

Propaganda, mise a veřejné mínění
Sociologický průzkum mezi obyvateli MDM ve Varšavě v roce 1951
Krzysztof Mordyński

Na přelomu čtyřicátých a padesátých let dvacátého století začal polský komunistický režim věnovat zvláštní pozornost městskému plánování a architektuře a prosazovat v této oblasti zásady socialistického realismu. Z pohledu vládnoucí moci byl v kontextu poválečné rekonstrukce nejdůležitějším rozměrem architektury její propagandistický efekt. Někteří současní

historikové proto považují jeden z klíčových projektů tohoto období, varšavskou obytňou čtvrti Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa (MDM), za „čistě politickou záležitost“, spíše „model města“ než reálnou součást Varšavy. Tento pohled však opomíjí, že architekti nebyli jen poslušnými státními úředníky, ale řada z nich zasvětila svůj život reformistickým ideálům moderního města. Aktivitu, které se dnes jeví jako pouhá propaganda, mohly mít i svou reálnou hodnotu. Od sklonku čtyřicátých let realizoval Ústav pro bydlení řadu průzkumů

mezi obyvateli různých obytňových čtvrtí a sídlišť. V roce 1950 proběhl interní průzkum týkající se prvních tří čerstvě dokončených budov MDM. Byl zaměřen na obecná témata jako hustota obyvatel, ale i detailnější zkoumání toho, jak obyvatelé své byty používali, jak je vybavovali nábytkem a v neposlední řadě na co si především stěžovali. Předkládaná studie konfrontuje oficiální propagandu, deklarované záměry architektů a názory uživatelů.

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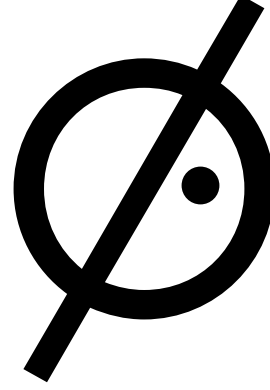
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Propaganda, Mission, and Public Opinion. Public survey among inhabitants of MDM in Warsaw in 1951

Krzysztof Mordyński



The period of socialist realism is considered a time of strict ties between politics and architecture. At the turn of the forties and fifties the communist authorities in Poland decided to pay special attention to town planning and architecture by imposing a soviet doctrine on architects. From the ruler's point of view, one of the most valuable features of architecture and the process of after-war rebuilding was its propaganda effect. That's why some contemporary historians assumed that the characteristic urban project of this time in Warsaw – Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa [Marszałkowska Housing District] (MDM) – was “purely a political matter”⁽¹⁾ and served rather as a “city disguise, its plan, functions and meanings”⁽²⁾ than as a real part of Warsaw. These statements, however, didn't take into account that Polish architects weren't just obedient officers in state service but many of them dedicated their lives to the idea of city reform of modernist origin. It wasn't easy, but they were able to find a way to continue this idea and seek their place in official structures where they could perform their actions. In fact, it is not necessary to decide where their inspirations exactly came from – were they pre-war studies or a chance to build an equitable city in a communist country – it is more important to observe that many acts that currently are considered as “propaganda” had their real value.

Starting in 1949 the Institute of Housing⁽³⁾ carried out a series of public surveys among inhabitants of different residential districts or housing estates. A document entitled “Results of public surveys in the first three buildings

1 Andrzej SKALIMOWSKI, *Sigalin. Towarzysz odbudowy*, Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne 2018, p. 200.

2 Waldemar BARANIEWSKI, “Architektura Warszawy w czasach stalinowskich. Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa – symboliczny kamuflaż”, *Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki*, 2010, issue 3, p. 61–62.

3 Instytut Budownictwa Mieszkaniowego, the government Institute established by the Ministry for Construction on 29 July 1949. The task of the Institute was defined as conducting research, technical and scientific work on typical housing production and the economics of architectural solutions in construction as well as socio-economic solutions in the planning and construction of settlements. *Monitor Polski* 1949, issue 49, p. 687.

of MDM”⁽⁴⁾, published in May 1952, presents the inquiry made by employees at the Institute in MDM. The document was intended to assist architects; it was a sociological study, however, we are going to use it in another way, as a source of history. We will present the problem of the discourse of the official propaganda, declared intentions of architects, and an image of life arising from collected data. It also touches on the problem of historiographical narration.

What interests us most is the context of questions and answers. The range of questions reveals issues that were considered important while the questions that weren't asked suggest the topics which didn't seem as vital or maybe represented subjects that shouldn't be touched. Data gathered and answers provided are interesting in themselves, giving us a chance to observe an image of living conditions in general and detail. However regarding data and answers, a general issue comes to the fore: were they true or forged for some purpose, for example, propaganda reasons? This question leads us back to the problem mentioned above, to the overall context of the inquiry, and the play of power and reason in the field of architecture.

Architecture as “propaganda”

Thanks to Deyan Sudjic's analysis there is no doubt that architecture is very useful for democratic as well as despotic systems of power when it comes to state-building activity.⁽⁵⁾ In the Polish case, the vast destruction of the country after WWII and especially its capital city created a situation where the physical rebuilding of Poland could be a significant symbol of a much deeper transformation of its society, economy and culture in the spirit of communist

4 Zofia BARSZCZEWSKA – Wanda CZECHERDA-MACIUSZKO, “Wyniki badań w trzech pierwszych budynkach MDM”, *Materiały i dokumentacja – Instytut Budownictwa Mieszkaniowego*, 1952, series B, issue 2.

5 Deyan SUDJIC, *The Edifice Complex: The Architecture of Power*, London: Penguin Books 2011, p. 23–25.

ideology. Rebuilding was also a chance for authorities to gain some true popularity. During the first few years after the war, they depended strongly on the power of the Red Army. Stalin imposed a new temporary government, seemingly built with diverse political groups but actually dominated by the Communist Party. Facing a lack of popularity, authorities decided to forge in their favour the people's referendum of 1946 and parliamentary elections in 1947. In both cases, intensified propaganda campaigns were launched to hide the real results.⁽⁶⁾ In the following years, persuasion went even further, coming into conflict with the everyday life experience of Polish society. The authorities made many controversial moves, such as tarnishing non-communist underground fighters and conspirators of the Home Army, which were supported and respected by most of the Polish society. They were accused by the new government of fascism, nationalism or fratricide, and then they were imprisoned, persecuted or murdered.⁽⁷⁾ The monetary reform of 1950 which deprived people of their savings was shown in propaganda media as a justifiable fight against the richer part of society, who were treated as "class enemies".⁽⁸⁾ For many reasons, any news publicized by the government could be seemed as false, deceptive or at least exaggerated.

In fact, one of the most popular topics in the official media was rebuilding the country. Among all cities destroyed in WWII in Poland, Warsaw took a special position. The capital city was a symbol of resistance against German occupation, and now it would be a symbol of the reborn country. Polish society showed huge enthusiasm for the idea of rebuilding and no one was surprised to see

6 Czesław OSEKOWSKI, *Wybory do sejmu z 19 stycznia 1947 roku w Polsce*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie 2000, p. 157–160.

7 Mariusz MAZUR, "Propaganda komunistyczna wobec Armii Krajowej w latach 1943–1955", *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 2015, issue 1, p. 78–79.

8 Jerzy KOCHANOWSKI, "Dziesięć dni, które wstrząsnęły portfelem", *Polityka*, 2010, issue 44, p. 64.

citizens who after work spontaneously helped in cleaning the city from the rubble. New buildings or housing estates let people feel that the war nightmare had ended and gave rise to the hope that life would be easier. State authorities understood that direct engagement in commanding the rebuilding of the capital city offered them great possibilities to gain popularity and to harm their opponents. Propaganda created an image of Bolesław Bierut, the chief of the communist party and President of Poland, as a "Great Builder" while Western countries, as well as the Polish democratic opposition, were called "destroyers" with a wide range of associations stemming from the contestation of a national effort to threat of nuclear bombing. Plans of rebuilding were presented as merits of government possible only in the communist political system.

Nevertheless in the very first period after the war town planners enjoyed some discretion and between 1945–1949 they developed a modernist plan for Warsaw reconstruction which focused on spatial divisions between districts for governing, working, living and recreation. The situation changed in 1949 when the socialist realism doctrine was imposed on Polish architects. The regime wanted to decide about the most important aspects of designing.⁽⁹⁾ Edmund Goldzamt, one of the most active adherents of the new doctrine, claimed that architecture's prime task was no longer function, comfort or beauty. It was spreading ideology among people, which could either be "capitalist" or "communist". He postulated strict control over architects and evaluation of their designs, with ideology as the most important element.⁽¹⁰⁾

9 Piotr MAJEWSKI, *Ideologia i konserwacja. Architektura zabytkowa w Polsce w czasach socrealizmu*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO 2009, p. 106–124.

10 Edmund GOLDZAMT, "Zagadnienie realizmu socjalistycznego w architekturze", in: Jan MINORSKI, *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Techniczne 1950, p. 17, 26. Piotr MAJEWSKI, *Czas Końca, czas początku. Architektura i urbanistyka Warszawy historycznej 1939–1956*, Warszawa: Bellona 2018, p. 214–215.

The postulated ideological role of architecture was in many cases equal to its propaganda effect. From the ruler's point of view, sketches of new buildings and districts, their mock-ups, and future designs were a kind of propaganda, because they were a promise of a better future, and a lot can be promised just by drawing on paper things that people wanted most: new houses and normal life.⁽¹¹⁾ When architects came to Bierut for acceptance of their first designs of MDM in May 1950, he was dissatisfied.⁽¹²⁾ They showed him a complex plan of the city district based on numbers and professional analysis, but he focused on something else: "It will not give a spectacular effect on Marszałkowska anyway."

Marszałkowska is the main city avenue, 3 km long, and MDM was planned at its south end only, so architects couldn't fulfil Bierut's desires by their design. But they modified their plan and mastered different versions of a monumental square on the axis of Warsaw's primary avenue, the square which was a triumphal entrance to MDM and could be a significant ending of Marszałkowska seen from the city centre. The square was named after the Constitution of 1952⁽¹³⁾ and as the most important part of MDM became one of the most recognizable symbols of Stalinist doctrine in Poland. The primary analysis focused on function, thus the architects' modernist way of thinking faded away from official media while the aesthetic and ideological meaning of the square became the most important issue. Starting from 1950 the press several times presented

11 Bierut stated: "The party pays attention to architecture because it's a significant form of ideology and ideology cannot be indifferent to the party. Ideology is postulating values that are needed for a better future, drawing an image of the future. (...) How better can we present our goals than using these mock-up panoramas of new cities?" (translation by K.M.) Waldemar BARANIEWSKI, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy okresu realizmu socjalistycznego", *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 1996, issue 22, p. 237.

12 Józef SIGALIN, *Warszawa 1944–1980. Z archiwum architekta*, vol. 2, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986, p. 239.

13 The square as the main object of the first phase of MDM construction was opened on 22 July 1952, the same day as the Constitution 1952 was passed.

mock-ups and drawings of the square in different variations: with a skyscraper, obelisk, three giant monuments and finally with huge candelabras. The topic of constructing MDM – concreting, masonry, plastering and so on – was an often discussed theme,⁽¹⁴⁾ while the functionality of the urban layout rarely found its way to official news, unless it was described in an article written by MDM architects.⁽¹⁵⁾

These circumstances played a significant role in the interest of later historians who began analysing socialist realism in Poland. The traditional historiography focused on the influence of the regime on architecture. For some reasonable functional and aesthetic reasons, Constitution Square was objectively needed. It was an important element of the transport system, first of all as a branch of Marszałkowska Street, but also for the capital shopping area that architects planned for it. However, the square was always judged as controversial because its construction drastically affected the area around it.⁽¹⁶⁾ Its monumental form designed according to a socialist realism doctrine was more problematic. From the front, the huge blocks of flats looked like neo-classical palace-like buildings. In many backyards, however, old tenement houses still stood, not usually linked with new blocks. This was one of the reasons architecture historian Waldemar Baraniewski called MDM a "city disguise" while analysing doctrine and architecture. Wojciech Włodarczyk – a significant art historian who studied socialist realism – presumed that MDM was a "broken creation" because Constitution Square was created according to the formal features of the doctrine, e.g., monumental, symmetrical and axial composition, and lost

14 Most popular daily newspaper *Życie Warszawy* and weekly magazine *Stolica* offered regular reports on the progress of construction.

15 Józef SIGALIN – Stanisław JANKOWSKI – Jan KNOTHE – Zygmunt STĘPIŃSKI, "Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa", *Stolica*, 1950, issue 35, p. 4–9.

16 Krzysztof MORDYŃSKI, "Plac Konstytucji w Warszawie. Konteksty urbanistycznej rewolucji", *Kronika Warszawy*, 2015, issue 1, p. 104–111.

its sense and functionality⁽¹⁷⁾. The historian Andrzej Skalmowski, who dedicated his analysis to the main architect Józef Sigalin,⁽¹⁸⁾ perceived MDM by his actions, which required constantly trying to catch Bierut's attention and agreement. Sigalin was in fact more a manager in his chief role than an architect and he had to play with political argumentation all the time. This led Skalmowski to the statement that "MDM was purely a political matter". People who played a vital role in imposing socialist realism perceived architecture as "an ideological weapon of the party" and "a factor of socialist education".⁽¹⁹⁾ To perform architecture like this, authorities just needed obedient officers, not independent visionaries.⁽²⁰⁾

Architecture as a "mission"

As was mentioned in the introduction, this is only one way of putting it. On the other side of the coin, there was all the work, ambition, sacrifice and missionary zest that many architects had on their minds. In the first chapter of his book, edited soon after the war, and directed toward his younger colleagues, the well-known architect Lech Niemojewski proposed an explanation of what their profession was: "Not everybody understands what great responsibility one

17 Włodzimierz WŁODARCZYK, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950-1954*, Paris: Libella 1986, p. 92.

18 Józef Sigalin (1909–1983) organized the Bureau of Reconstruction of Warsaw and became its vice-president. Besides MDM he was also in charge of the construction of the Warsaw W–Z Route (1947–1949) and acted as the General Architect of Warsaw (1951–1956).

19 This was a conclusion of the National Conference of Architects that held by members of the party on 20–21 June 1949, which was a crucial step to socialist realism in Polish architecture. MINORSKI, *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną*, p. 214.

20 Bierut's opinion on experienced leftist modernist architects, who planned Warsaw's reconstruction was full of hesitation: "They think that they embody the unity of social progress and the advance of architecture. (...) In the time of great migration and resettlement a necessity comes for active cultural politics. I respect these progressive architects, but I don't much believe that they are capable of completing this goal" (translation by K.M.). BARANIEWSKI, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy", p. 236.

takes upon himself in reaching for the architect's ruler and compass [...] the profession which the architect executes is not a craft, it's a mission."⁽²¹⁾ His lecture aimed at convincing students to perceive architecture as a social duty and a choice of great value, not as an assignment to which they had been contracted. Indeed, many architects of his generation proved their attitude to the profession with their lives. Those who counted, who took leading positions and made important contributions to the Warsaw rebuilding plan graduated before WWII, some of them even before the Great War. The need for rebuilding tightly-built cities, reforming their transport and housing systems, their areas of representation, industrial zones and recreation places was something they were taught in technical colleges. Some of them before the war were very involved in social housing for labourers and cooperatives in Warsaw, which in the conditions of a capitalist economy and very low budgets was nearly an idealistic undertaking.

Founded in 1921, the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) was a grassroots movement.⁽²²⁾ The architects involved in it – among whom an important role was played by Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski or Helena and Szymon Syrkus – tightly cooperated with sociologists and asked for research and public surveys to better understand the needs of the inhabitants.⁽²³⁾ One of the sociologists was Stanisław Ossowski, an outstanding researcher of Polish sociology, who lived at WSM and was involved in creating it. The teamwork of Brukalski and Ossowski tightened during the war, when they conducted conspirational studies for the future Warsaw and after 1945 when they tried to develop

21 Lech NIEMOJEWSKI, *Uczniowie cieśli*, Warszawa: Trzaska, Evert i Michalski 1948, p. 11.

22 Jakub FREJTAG, "Society of Workers' Housing Estates and Its Attempt To Overcome the Residential Crisis in Interwar Poland", *Budownictwo i Architektura*, 2021, issue 20, p. 25–36.

23 Aleksander MATEJKO, "Socjologiczne aspekty budownictwa mieszkaniowego", *Przegląd socjologiczny*, 1958, issue 12, p. 78–79.

WSM housing ideas.⁽²⁴⁾ The main goal of these undertakings was acceding to the need for constructing cheap but decent flats for rather poor inhabitants. The idea was to create – through cooperative movement experience – a new society, aware of its rights and responsibilities.

The biggest low-cost housing estate in Warsaw was built in the Wola district by the Society of Labour Housing (TOR), a government institution founded in 1934. We can find similar attention to sociological studies there, a discipline that was developing. One of the Society architects – Roman Piotrowski – became the chief of the office for rebuilding Warsaw in 1945.

Architects didn't stop planning when war broke out. All universities and colleges were closed by the German occupiers but this didn't prevent Polish teachers from secretly continuing their work even when it meant the threat of the death penalty. Architects from Warsaw University of Technology took part in conspirational studies and they still kept drawing plans of a new reformed Warsaw.⁽²⁵⁾ When Warsaw was captured by the Red and Polish armies, the chance for rebuilding arose. In fact, architects didn't perceive this as a chance but as an obligation to change the capital city into a modern metropolis. Capitalism, war, and communism could be considered different types of circumstances that weren't able to prevent architects from searching for better forms of a cities. Even the much stricter socialist realism doctrine could be seen as nothing more than a temporary obstacle on one field while its offered help at the other. Architects were under strict political supervision but they could design and built huge housing, industry or representative complexes. The historian Piotr Majewski, regarding Polish architects who saved and reconstructed

relics of historical architecture, drew attention to their standing, remarked that “the political situation is only an episode in historical perspective, and original heritage as well as this reconstructed one, would remain”.⁽²⁶⁾

The Post-war Warsaw Rebuilding Office (Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy)⁽²⁷⁾ was dominated by architects with social ideas which they wanted to achieve by deploying a modernist vision of city reform. In the years 1945–1949 they elaborated the general modernist plan for rebuilding the capital city, which was a continuation of their previous studies and experiences. The same people directed the development of Warsaw from 1949 when the soviet doctrine was declared. That's why an attempt to impose socialist realism to the capital city town planning was much more superficial than it has been estimated in historiography.⁽²⁸⁾ We can say the same about MDM, which was labelled as a symbol of Stalinist town planning in Warsaw.

MDM district plan

There were four main authors of the MDM plan. At the beginning of 1950 when the studio of design officially started to operate, they were already an experienced group that could be proud of the most spectacular town planning undertaking in post-war Warsaw history. In 1947–1949 they had completed the East-West Route which required an unprecedented reform of city space: the new route went through the escarpment in the tunnel below the historic heart of the city and linked two distant districts, Wola and Praga. All four of the architects were pre-war educated at the Warsaw University of Technology, however, their fates

24 Magdalena MATYSEK-IMIELIŃSKA, “Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa – ideowy eksperyment i socjologia w działaniu”, *Journal of Urban Ethnology*, 2014, issue 12, p. 152–156.

25 *Warszawska Szkoła Architektury*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1967, p. 38–43.

26 Piotr MAJEWSKI – Andrzej SKALIMOWSKI, “Odbudowa miała swój czas”, *Nowe Książki*, 2018, issue 5, p. 4.

27 Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy (BOS), founded in 1945, operated till 1950 when it was followed by the Warsaw Town Planning Office. BOS designed and managed the rebuilding of Warsaw in the spirit of modern architecture.

28 Jan ZACHWATOWICZ, *Architektura polska*, Warszawa: Arkady 1966, p. 463.

during the war were dramatically different. Józef Sigalin, the head of the MDM studio was a true communist who bound himself with the new government in 1943. The chief of the town planning section, Stanisław Jankowski was in 1944 an aide to Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, the Commander in Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, and the main rival for communists authorities. Jan Knothe spent WWII in a prisoner of war camp for officers where he gave lectures on architectural studies. Zygmunt Stępiński was an active Home Army soldier and took part in the Warsaw Uprising.

Planners at MDM declared that they would design a district that would fulfil all the inhabitants' needs.⁽²⁹⁾ One could judge it as just another propaganda statement but to form an opinion we should look at the basis of their proposal. Did it consist of mock-ups of the "beautiful" city or brilliant sketches only? Or did these drawings and town models present well thought out district plans based on analysis? From their everyday work recorded in the studio log, an image of tough and seriously elaborated design emerges.⁽³⁰⁾ MDM was a huge project of constructing a housing estate on the southern edge of the Warsaw city centre. It was estimated at 45,000 inhabitants. Based on pre-war street patterns, architects designed a new district plan which indicates that they had learned and knew well the ideas of modernist town planning, however they decided to use some of its principles while they denied most characteristic modernist forms. They located houses along the streets instead of spreading them around in the greenery. Thus, the density of housing was lowered and spacious green backyards were designed. The plan took into account a coherent and progressive transport system (ranging from transit roads to pedestrian paths), educational system (nurseries, kindergartens, primary schools and a technical

29 SIGALIN – JANKOWSKI – KNOTHE – STĘPIŃSKI, "Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa", p. 5.

30 Krzysztof MORDYŃSKI, "Dziennik Pracowni MDM – nowo udostępnione źródło do badań nad dziejami Warszawy", *Niepodległość i Pamięć*, 2011, issue 2, p. 41–52.



*C block at Marszałkowska
street, photo by Zbyszko
Siemaszko, 1952–1954,
resources of the National
Digital Archive/Poland*

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*The flat of Stanisław
Krzywiński's family in 2A block,
the middle-sectioned kitchen
and day-activities rooms,
photo by Zbyszko Siemaszko,
1954, resources of the National
Digital Archive/Poland*

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Stanisław Krzymiński, labour leader, in his apartment, photo by Zbyszko Siemaszko, 1954, resources of the National Digital Archive/Poland

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school), different branches of shops, workshops, services, culture and healthcare buildings. All of these were planned according to a predicted social and age structure, number of district inhabitants as well as needs of neighbouring parts of Warsaw. The MDM design included a dual function of the district: as a housing estate as well as the capital, a representative part of the city. This was a modern design⁽³¹⁾ – although under the costume of socialist realism architecture which used neo-classical decoration. Architects admitted that designing a housing estate according to the principles of the new doctrine was a challenge for them.⁽³²⁾ Nevertheless, planners at MDM used all their professional abilities and knowledge to design a real district, not a “mock-up” one.

The construction plan estimated that MDM should be built in six years accordingly to the state six-year plan of economic development (1950–1955). This guaranteed – as architects reasonably could expect – that funding of construction should not be stopped. They didn’t predict the outbreak of the Korean War (June 1950) and the general transfer of money for military purposes which ultimately caused the failure of the six-year plan as well as the completion of MDM construction. The project was divided into three phases, with each planned to take two years. Eventually, only the first was fully completed, the further two just partly, thus MDM appears to be an unfinished creation. When the first phase 1950–1952 was coming to its end The Company of Working-class Housing Estates (ZOR),⁽³³⁾ in which structures MDM studio operated, decided to check the design quality and effectiveness of houses erected until

31 A modern plan doesn’t have to be a modernist one. Under this term I understand a design which takes into account the specific role and downtown location of MDM, design which uses contemporary methods of planning to construct transport, educational and supply system.

32 SIGALIN – JANKOWSKI – KNOTHE – STĘPIŃSKI, “Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa”, p. 6.

33 Zakład Osiedli Robotniczych, a government company established in 1948 for the purpose of building housing estates. It was an actual monopoly in this field.

then. Both – architects and politicians – wanted people to be satisfied. The comfortable flats would mean that not only the design job was done well but also that the new doctrine had succeeded.

The Institute of Housing

ZOR ordered a public survey of inhabitants of the first three blocks of flats built in MDM from The Institute of Housing. The Institute was founded in 1949 as a result of the efforts of Michał Kaczorowski, the former Minister of Rebuilding. Kaczorowski became also the first director of the Institute (1949–1971) and he worked together with Adam Andrzejewski, the scientific director (1949–1965). They had both cooperated in the Polish Society for Housing Reform before 1939 and reactivated it after the war. The Institute was its continuation in the official structures of the Company.⁽³⁴⁾ Technical, as well as economic and sociological analyses carried out by the Institute were intended to serve town planners and architects. The results should “create a base for the proper design and urban function of new city housing and the rational reforming of old cities”.⁽³⁵⁾ Through the fifties the Institute conducted public surveys in about thirty new great housing estates throughout the country: in Warsaw, Nowa Huta, Łódź, Białystok and the regions of Silesia and Pomerania. The research focused on the demographic structure of inhabitants, density of new flats, living conditions, housing culture and the collective life on new estates.⁽³⁶⁾

Its activity didn't exactly fit the new doctrine of socialist realism which was imposed at the same time on Polish

34 Maciej CESARSKI, “Działania i losy Instytutu Gospodarki Mieszkaniowej. Przyczynki do dziejów naukowego zaplecza polityki społecznej”, *Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Studia i Dyskusje*, 2009, issue 12, p. 267.
 35 Wanda LITTERER, *Nowe osiedla mieszkaniowe i ich mieszkańcy*, Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwa Gospodarcze, 1952, p. 22.
 36 MATEJKO, “Socjologiczne aspekty”, p. 73.

architecture. Authorities would have liked to avoid sociological studies and true field research because their results could contradict some of the basics of the Marxist-Leninist theory.⁽³⁷⁾ However, the new government had to rely much more on pre-war specialists with an independent approach to their work than it would have liked to. As historian Michał Cesarski estimated, “the Institute became the only site in Poland and unique in Europe regarding the consequences and continuity of research, which was also a kind of asylum for people of a different [i.e., non-communist or even anti-communist – K.M.] political past”.⁽³⁸⁾

When asked to start the survey in MDM, the Institute had already completed sociological research in eight housing districts conducted in the years 1949–1951. Most of them concerned new Warsaw estates in Mokotów, Koło, Młynów and Muranów districts.⁽³⁹⁾ These studies were gathered, analysed and printed as a book in 1952. The major purpose of the studies was to report the status of the finished housing estates. MDM wasn't included, because its construction had already started, but the set of research interests and questions was generally similar. It focused on two groups of issues. The first one concerned quantitative data: the number of inhabitants, population pattern, density of the flats, and so on. The second one was related to the data gathered in the course of interviews and applied to the past and present living conditions of inhabitants.

Among the questions asked by interviewers, none was directly dedicated to the problem of the aesthetics of socialist realism, none confronted modernist and socialist realism housing. Inhabitants were not asked about the “ideological” sense of architecture. Employees of the Institute paid attention to the practical user experience. Remaining at the level of specific data presented mostly in numbers and drawings

37 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
 38 CESARSKI, “Działania i losy”, p. 268.
 39 LITTERER, *Nowe osiedla*, p. 27.

allowed the Institute to continue its activity even during the Stalinist era.

The document dedicated to MDM was edited separately in a working format; it was not printed as a book but copied as a typescript for administrative use. This fact convinces us that the analysis served the purpose of controlling the ongoing process of design and building works. The document was probably not printed because of another reason: it contained too many critical opinions of MDM.

The survey: population patterns

The Institute researched the three first settled blocks of MDM. They started in December 1951 and in May 1952 the final document was ready. Five-hundred-and-twelve inhabitants lived in 150 apartments.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Two of the blocks built at MDM were located almost on the corner of Constitution Square, and the third in another part of the district but still along its main street, Marszałkowska.⁽⁴¹⁾ Interviewers from the Institute paid attention to the number of inhabitants and their social status. They were interested in apartment assignment and density. Also, they carried out interviews to establish what previous living conditions the inhabitants had had, how they deployed furniture in the new flats and how rooms were used. Last but not least inhabitants were asked to share their opinions on flats and blocks. In fact, the main part of the whole document which followed these public surveys was dedicated to an analysis of the inhabitants' point of view. We can see that many of the questions referred to architects' ideas or concerned problems described by propaganda.

In the first place, interviewers tried to estimate the social status of inhabitants. They used a general social division of "labourers" (physical workers) and "those who

perform brainwork" (office, intellectual, creative or artistic workers). This question should especially be considered in the context of the before and after war housing situation as well as an image of propaganda created simultaneously to the designing and building of MDM.

Pre-war Warsaw offered very severe conditions of living to the working class. Like in many other European cities that experienced rapid growth at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Warsaw town plan consisted of tightly-built narrow streets, high rise tenement houses with narrow backyards. Before the Great War Warsaw was under the reign of the Russian Empire and served as a fortress-city, closed in a circle of fortifications. Until 1916 it prevented any spatial development that could bring relief. When it was finally possible after regaining independence, new districts were built, in most cases for the rich and the middle classes. Beautiful squares, palaces and churches in the historical city centre and rich neighbourhoods didn't balance the poverty of the side districts of Wola, Powiśle and Praga. Houses, some still wooden, most of them without access to tap water, factories and workshops producing pollution and noises, stinking open-air marketplaces, dirty and wet unpaved streets created a city with a desperate lack of space for parks and schools, sunlight and fresh air. It was a perfect study for architects who believed in the ideas of the modern city. The situation pushed them to develop brilliant theoretical studies, like *Warszawa funkcjonalna* [Functional Warsaw] by Jan Chmielewski and Szymon Syrkus in 1934, which were recognized by CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) as a model plan for developing modern cities.⁽⁴²⁾ As was mentioned above some architects got involved in a social movement for cheap housing which resulted in housing estates for labourers built by cooperatives.

40 BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECHERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", p. 2.

41 Interviewers used MDM studio symbols to identify buildings. We can specify its addresses: block 1D – 34/50 Koszykowa street, 2A – 28/34 Piękna street, 7C – 9/15 Marszałkowska Street.

42 Anna DYBCZYŃSKA-BUŁYSZKO, *Architektura Warszawy II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej 2010, p. 176–178.

But still, this was not enough to change the poor state of the living conditions of Warsaw's labour class before 1939. This was used for post-war propaganda to justify town plan reform which estimated the need for the mass clearing of old buildings. While the architects developed studies continuing pre-war *Functional Warsaw* and evolving it into a form of the city with separated districts for living, working and recreation, the government focused on the question of social justice which could be brought – according to propaganda – by executing a socialist realism doctrine based on Marxism-Leninism.

Under the circumstances of a nationalised and planned economy, the only residential developer was The Company for Working-class Housing Estates. Its name suggested that this was a company for building working class housing as if nobody else needed a place to live. Official statements of the authorities created a similar perspective. The decorative album printed on the occasion of the start of the six-year plan for the reconstruction of Warsaw (1950–1955) with the text of the speech of president Bierut also reserved a number of pages to illustrate the terrible living conditions the labour class had endured before the war.⁽⁴³⁾ It was a thick book – more than 360 pages – richly illustrated with sketches, graphs and diagrams describing both the pre-war and the future capital city of Poland in different fields, e.g., greenery, transport, health, living. The purpose of the album, which we can treat as one of the most elaborate examples of propaganda, was to show the injustice and inequality of pre-war Poland in comparison to the new direction. One of the most significant diagrams describing this situation showed the range of the Warsaw sewage system in 1939. The colour red marks the “labour districts” in the suburbs outside the range, while nearly all building

43 Bolesław BIERUT, *The Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw*, Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza 1951. Published in Polish but also in Russian, English, French and German separate versions.

developments inside of canalisation zone – according to the preceding description – are believed to belong to “capitalists” and the “bourgeoisie”.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Bierut vowed that with socialist realism Poland's workers' housing settlements would be in districts which before the war were the domain of the wealthy people of Warsaw. Workers' homes would be in the centre of the city along the East-West Thoroughfare and Marszałkowska Street.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Bierut stated that new districts completely equipped with schools, shops and everything else needed to live comfortably should be dedicated to physical labourers as compensation for long years of humiliation.⁽⁴⁶⁾ MDM, as the very first socialist realism housing estate located in the south part of the city centre and along the main street of Warsaw, Marszałkowska, was a perfect case for propaganda. It was also named in the press or newsreels as a “labour district” designed for people who do physical work. To make it sound more likely, an album diagram suggested that MDM was appointed to fulfil the need for labour in one of the industrial districts close to the city centre.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The idea of linking housing estates with industrial or business districts in pairs or groups was one of the main modernist propositions to reform the city. In general, it helped to plan the location of both activities, living and working, separating them with belts of greenery but linking them with transport lines. Town planners however sought practical solutions and from this point of view, there was no sense in locating people in the city centre while offering them jobs outside it. Architects estimated that this district should serve various workers with jobs in the city centre. This area, the heart of Warsaw, was assigned to host government, cultural and shopping buildings and functions so in fact, there was a vast need for flats for office workers and

44 BIERUT, *The Six-Year Plan*, p. 77, diagram n. 3 following p. 88.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 181,

47 *Ibid.*, diagram n. 6 following p. 224.

intellectuals rather than a huge group of labourers. Professional town planning and propaganda had come into conflict on this point.

Five months after the first buildings were settled, the interviewers were sent to check the real status. It happened that of 150 flats, 120 (80%) belonged to non-labour workers, the people who – according to the loud voice of propaganda – weren't expected to be the main inhabitants of the district. When we compare this data to the results from other Warsaw housing estates gathered by the Institute it seems that this was the worst outcome for labourers. They were estimated as about one-third of the population of the Mokotów and Młynów estates, built earlier than MDM. In Muranów it reached nearly 40% and in Koło II 46% of families belonged to the working class.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Labourer and non-labourer flat assignments, MDM, 1951(49)

	Number of flats	Ratio of flats	Number of inhabitants	Ratio of inhabitants
Labourers	30	20%	143	27.9%
Those who perform brainwork	120	80%	369	72.1%
Total	150	100%	512	100%

At MDM only 20% of the flats were given to labourers. A quarter of their inhabitants belonged to families of MDM workers who were granted flats as favours in exchange for their contributions. It was a tiny number, but this way of achieving one's own flat was presented by the propaganda as the most attractive scheme. A mason, carpenter or operator were granted keys for apartments to whose construction they contributed. The daily *Życie*

48 LITTERER, *Nowe osiedla*, p. 201.

49 BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECHERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", p. 2

Warszawy [Warsaw Life] describes the situation of Tadeusz Tomaszewski, a carpenter at MDM. We can read that on Friday, as usual, he returned home after work, to "Wołoska Street, where the pavement ends suddenly at the last stop of the 112 bus and you have to trudge along a field path, full of holes in which during rain gathers so much water, that it is extremely difficult to find your way to the city".⁽⁵⁰⁾ The description of terrible living conditions follows as Tomaszewski couldn't offer his wife and four children a decent house. Two young daughters often cried on December mornings because the cold air rushed into their room through gaps in the walls. However, "while you are reading this the Tomaszewski family is spending their last day at Wołoska street. Tomorrow they won't be there, because... on the table rest the keys to the new..." These kinds of tearjerker articles formed the official line. In the book dedicated to the construction of MDM, where this article was quoted, the editor presented a table that looks like a reproduction of the housing commission document resuming the process of flat assignment. The typescript contains ten names of workers, their jobs, employment company, families, current living conditions, justification of application for a flat and the number of assigned rooms. Eight of ten main inhabitants are labourers, all of them with merits at work exceeding the standards by 140–352%.

As we know from the interviewers' analysis this propaganda picture was false. Most of the flats were assigned to office workers. The biggest group of inhabitants were families of officials from the Central Committee of the Communist Party followed by civil servants from different ministries and some artists and teachers. We have to keep in mind that flats weren't sold but assigned by a council housing commission. It was not money but other factors

50 Stanisław JANKOWSKI, *MDM. Marszałkowska 1730–1954*, Warszawa: Czytelnik 1955, p. 154.

that determined flats assignment. No evidence is available but one could guess that people with power were able to arrange an agreement for flats for themselves. This was a very uncomfortable fact for propaganda purposes but ironically proved the predictions made by architects who believed this district should be settled by people working close by.⁽⁵¹⁾ The government area was at a distance of about 1 km, which offered a nice morning walk to the office. And on the contrary – while living in MDM, labourers from the Wola district (three of them were mentioned in the assignment table) had to travel 3–4 km and use the most crowded city centre public transport trams. An interesting fact is that the interviewers didn't hide the incompatibility between the propaganda and their observations and that they specified Communist Party officials as the main beneficiaries of MDM.⁽⁵²⁾

The survey: the flat system

Warsaw in those days experienced a painful lack of flats. It was even more noticeable than in the first five years after the war, because the number of citizens on the left bank of the Vistula River, rose rapidly from nearly zero inhabitants in January 1945 to 400,000 in 1950. Also, people's expectations rose. Shelter in a half-ruined house would have seemed a real treasure in 1945 but after five years of sacrifice citizens wanted to see that they were closer to the social justice declared by the authorities.

The MDM housing system offered six kinds of flats marked by interviewers as categories A, B, C, D, E, F. The smallest type (A) included one room, WC together with

51 Families of Central Committee workers composed 9.3% of inhabitants. Families of ministry workers were estimated at 20% of inhabitants. BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECZERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", p. 3.

52 A similar situation was detected by the interviewers of the Institute in other Warsaw housing estates – Muranów, Młynów, Mokotów and Koło, where families of labourers represented only 29–48% of inhabitants. LITTERER, *Nowe osiedla*, p. 32–33.

bath and tiny annexe for gas stove. It was 21.6 m² in total (including technical spaces) which meant that the user had 15 m² of pure living space. Every next category from B to E offered something extra, but generally it was an apartment with two rooms and a kitchen (about 8 m²), in the D and E categories there was a substandard small bedroom usually used to host relatives in need. F category was the best and it offered 58.9 m² with three rooms, an extra small bedroom, kitchen and WC with bath.

The following results from the interviews revealed that it was not only the greater number of flats that was given to office workers and intellectuals but also the actual figure of inhabitants living in rooms that gave non-labour workers an advantage. When comparing applications to the housing assignment commission with the real number of citizens living in flats it happened that there were significant differences. Some labourer inhabitants had declared a lower number of household members than what interviewers actually found. After an apartment had been assigned, the host fetched his relatives or friends in need causing somewhat worsening living conditions. Certain office workers did the opposite, they asked for apartments suited for declared family size but when visited by interviewers it turned out that in fact a lower number of people occupied the flats.⁽⁵³⁾ So, in general, the latter inhabitants lived in better conditions.

Number of inhabitants in the first three blocks of MDM

All		Labourers		Those who perform brainwork	
real number	declared	real number	declared	real number	declared
512	528	143	132	369	396

53 BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECZERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", p. 5.

The results of the survey proved that the behaviour of inhabitants made reasonable planning difficult. To build decent flats for everyone the government approved certain standards concerning living space in flats. Generally, the acceptable square footage was 9–12.5 m² per person (including technical and transport spaces in the building like a staircase, air vents or lifts). The MDM standard was a bit higher, ranging from 11 to 15 m² per person, due to its special city centre location.⁽⁵⁴⁾ But taking the results of interviews into account, it turned out that there were many flats with one person using more than 15 m². This sounded like a terrible waste and injustice, so interviewers suggested taking a close look at the principles of assigning flats.⁽⁵⁵⁾ We must again point out that the report written by the workers of the Institute recorded facts that were inconvenient for the authorities since employees of the party headquarters and ministries officials dominated the group of doubtfully assigned flats.

The survey: interviews

The second part of the document is dedicated to interviews with the inhabitants. The workers at the Institute wanted to set down facts about the previous accommodation of the inhabitants, their likes and dislikes, and how they furnished their flats. Not all inhabitants were interviewed – it seems that the researchers visited 33 apartments and talked to adults representing their families.⁽⁵⁶⁾

It happened that labourers had usually lived previously in much worse conditions while white-collar inhabitants had occupied better apartments, so even MDM didn't impress them. Most of the latter weren't from Warsaw, but had been relocated from other less destroyed cities to work

54 In Mokotów, Koło, Młynów and Muranów inhabitants were assigned ca. 10–11 m² of square footage.

55 BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECZERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", p. 9.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 14–15.

in the capital. The propaganda didn't mention them; instead it focused on the great change which the new MDM flats brought to the lives of labourers. Let's have a close look at an example of the propaganda approach to this topic. In the special album dedicated to MDM exclusively we can find a short two-photo story which shows Mrs Alicja Ziółkowska's family in two situations.⁽⁵⁷⁾ On the left she is pictured with her daughter Danka standing in front of their wooden shack in Marymont, a remote housing district of Warsaw. On the right she is bathing her son Bolek in a comfortable bathroom in their new MDM flat. The concise comment informs us, that she is the wife of an employee of the water pipe system. We don't know more details but we don't need them to construct – with a little help from empathy – our own understanding of the great change in Ziółkowska's life. Her existence used to be miserable before she was given a flat in MDM. The propaganda message is simple and brief – it comes directly to the point and its main advantage is that it acts through emotions. Who can withstand the harm to the first child and who would not smile seeing the happiness of the second? The reader should concentrate on the depicted benefits and shouldn't ask questions about the group of inhabitants who in fact settled 80% of the flats who are not depicted in the album. The other thing is the reliability of the story. The name and surname of the specific person are given (Alicja Ziółkowska) and on other album pages you can even find the exact addresses of the pictured people. So there is a strong impression of veracity of the presented data, which we are not going to undermine. Alicja Ziółkowska, the wife of a labourer was assigned a flat in MDM. The role of this propaganda picture was to convince us that in communist Poland labourers are granted a better life. But what was the chance that other Warsaw labourers would get proper accommodation? How was the happiness of Ziółkowska's children related to the situation of other

57 JANKOWSKI, *MDM*, p. 156–157.

labourers' children and their chances to improve their lives when only one out of five of the new inhabitants came from the working class?

According to the data gathered by the interviewers, labourers' families had lived previously in "catastrophic" conditions, some without any facilities, some only with electricity, others without direct access to a WC (there was a shared toilet in a backyard).⁽⁵⁸⁾ Getting new homes made it possible for some families to come together again, as they were separated: fathers worked in Warsaw and lived at the job site, while their families still lived in the country.

The way that inhabitants furnished their apartments was so important because of the idea of optimisation promoted by modernist architects. In pre-war Poland, they were represented by the designers mentioned above who were well known at CIAM, e.g., married couples Szymon and Helena Syrkus and Stanisław and Barbara Brukalski. They planned and executed some social housing estates before 1939 in search of economic but decent flats for labourers. They didn't abandon their dreams about a better city during the war and they met in 1945 to rebuild Warsaw. They participated in creating the modernist plan of Warsaw and they deployed modernist ideas in housing estates. Until 1949 the Brukalskis continued their designs of cooperative housing at Żoliborz, while the Syrkuses built a modernist freestanding building in the district of Praga. What they learned before the war was that the quality and square footage of cooperative houses strictly depended on the little earnings of their labourer inhabitants. So as they wisely understood, the economy of building pushed them to the idea of ergonomic planning. In the new, post-war conditions of housing policy, workers didn't have to pay directly for their living premises, flats were assigned by the state. However, the problem of wise economics and ergonomics was still vital. In architects' ideas, it was just the scale that

58 BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECHERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", p. 14.

changed: not one house, not one estate, but the whole country was a cooperative.

In the modernist way of thinking, the interior of one flat was a source of further planning: socially, economically and spatially. Furniture deployment was one of the most important issues. Especially female architects played a significant role in these theories and undertakings – as Marta Leśniakowska, architecture historian, presented it – far extending the position of "invisible assistants".⁽⁵⁹⁾ Barbara Brukalska gathered the experiences of the Polish Architects Society and during the war she wrote down her theory of "the rules of designing a social housing estate", the most intelligent and elaborate work on this topic. Her thesis on housing was prevailed by earlier studies on the revolutionary concept of "laboratory" kitchens, adopted from Grete Schütte-Lihotzky.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Modernist architects considered a flat to be a perfectly designed machine. Still fighting for sufficient houses built at the lowest possible cost, they mastered the use of every inch of apartment square footage. They tried different ways of reforming living habits to achieve functional and healthy rooms. Some of the experimental proposals didn't take, but a valuable and long-lasting achievement of this time was that they linked apartment plan design with daytime and bed-time activities as well as storage organisation. That's why instead of freestanding wardrobes or dressers of different sizes architects preferred designing built-in furniture which exactly fit and filled all the wall curves leaving living space untouched.

59 Marta LEŚNIAKOWSKA, "Na przecięciu. Barbary Brukalskiej socjopsychologiczny model zarządzania przestrzenią", the foreword to the coming edition of Barbara BRUKALSKA, *Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*, Warsaw: Trzaska, Evert i Michalski 1948, p. 9. I would like to thank prof. Leśniakowska for allowing me to use her unpublished typescript. The Brukalska book, devoted to the principals of the democratic planning of social housing, was printed in 1948 but due to its democratic content authorities ordered the edition to be destroyed in 1949.

60 Marta LEŚNIAKOWSKA, "Modernistka w kuchni. Barbara Brukalska, Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, i 'polityka kuchenna', *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 2004, issue 1–2, p. 223.

MDM architects also designed places for built-in furniture in corridors and tried to shape rooms as close to square as possible. This wasn't always evaluated as successful by users as we know from the public survey. Inhabitants generally agreed that the single studio apartments should be equipped with built-in furniture, but in many cases, they preferred furniture of their choice. Some inhabitants didn't share the idea of deploying furniture along walls, and some of them even placed wardrobes in the corners facing the middle of the room with an obvious waste of space behind them.⁽⁶¹⁾ This had to be a strong habit transferred from bigger apartments, however something else interested interviewers even more. It was the daily custom of eating and resting. They questioned inhabitants to check whether space could inform people's behaviour.

*Kitchen design and
inhabitants' behaviour*

MDM architects experimented with a kitchen that in some flats was located inside the block without a window. There was a window in the wall between the kitchen and one of the rooms instead. Architects wished inhabitants to treat this part of the flat as a dining room. The purpose was not to allow inhabitants to eat and sit all day in the kitchen, as the peasantry traditionally did in their cottages (in "black chamber"). The flat design suggested the users should go to one of the rooms and use it as a common daytime activity space, for talking, eating, playing or listening to the radio.

MDM architects had an extra mission in their field. The Warsaw population was restored thanks to many new citizens who came from the country. They had their habits for eating, sleeping and entertainment. Most of them did not feel comfortable in the city, especially in destroyed Warsaw. Architects felt they had to change new inhabitants'

61 BARSZCZEWSKA – CZECHERDA-MACIUSZKO, "Wyniki badań", il. 2 after p. 33.

customs; they had to teach them how to live in the city, how to behave like a citizen. Unhappy examples of the first years after the war taught designers that an ex-peasant labourer, left in the city alone, without family, friends and the tight pressure of their village community, would spend all their money on alcohol and questionable entertainment. Here the modernist belief that people could be somewhat shaped by the space they populate met with the socialist realism dogma that architects are "engineers of human souls" and by designing houses and cities they could hasten or slow the final age of the humanity/communism era. The interviewers from the Institute brought these ideas to a reasonable level by asking inhabitants about their opinions. This part of the document is the longest and most detailed. The interviewers not only asked questions but also made sketches of the furnishings in many flats. Every type of flat was represented by two, three or even five exemplary sketches giving an idea of how apartment space was used by different families. Sketches also informed who the user was, a labourer or an intellectual family; where beds were located and who slept in them: male or female, child, teenager or adult, single or double. Was it a permanent bed or one prepared only at night-time and then hidden? Where did wardrobes, commodes, shelves, tables, armchairs stand? Were places for built-in furniture used at all? Even a baby carriage was given a separate symbol.

The interviewers gathered all the opinions and presented them in a building by building order divided into types of flats. They wrote down the opinions on the use of space and tried to estimate them. They paid special attention to complaints. Some of them were regarded as guidelines for architects, some were considered true but some declared inconveniences were just an effect of the wrong apartment assignment (usually for too many people), and some were judged as ridiculous.

We can group complaints into two general categories: one of design and the other of execution. For MDM architects both should be important as their design group

not only prepared plans but also supervised the whole process of construction. Inhabitants criticized windowless kitchens, their low square footage and problems with food storage.⁽⁶²⁾ They pointed to some conflicts with room connections,⁽⁶³⁾ but in fact most of the complaints concerned mistakes made during construction: bumpy floors, inaccurately mounted windows, no operating elevators and malfunctioning central heating. The main reason for most of the latter ones was the hurry to finish MDM by 22 July, the national holiday.

We cannot refer to all of it in detail and there is no need to do so. The purpose of gathering the data and the way the interviewers interpreted it is more interesting. It is important that they didn't come to hear delight or enthusiasm only for propaganda purposes. They concentrated on difficulties. They hoped that pointing out inconveniences would allow architects to design better flats in the future. The most interesting thing is that the interviews were conducted in order to bring real, true information for architects on how their designs served, what users did with planners' brilliant-looking ideas, where the execution didn't follow the plan. Previous papers produced by the Institute regarding other housing estates presented a similar approach.⁽⁶⁴⁾ However we have to note that unlike Litterer's *Nowe osiedla*, the MDM report wasn't published as a regular book. It remained rather a working document for the architects. It was too honest; it included too much compromising information. So public opinion and the troubles of living in the newly built houses were recorded by the researchers of the Institute, who hoped their work would be used by architects. We cannot confirm whether their work was exploited by politicians, as they needed a propaganda picture not

62 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

63 In some apartments the dining room was connected with the kitchen by an internal window, but without direct connection by a door. Inhabitants indicated the impracticality of this solution.

64 LITTERER, *Nowe osiedla*, p. 148–151.

true opinion. Thus in 1952 an image of MDM Constitution Square in the media was close to propaganda-drawn perfection as a "beautiful labourers district".⁽⁶⁵⁾

The difficult relationship between politics and architecture during the socialist realism era can confuse us. MDM architects did not have a free hand at designing and building – they had to follow the doctrine and pay attention to the wishes of president Bierut as well as other members of the government and the party leadership. You can find many examples of the ways that propaganda shaped the final look of the MDM project, starting from the need for a representational square, which had an impact on the arrangement of a huge part of this housing estate, ending with inhabitants complaints about the floorboards that needed to be assembled twice; at first, builders put it in too early, when the walls were still wet, being in hurry to finish – for reasons of propaganda – the first three blocks of MDM by 22 July 1951. This enabled the authorities to announce the success of the first phase of building MDM and play the propaganda show of presenting keys to inhabitants, performing social justice, proving that dreams come true in a socialist city. The party wanted to produce a picture of labourers entering the city centre which – according to the public survey – wasn't appropriate. The present-day reader can get the impression that living was nearly the last thing that these houses were built for. That's why MDM was called a "city disguise" district.

However, the proliferation of the facts mentioned above doesn't invalidate the other side of the coin. Architects did their professional work and judging from their

65 Several opinions, articles and poems on MDM are published in an album dedicated to the district; JANKOWSKI, *MDM: MDM as "the incorporation of dreams"* – p. 277; MDM as "a romantic area" – p. 278; Constitution Square as the most monumental European square built for labourer inhabitants – p. 280; MDM as a creation where "not a single detail has been forgotten" – p. 282; Constitution Square as a beautiful creation "arising from the young tradition of socialist construction" – p. 284; "we love you once and for ever" Marszałkowska Street – p. 286; MDM as a testimony and the result of "an effort to change people's minds" – p. 354.

discussions, alternative designs, and memories we can assume that they treated their work seriously. They prepared a plan according to diverse analyses on economic, sociological, geographical, transport or technological grounds, just as the used method of planning towns required at those times. The public survey performed by the Institute interviewers was one of them. Architects needed true feedback for real planning, for executing their mission, not for propaganda tasks. Describing the times of socialist realism doctrine in architecture only from the point of view of ideology, politics and propaganda would lead us to a distorted conclusion. The reality was much more complex and to capture it in a more complete way we should consider the architects' sense of the mission to rebuild Warsaw, and – last, not least – the opinions of the inhabitants.