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Housing Estates and Dreams of Living¹

A study of housing estates undertaken by Jiří Musil and his team at the Research Institute for Building and Architecture, 1976–1980

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Multidisciplinary research was carried in the late seventies by a team of experts from the Research Institute for Building and Architecture (VÚVA) under the leadership of Jiří Musil, the conclusions of which were published in the 1984 book *Lidé a sídliště* [People and Housing Estates]. To this day it remains the most extensive and most complex study of life on housing estates in Czechia. The researchers compared twenty-two housing estates in seven cities to older districts and areas with family

houses. I will try to reveal some period and institutional limitations of the Musil team’s research, without any ambition to challenge it as a whole. Most of all I will focus on the part of the survey that was devoted to residents’ opinions on the architecture of the estates. Were the questionnaires open and unbiased enough? And do the published interpretations comply with the acquired data? And how do the results differ from similar though smaller surveys from the same period?

Keywords:

housing estates – Czechoslovakia – socialism – public opinion research – sociology – Research Institute for Building and Architecture – urbanism – architecture – Jiří Musil

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When the exhibition *Bydliště: panelové sídliště* (Residencies: Prefabricated Housing Estates) was held at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague in 2018², one entire showcase was devoted to research into the lives of residents of new housing estates carried out in the latter half of the 1970s by a team of sociologists led by Jiří Musil at the *Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury* (VÚVA), or Research Institute for Building and Architecture. The project found that people living on a housing estate were on the whole more satisfied with their accommodation than residents of other types of development. At the exhibition the research findings served as one of the arguments for the rehabilitation of housing estates, the public image of which had been extremely negative, especially in the latter half of the 1980s and into the 1990s.³

The exhibition presented VÚVA's findings as unquestionable empirical facts. And to this day, Jiří Musil (1928–2012) is regarded as one of the leading figures in the field, a scholar who never lost touch with developments in global sociology or his professional honour. Musil worked at the Research Institute in Prague from 1958 to 1983, i.e. for a substantial part of his professional career. He was mainly involved in the sociology of housing, urban planning and the sociology of architecture. During the 1960s, he was in frequent contact with colleagues in the West. He published, undertook research fellowships, was a guest at foreign universities, and was a consultant to the United Nations. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, he became director of the re-established *Sociologický ústav Akademie věd* (Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences), where he made a significant contribution to the revival of the discipline. Between 1992 and 2003, he lectured at the Central European University (Prague, Budapest, Warsaw). He was also active in international professional organisations.⁴

The survey into life on Czech housing estates, to which Musil and his team at VÚVA devoted five years (1976–1980), is also appreciated by contemporary researchers for its methodological approach and multidisciplinary.⁵ In terms of its rigour and scope, it

- 2 *Bydliště: Panelové sídliště. Plány, realizace, bydlení, 1945–1989*, exhibition concept by Mariana Kubištová and Lucie Skřivánková, Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum v Praze 2018.
- 3 See: Rostislav ŠVÁCHA, “Stará města, panelová sídliště a denní tisk, 1960–1989”, *Zprávy památkové péče*, 2015, no. 4, 350–356; Maroš KRIVÝ, “Quality of Life or Life-in-Truth? A Late-Socialist Critique of Housing Estates in Czechoslovakia”, in: Ákos MORAVÁNSZKY–Torsten LANGE (eds.), *Re-Framing Identities. Architecture's Turn to History, 1970–1990*, Basel: Birkhäuser 2017, 303–318; Michaela JANEČKOVÁ, “Panelová sídliště ve filmu v období státního socialismu: Nadšení a kritické ohlasy”, in: Tomáš HOŘENÍ SAMEC – Michal LEHEČKA (eds.), *Pražská panelová sídliště jako místa protikladů*, Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR 2020, 12–15; Hubert GUZIK, “Spolia revoluce”, in: Hubert GUZIK (ed.), *Architektura v přerodu: 1945–1948, 1989–1992*, Praha: ČVUT 2019, 166–203. In the 1990s, Václav Havel's speech of 25 February 1990, in which he called housing estates a “kind of rabbit hutch in which one cannot live but only sleep or watch television”, resonated strongly. Václav HAVEL, “Projev prezidenta k výročí únorového převratu 1948”, in: Václav HAVEL, *Projevy z let 1990–1992, Letní přemítání. Spisy 6*, Praha: Torst 1999, 75–77.
- 4 The entry “Jiří Musil”, in: Zdeněk R. NEŠPOR (ed.), *Sociologická encyklopedie*, Sociologický ústav AV ČR, https://encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/w/Musil_Jiri (accessed on 14 March 2021).
- 5 This is backed up by Slavomíra Ferenčuhová's lecture “Mezioborový a multimetodický přístup: jak sociologové spolupracovali s jinými obory v hodnocení výzkumu poválečných sídlišť v Československu (1976–1980)” (Interdisciplinarity and a multi-method approach: how sociologists worked with other disciplines in the evaluative research of Czechoslovak post-war housing estates) at the online conference *Jak si přáli bydlet naši pracující? Sociologická expertiza a bytová výstavba 1945–1989*, 9 October 2020, organisers: Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University in Prague.

remains unparalleled. In addition to sociologists, researchers with a background in architecture, art history and economics participated in the project. These included Lubomír Kotačka, Irena Lérová, Eva Librova, Libuše Macková, Vítězslav Procházka and Zdeněk Ryšavý. They compared the life of twenty-two “residential units” located in thirteen estates in seven towns and cities with the situation in the older urban districts and in neighbourhoods dominated by detached, single-family homes. In 1985, the research findings plus commentary were presented to the general public in the book *Lidé a sídliště* (People and Housing Estates).⁶

In this text, I will give an impression of the institutional framework within which Musil’s team carried out their research at that time, not through data from the spheres of sociology, social geography or anthropology, but drawing on the methods of architectural history. I will therefore focus on that part of the research devoted to the views of the inhabitants regarding architecture and urban planning. I am not seeking to undermine the outstanding work carried out by Musil and his team or the overall conclusions of their research, namely, that people were generally speaking satisfied with their accommodation on housing estates during the latter half of the 1970s.

I view the research outcomes published in the mid-1980s in *Lidé a sídliště* as a period document and not as the absolute truth regarding people’s attitudes towards housing estates at that time, and I shall therefore adopt a critical distance. Unfortunately, I did not obtain access to the complete source data on the basis of which the researchers arrived at their interpretations. However, some of it is reprinted in *Lidé a sídliště*, along with some basic details of the research methodology. Moreover, the published project outcomes reflect the political and institutional conditions pertaining at that time most clearly. As the sociologist Daniel Prokop recently reminded us: “The measurement of reality in research can influence how we talk about it, which in turn can change that very reality.”⁷ I am therefore interested in whether similar considerations were not to some extent present behind the publication of *Lidé a sídliště*.

The selection of housing estates

Let us first look at the actual selection of residential units that were compared from the perspective of architectural history. The authors of the book included housing estates of different ages, sizes and locations in the city. Nevertheless, even the most recent housing estates were built on the basis of top quality designs dating back to the 1960s and had therefore not been impacted by the radical economising measures applied to housing developments undertaken during the normalisation period.⁸ The rest comprise older housing estates, including the more traditional urban structures of the period of Soviet Realism. The large, utilitarian, prefab towns, where the largest part of the housing estate population still lives (Jižní Město in Prague and Bohunice and Starý Lískovec in Brno) are not to be found here. Though the research was undertaken at a time when the hasty construction of these estates was already attracting criticism,⁹

6 Jiří MUSIL et al., *Lidé a sídliště*, Praha: Svoboda 1985.

7 Daniel PROKOP, *Slepé skvrny*, Brno: Host 2020, 103.

8 See the relevant chapters of the book by Lucie SKŘIVÁNKOVÁ – Rostislav ŠVÁCHA – Eva NOVOTNÁ – Karolina JIRKALOVÁ (eds.), *Paneláci 1*, Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum 2016.

9 See ŠVÁCHA, “Stará města”, KRIVÝ, “Quality of Life”.

construction work had not yet been completed and they could not therefore be included in the study.

This filtered perspective must be borne in mind when considering the findings of the survey. By the mid-1980s, when the results of the research were published in *Lidé a sídliště*, the image of a housing estate in most people's minds would have involved the giant structures that the researchers could not include in their project, which had begun ten years earlier. As a result, the book analyses a different style of life than the one most readers would have had personal experience of in the year it was published.

Moreover, many of the housing estates included in the book are among the most architecturally beautiful urban estates in the Czech Republic: think, for instance, of the experimental housing projects Invalidovna, Pankrác and Ďáblice in Prague, or Polabiny in Pardubice. Instead of a sample that would truly represent the reality of life on Czech housing estates in the latter half of the 1970s, what we see, for the most part, is the *crème de la crème* of post-war housing construction. While this was not reflected in all the aspects of life covered in the book, it most certainly influenced the opinion the residents had of the architectural qualities.

Just how representative the selection is of older neighbourhoods and groups of detached houses is also open to question. The authors attempted to find districts close to some of the estates they were studying. In Prague, for instance, the dilapidated eastern part of Karlín,¹⁰ or the area around náměstí Svobody in Bubeneč, which was and still is characterised by the din and emissions emitted from the four-lane highway Československé armády, represented older urban neighbourhoods and found themselves in competition with top quality housing estates. Surprisingly, the post-war Solidarita complex in Prague's Strašnice served as an example of a district of family houses, despite the fact it featured no villas, but instead atypical, economically designed cooperative terraced housing from the time of what was known as the two-year legal plan [under which the Ministry of Justice was to submit draft acts in all areas of law by 1 September 1950], the construction of which had involved experiments with concrete prefabrication. Again, this cannot be deemed a fully representative sample.

Characteristics of the estates

Let us now look in more detail at those parts of the research that examined residents' views of the architecture and urban planning of their housing estates. The researchers introduce the relevant chapter, entitled "Residents of the Settlements and Architecture", with the following words:

Experts in all countries where large housing estates are being built are very judgemental of their architecture. They go so far as to speak of a "housing estate crisis" and call for them to be replaced by fully fledged new urban neighbourhoods.¹¹

10 However, many other historic districts of wider city centres were in a very poor state of repair. Cf. Ivo HLOBIL, *Teorie městských památkových rezervací*, Praha 1985. During the 1980s, the journal *Architektura ČSR* devoted several issues to this topic, in 1986 no. 7, and in 1988 no. 3.

11 MUSIL, *Lidé a sídliště*, 106–126.

What follows is a concise overview of the content of this critique and its context, which shows that the authors (or at the very least the architecture theorist Vítězslav Procházka) had a very good grasp of the Western criticism of modernist urbanism. From the “separation of the main urban functions” (i.e. zoning according to the Athens Charter) via a unified “monoculture of apartment buildings” and the abolition of the distinction between public and semi-private space, to the “lack of urban character, i.e. the municipal feel of estates”. The authors themselves admit that the terms “prefab housing” and, to some extent, “housing estate”, have a “pejorative connotation” even among the Czech public.¹²

The first survey relating to architecture was conducted only among the residents of the Ďáblice housing estate in Prague, which, although it is one of the large residential complexes that were created as part of Severní město (Northern City), cannot be deemed a typical example of a Czech housing estate. To this day it is a popular location, especially after the extension to the metro line C was built.¹³ The Ďáblice estate was built on the basis of designs put together by a team led by the architect Viktor Tuček in the latter half of the 1960s. Tuček, following the example of experimental housing estates, attempted to steer clear of the uniformity of standardised layout and promote a plurality of atypical solutions – technical, constructional and dispositional. The layout of these panel buildings diverges from the standardised model, and prefabricated building cores are not used; the entry floors are not made from panels but cast-in-place concrete, which allows for the creation of spacious entrance halls. There is also a unique trio of tower blocks with terraced building socles. The estate has a clear urban plan comprising two intersecting pedestrian routes, and the landscaped park, including biotope pond, is outstanding.¹⁴

In the first part of the Ďáblice survey, residents were asked to rate the attributes of their housing complex on a list provided. However, they only had positive attributes to choose from. Though they were given the chance to add their own, they reportedly did this only sporadically, and so in the end these suggestions were not evaluated at all. After ranking the attributes offered according to the number of points, the residents rated their housing estate as “liveable and cosy, cheerful, orderly, welcoming and distinctive”. Attributes with lower scores were “diversity and remarkableness” as well as “lightness, chic and elegance”.¹⁵

This evaluation of the generally positive attributes, which took place only in the atypical Ďáblice housing estate, were then used in the authors’ summary as a blanket argument that, unlike “critics from the ranks for experts [...] the residents find something positive in these new residential developments” and that “the high rating given the orderliness and layout of the estate, as it appears to the residents, is at odds with statements made by experts regarding the chaotic nature of the estates, as well as with complaints made by residents regarding the difficulty of orientation”.¹⁶

12 MUSIL, *Lidé a sídliště*, 108–111.

13 According to a socio-demographic study of 2017, 80% of residents of the Ďáblice housing estate are satisfied with their accommodation – see Tomáš FIALA – Jiří BRAŇKA – Jitka LANGHAMROVÁ – Ivana PŘIDALOVÁ – Hana ŘÍHOVÁ, *Sociodemografická studie sídliště Ďáblice* [powerpoint presentation], <https://www.czechdemography.cz/res/archive/006/000718.pdf?seek=1558726856> (accessed on 15 March 2021).

14 Irena LEHKOŽIVOVÁ – Josef PLATIL – Ondřej TUČEK, *Sídliště Ďáblice: Architektura pro lidi*, Praha: Spolek přátel sídliště Ďáblice 2019; Michaela JANEČKOVÁ, “Praha – Ďáblice”, in: SKŘIVÁNKOVÁ – ŠVÁCHA – NOVOTNÁ – JIRKALOVÁ, *Paneláci 1*, 304–311.

15 MUSIL, *Lidé a sídliště*, 113–114.

16 MUSIL, *Lidé a sídliště*, 123–124.

However, these results can be interpreted from a different angle. A housing estate that is supposed to be liveable in and cosy, orderly, welcoming and distinctive, should have the very qualities that distinguish Ďáblice from the negative image of housing estate at that time, namely, an intelligible urban layout with clear landmarks and central nodes, a development comprising several types of building that create a diverse environment, facades that are not utilitarian and barracks-like, but properly designed down to the last detail, variable layouts, carefully thought out and created public space, including parks, and, finally, features that will create a place-based identity (pond, a commemoratively adapted old shooting range). However, not even Ďáblice succeeded in the categories of lightness, chic and elegance nor diversity and interest. One can read this as meaning that prefab panel technology, despite the best efforts of architects and the utilisation of atypical elements, is inherently cumbersome and compositionally limited to the point of monotony.

Musil's team averted their gaze from such considerations, however, and his researchers did not ask why the residents of Ďáblice highlighted certain characteristics while feeling lacklustre about others, nor how this related to the specific features of this particular housing estate. The team did not carry out a similar questionnaire-based survey in any of the other selected estates and were therefore not in a position to compare the results. Despite their initial recognition and consideration of the significant differences between the individual developments, in the end the researchers resorted to very general evaluations.

Architectural taste?

In the second part of the Ďáblice survey, the interviewers focused on “architectural taste” and presented the respondents with five tables of photographs, each of which was intended to represent one “aesthetic quality” of contemporary architecture. Table M referred to “Mies-style” architecture, table S to a sculpturally conceived style of architecture, table V “reminiscent formally of the applied arts”, table K drawing on classical forms, and table O working with examples that “emphasise the features of domesticity”.¹⁷ People were asked to state which group of photographs corresponded most to their taste, which came second, and which pleased them least. By a large margin the respondents liked the photographs contained in table O, i.e. features of domesticity, the most. Given that the researchers had included large terraced apartment blocks, coastal developments, Scandinavian townhouses and the deluxe Pyramid Hotel, in addition to Fallingwater, the house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, in table O, this selection is understandable. Indeed, I would be tempted to postulate that the results of the vote would be the same today, and not only on the Ďáblice housing estate.

Looking again at the sets of photographs offered the respondents, it would be very surprising indeed if other preferences were offered within the context of a housing survey. The lowest ranked table S contains images of highly extravagant, Brutalist and experimental architecture. Table V offers examples of a technological, even Futurist, aesthetic. With the odd exception, neither the more traditional table K nor the Mies-style M even contain examples of residential buildings. In contrast, the buildings depicted in table O, the respondents' favourite, meet all the requirements we might have of housing, from a natural setting or landscaped grounds, via a creative yet solid, calm and welcoming architectural design, to large loggias or terraces holding out the promise of similarly

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114–119, cit. p. 114.

spacious interiors. Rather than revealing “architectural taste”, these examples are far more indicative of unfulfilled dreams of accommodation. The researchers interpreted the results to mean that “three quarters of respondents demand from architecture above all a welcoming residential environment in forms that do not diverge from contemporary everyday conventions”.¹⁸ Everyday conventions? There is not a single example in table O of a photograph showing a building that even begins to resemble the reality of housing at that time in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The researchers’ statement to the effect that the architecture of the buildings shown in table O is basically of the same type as the new housing estates being built at that time is the stuff of fantasy.

The second survey,¹⁹ which looked at opinions of architecture, was conducted in all the housing estates. Respondents rated various features of their residential environment on a scale of one to five. They were asked about the shape of the buildings, the composition of the estate, the colour scheme of the facades, the greenery, the neatness and cleanliness of the public spaces, the view from their windows, the distance between the buildings, and how easy it was to find their way around. Residents deemed the view from their window and the greenery to be the most positive feature of the estate, and in general were neutral about the overall composition. However, they were critical of the shape of the buildings, especially the long plain blocks, though estates with a variable mix of buildings and blocks from the period of Soviet Realism were rated more highly. The worst rating of all the categories evaluated was given to the colour scheme of the facades. Residents also found it somewhat difficult to find their way around the estates, with dissatisfaction increasing significantly in the case of the larger, newer estates. This result completely contradicts the results of the localised Ďáblice survey, in which “orderliness and clarity” were ranked highly.

Respondents from all the housing estates as well as other types of residential neighbourhoods also commented on the distances between buildings. The majority of residents of housing estates (85%) and detached houses rated them as adequate, while residents of older urban districts were slightly less satisfied, with around a third stating that the distance between buildings was too small. However, if we look at the graph showing the overall results of this category in all types of residential neighbourhoods, it would appear that one’s neighbour is never far enough away, with almost no one whatsoever describing the distances between buildings as unnecessarily large, even in districts comprising single-family homes.

Residents vs. experts?

It was the opinions expressed regarding the distances between buildings, along with the positive characteristics of the localised Ďáblice study, that led the researchers to note a “genuine difference of opinion” between “the general public and experts”. In the Ďáblice survey respondents spoke of the “habitability and cosiness”, “friendliness and comfort” and “distinctiveness and expressiveness” of their housing estate. The researchers also pointed to the high rating given “orderliness and clarity”, which is “at odds with the statements of experts regarding the chaotic nature of housing estates”. Similarly, according to the researchers, the respondents were neutral in their evaluation of the composition of

18 *Ibid.*, 114–119, cit. p. 117.

19 *Ibid.*, 117–123.

the complexes and positive regarding the large distances between buildings, despite “the condemnation of architectural critics and experts” and despite the trend at that time “towards more tightly packed estates with higher population densities”.²⁰

According to the authors, the residents’ opinion, though less informed, is factual and less biased. The expert does not draw on personal experience but on knowledge of their discipline, and sees architecture “through the prism of their theoretical knowledge and hypotheses, i.e. always to a certain extent in an a priori and often one-sided way”.²¹ By emphasising user perception over expert opinion, VÚVA researchers were to an extent also undermining the prevailing paradigm of the “scientific management of society”. They were thus in line with the wave of postmodern architectural thinking at that time, which laid a stress on the taste of the inhabitants themselves and the general public.²² However, the original adherents of postmodernism in the USA believed that modern architecture could only be understood and appreciated by experts, the educated elite, while its abstract forms remained unintelligible to the ordinary citizen.²³ The team led by Jiří Musil offered the exact opposite view of the contrast between the evaluation of modernist urbanism offered by experts and the general public, with the experts being critical, while the inhabitants themselves were satisfied.

Quite to what extent the general public in what was then Czechoslovakia accepted modernist architectural principles and forms is a question that is difficult to answer. I believe that people understood well the main message of the language of standardisation and seriality, i.e. above all a certain standard for all citizens along with the much trumpeted speed of construction and economic savings (which was never, incidentally, proven). In fact, throughout the 1960s, the media carried very positive reports on housing estates.²⁴ The urban planning of the estates and the rational forms of individual buildings also linked up to the well known aesthetics of the architecture of the First Republic, which from the 1960s onwards (and indeed to the present day) is perceived in a positive, not to say idealised, light, at least on a political level.²⁵

However, with the transformation of society and its values during the 1970s and above all the 1980s, as the architect Václav Králíček writes, “our construction programme” became “an anachronism”. “Today, what used to be a fascination with

20 *Ibid.*, 123–124. These words were written by the architectural theorist Vítězslav Procházka. Here he takes issue with the uncritical adoration and adoption of the forms of the traditional block city typical of Jiří Ševčík’s collaborators at the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University. See Vítězslav PROCHÁZKA, “Úroveň architektury nových obytných souborů”, *Architektura ČSR* XLI, 1982, 162–164.

21 *Ibid.*, 124–125. Here the authors basically take aim at their own ranks and refer not only to architects but sociologists and psychologists as “experts”.

22 At the time of the book’s publication, the ideas of postmodernism and texts by Robert Venturi and Denis Scott-Brown and Charles Jencks were already fairly well known by experts in Czechoslovakia, and samizdat translations were also being produced.

23 For example, in her comprehensive article on postmodernism and deconstructivism, Mary McLeod speaks of the shared feeling among American architects in the 1970s that “modernism was failing to communicate to any group besides design professionals”. Mary MCLEOD, “Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism”, *Assemblage*, 1989, no. 8, 22–59, cit. p. 29.

24 See ŠVÁCHA, “Stará města”.

25 For more about the changing image of individual periods of our history see Stanislav HOLUBEC, *Ještě nejsme za vodou*, Praha: Scriptorium 2015, for its examination of the First Republic especially 34–49.

technology and industry has morphed into a deep distrust.”²⁶ The research by Musil and his team was carried out at a time when criticism of architectural modernism was already resonating amongst experts, though these changes in the way the city, its values and aesthetics were viewed were only slowly trickling down to the general public.²⁷ A quick look at the pages of the magazine *Domov* (Home) shows clearly that during the 1970s there was a shift, not only aesthetic, towards conservatism, to a perception of the apartment as a purely private, snug universe, the form of which was often in contrast to the rational and unified form of the buildings in which it was housed.²⁸ Nevertheless, the real problem was how to get one’s hands on an apartment at all. Given the ongoing shortage of housing, and in comparison with the much neglected older housing stock, being allocated a flat in a prefab apartment block, especially for a young family, was like winning the lottery.

Nevertheless, Musil’s survey also suggests a change in the way that housing estates were perceived. The level of satisfaction decreases in the case of people earning more and above all with higher educational qualifications, while neither income nor credentials have any influence on satisfaction rates in the case of other types of housing. The researchers did not offer any particular interpretation of this finding, though at least two explanations offer themselves for consideration: either a housing estate did not meet the more subtle and complex demands of the better educated and better off classes; or the generally lower status of housing estates when compared with historical neighbourhoods played a role.

In a good light

One might speculate that the book *Lidé a sídliště* was intended to marginalise the striking transformation in thinking about the built environment that was taking place amongst experts by pointing to empirical data. After all, the data showed that, whatever the experts claimed, people were basically satisfied with standardised, prefab and centrally planned housing estates. In a study devoted to social research and sociology as a tool of governance after 1969, Michal Kopeček draws on archival records in order to argue that the aim of the survey of public opinion was above all “to provide up-to-date empirical data on society and its changing attitudes for the purpose of governance”. This mainly applied to the *Ústav pro výzkum veřejného mínění* (Public Opinion Research Institute), which was subordinate to the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Communist Party Central Committee, which also decided which data would be utilised as propaganda material in specialist journals and the media.²⁹

26 Václav KRÁLÍČEK, “Architektura bez architekta”, *Umění a řemesla*, 1986, no. 3, 32–33 and 83–85.

27 Cf. Matěj SPURNÝ, the chapters “Věda a plán až do obýváku: městské plánování a proměna bydlení v Československu (1955–1980)” and “Nehostinnost spočitatelného světa: proměna představ o domově jako jeden z kořenů krize technokratického socialismu”, in: Vítězslav SOMMER et al., *Řídit socialismus jako firmu. Technokratické vládnutí v Československu, 1956–1989*, Praha: Ústav soudobých dějin AV ČR a NLN 2019, 138–190.

28 Michaela JANEČKOVÁ, *Domov na stránkách časopisu Domov*, a lecture at the postgraduate conference held by the Ústav pro dějiny umění FF UK, 8 May 2018, Praha: Galerie Tranzitdisplay.

29 Michal KOPEČEK, “Kritika, řízení, byznys”, in: Michal KOPEČEK (ed.), *Architekti dlouhé změny. Expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu*, Praha: Argo 2019, 217–265.

The Research Institute for Building and Architecture, where Musil's survey was carried out, reported to the Ministry of Construction and Technology (which in 1983 was renamed the Ministry of Construction), and was therefore in a different, less exposed position. During the normalisation period, the sociology department of VÚVA operated in a niche role on the periphery of the discipline, where researchers, regardless of mainstream Marxist-Leninist sociology, attempted to conduct meaningful, empirically oriented research.³⁰ However, in 2004, even Musil himself expressed reservations regarding the survey of housing estates carried out at VÚVA: "It should be pointed out that this is work that reveals clear signs of the time in which we conducted it."³¹

The research carried out by Musil and his team cannot simply be ignored and dismissed as "activist science". It looks at life on a housing estate from many different angles and does not shy away from naming problems and looking for possible solutions. Most of its conclusions are based on solid professional and empirical foundations. However, if we examine the questionnaires and their interpretation in more detail, as well as the selection of the estates to be included in the project, we see that the authors attempted to show the architecture and urban planning of housing estates in the best light. They might have been motivated by caution or a desire to avoid the kind of difficulties that the sociology department of VÚVA and Jiří Musil himself faced in 1977.

In 1976, a study by Lubomír Kotačka entitled "Preference sídelních typů mezi obyvatelstvem ČSSR" (Housing Estate Preferences amongst the Population of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) was published in the proceedings of VÚVA *Otázka urbanizace* (Questions of Urbanisation).³² A year later, Jiří Musil summarised the results of this research in his book *Urbanizace v socialistických zemích* (Urbanisation in Socialist Countries),³³ which was published by the Party-affiliated publishing house Svoboda. As Musil writes, the results of Kotačka's research in Czechoslovakia provoked "huge ideological disapproval on the part of the then minister František Šrámek, head of the department of which VÚVA was a part. However, once again, thanks to certain people running the institute, the department survived".³⁴ He was referring to the seemingly innocuous finding that housing in large cities was not very attractive (preferred by only 11% of the population), and its appeal had fallen in comparison with the situation in the latter half of the 1960s. In contrast, the residential attractiveness of small villages close to large cities, as well as small and medium sized towns, which overall formed the most popular residential locations, had increased.³⁵

It can be assumed that the publication of the book *Lidé a sídliště* in 1985 was to serve, at least to some extent, as propaganda. It appeared on the shelves at a time when criticism of the key principles of housing development (i.e. not merely simply of the muddy surroundings and a lack of amenities) was increasingly and openly being printed in newspapers and shown on television.³⁶ As early as in the preface we read:

30 *Ibid.*, 232.

31 Jiří MUSIL, "Poznámky o české sociologii za komunistického režimu", *Sociologický časopis*, vol. 25, 2004, no. 5, 573–595.

32 Jiří MUSIL (ed.), *Otázky urbanizace*, Praha: Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury 1976.

33 Jiří MUSIL, *Urbanizace v socialistických zemích*, Praha: Svoboda 1977.

34 MUSIL, "Poznámky", 592.

35 MUSIL, *Urbanizace*, 214–215.

36 ŠVÁCHA, "Stará města", 350–353.

This study (...) will, we hope, help to remove some of the preconceptions surrounding housing estates. These are usually held by those who know such locations only from the outside and do not live in them. The media then back such prejudices up when they speak of the “anonymity of a housing estate”, “estate life”, etc.³⁷

What is more, the book was not published in the specialist VÚVA series, but in a narrative form accompanied by photographs by the Party-affiliated publishing house Svoboda. This, as we see in the case of the publication of the findings of the research carried out by Lubomír Kotačka by the same publishers, meant a significantly higher level of ideological oversight.

The never-ending debate on urbanism

In *Lidé a sídliště*, Musil and his team offer their thoughts on the future development of architecture and the urban planning of housing construction. Given the generally positive picture of life on a housing estate that their study offers, it comes as no great surprise that they do not foresee any major changes in the future. According to them, housing development will simply take place at a somewhat “more relaxed tempo with more intimate dimensions” and the apartment blocks already built will “gradually be cultivated and humanised”. They devote most space to questions surrounding urban planning, especially the possibility of a return to traditional block developments with multifunctional streets and squares, which they are convinced “is not possible”. According to the authors, traditional block-based urban planning with multifunctional developments, which architects in the West and elsewhere were inclined towards, was inappropriate to the times. These were forms that “were created under different social, economic and technical conditions”.³⁸

However, during the course of the 1980s and with renewed vigour following the events of 1989, the completely opposite trend prevailed in architecture. The traditional urban block became the new mainstream.³⁹ Nevertheless, the realisation of new complexes in the traditional grid pattern is often hampered by strict hygiene standards covering glare, lighting and noise, based on the functionalist tradition of thinking of the city. This contradiction between the hygienic advantages of free-form development and the city-forming qualities of block planning emphasised today were at the heart of the recent struggle over Prague’s new building regulations.⁴⁰ The rejection of modernist urban

37 MUSIL, *Lidé a sídliště*, 8.

38 *Ibid.*, 125.

39 See, for example, the study of the development of former railway land in Prague’s Smichov district (urban study A69 from 2014, reworked by the studio Kuba Pilář Architekti after a competition in 2015), <https://iprpraha.cz/projekt/39/smichov-city> or in Bubny (a study by Pelčák and partner architects and Thomas Müller Ivan Reimann Architekten from Berlin, 2019), see: “Praha už ví, jak budou vypadat nové Bubny. Stavět se začne do 5 let”, *Institut plánování a rozvoje hlavního města Prahy*, 11 June 2019, <https://www.iprpraha.cz/budouci-bubny> (accessed on 15 March 2021).

40 For a summary of the dispute, see “Praha se zbavila povinnosti proslunění bytů. Opět mohou vznikat čtvrti jako Vinohrady nebo Dejvice”, *Institut plánování a rozvoje hlavního města Prahy*, 23 October 2018, <https://www.iprpraha.cz/proslunenischvaleno> (accessed on 15 March 2021)

planning in favour of block-style developments is now so dominant in the debate around architecture that it is reflected in proposals for the revitalisation of existing housing estates.⁴¹

41 This approach is clear in the project *Sídliště, jak dál?*, which took place in 2014–2015 at the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University in Prague, see the student designs created in 2014 under the auspices of the Kohout – Tichý studio, available at: <http://www.sidlistejakdal.cz/galerie/studentske-projekty/> (accessed on 17 March 2021), or the book Michal KOHOUT et al., *Sídliště, jak dál?* Praha: Fakulta architektury ČVUT 2016.