occupation of those shared spaces, is structured from the family unit to the group of houses.

The Lyulin gilo-district, in the west of the city center, is the largest in the Bulgarian capital. In the late 1960s, the Sofia Design Bureau (Sofprojekt) received a state order to build a socialist housing complex for 120,000 inhabitants on the site of the small village of Lyulin. The master plan was completed in 1969 and provided for the organization of the gilo-district into eleven micro-districts distributed along a cardo and a decumanus and a "green corridor", linking the "modern center" to the Zapaden park located to the south. This gilo-district was partly built in the seventies and eighties. Constructions kept built after the fall of the socialist regime, but in a haphazard manner and were often left to private investors.



Fig.3 – Transformations of a residential building in Lyulin, photograph by Clara Sandrini

The studies carried out in the residential part of the micro-district number 6 of Lyulin have highlighted an attitude of "laissez-faire" of the public authorities. The project was not carried out as a whole: the buildings that were supposed to face the green space connecting Zapaden Park to the modern center were never built, creating thresholds between residential and green space filled by wastelands and "modern ruins". The green

corridor is only a dream plan on paper, as it is now occupied by a landfill, a private car park, a shopping center and slums next to empty luxury buildings.

Within the residential spaces, however, the transformations of public space, common space and private space are taken over by the inhabitants, individually or collectively. The consensus between residents allows them to pool resources to renovate spaces. Tacit rules are created at different levels, as in Drujba : those of the landing, the stairwell, the building or the space in-between the construction units. Several inhabitants can thus establish a common project to install new insulation on the façade, others refurbish a cellar on the ground floor to set up a café while others repair the benches at the entrance to the building. This care given to the spaces allows the inhabitants to overcome the abandonment of the places by the public authorities since the fall of the socialist regime. It testifies the involvement of the inhabitants in the development of the space and a form of participation, posteriori to the construction of the apartment buildings.

#### 4. A division of space

The uniqueness of the city of Sofia lies in its cultural heritage, characterized by a heterotopia linked to communist planning and the legacy of Ottoman rules with a particular system of social organizations. The appropriation and the ephemeral, temporary or durable occupations of collective spaces create the conditions for sharing space and characterize it as the product of an interaction between the collectives of actors who conceived the city, those who built it and those who now occupy it.

The implementation of models throughout the territory according to communist planning, as well as the system of distribution of housing and land, have structured an urban space that seems uniform everywhere. However, each of the districts has a typological diversity which suggests that the Soviet model transposed to Bulgaria has been appropriated by the political authorities and by Bulgarian architects. In addition, this uniformity is matched by the appropriation of different spaces, from the most collective to the most private, which implies coordination in the implementation of occupations. The social practices indicate an appropriation of individual and collective space linked to a system of ownership of the habitat which includes part of the exterior spaces. The exteriors are thus divided up in space and time of day to allow all the inhabitant groups to use them. They are punctuated by ephemeral, temporary or durable facilities, the construction of which is part of a process of reuse on the scale of the city, and the layout of which shows several levels of privatization.

The result is a social logic: the sofiote space, private, common and public, is thus the representation of a superposition of the coordinated actions of the different collectives of actors opposing the space conceived, planned and built, to the space lived, diverted and occupied. The collective housing complexes thus present a participatory aesthetic which articulates state constructions and private interventions. They show a common space, product of a collective hijacking of the designed space which characterizes an a posteriori participation of the construction, and which shows the different levels of coordination of the users and inhabitants.

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## Shrinking the plan. A middle-class wishful thinking in the outskirts of Lisbon

**Leonor Matos Silva**, Dinâmia'CET, ISCTE-IUL; leonormatosilva@outlook.com

**Rogério Paulo Vieira de Almeida**, Faculty of Architecture, University of Lisbon; Dinâmia'CET, ISCTE-IUL; rogeriopaulo4@gmail.com

**Session:** 5 – *Middle Class Mass Housing: public / private joint-ventures*. Chair: Filipa Fiúza

### ABSTRACT

In the 1960s and 1970s, large-scale Portuguese architectural production was largely promoted by the State. This took further aspects after the 1974 revolution when housing construction became one of the pillars of the new state policy. It is in this context that Manuel Vicente develops the project for Quinta do Bacalhau in different times: 1– Before 1974 by EPUL as part of UNOR 26 of which M. Vicente was the coordinator, 2– From 1974 as a SAAL operation after the site was taken over by a residents' committee, 3– After 1976, as it was built outside the revolutionary period by a housing cooperative and financed by the state. Unlike most SAAL projects – small, contained and with low-row houses –, and despite the ideologically marked circumstances of this period, it presents somehow ostentatious. Volumes of broad and generous features, incorporation of commerce on the ground floors like a boulevard, contrast with the dominant model, thus raising some questions: – to what extent did a particular class position correspond to a certain typology, style, etc.? – wouldn't this imply an aspiration to the same “rights” as the middle-class, as far as architecture is concerned? M. Vicente remains throughout his life in an ideologically multifaceted position. Close to the Communist Party, he has a cosmopolitan experience still in the 1960s being in touch with the Western capitalism – in the United States and in Macao – and in close contact with the speculation and profit markets. It has thus a double folded stance regarding the state-sponsored housing and low standards one, as if responding to the residents were the same as responding to himself. In this communication we intend to analyse through drawings of the project how the notion of housing for “a middle-class” crossed through the project. This argument is revealed in a plan of a dwelling with dimensions close to middle-class, which is later reduced to smaller areas, but “keeping” architectural qualities.

**Keywords:** SAAL; Manuel Vicente; Housing in Lisbon.



## 1.

In 1974, Portuguese architecture was in a kind of crossroads situation. The revolutionary process after April 1974 led to a suspension of most construction works, the public ones as well as the private ones. The exception were the public social housing programs absorbed, in the meantime, by the peoples' revolutionary claims for proper houses, a claim made famous by the slogan "Peace, bread, health, housing". Therefore, social housing became an opportunity for established architects, young architects and students to engage with the revolution, and with the overall desire for a social transformation. In this context, this research points at how, at a certain time, at a given place, – the outskirts of Lisbon, in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution – there was a crisscross with different events, different actors. The goal was to provide an answer to a simple yet many times overshadowed question: a population aspiring to houses reflecting more a middle-class status and not carrying the stigma of housing for the so-called disadvantaged population. It was precisely this challenge that in a sense that can be found in an architectural design which carried some middle-class ideal principles.



Fig. 1 – Timeline, Portuguese political context in the 1970s

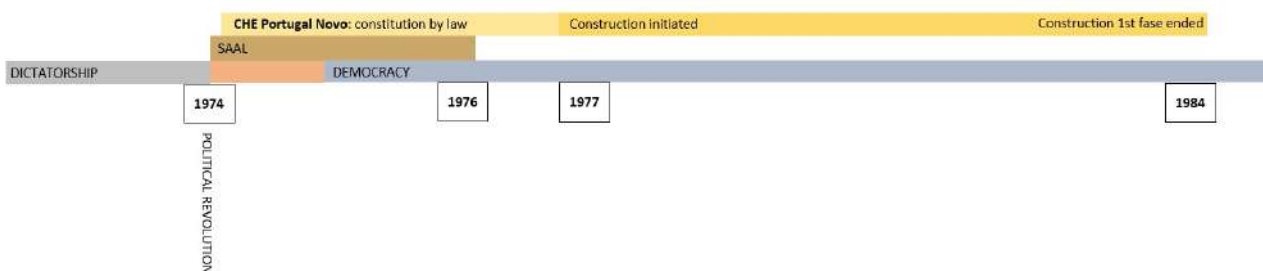


Fig. 2 – Timeline, Portugal Novo neighbourhood project and construction.

## 2.

The starting point for this paper is a plan from the late 1970s found between the sketches of a young architect for the "Portugal Novo" neighbourhood, in Lisbon, while a collaborator of architect Manuel Vicente. Manuel Vicente at the time was overseeing the overall project for rehousing the people from the Quinta do Bacalhau-Monte Coxo-R. Alberto Pimentel in one of the largest new housing schemes in Lisbon, – the New Portugal neighbourhood. While that young architect, Nuno Matos Silva, was monitoring a medium-scale architectural work in an outskirts area of Lisbon, he was also doing by himself some experiments with typologies for some uncertain future purpose.



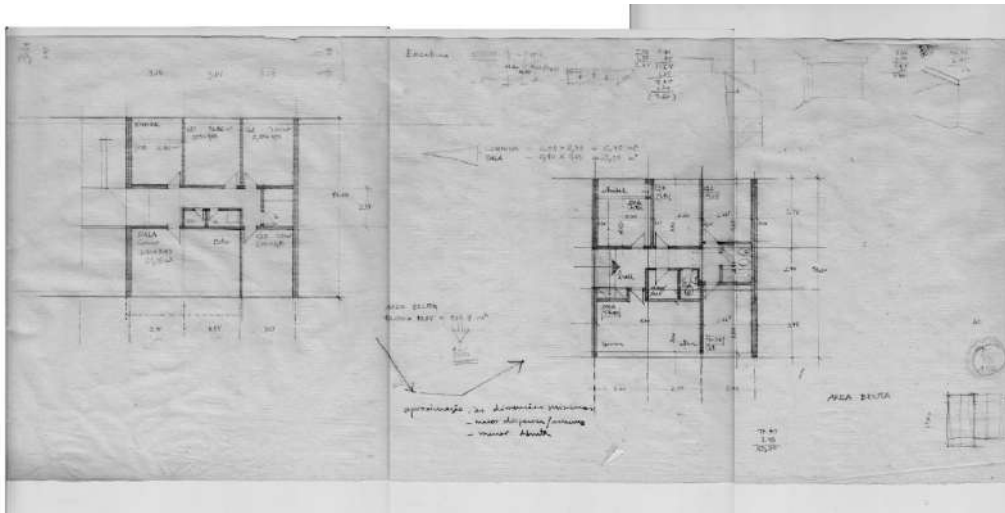


Fig. 3 – Drawing by Nuno Matos Silva, n.d. (ca.1974-1984)

At the time, experimentalism was on the agenda. Architects wanted to give needy populations the maximum comfort and dignity within an economic logic that intended to distribute the minimum to the maximum number of people. "Housing for the greatest number" became a commonplace. On the left of fig. 3, we see an ideal plan with larger areas. However, this "wishful thinking" immediately amended according to the minimum dimensions required on the legislation, as it can be seen in the plan on the right.

In a photo taken in 1997 by the already mentioned young architect, Manuel Vicente is at one of his works in Macao. Here, it is visible the architect's characteristic use of colour, the same colours – blue and yellow – already used in the neighbourhood New Portugal project – which we'll see ahead. In fact, the New Portugal neighbourhood was the announcement of the un-refrained intense colouring that will become a trend from the 1980s onwards.

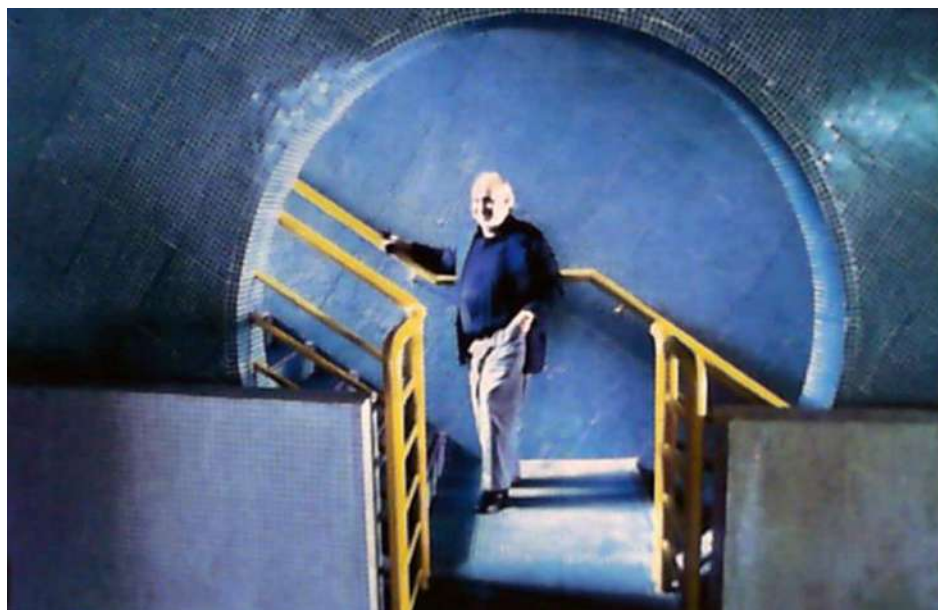


Fig. 4 – Architect Manuel Vicente (1934-2013). Photograph by Nuno Matos Silva

The colour was one of several features that made him a post-modern author. Well-travelled with a strong personality, a pupil of Louis Kahn, and living between Lisbon and Macao, he carried a unique cosmopolitanism that distinguishes him in the Portuguese architecture.

In the early 1970s he was designing urbanisation plans for the city of Lisbon, and in 1974 the revolution took place. After more than four decades of dictatorship, the eruption of the revolution in 1974 introduced a new watchword: freedom. And a year later, by the express will of the people, in free elections, democracy. Of course, the dominant values were the so-called left-wing ones, namely the distribution of wealth, equal rights and the public cause.

In the field of social housing, what distinguished this specific period (1974-1976) was the right to a place and self-construction. The needy populations, who lived in unhealthy shacks, claimed to remain where they lived and not to be re-located. The Local Ambulatory Support Service (SAAL) program was one of the main outcomes of the revolution concerning housing policies and was in force from mid-1974 to mid-1976. It consisted in the State providing support – financing, teams of architects, engineers, sociologists, etc. –, so that the populations could organize and manage and create themselves their own houses in the place where they lived. This programme had a strong impact in the architectural culture, as well a strong political engagement, evident in the fact that several of the most renowned Portuguese architects were appointed to make the projects (A. Siza, M. Vicente, S. Fernandez, F.S. Dias).



Fig. 5 – Intervention Area. SAAL Lisbon. Quinta do Bacalhau, Monte Coxo and Rua Alberto Pimentel, early 1970s



### 3.

The Cooperative New Portugal was created on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1974. Its purpose was to shelter the inhabitants of the slums of Quinta do Bacalhau, Monte Coxo and Rua Alberto Pimentel. As in most SAAL interventions, one first survey was made to determine how many families needed to be housed and other relevant issues concerning the socio-economical context. Then the architectural project was drawn up and only in 1977 did the construction work begin. By 1984 there were 221 dwellings fully built and inhabited, corresponding only to the first phase of the project.



Fig. 6 – Quinta do Bacalhau-Monte Coxo and Travessa do Noronha (Manuel Vicente's working atelier).  
Contact proof by Nuno Mato Silva

Before this process began, Quinta do Bacalhau-Monte Coxo was a place composed of a shantytown, a street and a countryside area, outside the consolidated city. The EPUL (Lisbon's Public Agency for Housing) stamp – as seen in the bottom right corner of a plan (fig. 5) – confirms us that this land was already in sight to be urbanised, already before the revolution. One of the main innovative aspects in the SAAL programme was the contact with the populations. In the post-revolutionary period, the planners – namely the younger ones, many of whom were still students, and who belonged to the so-called local support brigades – went to the shantytowns and attended to urgent sanitary problems, like the lack of electricity or water.



Fig. 7 - Quinta do Bacalhau-Monte Coxo and Travessa do Noronha (Manuel Vicente's working office).  
Contact proof by Nuno Matos Silva

The history of these on-site actions can be traced through several sets of photographs taken by the young collaborator of Manuel Vicente, Nuno Matos Silva. They are essentially of the shacks, of his family and of Manuel Vicente's office where he worked. In a contact proof (fig.7), one might acknowledge the poverty and the waste containers in the shacks, in contrast with what we supposed to be the office decoration (on the top right of the image): a woman dressed as a nun, with Che Guevara tattooed in her chest, an image revealing Manuel Vicente's strong personality.



Fig. 8 - CHE\* Portugal Novo/New Portugal \*(Economic Housing Cooperative) created 2 October 1974: political rally and football match. Contact proof by Nuno Matos Silva



Fig. 9 - CHE\* Portugal Novo/New Portugal \*(Economic Housing Cooperative) created 2 October 1974: political rally and football match. Contact proof by Nuno Matos Silva

One question here is: how did Manuel Vicente respond to the SAAL preposition of mediating an auto-construction by the residents in the shantytowns?

Another aspect we need to underline from these contact prints is the sessions' topic: the private/public joint ventures. The SAAL program was a government initiative. But soon, the residents' committees, like in many other SAAL locations, gave way into private cooperatives and the Economic Housing

Cooperative “Portugal Novo” (New Portugal) was created.

In one of the contact proofs (fig. 8), we see, on the bottom, a private football match and, on the top, a rally with posters where the following watchwords are written “Struggling for housing”, “No shacks”, “Residents’ committees”. One might say that sports and politics, as well as leisure, are two of many of the facets that a cooperative ranges.



Fig. 10 - Rua Alberto Pimentel (1 June 1975?; Children’s day). Photograph by Nuno Matos Silva

#### 4.

Fig. 10 shows the site before the construction. As we can see, this was a very rural place, almost bucolic. A privileged site for a dream house. The mentors of the Cooperative New Portugal wanted their homes with more than just simple features. According to Manuel Vicente, the people of the shacks wanted him to plan the house as it was for his own. He asks a question, in a João Dias film (2007) on his words: “On top of that misery, they still had to organize themselves?”.



Fig. 11 - Areeiro square, Lisbon. 1960s

Just a few hundred meters distant from the site, this was the formal and consolidated city, one of the most iconic urban squares in Lisbon (fig. 11).





Fig. 12 - Cooperative New Portugal: Architecture Project by Manuel Vicente. Implantation

Looking at the initial plan for the New Portugal neighbourhood, we see on the left the established city and on the extreme right the remaining rural areas within the city. The project, on the mid right, foresaw the construction of five housing blocks and an area for a building with school facilities. The site was a privileged one, and the plan was to absorb all the 350 families living in the shacks.

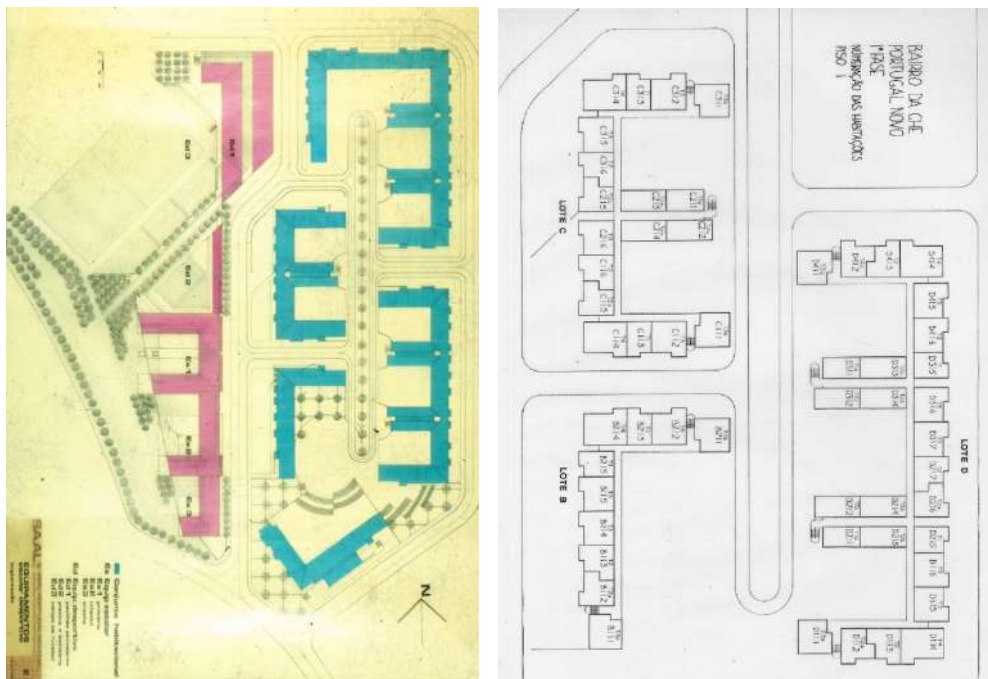


Fig. 12 - SAAL – CHE New Portugal: Architecture Project. Implantation. Housing and school and sports equipment and dwelling numbering- On the right: drawing by Nuno Matos Silva

The implantation of the planned blocks (fig. 13) shows great compositional richness by articulating the exterior roads with an inner street, and sequences of courtyards reflecting the “U” shape of the blocks. In blue, housing; in pink, school and sports facilities. What may have started as an imposing rule, at a close look reveals a much complex and rich design. The blocks are uneven, misaligned to each other. In the end they defy order and simplicity.

## 5.

From the initial project, 210 dwellings were built – with different types and for families of different dimensions. The plan on the right (fig. 13) shows in greater detail, the design of the blocks with their interconnections through exterior galleries and staircases. Both plans (fig. 13) show that the whole and its parts are carefully worked, minding the different dimensions and relations, and not just the pursuit of simplistic architectural codes.

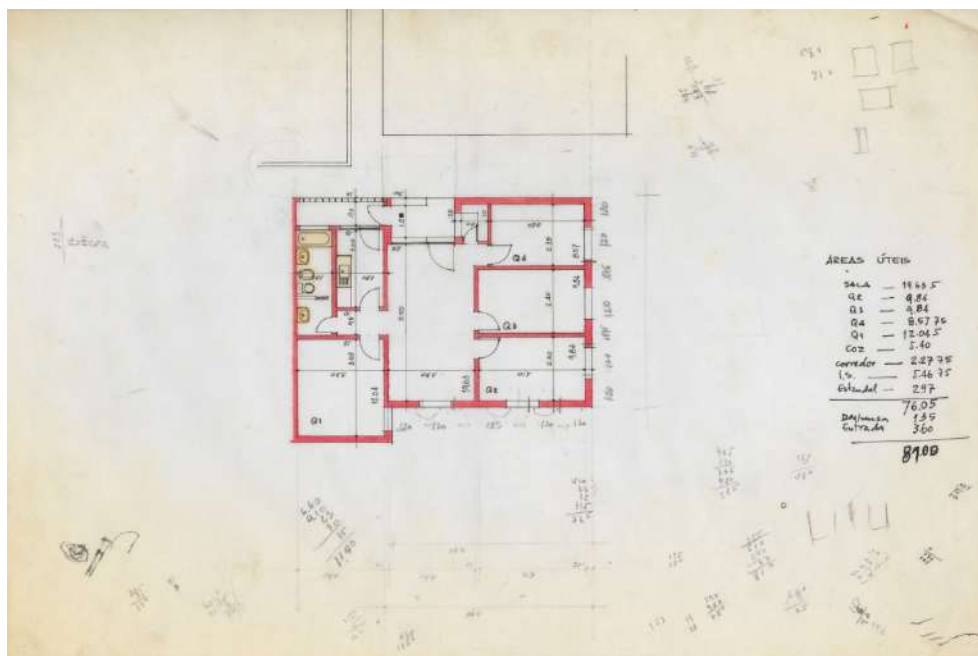


Fig. 13 - SAAL - Cooperative New Portugal: Architecture Project. Dwelling's numbering. Drawing by Nuno Matos Silva, n.d. (ca.1974-1984)

The plans of the apartments had to comply with the strict code regulations for social housing, and with strict budgets. These lead to organisations with open staircases and galleries to access the apartments. Nevertheless, the apartments in New Portugal reveal an attempt to go behind the strictness of the codes. In the plan of a 4-bedroom corner apartment (fig. 14), in addition to the gallery, a semi-public area guarantees a gradual passage between the inside and the outside, one first degree of privacy to the home.



Fig. 14 - SAAL - Cooperative New Portugal: Architecture Project being constructed. Photograph by Nuno Matos Silva, n.d. (ca. 1983)

What stroke the most was the dimension of the blocks. One sees that the supposedly three-storey high buildings became, in fact, and in some places five-storey high plus the ground floor (fig. 15). Regulations dictated that construction with no elevator could not be more than three floors high. But Manuel Vicente was not at ease with the idea of building the so-called houses for the poor, so he made a duplex on the last floor therefore making the buildings have a more visible size. In our view, Vicente proposed to ensure, as far as he could, what we may discuss as some middle-class principles in the 1970s: dimension and colour (it would be painted in blue and yellow). Other features, like a generous urban space and the inclusion of service facilities – like polyvalent rooms, a laundry, stores, etc. – made this place comparable to Olaias – which was this middle-class great endeavour on the background of the picture (fig. 15).

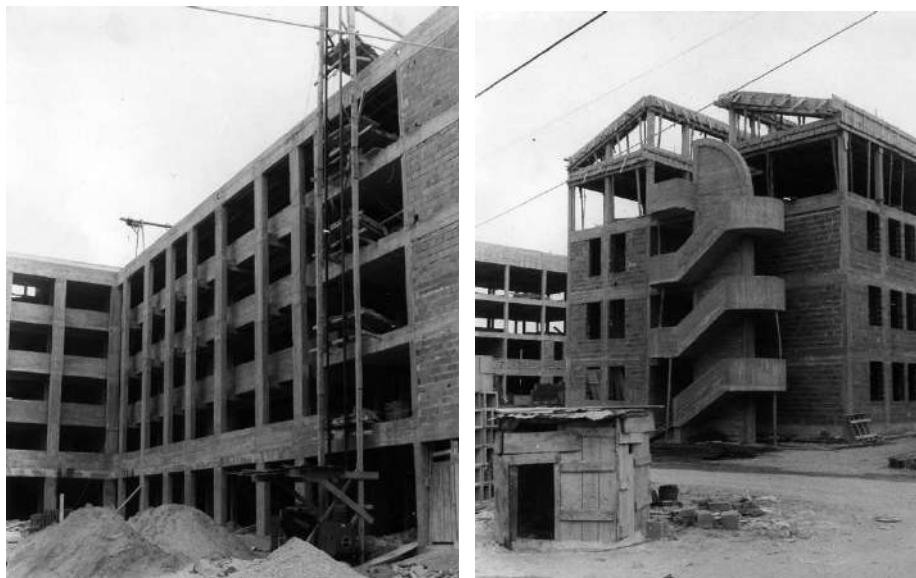


Fig. 15 - SAAL - Cooperative New Portugal: Architecture Project under construction. Photograph by Nuno Matos Silva, n.d. (ca. 1983)



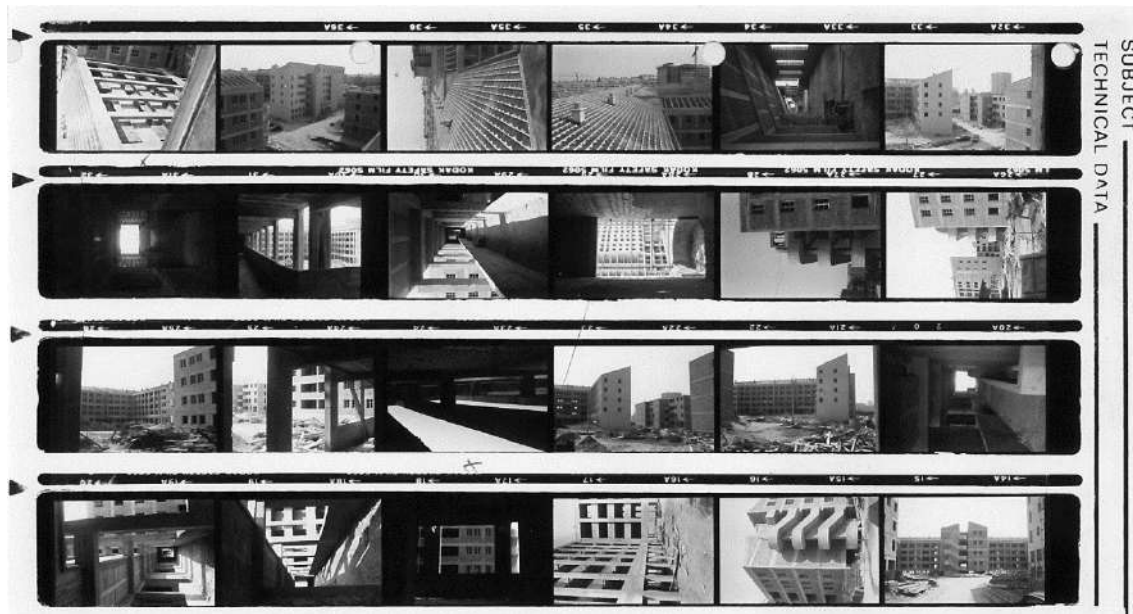


Fig. 16 - SAAL - Cooperative New Portugal: Architecture Project being constructed. Contact proof by Nuno Matos Silva, n.d. (ca. 1983)



Fig. 17 – SAAL interventions: New Portugal, Zambujal, Lagos, Porto (Top left to bottom right)

The remark about the striking dimension of the blocks may, today, seem enigmatic or anachronic. However, let's not forget that many of the SAAL interventions all over the country were rows of houses with one or two floors only. This was not the case in New Portugal neighbourhood, as we can see by comparing a few cases (fig. 18).

## 6.

The years have passed and, in 1987, the cooperative New Portugal went bankrupt. The neighbourhood became no man's land. What was supposed to be a perfect place to live became just one more dangerous neighbourhood in the country. Today, we may observe three stages in its development:

- First, the shacks' population where optimistically offered a kind of a dream house;
- second, the new houses were occupied, however the people's dream never fully fulfilled;
- third, this neighbourhood became a new sort of shantytown, or a 21<sup>st</sup> century ghetto.



Fig. 18 – Portugal Novo neighbourhood, current state

It is built in between bigger and uncharacterized buildings that minimize it, instead of applying the original project. There are people that have lived there since it was built; some others occupied it illegally, either buying a key, either just by simply awaiting someone to die to get in and occupy it. The ground floor stores have been occupied and electric cables been pushed down. The buildings need urgent maintenance, physically and socially: the iron bars of the concrete are visible at certain points, and some empty spaces are places of drug consumption.

Strangely enough, residents like to live there. On 25 March 2021, TVI broadcasted a TV news report: "New Portugal: the neighbourhood in the heart of Lisbon where the houses belong to no one". In it, the wife of member n° 1 of the cooperative testifies that she was 100% better when she moved from the shack to the New Portugal and that, even today, she would only move away if it was for a new, and legal, house at the same place.





Fig. 19 - Print screen from a TV report called “New Portugal: The neighbourhood in the heart of Lisbon where the houses belong to no one.”. 25 March 2021.

Still, on the 13 of May 2021, a Council of Ministries of Portugal Resolution promised to solve the situation. Unfortunately, for decades, the State didn't care about New Portugal as well as other similar neighbourhoods created in the mid-1970s. Nor the private sector. It is true that here are people still paying their rent to Caixa Geral de Depósitos, a public bank; however, these are remains of a wishful thinking similar to the one Manuel Vicente had when conceiving what we believed to be a middle-class intention proposal. In conclusion, we have three stages. The first is the creation of the private Cooperative New Portugal, which is going to provide ‘dream houses’ for the people in need. Then, in 1987, the Cooperative goes bankrupt, and the neighbourhood is no man's land. Lastly, the future. Again, in the TVI report, we hear the city's councillor for urbanism saying she will support whatever needed, either the rehabilitation of the building or its demolition.

## 7.

Having for background the Optimistic Suburbia moto, we might say that we wish the New Portugal neighbourhood and its residents to have a better outcome. Situated in a noble part of the city of Lisbon, may the neighbourhood not be demolished but rehabilitated. Some of the most important architectural principles still prevail. Also, it is important to finally acknowledge the right to the place for the people that live in it that the SAAL process claimed for.



Fig. 20 – Aerial view of the site, June 2021. Source: Google Earth.

This last image shows the consolidated city just a few hundred meters from the neighbourhood. After the 1974 Revolution, it was this dream that people were after, aspiring to a kind of middle-class status, both socially and in their homes.

## 8.

In this paper, we argued how some quite distant realities sometimes are quite related. Either physically, either conceptually, sometimes even in a more metaphysical sense.  
In the same sense that's what these last two sentences try to point at.

*What is immensely far, can be close*  
Heidegger, *The Thing*, 1950

*So far away, though standing near*  
ABBA, *S.O.S.*, 1975

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# The mass housing units as a possible typology for emergency housing

Miruna Moldovan; Technical University of Cluj-Napoca; miruna.moldovan@arch.utcluj.ro

Session: 5 – *Middle-Class Mass Housing: public/private joint-ventures*. Chair: Filipa Fiúza

## ABSTRACT

Large mass housing complexes built from the 1960s to the 1980s are a major component of the urban landscape of cities in Eastern Europe. In Communist Romania, most of them were designed as public socialist housing. Due to the fall of the regime and the privatizations of the early 1990s, they ended up as middle-class housing. Moreover, these large complexes had to adapt to different situations imposed by either their inhabitants or the public authorities, resulting in minor or major functional changes. One of these particular situations regarding the few public housing units that survived those privatizations is that they had to host or be transformed into emergency housing. The public authority provides them for people who find themselves in vulnerable positions such as being evicted or relocated due to poor or unsafe living conditions.

This research will address the question of whether the architectural typology of the mass (middle-class) large housing complexes can be suited to host emergency housing. This question is part of an ongoing doctoral research on specific typology for emergency housing. This paper proposes a compared architectural and social analysis of two case studies where units from large socialist housing complexes (situated in Bucharest and in Baia Mare) are being used as emergency housing. Four main analysis criteria will be used: the urban context (their place in the city and its impact on social life), the architecture (their initial architectural qualities and their further development), the administration (their poor management and crisis mediation), and the users (the daily life changes due to relocations). These case studies aim to emphasize the relationship between housing, vulnerability, and familiarity. Ultimately, this research aims to give an in-depth understanding of the versatility of the "middle-class" mass housing typologies and whether or not they can mediate various emergency situations today.

**Keywords:** emergency architecture; mass housing; emergency housing typology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The housing crisis is one of the most discussed themes of our generation. In a more globalized world than ever, people naturally strive to internationalize and standardize solutions for affordable or mass-housing, but tend to forget about the most important one: emergency housing. Emergency housing is an immediate architectural response to a crisis situation where one loses their house. A crisis is a temporary period of time of intense difficulty, danger and uncertainty. On a large scale, the loss of housing may be due to exceptional situations such as natural or environmental disasters or political and military conflicts. There are also small-scale situations in which people belonging to vulnerable or marginalized social groups lose their homes due to financial reasons, legal proceedings or home abandonments due to physical or emotional abuse. This paper is part of an on-going research that aims to discuss emergency housing typologies, having as a starting point the social relationship between a person and its home. The house, or architecture in general, is the formal setting of everyday life. In order to identify an optimal architectural typology, it is relevant to understand the life a person lives during a crisis situation. During the design process, anthropologist Hedda Askland states that “architects are increasingly turning to social science theory to seek relevance and impact of ideas.” (Askland, et al. 2014, 284).

In Romania, there have been identified two cases of emergency housing: the immediate shelter and the emergency housing unit (Ro: *locuința de necesitate*). The immediate shelter is a modular unit which uses one of the most common and globally used solutions - the container. Concerning the emergency housing unit, each city's public authority has a fund of units that are usually located in the large mass (middle-class) housing complexes built in socialist Romania. Therefore, this paper will address the question of the mass housing unit as a possible optimal emergency housing typology. In Romania, large middle-class housing complexes were mostly built between the 1960s and 1980s. During that time, the state was the sole investor and client. The state was also the one deciding to subsequently allocate those housing units mostly to the working class, based on criteria established by national laws. In those times, the people who benefited from those houses were forcibly displaced from rural to urban areas. With the fall of communism, in the 1990s, the mass privatization of almost the entire state-owned housing fund began. Due to the general state of chaos and national legislation uncertainty of the early years of democratic Romania, most of the housing units were bought at insignificant prices by private investors or the middle-class. However, there are some particular situations in which units or entire buildings from those complexes remained in the public administration and have been recently refunctionalized as emergency housing.

### 1.1. Research method

Two case studies in which units located in large mass-housing complexes are currently being used as emergency housing were chosen for analysis. They are situated in two Romanian major cities: one in the South - Bucharest (the capital city) and one in the North - Baia Mare. The emergency housing units were identified through official addresses provided by the public authority. To be able to establish whether these units are suitable to host emergency housing, a grid analysis with four main criteria was compiled: urban context, architecture, administration and users. The urban context seeks to understand whether the location, the settlement, the neighbourhood or the immediate site vicinity, have any influence on the inhabitant's social life during a crisis. At present, “neighbourhood is a topic of major interest in the field of urban sociology, urbanity itself being defined and conditioned by human interaction.” (Pipoș-Lupu 2019, 37) The architectural criteria focus on aspects related to functional or spatial characteristics and their development. The administration point seeks to clarify the legal status of emergency housing and their mostly controversial management. Last but not least, the user criteria seek to observe the inhabitant and its social life in exceptional situations. Losing one's home is a shock. Architecture should address this issue and should form a framework to mediate the upcoming social problems.



## 2. BUCHAREST

### 2.1. Urban context

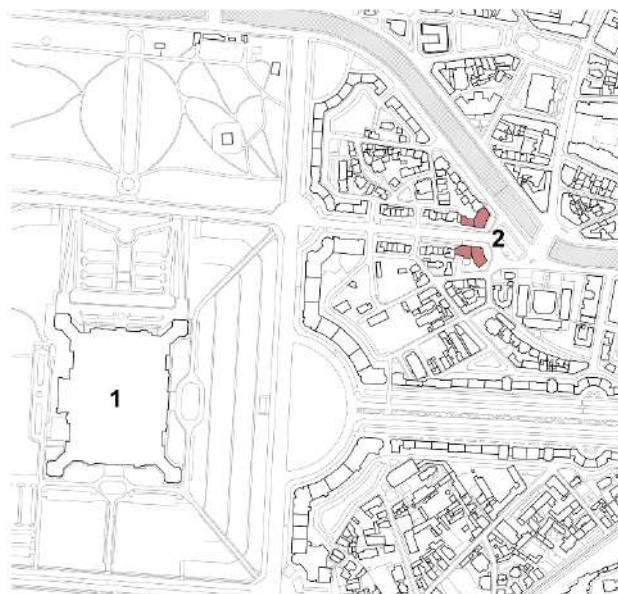


Fig. 1 – Part of *The New Civic Centre*: 1 – The Palace of the Parliament; 2 – Emergency housing buildings. Source: personal drawing.

In Bucharest, the emergency housing units found in public ownership are distributed in two buildings, which are part of the mass-housing and public buildings complex of *The New Civic Centre*<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 1). This complex is one of the most ambitious projects of the communist regime, whose construction began in the 1980s and lasted for decades. This central and emblematic housing complex has been brutally layered over the historical urban pattern of traditional houses of the former *Uranus District* (a district with interwar dwellings belonging to the aristocracy of that time). The construction of *The New Civic Centre* required 15 years of excessive demolition works of those private houses. More than 40.000 families were evicted from the Uranus District (Drăgan 2020), which led to significant scars in the collective memory of Bucharest's inhabitants. At first sight, the context may seem privileged, but it has a considerable controversial historical load that may affect its users.

### 2.2. Architecture

Both of the buildings have fourteen floors. They each have housing units with one, two or three rooms. The architectural language of the facades is associated with the realist-socialist style of the monumental *New Civic Centre* complex. The floor plans have functionalist features. Most of them are standardized, having those “Soviet functionalist tendencies imported by Romania” (Pipoş-Lupu 2019, 45) during the communist regime. The standardization of housing during the 80s was generally made on the basis of minimum living conditions. These units may seem impersonal or neutral, perhaps even austere, but they could allow a manifestation of spatial appropriation and personalization for its inhabitant to create a home. In their studies regarding emergency architecture, Anna Marie Steigemann and Philipp Misselwitz try to define how to build a *home* in a permanent state of temporality, stating that „we consider *home* then as not necessarily bounded and fixed

<sup>17</sup> The notion of *The New Civic Centre* refers to the monumental urban systematization and spatial reconfiguration project of Bucharest's city centre by which Ceauşescu's new axis was introduced – *The Socialist Victory Boulevard* – on the West-East direction that had the Palace of the Parliament in focus. This project was made possible “through political intervention that was intended to be an imprint of cultural and scientific progress” (Stoiculescu and Huzui 2013, 40) of socialist Romania.



spaces, but as familiar spaces of belonging, even if encompassing also (constant or punctuated) movements and the presence of strangers. Home can thus be experienced as strange and familiar simultaneously” (Steigemann and Philipp 2020, 632).

### 2.3. Administration

The buildings have been the state’s investment since construction began in 1982. Work stopped during the 1989 Anti-Communist Revolution and was resumed and completed by the public authority only in 2007 (The World Bank 2015, 28). The housing units were then regulated as emergency housing units, but due to poor and non-transparent management they have been unoccupied for several years.

### 2.4. Users

It is legally stated that the inhabitants are people and families who have lost their personal homes due to legal proceedings or evictions conducted by the local authorities (Municipal Administration for the Consolidation of Buildings with Seismic Risk 2020). In his studies on the nature of evictions in Bucharest, architect Cătălin Berescu stated that “any eviction is forced. When people leave voluntarily, they leave for better.” (Berescu 2010, 119) The emergency housing user lives in an intermediate space, in a marginal situation, at the limit, both physically and socially: between *home*, where he was the *owner*, and between *homeless*, where he is the *tenant*, the displaced from his own place and community. In emergency housing „these spatial practices correspond to manipulations of the fundamental elements of the constructed order and led to ambiguous arrangements – significant spaces – somewhere between a home and a fully controlled shelter.” (Steigemann and Philipp 2020, 644). In emergency architecture there always seems to be a dual situation which is often amplified by the crisis uncertainty.

## 3. BAIA MARE

### 3.1. Urban context

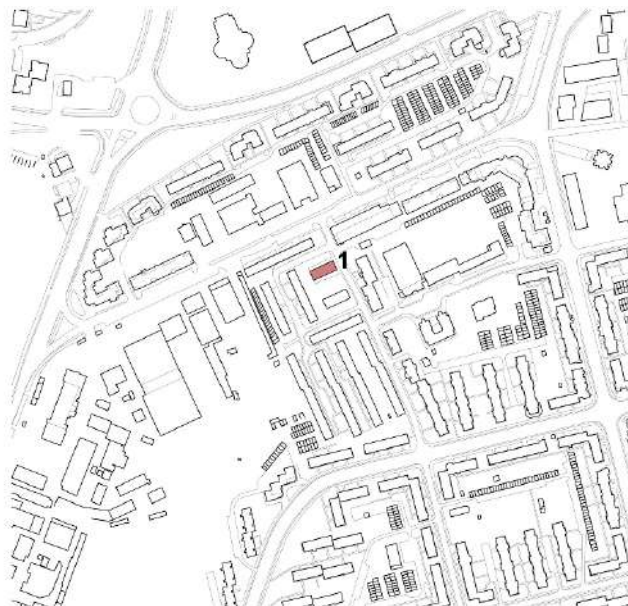


Fig. 2 – Part of *The Vasile Alecsandri Neighbourhood*: 1 – Building hosting emergency housing units.

Source: personal drawing.

In Baia Mare, the emergency housing units are distributed in several buildings of a large mass-housing complex situated in the outskirts of the city, known locally as the ill-famed *Vasile Alecsandri Neighbourhood* (Fig. 2). The neighbourhood was built according to the modern urban planning systematizations conducted by the state during the 1980s. (Ştef 2014). Its settlement, its poor inhabitants and its lack of spatial qualities raise discussions regarding insecurity, urban fear and segregation. When studying urban fear, researcher Simone Tulumello stated that affordable mass housing neighbourhoods “are amongst the favourite targets of commonplaces about crime, fear of difference stigmatization.” (Tulumello 2015, 489) Moreover, in 2010 the public authority decided to close the open premises where the buildings with emergency housing units are located by building a wall, in order to hide the poor living conditions. In short, they have established a barrier to control the inhabitants (Sandu 2011). The physical barrier became a social barrier and it compromised the interaction with the immediate vicinity. It led to discrimination and segregation of the inhabitants, given that the vast majority of them belong to the Roma minority<sup>18</sup>.

### 3.2. Architecture

The units are defined by the functionalist features of the 1980s housing series (Ştef 2014). All the units are found in bar-type buildings with four floors, built with prefabricated concrete panels and modules. These modules had a standard dimension of 3,6x3,6m. (Florian 1982, 15). The design of this module was reduced to a minimum standard, not only in terms of size, but also in terms of spatial qualities and financial costs. The facades lack any valuable aesthetic aspects, being currently found in an advanced state of degradation.

### 3.3. Administration

Initially, the buildings of this complex were designed to host only young individual workers, not families. Nowadays, they have a mixed-use. All of the housing units of this complex were privately owned after the 1989 Anti-Communist Revolution, but some of them have been bought back by the public authority in recent years. They were regulated as emergency housing units in 2015 and started accommodating the Roma minority (Baia Mare Public Administration 2020). Not being able to address their culture appropriately, led the public authority to attempt to radicalize their control over them by closing the premises with that barrier.

### 3.4. Users

Legally, the inhabitants are individuals and “families in areas at high risk of social marginalization in terms of housing” (Baia Mare Public Administration 2020). In reality, all the users belong to the Roma minority. Almost 100 families were relocated here following the demolition of their informal *Craica* community, without any prior sociological studies, as stated in *The Report on the Roma communities in Baia Mare*, conducted by *The Institute for the Study of National Minorities* (Hetea 2012). In this case, the loss of a home seems to be an even bigger issue. The forced relocation was not done in order to benefit from better living conditions. Users were moved from their personal informal settlement to a standardized modernist architecture, lacking any concerns of their ethnic culture.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Even though both case studies present emergency housing units located in large socialist mass (middle-class) housing complexes built during the 1980s, their situations are almost antithetical.

Firstly, the urban context has a major impact on crisis mediation. In Bucharest, even if there is a controversial historical load, the housing units benefit from a privileged, safe and central position, having high accessibility

<sup>18</sup> In Romania, the Roma minority is commonly known as *the gipsies*, facing several segregation, stigmatization and racial exclusion problems.

to the necessary living facilities. By contrast, in Baia Mare, being on the outskirts of the city, in a poor neighbourhood with unsanitary living conditions, leads to the birth of a ghetto. This issue can only amplify the social impact of a crisis and promotes the stigmatization of the inhabitants.

In terms of architecture, both cases have functionalist floor plans, being standardized by minimizing all spatial qualities, creating a neutral built environment. Such an architectural framework can fulfill the users' need to personalize or appropriate spaces. In Bucharest, the buildings seem to offer optimal living conditions. In Baia Mare, the buildings where the units are located are in an advanced state of degradation, showing poor living conditions (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 – Left – Bucharest building; Right – Baia Mare building. Source: personal photographs.

Regarding the public administration and the legal processes, in Bucharest the units were in public ownership from the very beginning. In Baia Mare, they went through privatizations, but they were eventually repurchased by the public authority. Given the fact that both local administrations have a fund of these units, this housing typology may come as a fast and financially efficient solution in small-scale crisis situations.

Lastly, regarding the users' life during a crisis situation, it was emphasized that the major problems are displacement, the loss of housing and need to rebuild a *home*. Due to its temporary nature, the emergency house may never be able to completely fulfil the user's need to find their *place* and recreate their *home*, but it may have a role in restoring their life balance in order to begin the later relocation process. Therefore, the emergency housing is located somewhere between *home* and *homeless*, needing to be both *personal* and *foreign*, while the user finds themselves between being *the tenant* and *the owner*.

If this emergency housing typology was to be ideal, it could make use of the urban context in order to stimulate social interactions both between users and the immediate vicinity to avoid segregation. It could also make use of the mass-housing's neutrality to provide design consumption and space appropriation in order to restore the daily life balance. Given the fact that they already exist and don't need to be designed and constructed, the mass housing units, if they meet the criteria stated above could turn out to be an optimal and efficient emergency housing typology.

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# Avoiding degradation: Urban care infrastructures in a LHE [Large Housing Estate]

**Liubov Chernysheva;** University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Center for Independent Social Research, Russia; l.a.chernysheva@gmail.com

**Elvira Gizatullina;** European University in St.Petersburg, Russia; egizatullina@eu.spb.ru

**Session:** 6 – *Spatial practice, representation and meaning of suburban housing estates*. Chairs: Madalena Corte-Real and Maria João Gomes

## ABSTRACT

In our research, we study one of the archetypical newly built LHEs in Russia – residential complex “Severnaya Dolina” (St.Petersburg) that provides affordable housing for low-middle class residents. Construction have begun in the mid-2000s and now it is home to more than 60000 dwellers. While urban researchers in Russia criticize it for inhuman scale, lack of greenery and social infrastructure, high population density, and predict its degradation in the near future, their critique avoids the maintenance and management issues. We argue for these aspects to be closely investigated. We analyse the relations between urban governance and urban care demonstrating how local residents take care of the LHE beyond the governance process. Based on the qualitative data collected, we examine the actual governance structure in “Severnaya Dolina” and its common perceptions, and the various forms of caretaking that the residents perform. We propose a concept of *urban care infrastructure* that reveals the gap between the actual role of residents (homeowners) in the neighborhood governance and their perceptions of due residents’ practices of urban care. This concept informed by the ‘infrastructural turn’ (Amin 2014), refers to the concepts of civil infrastructures (Zhelnina, Tykanova 2019) and infrastructures of care (Power, Mee 2020), and demonstrates how urban care is practiced through assembled elements. Our analysis reveals that community activists accumulate knowledge about the governance system, assemble situational civil infrastructures to care for the area, investing significant effort and time. These infrastructures, however, are too complicated for the ‘ordinary’ residents, who would predictably transform their concerns into solutions found and performed by various agents of urban care. Since there is no stable infrastructure, the residents do urban caretaking at the grassroot level, performing self-control of behaviour and control over the neighbors. Going beyond this scale, they delegate dealing with the local problems to a “city government” - an abstract imaginary institution.

**Keywords:** Large Housing Estates; Urban Care; Urban Governance; Civic Infrastructures.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of Large Housing Estates (LHE) usage experience has already shown that their wellbeing or degradation to a significant extent depends on the quality of governance and maintenance (Urban 2011). In fact, in Russian new greenfield developments these issues are considered neither by developers nor the state and the expert community.

Designing LHE, a developer relies on market research of buyers' needs and economic expediency. The developer creates promising renders of the housing and sells the desired image of the future comfortable life. Urban experts suggest looking deeper. They develop various ratings and indices to estimate 'quality of life' in LHE highlighting the features the consumer should pay attention to when choosing an apartment to buy (for example, Rating of the living environment's quality 2016). The focus of these criteria is still on the design, space organization, and infrastructure rather than on the processes of maintaining these built environments.

This study of a LHE "Severnaya Dolina" (St. Petersburg, Russia) demonstrates that homeowners' perception of 'the quality of life' limitedly meets the criteria from the expert ratings since some criteria do not take into account agency of residents, overlook the user experience and ignore processes of governance. We conducted 5 focus-groups (FGs) with different groups of residents of "Severnaya Dolina": young people (up to 35 y.o.), middle age (35-55/60 y.o.), elderly (retired), housing "activist" and tenants (non-owners). We aimed at understanding how residents perceive the urban environment's quality, the structures of local governance, and their role in maintaining the housing.

### 1. Setting

Residential complex "Severnaya Dolina" represents the modern housing development in Russia and in particular, a large-scale housing estate. It is one of the first and the biggest integrated urban development (IUD) projects in the country. Situated in the north of St. Petersburg it occupies 270 ha and consists of 33 buildings of 29 floors, from 900 to 3,500 apartments each. The complex was started to develop in 2009. Now it is inhabited by about 60 000 residents, and when finished it is supposed to accommodate about 100 thousand dwellers.

"Severnaya Dolina" belongs to the so-called "economy class" residential complex. The most part of flats (about 60-70%) is bought with mortgage loans. With the exception of a small share of urban social housing (about 1,5%), the vast majority of apartments in "Severnaya Dolina" are owned by private individuals. Because of the huge size of houses, low quality of construction and urban environment, mono-functionality (only housing), small flats and relatively low prices, "Severnaya Dolina" is stigmatized as "ghetto" by some journalists and urban researchers.

As the IUD project "Severnaya Dolina" has a very complicated governance structure. The owner of the land is the City. But in 2007 the company "Glavstroy-SPb" won the right to lease a plot of 270 hectares for constructing the residential complex. So the right to manage, use and profit extraction was acquired by a private developer. Further, the development company has been selling apartments in an open market. The right of ownership has been acquiring by individual private buyers.

According to The Russian Federation Housing Code (Article 36) an apartment buyer receives not only square meters of private space, but also a share of common spaces and structural parts of a house. Common ownership implies a collective format of management. The main self-governing body of an apartment building is the Apartment Owners Assembly (AOA). AOA decision becomes legitimate after it is made by more than 50% of owners, who should vote (for some issues it should be at least two thirds of owners). The AOA elects

a representative body - the House Council. The right and means of operation of the common premises and structures is given by the AOA to the Management company.

In fact only less than 25% of houses in "Severnaya Dolina" have elected House Councils because of the difficulty of holding a legitimate AOA (get more than 50% of owners' votes). This is to some extent the effects of the scale (buildings are huge, 700 - 3500 apartments) and apathy of the homeowners, including those who rent out their apartments (about 20% of apartments are rented by tenants who do not have a right to vote in AOA).

All buildings are managed by one property management company that is a subsidiary of the developer. According to the legislation AOAs and House Councils are authorized to control the property management company. But the illegitimate AOAs and the lack of elected House Councils play into the hands of the property management company, since the absence of a controlling body gives it freedom for non-transparent activities. The management company is not interested in high engagement of the residents who may control its working; so the residents believe that the company sabotages self-government in different ways. The residents, thus, have quite a limited power to influence the developer and seek elimination of construction defects.

One of the main problems of the territory is a lack of social infrastructures because of the dramatic delay in it's constructing. The lease agreement provides that the developer disposes of the territory, and the instruments of influence on its actions are very limited. The residents try to participate in the governance process and influence the developer in order to get the social infrastructure they were promised and paid for. The only way they found is signing petitions addressed to the development company, to the city governor, to prime-minister and Russian president. However, the effects can be hardly estimated.

## 2. 'Activists' and 'not activists' on the governance and care

The analysis demonstrates that there are two groups of residents ('activists' and 'non-activists') who differ in terms of their perception and understanding of the system and principles of local governance structures, and of the role that residents can take in the governance processes. Non-activists are not familiar with the governance structure and mechanisms: they mix up those who they blame for the housing problems with those who, they believe, should take responsibility for overcoming this situation. They have an idea of a rather vague and pretty abstract category of "city administration" ("gorod" or "gorodskaya vlast") who have to take all the responsibility for the LHE. Non-active residents hardly participate in the formal housing self-governance procedures and institutions, though they could have an experience of communication with neighbors, and their own perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' governance.

On the opposite, the 'activists' have a more detailed understanding of the governance structure and an experience of interaction with governmental bodies, address most of the accusations to the lower governmental levels, and first of all - to the management company's work, and are aware of control over it. And during the FGs activists were the only group who stressed the notion of care, maintenance and management as a significant element that would provide a comfortable living environment. At the same time they see a resident (precisely, an apartment owner) as the central actor, a mobilizer of all the processes related to the local governance. Non-active residents rather see that role in a more limited way. First, they believe that the residents' role is to inform the city authorities about people's problems and desires. Second, since they have no clear understanding of how urban governance works, they focus on grassroots initiatives that require the residents' time and practical activities only (such as collective neighborhood clean-up - *subbotnik*, - and other community work). Apart from collective initiatives and practices that transform the environment, non-activists believe in the power of a 'start with yourself' approach: 'good' residents make a 'good' estate, so the responsibility for dealing with local problems starts within the scale of an individual behavior.

### 3. Urban Care and urban governance

These differences transfer in practices the two groups of the residents employ in relation to the area. We suggest a distinction between urban care and urban governance in order to grasp the difference in activists' and non-activists' practices.

Urban governance is a widely used analytical category that became prominent in recent 20 years as a critical point to the category of urban management. In contrast, urban governance is employed to describe a variety of actors involved in urban development and maintenance, including civil society institutions and communities. However, the authors who deal with urban governance rather pay attention to interactions and interrelations of institutionalised actors (governments of different scales, NGOs, business units, etc.), ignoring unorganized practices pursuing the same aims of urban development and maintenance. As we find in Severnaya Dolina, there is a variety of such practices that are not organized and institutionalized, that have no collective subject behind. In contrast to activists whose strategy is to enforce self-governance as a legitimate institution that represents a collective subject, non-activists perform individual chaotic practices that are analytically invisible in urban governance models.

In order to deal with these practices, we refer to the concept of urban care. Gibson-Graham defines matters of urban care as the 'active experimental doings' that 'repair our environments' so that these may be 'lived in as well as possible' (Gibson-Graham et al. 2019, p. 9). This term may embrace practices of governance, however, for the purposes of our analyses, we suggest a distinction between urban care and urban governance. Once the case is associated with institutionalized actors, rules, and a formalized ways of participation in the development and maintenance of the area and , we refer to governance. In case of unsystematic practices that derive from the imperative of "not being indifferent to the housing estate", we refer to urban care.

### 4. Civic infrastructures of urban care and governance

Following the 'infrastructural turn' (Amin 2014) and the ideas of infrastructures of care (Power, Mee 2020), we suggest complementing the distinction between urban care and urban governance with another distinction that refers to the concept of formal and informal civic infrastructures (Zhelnina, Tykanova 2019). Formal civic infrastructures are associated with legally regulated forms of civic participation (participation in voluntary associations, municipal self-governance, public hearings, etc.), while informal associations and networks that maintain a common good are informal civic infrastructures.

The two distinctions produce four types of civic infrastructures that we trace in the data collected.

The first is formal infrastructure of urban governance. This infrastructure frames tasks for the development and maintenance of the area making them possible to be handled by other agents involved in urban development and maintenance (the management company, city officials, prosecutors, courts, and other institutions). This infrastructure works, for example, when local activists organize a meeting of homeowners and make collective decisions or when activists are suing a management company that illegally raised utility rates or when they file a petition for building a school in the district. The use of this infrastructure is very costly and difficult since it works unpredictably and requires knowledge and competencies.

The second infrastructure provides informal governance. For example, it provides informal meetings or online chats where activists interact with each other and share experiences that help them better understand how to effectively interact with other management agents. Activists may make decisions within a small initiative group that has no legal rights to represent all the residents.



The third is the informal infrastructure of care. When residents gather for a cleanup of the streets or shame their neighbors for improper dog keeping or garbage collecting, it is this infrastructure that is involved. Using online groups in VK.com, the residents produce chaotic care practices that are often competing and inconsistent since residents have different understandings of what is good for the neighborhood and what leads to degradation.

The fourth type of civic infrastructure provides urban care in a formal way. The find a request for this type in interviews and focus groups with non-activists. The call for such an infrastructure is based on the following:

- 1) The formal governance structure is complicated and even incomprehensible for the residents. They hardly know where to go, whom to contact, where the entry point to solve the problem is. It takes a lot of time and other resources to puzzle out the structure.
- 2) The (complex and complicated) governance is unpredictable, and thus - risky for participation by residents, in terms of the unpredictable amount of resources, efforts, time etc. to be invested
- 3) Residents call for routine but systematically functioning engagement that is transparent, easy to understand and perform; an engagement in the current governance that would allow fixing any problem "in two clicks" by complaining to the "right people" who fix it quickly.

The residents call for the formal infrastructure of care that sustainably and smoothly translates their dissatisfaction (feeling of a 'problem') into an action that would eliminate it. In some focus groups, the residents articulate their request for such an infrastructure by discussing a possible "box for complaints" or regular meetings with municipal deputies. These suggestions indicate that residents imply simple governance tools that do not require high competencies and experience. Instead, accessible competent specialists should navigate residents and ensure management coherence.

## CONCLUSION

The research revealed that residents of a newly built Russian LHE perceive the quality of life through problems, mismatches between expectation based on renders and the reality they live in. The quality of housing governance and maintenance is perceived by local residents-activists as a significant factor that influences the quality of life and prevents possible future degradation.

Encouraging the building of LHEs in Russia to solve the affordable housing problem, the state should simultaneously create well-functioning infrastructures for their maintenance and governance, so as not to receive large volumes of housing degrading at the same time in the future. But the study in "Severnaya Doina" showed that governance infrastructures are poor and do not work well, are regularly being blocked by the management company, the developer, and some other actors. Trying to get involved in the processes of self-governance, residents meet not smoothly working infrastructure but obstacles. It seems that the existing mechanisms do not work properly, the time costs are large, and the effect is unclear. While participation in local governance is available only for the local activists as expert, labor-consuming, and risky activities, both activists and non-activists demonstrate practices of care that aim at maintaining their housing.

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## Rediscovering modern 'civil architecture': The case of Bela Vista neighbourhood in Setúbal

**Sara Silva Lopes;** DINÂMIA'CET, Iscte-IUL, Portugal; sara\_alexandra\_lopes@iscte-iul.pt

**João Cunha Borges;** DINÂMIA'CET, Iscte-IUL, Portugal; joao\_cunha\_borges@iscte-iul.pt

**Rui Del Pino Fernandes;** NOTE – Galeria de Arquitectura; ruidelpino@live.com.pt

**Teresa Marat-Mendes;** DINÂMIA'CET, Iscte-IUL, Portugal; teresa.marat-mendes@iscte-iul.pt

**Session:** 6 – *Spatial practice, representation and meaning of suburban housing estates*. Chairs: Madalena Corte-Real and Maria João Gomes

### ABSTRACT

Suburban mass-housing became commonplace in Portuguese cities during the twentieth century, particularly in the metropolitan areas. Research into the current conditions of such suburbs is increasingly important, as challenges facing metropolitan cities continue to evolve and demand for sustainable change.

Here, we observe the urban process of a particular case-study – the Bela Vista neighbourhood in Setúbal, planned by José Charters Monteiro as 'civil architecture'.

What aspects defined its urban design and what role can the territory play in improving Bela Vista in the future? Moreover, the urban and architectural forms of Bela Vista underwent a period of disbelief, deserving today a closer look. Can its intended 'civil architecture' and the later civic engagement promote urban regeneration and social-territorial cohesion?

Anchored on a morphological and ecological perception, we aim to disclose the key transformations of this planned suburb, assessing how it can continue to change towards a more just and sustainable future.

**Keywords:** suburban estate; public mass-housing; socio-spatial multidimensionality; Bela Vista neighbourhood; 'civil architecture'.

## INTRODUCTION

Suburban mass-housing estates bloomed in metropolitan cities, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, which placed unprecedented pressures for transforming rural and peripheral landscapes. Urbanization and metropolisation of rural areas, during the 20th century were prompted by migratory flows, related to labour markets and later by decolonisation (Brandão & Remesar, 2000).

The urban spatial structure of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA) underwent a late and intense development, and in face of this growth and 'disorderly' urban expansion, housing for families arriving to modernizing cities was insufficient (Pinto & Guerra, 2019). Thus, suburbanization was not always compliant with planning policies, as there were often frail or inexistent, while the public sector itself played a key part in many cities in shaping suburban expansion. Some of the urban forms and architectural solutions of many mass-housing suburbs, particularly those led by the public sector, underwent a period of dismay and disbelief, which now deserves a closer look.

Here, we attempt this closer look towards the case of the Bela Vista neighbourhood in Setúbal, intended by its original architect, João Charters Monteiro, as an example of 'civil architecture' (Franco, 2009). Anchored on a morphological perspective, we aim to follow the planning process of this neighbourhood, assessing its relationship with the territory and how both can continue to change towards a more just and sustainable future. Can 'civil architecture' and civil interventions promote urban regeneration and social and territorial cohesion in the suburbs?

## 1. SETÚBAL AND ITS PLANNING HISTORY

Currently one of the main cities of the Setúbal Peninsula and part of the LMA, Setúbal has a long and important history, changing from town to city in 1860. Its dynamic urban life partly results from being what Spiro Kostof (1991) terms 'natural harbour cities'. Other examples are Halikarnassos, Naples and Valparaíso. Such cities have sweeping backdrops with offset street-sweeps. Likewise, Setúbal's urban structure was defined, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by east-west streets, parallel to the coastal line, with a few secondary perpendicular alleys (Faria, 1981). At the same time are built the port and Avenida Luísa Todi, also parallel to the coast (Pereira, 2007), replacing the defensive line and creating a modern "boulevard", a dynamic centre of urban life. Until the 1950s, the landscape of Setúbal was defined by dispersed residential neighbourhoods housing a precarious and dispossessed workforce, separated by farmsteads and other rural land belonging to the local middle-class (Faria, 1981).

Modernization in Setúbal goes hand in hand with industrial development, particularly the preserve industry (particularly canned fish), with several neighbourhoods or shanty towns emerging in the periphery to house its workers, generally of low income (Faria, 1981). From the 1930s onwards, urban growth rises significantly, partly due to the public works policy promoted by the New State (*Estado Novo*), a Bonapartist conservative dictatorship that governed Portugal from 1926 to 1974. Among its intervention are neighbourhoods directed towards the local middle and lower bourgeoisie (Faria, 1981), some of which were demolished later on, or occupied by the population during the democratic transition (Faria, 2009). However, low wages and deprivation were constant in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Setúbal, causing a continuous "chronic housing crisis" (Faria, 1981, 110). Modernization and resolution of urban structuring problems led the Setúbal municipality to launch planning efforts from the 1940s onwards.

In 1944, architect João António Aguiar is hired to design the Setúbal Masterplan (*Plano de Urbanização da Cidade de Setúbal*), a document whose process will continue for several decades (Faria, 1981; Lôbo, 1995; Pereira, 2007). This first version prioritizes road infrastructuring, a land-use scheme, and four zones for expansion. While the Setúbal Council approved Aguiar's Plan in 1946, several problems were pointed out to



it, namely its onerous solutions and its classification of the northern floodplain orange groves as land for urbanization (Pereira, 2007). However, Aguiar's plan would meet serious resistance from public opinion mostly because of the extensive demolitions it proposed on the old Setúbal centre (Lôbo, 1995). A first revision of this work is promoted in 1955, ignoring many objections raised to the primary design (Faria, 1981).

In 1962, a new version of the plan is prepared by Aguiar, introducing new areas for expansion. These include 'Bela Vista Residential Unit', in the immediate eastern limit of the city. However, the spatial planning framework had changed recently with the introduction of the Foreplan, a technical study which did not empower municipalities to expropriate the land necessary for implementation (Lôbo, 1995). This happened with the 1962 Setúbal plan, which, treated as a Foreplan, was powerless to control development dynamics (Pereira, 2007).

This era is also marked by the collapse of the preserve industry, and economic life is recovered through the great economic groups promoted by the New State's new development policies, which attracted rural newcomers mostly from Alentejo, rising the pressure over Setúbal's housing stock (Faria, 1981). New industries included metallurgy and ship construction, and the expected population growth is undeniable, leading to the first prospect of a housing intervention of larger scale (Faria, 1981).

In 1973, Aguiar finishes his last Setúbal Masterplan, in continuity with his prior proposals, privileging residential areas and equipment networks (Pereira, 2007). When the democratic Revolution sprang in 1974, the territorial situation of Setúbal was chaotic, mostly due to the weak planning policies followed so far (Lôbo, 1995) which protected the interests of dominant classes, particularly land owners and the industrial bourgeoisie, whose priority was infrastructuring (Faria, 1981). Often, as was the case in Setúbal, plan revisions were passive records of new urbanizations rather than instruments for programming urbanization (Faria, 1981).

In the early 1970s, the Housing Development Fund (*Fundo Fomento à Habitação* – FFH) promotes a new planning instrument, the Integral Plan. Inspired by municipal planning experiences in Lisbon (Monteiro & Ferreira, 1979), these plans created new residential areas with housing, infrastructure, equipment and services (Vilaça & Ferreira, 2018). Setúbal is assigned an Integral Plan (*Plano Integrado de Setúbal* – PIS) parallel to Aguiar's final Masterplan (Faria, 1981). This is the first plan which seriously tries to tackle the massive population increase prompted by the late 1970s industrial boom.



Fig.1 – Bela Vista Neighbourhood under construction. Source: Silva, 1988

## 2. THE BELA VISTA NEIGHBOURHOOD

At the time of the Revolution, housing shortage in Setúbal was so severe that nearly 50 residents' commissions formed in shanty towns, slums and even middle-class neighbourhoods, all seeking housing improvements (Faria, 2009).

Social housing during the New State had been so ineffective that nearly 5000 Setúbal families were, in 1975, living in precarious housing (Faria, 1981). A city planning office was formed in 1975 to create a new form of housing policy, which extended from a municipal Masterplan in 1977 to the urbanization of neighbourhoods under several programmes, including the FFH, cooperative housing, and self-construction programmes (*Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local* - SAAL).

The Bela Vista neighbourhood was the most visible urbanization promoted by the PIS, and one of the most relevant of the post-revolutionary period in Setúbal. Originally its design was coordinated by architects José Charters Monteiro and João Campina Ferreira for the FFH. This was the largest suburbanization process in Setúbal's planning history, marking the transition from dictatorship to democracy and proposing the most radical change in the morphological patterns of the city.

The experimentation of new morphologies and the paradigm shift in social housing design in this neighbourhood sought a reconciliation between its civics, utility, and beauty, which the architect defines as a 'civil architecture' (Franco, 2009).



Fig.2 – Yellow Estate. Source: Authors, 2021.

The residential ensemble includes three estates, Yellow, Blue, and Pink. Its urban morphology is regular and orthogonal with a 'rigid design' generated by explicit architectural norms (Crespo, 2012). The neighbourhood presents a discontinuity with the surrounding urban fabrics.

The Yellow Estate, built between 1976 and 1989, consist of rectangular blocks with three to five floors, circumscribing semi-public courtyards inside. Access to dwellings is made through vertical access cores located in the corners of building and then through horizontal decks. The Blue Estate was built between 1980 and 1989, consisting of a set of deck-access parallel slabs separated by public courtyards. Finally, the Pink Estate was built in two phases –in 1992 and in 2001 – with several low-rise slabs, some linear and others in U

shape, along a backbone defined by Alameda das Palmeiras. For the first time, access to homes does not use a deck structure.

Despite the geometric formalism and innovation, the urbanistic quality of the public and semi-public (third spaces), and the shift in the ways of living of the community was not always successful (Nogueira, 2007). For a long time, there was no correspondence between the functional and social dimensions meaning that habitat morphologies were not suitable to collective life.

Lack of public transportation to the city restricted neighborhood life to its immediate space. The lack of public facilities, as well as qualified common spaces, were only rectified later, with collaboration from residents' committees.

Public space had three key elements: green areas, squares and access-decks. The green spaces, which included allotment gardens (Silva, 1988) were not implemented, and the escarpment was not recovered. In recent neighbourhood redevelopments, these spaces were redesigned for integration on the neighbourhood. Squares were conceived to intermediate between domestic and urban space, promoting collective life. Access-decks are considered a third space, for collective distribution and leisure as well as thermal comfort (Franco, 2009).

Services and facilities were built separately. Community relations and everyday activities were later recognized as fundamental for an adequate habitat. The 'Observatório Social da Bela Vista' (*Bela Vista Social Observatory*) identified problems associated with social exclusion, degradation of the housing stock and weak community bonds. The 'Nosso bairro, Nossa cidade' (*Our neighbourhood, our city*) programme was an innovative local experience, with a socio-economic and spatial dimension, promoting citizenship and community participation in local decisions. It sought to transform and improve the life of a run-down area through participation in the identification and resolution of problems (AICE, 2018).



Fig.3 – Bela Vista Neighbourhood. Source: Authors, 2021.

### 3. DISCUSSION AND FINAL NOTES

Although at first the community did not accept the morphology of Bela Vista – particularly in the Yellow Estate – the recent interventions have demonstrated that shifts in socio-economic conditions do strengthen the link



of residents with space, promoting a better usage. The model of public mass-housing focused on specific urban areas, often producing peripheralization and social homogeneity. This has led to habitats that neither improve the living conditions of the residents nor the socio-territorial cohesion and integration of these neighbourhoods.

Community involvement, encouraged by local authorities, created tools for improving conditions. Projects like "Nosso Bairro, Nossa Cidade" promote the organization and participation of residents in actions such as cleaning, dynamizing and rebuilding the neighbourhood. The social stigma attached to the neighbourhood is being circumvented through educational activities for young people, as well as exterior and public space arrangements. The community is also partaking in neighbourhood management (Silva & Raposo, 2007a), while more integration with the Setúbal centre was sought.

In 2017, the aforementioned project promoted eight flowerbeds were rebuilt in the inner courtyard of one of the blocks. Similar actions, involving the community in improving public spaces run alongside the municipal support for community gardens, and could potentially generate jobs (one of the project's objectives) to mitigate unemployment.

Indeed, this civil architecture failed for a long time. But this tells us less about architecture, and rather emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary teams in mass-housing suburbanization. Architecture sought to promote beauty, utility and civility, but implementation counted only with a limited team of architects and sociologists. Furthermore, civil architecture implies municipal decision-makers, social workers, as well as socio-economic stability and employment, which was not the case in Bela Vista (Silva & Raposo, 2007). The Lisbon planning experiences which inspired Integral Plans were successful where multidisciplinary teams joined to create a cohesive habitat, and where social mobility was effectively promoted. In Bela Vista, there was indeed a civil architecture, but this cannot do without other civilities for which all of society, not just architects or the local community, is responsible.

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## The phenomenon of experimental neighbourhoods in Russia. The different approaches of Soviet modernism to the housing problem (1950–1980)

Ariadna Kuzhakova; Independent researcher; kuzhakovva@mail.ru

**Session:** 8 – *New technologies in housing construction: a path towards a new city?* Chair: João Cardim

### ABSTRACT

The history of mass housing in Russia can be divided into several particular periods, each distinguished by its own aspects, terminology, and representation. The active growth of middle-class mass housing increased in the second half of the 20th century—the so-called time of the soviet *Khrushchyovka*, an unofficial name for a type of low-cost, concrete-panelled five-storied apartment building developed during the premiership of its namesake. N. Khrushchev's formula included compact mass housing construction and the concept of 'micro-districts' (dormitory suburbs on the outskirts of cities). Speed, functionality and profitability were the primary focus of the new ideologies. Construction was carried out literally 'on wheels', bypassing industrial warehouses. Large-unit concrete 'room-sized' panels were transported and mounted directly from factories. In order to test and choose the type of construction, it was necessary to compare a variety of structural, urban solutions and the organization of the apartments. Thus, experimental neighbourhoods were formed in different parts of Moscow. Rectangular blocks of 5-story houses ringed a courtyard, creating an enclosed space inside. The shape of yards and their size depended on the routes of tower cranes. "Vernacular" mass housing was being formed. Thus, areas were building up. However, one issue was not taken into consideration in the experimental projects. Formation of closed space prevented the possibility of human socialization. Walls were built between people to keep strangers out. An invisible conventional line emerged between the concepts of My Yard, the Yard of Neighbouring Houses and Our Common Street. Experimental neighbourhoods have revealed a lot of defects. In the present paper I want to convey the phenomenon of the "vernacular" aspect ('architecture without an architect') of experimental mass housing in Russia and express the idea that it's not the boundaries and number of houses that create neighbourhoods, but the cross-use activities inside the area, vibrant life and identity and integrity of a territory. A lively and active neighbourhood is safe neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** Experimental Neighbourhoods; Building Technologies; People.

## INTRODUCTION. HOW ELEGANCE TURNED INTO OVER-INDULGENCE

The architecture of each new period of Russian history can be compared to an antenna device that serves to broadcast the image of the central government and personifies the mode of life in its era. However, it is worth noting that each period is, in its essence, an experiment, resulting from technological development, achievements and experience acquired from 1917 to date. Housing construction in big cities has been an area of primary focus in terms of development since the first years of Soviet power, but there were no financial, technical or material resources. The government tried to address the housing crisis through the socialization of land and the popularization of communal apartments, but it soon became clear that new housing was indispensable. In the 1920s, the first attempts were made to build residential areas, but the growth of the urban population outstripped the rates of construction. J. Stalin's general plan for the reconstruction and development of Moscow in 1935 involved complex building development and the reconstruction of residential areas. Still, the new ideology in architecture prevented the accomplishment of this plan. The artistic approach became a priority. An "antenna" of Stalinist architecture was being formed, and the famous *Stalinkas* were constructed. It is worth noting that mastering the technology of manufacturing structural elements at a factory (instead of making them on a construction site) was a huge breakthrough at that time. But after the Second World War one of the courses of the fourth five-year plan for the restoration and development of the national economy of the USSR involved standardized projects. That approach completely rejected the idea of individual projects. The housing industry began to shift to a much simpler, less persistent architecture and more economical construction, since the needs of people for living space in the post-war years could not be solved by the ideological Stalinist architecture. The construction of standard panel housing acquired a special scope when N. Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. On November 4, 1955, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution 'On the elimination of excesses in design and construction.' This day became a turning point in the history of Russian architecture; it is considered to be the birth of a new architectural trend, which would later be called Soviet modernism. This decree became a manifesto. It was not just a list of instructions or formal requirements.

### 1. TIME AND EXPERIMENTATION

With the coming to power of N. Khrushchev, the production of panel houses began to develop actively. The task of the party was to develop, by the fall of 1956, experimental projects that allowed for a sharp reduction in the cost of residential construction that in turn would lead to its accessibility among the working people. This is how the famous Khrushchevka first appeared. It was time for Khrushchev's "antenna". It was decided to use vacant land for large, inexpensive residential areas—"micro-districts" (dormitory suburbs on the outskirts of cities), instead of conducting expensive construction in the city center.



Fig.1 – Novye Cheryomushki. Source: ArcGIS. GIS application

## Part 1. The first experimental districts

The centre of the first truly large-scale experimental construction in Moscow was the *Novye Cheryomushki* area. It was there that, from 1956, the leading design and research organizations of the capital started proposing new developments. In a short period of time, 4 experimental districts grew in the micro-district: the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. These areas were formed with the aim of studying the manufacturability of the new structures and test the prefabricated elements before the start of the mass construction process. Each of the 4 districts became a sort of phenomenon in the design and construction of that time. They gave impetus to the development of new construction technologies.

### 1.1.1. District №12. Large-block housing construction (1956-1957)

As a result of the generalization of the construction experience of the 12th district, the nomenclature of large concrete blocks was fully formed. All of the above led the designers to the conclusion to use lighter materials in large-block housing construction more widely.



Fig.2 – Large-block housing construction. Source: Retro View of Mankind's Habitat

### 1.1.2. District № 11. Large-panel housing construction (1958)

The construction of large-panel houses was a new, more refined stage in the development of prefabricated housing construction. Compared with large-block houses, the prefabricated elements, walls and partitions, were larger. During the construction of the 11th block the so-called 'from wheels' installation was tested for the first time in Moscow, when 'room-sized' panels were transported and installed immediately from the factory, bypassing warehouses. This contributed to an increase in the technical level of construction, significantly reducing labour costs and the buildings' construction time. Speed and economy became the postulates of the experiment. According to the Research Institute of Moscow Construction, houses built in the 11th district were the cheapest residential buildings of such design built in Moscow. At the same time, they turned out to be the most technologically advanced in production and assembly.

In turn, the urban planning of the district made it possible to transfer tower cranes from one object to another, avoiding disassembly. The rectangular forms of five-storey buildings ringed the courtyard, and the shape of the courtyard depended upon the paths of the construction cranes. Thus, in the course of construction, a kind of "vernacular" phenomenon of experimental mass residential areas was formed. However, the creation of closed spaces hindered the possibility of human socialization. People got used to the barriers that the buildings themselves formed, protecting them and their children from the dangers that might lurk in neighbouring yards.



As a result, closed dormitory areas were formed as well as the following concepts: My Yard, the Yard of Neighbouring Houses and Our Common Street in Our District.



Fig.3 – Prefabricated panel construction. Source: TsDKFFA of Ukraine

### 1.1.3. District №9. Open planning of the district and small apartments (1958-1959)

In contrast to the experiments described before (the 11th and 12th districts) that were still of local character, the 9th district is distinguished by a wide search in various directions. It was vital to develop projects of apartments for one family, to check the principles of open urban planning and development of the district, to develop and introduce new progressive structures, and to test new service facilities housed in detached buildings.

In total, 16 five-storey residential buildings were built in a district with an area of 11.85 hectares in 22 months. The design began at a time when the question of creating new types of apartments for single families was brewing. These types of small apartments had to be developed taking into account more progressive industrial structures made of precast concrete, while reducing the cost of living areas. The task was one of the main ones in the experiment in the 9th district. Therefore, in all 16 residential buildings of the district, various layouts of apartments are provided, which were to be compared with one another.

In addition, an open urban planning was tried and for the first time the residential part of the district was separated from the non-residential one. Simple in configuration, with a geometrically clear number of houses, with the allocation of shops and blocks of utility services in separate buildings, and taking into account simple transport links—it all simplified the construction process and made it possible to carry out construction work regardless of landscaping. The district excluded any through traffic. People left cars in a parking lot near the micro-district and walked home along the pedestrian paths. This would seem unacceptable to a modern driver in Russia, but the solution was an innovation, although it did not persist. Urban planners of that time understood that it was necessary to develop convenient pedestrian networks along which there would be points of attraction, because they thought a living neighbourhood—due to human activity, not car activity—was a safe neighbourhood. Experiments in *Novye Cheryomushki* in 1956-1959 received a positive assessment from the government and part of the population, and thus it was decided to focus experimental construction in 1961-1963 on the territory of the 10th district.

#### 1.1.4. District № 10. Volumetric construction (1961-1963)

New and progressive designs were tested in District №10. First of all, these included houses made of enlarged volumetric elements. Architects understood that the erection of this building was the way to further the industrialization of housing construction. Volumetric blocks were designed to be structural and act as box girders supported by four points. Blocks were uniform in size and shape. All work on finishing and equipping blocks, consisting of two rooms, took place at the factories. Later the finished apartments were delivered to the assembly site. All houses were assembled using a modernized portal crane. The first experiments in house building from volumetric elements showed that the labour intensity of the construction of these houses is almost 2 times lower than during the installation of conventional large-panel buildings, used in the 11th district. Now more than 80% of labour costs occurred at plants. As a result, the need for manual labour decreased.



Fig.4 – Mounting volumetric blocks. Source: Ataev. 1967. Technology and Economics of Volume-Block House Construction

The 10th district served as a promotion of technical innovations, representing, in fact, an achievement of that time. And volumetric construction originated in *Novye Cheryomushki* has become recognizable all over the world in 60 years. The results of the experiments carried out in the capital were replicated throughout the country. However, in the pursuit of cost-effectiveness, the simple human factor was not taken into account. There was no place for individuality in the project designed for the standard inhabitant. It was in pursuit of technology and speed of installation.

## 1.2 Part 2. NER. Model of interaction ‘Human—Environment’

By far the most famous architectural product in post-Stalin Russia is the *Khrushchevka*, but Soviet architecture of that period was not limited to one brand of Khrushchev Modern. It was also a time of active search for alternatives to mass urban development. One such alternative was the 'NER. New Element of Settlement' project, which proposed a scheme for the future settlements of a post-industrial society. In 1960, a group of students of the Moscow Architectural Institute (MARCHI) graduated with the topic of diploma being centred on a new urban planning concept, developed on the example of the city of Krytovo in the Krasnoyarsk Region, Russia. The group of nine architects created a communist city built on social justice. They absolutely did not consider themselves utopians, but they knew that only the system could provide such large-scale change. They actively criticized the state of Soviet urban planning, arguing that "today, the city is not fulfilling its primary purpose to be an organic living environment", and believed that the intensive development of industry would

lead to irreversible changes in the functional structure of the settlement, such as the mixing of industrial and residential areas and the lack of a clear scheme of urban traffic, and thus the outline plans of cities would not be able to organically regulate the influx of population. In their book 'NER. On the Way to a New City', the architects write:

[...] the micro-district as the main structural unit of a modern settlement does not reflect the complexity of the social, economic and technical problems that can potentially arise. As a result: unsatisfactory sanitary and hygienic conditions, transport difficulties, large losses of time, fragmentation of people and an extraordinary overcrowding of buildings. Conclusion: it is necessary to find a structure that organically meets the social and economic functions of the new settlement. (Gutnov and Lezhava 1966, 9).

Even then, a team of students talked about the city as a structure that includes complex multi-level parameters of 'probabilities', about the concept of 'environment' as a place of habitation and activity, and about the role of the Person in the context of the non-stop development of technologies. It was a project about the dynamics of relations between Human and City, or rather between Human and the Environment. The philosophy of the project was that design interventions that change the environment affect the behaviour of its inhabitants, later resulting in new transformations of the environment, since competent design and management of city development should be carried out on the basis of observation, analysis and forecasting of the subtle relationship between Human and Environment. Can it be considered a utopia?

The team dreamed of applying this philosophy to Moscow, but, unfortunately, time was not on their side. 'The period of stagnation' began. L. Brezhnev became the new head of the USSR. The era of the Khrushchev 'thaw'<sup>1</sup>, when in the USSR for some time people still had hopes for the expansion of social freedoms, ended.

### 1.3 Part 3. 1960-1980. Toward understanding comfort

During this period, more attention was paid to the construction of high-rise buildings, as well as the introduction of improved housing structures. Brezhnev's "antenna" was formed. *Brezhnevka* became the new version of *Khrushchevka*. However, the housing problem remained urgent. Nevertheless, the structure of the city was practically settled by the 1980s, and almost all the territories included in Moscow from 1959 to 1962 were developed. It was during these years when the understanding of comfort began to form. At first, it was about transport accessibility, but later people acquired a desire to have the required number of nearby kindergartens and schools. In addition to the layouts of apartments and the experimental series of houses, the infrastructure of the district also began to play a vital role, although many residents were often just glad to have received the long-awaited living space. And, as the trend shows, people gradually began to understand that architecture should still be more individual and focus on the needs of each individual user.

## 2. CONCLUSION

The formation of the image of the periphery in Moscow and the architectural image of Russia as a whole, that has become recognizable throughout the world, was influenced by the rapidly growing demand for living space in the post-war years. The history of the country, with its planned economy, knew no other way to satisfy this demand except to increase the volume of mass construction in a short time and with minimal investment. It was this need that became the impetus for technological progress.

<sup>1</sup> The Khrushchev Thaw refers to the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s when repression and censorship in the Soviet Union were relaxed.

Today, there are signs of a gradual degradation and wear and tear of the development of the periphery, which for the most part is composed of the architecture that originated under N. Khrushchev. His architectural-building revolution has left behind contradictory results. A conscious bet on the standardization of design processes and in typified construction to solve the short-term problem of providing cheap housing for millions of people, has generated social problems. Residents of both *Khrushchevskas* (five-story buildings) and *Brezhnevskas* (nine-story buildings) are used to erecting the borders of Their Yard, they have not communicated much with the residents of Neighboring Yards, and it is difficult for them to organize themselves to solve any urgent domestic tasks. Consisting today mainly of high-rise buildings, dormitory 'micro-districts' form a boring, depressing urban environment that has a negative effect on people's behavioral attitudes. Not only is this problem not being solved today, it is only getting worse. The outskirts of large cities and the suburbs of megacities are being actively built up with 20-30-story buildings with small apartments. In essence, they cause the same problems as the American suburbs based on single-family detached houses. And there are certainly similarities between both kinds of periphery, such as lack of qualified public spaces, dependency on car mobility, lack of public facilities, undeveloped sense of community, etc. In Moscow, this process is accompanied by significant investments in improving the urban environment in the city center, leading to an even greater imbalance and polarization between the city center and the outskirts. At the same time, the periphery has a unique potential, preserved in the structure of micro-districts, which needs further development today. It is necessary to stop thinking of cities with a single center and focus on open networks of distinctive neighborhoods, with convenient pedestrian links along which all the necessary points of attraction and food provision would be located. A lively and open city is safe city.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of mass housing development in Russia, which has its origins in experimental districts, has proved that a path towards a new city is not achieved through new technologies in housing construction, but through a comfortable urban environment, created for human beings. It is important to remember the role of the Human and his relationship with the Environment in the context of the nonstop development of technology.

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# Wallpapers from the Eastern Europe. A visual research on the façades of post-war mass housing

**Giuseppe Resta**; Assistant Professor, Bilkent University (Ankara, TR); [giusepperesta.arch@gmail.com](mailto:giusepperesta.arch@gmail.com)

**Session:** 9 – *Inhabiting Suburbia: art (registers) of living*. Chair: Maria Rita Pais

## ABSTRACT

*Wallpapers from the Eastern Europe* is an ongoing visual research that explores the modular quality of post-war facades in mass housing complexes. It is based on a photographic survey across Albania, Greece, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovakia, and Turkey, in which facades built with precast assemblies have been studied and sampled. Elaborations take the form of wallpapers tessellated with samples that convey periodical designs. The series of patterns presented is open-ended and intentionally non-scientific. *Wallpapers* series creates a connection between post-war standardized domestic accommodations, often scattered in concrete suburbs developed under the flag of time-cost efficiency, and unexpected patterned repetitions based on identity vitiation, or weak individuality of the single elements, as Gombrich pointed out in his study on the sense of order. Reproduction devalues complexity, but these photographic series aims to demonstrate that while some buildings preserved their original *facies*, others have been allowing unregulated adaptations performed by those who actually live those edifices. First we will introduce the concept of repetition and see how facades and patterns are intertwined; secondly, we will lay out the fundamentals of plane tessellation; then we will analyse some samples of the series and how they can be transformed in wallpapers; finally are the possible variations of the spatial structure and practical applications.

**Keywords:** Pattern; Façade; Standardization.

## INTRODUCTION

*Wallpapers from the Eastern Europe* is an ongoing visual research that explores the modular quality of post-war facades in mass housing complexes. It is based on a photographic survey across Albania, Greece, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovakia, and Turkey, in which facades built with precast assemblies have been studied and sampled. The elaborations take the form of wallpapers tessellated with samples that convey periodical designs in the form of patterns. Hence, a seamlessly repeated geometry that could be ideally repeated *ad infinitum*.

The *Wallpapers* series creates a connection between post-war standardized domestic accommodations, often scattered in concrete suburbs developed under the flag of time-cost efficiency, and unexpected patterned repetitions based on identity vitiation, or weak individuality of the single elements, as Gombrich (1984) pointed out in his study on the sense of order. Reproduction devalues complexity, but these photographic series aims to demonstrate that while some buildings preserved their original *facies*, others have been allowing unregulated adaptations performed by those who actually live those edifices. First we will introduce the concept of repetition and see how facades and patterns are intertwined; secondly, we will lay out the fundamentals of plane tessellation; then we will analyse some samples of the series and how they can be transformed in wallpapers; finally are the possible variations of the spatial structure and practical applications.

## 1. WALLPAPERS AND FACADES

### 1.1. Repetition

Looking at patterns is what we do to understand and study phenomena. On a more psychological level, our general search for meaning passes through an ordering structure that eventually makes patterns appear (Gombrich 1984). Recurring events convey a sequence that we are capable to codify and project previsions with. The classical definition of pattern is that of “a design composed of one or more devices, multiplied and arranged in orderly sequence. A single device, however complicated or complete in itself it may be, is not a pattern, but a unit with which the designer, working according to some definite plan of action, may compose a pattern” (Christie 1969, 1). In the text, we will see how the single device can be adapted to architectural geometries and what outcome will result with different plans of action.

*Wallpapers* bring to fruition architectural facades of standardized neighbourhoods, understanding geometrical rules and variations within a square sample. The latter, in turn, is replicated in a seamless visual continuum. The Cartesian obsession at the base of the *Wallpapers* series is inspired by Jacques Tati's 1967 masterpiece *Playtime*, in which post-war Paris is represented as a generic city looking for neobourgeois spaces characterized by “shoddy construction, lack of amenities, and morbid geometrism” (Ockman 1995, 24). Geometries of the built environment dictate the movements of people. Architecture works as a mould for social behaviours allowing only patterns of orthogonal flights through grid-based layouts. *Playtime* represents the predominance of geometry over improvisation. Repetition makes daily actions part of an urban ritual that is as much nonsensical as hypnotizing is the whole picture of office workers walking in straight lines. *Playtime* has a non-plot, as it represent one ordinary day in a generic neighbourhood of a generic metropolis. One has the sensation that the film can be repeated in a loop for each day of the year. In a way it works exactly like as the single device of a wallpaper, which has a definite meaning in itself but its ends are open and allow another adjacent piece to be juxtaposed.

Uniformity is also at the centre of the scene in which Monsieur Hulot is received at his friend's home. The façade frames floor-to-ceiling windows that allow full view of the domestic space from the street. The scene is shot from the exterior and we can see his friend's neighbours simultaneously. They have the same furniture, wall colours, and layout. The curtain wall functions as a display of shopping windows available for the

consumption of the passers-by (Ockman 1995). *Playtime* is also a film about facades and how their transformation, in terms of materiality and transparency, is a metaphor of the changing post-war society. In the second part, the human factor and that of the architecture switch their role. At the Royal Garden restaurant diners slowly disrupt their geometrical constraints up to the point of a carnivalesque scene, where background music turns into tribal rhythms. This is not a contradiction of the first half of movie, but rather reinforces the cycle of daytime associated with office work and night time in which characters unload their constrictions before another morning in their cubicles.

Instead of studying how patterns can be applied on facades, as it has been done in many occasions, here is discussed how façades from the post-war suburbia can be transformed into patterns. Whether from ancient Greece or contemporary Europe, periodical designs follow the same rules and have the same unchanged anatomy over time (Stevens 1980). Proof is that many studies published in treatises of the 18th century are still applicable today, and their generative character is easily adaptable to computational aesthetics, i.e., parametric architecture.



Fig.1 – Struga façade pattern on polyester cloth. Source: author

## 1.2. Re-elaborations and tessellation

We have already conducted other combinatory experiments with residential plans, analysing how historical domestic typologies can be reinterpreted in contemporary layouts (Gasco and Resta 2021). This series expands on the idea of visual standardization that is attached to post-war building industry. Facades, where domestic life is projected, are being resized to the point of a tessellation module.

Given a photograph in which the perspective has been corrected and squared, the first step is that of looking for a sample unit, which is the largest portion of the façade that can be selected and transformed in a geometric pattern. In prefabricated mass housing buildings, it can be easily identified following the joints between precast elements. Its underlying geometry establishes a systematic link between the design of the façade, its visual feature, the compositional rule, and possible generative configurations. The search for a shape grammar outlines “constituent components of a form and their arrangements and relationships. It usually emphasizes the lexical level (vocabulary elements) and the syntactical level (grammars and relationships) of the architectural composition” (Eilouti and Al-Jokhadar 2007, 8).

The following step entails the tracing of the sample, redrawing the geometry of the façade as well as its local modification. Namely, different window frames, extensions, exposed infrastructure, hanged laundry, and so on, are included as well. This overlaps a second level of complexity on the base image in order to get a non-uniform, asymmetric, sample image (Figg. 2-3). Eventually, the final outcome is the product of a tessellation of extracted motifs that are placed according to the initial spatial structure. George Stiny studied the aesthetic implications of recursive generation of arrangement of shapes in two-dimensional compositions (Stiny 1976, 1980, March and Stiny 1985). His work on shape grammar, founded on structuralism and early experiments of computational art, departs from simple geometrical rules applied via increasingly complex syntaxes.

So we enter the mysterious domain of ornament to which the patterns and images are subjected, as Focillon (1992) maintained in *The life of forms in art*. From an architecture to an elementary motif turned into ornamental theme, forms have their internal rules and can be constructed outside the realm of meaning. Indeed, the French art historian warned on the importance to separate the abstract realm of patterns and the concrete domain of forms. Form is there and not anywhere else, it communicates via its physical qualities, unique qualities, which will inevitably change the perception of an abstract pattern (Focillon 1992, 62). In Focillon’s view, form is alive and always in motion. It has its own history that escapes that idea of being a by-product of a historically determined social context. In Romanesque decoration, for instance, “figures were made to conform to their architectural setting and it was ornamental, in that the figures were drawn and composed in accordance with ornamental schemes” (Focillon 1963, 105). Hence, human bodies and ornamental features could be superimposed.

### 1.3. Wallpapers from the Eastern Europe

Following is a selection of wallpapers of the series that covers Albania, Macedonia, Turkey, Greece, Slovakia and Montenegro. Additionally, one of the Macedonian patterns, Struga, has been presented as a printed sample (Fig. 1), and one of the *polykatoikia* patterns from Athens is utilized to show possible variations in Fig. 4.

Wallpapers from Albania have been sampled in Tirana, Durazzo, Valona, and Saranda. Here is presented the elevation of student dormitories in the Tirana Student City, the *Qyteti Studenti* (Fig.2), which was built under the regime of Enver Hoxha. Turkish wallpapers have been sampled in Istanbul and Ankara. Here is presented one of the buildings in Çankaya, a large district to the south of the capital, specifically the MESA mass housing (Fig. 3). MESA is one of the companies that provided mass housing complexes in a period of momentous increase of accommodation demand in Istanbul and Ankara. Construction employed tunnel formwork systems and reinforced concrete precast facade elements (Eryıldız 1995). Greek wallpapers are mainly concentrated in Athens, and more specifically on the widespread economical multi-storey typology called *polykatoikia* (Fig. 4). It was introduced in the post-war period to accommodate rural migrants and refugee moving to the capital. *Polykatoikia* buildings provide maximum flexibility within a simple reinforced concrete frame, which commentators consider a direct reference to the Maison Dom-Ino (Aureli, Giudici, and Issaia 2012, Aureli 2014).





Fig.2 – Qyteti Studenti pattern, Tirana, Albania. Source: Author

#### 1.4. Variations on the spatial structure

The wallpapers that we have analysed up to this point have been arranged on a simple spatial structure, following a regular grid array with aligned tiles. The same sample is repeated to all adjacent cells without modifications. In order to apply variations to wallpapers, we can transform both the geometry of the spatial structure and the repeating sample motif. In this text we work only on the latter. It is possible to apply four different operations: translation, rotation, reflection, glide reflection (Stevens 1980). The variations presented in Fig. 4 employ the second operation. Tiles have been rotated around their centre, with an interval of  $90^\circ$ , in order to obtain four versions of the same image:  $a = 0^\circ$ ,  $b = 90^\circ$ ,  $c = 180^\circ$ ,  $d = 270^\circ$ . Having previously sampled seamless patterns along the two direction of the plane, matching  $a$  with  $c$  and  $b$  with  $d$  will give again a seamless pairing, visually continuous. However, matching  $a$  with  $b$  or  $d$ ,  $c$  with  $b$  or  $d$ , and vice versa, the continuity will be lost. This is evidently due to the asymmetrical nature of the tile. Now we have for tiles and it is possible to generate infinite pattern of patterns, super patterns. To do that, alternative tiling systems are sourced, in our case, from shape combinations studied by father Sébastien Truchet in 1704 in *Mémoire sur les combinaisons*. Dominique Douat published and extended Truchet's work in 1722 with the title *Methode pour faire une infinité de desseins differens*. The compositions developed by the French Dominican are based on tiles that are not bisymmetric, like our images, in which a simple rotation of  $90^\circ$  affects the appearance of the single unit. In this way, Truchet obtained a catalogue of tessellations with four different rotations of the same tile, a simple square split along one diagonal and coloured black and white (Fig.4).



Fig.3 – ME-SA Çankaya Sitesi'ne komşu parseller üzerinde, Ankara, Turkey. Source: Author

## CONCLUSIONS

*Wallpapers from the Eastern Europe* series is a visual experiment on facades of post war mass housing complexes. The underlying geometry of large precast assemblies is treated as a decorative motif for experimentations on patterns. In a short circuit, the very large turns into microscopic fractal, the homogeneous built environment develops in a trivial divertissement, what is made of concrete acquires the consistency of a piece of fabric. We have seen how architecture can be analysed and its meaning displaced to be used subjectively. The sign departs from the form to which it was attached, is multiplied in an infinite space, and creates a uniform visual noise that cancels again any singularity.



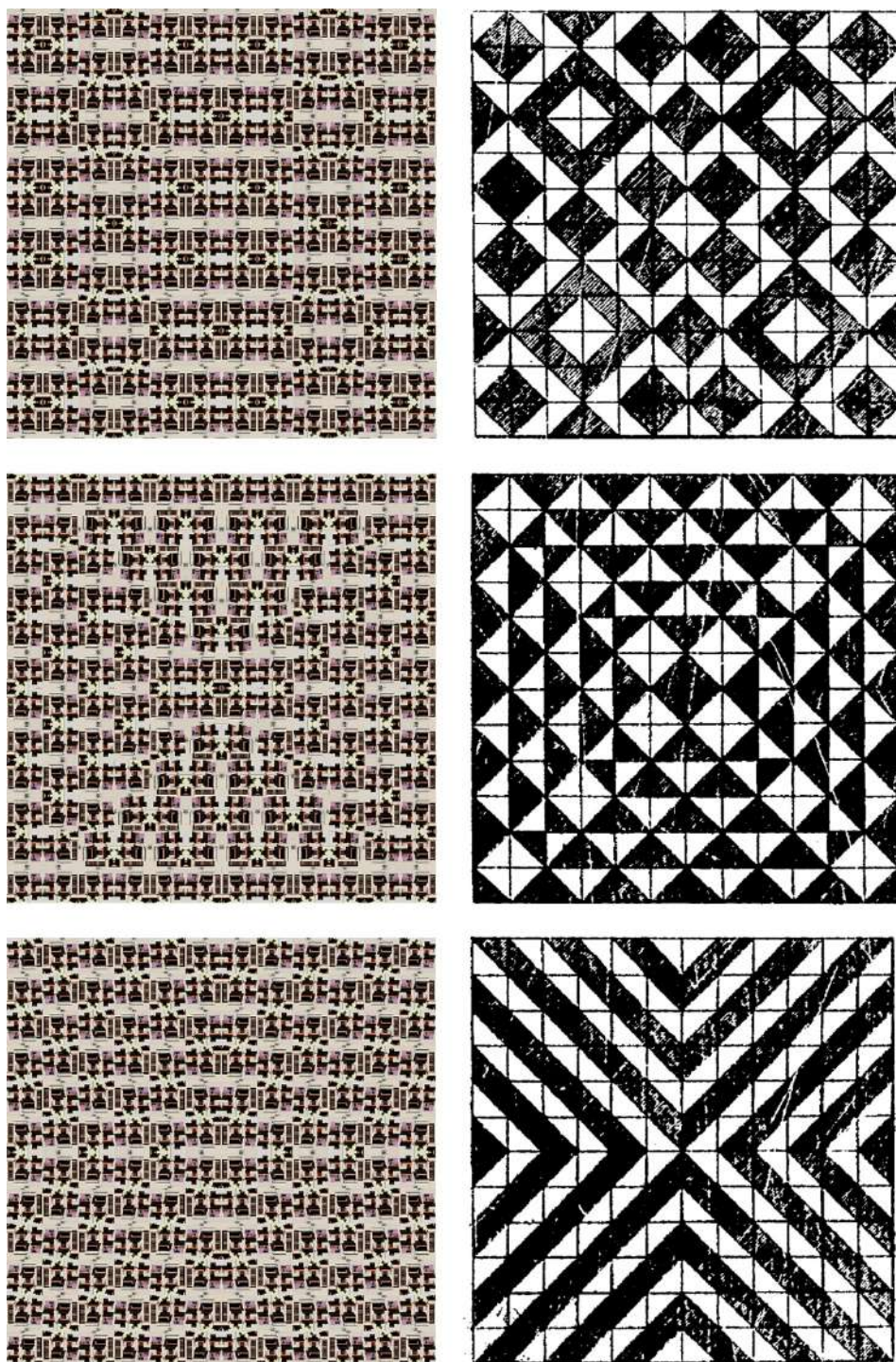


Fig.4 – Variations on Truchet pattern n°46, n°50, n°51. Source: Author and Truchet (1722)

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## **Walking wonders.** An atlas of useless structures in two housing complexes in Lisbon

**Inês Andrade Marques;** COW – Center for Other Worlds / Universidade Lusófona (Portugal);  
ines.andrade.marques@ulusofona.pt; p4198@ulusofona.pt

**Session:** 9 – *Inhabiting Suburbia: art (registers) of living.* Chair: Maria Rita Pais

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on a set of sculptural objects existing in public places in two large housing complexes: Olivais Norte (1955) and Olivais Sul (1959). It is well known that these two housing estates exemplify the rise and fall of the ideals of the Athens Charter in Lisbon. By the time they were built, several authors were already criticizing the dryness of public spaces of modernist urbanism (Zevi, Jacobs, Cullen) and their incapacity of generating social life.

Accordingly, some experimental teams of architects and visual artists who were working in these housing complexes engaged in designing transitional spaces and enclosed areas that could foster social encounters, as well as ludic structures for residents to meet and play on the open air.

In a more or less deterministic way, these structures were sought to induce social relationships, and active use of public space, which was considered as an extension of housing - whose scarcity of space should supply – and as a platform for social equality.

Thanks to their way of working – modelling with clay as a starting point - their approach went far beyond recreating the picturesque plaza, or the traditional playgrounds, to create sculptural objects which were imbued with great poetry and formal ambiguity, recalling contemporary land art interventions (Nancy Holt, Mary Miss).

These 'useless' objects – observatories, circular walls, labyrinths – which remain in the territory (truncated, or ruined) can be described as monuments that 'define the memory traces of an abandoned set of futures', as Robert Smithson said about the monuments of Passaic. This communication intends to identify and chart these objects in the territory. It is accompanied by an Artist Book in the form of a map.

**Keywords:** Play structures; Unintentional Monuments; Modern Ruins.

## INTRODUCTION

Anyone who walks through the Olivais (Olivais Norte and Sul), in Lisbon, is faced, here and there, with small built structures, with no other apparent function other than as an invitation to play or to simply stay outside. These structures assume great formal and material diversity: from simple inscriptions on the pavements to architectural constructions in concrete or masonry. These structures, most of them truncated or ruined, were intended to counteract the monotony of mass housing, or to compensate for the scarcity of interior space in homes, prolonging people's time outdoors. This communication intends to contextualise these interventions in Olivais Norte and Sul in time and space. It is accompanied by an artist book in the form of a map that charts and identifies them in the territory.

## 1. POSTWAR URBAN PLANNING IN LISBON

### 1.1. Post-war Urban Planning in Lisbon

Olivais Norte [1955] and Sul [1959] were the major residential urban developments built in Lisbon after the second world war, gathering influences from various European experiences. This golden period of urbanism and urban design corresponded to a time of large-scale housing construction, where the strict rules emanated by CIAM in the first decades of the twentieth century were softened<sup>1</sup>. An increasing sensitivity to people's need for socialization, and a new attention for what happens in the housing estates' public spaces was clearly noticeable. Children were an important portion of the population in residential areas, epitomising a yearning for a better society in the post-war world. Renewed attention to the needs of children was evident, in terms of urban planning, architecture and public art.

It is telling that the 1959 Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child states that "the child must have full opportunity to play and to dedicate their self to recreational activities, which must be oriented towards the same objectives of education; society and public authorities must endeavour to promote the enjoyment of these rights"<sup>2</sup>. The residential areas created in these decades are thought of as lavish in terms of playgrounds, if compared to their predecessors (Lefaivre and Döll 2007)

In addition, there was also a sensitivity to the use of public space by adults, being these spatial structures understood as facilitators of physical exercise and outdoor recreation, as predicated by the Athens Charter (Álvarez, 2007), or as spatial containers that could foster and promote social interaction.

Thus, playgrounds, recreational structures, spaces for staying outside, were also a mean for a social transformation – a wishful miscegenation of people of different backgrounds, through contacts made by children and informal interactions between adults.

### 1.2. Olivais Norte

Olivais Norte [1955] corresponds to the first large-scale application of the ideas of the Athens Charter in Lisbon, taking the sun, vegetation and space as the raw material of its formulation (Corbusier and Giraudoux [1941] 2016). Although criticised in some countries, the Athens Charter represented, for the Portuguese context in the 1950s, a radical step forward. Despite the schematic and a priori approach to urban issues, it had the merit

<sup>1</sup> For instance, on the *Reaffirmation of the aims of CIAM* (CIAM 6, Bridgwater 1947) one of the goals was "to work for the creation of a physical environment that will satisfy man's emotional and material needs and stimulate his spiritual growth"(Giedion 1951).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 1386 (XIV, 7), of 20 November 1959

of giving critical importance to the question of housing, while also considering its relationship with the surroundings, mainly understood as green areas.

For the first time in Lisbon, in Olivais Norte: "... the principle of independence of housing blocks was directly adopted, with all the known advantages of the possibility of convenient orientation, isolation of housing, etc." (GEU 1964) which meant a radical break with the space of the traditional city.

Although two key criteria were adopted – 1- seeking the "social balance of the cell", avoiding the spatial segregation between types of buildings and rent categories; 2 - implementing the tallest buildings in the centre of the neighbourhood, decreasing as they moved outwards – the buildings were inserted freely on the ground, in the direction of the best sun exposure. These principles of building arrangement on the ground, generated a very irregular grid with unrestricted open spaces which were not thought of not only as neutral spaces, but also as containers for collective outdoor activities, as the Athens Charter proposed.

The plan for the arrangement of outdoor spaces (public/green spaces) directed by landscape Arch. Álvaro Ponce Dentinho, was thought to correct the inconveniences arising from location and climate, and to safeguard the security of pedestrians, providing the unit with abundant vegetation, where several spaces and structures suitable for the practice of outdoor activities for different age groups would be inserted. There is an appreciable gap, however, between what was conceived and what was actually accomplished: the concrete structures that we see today – sand boxes, circular walls, etc. - have probably fulfilled the function of recreational areas, although they do not correspond to the initial projects (Marques 2012, 263). (Fig.1).



Fig.1 – Labyrinth. Olivais Norte. Rua General Silva Freire. Source: Photo by author.

Nevertheless, other structures have been built, on the initiative of architects who have created some of the unit's architectural projects. Among all of them, one deserves special mention in the scope of this study, because it established a new type of experimental architectural structure (arch. Nuno Teotónio Pereira, António Pinto de Freitas and Nuno Portas). It is a project for six rows of four buildings, heavily influenced by organic and vernacular architecture. Here, the concept of transition space was introduced, a space aimed to mediate between the interior of the house and the outdoor, and was intended to be an inter-generational meeting place. Some of these structures are series of "satellites" (as named by the architects) of the buildings: architectural structures with a porch and a bench in front of their entrances (Portas 2004, 51). (Fig.2).



Fig.2 – Buildings' Satellites – Porch and bench, Rua Alferes Barrilero Ruas, Olivais Norte. Nuno Teotónio Pereira, António Pinto de Freitas and Nuno Portas archs. Source: Photo by author.

### 1.3. Olivais Sul

Olivais Sul [1959] was the largest housing complex built at the time in Lisbon, as a “semi-autonomous” residential unit in relation to the city (GTH 1964). Olivais Sul's conception reveals a critical transposition of ideas and solutions gathered in various reconstruction programs in post-war Europe, namely the Athens Charter, the English New Towns and the Scandinavian experiences. These included functional zoning, the segregation between automobile and pedestrian routes, a cellular structure and the concept of the neighbourhood unit, thanks to which the allocation of schools, small shops and other facilities was systematised and a generous provision for green public spaces was ensured (Duarte 2002). A mix of different heights and volumes of the buildings was sought, as the richness and variety of the landscape was considered as an important factor for the wellbeing of the population.

On the other hand, the plan itself paved the way for a careful and thoughtful revival of the traditional city, by proposing in certain areas an agency of buildings that strongly defined streets or squares. In formal terms, the plan already established an ambivalence between the unrestricted green space of the Athens Charter, and the presence of areas “within the tradition of Lisbon's public garden”(GTH 1964).

The sensitivity to the public space surrounding the buildings, which characterises European urbanism after the war, is very evident in the planning of Olivais Sul. Here, the design of the public space was recognised, perhaps for the first time in Lisbon, as a problem too complex to address from a single disciplinary point of view. In an absolutely innovative way, the working group dedicated to the “arrangement of free spaces” (directed by arch. Carlos Duarte) was a team with several specialists - architects, engineers, physical education teachers<sup>3</sup> – which also included two visual artists: the sculptor Jorge Vieira and the painter António Alfredo (André 2004, Marques 2012, Marques 2016)

An interdisciplinary approach reconciled the solutions found in foreign countries with the study of the nearby reality, through surveys performed in the city of Lisbon (Nunes 2007). A systematic study was carried out on the dimensions of the new playgrounds and recreational areas taking into account the age groups of users and the distribution of the population (Marques, 2012).

Again, it is worth noting the extraordinary importance given to children in the study of public spaces along with the belief of the need for the collaboration of artists in urban design. Some of the main references of the team were, for instance, the network of playgrounds set out by the Stockholm Master Plan of 1952 – with the famous

<sup>3</sup> Carlos S. Duarte, Eduardo Medeiros, Francisco Figueira, Carlos Worm, Joel Santana, Joaquim Castro (arch.); J.M. Pereira Gomes, João Guterres (engineers); Joaquim Rodrigo (landscape arch.), Jorge Vieira and António Alfredo (artists).



playful sculpture for children Ägget (Egg), by Egon Møller-Nielsen –, the playgrounds in Denmark and Switzerland, the collaborative experiences between architects and artists (Frank Dickson, Peter Daniel and the painter Vitor Pasmore, in Pieterlee New Town) and the work of the Swiss sculptor-architect Walter Förderer (Duarte 1965, Duarte 1966)



Fig.3 – Sculpted pavement, Praça Cidade de S. Salvador. Olivais Sul. Source: Photo by author.

If the landscape arrangements were made using three-dimensional models or drawings, the studies of playgrounds and public spaces in the surroundings of the buildings – often entrusted to artists António Alfredo or Jorge Vieira – were made using clay (Marques 2012, Marques 2016). This meant that, if compared with Olivais Norte, Olivais Sul has a much more varied type of playing structures a different plasticity using of the very materials of the city – pavement, earth, concrete, masonry. Besides architectural structures – circular walls enclosing spaces, sand boxes, building’s “satellites” – that we see in Olivais Norte, we testify here the appearance of a much more fluid understanding and treatment of space as, for instance, the creation of sculpted pavements, fountains, water-circuits, observatories, etc.: (Fig.3).

## 2. RUINED PLAY STRUCTURES

Scattered across the green spaces of the two units, these useless structures that we can hardly name - are they sculptures, observatories, labyrinths? – still exist today, although without active use by people. Deteriorated, truncated, more or less forgotten by the inhabitants of the neighborhoods, these structures now assume the improbable status of modern ruins.

Associating ruin and modern movement is, as we know, an uncomfortable exercise. Conceived as urban laboratories that heralded the future, modern buildings and playgrounds barely tolerate aging, the erosion of their materials and the very fast pace at which this erosion happens (Olsen, Bjørnar and Þóra Pétursdóttir 2019, 7). In Olivais the buildings remain fully inhabited – even quite valued today – but these structures show people's incomprehension and indifference.

Nevertheless, these strange urban objects still appeal to an idea of play. They were thought as open objects, that could be appropriated individually or collectively, sometimes inducing games with defined rules (e.g. hopscotch), but generally inviting to free improvisation, or spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct. (Caillouis 2001, 28).

These poetic, artistic and useless structures, in its vagueness or functional ambiguity, are places to stay or to

play in a non-deterministic way, a kind of activity that could be described as eminently *free*; *separate* or isolated from ordinary life; *uncertain* and utterly *unproductive*. In fact, free or improvised play produces no goods, wealth, nor new elements of any kind. It is an occasion of pure waste (waste of time, energy, skill) but also a source of joy, pleasure and amusement (Caillois 2001, 5-8).

Would these spaces have ever been appropriated by residents as places to stay or to play? Would these structures have ever fulfilled their more or less utopian function?

Now, in the course of accelerated aging, nature has taken care of them. Lichens, small ruderal plants are already growing between the cracks in the concrete, generating their own microcosm ecosystem. Some structures are truncated, destroyed or have been replaced by mass produced anodyne urban furniture. Also, some of them have been complemented with spontaneous informal gardening by the residents.

### 3. WALKING WONDERS

Suburban spaces are generally not considered to be places of visit or leisure. Synthetically outlined on tourist maps, it is rarely considered that residential suburbs are worth a visit, unless if they exhibit eye-catching street art murals (thus attracting a kind of tourism that pursues this new type of colossal images around the world).

The walking wonders map proposes a visit in the antipodes of this visual and disengaged relationship with the suburb: it is a compilation of these non-photogenic spatial structures that still invite to play as a bodily experience.

There is no nostalgia in charting them on the territory, but there's no parody either. More than mocking tourist visits with non-sense tours, like the Dadaists in Paris a century ago, it is about creating alternative cartographies that connect these urban structures once designed to strengthen the relationships between residents, and to allow for some moments of play and joy. The fact that they accuse decay and oblivion recall, *mutatis mutandis*, the idea of the "ruins in reverse" (Smithson 1967 in Marot, Sébastien 2003). As Smithson famously remarked on what he called the monuments of Passaic, the suburbs have no past, being their "monumental vacancies [...] the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures." (Smithson, 1967). Here, again, it is about collecting and mapping urban artefacts which were sought to induce a wishful convivial society and can be described as involuntary monuments of an utopian future.

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## Fundamental(s) (Acts)

**Spela Hudnik**; University of Ljubljana Faculty of Architecture, Slovenia; spela.hudnik@fa.uni-lj.si

**Session:** 9 – *Inhabiting Suburbia: art (registers) of living*. Chair: Maria Rita Pais

### ABSTRACT

Fundamental Acts, as a series of films produced by Superstudio in the '70s, inspired Rem Koolhaas, curator of the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale titled *FUNDAMENTALS*.

Koolhaas's *FUNDAMENTALS* is correlated with Superstudio's *FUNDAMENTAL ACTS* as a continuum of the process of refounding acts in architecture and human life.

This article is based on a critical reflection of both works (*Fundamentals* and *Fundamental Acts*) as radical space scenarios and reformulations of human existence behaviour in the context of different political, cultural, social, and economic realities.

It questions Koolhaas's reconceptualization of Superstudio's ideology of architecture in the context of *Fundamentals* exhibition subdivided into 3 themes: *Elements of Architecture*, *Monditalia*, and *Absorbing Modernity*. The exhibition reflects critical and (un)conscious strategies of radical transformation of space and process of human existence (interaction/adaptation/integration) with micro and macro narratives, technology and consumption ideology through the past, present and future.

The goal is to emphasize the theoretical, conceptual, communication and research methodology for a better understanding of the correlation and public appearance between Koolhaas's La Biennale and Superstudio projects as a continuous urban development strategy.

The article is concluded with questions such as: What could we learn from utopia? What are the future fundamentals? and Where do we go from here?, which are emerging as arbiters of the continuous evolution process of urbanization. These questions also serve as a critic and warning of distinctly market-oriented society and its tendencies in architecture which are present even today. They also revive the 60s Radical Architecture where Superstudio is once again the protagonist of the future reconception of architecture as the fundamental condition of an alternative model of life on Earth.

**Keywords:** Fundamentals; Koolhaas; Superstudio



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture never touches the great themes, the fundamental themes of our lives. Architecture remains to be at the edge of our life and intervenes only at a certain point in the process, usually when behaviour has already been codified, furnishing answers to rigidly stated problems. [...] Only then it becomes an act of coherence, or the last try for salvation, with its ability to concentrate on the re-definition of the primary acts, and to examine, in the first instance, the relationships between architecture and these acts: Life, Education, Ceremony, Love, Death. (Superstudio 1973)<sup>1</sup>

"How did we get here?" and "Where do we go from here?", are the research questions, that Rem Koolhaas focuses on as a curator of the 14. architecture biennale in Venice titled *Fundamentals*. The critical attention of the contemporary status of architecture and deep impact of market economy, that "has eroded the moral status of architecture" [...] and even deeper 'delamination' between public and private." (Koolhaas 2014b, 17) could be understood as revocation of Superstudio's critique of '*mirracolo economico*' in the 50's and '60s and the performance of architecture in the consumption society absorbed by modernity.

It is not a coincidence that Rem Koolhaas recently reconceptualized the Superstudio's radical ideas and their extreme positions to refound the architecture against geo-economical forces of globalization. Koolhaas's association with Superstudio dates back to the 1970s and has a deep influence on his imagery as well as theoretical and philosophical expression of architecture even today. The projects *Continuous Moments*, *Twelve Ideal Cities* (Superstudio) and *Exodus* (Koolhaas), as the alternative solutions to anti-architecture escape from the existing economic, spatial and social relationships are significant examples of their correlation in the context of the negation of discipline and its specifics, the criticism of global marketing, monumentality in architecture and concerns about humanity.

Koolhaas's exhibition is to be understood as a research method "The spirit of research is always something with which la Biennale concerns itself; but here it is la Biennale itself that is doing the research" (Baratta 2014, 15). It is more about illumination of impacts and events of the past to reflect the current situation in architecture and not about contemporary architects and architecture. It is about the continuation of the elimination of authorship and the monumentality that Natalini remarked in 1971:

If the design is merely an inducement to consume, then we must reject design; if architecture is merely the codifying of the bourgeois model of ownership and society, then we must reject architecture; if architecture and town planning is merely the formalization of present unjust social division; then we must reject town planning and its cities... until all design activities are aimed towards meeting primary needs. Until then, the design must disappear. We can live without architecture. (Lang and Menking 2003, 167)

*La Biennale* becomes an open stage for multidisciplinary scenarios, philosophical and anthropological discussions that capture the territorial and microscopic view. The presentations in different media depict the past, present, and future of different political practices and societies, ideology of modernity in the relation between local and global, city and countryside, architecture and nature, culture and technology.

Koolhaas's *Biennale* reflects the continuity of intellectual multidisciplinary and the radical imagination of architecture (without object), which is believed to correlate with Superstudio's expression of political, economic, cultural, and ideological disagreements. The ideology behind the *Fundamental acts* as an assemblage of their philosophy, methodology, pedagogy, research, and presentation, is linked with Koolhaas's manifestation of the exhibition divided into three main sections: *ABSORBING MODERNITY*, *ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE*, *MODITALIA*.

<sup>1</sup> Superstudio/Adolfo Natalini cited In Lang and Menking 2003, 177.

The whole territory of La Biennale from Arsenale to Giardini performs as *supersurface*,<sup>2</sup> which could be imagined as one great borderless surface, where each moment or event, architecture or object belongs to an imaginative grid of points or fragments that generate life and interact through the reflection of time and movement. "The grid is, above all, conceptual speculation... in its indifference to topography, to what exists, it claims the superiority of mental construction over reality." (Koolhaas 1994, 20)

In the following chapters, the link between each of the three sections of the Fundamentals that correspond to the ideas and philosophy of the Superstudio is also presented.

## 2. ABSORBING MODERNITY = THE WIFE OF LOT

"Architecture exists in time as salt exists in water." (Superstudio 1978, 214)<sup>3</sup>

"Has national identity been sacrificed to modernity?" (Koolhaas 2014b, 22)

In the first section **Absorbing Modernity: 1914–2014** Koolhaas asked national pavilion curators to provide their national contributions to the history of modernization in the period over the last hundred years. The collection of the fragments of national realities, cultural symbols, local specifics and history triggers melted into a global reality under different circumstances of modernization. National pavilions represent 66 fragments of national narratives, "a portrait of the terrifying century in which almost every country was destroyed, divided, occupied, drained, and traumatized, yet survived... The role of architecture in this narrative is substantial,... " (Koolhaas 2014b, 17). In this context, we can see the reflection of various political, economic, social, technological and cultural transformations, as well as the identification of key moments of modernization of each participatory country.

Together have produced a composition reading of a century, revealing massive deconstruction, humiliation, and embarrassment, failure and triumph, political upheaval, economic boom and busts, death and rebirth,..., moments of territorial expansion, division and reunification, technological upgrades, periods of calm, a layering of chaos, and resurrected past, and ideological fantasies... (Koolhaas 2014b, 22).

If "Architecture exists in time as salt exists in water" (Superstudio 1978),<sup>4</sup> "the role of architecture in this narrative is substantial." (Koolhaas 2014b, 17).

In this section, Koolhaas again recalls Superstudio and its subversive ironical criticism of modernity and architecture production which can be found in the texts of the *Fundamental acts: Ceremony* and *Love* and its two projects: *Continuous Monuments*<sup>5</sup> and *The Wife of Lot*.<sup>6</sup> Both projects can be seen as a continuous process

<sup>2</sup> The *supersurface* is continuous radical utopian discussion about Superstudio's theme of grid performs similarly to The Continuous Monument as an act of action. The invisible artificial continuous grid is appeared as a universal communication network of energetic supply points (pogled original), a mental model, supporting a different form of existence which operate in planetary dimension. The *supersurface* is introduced in the exhibition Italy: the New Domestic Landscape in MoMA, NY (1972) as a part of *Fundamental Acts* (1972–1973) – Life, Ceremony, Education, Love, and Death providing a new philosophical and anthropological reformulation of architecture, human life and behaviour.

<sup>3</sup> Superstudio/Adolfo Natalini cited In Lang and Menking 2003, 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Continuous Monument: An Architectural Model for Total Urbanization* (Superstudio, 1969) presents the entire environment of universal dimension as a total design rejecting the power and control of architecture production and existence. As follows in the text of The Continuous Monument publication in 1969: "We believe in a future of 'rediscovered architecture', in a future where architecture will regain its full powers abandoning any ambiguous designation and posing itself as the only alternative to nature. In the dichotomy between natura naturans and natura naturata we choose the latter term." (Superstudio cited In Natalini 2014).

<sup>6</sup> *The Wife of Lot*, the project consisted of five salt monuments – a pyramid, an amphitheatre, a cathedral, the Palace of Versailles, and Le Corbusier's Pavillon of the Esprit Nouveau. A drop of water continuously erodes the structures one after the other, revealing something hidden inside: a pyramidal structure made of metal wire, a residential settlement, an eggshell, Marie Antoinette's brioche, and a brass plate with the following inscription: "the only architecture will be our lives". (Superstudio) The project was presented at the Venice biennale

or sequence, which reflects how time affects architecture revealing its durability, monumentality and presence of historical symbols, "in which salt, a symbol of architecture melts in a course of time, thus revealing their durable core." (Frasselini 2016, 10)

The correlation between initially cited statements and the mentioned projects of Superstudio and the national contributions in section *Absorbing Modernity*, attributed a dual significance to the meaning of

architectural existence in time, eroding its functions, its monumentality and disclosing a key transformable moment. Koolhaas questions the reconceptualization of architecture through the time frame of hundred years, without reducing the complexity of historical layers and diverse cultural and political environments, to summarize generic modernity into a specific one. However, Superstudio's radical idea has an antihistorical character as a system of operation which serves to unify the Earth by seeking for the elimination of any historical symbol in architecture. At the same time, the collective memory is an essential part of the fundamental fragments of their investigation.

The plurality of national contribution represents the fragments of complete Fundamentals, understood as a broader field according to Koolhaas: "I would say the broader field is *Absorbing Modernity* with the two other entities within it: *Elements* and *Monditalia*. In the end it is an exhibition about the whole process of modernization." (Koolhaas 2014c)

Koolhaas in the catalogue *Fundamentals* wrote: "The fact that the West could claim – as the show implicitly did – that it owned the key to a universal architecture and the copyrights to the only model of the city, felt particularly embarrassing in the face of the imminent emergence of a number of other continents' perspectives and realities." (Koolhaas 2014b, 17)

### 3. ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE = CONSCIENCE OF ZENO

"We were interested in simple objects of use, farm tools, crafts and buildings without architects: we were seeking the roots of creativity." (Natalini 1973)<sup>7</sup>

"The fact that elements change independently of each other, according to different cycles and economies, and for different reasons, turns each building into a complex collage of the archaic and the current, the unique and the standard, of mechanical smoothness and bricolage." (Koolhaas 2014b, 193)

When Superstudio introduced the project *Conscience of Zeno*<sup>8</sup> as part of an extensive course called *Extra-Urban Material Culture* at the University of Florence (1973–1978), they actually shifted their research on anthropological observation and documentation to suburban material culture, "...cultural anthropology, research on humans and their mental and material production, [and] attempts to consciously change the environment and ourselves are all part of a process of lifelong learning that involves us completely." (Natalini 1977, 8)

They brought architecture students for fieldwork in Tuscany to investigate and document the materials and tools of Tuscan peasant culture, as well as to learn about these extraordinary human experiences under the Poli research as Natalini describes:

in 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Adolfo Natalini cited In 2A+P/A 2013, 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* For Superstudio, Zeno represented the possibility of living in total autonomy. Through an analysis of his life, they tried to build a survival guide, a grammar of a culture of self-sufficiency based on the techniques of reusing and recycling. Superstudio's research ultimately concluded with the declaration that "the only true art is our life".

In 1973–1974 we thought we would dedicate ourselves to a type of work with the students of the University of Florence. With Alessandro Poli the research on the suburban material cultures started. We were interested in simple objects of use, farm to- oils, crafts and buildings without architects: we were seeking the roots of creativity. (Natalini 1973)<sup>9</sup>

Parallely, Koolhaas uses a similar investigation methodology in the second section ***Elements of Architecture*** in Central Pavilion. He goes back to the roots of 15 fundamental elements of the building "used by any architect, anywhere, anytime" (Koolhaas 2014b, 17). The representation of elements is without chronological sequence or relevant connections. They are associated with 15 categories: the

floor, the wall, the ceiling, the roof, the door, the window, the façade, the balcony, the corridor, the fireplace, the toilet, the stair, the escalator, the elevator. Their cultural diversity and independent mutation through different spatial, temporal and economic dimensions are examined through details, fragments are micronarratives in order to show their anthropo-sociological characters.

Only by looking at the elements under a wide lens can we recognize the cultural preferences, forgotten symbolism, technological advances, mutations triggered by intensifying global exchange, climatic adaptations, political calculations, regulatory requirements, new digital regimes, and, somewhere in the mix -- the ideas of the architect that constitute the practice of architecture today. (Koolhaas 2014a, front page)

Projects *Conscience of Zeno* (1978) and *Elements of Architecture* (2014) are based on the anthropological and cultural academic investigation and show parallel interest in collecting the elements of urban and suburban material culture without any architects but in a form of individual or public acts. While Superstudio rediscovers craftwork technique, domestic and rural tradition, self-sufficient culture and spontaneous creativity, is Koolhaas looking at the evolution of the individual elements of buildings as complex cultural and historical conditions articulated according to different modalities of technological and digital progress.

Koolhaas presents the collection of architectural elements in *Elements of Architecture*, published in a series of 15 catalogues, whereas Zeno's tools with a description of artisanal techniques are published in the catalogue *Cultura Material Extraurbana*. In this section, Koolhaas evokes correlations with Superstudio referring to their concept, theory, methodology and presentation.

According to Superstudio, *Zeno* symbolizes the final radical act, as Frassinelli explains "to be radical means to grasp things by the root...we had reached the roots...That is the main point of extra-urban material culture, the last chapter of our history" (Frassinelli 2016, 7), and is at the same time the answer to Koolhaas's fundamental question of La Biennale.

#### 4. MONDITALIA = MOND/ITALIA = SUPERSURFACE

"Dismissing any myth of globalisation, we tried to understand and speak the languages of the places." (Natalini 2014, 95)

"The current state of Italy is an emblematic condition for a global situation where many countries are balancing between chaos and a realization of their full potential." (Koolhaas 2014b, 17)

In the third section ***Monditalia***, Italy is presented as a fundamental country in its complex reality of crucial political transformation, curated by Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli "as a paradigm of local and global conditions" (Koolhaas and Pestellini Laparelli 2014, 355). With the research process and the method of observation, the entire territory of Italy had been scanned and documented through the geographical coordinate system, which determinates the position of points – 41 case studies of political, cultural, social, and economic contradictions,

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



eliminating any chronological reference of presentation. According to Pestellini Laparelli, this investigation method could be applied elsewhere: "This idea of the scanning through the country, selecting case studies, selecting another way to represent the case studies...it's as the method that can be applied also elsewhere." (Becky Quintal 2014)

This research methodology consistently matches Superstudio's methodology (Global Tools), which in 1973 investigated contradiction in the Italian countryside and developed the general fieldwork methodology, that could also be applied in other countries (Project of Zeno): "This investigation led us to fieldwork first throughout Italy, and then in other countries, such as Greece." (Natalini 1973)<sup>10</sup>

For instance, *La Madalena*, *Radical Pedagogies*, and *Space Electronic* are significant case studies of *Monditalia*, which generate the entire picture of the country as a paradigm of local and global conditions, (*Monditalia-Mond/Italia*) and Koolhaas's constant quest of countries evolution in relation with the rest of the world.

*La Madalena*<sup>11</sup> project, taking place in the north part of Sardinia, investigates territory, architecture, politics and their complex contradictions between the global political act of G8 affair and the local resistance story of Mauro Morandi questioning the current political, economic and social reality.

*Radical Pedagogies*<sup>12</sup> speaks about multiple case studies of architecture education practice reforms that demanded changes of the curriculum in the '60s and '70s in Italy which resulted in the international fluctuation on the radical reshaping of existing disciplines. The architecture pedagogic discourse could be used as a tool towards political change and take control of the public space as performative political acts. According to Colominia: "It has never merely been a space of reflection, of training, and rehearsal but one of action, reaction and interaction (Colomina 2015, 34).

The monumental place of Arsenale changes into an open venue – exhibition and events stage for global experimentation and intellectual exchange, negotiations, different disciplines, localities, and globalism, which is interpreted, « as an ideal set, rather than a sequence of individual episodes." (Koolhaas and Pestellini Laparelli 2014, 355). It highlights the controversy of Italy through a series of simultaneous occurrences of different events, researches, films, dance performances, installations, and theatre – exactly as *Space Electronic*.<sup>13</sup> In the early 70s, *Space Electronic* was a hybrid space for dance and art to express radical creativity, as Catharina Rossi describes,

it was filled with live music and theatre, light projections and televisions screens that relay the worked inside and outside venues. Its life purpose was defined by happenings, events, architecture experiments; 9999 used it as a classroom for the S-space\*, and even created a lake and planted a vegetable garden inside the club for 1971's Mondial festival, a coproduction with Superstudio. (Rossi 2014, 400)

All three case studies reintroduce the domain of Radical Architecture Movement, Global Tools, and Superstudio as *fundamental acts* of territory, architecture, and politics contradicting a fusion of theory, multidisciplinary, imagery, and academic research methodology. Here Koolhaas shares an interest in reading

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Project La Madallena (curated by Ila Bêka & Louise Lemoine) is the installation of two videos that present a dialogue between very specific neighbouring islands Madalena as a disaster and Budelli island as a paradise; G8 political affair and La Madalena chair; architects Stefano Boeri and Mauro Morandi – who represents Zeno's ethic of life and creation.

<sup>12</sup> Radical Pedagogies curated by Beatriz Colomina with a team of the PhD students of the School of Architecture at Princeton University is a result of 3-year-long- research, that explores a series of intense but short-lived experiments in architectural education that profoundly transform the landscape, methods, and politics of the discipline in post-WWII years. (Colomina 2015, 34).

<sup>13</sup> Space Electronic: then and now (curated by Catharina Rossi) presenting a night club in Florence (1969) as a multimedia architecture space for experimentation inspired by New York's Electric Circus and introduced by Radical Architecture movement – Grupo 9999. (Rossi 2014, 400)

and decoding a territory on a macroscale and looking at its contradictions in microscale - *Monditalia* = *Mond/Italia=Supersurface*.

## 5. CONCLUSION

"The Biennale is a fascinating map that reflects all the changes that happened over the last one hundred years". (Koolhaas 2014c)

Koolhaas exhibition *Fundamentals* is to be understood as an essential part of his design research, using the exhibition as a research project. Through three main themes: *Absorbing Modernity*, *Elements of Architecture* and *Monditalia* the questions, which trigger points defining past, present, and future of architecture conceptualization, are opened. Instead of displaying contemporary architects and architecture, the exhibition presents the connection of architecture with art, performance, film, installations and philosophy. It also demonstrates the academic research methodology of scanning the territory in macro scale to elements in microscale as a part of the universal grid structure. The entire space of *La Biennale* could be seen as a platform for multi-events, multi philosophies, multi entities, multi histories, multi modernities, multi-elements, multi nations, multi-cultures, multi economies and multi politics. *La Biennale* with evident traces of Superstudio's universe could be understood as a continuous collection of *Continuous Monument*, *Histograms of Architecture*, *12 Cities*, *Zeno*, *Lot's wife*, or *Fundamental acts*, all of which are performed as sequences of narratives in *Supersurface*.

The results of the research presented in this article prove that Koolhaas's multilayered concept of *La Biennale* is influenced by the radical ideas and concepts of Superstudio, which has not yet been discussed by any critic of this biennale.

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# How to think the periphery in intersectional ways.

Spacing layers to the arts to architecture

**Maribel Mendes Sobreira;** CFUL (Portugal); maribel.sobreira@campus.ul.pt

**Session:** 9 – *Inhabiting Suburbia: art (registers) of living.* Chair: Maria Rita Pais

## ABSTRACT

We intend to rehearse/analyze the intersection between Art and Architecture, placing the emphasis on aesthetic experience, through two concepts that will complement each other: that of *spacing* (räumen; Heidegger, 1969; Matina Löw, 2016), understanding it as a constitutive element of subjectivity, not in the physical (sciences), geometrical sense, but rather existential and; that of *ontology fields of sense* (Ontologie der Sinnfelder; Markus Gabriel, 2013) which translates into the object's reading and apprehension of layers. When we look at Malevitch's work, what we see is not only a square, but a set of layers of meaning.

Both concepts, used to think about the visual arts, will be important for the analysis of the architectural object, that is, the *spacing* being the subjective relationship between an object and a mediator, open layers of meaning. In a complex century like ours, we can integrate them in the analysis of the object, being it both artistic or architectural.

The way spacing is involved with space occupied by objects and the way the observer reads and integrates these discursive layers involved in this relation is a sensitive apprehension.

We can expand some concepts linked to art and its aesthetic experience, to architecture, by raising questions and problematizing them. Thinking objectively about the suburbs raise problems of access to ontologies put asleep by a universalizing or normativizing system, which by not being heard, or taken into consideration, collide with the center.

**Keywords:** Spacing; ontology fields of sense; Architecture; periphery; decolonial.



## 1. Introduction

We intend to analyze the intersection between Art and Architecture, placing the emphasis on aesthetic experience, through two concepts that will complement each other: that is spacing (*räumen*; Heidegger, 1969; Matina Löw, 2016), understanding it as a constitutive element of subjectivity, not in the physical (sciences), geometrical sense, but rather existential and the concept of ontology fields of sense (*Ontologie der Sinnfelder*; Markus Gabriel, 2013) which translates into the object's reading and apprehension of layers. When we look at Malevitch's work, what we see is not only a square, but a set of layers of meaning.

This essay will not focus on the categories of material and formal space, but rather on the living space, since it is not the first one that the subject apprehends. We believe that we only perceives/apprehends space when we analyze it and becomes aware of its coordinates. Before that happens, we give to the intuition are the fields, the layers of experiential sense, interconnected with others that carry stories and memories, that spatializes itself. A true lived space where the body opens itself to spacing, embodying itself, playing with the abstract and with the experiential space.

Thinking objectively with the suburbs raises problems of access to ontologies put asleep by a universal or normative system, which by not being heard, or taken into consideration, collide with the center.

In this sense we propose to create a method of analysis, to help us to understand the problematics, through the intersection of themes considered suburban in its origin, which are the margin, such as: decolonial and gender issues; the meaning and practice of architecture and the constitution of the observer, that is, the object of my appearance, what is given to/in my consciousness is always through a discourse loaded with narratives, or loaded with countless layers that influence the apprehension of an object, be it marginal (peripheral) or central (normative).

This viewer, as specific as we, is an engaged subject who sees. He is not detached from the influences and power relationships, which imagery produces through the gaze of the politics of perception, that decide what we should have access to.

This *Seeing is a subject*, as Didi-Huberman notes, there are no neutral gaze. The utopia of the minimalists would never be achieved because the observer is in himself a subject constituted with various discursive, symbolic, and psychological layers, analyzing, and interacting with objects, whether physical or intellectual. The *Seeing is a subject* is never a linear, fixed, and crystallized act, either in time or space. We would rather say that *Seeing is a subject* is a dialectic process that fluidly intersects the various layers of sensitive and sensorial apprehension, which sometimes shows and sometimes erases.

This game between presenting and disconnecting also involves the representation of space, mostly integrated in a Cartesian methodology, making the observer external to and dissociated from the spatial experience. This means that this representation is free from tensions and conflicts inherent to difference, becoming, deceptively, immutable, and timeless spaces.

Reinforcing this idea, Fernando Luiz Lara observes that "Our cities are designed to exclude and to forget. (...) We have created an excluding and predatory urbanism that uses informality, precarious work and police repression to maintain a physical and symbolic distance between the owners of the land and those who have always worked here" (F. Luiz Lara; 2020,p.9). So, according to the Cartesian representation, which has as its constitution a generic spatialization, the universalizing subject is reinforced, erasing, or hiding the inherent problems that such practice brings up in the correspondence with the periphery.

According to Plato, If the eye were in a situation where it could look at itself, it would become aware of the constitution of vision. This, and following Merleau-Ponty, passes through a game of spatial alterity, to which

the holistic, flesh, sensitive body is submitted. Spatiality appears in the encounter of ontological holisticity with the surroundings of the living body, in flesh, sensitive, thus constituting the subjectivation of the object-subject.

We understand that Spacing, and we will see further on, has to do with this gaze (*seeing is subject*) that shows and erases, that excludes and forgets, that constitutes and is constituted in the aesthetic relationship with its surroundings, but what is Spacing, how does it come about and how is it composed? What fields of sense does it open?

## 2. Spacing to the located body

Let us borrow as a starting point for our reflection, the concept of Spacing (*räumen*) from Heidegger, updating it through the study and analysis that the sociologist Martina Löw to later connect it to the ontological fields of sense and how they can dialogue and work together in the analysis and problematization that we propose here.

Heidegger's intention is to open a path of understanding beyond Cartesian logic and physical determination, like the Kantian a priori in what concerns the exteriority of space. He begins his analysis, in *Being and Time*, with the question about the existence of *dasein*, which is the equivalent to ask about the spatiality of the human being that unfolds in everyday life.

In short, for Heidegger, the Heideggerian *dasein*/human being/subject is constituted and produced by its spatiality (cf. SuZ, §22-§23), the space is always understood here (spatiality) with the dealing with/in the world, the quotidian, that is, with what is at hand (*zuhanden*), around him, as he goes through the world, he opens himself in space, he spatializes himself. Its experience is singular and specific to each human being and not an abstract and universal concept. The Heideggerian human being/subject *dasein* starts from the space closest to him/herself, the one which is familiar to him, it is in its appearance that things are constituted, that is, for something to appear it needs a delimitation, a mark/frame, or an opening where it may appear.

This *being-in-hand* presupposes a proximity and/or distance of things based on their usefulness, discovering the space through seeing-the-frame, that is, the spatiality of the Heideggerian *dasein* human being/subject is constituted by dis-attachment and direction. Let's take the example of a window, what appears to us is not the window itself, but it takes shape for us through the elements that appear in it, playing with Heideggerian terminologies, the window, windows itself (it becomes world). In this embodiment of the window, we become aware of its limits and its region (*gegend*), the place where things happen.

In both *Bemerkungen zu Kunst - Plastik -Raum* (*Observations on art, sculpture, and space*, 1964:2008) and *Die Kunst und der Raum* (*Art and Space*, 1969; 2009), the author poses the question/emphasis on the two categories of space, the technical-physical and the artistic, asking for their existence. He argues that the geometrical, projected, and scientific space is not the only true space when confronted with the living and artistic space, questioning how the relationships between bodies, the plastic figure and the space take place, what happens for them to appear. For this, the space of plastic (*Plastik*) spatializes, or opens itself to its spatializing dimension, that is, space is not a mere receptacle ready to receive the bodies, but is made in the relation in and of, it is a relational space, a constitutive element of the world, of the conformation of matter in space and time.

Following the trail of these two ideas, the question of space refers to Spacing, the word when asked already speaks of spatializing (dKudR, 1969;2009, p.21). Succinctly, this spatializing refers to the free giving of places, preparing the limitation, location, region for an inhabiting, and that means that the place opens a region (*Gegend*). In the sphere of *Plastiks*, this would be an embodiment of its own elements making space, producing it, Spacing itself. In this sense, Spacing speaks the natural constitution of making space, understood as an

existential form that refers to the sphere of human action, where everyday activities are developed (dKudR, 1969;2009, p.42).

Let us see that the way we perceive the space we experience daily reveals itself as something within which we and all other things are in relation to or move in. We are always and mainly located, in a place. Everything has a place and is within a space, all concrete things are spatial and within space. As noted above, this means, in reference to space, that space should be thought of as a spatial event, that it is space that gives and provides space (Spacing?).

To be spatial, space needs human beings, and their space, human beings and space are not two independent entities, of which one would be prior to or, on the contrary, dependent on the other. Both always refer to each other. Neither can be without the other, they belong to each other, they need each other.

This dimension also brings the analysis of the sociologist Martina Löw who, given her training, theorizes space and Spacing in its social dimension, disconnecting herself from the conceptions that defend a pre-existence of the space. Like Heidegger, there is an existential dimension, which is further specified in the specificity of a body and its way of Spacing. It passes from the spoken word to a dualistic space of action, without escaping this existential dimension that Spacing opens up.

For space to take place, a simultaneous movement between synthesis and Spacing will be necessary, between the processes of perception, imagination, memory and allocation, in the sense of raising, building and positioning (Martina Löw, 2013, p.28). This second process she calls Spacing, this would be the allocation of bodies, being them goods, human or non-human, both in a projective (future) and immediate action.

Being the action, between synthesis and Spacing the one that produces the space between the objects by placing them in relation and/or extension, we defend that there are as many spaces as there are subjects, and their actions of spatial constitution lead to denying or excluding the perceptive-constitutive action of the space of another, who is also a *seeing is a subject*.

Thus, in the places of living, the necessary coexistences are constituted to establish the relations we associate with territoriality, whether in the context of the congregation of affinities or as a subterfuge for the demarcated emergence of an alterity, where difference is legitimated. As Martina Löw argues in the same place there are multiple modes of formations of space and spacing, human beings do not act in a similar way (Martina Löw, 2013, p.29).

The analysis of the aesthetic experience of spacing must take into consideration the positioning, or the location of the bodies, that he carries. It can, moreover, not take into consideration, gender, race, and class (Martina Löw, 2013, p.29). The conception of space only considers a generic user who influences the sensory and aesthetic experience of that space. There is also the gaze, which formats and hegemonizes, and omits access to other bodies in a full way. In this sense, *seeing of -the-seeing* is a subject, part of a positioned, located body, as Adrienne Rich puts it.

### 3. Localization and the fields of meaning

The essay "Notes toward a Politics of Location" (Adrienne Rich, 1984), arises from her concerns about identity plurality and the way it influences her political and aesthetic positioning: "[...] I need to understand how a place on the map also becomes a place in history within which, as a woman, as a Jew, as a lesbian, as a feminist, I am created and try to create", that is, a body is not merely a set of organic elements, such as arms, legs and head, we are not only citizens, but our body is constituted by our gender, race, sexuality, social class and, it is from this configuration that we look and construct reality, always from our body, and constitute spaces. The *seeing is a subject* is geographically, historically, culturally, and politically positioned, all our dimensions

influence the way we construct ourselves and how we construct the relation with the other through the processes of spacing.

This body is not a mere constitutive element of the eye, which originates the vision devoid of a subject, without experience; *Seeing* is understood here, and as we saw above, not in the plan of the projections that appear or manifest themselves by anticipating schemes that give meaning to or appear to *Seeing*, but rather as a *Seeing* that starts from one's own body experiences, from the experiences, from one's subjectivity, breaking with the generalization/universality of perception.

In this sense, it interests us to understand how each one, in his subjectivity of seeing is a subject, interacts and integrates the various fields of sense in their experience in/of the space that the Spacing opens.

Given the limits and circumscription of this essay, we will not deepen the discussion that For Markus Gabriel opens, problematizing what the world is and why it does not exist, succinctly, it does not exist as an ontological totality, existing an undetermined number of worlds, there is no hegemonic, universalizing thought. There are only facts, objects in context, everything we can think about it is enough for something to be in the field of thought for it to exist.

For the world to exist, there would have to exist a world field of reference, and this would have to have a world field of sense, and so on, without our being able to detect the origin of this field of sense.

Giving us the example of Vincenzo Natali's film *Cube*, he tells us that "if only a single object existed, none could exist because the object, completely alone, would have to appear in a field of sense in order to exist." (Gabriel; 2013, p.44). Therefore, for an object to exist, must exist its sense field and the sense field where the first field appears, it is enough to exist in the sense field of thought for us to consider that a new sense field exists and so on.

For what interests us, we will focus now on *ontological fields of sense*, following Markus Gabriel, these are the places where things appear, have existence, existence is appearance, the context where something appears in that *field of sense* (Gabriel; 2013, p.59). The *field of sense* understands the comprehension of the human perspective (Gabriel; 2013, p.202) as ontological facts that are not closed in on themselves, but rather open and shareable by individual beings that are not living confined to themselves, but open to interaction, enabling the intersection with other *fields of sense* coming from other human beings without erasure (p.108). Just as there are multiple spaces, as there are subjects, there are also multiple ontological fields.

Following this idea, the center-periphery division would not exist, because there would no longer be a center where everything gravitates, a whole that is broken down, opening a terrain for the coexistence of other ontologies suburbanized by the centralized gaze.

To help us visualize, we will exchange the word fields for layers, since the information that reaches us may be understood by successions of dense layers, but which are not hierarchical; the *emotive-perception* opens them up and interlinks them according to the level of understanding of reality. Let us now look again at the subject, a spatializing subject, which both embodies and lives in that embodiment, a committed observer, who creates objects in the illusion of their neutrality.

The object is not neutral, it suffers itself from the various layers of sense, opening semiotic readings that each epoch hides and is actualized by the engaged subject. Because each epoch can only give form to what it is capable of knowing of its own process, it only shapes what subjectivity can capture from the contents available to it, and this is also valid for the observer. As we have seen, neither the object is neutral, nor is the subject, this *seeing is a subject* located opens fields of sense by spatializing space, which, referring to Fernando Luiz Lara, were used to exclude and forget.



## 4. Conclusion

To think of centralized architecture is to decentralize so that the margin (periphery) can emerge as a field of ontological sense to apprehension of this *seeing is a subject* spatialized in its location. This *seeing is a subject* has a body that problematizes its location (Adrienne Rich), its spacing is not deprived of its identity and, with this, the conceptual analysis of this layer allows other ontologies to coexist, without being in a process of hierarchization and abstractions, referring the observer to a mere receptacle, or a passive and uncritical constructor in the taking of space, unable to experience and critically analyze the space.

Because this is an essay that is an essay itself, we cannot draw conclusions, we can only leave some loose lines that, in future reflections, can materialize. We can only focus on the idea that what is given to the intuition of a space that opens itself to a body, that spatializes itself, are the fields, the layers of living sense, interconnected with others that carry stories and memories, a true lived space where the body opens itself to the spacing, embodying itself, playing with abstract and living space.

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## Exploratory Talks as a Tool for Co-Diagnosis.

### Comparative Analysis of Residential Neighbourhoods in New Belgrade & Almere Haven

Anica Dragutinovic<sup>1,2</sup>, Lidwine Spoormans<sup>1</sup>, Uta Pottgiesser<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> TU Delft, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Delft, Netherlands, A.Dragutinovic@tudelft.nl, L.G.K.Spoormans@tudelft.nl, U.Pottgiesser@tudelft.nl; <sup>2</sup> TH OWL, Detmold School for Architecture and Interior Architecture, Detmold, Germany, anica.dragutinovic@th-owl.de, uta.pottgiesser@th-owl.de.

**Session:** 10 – *Building a Key Analytical Framework for MCMH*. Chairs: Els De Vos and Eva Storgaard

#### ABSTRACT

**[Intro]** The paper introduces a participatory tool for assessment of the Middle-Class Mass Housing (MCMH) in Europe that was simultaneously applied in two studies, on the two cases New Belgrade (Serbia) and Almere Haven (The Netherlands). The studies were exploring the values, problems and opportunities of these residential neighbourhoods through the eyes of their residents.

**[Method]** A comparative analysis reveals contrasting and complementary aspects of the two cases. Exploratory interviews and surveys were used to collect testimonies of residents, informing the method of assessment (co-diagnosis) in residential neighbourhoods. By applying the same tool and comparing results, the paper contributes to a validation of this method for research on MCMH neighbourhoods in different regions and for different MCMH typologies and scales.

**[Result]** The paper highlights some main themes of residents' analysis of their neighbourhood's strengths and weaknesses. Aspects discussed are, among others, deterioration (technical, functional, social), sense of community, place attachment, maintenance and taking care, ownership and appropriation, quality of public spaces and green areas, satisfaction and comfort. Both researches are still in development, but some preliminary conclusions can be sketched. Although both cases were built in the same decades (1970s-80s), they seem to hold opposite architectural and urban characteristics. New Belgrade is composed of modernist blocks with mass housing types in a high-rise urban pattern with mainly collective green spaces. Almere Haven is a suburban low-rise pattern and consists of a wide variety of typologies, materials and a range of private, collective and public green spaces. However, the residents' opinions and assessments show many similarities, regarding the themes they address and the values and problems they identify.

**[Value for MCMH]** The paper illustrates the diversity of MCMH in two different European regions and projects, identifying the broad scope that is needed to assess MCMH. Moreover, the method of exploratory talks with residents is identified as an important participatory tool within the broader analytical framework for MCMH neighbourhoods.

**Keywords:** Co-diagnosis; New Belgrade; Almere Haven.

## INTRODUCTION

The middle-class mass housing (MCMH) areas in Europe have for a long time received very little attention since most of the studies on housing favoured either the theme of high-class single-family houses or the other extreme, social housing for low-income families (Milheiro et al. 2018, 44). Nevertheless, MCMH is an emerging research topic in recent studies in several European countries and is further receiving more attention internationally. Aiming to contribute to the emerging discussion and existing knowledge on MCMH, the paper presents a comparative study on two examples of MCMH in Europe: New Belgrade (Serbia) and Almere Haven (The Netherlands).



Fig.1 – Two case studies: Almere Haven, Netherlands and New Belgrade, Serbia. Illustration by the authors, adapted from <http://www.bing.com/maps>, accessed on 23 January 2018 and 29 June 2020.

New Belgrade is the biggest municipality of the Serbian capital Belgrade. Basically, it is a city within the city with around 250.000 inhabitants. It was planned in the 1950s just after WWII as *the capital city* of the newly founded socialist Yugoslavia, but largely constructed in 1960s and 1970s as *a housing city*, composed of modernist mega blocks in a high-rise urban pattern. The constantly changing socio-political context caused discontinuity in planning, building and maintaining the housing area, eventually resulting in decay and disrepair, especially of the common spaces.

Almere had to become the antithesis of the modernist model, the city that was different from the Amsterdam Bijlmer (Provoost, 1999, 13). New town Almere should be more human, representing a general shift of Dutch planning ideals in the early 1970s, strongly influenced by architects and planners related to Team 10. Almere Haven is the oldest core in the polycentric urban layout. It was built from the 1970s onwards, on new polder land. Its suburban low-rise pattern was inspired by traditional Dutch harbour towns and the organic human scale concept of the 'woonerf'. Almere is based on small scale but has grown into a city for over 200.000 inhabitants.

Although the two residential neighbourhoods were built in the same decades, they seem to hold opposite architectural and urban characteristics. As indicated above, the ideologies that formed the basis of Almere Haven can even be interpreted as a countermovement to the urbanism of New Belgrade. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis will show many similarities, regarding the values, problems and potentials that were identified and are to be addressed in further research.

This paper explores the values, problems and opportunities of these residential neighbourhoods, through the eyes of their residents. It is based on the assumption that residents are the experts in assessing the quality of living environments. The inclusion of citizens in the co-diagnosis and co-creation processes can be seen as a trend in local communities and national policies. Also, on European level, the Faro Convention<sup>1</sup> advocates people-centred processes as an essential part of development, in which “everyone’s opinion, interests and aspirations counts” (Council-of-Europe 2005,10).

## 1. RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODS

In the first phase of the research, thematic frameworks and research methods were defined independently for each case. Focusing on the two different case studies, this phase was done in parallel by the researchers<sup>2</sup>, resulting in a complementary setting. Second, the empirical research focussed on the exploration of the two case studies. Exploratory interviews and surveys were used to collect testimonies of residents, informing the method of assessment (co-diagnosis) in residential neighbourhoods. Third, a comparative analysis of the two studies revealed contrasting and complementary aspects of the two MCMH cases.

### 1.1. Thematic framework and research methods

Being part of the broader MCMH thematic framework, the research explores values, problems and opportunities by using exploratory talks as a method of participatory assessment (co-diagnosis). The use of anthropological-ethnographic methods is used by several disciplines relating to evaluate the built environment. In the heritage assessment, various techniques are applied, like transect walks, behavioural mapping, focus group interviews (Low 2002, 38-39). In the architecture and history discipline, oral history as a research method is gaining ground (Gosseye, Stead, Van der Plaat, 2019). By application and testing this participatory tool, we aim to contribute to more inclusive methods of neighbourhood evaluation and development.

### 1.2. Empirical research – two case studies

The two researches as parallel, yet independent, studies use different techniques. However, they share the methodological approach of consulting individual residents to identify qualities of their living environment.

The study on New Belgrade applied the method of exploratory semi-structured interviews. The questions, or rather topics for discussion, were previously designed in a workshop with Master students at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture. The questions were pre-tested in an interview simulation with a guest expert. The test-interview helped with refining the questions/topics. In this way, the students were also trained on how to conduct the interviews with the residents. Moreover, the researcher trained the students on how to identify and select the interviewees. The research process followed: preparatory talks and selection of the interviewees, the on-site interviews (48 interviews), organisation and analysis of the collected material, representation and visualisation.

<sup>1</sup> The Faro Convention is a treaty whereby European countries agree to protect cultural heritage and the rights of citizens to access and participate in that heritage.

<sup>2</sup> The study on New Belgrade is part of the ongoing PhD researches, see acknowledgements.



In the specific method for Almere Haven, informants were asked to keep a diary, responding to two questions or assignments per day, for one week. Completion of the diary notes is done by the participants independently, and 55 diaries were returned and completed. The questions and assignments include aspects of the urban scale and architectural scale, relating to the living environment of the individual resident. Respondents are residents of Almere-Haven and were approached by encounters in public space, snowball method (a respondent suggests or recruits others) and two group meetings with children and elderly.



Fig.2 – a) Almere Haven (left), Photography © Lidwine Spoormans 2018; b) New Belgrade (right), Photography © Zorana Jovic, Student Workshop, Belgrade, 2020.

### 1.3. Comparative analysis

The analysis of the collected material that was done independently by each researcher after each study is not subject of this paper. This paper focuses on the comparative analysis of the collected testimonies of the residents in the two studies. Based on the collected testimonies of the residents, a set of parameters for comparative analysis was defined: social cohesion, community centres, facilities, ownership, taking care, public and green spaces, aesthetics and living histories. Within each category, the statements of the residents from the two neighbourhoods were correlated.

This stage is revealing contrasting and complementary aspects of the two MCMH cases. The approach represents an important contribution to the existing analytical framework for assessment of the MCMH, and for residential neighbourhoods in general. It validates the research method proving its applicability to the different examples of MCMH neighbourhoods in different regions and for different MCMH typologies and scales.

## 2. RESULTS

A comparative overview of the residents' testimonies, that were collected during the empirical part of the research, are presented in this chapter. Each theme, or parameters of the comparative analysis, are separately studied, and summarized in a final graphic (Fig. 4).

## 2.1. Social cohesion

Residents from both neighbourhoods value social cohesion with their neighbours very high. Children are often a natural connection, as a resident explains: “Kids are all the time outside, and then you meet people. You are simply directed towards the centre of the block, onto that one park, that shop, school, and that’s where you meet your neighbours all the time.” (resident, New Belgrade). Social cohesion has also organisational benefits: “I do have contact with my neighbours. Not because it is fun, but for practical reasons. Six or seven neighbours would alarm if my curtains don’t open in the morning.” (resident, Almere Haven). This way, social connections can provide social safety.

## 2.2. Community centres

Community centres are very important places to facilitate communication and collectivity. In New Belgrade, their disappearance has an impact on the residents: “The community centres had the importance, but they are systematically destroyed by taking the rights and budget step by step. That is a big issue.” (resident, New Belgrade). The collective courtyards, which are present in low-rise neighbourhoods of Almere Haven as well, have a similar community function nowadays. Therefore, it is important for these spaces to be safe and accessible.

## 2.3. Facilities

Close proximity of shops and other facilities is important for the daily lives of residents. In New Belgrade residents appreciate the high level of amenities: “Well, you have everything you need here in the block, kindergarten, schools, shops, bakeries, pharmacies, health facilities and a dentist.” (resident, New Belgrade). The importance is also felt in Almere Haven, but here residents “are worried about the vacancy of stores. Many convenience stores and specialty stores are disappearing.” (resident, Almere Haven). So, in the low-rise neighbourhood of Almere Haven retail is declining, whereas the high density of New Belgrade makes that facilities can keep up.

## 2.4. Feeling of ownership

Residents mention the lack of responsibility for the environment as a problem. The feeling of ownership of collective property is declining. Especially in the high-rise blocks in New Belgrade the distinction between individual and collective ownership is problematic, expressed by a resident: “The residents are mainly the owners as well. A few are renting the flats. [...] But then a big issue of not knowing what’s yours and what’s collective emerged.” (resident, New Belgrade). Feeling of ownership over private property in the low-rise neighbourhoods with dominance of single-family homes, make this distinction easier: “My own garden is my favourite place.” (resident, Almere Haven).

## 2.5. Taking care

Both neighbourhoods still have first or early inhabitants, who observe a decline in taking care and collective spirit. This can relate to the beforementioned maintenance and feeling of ownership. A New Belgrade resident said: “People simply could not understand that the building is a common space, and that it should be collectively managed and maintained. They understand that they should maintain their flat, but not the building. That is the reason for today’s physical condition of the buildings.” (resident, New Belgrade). In other cases, residents share interest in maintenance and taking care of the collective, like in a street in Almere Haven: “I have regular contact with neighbours, especially ‘people like me’. Together we are taking care that the street looks neat and we borrow each other’s broom.” (resident, Almere Haven).

## 2.6. Public and green spaces

Green areas and playgrounds are the absolute winners in public space (Fig. 3). However, the type of space, the layout and programming make a difference. Apart from the extensive park-like areas with mature greenery, especially the smaller scale public places integrated in the residential neighbourhoods are appreciated. “No one has time or initiative to do something in the collective spaces. Only the kids’ playgrounds are important for us.” (resident, New Belgrade). So again, children are often drivers, as expressed by a young participant in Almere Haven as well: “We have two courtyards, one with a playground and one with a garden. I like the courtyards because they are next to my house and it is where I meet my friends. It is nice to have a lot of freedom to imagine games to play.” (resident, Almere Haven). In future developments, public green spaces are key values in spatial terms, enabling social contact and feelings of freedom.



Fig.3 – a) Almere Haven (left), Photography © Lidwine Spoormans, 2018; b) New Belgrade (right), Photography © Zorana Jovic, Student Workshop, Belgrade, 2020.

## 2.7. Aesthetic

The brutalist architecture of New Belgrade starts to be appreciated. Several residents here express positive opinions, like: “To be honest, I find the contrast grey concrete - greenery very appealing.” (resident New Belgrade). The ordinary atmosphere in Almere, on the other hand, is not generally recognised as aesthetically valuable. As a resident in Almere Haven explained: “There are no beautiful neighbourhoods in Almere. In old cities like Alkmaar or Amsterdam, of course they are beautiful. But not in Almere, everything is very ordinary here.” (resident Almere Haven).

## 2.8. Living histories

Although both neighbourhoods are relatively young, childhood memories as living histories play an important role in the legacy of the neighbourhoods. A child in Almere Haven, being proud of his neighbourhood, said: “My father grew up here. I know that my house and my neighbourhood are very old.” (resident, Almere Haven). A New Belgrade resident said: “It was great for me to grow up here, as the level of freedom in New Belgrade was very high.” (resident, New Belgrade). These strong feelings of belonging, of both first inhabitants, children and newcomers, should not be neglected.

## 2.9. Synthesis

Although the parameters for comparative analysis were the same, they were differently evaluated in both neighbourhoods as shown in the graphic (Fig. 4). The comparative analysis highlights some main themes of



residents' analysis of their neighbourhood's strengths and weaknesses. Social cohesion, community centres or courtyards, green spaces and living histories are highly valued in both cities. Facilities and aesthetics are higher valued in New Belgrade. Feeling of ownership and taking care are better appreciated in Almere Haven, composed of single-family homes mainly. A decline in taking care and increased deterioration (technical, functional, social) could be correlated with a declining feeling (or, in case of New Belgrade, also legal status) of ownership. Sense of community and place attachment, that are highly valued and important for the residents, could be main drivers of change. Furthermore, the public spaces and green areas are recognised as spatial value and as potential spaces for interventions that would increase residents' comfort and satisfaction with the neighbourhood.

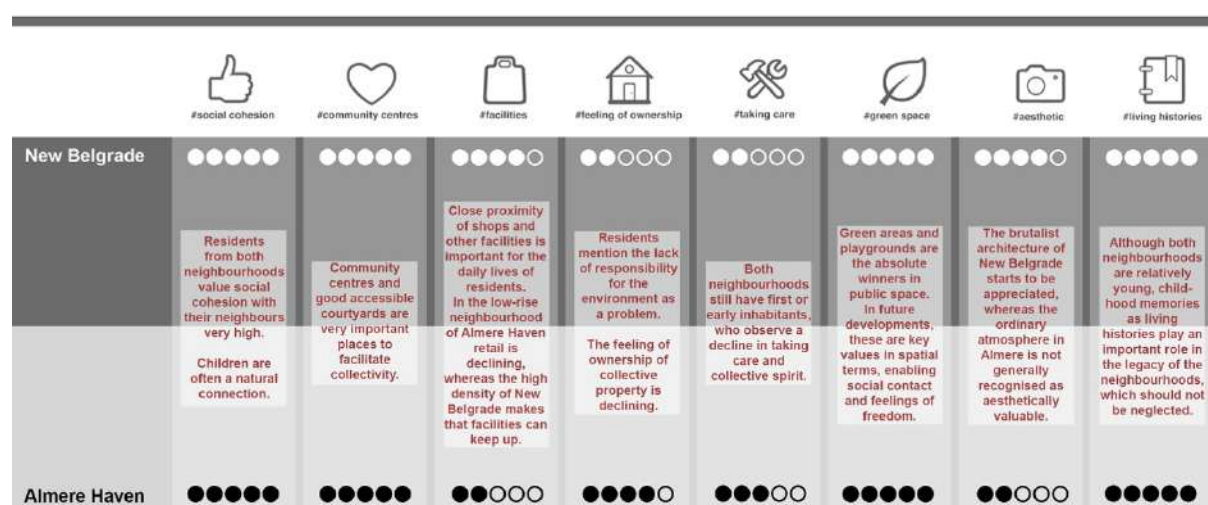


Fig.4 – Comparative analysis of the two neighbourhoods as recognised by their residents. Illustration by the authors.

### 3. OUTLOOK

The themes that result from the exploratory talks are sometimes different, identifying certain weaknesses and strengths of urban characteristics of the two neighbourhoods. However, generally the residents seem to attach importance to the same aspects of the living environment. One can argue that aspects such as public green spaces, facilities and social cohesion are not specific for the case studies in this research but general conditions for liveable neighbourhoods. However, this does not make them less relevant. It underpins the importance of involving residents in co-diagnosing problems and values. The method of exploratory talks with residents is identified as a valuable and operational participatory tool within the broader analytical framework for MCMH neighbourhoods.

As illustrated, the method is valuable for a diversity of MCMH in different European regions and projects, identifying the broad scope that is needed to assess these neighbourhoods. The authors aim to apply the method to further neighbourhoods and cities to validate the results obtained in New Belgrade and Almere Haven and thus contributing to a better understanding of European MCMH. We hope to inspire other researchers to join.



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# From isolated enclave to an integrated urban area: New ideals for infrastructure in large-scale housing areas

**Lene Wiell Nordberg**; Researcher at Aalborg University, Denmark; lwn@build.aau.dk

**Rikke Borg Sundstrup**; Research Assistant Aalborg University, Denmark; rbsu@build.aau.dk

**Session:** 10 – *Building a Key Analytical Framework for MCMH*. Chairs: Els De Vos and Eva Storgaard

## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on infrastructure and safety in the redevelopment of selected post-war large-scale housing areas in Denmark. We discuss how the shift in planning practice from traffic separation to traffic integration affects the areas' residents and qualities of the areas. The paper shows that traffic separation and traffic integration are two different perspectives on creating safe, child-friendly, and livable neighbourhoods.

In the paper, we display how the resident's perceptions of traffic integration in post-war large-scale housing areas differ from urban practitioners' view. Interviews with residents reveal that they often appreciate their recreational housing area without cars. Simultaneously, planners want to change the infrastructure to integrate the site into the surrounding city and ensure safe neighbourhoods with less crime and greater diversity. The question is how these drastic physical changes will affect the housing areas' DNA and whether the changes will create a feeling of safety and for whom.

Through interdisciplinary methods as mapping, architectural analyses, qualitative interviews and ethnographic go-along, we display ways of investigating the complexity between planning ideals, qualities of the areas and the lived life in selected social housing areas.

The paper is based on data from an evaluation of the redevelopment of 15 disadvantaged large-scale housing areas in Denmark. The evaluation, conducted by a team of interdisciplinary researchers from BUILD, Aalborg University, is following the development in the sites for ten years and will complete the same interdisciplinary investigation every second year to understand which long-term effects physical changes have on the lived life in the housing areas.

**Keywords:** infrastructure, safety, interdisciplinary research, disadvantaged housing, redevelopment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modernist paradigm was fundamental for developing Danish residential areas from the 1960s to the 1980s and representing suburban sprawl's starting point. Ideas of creating new, healthier residential zones located at a distance from the polluted historical cities were essential, like separating these new residential enclaves from other more polluting and noisy functions like industry, business, and traffic.

During the same period, social housing developed explosively and represented a cornerstone of Danish Welfare State development. The multi-story apartment block became the dominant housing typology in this period. It embodied the aim to create modern and healthy homes with light, air, and easy access to green areas for all. The new neighbourhoods' functional zoning strategy resulted in a suburban structure consisting of enclaves often oriented inwards and less towards the neighbouring areas. The physical divisions' primary purpose was to shield the site from the surrounding, noisy and polluting cars on the roads and intentionally create a defined, car-free, and safe neighbourhood (Bech-Danielsen and Stender, 2017).

Typically, the new residential enclaves were built on open fields, making it possible for the planner to use a top-down approach to design an entirely new hierarchy infrastructural system. The traffic concepts of the 20th century inspired by The Garden City Movement dictated a hierarchical infrastructural structure segregating pedestrians and bicycles from car traffic. The main argument was to increase traffic safety in general and create safe, child-friendly, and liveable neighbourhoods. Focus on traffic safety originated as a reaction to the fact that the number of casualties grew rapidly as the number of cars on the roads increased (Marshall, 2005; Nielsen, 2007). To this day, most large-scale social housing estates in Denmark still reflect the ideals of the modernist paradigm.

Social housing in Denmark is available for everyone and today the social housing sector constitutes 20% of all dwellings in Denmark. Despite this, some of the large-scale post-war social housing estates in Denmark are characterised by social problems with a high concentration of ethnic minorities and socially vulnerable residents (Bech-Danielsen & Stender, 2017). Since 2018 Danish legislation mandate municipalities and housing associations to reduce the concentration of social family housing from 100 pct. to 40 pct. in 2030 in 15 targeted disadvantaged housing estates. The future will bring substantial redevelopment strategies in the 15 areas due to the legislation. The majority of the plans aims to attract middle-class residents through mixed-ownership, new functions and attractions, increased density and integrating the areas into the surrounding city. Furthermore, the plans focus on changing the current infrastructure layout from traffic separation to traffic integration.

## 3. FROM ENCLAVE TO AN INTEGRATED AREA

In this paper, two of the 15 targeted large-scale social housing estates exemplify planned infrastructural transformations. The two cases differ in terms of resident composition, development plan, scale, and location. Still, the two housing estates have a comprehensive planned infrastructure plan based on integrating the area into the surrounding city and ensuring safe neighbourhoods with less crime. In the following, the two cases and the infrastructural plans will be presented.

### 3.1 Ringparken

Ringparken is a social housing estate located on the outskirts of Slagelse City. The estate was built in 1963-69 and consists of 24 apartment blocks on four floors with 868 social family housing and a small shopping centre. Ringparken is a traffic-separated area, and access by car is limited to road entry from east and west, which ends up in a central parking zone in the centre of the estate.

A new infrastructure plan focuses on a new main street through the estate and opens up the centre's enclosed parking zone, while a road from north to the south will connect the area to a central ring road. The new strategy describes as:

*"Blind roads create dead areas in the city. A cohesive road network makes it easy to orientate yourself, get around and experience a neighbourhood as cohesive with the city. We design both small, cosy residential streets and Kierullfsvej as a vibrant, beautiful main street" (FOB et al. 2019, 30).*



Fig. 1 –Ringparken today (L) and visions for the future (R) © FOB, KANT Arkitekter og Niels Bjørn.

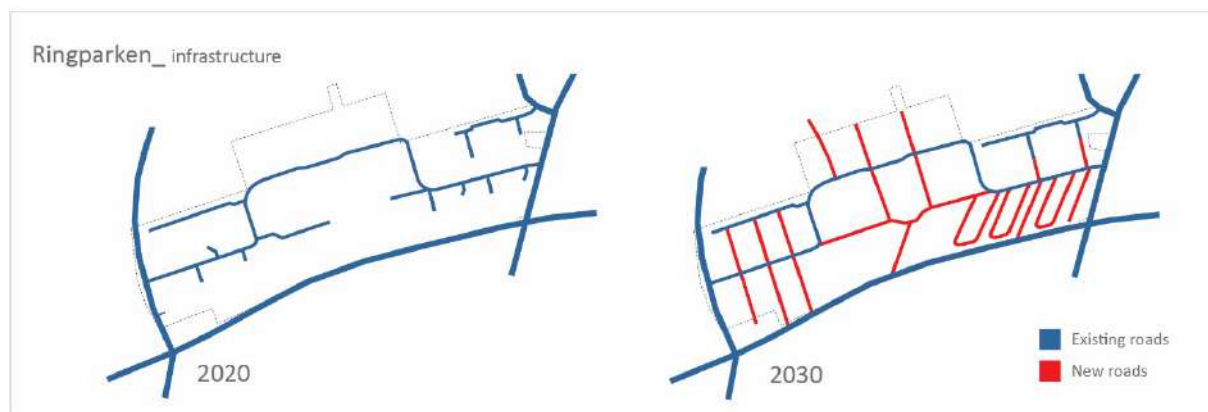


Fig. 2 – Infrastructure in Ringparken today (L) and visions for the future (R). © Pernille Jørgensen.

### 3.2 Gadehavegård

Gadehavegård is a social housing estate located in Høje-Taastrup on the outskirts of Copenhagen. The estate was built from 1973-80 and consists of 19 apartment blocks on four floors with 986 social family housing and few community facilities. Today, Gadehavegård is a traffic-separated residential area. Access by car is limited to three large parking areas in the northern part of the settlement, from which paths lead into the blocks and green outdoor spaces.

In the summer of 2020, a winning proposal from an architectural competition forms the basis for the planned



substantial transformation of Gadehavegård. A vital element in the development plan is a new infrastructural layout:

*"The street functions as a 'zipper' that brings together the existing, the new and the experimental homes in an attractive and urban street course" (Arkitema 2020, 1).*



Fig. 3 – Gadehavegård today (L) and Gadehavegård in the future (R). © Arkitema Architects

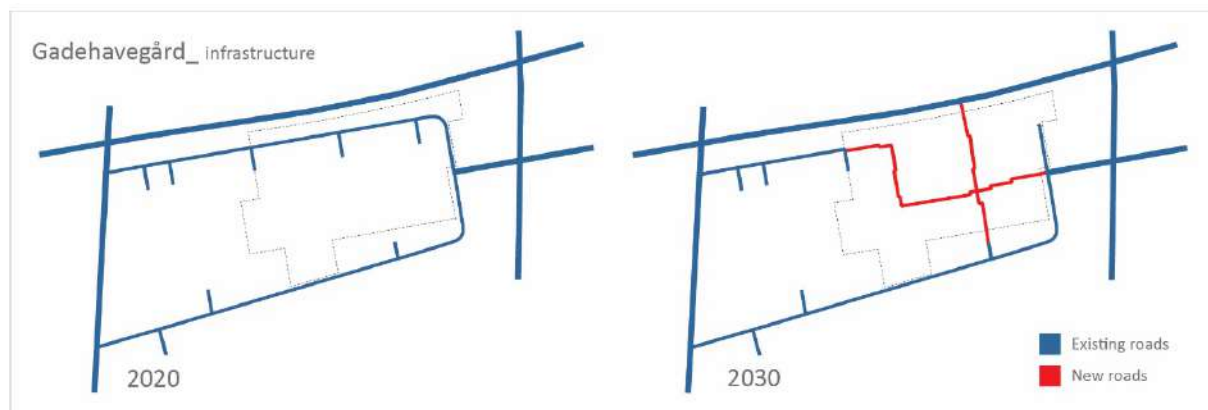


Fig. 4 – Infrastructure in Gadehavegård today (L) and visions for the future (R). ©Pernille Jørgensen.

#### 4. TRAFFIC INTEGRATION IN NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The new infrastructure plans for the two cases visualise a shift in planning practice from traffic separation to traffic integration. Interviews with urban practitioners, desk research and diagrammatic analysis brought insight into the outside perception of the areas and the arguments for traffic integration in the two cases.

Urban practitioners from the housing association and municipality in both Ringparken and Gadehavegård argue that outsiders moving through the area can link the enclosed enclaves to the surrounding city and secure the feeling of safety. Their arguments reflect a critique of the modernist paradigm in which Jane Jacobs is one of the most influential critics. Jacobs focused on the benefits of open and well-integrated urban spaces, in which the movement of different people could secure informal social control on the street (Jacobs, 1961). The vision for integrated infrastructure in the two areas displays a change in understanding what creates a safe

neighbourhood; from the belief that safety was created by enclosing housing areas from outsiders and traffic to an idea that traffic can open up the enclave, bringing in outsiders and reinforce a sense of security.

Furthermore, the urban practitioner's arguments for integrated infrastructure display an altered view of traffic and the street in neighbourhood development. In both cases, new main streets represent a vital driver in creating social interactions and an integrated neighbourhood, like the zipper example from Gadehavegård. In both Gadehavegård and Ringparken, the new main streets aim to change cars and pedestrians' present separation into an integrated design. The arguments for the infrastructure plans reflect inspiration from New Urbanism, in which the streets have a more social purpose, as a public space designed to encourage street life (Tallen, 1999). The ideal represented in New Urbanism is based on the idea that street life can strengthen community bonds by promoting a sense of place through social encounters. The pedestrian plays an important role, and Calthorpe (1993) argues that pedestrians make casual encounters and practical integration of diverse spaces and people.

The argument for traffic integration in the two cases display a shift from the belief that the enclosed area is seen as a positive towards a focus on the movement of people from the outside is necessary to connect the area to the surrounding city, securing the feeling of safety and strengthening community bonds.

## 5. INSIDE PERCEPTION OF TRAFFIC SEPARATION

Our data shows that urban practitioners ideals for the areas differ from the resident's view, which we will unfold in the following. We used the ethnographic method go-along to investigate the tenant's percipience of the physical environment. Our analysis bases on 30-50 walk-along in each of the two cases with different informants regarding gender, age and ethnicity and a mixture of residents, neighbours and outsiders. The walk-along gave way for actively exploring the tenant's stream of experiences and practices as they moved through and interacted with their physical and social environment (Kusenbach 2003). By asking questions, listening, and observing the tenants in their natural outings while conducting the walk-along, we discovered that the areas' infrastructure played an essential role in the tenant's perceptions of the area's qualities.

In both Ringparken and Gadehavegård, the enclosed area seems to positively affect the resident's possibility to recognise each other and form relations. Our go-alongs show that the tenants appreciate the enclosed area and enjoy their calm and private neighbourhood with large recreational areas. A resident said:

*"It is a good place for children to grow up. Here is closed to traffic, there are playgrounds, and then there are many other children."*

We discovered that the enclosed area positively impacted how the residents interacted with their neighbours. The resident's experience that mainly tenants move through and use the area, but didn't see it as a negative. We experienced many residents greeting each other, and most of them recognise each other by repeatedly seeing the same people in the area. A resident stressed:

*"It is excellent that everyone knows each other. You meet each other in the area. Even though there are 2100 people, you often meet the same people."*

What the urban practitioners found as negative and unsafe was understood differently by the residents.

The residents experience the 'dead ends' traffic solutions as quality spaces as they entail car-free recreational areas and provide safe spaces for their children to grow up. A resident explains:

*"Previously, there was a bus stop in the middle of the area, but now it has become a green area. It's excellent because now the children can play without thinking about cars."*

Our main findings show how the areas' qualities are related to the infrastructure. Traffic separation is seen as positive in the residents' everyday lives and perceptions of their neighbourhood.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our investigations are preliminary as the extensive planned infrastructural changes in Ringparken and Gadehavegård have not yet been realised. Interdisciplinary research methods allow us to nuance the discussion. Our first findings show us substantiate differences between the outside view and the residents' perspective on the areas'. The residents' everyday lives and perception of their neighbourhood reflect that the enclosed area and traffic separation creates spaces for social interaction between the residents. The interviewed urban practitioners see the enclosed area as negative. First, due to the belief that the enclosed area reinforce the experience of the areas as unsafe. Second, because the enclosed areas do not ensure social interaction between the residents in the areas and the residents in the surrounding city. Therefore, the development plans reflect a desire to secure spaces for exchange across social groups, which Hajer Reindorf have defined as public domains (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001). Furthermore movement of different people throughout the day to secure informal social control (Jacobs, 1961). In the development plans, traffic integration is essential to ensure these visions.

In the two cases, the vision for an integrated street displays a shift from car traffic perception as unsafe for pedestrians to a perception that an integrated design creates place-making by concentrating movements to secure social encounters between different social groups. In theory, a similar shift emerges, which has influenced the planning ideals and practices then and now. The modernist paradigm dictated traffic separation, which was fundamental for the origin of Ringparken and Gadehavegård. Currently, traffic integration appears to be a different generic traffic solution, affecting the 15 targeted disadvantaged housing estates' development plans. We argue that traffic separation and traffic integration are two different perspectives to achieve a uniform goal of creating safe, child-friendly, and livable neighbourhoods. From this perspective, however, how these goals conduct has changed.

The majority of the residents do not want a new main street through their living areas. Most of them find it challenging to open up the areas with integrated traffic solutions without destroying the area's current car-free and child-friendly qualities. Therefore, the new infrastructure plans for the 15 disadvantaged housing areas appear as generic traffic solutions that do not take site-specific qualities and user involvement into account. The coming infrastructural transformation of the areas should be a point of attention. Residents' participation and more site-specific traffic solutions in the future design process could help keep a sense of community and respect the site's qualities.

In the next ten years, we will, as a part of an interdisciplinary research team, continue our architectural-anthropological field studies of the 15 targeted housing estates to understand which long-term effects physical changes have on the lived life in the areas for both current and future residents. With our research, we hope to gain experience and build knowledge about physical transformations of large-scale social housing areas which can continuously influence the development of the 15 areas and other social housing areas in Denmark.

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# Research by design as method for the regeneration of post-war modernist housing ensembles

**Marie Moors**; PhD student FWO Fellowship Fundamental research 1116421N - Faculty of Architecture and Arts, Hasselt University (Belgium); marie.moors@uhasselt.be

**Session:** 10 – *Building a Key Analytical Framework for MCMH*. Chairs: Els De Vos and Eva Storgaard

## ABSTRACT

This paper is written in the light of a larger PhD research entitled BELGIAN MOMO HERITAGE ON THE RADAR – ‘Re-reading modernist housing estates: an inquiry into the value of threatened heritage sites and the possibilities of adaptive reuse as a method for re-evaluation’. Today, a considerable number of the urban settlements or high-rise estates, constructed according to Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) principles, are threatened with demolition following years of neglect and lack of maintenance. Notwithstanding the fact that they are all comprising discursive segments of the post-war time period, these estates are in poor (technical and social) condition. Additionally, none of them is protected, which means that the path for demolition is fully open. This research opens up some future visions by considering these ensembles as an opportunity to re-state and re-invest, instead of regarding them as an inescapable problem. The concept of research by design is used as a methodology to develop new insights. Within the framework of the PhD research architecture master students have tested the hypotheses of different regeneration scenarios on a larger scale of 13 case studies. The aim is to investigate the adaptive reuse potential of this modernist typology. This paper focuses on one of the case studies, specifically the Jan De Voslei housing complex designed by architect Jos Smolderen (Antwerp, BE). In the first part of the paper the general problem statement is introduced. In the second part, the objective of the exercise is explored, and an overview of the regeneration scenarios is explained. Subsequently, the students' results that focus on an activation of the landscape values and the so-called parasite-concept of the Jan De Voslei housing complex, are presented through drawings and isometries. In conclusion, these first outcomes of this exercise are discussed combined with a reflection and suggestion for further research.

**Keywords:** Middle-class Mass housing; Research by design; Modernist housing; Regeneration strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

"Never demolishing, subtracting or replacing things, but always adding, transforming and utilising them." (Druot, Lacaton, and Vassal 2004, 29).

This short paper is written in the light of a larger PhD research entitled BELGIAN MOMO HERITAGE ON THE RADAR – 'Re-reading modernist housing estates: an inquiry into the value of threatened heritage sites and the possibilities of adaptive reuse as a method for re-evaluation' (FWO 1116421N). The objective of this research project is to investigate the adaptive reuse potential of modernist housing ensembles and develop a theoretical framework that defines a set of strategies for intervention.

The initial ambitions of the post-war housing from the modern movement (MoMo) in Flanders, more specifically the urban settlements and high-rise estates constructed according to Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) principles, have undergone a critical shift in sense and meaning; moving from revolutionary constructions solving the post-war need for housing to districts where people no longer want to live. A considerable number of these sites have become fragile and vulnerable, with demolition seemingly the only path (Docomomo 2020). In my research, I aim to point out the value of these structures as discursive segments of post-war architecture (physical and cultural-historical) as well as the strategy for reusing the existing structures to give these modernist ensembles a second life and hence contributes to a sustainable approach to the built fabric.

Research by Design<sup>1</sup> is used as a method for both developing new strategies and testing existing ones in a variety of contexts. After an intensive inventory process<sup>2</sup>, 13 case studies were chosen as representatives of the CIAM-typology in Flanders; of which two case studies (one focussing on the heritage aspect, another focussing on the ensemble and context values) are the foundation for the development of (new) regeneration scenarios by myself as a researcher.<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses on the testing of (existing) regeneration scenarios using the example of the Jan De Voslei housing complex in Antwerp (BE). Students of the Master of Interior Architecture of Hasselt University (academic year 2020-2021) were involved in that process. The first chapter addresses the content of this exercise and the proposed regeneration scenarios. Secondly, the most refreshing and interesting design ideas of the student work are discussed. For this contribution, I focus on two of the proposed regeneration scenarios: the parasite-concept and the activation of the landscape values. In conclusion, the design results are further discussed. Additionally, a reflection on the conduct of the exercise is outlined and options for further research are suggested.

<sup>1</sup> The EAAE Charter for Architectural Research defines research by design as "Any kind of inquiry in which design is the substantial constituent of the research process is referred to as research by design. In research by design, the architectural design process forms the pathway through which new insights, knowledge, practices or products come into being. It generates critical inquiry through design work. Therefore research results are obtained by, and consistent with experience in practice." The European Association for Architectural Education. 2012. "EAAE Charter on Architectural Research". accessed 09/07/2021. <https://www.eaae.be/about/statutes-and-policypapers/eaae-charter-architectural-research/>. Further detailed information can be found in the following publication: van de Weijer, Marijn, Koenraad Van Cleempoel, and Hilde Heynen. "Positioning Research and Design in Academia and Practice: A Contribution to a Continuing Debate." *Design Issues* 30 (2014): 17-29.

<sup>2</sup> This publication gives a detailed overview of the selection process for the 13 (and two) case studies including the defining of the selection criteria. MOORS, Marie (2020) Post-war social housing in Flanders: inventorying & research by design. In: Cafiero, G.; Flora, N.; Giardiello, P. (Ed.). *Costruire l'Abitare Contemporaneo - Nuovi temi e metodi del progetto*, p. 347 -351

. <https://documentserver.uhasselt.be/handle/1942/30450>

<sup>3</sup> The following presentation gives an overview of the first personal results of the research by design method. MOORS, Marie (2021) ONDERHANDELEN OVER AUTHENTICITEIT: 'ADAPTIVE REUSE' VAN MODERNISTISCHE WOONENSEMBLES. In: Contactdag bouwkundig erfgoed, Online event, 24/02/2021.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1942/33354>

## 1. RESEARCH BY DESIGN AND SCENARIO TESTING - STUDENT EXERCISE

This exercise was for the first time organised in the fall semester of the academic year 2020-2021 as part of an optional, project-based research course. Each student was expected to work circa 80 hours on this assignment/project. Eight master students joined the course and worked in pairs on one chosen case-study. Guidance was organised digitally due to the covid-19 pandemic and took place every week and/or every two weeks for half an hour per group. The competences to be acquired focus on articulating a personal design language, carrying out relevant (design) research linked to a complex research question and being able to reflect in a personal and scientific way.

The project Jan De Voslei of architect Jos Smolderen in Antwerp (BE) was chosen, on the one hand because it is situated in a district that is diverse and layered in terms of typology of buildings (low, middle and high-rise) and on the other hand because of its 'context values', 'ensemble-values' and 'representativeness' of the CIAM principles. The objective of the exercise is to test pre-defined regeneration strategies (selected by the author) in order to revive the buildings and 'the space in between' the buildings. For each scenario good practices were shown and explained in a detailed way. The suggested 10 scenarios are the following: ruination, secondary/supporting volumes (parasite), reinterpretation/revising lay-out, activating landscape values, DIY (the vernacular as design motor), re-fronting, diversify/rescale/densify/reduce, the chirurgical intervention, reprogramming and restoration. The selection of these scenarios is based on the extensive literature review and case study analysis of the first work package of the PhD research. For the moment I only elaborate on the scenarios that are presented in the following chapter: the supporting structures (parasite) and the activation of the landscape, as those scenarios resulted in the most rich and interesting proposals. The first one is explained with the help of the project FRAC (Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain) Nord-Pas de Calais (FR) (2015) by architects Lacaton & Vassal. The basic idea of this scenario is to create a supportive (new) structure that can solve problems for the existing constructions or fulfil a beneficial role. Regarding the activation of the landscape values the two following projects were presented as good practices: Renovation Lormont (FR) (2015) by LAN ARCHITECTURE and Rosenhøj (DK) (2017) by EFFEKT, Arkitema Architects. With the activation of the landscape values, I argue for considering the non-built/in-between-space as opportunity to make connections between the built elements and its surroundings (nature/landscape, other buildings, etc.); it transcends the ground level.



Fig. 1 – Areal view of the Jan De Voslei in Antwerp. Source: Google Earth, edited by Marie Moors.

Firstly, the students visited the project-site, in order to collect photographic material and experience the place in a personal way. This visit was transcribed into detailed graphic SWOT analysis on two different scales: the building block and the district. This analysis formed the argument for their choice of the four most adequate regeneration scenarios. Simultaneously, they drew the plans of the existing situation, based on provided information such as archival drawings, photographs and isometric drawings made by students of the previous year. New design interventions were presented in alignment with the of *YellowRed*, a publication that applies clear presentation techniques in terms of transformation processes: existing situation is shown in black, demolished parts in yellow and the new design interventions in red (Boesch, Machado, and Lupini 2017).

## 2. REDEFINING COLLECTIVE SPACE - STUDENTS' RESULTS

This part presents a short summary of the students' results for the case study Jan De Voslei in Antwerp.<sup>4</sup> This modernist residential district of circa 1200 units consists of large-scale residential blocks and three towers (currently undergoing a major renovation) as well as various collective facilities such as a municipal school and a kindergarten with the Christus Koning Church in between. Many commercial shops, a library, elderly complexes, playgrounds, sports facilities, communal centres etc. were planned but never built (due to the priority given to the urgent housing shortage). The district was constructed between 1952 and 1965, commissioned by the social housing company De Goede Woning (currently Woonhaven Antwerpen) and designed by architect Jos Smolderen (1889-1973) in collaboration with Hendrik Maes (1902-date unknown) (Van Herck and Verhelst 2016).

Based on their SWOT analysis, the students Caroline De Queker and Toke Vanhove raised the problem of the very busy traffic road A12 dividing the district without safe and easily accessible crossing possibilities. This problem will in the future be less prominent as the city of Antwerp is planning on lowering and covering the ring road of (including A12) Antwerp<sup>5</sup>. The A12 will be transformed into a connecting road with a new, southern tramline. Aboveground the park sites are re-connected through the green boulevard with space for leisure, sports and allotments (Segers et al. 2013, Antwerpen 2018). The students developed their interventions in line with the city plans using secondary/supporting structures as a strategy (Fig.1). Inspired by the unbuilt Golden Lane estate (1952) by Alison and Peter Smithson for post-war London, the concept of 'streets-in-the-sky' is introduced to openly question and test this modernist idea of separation of traffic routes in present time; e.g. how to deal with privacy, safety and accessibility? At the junction of the bridges collective resting points are located. This study wanted to encourage 'meeting' between the inhabitants' (and the environment), referring to the initial ambitions of collective facilities (that were never built) of architect Smolderen. In addition, the bridges also link the buildings to create (social) connection between the communities and to enlarge social control. By re-interpreting these modernist typologies of 'streets-in-the-sky' this approach touches upon the debates/critiques about modernist home life, social housing and urban structure.

These bridges lead to newly added 'green' balconies of the long block (Fig.2) (strategy: activation of landscape values), to respond to the need for enjoyable private outdoor spaces for the inhabitants. As this intervention is giving the building a more attractive and green character (responding to the green boulevard) it is also a wink at the initially planned green pergolas (never built). These balconies make connection with the surrounding landscape and end in collective open terraces on every other floor (at the ends of the buildings). This idea was also extrapolated to the other blocks as strategy and emphasizes how collective spaces can be integrated in a subtle and influencing way.

<sup>4</sup> Full description and detailed history of the site: <https://inventaris.onroenderfgoed.be/erfgoedobjecten/302578>

<sup>5</sup> This project is entitled 'Over de ring', further detailed information can be found on <https://www.overdering.be/>.





Fig. 2 - Activation-of-landscape-values-strategy: Creation of 'streets-in-the-sky' reconnects the mid-rise buildings('society) of the Jan De Voslei in Antwerp; isometric drawing. Source: Caroline De Queker and Toke Vanhove.

The students Selina Steegen and Kimberly Lievens worked on the north part of the Jan De Voslei district, focussing mainly on the high-rise buildings and implemented the same strategies: supportive parasites and activation of the landscape values (Fig.3). Their dream scenario consists of a combination of the two; more specifically, the addition of 'green' terraces in the 'armpits' of the Y-shaped towers. This intervention enables the continuation of the landscape into the building, just until the rooftop where Le Corbusier's modernist *toit jardins* are reviving. Thanks to the integration of those collective spaces throughout the tower interesting added values are discovered, such as: outdoor spaces (shared as well as private) with wide views, the enlarged connection with nature, the unexpected social interaction, more incidence of light, a new upgraded look of the building, etc.

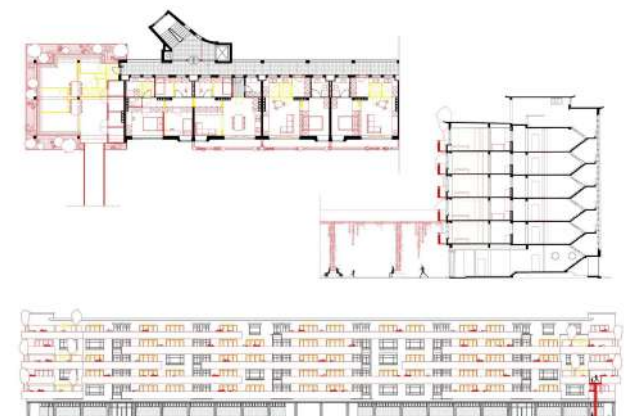


Fig. 3 - Parasite-strategy: addition of balconies creating collective open terraces on every other floor in the mid-rise buildings of the Jan De Voslei in Antwerp; floorplan, section and elevation. Source: Caroline De Queker and Toke Vanhove

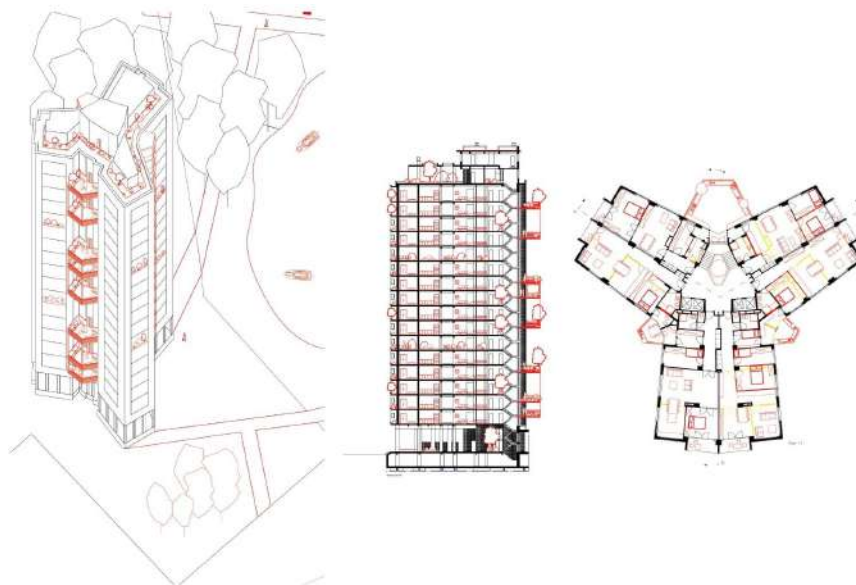


Fig. 4 - Parasite-strategy in combination with activation of nature: addition of trapezium shaped (green) balconies in the armpits of the towers of the Jan De Voslei in Antwerp; isometric drawing, section and floor plan. Source: Selina Steegen and Kimberly Lievens

### 3. CONCLUSION: THE SPACE IN BETWEEN FOR COLLECTIVE PURPOSE

Even though the students tested different scenarios and translated them in a personal way, there is an overall coherence when analysing the students' results: the (re)-creation of collective spaces. It is interesting to notice that they are somehow reinterpreting the initial ambition of these modernist estates which is in its essence 'living together'. How can we emphasize the word 'social' in 'social housing'? Conversely, it is also important to think about the negative consequences of the proposed designs, such as: more visibility into the adjoining (bed)rooms, noise coming from occupied balconies, those balconies shadowing the floors underneath, extra maintenance of those collective spaces, etc.

Besides, I want to openly question the role that the 'void'/negative space/'space-in-between' can play in the regeneration of modernist housing ensembles. As I am conducting research by design myself, I am strongly convinced of the potential that is hidden in the undefined green spaces around/in between modernist (high-rise) blocks on the one hand, and the addition of (private) outdoor spaces to these modernist buildings on the other hand. How can a good landscape design serve children's exuberance, invite young and old to have a walk, bring people together but also solve functional aspects (storage spaces, parking etc.) in an aesthetic subtle way?

When reflecting upon the content of the exercise itself I conclude that pre-defining the strategies in such a detailed way has negative and positive consequences. It can limit the creativity of some students, whereas for other students it was a very good incentive for their work. In every sense, an intensive follow-up and (personal) guidance was necessary to produce the qualitative drawings. A suggestion for further research would be to repeat this exercise as often as possible, in order to finetune the content of the exercise every time (e.g. rethinking the pre-defined scenarios), to enlarge the tackled case-studies (some of them described above) and to discover new possible strategies.

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# Transformations of Green Infrastructures in Middle Class Mass Housing Residential Areas. Planning and Participatory Issues in the Residential Estate of Nedezhda 2a, Sofia

**Veneta Zlatinova-Pavlova**; University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG), Department of Urban Planning, Sofia, Bulgaria, [zlatinova\\_far@uacg.bg](mailto:zlatinova_far@uacg.bg)

**Session:** 10 – *Building a Key Analytical Framework for MCMH*. Chairs: Els De Vos and Eva Storgaard

## ABSTRACT

Mass housing constructed during the 1960s and early 1970s in Bulgaria aimed mainly at providing dwellings in the large rapidly industrializing cities. Originally, the estate masterplans envisioned free standing multifamily multistorey apartment buildings and provided large open green areas, usually designed as a common good. Recently these green and often underused areas have been recognized as an opportunity for solving the rapidly raising demands for parking spaces and additional facilities related to the contemporary demands for urban mobility. The new masterplans for restructuring the mass housing estates from the last decades focus on zoning, defining plot boundaries and reflecting the up-to-date legal requirements. As a result, two important qualities of the urban environment, the mobility and the green infrastructure, are intertwined and the pedestrian accessibility is neglected.

The positive impacts of and the need for green areas in residential estates in Bulgaria have been studied since the 1970s. Mostly approached and understood as landscape architecture with a focus on greenery, the studies neglect the residents' predominant concern about the pedestrian and recreational areas. As part of URBiNAT, an on-going European project, one of the estates (Nadezhda, Sofia) is subject for the creation of a so-called green, healthy corridor. It re-introduces the perspectives of urban planning and architectural design in the re-design of open green areas in middle class mass housing estates while also introducing the participatory approach to urban regeneration.

This case study demonstrates the application of morphological approach to re-designing pedestrian and recreational areas in mass housing estates. It reveals the discrepancy between priorities of landscape design and citizens' needs through the results of semi-structured interviews and participatory workshops conducted as a part of the process for re-designing of open spaces - greenery, pedestrian paths and alleys, playgrounds and sitting areas.

**Keywords:** mass housing estates; green areas; morphological approach.



## INTRODUCTION

The positive effects of nature, and especially trees, in urban areas have been broadly included in various projects and discussed in many publications. Today, their presence and importance raise the questions of status, ownership and management – there are voices raising for recognizing it as a common good (Finka, 2015) and discussions if it should rather be a resource (The Nature of Cities, 2017) or even a human right (Menatti, 2017). Urban greenery is however conditioned by time, a circumstance that is well known, yet often underestimated in planning and design. It makes greenery different than any other element of urban landscape – it takes decades from planting a sapling till having a mature tree. This is especially obvious when comparing photographs of newly built residential areas from 1960s or 1970s to their present appearance. Time has allowed for urban trees in these estates to get to their mature size and to form the rich urban greenery envisioned by planners and designers five or six decades ago.

Urban peripheries in post-soviet states share a common feature – they are dominated by large scale residential neighbourhoods, designed after 1960s and build before 1989 – the mass housing estates of the socialist state. In Bulgaria they have been built in order to allow “faster and cost-effective construction of large number of housing that could solve the housing deficit in shorter terms” (Zlatinova-Pavlova, 2020) and “were aimed to support the national industrialization policy by following the then influential Modernist planning principles and providing good quality urban environment for large social groups” (Tasheva-Petrova et al. 2020). Even more than 30 years later these residential estates – generally known in Bulgaria as residential complexes (RCs) – still amount to more than 29,7% of the residential buildings in the state, with 46% of them being more than 6 stories high (in the capital of Sofia the numbers are respectively 35,6% and 66,7%). (National housing strategy, 2017) In Sofia they shelter 575.000 people or 47% of the population (NSI, 2011). They have been planned following the principles of microrayon<sup>1</sup>, and their construction using standardized structural elements and industrialized fabrication allowed for the extensive growth of the rapidly industrializing cities at the time.



Fig.1 – Residential complex of “Emil Markov” (now “Gotse Deltchev”) in 1970s Sofia. Source (Labov, 1979).

<sup>1</sup> The microrayon concept for the planning of large scale residential estates has been implemented in all socialist states after the WWII, after the socialist ideology embraced the ideas of modernism after mid-1950s. It is based on a hierarchical polycentric spatial and functional structure. Initially developed in 1920s Soviet union and further revised in 1950s, it sets the microrayon (e.g. microdistrict) as a primary structural element of the residential estate with only low traffic and calm streets, including multifamily residential buildings, school and kindergarten, and basic commercial services. Several microrayons form a rayon (or a residential complex) with a main commercial and service center. In Bulgaria microrayons were defined as areas of 20-40 ha planned for 8-12 thousands people.

They were predominantly built on vacant land in the outskirts, on former agricultural land or replaced existing small suburban villages located at the city fringe. The result of the industrialized construction following the paradigm of the man over-powering nature was a uniform landscape of rows of identical grey concrete parallelepiped buildings sitting on a flat empty ground (Fig.1). These characteristics of the landscape have been the major reasons for critiques on the planning paradigm of these RCs.

Today the landscape is completely different mainly due to the maturity of trees and urban greenery. But the transformations of the social, economic and political context and the changes in the legal framework related to spatial and urban planning have caused some visible changes and have set new invisible boundaries that may further not just add to the morphological characteristics of the green spaces but even considerably change them.

## 1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Considering the contextual differences between then and now two research questions are hereafter discussed: 1) How do the changes in the legislative framework affect the transformations of urban green infrastructures in large scale residential estates (RCs)?; and 2) Which conflicts emerge from the imposition of contemporary planning legislation to existing built urban environment planned following the principles of a completely different paradigm?

These questions have been addressed using the case study of Nadezhda 2a – a large scale residential area in Sofia, built in 1970s and early 1980s – one of the considerably well preserved examples of RCs in Bulgaria. Together with Nadezhda 2b it forms one of the four microrayons of Nadezhda RC (Fig. 2), a large scale residential estate located at the North-West fringe of the capital city which represents about one half of the administrative unit Nadezhda of area of 1.930 ha, accommodating over 77.000 people (Stolichna obshtina – Nadezhda district, 2018).



Fig.2 – Residential estates and microrayons in the administrative district of Nadezhda, Sofia.  
Basemap: Google Earth, retrieved on 14.07.2021.

Since 2018 Nadezhda has been a research polygon of the URBiNAT project. As part of the co-diagnostics and co-design phases, semi-structured interviews were carried out in August-September 2020 and June 2021 on four locations in the neighbourhood, selected for focused intervention within the project. The total number of respondents counted to almost eighty adults. Some children also participated upon the consent of their parents. Diversity of representation by age, occupation and gender was aimed as well as a personal bond and experience of the area – the majority of the respondents were living in the estate although some passers-by also participated. This initiative provided the project with feedback from the local citizens regarding the current state of existing urban greenery and the attitudes towards it. During the following phase of conceptual planning within the project, a morphological approach to analysis was implemented. A diachronic analysis of the state of planning and of green areas in Nadezhda 2a with a focus on the pedestrian accessibility and the impact of the legislative framework was done. It outlined some existing and emerging conflicts regarding open and green spaces which are further reflected upon below.

## 2. CASE STUDY

The RC of Nadezhda 2a<sup>2</sup> was built in the 1970s and the early 1980s using three different standardized prefabricated panel structures developed in 1960s and later optimized and adapted. The Northern part of the area is formed by 4-storey high long boxes while the largest central and Southern parts are composed of 8 storey-high buildings attempting to break the simple linear volumes by slightly stepped plans and L-shaped buildings. The morphological studies demonstrated that the buildings of each standard formed a compact part of the RC with the social infrastructure located between them (Fig. 3). The masterplan provided large green areas among the buildings with pedestrian paths and alleys crossing them in order to connect apartment buildings with the streets. Originally, the land was owned by the state (the communist state) while the apartments were privately owned<sup>3</sup>. Therefore the creation and maintenance of the green areas were provided by the state. However citizens were often forced to participate in activities like cleaning and maintenance of the open areas, planting trees etc.

Today Nadezhda 2a is one of the densely built-up areas in Sofia with an area of 32,7 ha, a ratio of total built-up area and plot area between 0,5 and 1 (common for most of the RCs) and a population density between 100 and 200 people/ha (typical for 57% of the urban units in Sofia). (Vision Sofia 2050, 2019) Because of its rather inconvenient transport connections within the city the entire RC stood out of the developers' spotlight until 2012, despite its comparatively close location to the Central railway station and the city center, while the more accessible estates faced densification often at the price of decreasing greenery and open spaces. This slowly started to change since 2012 when Metroline 2 started to serve this part of the city. Meanwhile after the introduction of a completely new legal framework for urban planning in 2001 and the almost completed process of restoring private ownership of land, the authorities were increasingly aware of the need for redrawing the masterplans of the RCs. The detailed zoning plan for restructuring Nadezhda 2a was approved in 2013. It provided a completely new plot structure of the previously no plot territory. The plan (Fig. 4) followed the requirement of the legislative framework for providing separate plot for each residential building and each use (urban greenery, diverse elements of the social infrastructure and other services, technical infrastructure, and streets etc.). This allowed for better and more convenient management of land as well as for some flexibility of the land use but also for protecting most of the open green spaces between buildings. However the plan had to provide for the compliance of the area with the contemporary requirements for parking in residential areas. As the RC was planned in a period when the motorization level in Bulgaria was more than 3 times lower than it was after 2010 when the plan was elaborated, the existing space for parking was far below the required.

<sup>2</sup> Nadezhda (надежда) is the Bulgarian word for "hope". The estate was named after the village it replaced.

<sup>3</sup> In Socialist Bulgaria the apartments in the RCs were private property and unlike most other socialist states almost no privatization of apartment building happened after 1989.



The solution set by the plan included new and existing parking lots, underground parking garages below them or in separate plots chunked from the green areas with the requirement for providing greenery on ground level. Eventually, the cumulative area of publicly accessible greenery was reduced to 18,71% of the total area<sup>4</sup> because of the formal and functional approach imposed by the legislative framework.

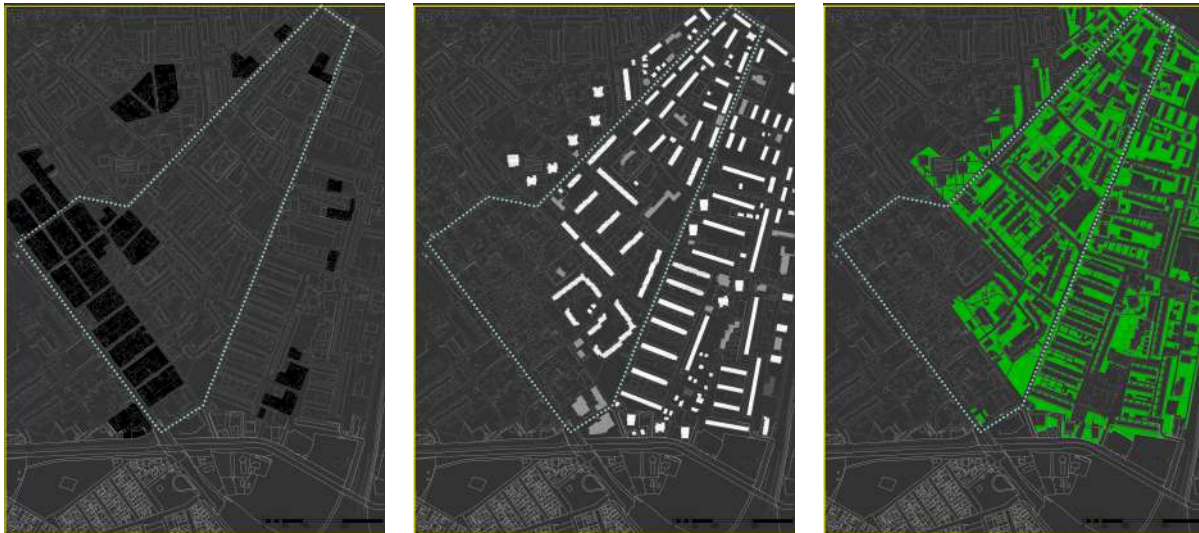


Fig.3 – Morphological study of residential estate of Nadezhda 2a in Sofia: (a) private plots (in black); b) prefabricated buildings (white) and public services (grey); c) green areas.

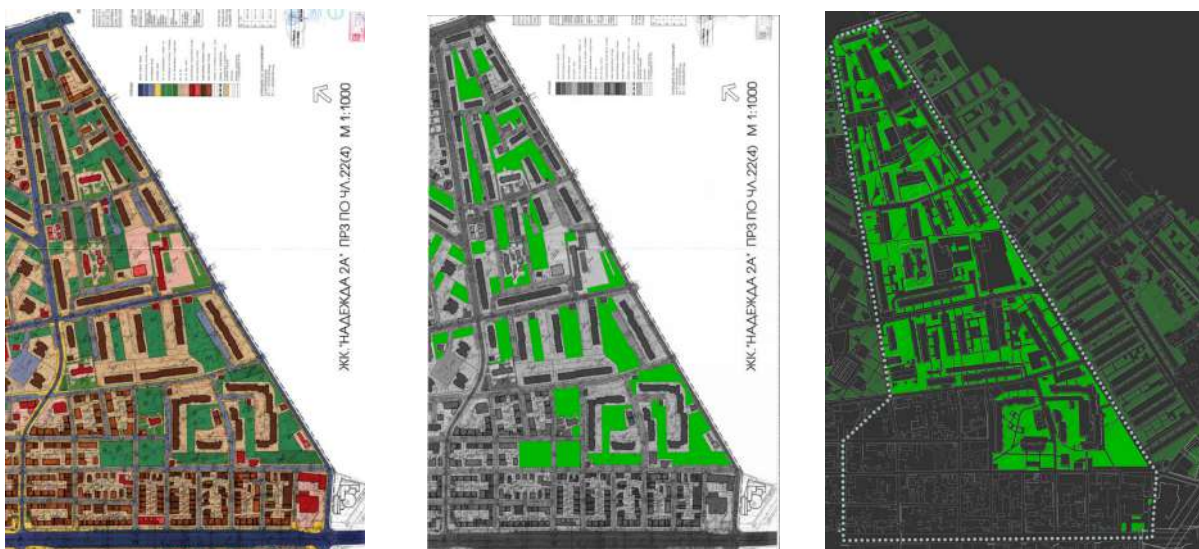


Fig.4 – Transformation of the publicly accessible green areas in residential estate of Nadezhda 2a, Sofia: a) new zoning plan (2013); b) public green areas in the zoning plan; c) previous state of public green areas.

<sup>4</sup> The total area of urban green should actually be a bit larger as this number does not include the greenery that should be developed within the plots set for uses different than public greenery.



Existing pedestrian paths and alleys through the greenery were neglected in the plan. In some cases this led to cutting the access from streets to residential buildings by introducing separate plots for greenery in between thus cutting existing pedestrian alleys (Fig.4). Although these boundaries have no physical presence yet and are still used just as a regime for protecting the greenery, it is doubtful how this could be impacted by future amendments of the legal framework and whether it will further hinder pedestrian accessibility.

During the semi-structured interviews the citizens shared their satisfaction with the open green spaces and their concern of protecting them from being built-up. Some of them declared they have taken care of the open green spaces – those caring for sports playgrounds were usually men while those caring for children playgrounds and greenery were usually women. Some women actually described how they “adopt” small pieces of the public green, usually under their balcony, and create flower gardens.

### 3. REFLECTIONS

The case study clearly demonstrates the impacts of the changes in legislative framework on the green infrastructure in RCs: in terms of quantity they reduce the share of the green plots; in terms of quality they provide a type of protection from changing the zoning regime and also create boundaries that may break the pedestrian accessibility.

In the semi-structured interviews most of the citizens declared that they appreciate the existing greenery in the RC and many shared their doubts about the possibility for new buildings to appear on currently free green areas even though this is not allowed by the plan. Here emerges the potential conflict between the opportunities for new developments in the RC and protection of the green infrastructure in it.

The second conflict is between the need for parking and green plots, currently solved by the plan but not implemented in place as the solution saves green areas but is costly and slow for implementation. This conflict should be carefully tackled as it confronts a current need (for parking in times of high share of motorization) to a common good (the urban green spaces) with large-scale and long-time impact on people's health - access to urban greenery is associated with less depression (Cohen-Cline, et al. 2015), more physical activity and overall physical health (WHO, 2017) and is highly valued in current times of lockdowns because of Covid-19. The next emerging conflict is between the need for protecting the open and freely accessible green areas and providing convenient access to the apartment buildings. There is also a conflict of restructuring the plot boundaries without restructuring the ownership and with very limited opportunities for restructuring the buildings as the plan actually preserves the status quo of the spatial structure of the RC.

The conflicts may not have had a negative impact on the green infrastructure yet but they point out the importance of providing a differentiated approach to the zoning and restructuring of the existing large scale RCs from the second half of the 20th century and paying special attention to the opportunities for the restructuring of the built fabric too, rather than focusing only on plots.

### CONCLUSION

Large scale residential districts in the large Bulgarian cities still shape their skylines, accommodate the majority of their population and have for long been the estates of the middle class. Although they were introduced as a physical embodiment of the socialist city, they have faced critique since their construction, especially focused on the quality of open and green areas. About five decades later semi-structured interviews among the local community demonstrated the satisfaction with the planting and the area of the open and green spaces. The major concerns bothering the citizens are associated with the increasing interest of developers that threatens

the green areas rather than beautification and composition of the greenery or the material and colour of the pavements. The inhabitants focus on the social problems and the physical obstacles in the urban environment they face rather than on design issues and visual qualities of its elements - pedestrian paths and alleys, playgrounds and sitting areas.

The morphological analysis and the comparative analysis of the physical status of the area and the zoning plan demonstrate the institutional effort for protecting the urban greenery and outline the emerging conflicts between current problems and long-term values. It also outlines that besides protecting the existing green infrastructure (that took decades to reach the current state of rich urban forest) the legal framework and the zoning plans should take into account the lifecycle of the prefabricated buildings and provide opportunities for restructuring the built fabric in mid- or long-term perspective.

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## Between demolition and renovation: Landscapes of care in a large housing estate of St. Petersburg, Russia

Irina Shirobokova; City University of New York; shirobokova.i.v@gmail.com

Ekaterina Korableva, Centre for Applied Research, European University at Saint Petersburg

**Session:** 11 – *Demolition vs Renovation: an open question with regard to Middle-Class Mass Housing in the contemporary city.* Chairs: Alessandra Como and Luisa Smeragliuolo

### ABSTRACT

At the turn of the 21st century in major Russian cities there was a discussion about the future of the ageing stock of prefabricated estates popularly called khrushchevki. These estates, normally 5-stories high, were mass-produced in the middle of the 20th century all over the country to solve the acute housing crisis and gained their fame for the record-breaking speed of construction, uniformity and highly compact apartments. The authorities ruled out the option to modernise the estates in favour of their demolition and launched differing large-scale regeneration programs commonly named Renovatsiya in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. We study the case of Saint Petersburg Renovatsiya stagnation where the policy failure blocked estate maintenance and improvement, resulted in significant decay of the material environment, divided neighbours. We suggest to examine this case through the lens of care – concept understood not only as empathy, but as ethical and experimental doings through interaction with the material world in order to create a more just situation (Reid, 2020, Gibson-Graham, 2019) that can also be considered across scales (Power & Mee, 2019). In our case study, we see how practice and the very possibility of care becomes an important component of dwelling experience for residents. The loss of proper connection with the state infrastructures and confusion within institutions creates a 'crisis of care'. While residents perceive the lack of care as the core problem of their estates, Renovatsiya program doesn't address the hindered mechanisms of estate maintenance, bulldozes over the hard-won landscapes of care (Reid, 2014) and reproduces the problematic housing in higher density. With this in mind, we argue that the method of demolition, as opposed to renovation, comes in contradiction to the definition of care as attempts to repair the world in crisis.



## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the 21st century in major Russian cities there was a discussion about the future of the ageing stock of prefabricated estates popularly called khrushchevki (after the USSR party First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev). These estates, normally 5-stories high, were mass-produced in the middle of the 20th-century all over the country to solve the acute housing crisis and gained their fame for the record-breaking speed of construction, uniformity and highly compact apartments. Since 1957, Millions of “new settlers” (novosely) relocated over the following decade from overcrowded communal apartments and barracks to separate apartments for nuclear family with modern conveniences receiving these apartments for lifelong use at low rent, while state remained the main landlord (Reid, 2019). From 1957 to 1985, 290 mln. sq.m. of housing was built as khrushchevki.

As time passed, the question of the upkeep of this peculiar housing stock entered the city agendas. In the 2000s, the authorities in Moscow and Saint Petersburg ruled out the option to modernize the estates in favor of their demolition and launched differing large-scale regeneration programs commonly named Renovatsiya. We explore the Saint Petersburg Renovatsiya program that started in 2008 after the initial attempt at mass modernization of the buildings was considered financially non-viable. Despite the fact that most of the buildings were still solid, renovatable and located in quite attractive urban environments (green, low-rise, developed, well-connected), the designers of the program stated: “It is easier to demolish”. Thus, 1200 buildings in 23 zones around the city were set to be turned down and over 65 thousand families resettled into new “modern and comfortable” premises at least three times as dense.

The promotion of Saint Petersburg Renovatsiya has generated a particular discourse about khrushchevki: depressing, obsolete, soon-to-be-dilapidated, with suffering residents, while the demolition and relocation was painted as an act of care from the welfare state and a benevolent developer. Pronouncedly neoliberal in its design, the program has faced enormous difficulties in its implementation due to the underdeveloped legislature, the weakening of the city-business coalition and the fragmented house ownership.

Empirically, we base our research on a case-study of Sosnovaya Polyana, a large housing estate district in the south-west of the city. Some parts of that area became a Renovatsiya zone where the program has stagnated for years leaving the residents and the estates in an uncertain condition, blocking the upkeep and repair of the buildings and the built environment. To challenge the premises of the demolition project, we have conducted focus group interviews with residents of khrushchevki whose homes were set for Renovatsiya to recognise their perspective of the estates and life quality there.

Residents formulate the issue of the broken mechanisms of the estate maintenance as the central one which encourages us to explore this context through the lens of care – cross-scale concept understood not only as empathy, but also as ethical and experimental doings through interaction with the material world in order to create a more just situation (Reid 2020, Gibson-Graham 2019, Power & Mee, 2019).

## Conceptualizing landscapes of care on the case of housing

Currently, care and housing are undergoing marketization and rework by various neoliberal market logics (Smith, 2005). Reconceptualizing housing through the lens of the ‘ethics of care’ is an effort to make visible, revise and re-value the caring possibilities (Power & Mee, 2019) in the city and across other connected scales and spaces.

Susan Reid understands care, both as an action and an emotion, as well as an essential part in material practices of place-making and maintenance in the appropriation of standard, industrially-produced housing as

“home” with affective, subjective attachment (Reid, 2019).

In this research, we draw from feminist ethics of care (Tronto, 1993) combined with political economy (Gibson-Graham 2019) approach, examined through everyday practices in post-soviet spatial-material context of large housing estate, in particular khrushchevki neighborhood (Reid, 2019, 2014) in St. Petersburg, Russia.

We understand care as an affective, situated and complex spatial-material process of ‘maintaining and repairing the world in crisis’ (Tronto, 1993: 113). The framework of landscapes of care was introduced by Christine Milligan and Janine L Wiles. Rooted in health geography, it is understood as spatial manifestations of the interplay between the sociostructural processes and structures that shape experiences and practices of care (Milligan & Wiles, 2010). Transferring this term into the domain of housing, we would like to reconceptualize landscapes of care as a frame that combines spatial and material perspectives within the dynamics of scalar production (Smith, 1984) that is attentive to power relations. Through this multi-scalar relational optics, we engage with a broader scope of care research since the theory of care is in a way contained in every political theory (Tronto, 2013). This also helps us escape the ‘trap of localism’ (Jessop B., Brenner N., 2008) in traditional study of specific cases within social sciences. Thus, we approach our case study through these complexities of care and, specifically, its spatialized political economy entangled into everyday life.

## **Soviet mass housing estates in the context of care**

Building of large housing estates is a modernist project implemented in both socialist and capitalist contexts. However, according to Susan Reid, the case of soviet khrushchevki stands out from the expected framework of modernism as of a system with efficient, standard and massproduced solutions. Reid unpacks khrushchevki as DIY projects and reminds that the Khrushchev experiment was initially aimed at “withering away of the state” and serving as a nursery of the new utopian ‘state of all the people’ (Reid, 2019). Public discourse of the time sought to educate people to engage individually and collectively in the ‘communist everyday life’ entailed establishing mutually caring relations between residents and the state, and between private and public interests, as these relations were mediated by housing (Reid, 2019).

Moving into the new apartments, new settlers found a wasteland of builders’ rubble Instead of the clean white world of modernity. (Reid, 2019). In that way, khrushchevki did not appear as an alienated modernist product, they required immediate engagement and repair and in that way emerged as hard-won DIY landscapes. Reid’s informants, however, did not perceive this solely as misfortune and inconvenience, they connected that experience with a sense of agency and pride of being co-creators of their homes (Reid, 2014). In our research, we have tracked related sentiments of a complex intertwinement between care as control, service, obligation and an essential part of dwelling experience.

Some aged elements of the built environment in the studied estates as well as the trees overgrown the rooftops remain as artefacts of the participatory efforts of the first generation of settlers.

“When our housing was built, it was so good, harmonious and beautiful. The trees have grown, my grandma planted them herself. <...> Now everything is abandoned and no one cares. This worries me.” (Tatyana, Sosnovaya Polyana)

In the soviet times, top-down forces and bottom-up initiatives seemed to coincide in the interest of improving the asset of the produced housing:

“Of course, we were forced to participate in subbotniks but it is not like we did not want to”. (Viktoria, Sosnovaya Polyana)

As perceived by the residents, this model has not survived the post-socialist transition. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the privatization of housing (i.e. the transfer of flats from the state to individuals) took place. All in all, the privatization made the majority of Russians homeowners, but also led to a large degree of fragmentation with regard to housing ownership and the housing management of the last decade has also been established in a very fragmented and complicated way. Because of that, the general upkeep of the buildings is to a large degree provided by management companies whose business considerations are crucial in the maintenance and development of the housing stock, often overruling the goals of the owners.

People living in the Khrushchev quarters still communicate with each other, some are involved in the care of outdoors areas, mutual assistance, and monitoring of common spaces. However, the practices of participation inherited from the Soviet time meet both infrastructural and everyday challenges:

“What does not let me participate in the life of my district is that I don't understand how it works. When I write somewhere [about the issues] they always tell me that it is someone else's responsibility”. (Elena, Sosnovaya Polyana)

“As I see it, no one cares about our houses because they have no interest in keeping them in good condition because they want to launch Renovatsiya. This is a great location. I feel that they do it on purpose so that they can demolish these housing and build high-rises”. (Anna, Sosnovaya Polyana)

When it comes to problematizing these estates, there is a divergence between the outsider and the insider gaze. Experts, media and officials criticize khrushchevki as ugly, aged, depressing, homogenous and not fitting the needs of the modern citizen. Meanwhile, local residents speak of them in descriptors that refer to the lack of attention: neglected, abandoned, not taken care of, run-down, in decay. Some of them articulate the identity of the area as babushka's district – a two-fold image that can both relate to something old, old-fashioned, in poor physical condition, not moving with the times, or as something warm, homey, nostalgic and caring, – the image that also brings in a gender dimension:

“Well, everyone says: “babushka's district”, “babushka's district”, as if only old ladies lived there! But living there was actually cool: there was a park, people took walks, fewer cars, friendly neighbors.” (Katya, Sosnovaya Polyana)

“We moved here when I was 14 and I thought it was the end of my life! I thought they brought me to a village, and everything here is like... people growing flowers, everything will be terrible, I will grow old and die here. But only 2 or 3 years passed and felt this was the best place! It is peaceful and quiet... and people are growing flowers! That actually appeared to be the main advantage. And that is it, I do not want to move any longer!” (Elena, Sosnovaya Polyana)

Renovatsiya discourse built on the assumption that the crisis of khrushchevki is a consequence of their inherent technical flaws that the residents cannot tackle without the state intervention. The advantages of the urban qualities in khrushchevki were apparent and there was no expert consensus on the engineering matters. Still, the program of modernist estates redevelopment has once again adopted a modernist approach based on efficiency, standardization and mass scaling, this time also catering to the needs of the market and large corporations:

“We considered two ways of Renovatsiya: reconstruction of existing buildings or demolition of the existing buildings and construction of the new ones <...> The architects suggested keeping the estates: there are good planning solutions, settled environment and lifestyles, good public spaces. They were in favor of reconstruction, changing the qualitative characteristics. So was I. But it was decided that it is expensive, slow, costly, not interesting. It is easier to demolish.” (Iliia, government official, participated in Renovatsiya design and launch)

However, due to the program's failure on its first round (only 3,5% were completed after 10 years with not a single khrushchevka demolished) the maintenance of the estates in 23 zones around the city was disrupted both on the institutional and individual levels, leading to the rapid decay of the housing and the environment:

"We cannot properly renovate our apartment, invest money in this way, because it has been many years of us being "about to be relocated". Up to this day we have no certainty whether we will move or not. [...] Nothing is being done. [...] If the fate of our house was clear, I would of course keep improving it... I look at other buildings that aren't set for relocation – people there really invest in caring about their homes, get things done, you see that they get things improved..." (Ksenia, Alexandrovo)

In these cross-sections, we see the khrushchevki estate through historically rooted and multi-scalar landscapes of care: while in the soviet times the practices of care for the housing were weaved into the everyday and institutional arrangements, the post-socialist transition was marked by the crisis of care connected with the specific trajectory of housing privatization and hindered mechanisms of estate management. This crisis eventually resulted in the perspective of the estates' demolition. Despite the described detachment from the estate materiality, care for it remains an important aspect of residents' perspective on life and environment quality. This contradicts Renovatsiya logic of care proposed by the city.

## CONCLUSIONS

In our case study we see how practice, observation and the very possibility of care appear as an important component of dwelling experience for residents. The loss of proper connection with the state infrastructures and the confusion within institutions translate into the detachment of the estate materiality and can be described as a crisis of care exercised throughout multiple scales from flat to neighborhood, city and national. Promoting Renovatsiya, the media and authorities approach the poor estate conditions by problematizing the inherent technical characteristics or insinuating the residents' dependency, while the legacy of care in the neighborhoods and the hindered mechanisms of the estate maintenance are not addressed. In that way, under a mask of a welfare provision Renovatsiya bulldozes over the landscapes of care and reproduces the problematic housing in higher density.

Our conceptual argument contradicts Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017, p. 121) logic of care that call to attend to the ways that care, like neglect, circulates "not necessarily morally or intentionally, but in an embodied way, or simply embedded in the world, environments, infrastructures that have been marked by that care". Because in the case of a decision to demolish or renovate housing there can be no unintentional or detached processes, it is a radical political decision that is made by human agents.

By building on these complexities of care, we call for a spatialized political economy of care that appeals directly in thinking about care as an activity arising out of a sense of responsibility toward others, in which responsibility is 'located' in a material environment and exercised on multiple scales. Thus, we combine spatial and material perspective within dynamics of scalar production and suggest to analyze the ongoing housing transformation through the 'landscapes of care'.

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# Demolition and replacement in Chicago: traditional, modern, and contemporary dreams for a better urban life

**Melinda Benkő**; Habilitated Associate professor, Department of Urban Planning and Design, Faculty of Architecture, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Hungary. e-mail: benko@urb.bme.hu

**Session:** 11 – *Demolition vs Renovation: an open question with regard to Middle-Class Mass Housing in the contemporary city.* Chairs: Alessandra Como and Luisa Smeragliuolo

## ABSTRACT

Chicago is a city where demolition seems to be the traditional method used to give place for something brand new. Its modernization started by a catastrophe in 1871 when the “big fire” destroyed a relevant part of the housing stock. A new high-rise city centre was realized from scratch, and developing modern urbanity attracted people from everywhere because there was work and there were others like them. However, the “American Dream” resulted not only wealthy neighbourhoods but also overcrowded slums around the centre. In 1937 the USA First Housing Act introduced a social housing policy, and a federal fund provided 90% of the budget of these slums clearance, and of their replacement by urban infrastructure and public housing projects. Using this opportunity Chicago Housing Authority managed a 30-year social housing program focusing on the inner slum areas and replaced them with modern housing estates. But 30 years later, the renewal of these public projects became inevitable, and the solution provided by a new national program, the HOPE VI introduced in 1992, is again the total demolition. In Chicago, based on the Plan of transformation, most of the high-rise slabs and towers of former mass housing areas are demolished in the last 20 years. These sites started to be reshaped by the “new urbanism” concept, so now, American modern neighbourhoods are replaced by “traditional” European urban fabric of mixed-income developments. The paper focuses on Chicago’s Cabrini-Green drastic contemporary metamorphosis by the point of view of urban policy and design. Thus, there not only the physical but also the social context changes absolutely, revealing the main feature of the demolition/replacement policy in a valuable urban location.

**Keywords:** demolition and replacement; mass housing; Chicago.

## INTRODUCTION

In Chicago half of the residents are tenants and their homes are in different types of collective housing: two- and three-flat apartment buildings, courtyard buildings, row-houses, slabs, towers, or skyscrapers. The paper focuses on the modern mass housing areas within Chicago's zone in transition, especially Cabrini-Green neighbourhood, where demolition and replacement by drastically new urban fabric was and still seems to be the tool for renewal. There, not only the physical but also the social context changed several times for one century revealing the main feature of the housing policy and urban development applied in a valuable urban location of a US great city.

### 1. SLUMS IN CHICAGO'S HISTORY

The planning history of Chicago started in 1833, and by the turn of the century from a small frontier settlement it became one of the biggest industrial boomtowns of the world. Chicago's rapid modernization based on a catastrophe in 1871 when the "big fire" destroyed several square miles, the relevant part of the former wooden housing stock. Then the city developing and promoting modern urbanity had a high-rise city centre from scratch, organized World's Columbian Exhibition in 1893, and attracted more and more people from everywhere because there was work and there were other migrants like them. But the "American Dream" resulted not only wealthy neighbourhoods, but also overcrowded slums. (Hunt and DeVries 2013)

Meanwhile, Chicago urban fabric developed using typical planning tools, as the homogeneous orthogonal grid and the simple functional zoning, it became simultaneously one of the most important fields of urban sociology and human ecology discovering the social consequences of this urbanization process. Chicago School of Sociology analysed social differences beyond the clear physical structure, the spatial and the social segregation. Their two basic urban models are important to understand the location of the former slums, which became the sites of the modern mass housing developments. In 1926 Burgess's concentric model described belts around the Loop, the central business district. And this is the first belt, the so-called zone in transition which gave place ethnically articulated slums, for example Little Sicily, Ghetto, or China Town. In 1939 Hoyt's sector model highlighted the importance of the radial transport routes modifying the value of the land within concentric zones. (Salerno 2010)

### 2. SLUM CLEARENCE AND REPLACEMENT BY MODERN URBANISM (1937-70)

Following the global crisis of the early 1930s, the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced a series of programs, the New Deal in which the housing issue was crucial. The objectives were to regulate the private housing market, to create a federal fund and policy facilitating the realization of public projects. In 1937 the First Housing Act introduced a social housing policy based on the federal fund providing 90% of the budget of the slums clearance, and the development of their sites, the construction of the urban infrastructure and public housing projects for the lower/middle-income middle class. The call was opened to newly formed local housing authorities. So, in the same year, Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) started to work actively and used this federal opportunity efficiently: it selected the action areas, managed the urban planning and the building design process, involved private investors, displaced the residents, demolished the slums, and controlled the realization of the residential neighbourhoods.

## 2.1. Location of Public Projects in Chicago

During this 30-year long federal housing program several modern, high-rise mass housing neighbourhoods, so-called family projects, were realized in Chicago. The five biggest ones, with more than 3000 dwelling units built for app. 20000 residents are all located on the sites of the former slum areas. Their main axis are important transport routes, and lines of the well-developed local public transport. Besides the physical environment, the social context changed dramatically because local individuals being displaced from their homes, from their neighbourhoods and new people arrived „making the second ghetto” of the zone in transition around the urban core. (Hirsch 1983) (Fig.1)



Fig.1 – Chicago composed of 77 community areas; its centre is the Loop (in grey) on lake Michigan. The five biggest modern mass housing neighbourhoods were the following (numbers on the map). 1 / Cabrini-Green Group 3606 units (1942-60), 2 / Horner-Rockwell Group 3073 units (1950-70), 3 / ABLA Group 3658 units (1938-61), 4 / State Street Corridor 7938 units (1950-66), 5 / Wells Group 3239 units (1941-70). Source: Author's drawing based on the map by Dennis McClendon. (Hunt 2012, 2)

## 2.2 Cabrini-Green Group

Chicago is one of the most racially and economically segregated US cities, and from the five biggest modern mass housing neighbourhoods is only the Cabrini-Green Group which located in the wealthy Northern part. (Metropolitan Planning Council 2017) The federal housing program gave the opportunity to demolish the slum so-called 'Little Hell', and to change not only its physical but also the social context providing new housing for low- or middle-income, white, working American citizens with large families. First, in 1942 CHA built simple, flat roof, two-three storey high 54 row-houses by brick with 586 dwellings, the Frances Cabrini Homes. (Fig.2)

But the federal housing policy changed in 1949 articulating objectives to realize “as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.” (Housing Act 1949, 413). The quantity of dwelling, the efficiency required by economists and lawyers in Washington DC overwrote local urban and architectural experiences regarding living conditions. As consequences, new mass housing neighbourhoods were developed for app. 20000 residents and composed by similar residential high-rise slabs and towers.

In Chicago's Cabrini-Green Group, the second phase, the Cabrini Homes Extension opened in 1957, consisted of fifteen 7, 10 or 18-storey high elevator red-brick buildings with 1925 flats. And its last part, the William Green



Homes completed by 1960 became even more economic: the 1099 family flats were in seven 18-storey identical, stand-alone blocks, nicknamed 'white walls'. In addition, as afterwar policies helped whites to achieve suburban homeownership, flats of massive high-rise buildings were mainly populated by Afro-American and later Latino large families of 5-8 persons. (Hunt 2009)



Fig.2 – More than two-third of the row-houses composed of 440 family flats were evacuated by 2012 and they are still waiting for private investors who are interested in their renovation. Source: Author's own, 2020.

### 3. DEMOLITION OF MODERN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND REPLACEMENT BY NEW URBANISM (1992 onwards)

In 1960s, theoretical critics of modern urbanism and architecture appeared everywhere. "This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding" stated Jane Jacobs in the introduction of 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities' (Jacobs 1961, 3). After 30 years of practice the US federal housing policy changed in 1967, the realization of mass housing neighbourhoods was all over, and the new housing act encouraged the renovation of these young urban area. In 1972, the city of St. Louis in Missouri decided to apply the simplest effective tool for the renewal of the 17-year-old Pruitt-Igoe public project, the total demolition, but in most of the great US cities modern mass housing neighbourhoods were neglected and they lived as spatial, social, cultural isolated island-like parts of the urban fabric, mainly in the zone in transition. Last, in 1992 simultaneously of the urban core renaissance, the HOPE VI was introduced to facilitate the revitalization of the worst public housing projects into mixed-income developments in the country by a fund for demolition and planning. The CPTED, the crime prevention of environmental design (Cozens et al 2005), and the New Urbanism based on the discovery of the traditional European urban culture, provided the architectural theoretical background. (The Charter 1996)

#### 3.1. Demolition and replacement in Chicago

Chicago Housing Authority as was the first applicant for the realization of public housing in 1937, it became one of the first funded by the HOPE to demolish and replace Cabrini-Green neighbourhood. The process started in 1994, the first high-rise residential building was blown up in 1995, and a new development plan was approved in 1997. At the same time, CHA prepared a new strategy for the whole city, and the objective of this Plan for Transformation is the renewal of the physical urban fabric of its properties by the demolition of 18.000

family dwelling units. Since displacement of residents, demolition of many of the high-rise buildings in large-scale mass housing projects, the privatisation of the land, and the construction of mixed-income developments in their stead reshaped several parts of the city. (Austin 2018)

### 3.2. Cabrini-Green neighbourhood

Cabrini-Green neighbourhood as a part of the Near North Side community area is located officially in central Chicago. Between 1995 and 2012 every mid-rise and high-rise building of the public housing development was demolished, and nearly 15.000, mostly Afro-American residents were displaced somewhere else using voucher program. Only low-rise row houses from the 40s survived the radical intervention, third are renovated and remained social rental family apartments, meanwhile, the other two-third are still vacant waiting for investors. CHA's redevelopment plan is based on new urbanism concepts to rebuild these 65 acres: the new street network integrates the area to the surrounding; the transit-oriented development guides the density criteria of the projects; main streets, and public green parks give hierarchy for the urban fabric; and traditional neighbourhood design defines the character of the buildings and open spaces. After the privatisation of 50 acres divided into 14 parcels, different private investors could do low- or high-density developments with app. 2500 new dwelling units. The socio-economic diversity is regulated requiring a specific distribution of housing: max. 50% of new flats could be sold on a market basis, 20% should be subsidized affordable, and 30% should be social rental housing but "invisibly" integrated into the new developments. (Vale 2012) (Fig.3)



Fig.3 – On the land of the Cabrini-Green neighbourhood, contemporary housing developments follow new urbanism requirements. In the foreground, one of the empty plots is seen more than ten years after the demolition of its residential tower. Source: Author's own, 2020.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The Chicago's Cabrini-Green case is not a typical example of contemporary mass housing renewal. Because the location of the area is excellent, being in the central part of a dynamic global city private investors are interested in the development opportunities. However, the US federal fund and policy force and help the total demolition and replacement, and local policymakers believe that social problems could be solved by interventions into the physical environment. In addition, the owner of the land and buildings, the Chicago Housing Authority did not privatize its property before the transformation process started (Benkő 2018). And last, the debate on the cultural, social, architectural, and urban legacy of modern mass housing is not relevant enough, meanwhile new urbanism theory gives stable professional and public fundamentals for the planning

and the realization of new developments. (Klein 2020). Are demolition and replacement really the most efficient, long-term orientated, sustainable, human-based methods of the mass housing renewal? Chicago's Cabrini-Green area always was and still seems to be a zone in transition. Not only by its position within the city but also by its lifespan fragmented by several drastic changes provided by federal funding. There, traditional, modern, and contemporary dreams for a better urban life are always built from a tabula rasa. But what could be the next step? And how the methods and tools of the renewal would change if the objective were finding a future orientated, sustainable, and human-based solution for a large-housing complex?

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# The *Cité de l'Amitié*, a 1970s pioneering housing ensemble for people with reduced mobility in the Brussels periphery confronted to its future

Jean-Marc Basyn; Faculty of Architecture ULB La Cambre Horta (Belgium); jmbasyn@urban.brussels

**Session:** 11 – *Demolition Vs Renovation: an open question with regard to Middle-Class Mass Housing in the contemporary city.* Chairs: Alessandra Como and Luisa Smeragliuolo

## ABSTRACT

In a period of radical urban changes and new housing typologies in Brussels and its periphery initiated in the 1950s, the *Cité de l'Amitié* is to be considered as a pioneering archetype. The *Cité* is situated in an outer part of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre urbanized after Second World War following the Scheme for a Greater Brussels designed by Louis Vander Swaelmen in 1929, implanting large *parkways* connecting the Brussels Pentagon to the 3<sup>rd</sup> concentric ring. Built in 1974-1978 by groupe AUSIA, the *Cité* is halfway between the concept of garden-city and collective housing ensemble, as an alternative to high-rise ensembles. Built on a plot of 3 hectares, 329 dwellings were constructed with the main goal of social mixity. The urban concept is totally pedestrian with main accent on PRM mobility comfort, public space quality and furniture. The roadway is lined with single-family houses, facing 7 apartment buildings (up to 7 floors). The height of the buildings was voluntarily reduced for a more convivial and human urbanism. The diversity of volumes answers to the diversity of dwellings. All dwellings are however built on the same canvas of 6 meter distancing concrete load-bearing walls using tunnel formwork technique. The human dimension is reinforced by local building materials such as bricks and slates, hyper realistic artwork and vivid colors in the common parts. Having set down this new collective housing typology, AUSIA conceived more comparable ensembles in the Brussels periphery such as *Les Venelles* and student housing on the UCLouvain medicine campus.

Currently in an interventionist renovation (thermic isolation) to prepare the *Cité* for the future, the *Cité* risks to lose some of its original architectural and urban values (materiality, arterial hierarchy, street furniture). This paper intends to develop heritage strategies and to interrogate compatibility between a defensive heritage position and eco-responsible solutions for the future of the unprotected *Cité de l'Amitié* and its 1970s-1980s avatars.

**Key-words:** urban prototype; communitarism; disabled people



## INTRODUCTION

The *Cité de l'Amitié* is an utopia that has become a reality, an urban prototype that has become a model thanks to a combination of several opportunities: a young multidisciplinary group with innovative ideas, a dynamic association committed to defending the rights of the disabled, a historical context in search of a new, more humanistic modernity, and urban conditions that are conducive to the development of new neighborhoods on the outskirts of the Brussels agglomeration. All of these factors make this unique project fully part of the architectural and societal debates of the 1970s.

## 1. MAIN PROTAGONISTS

### 1.1. AUSIA

Group AUSIA (*Architectes, Urbanistes, Sociologues et Ingénieurs Associés*) was founded in 1966 around the association of three friends Michel Benoit (1941), Jean de Salle (1942) and Thierry Verbiest (1942-2008) who graduated as architects from the *Saint-Luc School of Architecture* in 1966-1967. In 1968 they won the triennial Paul Bonduelle Prize issued by the Arts section of the Royal Academy of Belgium with the theoretical study for a new town *Cité de la Lasne* of 50.000 inhabitants in the Lasne valley (15 km South-East of Brussels) proposing a new urban model taking into account the errors of the Modern Movement. The *Cité de la Lasne* proposes a groundbreaking approach for the Belgian architectural scene: an organic infra-architectural scheme with satellite neighborhoods linked to the center holding all the needed collective functions by a complex system of pedestrian paths and streets covered by dwellings; car traffic is banned to the outskirts and totally underground.<sup>5</sup> They revendicate a clear influence of new urban models such as Le Mirail in Toulouse conceived in the 1960s by the team Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods, the pioneering Churchill Gardens (Philip Powell and Jacko Moya, 1946-1962) and Lillington Gardens (Roger Westman, John Darbourne and Geoffrey Darke, 1961-1972) in Pimlico (London) characterized by the mixity of scale and built forms. More than an architecture agency, AUSIA must be considered as a reflection atelier, stimulating pluridisciplinary brainstorming where architects, urban planners, sociologists, jurists and economists are participating toward the elaboration of the project. Contextualism, communitarism, concertation, conviviality, fraternity (*"d'égal à égal"*) and humanism are the main characteristics of their prospective approach, in reaction to the 'dogmatic' cold functionalist post-war urbanism. They consider social housing as the laboratory of architecture, and push forward the need for a softer urbanity. The Bonduelle Prize propels this young association on the forefront of the Belgian architectural scene. In a few years they participate and win several international competitions. AUSIA produces mainly social equipments, housing ensembles, offices and urban planning. Their main projects are first located in Brussels, then increasingly from 1974 on in France. The architectural association of the group AUSIA split in 1977.

In the search for a new way of thinking about grouped housing, the AUSIA group brings a new perspective to social housing in which formal and typological research is combined with the concern for redesigning the urban fabric by densifying the interior of the block and in which public space and private built space coexist.

### 1.2. National Association for the Housing of Disabled People

In 1962, a group of friends made up of able-bodied and disabled people called *Amitiés* got together to develop the concept of a community house; this was to be the basis of the future *Cité de l'Amitié*. In 1966, they formed the non-profit organisation *Association Nationale pour le Logement des personnes Handicapées (A.N.L.H.)*. Their aim is to promote the social integration of disabled people in social life and focuses on their autonomy.

<sup>5</sup> "Cité de la Lasne. Prix Paul Bonduelle". 1968. *Académie royale de Belgique - Bulletin de la Classe des Beaux-Arts*, Book L no. 4-5 (May) : 89-119.

The *A.N.L.H.* collaborates in the definition of architectural and urban planning standards, which are the basis for the implementation of legislation concerning the accessibility of people with reduced mobility.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. URBAN EVOLUTION OF THE BRUSSELS PERIPHERY

### 2.1. Second crown of Greater Brussels

Till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the second crown of Greater Brussels is mainly rural or forested. Its urbanization is planned by architect and urban planner Victor Besme (1834-1904), who was in charge of coordinating major roads and new urban extensions in the second half of the 19th century. In the interwar, Louis Vander Swaelmen (1883-1929) published his *Schéma pour un Grand Bruxelles* (Scheme for a Greater Brussels) in which he sought to organize the extension of the agglomeration along avenues crossing large green spaces and detailed the third concentric ring of Greater Brussels East, including the municipality of Woluwé-Saint-Pierre. In 1945, the *Administration de l'Urbanisme et de l'Aménagement du Territoire (AUAT)* (Administration for Urban and Spatial Planning) is created under the Ministry of Public works. In 1948 the agency *Groupe Alpha* is commissioned for the general planning of Greater Brussels, still characterized by a functionalist method based on zoning and the development of a vast motorway network in the periphery. The road plan was accompanied by the *Green Plan* developed by the Ministry of Public works in 1958, devised by the landscaper René Péchère, in order to pursue environmental quality into new roads and to define local urban identities. A strong criticism to this urban planning vision appeared at the end of the 1960s and saw the development of several alternatives from which the *Cité de l'Amitié* emerged.

### 2.2. Woluwé-Saint-Pierre (W-S-P)

Till the end of the 19th century, the municipality of W-S-P is essentially a rural entity composed around three villages. The creation of the Tervueren Avenue in 1897 determined the development of new residential areas. After the first world war, the municipality experienced a major urban development boom with the construction of numerous villa districts. After second world war, the urbanization, still essentially residential, increases rapidly with many villas, apartment buildings and the apparition of a new housing typology encouraged by the local deciders : grouped or clustered housing developments. These essentially residential and private initiatives gave the municipality a rather comfortable but not very homogeneous urban aspect. At the same time, the development of a new motorway network strongly marked the identity of the commune. Today, this 885-hectare municipality has approximately 42,000 inhabitants.

## 3. CITÉ DE L'AMITIÉ

### 3.1. Urban context

In 1966, the *Cité de l'Amitié* project was made possible by the donation of a three-hectare plot of land to the *A.N.L.H.* In 1968, the municipality sold the neighboring three-hectare plot to the National Housing Agency. Located on the edge of the municipality, the *Cité* is surrounded by an urbanized area in the form of isolated architectural ensembles, very different in their structures and shapes: the garden city Kapelleveld (1922-27), the UCLouvain medical campus (1970s), the Kraainem suburban zone and the Woluwe Boulevard office and shopping area.

<sup>6</sup> De Salle, Jean. 2021. "La genèse et les enjeux de la Cité de l'Amitié." Interview by Jean-Marc Basyn, 15-04- 2021.

### 3.2. Genesis<sup>7</sup>

The architects were appointed in 1968 and proposed the first plans in 1969. The preliminary project was drawn up in 1972 on the basis of a technical document entitled "Architecture and Accessibility". The building permit was issued in 1973. In 1974, a study trip to Denmark and Sweden allowed the architects and the A.N.L.H. to familiarize with the most recent advances in accessibility (research department Göteborg University) and to visit several exemplary projects. The construction of the first phase started in 1974. The work was quickly stopped due to the increase in costs caused by the oil crisis and resumed at the end of 1975. A test flat financed by the EEC was presented to the public in 1975. The first dwellings were inaugurated in 1978.

### 3.3. Description<sup>8</sup>

Initially, 600 dwellings were to be built in two phases. Only the first phase was built: 329 dwellings, 15% of which were intended for the locomotor handicapped and spread throughout the *Cité* with the declared aim of social integration. The housing for the able-bodied is all accessible to the disabled in order to facilitate door-to-door relations. The housing for the disabled is specially adapted to their needs.

The urban concept opposes the dominant model of separate blocks and revives the urban form consisting of continuous streets laid out in a varied manner and lined with semi-detached buildings. The height of the buildings has been deliberately reduced in order to give the whole a friendly character. This idea of urban planning with a human face is also present in the varied articulation of the volumes and the characteristic treatment of the roofs, which give the ensemble a small village feel. (Fig. 1).

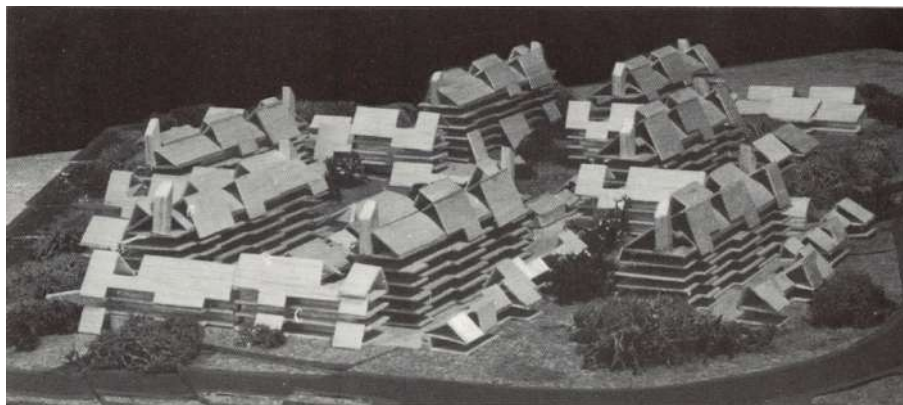


Fig. 1 - Model, 1972 (picture private funds Jean de Salle)

The *Cité* is entirely pedestrianized, unlike the large housing estates of the 1950s and 1960s, which offered a large space for car traffic. The complex is built on top of a large car park which absorbs cars as soon as they arrive. The pedestrian circulation networks are particularly developed and diverse. They widen in places to create rest areas with benches to encourage meetings between inhabitants. All horizontal circulation spaces are rigorously planned to be wheelchair accessible. Vertical circulation is provided by spacious glass lifts.

The arteries are lined with an apartment building on one side and a string of single-family homes on the other. The houses have three or four bedrooms and are one, two or sometimes three floors high. The seven buildings

<sup>7</sup> Leblicq, Corinne. 1979. "L'amitié autour d'une cité." *Habiter* no. 78 : 32-37.

<sup>8</sup> Van der Heyden, Anne. 1995-1996. "Architecture sans handicap. Analyse de la Cité de l'Amitié." Master thesis, I.S.A. Saint-Luc Tournai.

range from three to six floors depending on the span. They contain one- to four-bedroom flats as well as studio apartments. These flats open onto an interior corridor that runs through the entire volume. (Fig.2).

The diversity of the volumes corresponds to the diversity of the planned dwellings. However, they are all designed according to the same basic framework: the load-bearing system of the buildings consists of walls spaced six meters apart, arranged perpendicular to the main façades. These walls are made of reinforced concrete walls (tunnel formwork technique) and determine the boundaries between dwellings.

Although the articulation of the volumes deliberately differs from one building to another, the same architectural vocabulary confers unity to the whole. The load-bearing walls and reinforced concrete floors structure the facades in a network of rectangles, most of which contain a large window. The long facades are largely glazed, while the brick side facades are blind. The bricks used are so-called shale bricks, produced from compressed coal waste. (Fig. 3).

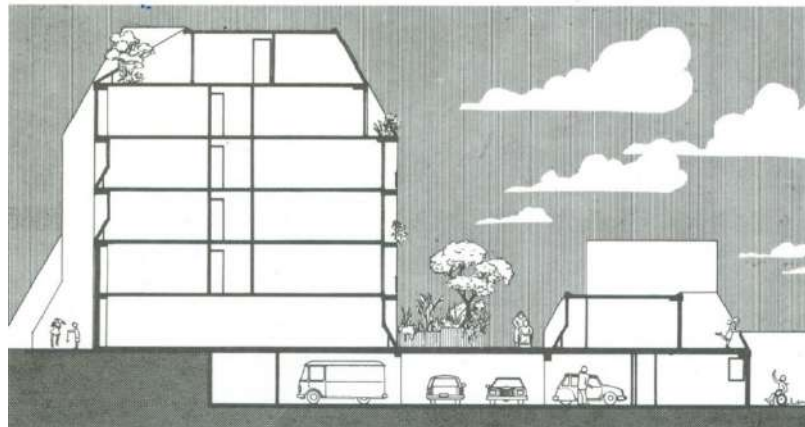


Fig. 2 - Cross-section showing the functioning of the *Cité* and the dialogue between built volumes (De Salle, Jean. 1979. "architecture et handicapés." *A Plus* no. 60 (September-October) : 18).



Fig. 3 - Detail of the *Rue de l'Angle Jaune* today showing the variety of building scales (©Jean-Marc Basyn, April 2021)



The play of volumes is particularly varied: exposed concrete walkways, successive recessed floors, whose offsets are softened by sloping connections covered with Eternit slates. The roofs are of great visual importance and come in various variants. Their slopes rise to two levels connected by a wide ridge terrace.

The doors and lift shafts are painted in the same bright color - blue, yellow, red, orange - which varies according to the street. The very names of the streets reflect this chromatic play, developed by the artist Yvonne Cattier Wastchenko: *Rue de l'Angle Jaune*, *Rue du Ciel Bleu*, *Rue du Temps des Cerises*, *Rue de la Fleur d'Oranger*.

Playgrounds, sandboxes and gardens are integrated into the area. The landscaping was designed by Yves Rahier, who also participated in the landscaping project for the new university town of Louvain-la-Neuve (1970s), and includes mainly fruit trees for the children to enjoy. There is also a crèche, a socio-cultural center and a scout troop to strengthen the social cohesion of the *Cité*.

### 3.4. Today's intervention

The social owner has undertaken an ambitious project for the renovation and spatial reorganization of the *Cité* in 2020. This plan is based on a master plan that defines four main axes: the perpetuation of the values of inclusion for all inhabitants, the enhancement of green spaces, the reaffirmation of the opening of the *Cité* to the neighborhood and the support for alternative mobility. The interventions are organized in phases. The first phase, currently underway and budgeted at €4,290,000, concerns the renovation of the housing with the improvement in energy performance. The original single-glazed aluminum windows (SIMEC) are being replaced by new triple-glazed PVC windows with new heating systems and controlled mechanical ventilation. In addition, a layer of insulation is being added to the exterior of the walls, which involves the total replacement of the bricks and slates cladding. These interventions should reduce the current consumption from 408 to 60 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year, in order to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Energy-Climate Plan (*PNEC*) adopted in 2019 by the Brussels Region. The next phases aim is to improve the quality of common spaces and to rework the pedestrian connections between the *Cité* and the surrounding neighborhood.

### 3.5. Heritage evaluation

Widely acclaimed at the time of its construction, the *Cité* was cited in the No. 0 of the architecture magazine *Aplus* in 1973 and was discussed in the thematic issue "architecture and the disabled" of the same magazine in 1979.<sup>9</sup> However, the *Cité de l'Amitié* does not benefit from heritage protection but is listed in the Inventory of the architectural heritage of the Brussels Region.

The phased renovation must prepare the *Cité* for the future and improve its viability and the comfort of the private and common spaces in a steady effort towards sustainability. However, these interventions also go hand in hand with major changes to the detriment of its materiality and authenticity. As the *Cité* does not benefit from heritage protection, heritage values are not necessarily a priority in the actual debate. These interventions tend to focus on an 'image' and risk undermining the original concept and its legibility as historical material. On the other hand, its use value seems to be perpetuated thanks to the Masterplan and the maintenance of the original concept of social integration.

The case of the renovation of the *Cité de l'Amitié* must be studied under the criteria of heritage, use and sustainability, in order to compare the good interventions and to avoid the loss of character in the case of future interventions on similar urban typologies and architectural expression of the same period.

<sup>9</sup> Benoît, Michel, de Salle, Jean, and Verbiest, Thierry. 1973. "Cité de l'amitié." *A+* no. 0 (June) : 31-34. De Salle, Jean. 1979. "architecture et handicapés." *A Plus* no. 60 (September-October) : 7-22

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## Berlin's Central Suburbia. On IBA Berlin 1987 and its Housing Complexes after the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

**Ilaria Maria Zedda**; RWTH Aachen University, Department of Spatial Design (Germany) and Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna (Italy); [zedda@raum.arch.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:zedda@raum.arch.rwth-aachen.de)

**Session:** 11 – Demolition Vs Renovation: an open question with regard to Middle-Class Mass Housing in the contemporary city.

### ABSTRACT

In 2013, images of the demolition of Oswald Mathias Ungers' block on Berlin's Lützowplatz appeared in numerous architectural journals and newspapers, causing considerable uproar. This demolition soon assumed broader meaning and posed a threat to many architectures that conceptually and contextually resembled it. What happened to Unger's block could have happened to any other block built for IBA 1987, the International Building Exhibition held in West-Berlin in the 1980s. This exhibition represents a remarkable stage in Berlin's reconstruction after WWII. IBA's approach differed from that of the urban practices from the 1950s until the 1970s, which decentralised housing in large estates at the outskirts of the city. IBA envisioned instead new housing complexes for Berlin's city centre. In the 1980s, however, Berlin's centre was still divided by the Wall and consisted of two parts that were both peripheral in their respective half of the city. After Berlin's reunification, these once peripheral neighbourhoods re-became central; however, their former peripheral characteristic is still manifest, owing to a lack of services and of qualitative public spaces. The shortcomings of these districts, despite their appealing central position, have led IBA buildings to become targets of speculative interest. Apart from the demolition of Unger's Lützowplatz block, other IBA buildings such as John Hejduk's Kreuzberg Tower have faced inadequate renovations, which would have cost the building much of its identity. Therefore, this paper reflects on the consequences of these occurrences as well as on the meaning and the future prospects of IBA's housing complexes in contemporary Berlin.

**Keywords:** IBA Berlin 1987; Middle and lower-class housing; Speculation.

## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, West-Berlin led an initiative for urban reconstruction that was unique to those years. This initiative, called “International Building Exhibition Berlin 1987” (IBA Berlin 1987)<sup>1</sup> was organized by the West-Berlin Senate for the restoration and reconstruction of the city centre and for the increase of middle and lower-class public housing. It needs to be said that, because of the Wall that divided it, what we consider to be centre of Berlin today was periphery in the 1980s. IBA focused on this “central periphery” in West-Berlin, where it promoted new projects for public housing. By doing so, IBA opposed the dominant planning tendencies of that time that foresaw the decentralisation of public housing towards the *Großsiedlungen* at the outskirts of the city. Moreover, IBA did not promote modernist urban models, nor did it focus on the paradigm of the car-friendly city. Instead, IBA’s design approach was based on the contents of the international architectural debate that developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, which claimed for the rediscovery of the values of the historical city and of its urban elements.

IBA provided occasions for the implementation of the contents of this debate. It opposed, for example, the plans of the late 1960s that foresaw the demolition of many historical buildings in the city centre and their replacement by new motorways. Alternatively, IBA intended to renovate damaged buildings and to reconstruct central districts that had been razed both by bombings and by the earliest redevelopment plans of the 1950s and 1960s. In its new projects, IBA assumed the historical urban fabric as a starting point. Moreover, instead of designing large and homogeneous housing estates ignoring the historical urban fabric as it was common practice in the 1960s and 1970s, IBA conducted its urban reconstruction through rather punctual interventions, focusing mostly on the dimension of the 19th-century Berlin block.

In 1989, only two years after IBA’s opening, the fall of the Wall was as impactful for Berlin and its central districts as its construction in 1961. After the Wall fell, both “central suburbia” of East- and West-Berlin were, once again, the centre of the reunited city.

The reunification of Berlin’s city centre eventually led many speculators to see the presence of (unlucrative) public housing in those central locations as inconvenience. In the early 2000s, after many IBA projects lost their subsidised status and were privatised<sup>2</sup>, new owners envisioned significant changes. These changes even entailed demolition, as in the case of the block on Lützowplatz designed by the German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers. This is the only IBA building that underwent demolition. Similar occurrences raise questions, such as: What is the background behind this demolition and what did it imply? What consequences arose from IBA public housing not being public anymore? In order to answer these questions, this paper first contextualizes IBA Berlin 1987. It then discusses the events that affected its buildings after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In doing so, it addresses two case studies in detail: one concerns a demolition, the other a restoration. Finally, this paper explores the most recent fate of IBA projects between speculation and attempts to gain preservation status.

## 2. Continuity and Changes in West-Berlin’s Urban Reconstruction

The approach of IBA’s department for new constructions (IBA-Neubau)<sup>3</sup>, is known as “critical reconstruction”. The term “critical” was very important for IBA’s organisers: it specified the fact that the reconstruction of West-Berlin’s “central suburbia” was not to be pursued nostalgically, by copying former models. On the contrary,

<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, this paper will refer to this exhibition as *IBA*, acronym for *Internationale Bauausstellung* (International Building Exhibition).

<sup>2</sup> See: Sollich, Jo “Abschied vom Sozialen Wohnungsbau: Folgen für die IBA-Architektur.” In: 25 Jahre Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1987. 2012 (chapter at pages 85-91) 85.

<sup>3</sup> IBA was divided in two departments. One of them, called IBA-Altbau (old buildings) focused on renovation and modernization of damaged buildings. The other IBA department, called IBA-Neubau (new buildings), worked mostly on the reconstruction of brand-new buildings within the former urban structure as it was before WWII. This paper focuses on IBA-Neubau.



IBA's reconstruction had to base on historical knowledge and analysis. It had to consider both the historical city and the modern needs of Berlin in the 1980s. All this, within a public housing programme.

In Berlin's central districts southern Tiergarten and Friedrichstadt, where IBA Neubau focused the most, the organisers of the exhibition did not aim to rebuild the city's fabric exactly as it used to be before WWII. Nonetheless, at least the blocks' contours and the streets' profiles were recovered (Fig. 1). IBA 1987 was the first large-scale reconstruction initiative in Berlin to be conducted after WWII with reference to the traditional elements of the city's architecture, i.e. streets, squares and blocks.

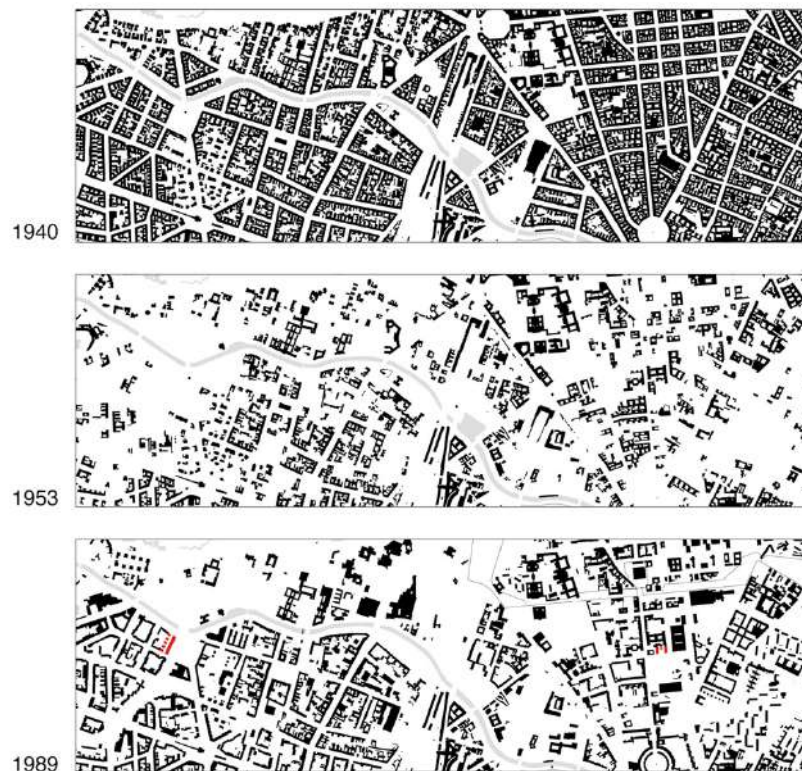


Fig.1. Berlin's central districts southern Tiergarten and Friedrichstadt, figure-ground plans. From top to bottom: before the bombings of WWII (1940), after WWII (1953) and after IBA 1987 (1989). In the plan of 1989, the path of the Berlin Wall corresponds to the two thin grey lines and both case studies illustrated in this paper are evidenced in red. © Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen Berlin, mit Tobias Nöfer (the figure-ground plan of 1989 was partly edited by the author, 2021)

Before looking at the case studies, it is important to stress that, despite their rich variety of architectural forms and languages, all IBA projects resulted from the aim of providing public housing within an urban and human scale rather than ghettoise it in the suburbs. IBA's public housing was proposed for buildings embedded within a system of urban elements, where courtyards and semi-public spaces provided in the blocks offered meeting places for the community of their residents. This was a turning point for Berlin's architectural and urban practice in the 1980s.

### 3. “Too Cheap” for the City Centre. On the Demolition of the Block on Lützowplatz

A good example of IBA block conceived at human scale in a context that seemed to have forgotten what the human scale was, is the block designed for IBA on Berlin's Lützowplatz by Oswald Mathias Ungers.

Before IBA included Lützowplatz among its design areas, this square was not seen as pleasant as it used to be. In addition to the damages caused by the war, at the beginning of the 1960s, Lützowplatz was further transformed by traffic plans. These plans included a four-lane road, which not only bypassed Lützowplatz, but also made the square unrecognisable and unappealing as a residential area. As a result of this situation and unlike other IBA blocks, Ungers' block (Fig.2) remained closed from outer public spaces. This project faced Lützowplatz with a compact six-storey front, thereby also redefining the western contour of the square. This massive front, with an interplay of flat and gabled roofs, sheltered from traffic the inner garden and the urban villas located in it, thus merely visible from the outside.



Fig.2. Left: Ungers' IBA Block on Lützowplatz (built 1983) as it was until its demolition. © Jim Hudson.  
Source: <https://architectureinberlin.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/destruction-at-lutzowplatz-final-4-march-2013/>

Right: Ungers' IBA Block on Lützowplatz undergoing the final stage of its demolition in 2013. © Stephen Hartley. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/isarsteve/8492983552>

Even though because of the limited budget available for IBA's public housing the houses had quality weaknesses and needed frequent maintenance, life in Ungers' block on Lützowplatz was appreciated by its tenants, who, after the fall of the Wall, could live in the city centre at an affordable price. If this improved condition initially benefitted the community of the tenants, from the 1990s onwards, the central location of this block also caused conflicts of interest. For example, after numerous embassies were built in the surroundings of Lützowplatz, both the value of this square and the interest of speculators increased. In this context, Ungers' building—which was little more than ten years old but already needed frequent maintenance—was not attractive for estate investors, who had more lucrative projects in mind for the surroundings of the square.

In 1998, Ungers' block was purchased by an estate investor who, in 2005, disclosed his intentions to demolish it.<sup>4</sup> The stated reason for this demolition was that the costs of the necessary renovations would have far exceeded those of new construction.<sup>5</sup> However, there was little discussion as to whether this architecture could

<sup>4</sup> See: Fülling, Thomas. 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem

have contributed to Berlin's history and identity. In 2008, the demolition of Ungers' block began, starting from its urban villas. These earliest demolitions were followed by years of intense arguments between dwellers and owners, which ended with the legal victory of the latter, the eviction of the last tenants, and the demolition of the front on Lützowplatz<sup>6</sup>. In the spring of 2013, thirty years after its completion, the building was not there anymore.

#### 4. Other Consequences of IBA's Privatisation

From 2010, while the tenants in Lützowplatz were legally fighting against the demolition of their apartments, the interest of the press was drawn to another IBA building: the "Kreuzberg Tower" designed in southern Friedrichstadt by the American architect John Hejduk. This project is composed of a tower and two side wings, which soon became very iconic because of their inverted gable roofs and their southern anthropomorph façades. In this project, Hejduk left no details to chance—least of all the grey colour of the façades, which recalls that of Berlin's sky for most of the year.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly to Ungers' building, in the 2010s the Kreuzberg Tower was privatised and its new owners were not satisfied with the status of the IBA building they purchased. Instead of demolition, however, the new owners embarked on renovation. They envisioned, for example, the replacement of the grey original plaster with a lighter one, the enlargement of some balconies, and the removal of some characteristic elements of the southern façades (Fig.3).



Fig.3 – John Hejduk's Kreuzberg Tower in 2010, when the works for its renovation already started from its eastern wing. Photo: Ian Werner (Slab Magazine) © CC BY-SA 2.0. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/36206536@N00/albums/72157623630961150>

<sup>6</sup> See: Beyerlein, Andrea. 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See: Dame, Thorsten, Herold, Stephanie, and Salgo, Andreas "Die IBA als Baukulturelles und städtebauliches Erbe?." In: *25 Jahre Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1987*. 2012 (Chapter at pages 92-99) 92.



These changes would have irreparably altered the identity of one of IBA's most iconic buildings. Therefore, not only demolition, but also incorrect renovation may threaten architectural identity and the readability of architects' original ideas. At the beginning of 2010, architecture blogs<sup>8</sup> and journals reported about the beginning of the renovations of Hejduk's building. The news spread quickly and aroused protests, to the point that the petition "Stop the Disfigurement of John Hejduk's 'Kreuzberg Tower' in Berlin" was announced, to prevent the building from being transfigured.<sup>9</sup> This petition was successful and managed to "save" the building, which was finally renovated according to its original image.

## 5. IBA Buildings Today. Between Speculation and Preservation

In 2010, when half of Ungers' block had already been demolished, the debates on the renovation of the Kreuzberg Tower made clear that the value of IBA buildings needed to be questioned, in order to eventually put them under preservation order. Considering this, the case of Hejduk's project, "saved" from wrong renovations, had a happy ending that went far beyond the destiny of that single building. After 2010, moreover, a renewed awareness of the importance of IBA's architectures was at the basis of various research initiatives, which involved architecture schools as well as other cultural institutions.<sup>10</sup> These initiatives contributed to disseminating knowledge about IBA and to achieving the earliest steps for the preservation of its buildings. In 2015, numerous IBA buildings in southern Friedrichstadt were finally included in the list of Berlin's monuments. In 2019, other IBA buildings in Tegel harbour, Wilmersdorf and southern Tiergarten were also included in this list.<sup>11</sup>

This turning point occurred too late to avoid the demolition of the block on Lützowplatz. The former site of Ungers' building is now occupied by another building, designed by the Berlin-based architecture office Modersohn & Freiesleben. This new building substitutes the former public housing complex with a mix of expensive apartments, offices, and shops. The new design is, thus, a far cry from one of the main ideas of IBA, namely that of providing housing for the low and middle class in the city centre, prompting for social diversity. Although not as evident as in the case of the block on Lützowplatz or of the Kreuzberg Tower, other IBA buildings have also recently undergone transformations. For example, after their shift from public to private housing that followed the financial crisis of 2008, many of them became unaffordable for the lower middle class (Akcan 2018, 38, 91). New owners took advantage of the central location of these buildings to raise their rents considerably, so that many tenants were forced to leave their flats.

Furthermore, also the closing of many courtyards in IBA blocks considerably affected these blocks after their privatisation. On the one hand, the choice to close these courtyards aimed at protecting the tenants' privacy. On the other hand, however, it also affected the spatial interaction between courtyard and street as it was originally conceived by IBA, which was important in order to offer spaces for meeting and social integration within the blocks.<sup>12</sup> Considering this, together with demolitions or inadequate renovations, also these modifications significantly affected IBA blocks. While the raising of the rents caused gentrification in these

<sup>8</sup> Remarkable contributions were published in the blogs "Architecture in Berlin" (<https://architectureinberlin.wordpress.com>)—which also addressed the case of Lützowplatz's demolition between 2008 and 2013—and "Slab Magazine" (<http://www.slab-mag.com>)

<sup>9</sup> See: „Rettet den Turm! Petition für Hejduk-Bau in Berlin“ (Baunetz, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010) and “Stop the Disfigurement of John Hejduk's 'Kreuzberg Tower' in Berlin” (Docomomo, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Particularly remarkable among these initiatives was the one called “F-IBA” (Forschungsinitiative IBA), active between 2010 and 2012. The results of its intense research activity are still available on the website of the initiative, which provides an outstanding source for contemporary research on IBA. See: <http://f-iba.de>

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.berlin.de/sen/kulteu/aktuelles/pressemittelungen/2019/pressemittelung.809944.php> (link accessed on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

<sup>12</sup> The outcomes of these privatizations can be seen, for example, in IBA “Block 4” in southern Friedrichstadt. Whereas the inner garden of this block was conceived by IBA as a meeting place for its neighborhood, publicly accessible, after privatization its numerous passages were closed. See: Akcan, 2018: 138–142



districts, the closing of the courtyards profoundly changed the way in which IBA's housing blocks can be experienced by their community.

## 6. Conclusions. The Inner City is not (Anymore) for Everyone

The acknowledgement of preservation status to many IBA buildings demonstrates today's growing awareness of the fact that IBA Berlin 1987 was not just an architectural exhibition, nor was it just another public housing initiative in West-Berlin after WWII. IBA was, in addition to all these things, a pivotal experience in urban design. It marked, for the first time in Europe after WWII on such a large scale, the shift to an approach to urban design sensitive to the identity of the historical city. Moreover, IBA 1987 represents the last phase of architectural production on large scale in West-Berlin before German reunification (Tiez 2008). In the words of the Turkish-American architect Esra Akcan, IBA was "the last episode in the history of the 20th century public housing, when housing was part of architects' disciplinary concerns; as a microcosm of the participatory, postmodernist, and poststructuralist debates in architecture from the mid-1960s till the early 1990s" (Akcan 2018, 10-11). However, awareness of all those IBA's values arose only quite recently, when the block on Lützowplatz already succumbed to property-speculation.

If the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe stood for the death of Modern Architecture (Jenks 1991, 23), how shall we see the demolition of Ungers' block on Lützowplatz? Rather than representing the death of postmodernism—which in many respects was already overcome in the last years of IBA's activity—this demolition, and the other occurrences related to the recent fate of IBA's architectures reported in this paper, is a tangible evidence of the speculative interests prevailing today in architecture and urban planning in Berlin.

After the fall of the Wall, urban dynamics in Berlin's centre changed profoundly. This part of the city suddenly no longer aroused mistrust, but rather became target for big investors, who began to build here offices, shopping malls, upper-middle class housing, and diplomatic buildings. In this changed context the majority of IBA blocks—mostly mono-functional (residential) and built with the qualities and standards of 1980s public housing—appear today rather disconnected from the buildings nearby. Nevertheless, also these blocks have been subject to significant rent increases due to their location.

The affordability of housing in the inner city for the low and middle class was one of IBA's main *raison d'être*, perhaps the hardest one to restore and preserve in capitalist Berlin. Despite all the efforts of the 1980s—or perhaps precisely because of the processes that IBA started to recover these central suburbia—living in Berlin's centre today seems to be a privilege for the wealthier class.

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#### REMARKS

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