the CITY

Mass Housing Estates of Multifamily Housing Complexes?

ECO REHAB 3 CRACOW 2012
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PART II

FUTURE OF THE CITY
ECO-REHAB 3
International Student Workshops on Mass Housing Estates – CRACOW 17th – 28th APRIL 2012
FOREWORD

The publication you are holding in your hands is another issue from a series of scientific books devoted to research on the condition of the contemporary city as well as forecasts of its future development. They originated on the initiative of the Institute of Urban Design, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology. Six previous editions of the results of research carried out by a wide international circle of specialists were published within the prestigious Technical Transactions from 2004 till 2012. The direct reasons for the creation of this year’s book were the beginning of international educational and research cooperation as well as the International Student Workshops on Mass Housing Estates – FUTURE OF THE CITY – Eco Rehab 3 organized in April 2012 by the Chair of Urban Composition and the Chair of Public Spaces for Movement at the Institute of Urban Design FA CUT in Cracow.

The twenty-first century is and will be the age of the cities. Their population is increasing at a pace unprecedented in history, while the spatial reserves of our planet are shrinking. The ideas of a compact city and economical management of urban space seem particularly important in this context. The amorphous areas of mass prefabricated housing estates, built in the second half of the twentieth century without legible compositional layouts, still occupy extensive stretches of European cities. These areas suffer galloping spatial and social degradation. The series of international student workshops Eco Rehab is devoted to the problems of their revitalization. The workshops were initiated in Bucharest in 2010, whereas the next editions took place in Barcelona (2011) and in Krakow (2012). The next workshops will be held in Milan in 2013. Each edition is summed up in a trade book which presents the students’ works as well as the latest scientific research concerning these problems.

This publication is divided into two parts: a theoretical survey of the results of research carried out by an international group of scientists involved in the organization and supervision of the workshops and a report of this event which includes a presentation of the designs. We want our book to reach the widest possible circle of recipients, including young apprentices of architecture who will be responsible for the shape of global urban spaces in the decades to come. I would like to thank all those engaged in the creation of this publication – the authors, the reviewers, the editorial staff as well as the students of seven European Faculties of Architecture who participated in the Eco Rehab 3 workshops.

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INTRODUCTION

An increase in the global population, observed within three previous centuries, accelerated violently in four last decades of the twentieth century and does not seem to be slowing down. Its approximate numerical profile is as follows: the population of our planet increased from about three billion in 1960 through more than six billion in 2000 to nearly seven billion in 2011. Apart from the development of civilization and technology which facilitated a significant improvement of the living conditions, changes in military techniques and the rising global community spirit (noticeable in the multitude of international organizations), the way was also cleared by a number of other factors beyond architecture.

These phenomena brought about an increase in urbanization processes because the second and third wave societies – in other words industrial and postindustrial societies – usually abandon the shrinking agricultural areas and move to the cities. It is currently estimated that seventy per cent of the Earth population will live in the cities by the year 2050. This number already exceeded fifty per cent of the global population in 2008. It is supposed that the total urban population increases by one million every week. Thus, the cities are becoming the natural housing environment for billions of people – the inhabitants of our planet which is getting more and more confined in this context.

Thus, satisfying the city dwellers’ rising housing needs is becoming an extremely important problem. The history of architecture and urbanism is full of visions of future cities which would offer better living conditions. Several implemented utopias (e.g. the socialist realist city exemplified by Nowa Huta presented in this book) stand out against this background, while new visions keep springing up. In spite of numerous shortcomings, it seems that the historical European city remains the unparalleled model of a compact city adjusted to the human scale which offers diverse, richly fitted public spaces.

As a matter of fact, however, the European cities are not ideal structures. Many of them grapple with various spatial problems caused by numerous factors of transport, structural, social or economic nature. Estates of prefabricated blocks of flats, built across the world after World War II, left their visible stamp on the urban structure of many cities, especially in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Rejecting the centuries-old tradition of city building for the sake of layouts loosely inspired by the international style and the guidelines of the Athens Charter of 1933 led to unimaginable spatial chaos in extensive areas of European towns and cities. In spite of this, the idealized, unequalled model of a European city or small town underlies most reformative movements in 20th-century urbanism as well as significant theoretical works concerning the development of urbanized areas. Not accidentally, the New Athens Charter is a document which restores trust in a new, cohesive and compact city.

Within three previous decades, burdensome heavy industry and mass production have moved from the European cities to other regions of the world. The European society, which is not homogenous by nature, is being intensely transformed by the rising wave of immigrants. Despite the phenomenon of shrinking cities observed in certain places, the housing needs in the European countries must be still satisfied. More and more frequently, it is not only about the number of flats (as in the postwar period) but first and foremost about the quality of a housing environment. More sophisticated social needs and requirements with reference to urban spaces related to functions which accompany residential buildings than in the other historical periods make one of the features of a contemporary European city.
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In Europe, whose urban culture has been developing for several millennia, there are less and less undeveloped areas, whereas a lot of intact lands have been devastated irreversibly. Those which remain are usually protected by the law or act as the agricultural hinterland. That is why – for the sake of sustainable development and rational management of the resources of our planet – a return to the concept of a compact city, which can be also called an economical city, seems more and more significant. It particularly concerns our continent which faces threats resulting from such negative phenomena as urban sprawl\(^3\). Thus, the problems of revitalizing or rehabilitating already urbanized areas, including residential grounds, as well as protecting the architectural and urban heritage are getting increasingly important.

A substantial part of this publication is devoted to the problems of revitalizing multifamily housing complexes dating back to the previous decades, creating appropriate spatial and compositional relations in the existing complexes as well as preventing the intensification of spatial chaos in dwelling environments. It seems that multifamily housing complexes make a model of residence which will dominate the cities, not only in Europe, in the face of the foregoing global processes. This paper is divided into two parts: a theoretical presentation and a report of the International Student Workshops on Mass Housing Estates – FUTURE OF THE CITY – Eco Rehab 3 organized in Cracow in April 2012. They were devoted to the revitalization of three selected housing estates in this Polish city.

Mateusz Gyurkovich, Ph.D. Arch.
Research Editor

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\(^3\) The phenomenon of urban sprawl (the uncontrolled growth of urban, mainly residential buildings beyond the administrative city borders and the creation of less intensively urbanized areas along the backbone of a transport layout) was born in North America in the 1920s. A report from the European Commission of 2006 shows that this phenomenon, even though ignored, is still dangerous in many European cities. At that time, 75% of the population of United Europe lived in urbanized areas. However, an alarming fact was that the amount of a developed area per capita increased twice within the previous fifty years. It proves a disturbing tendency, related to rising wealth and social expectations, realized by numerous Europeans: an escape from the city in search of a suburban lifestyle. In certain regions of Europe (mostly northern England, northern France, western Germany, Ireland and Belgium), almost 95% of residential buildings dating from the years 1960-1990 are low intensive objects consuming vast patches of land together with their necessary infrastructure. The authors of the report warn us that a similar state of affairs could be observed at the beginning of the 21st century. – cf.: URBAN SPRAWL IN EUROPE. The ignored challenge, European Commission, Directorate-General, Joint Research Centre, European Environment Agency, EEA REPORT no. 10/2006
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Mass Housing Estates or Multifamily Housing Complexes?

PART 1
PART 1

Architect since 2002, currently is Adjunct professor at Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (Department of Urbanism and Territorial Planning). Since 2000, member of the office JORNETLLOPPASTOR arquitectes, where he has participated in many urban planning projects of different scales.

mass housing estates, urban renewal, social identity, participatory process

The mass housing estates built between the 50s and 70s in the metropolitan region of Barcelona have usually been identified as areas of the same family. Conceived, planned and executed under the same mechanisms, have been stigmatized by their urban planning and public space deficits but even more by their social profile.

Nevertheless, despite all difficulties, these areas were able to become in neighbourhoods with its own identity, often motivated by their own original shortcomings and the need to collectivize the claims by its residents. A social and cultural identity was reflected in the daily activity of their neighbours and the activities of existing organizations and groups.

The social identity of these neighbourhoods, in some cases involved in a process of demographic structure change, should be an asset and also a key factor while establishing the urban renewal strategies in each specific case, avoiding the systematically repetition of identical projects and overcoming the historical prejudices.

Xavier Matilla Ayala, Adolf Sotoca

Social identity and Mass Housing Estates

CV

key words

abstract
Mass Housing Estates or Multifamily Housing Complexes?

1. Mass Housing Estates: the same origin and destination?

The concept “polígono de viviendas” has systematically been used to refer the result of a group of urban residential operations carried out in metropolitan area of Barcelona between the decades of 50 and 70. Useful to refer generically and to identify some urban areas, created at a specific time and under the same instruments and mechanisms, with the passage of time and the evolution of urban and social context of the neighbourhoods, is a concept that unfortunately leads to excessive semantical simplification of urban realities that makes reference to.

The use of the word “polígono” in urban planning issues has its origins as a concept that identifies a geometrical area to be developed by the same management unit. In the present case, it perfectly explains the inception and spirit of this kind of operations: the demarcation of new growth areas to build as many dwellings as possible, in the shortest time and with the least economic cost. It mainly intended to accommodate the large number of people living in cities without housing, often in shantytowns. This beginning meant the simplicity and lack of project criteria that these new urban growth were conceived and executed.

For this reason, from an urban planning standpoint, citing “polígon d’habitatges” has often meant accepting certain precepts relating to urban problems: are isolated dormitory suburbs of the city, high density, without urban activity, serious shortages of facilities and public spaces, among others.

We can consider much more serious the topics generated on their social conditions. The media coverage and impact of certain situations of social conflict have enriched a number of established social prejudices about these neighbourhoods and people who live there, often associating “polígon d’habitatges” with social conflict, crime and extreme marginalization. As if its origin had given himself a social common destiny.

Given this simplification process, and after more than 60 years since its appearance, we should consider the different aspects that should allow us to understand that not all the “polígons d’habitatges” are equal and it is necessary to overcome certain prejudices to be able to diagnose them properly.

From a planning perspective, is needed accurately assess and survey the stereotypes that have been proven as false in many cases.

But above all, it’s needed to include the social aspect within the diagnosis and proposals of the renewal projects. The profile of the population that originally occupied the mass housing estates, despite they came from the same social, cultural and economical precarious situation, was different and in each district were established the human factors that have decisively determined its evolution and thus their current situation. People have been the genetic component that, despite being in an environment and similar urban space in most cases, has created a unique social structure in each district.

We must be able to properly diagnose each case, from an urban planning perspective but also from their social settings, so that intervention projects do not become a generic solution programmed independently of each situation.

2. Urban deficits and social virus

The result of the accelerated construction process of mass housing estates housing, meant the appearance of thousands of new residential buildings in a very precarious urban situation and with huge constructive pathologies.

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1 The Catalan Urban Planning Law defines in its article 112: “Polígons d’actuació urbanística are the minimum territorial areas for carrying out integrated planning management”.

2 The PERM (renewal plan) of La Mina neighbourhood proved that density of many mass housing estates in Barcelona was lower than densities of historical urban fabric or the Eixample. La Mina density was 154 dwellings/ha and the Eixample density is about 300 dwellings/ha.
The new urban areas, located on the periphery of cities and very often in discontinuity with this, did not have the services and basic urban facilities such as schools and medical centres. In some cases not even water supply. The level of development of public space was precarious or non-existent.

Obviously, immediately after opening day, there appeared constructive and structural pathologies in the buildings. All this justified that the new districts have been called “vertical shanties”. What was conceived as a solution to homelessness had become a problem again, thanks to political cynicism, and their collusion with the economic power of the moment.

However, it was the level of deficiency in mass housing estates, among other reasons, what paved the emergence of collectivization processes of the vindication and neighbourhood struggle, despite the difficulties and prohibitions imposed by dictatorship during the 70’s. Protests focused primarily on three areas: housing and the need for more affordable housing and the rehabilitation or replacement of those with major constructive problems, the construction of basic facilities, and improvements in quality and maintenance of public space.

The neighbourhood movement, organised by neighbourhood associations and social centres, was able to influence in the municipal political power, and got improvements in the qualities and facilities of the residents. It acted as catalyst of social activities, and was able to change the forms and functions of the city.

Interestingly, the public space of mass housing estates, usually presented as a residual space because of its dimensional excess, its lack of meaning and function and its abandonment, in many cases became the central space of daily life in the districts. The failure of mass housing estates, as a bad interpretation of the modern movement precepts, creating isolated neighbourhoods with substandard housing buildings became paradoxically, the catalyst, which generated new forms of social action. Even nowadays, we can observe new ways of urban struggle in mass housing estates in some European cities.

The protest movement of the 60s and 70s led to the formation of a new urban culture, with a clear ideological

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3 The first phase of the construction of the mass housing estate „El Polvorí” in 1952, meant the construction of 104 dwellings in 68 days and the new buildings had not even water supply.

4 Ciutat Meridiana mass housing estate was managed and built by the private investor Torre Bard SA, which had in its board people who simultaneously occupied prominent positions in public administration. See FABRE (1977) pp 245–247.

Spirit, based on the defence of a social model of city where citizens should be involved, as opposition to the political system that had generated the neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, social movements helped forge an identity in a sort of neighbourhoods that had been created without a soul, conceived as simple politico-economic operations. In fact, mass housing estates that currently enjoy better health and social internal cohesion, and have developed greater resilience to contextual changes, are those that were able to articulate neighbours associations and collective movements.

The existence of a social fabric made during decades that has been able to create a sense of identity and belonging to the site should be a key factor when proposing improvements in this urban area in order to reduce the distance between space project and society.

3. From the obsolescence of mass housing estates, to the renewal projects obsolete

The years following the construction of mass housing developments were characterized by social complaints and vindications, which force the administration to intervene by introducing specific improvements in the neighbourhoods, as building new facilities or urbanizing some public spaces. These actions were more conditioned by the need to combat the political effects of the social protest movements that by a true conscience and desire to improve neighbourhoods. We could consider that this period marked the origin, of the urban planning process, that was undertaken once the democracy was restored in the 80s, characterised by the dialectic between local government, private investors and citizens.

Obviously, this first stage of small improvements, did not solve all the urban and construction troubles, and more of them continued appearing, uncovering serious security problems for the residents and forcing the public administration to tackle the issue in a more determined way.

Since the 80s, with the restoration of democracy, have been carried out various programs in order to improve urban and living conditions in mass housing estates. In a synthetic way, we can group the various intervention programs undertaken in three categories: remodellation, rehabilitation and integral projects.

The “remodellation program”, have been promoted by the regional administration and Institut Català del Sòl (IN-CASÒL) and also by local administration and the Municipal Housing Barcelona (PMHB). The program have been carried out during the decades of 80s and 90s, and there still are some projects not undertaken or finished. Its fundamental aim was to demolish the residential buildings with serious structural problems and replace them with new ones that improved as much as possible the residential types and standards. These were operations that could be considered of emergency, characterized by their excessive obsession for management and economic viability. Projects were likely conditioned by hard economical and management difficulties and because that, weren’t able to attempt the improvement of the original districts urban conditions, concerning structure and urban shape, wasting an opportunity to renew profoundly the urban areas affected.

“Rehabilitation programs” have been diverse and various local, regional and european administrations have been involved in. We can identify the PMHB rehabilitation program, and the projects REVITASUD-INTERREG i REHÁBITAT 2010, sponsored by the European Union, in which have participated several towns near the border between France and Spain, or the projects...
E3SOHO, RESHAPE, REHAB in BCF, IMPACT linked to European Union programs for improving the energy efficiency of buildings, the analyse of their impact and mechanisms of certification.

The “Llei de Barris” (neighbourhoods law) was passed in Catalonia in 2004 intended to fund urban renewal projects in areas with urban and social problems. It entailed the intervention in a total of 22 mass housing estates. The law, through a set of indicators proposed allowed to evaluate and decide which districts were eligible for the program, promoting integral intervention projects, it means, “that exceed the sectoral interventions and allow to tackle comprehensive intervention actions, aimed at the physical rehabilitation, environmental sustainability, social welfare and economic revitalization”. This objective was translated into the definition of eight fields of intervention that could be grouped into four main groups of actions: urbanization, new facilities, social programs and economic revitalization.

From the diagnosis of the projects carried out in housing estates, distributed in different areas of the metropolitan region and various sizes and conditions, you could deduce a number of intervention factors in common between the diferents projects, primarily related to position and relation to regional infrastructures, living conditions and access to housing, residuarity of public space, degradation of the urban landscape, environmental quality issues and social processes of negative selection of the population. From the proposals could also being deduced similar strategies in the diferents projects, with the aim of improving relations between neighbourhoods and the city as well as their internal conditions.

However, intervention projects were conditioned by the fact that the program did not include, as funded actions, the construction of new residential buildings. So, it entailed that projects did not propose actions in order to affect the estructural urban conditions or introduce changes in the ownership structure. Therefore have been projects incapable of change for better the morphology of the existing urban fabric. The urbanization actions, approximately 70% of the total investment, only consisted in re-urbanise existing public spaces, in the best cases related to the construction of new facilities.

Regarding the actions related to social programs, it should be noted the considerable methodological improvement that the program has meant with respect to earlier methods in renewal projects. It has been really useful for incorporating...
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new dynamics, improving communication and transparency of actions as well as increasing people participation and improving the perception that people have of the intervention projects.

However, without minimizing the obvious improvements to the neighborhoods where the program has operated, can be considered from an urban point of view, that projects have generally worked a as program of redevelopment of public spaces, without having any positive effect on structural or morphological aspects, which should have been key elements to achieve the intended objectives.

The renewal project of La Mina, in Sant Adria de Besos, in 2002, not affiliated to any of the programs mentioned above, has likely been an intervention in mass housing estates that has established a new “modus operandi” as a result of a very specific historical context. First, by the triple diagnosis approach made in: social, planning and construction issues. Secondly, because it has been able to establish a real transformation process. According to the diagnosis, the project defined a new urban structure in the neighborhood, keeping almost all of residential buildings and transforming public facilities areas. Therefore, it has been a proposal that exceeded the “making up” of redevelopment of public space of earlier actions, without demolishing residential buildings.

After have synthetically reviewed the different types of programs and projects of intervention in housing estates in recent decades in Barcelona we can draw some conclusions and lessons learned:

- The programs mentioned were always carried out by public administrations in order to eradicate a problem or conflict as quickly as possible. The program of remodelling, appeared
with the urgent need to solve serious structural pathologies in buildings which were endangering the safety of residents. The rehabilitation programmes, with the aim improve the low habitability level caused by the existence of construction pathologies. The projects of the “Llei de Barris” to try to solve obsolescence of certain social and urban areas.

- The need of acting with urgency, justified by the situation or motivated by the desire to gain visibility and increase performance of political action means define actions in a short period of time. This gives visible and positive physical results but does not allow synchronize the paces of urban and social changes. Usually it is considered that when we talk about physical changes in the city we can think in periods of 10 years. Instead, when we talk about social changes we need to consider time periods much larger, almost generational.

- Operating in mass housing estates in short periods of time, waiting for instant results, we are probably repeating the same process which originated them: create a new physical space and think, that it will absolutely mean social improvements. Ignoring a basic fact: in this neighborhoods is living a community that after several decades has been able to hijack a soulless space and turn it into a place with its own identity. This should not be regarded as a socially idyllic situation but as a set of strengths that can support the renewal processes.

- Urgency has a second negative aspect. It avoids to tackle intervention strategies more extensive and complex, capable of overcoming the isolated vision of mass housing estates and its inner problems, and expand the focus of the proposals to introduce structural and morphological changes, beyond the simple replacement of the buildings. The new urban and regional context of many housing developments allows us to identify a huge urban potential of development that should help not only to improve the neighbourhoods but also to improve city and territory.

Fig. 5. Renewal project of “Trinitat Nova”. Left: Renewal project after competition in 1999. Right: new project passed in 2002 after participatory process.
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- In general, intervention programs have tended to standardize methodologies and strategies of the projects, as if the goal was to perfect an instrument at the same time it is used in different situations, improving their efficiency, but at the same time ignoring the particularities in each case. We have equipped ourselves with instruments for planning and managing increasingly sophisticated, but also further away from existing urban problems.

- Although the program of “Llei de Barris”, have ensured the incorporation of participatory processes, the short period expected and the own projectual limitations, have made it difficult to assess its incidence and impact. Therefore, it is necessary identify and develop which should be the spaces and tools to integrate the social potential of the districts in the definition of renovation projects.

4. A new perspective for intervention

In short, once has been overcome a long phase of emergency measures, which have allowed minimally dignify original mass housing estates, a new type of renewal interventions should be defined, in order to be aware of the following issues:

- Properly identify and diagnose the specifics of each quarter. After over 50 years of its appearance, mass housing estates have become in neighbourhoods, different between them. Although they were designed by the same way, its public spaces, currently respond to different logics of use and empowerment in each case. This aspect must be taken into account, and being integrated in renewal projects in order to determine appropriated intervention strategies.

- To re-value the real urban planning potential of mass housing estates, derived from its new urban and regional context and its great quantity of available public space. The capacity of many mass housing estates to provide improvements to a longer urban and territorial scale should be a fundamental strategy for the next renewal projects.

- Sizing and temporalizing the intervention projects so that there be interaction between urban space and society, between the spatial sense of neighborhood and cultural identity of its inhabitants. Avoiding projects that propose “tabula rasa”. Only this kind of approach can ensure that the efforts of public investment will affect positively the residents of the neighborhood, avoiding speculative renewal processes, that only aim incorporate a new profit gap and replace the former residents.

In this sense, it is interesting and appropriate briefly mention two experiences that allow us to illustrate the need to incorporate the aspects mentioned above and at the same time the new perspective that it entails:
In 1999 it was announced the winner of the proposal ideas competition that had been called for define the remodeling project of “Trinitat Nova” district. The proposal was characterised by making “tabula rasa” with pre-existing neighbourhood and proposing a new rational layout in which all new buildings had the same orientation with the aim of improving the functionality of the new district. The neighbourhood association, which had not participated nor establishing the rules of competition neither to select the winner, strongly rejected the proposal as they understood, it did not respond to the real needs of the neighborhood. Through a participatory process, promoted by the neighbourhood association, a new document called “basic lines of planning” was developed. The document collected a set of strategies basically related with need to preserve and integrate certain existing architectures, urban spaces and natural elements considered as a symbols of the neighborhood identity and also the need to address the necessary continuity of the neighborhood with its urban surroundings. In 2002, was passed a new renewal project in which were integrated the conclusions of the different’s participation tools undertaken.

VdB is a bottom-up integral and participated renewal project of the mass housing estate Virgen de Begoña in Madrid. It began in 2011, when the collective Paisaje Transversal contacted the neighborhood association with the aim of initiate a participatory process in order to formalize the neighbours demands. The project is organized into three channels: Diffusion, Citizenship and Participatory Project. The Diffusion channel aims to improve transparency and dissemination of the communication process. The second channel aims to incorporate Citizenship pedagogical tools in order to strength community identity and create a new collective consciousness about what public space or urban ecology means, among others. The channel Participatory Project try to define and develop projects and their management through a participatory diagnosis and a pilot testing of the proposed final draft. The three strategies are being developed simultaneously through different actions, which seek to involve residents, through incorporating new digital tools like social networks or the blog of the project.
The project is still in process, looking forward for results.

Two projects explained above, despite they are still in process, has meant a significant change regarding how generate and manage renovation projects in mass housing estates, understanding that the generation of the project is a process rooted in a participatory methodology and not in certain preconceived theoretical precepts and defined before knowing accurately the urban and social reality in which the action is being undertaken.

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9 see RAVETLLAT-RIVAS (2002).