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Sociological Research in the First Half of the 1960s and the First National Housing Debate¹

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The first nationwide debate on housing in Czechoslovakia was organized by the authorities due to the resolution on housing issued by the communist party in March 1959. The series of company and public debates aimed at collecting popular opinions as well as making the public familiar with lesser-known aspects of the resolution. The actions took place in 1960 and 1961 and dealt with new construction frameworks, typification and planning of new residential districts, which eventually became large

“panelák” estates. We have to ask: what was the point of the first nationwide debate? What purpose did the research serve? How did public opinion influence the architecture and composition of the housing estates? The article describes the course of the debate and data collection as well as the implementation of the outputs of the debate into actual housing designs. And what role did public surveys play in the democratization process of the sixties?

Keywords:

First nationwide debate on housing – housing estates – panelák – urban planning – Czechoslovakia – socialism – public opinion research – sociology

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The historical texts examining mass construction and housing in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1989 do not shed much light on the opinions of the people who actually had to live in the apartments and prefab housing estates. Various observations and complaints regarding life in the new estates appear sporadically in the press, magazine surveys and letters from readers. Did people like the apartments they were allocated? And what did they think of the architecture? What did they dislike most about their new housing, and what did they wish to see changed? And did the state take these opinions into consideration during the planning stage? The most extensive public opinion survey intended to provide answers to these questions was undertaken at the start of the 1960s. The term “First National Housing Debate” was used to describe a series of discussions that took place from October to December 1960 at various workplaces under the guidance of architects and staff of national committees. The debates were subsequently accompanied by a package of activities, including specialist discussions, a series of exhibitions, media surveys and sociological research. Finally, several experimental buildings were created at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s which led to the design of new types of prefab buildings (T06–T08 B) and the concept of residential districts and neighbourhoods. In addition to the discussions themselves, I shall examine the research and interdisciplinary debates on housing during the early 1960s and reflections on the emerging concept of the prefab housing estate.

I was most interested in how the activities referred to were related to each other and to changes in the economic, housing and social policy of the early 1960s. I also wondered whether the outcomes of the debates and research were to influence the later development of housing and the construction of prefab estates. And what role did architects, the general public and sociologists play in all of this?

I drew on period sources, above all the archived documents of the *Komise pro řešení bytového problému* (Commission for the Resolution of the Housing Problem) (1959–1962) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ), and to an extent on documents of the subsequent *Komise pro otázku životní úrovně* (Commission for Questions Relating to the Standard of Living) (1963–1968). Both commissions played a pivotal role in coordinating research, overseeing construction and organising public events around housing issues and increasing the standard of living, and took a number of measures aimed at implementing their conclusions. Contemporary journals provide valuable information on the course and outcomes of discussions from the point of view of individual actors, e.g. *Pozemní stavby* (Civil Engineering), *Československý architekt* (Czechoslovak Architect) and the in-house journal of the Svaz architektů (Union of Architects) *Architektura ČSSR*, which published a regular annex by the Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury (Research Institute for Building and Architecture) or VÚVA, including articles and reports written by its sociology division. The basic information on sociological research into housing, its methodology and results is taken from archive materials and contemporary publications such as *Jak bydlet. Zkušenosti z průzkumu nových sídlišť* (How to Live: The First National Housing Debate), *První celostátní diskuse o bydlení* (The First National Debate on Resolving the Housing Situation) or *Režim dne různých skupin obyvatelstva ve vztahu k řešení bytu*

(The Daily Routine of Different Population Groups in Relation to Apartment Layout).² Important data is also to be gleaned from period publications and research conducted by the Státní statistický ústav (State Statistical Institute).³

The text also draws on articles published in the *Sociologický časopis* (Sociological Journal). Although this publication only commenced its activities in 1965 (it continues to be published by the Academy of Sciences), and issues surrounding housing were not its primary concern, it nonetheless reflects fundamental changes in discourse and illustrates the shift in the role of sociology from an instrument of social control to a critical analysis of social phenomena and the separation of science from the structures of state socialism. Relatively recent articles by Jiří Musil looking back on the development of the sociology of the city and housing in Czechoslovakia from the 1960s to the 1980s also contain valuable insights.

*The situation at the end of the 1950s and
measures to solve the housing problem*

Despite all the efforts of the state and investment in construction, the post-war housing crisis had not been solved by the end of the 1950s.⁴ A population boom meant young families and married couples above all did not have their own housing but were forced to share a household with the parents of one or other of the partners, or lived apart with their original families. The previous decade saw work begin on the construction of standardised brick and prefabricated concrete buildings, though this was not yet being carried out on the scale and at the speed necessary.

The need for the acceleration of housing construction and a change in the way it was being financed were debated at the 11th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in June 1958. In March of the following year, the Central Committee adopted a Resolution to Resolve the Housing Problem, the aim of which was to introduce all the requisite decision-making, financial and legislative changes that would make it possible to build 1,200,000 apartments between 1959 and 1970 in order to meet the demand for housing.⁵ This was the first time this astronomical figure had been aired in public.

So where did this figure come from and on what basis was it calculated? Following motions passed by the 11th Communist Party Congress, the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Construction adopted new economic housing directives, and guided by expert assessments the Commission clarified its data on the existing state of housing and the size of investment over the coming years. Planners thus faced the task of determining as accurately as possible the number of housing units needed and setting

2 Eva LIBROVÁ – Jaroslav KLOFÁČ – Karel BRIX, *Jak bydlet: Zkušenosti z průzkumu nových sídlišť*, Praha: Státní nakladatelství technické literatury 1961; Jiří MUSIL – Hana POLÁČKOVÁ (eds.), *První celostátní diskuse o bydlení*, Praha: Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury 1962; Eva LIBROVÁ – Anna VESELÁ, *Režim dne různých skupin obyvatelstva ve vztahu k řešení bytu*, Praha: Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury 1966.

3 See for instance: Alois ANDERLE – Miroslav POJER – Ota ULLMANN, *Byty a bydlení v Československu*, Praha: Státní statistický úřad 1967.

4 This study is based in part on an unpublished dissertation: Eva NOVOTNÁ, *Česká bytová výstavba 1958–1970. Stát – ideologie – architektura – lidé*, FF UK Praha, defended in 2018.

5 “Usnesení ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa k řešení bytového problému v ČSR do roku 1970”, *Rudé právo*, vol. XXXIX, 1959, no. 66 (8 March), 3–4; “Usnesení Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa nám ukládá: Do roku 1970 postavit 1 200 000 bytů!”, *Pozemní stavby*, vol. VII, 1959, no. 3, 109.

standards for mass construction over the following decade. Economic and sociological data, above all the most accurate economic models and socio-graphic, statistical and demographic information played an irreplaceable role in the decision-making process.

For what types of households should new types of housing and the urban design of entire housing estates be planned? What should standardised dwellings look like? What layout should they possess, how large and of what category should they be? What facilities would the new estates need and of what dimensions? These decisions had up till then been reached on the basis of standardised data collections, discussions amongst architects or the size of budgets for the T12–T20 house types.

In addition to sociological research and special debates, which will be looked at later, the first detailed census of 1961 was crucial for understanding the genuine state of housing from the perspective of the central authorities. Information from the State Statistical Office provided data not only on the the structure of the population, but also on the structure of the housing stock categorized by building type and the size and age of apartments. The analysis of the statistics was then repeatedly used by the top planners of the Central Committee⁶ and the State Planning Commission for the timetable of mass construction and urban planning strategy. The population census, which revealed many problems, including overcrowding of the existing housing stock, helped to specify the size and structure of planned apartments aimed at resolving the housing situation by 1970. The data contained in the census also offered valuable information regarding the existing level of housing in individual towns, cities and regions, including differences in heating technologies, sanitary equipment and commuting distances. The number of households equipped with washing machine, fridge, radio, television, telephone, etc., also offered clues as to the residents' standard of living.

However, what the data collected by the statistics office could not show was how satisfied and happy people were and what expectations they had. It also lacked an understanding of broader social phenomena. From the latter half of the 1950s, greater consideration was given to existing construction projects, though the criticism of systemic errors also increased. One particular problem involved the amenities enjoyed by housing estates, which during the 1950s had been a fairly haphazard affair dependent mainly on the investor's options and the capacity of construction companies. It was precisely the "incompleteness" of new housing estates and the fact that even after official approval the apartments lacked pavements and public lighting, and in the majority of cases new residents looked in vain for services, shops, nurseries and schools, that articles in the press first drew attention to. The following extract from *Večerní Praha* (Evening Prague) from 1956 is a typical example:

The construction of the Vršovice housing estate is a typical example of how many cock-ups we have made while building new dwellings. [...] Another chapter in the story, even less pleasing, is the appearance of the land around the new projects. Mountains of soil, all sorts of materials, rutted roads (if you can call them that), a sea of mud – abandon all hope ye who enter here. The lack of awareness of the

6 NA [National Archive], f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 4, archivní jednotka (A.J.) 17, zasedání 20. 11. 1961, bod 5: Informace o stavu prací na sčítání lidu pro potřeby posouzení těch oblastí, kde má být bytový problém vyřešen do doku 1965, fol. 1–4.

officials involved, especially those from the Ministry of the Local Economy, is astonishing. Until recently, there was no designated body to deal with this, and landscaping was not even included in the national plan. Now it has finally been decided that construction work (on roads, parks, greenery and public lighting) and maintenance will be overseen by the *Správa komunálního hospodářství* [Municipal Economy Administration]. Without doubt there are yet more unresolved issues surrounding the construction of the estates, and we shall return to them in good time. However, it would be a good idea if someone (from, say, the *Státní výbor pro výstavbu* [State Construction Committee]) were to tell us today why housing estates are not being built according to an overall plan, and when these projects will finally be preceded by the approval of a detailed zoning plan. So far this has not been the case.⁷

Complaints in documents that were never made public were even sharper. In the minutes of a meeting of the State Committee for Construction, for example, we repeatedly read how the architects of housing estates themselves pass comments on the monopoly status of suppliers, the dictates of national standards and the sloppy work carried out by the builders. In 1959, the growing dissatisfaction was to some extent stemmed by the Central Committee announcing a range of measures aimed at boosting the economy and the standard of living. Top of the bill was the ambitious plan already mentioned to build 1,200,000 apartments within eleven years that would meet the higher demands of citizens on housing and take into account the complaints made by both the general public and experts. The Party was apparently receptive to this criticism, which was to be addressed as part of the nationwide discussions organised on accommodation, in sociological analyses and specialist projects being planned.

In the same year, the Research Institute for Building and Architecture began work on the document *Výhledové směry bydlení* (Future Directions of Housing) at the instigation of the central authorities. Suggestions as to the future of housing proceeded hand in hand with sociological research into selected post-war housing estates and discussions on the level of experts and the general public. Conferences were held on the outlook for housing in May 1959 and a year later, at which the main themes were debated by members of VÚVA, architects from other workplaces, and representatives of almost thirty institutions, departments and scientific institutes (the Institute of Hygiene, the Institute for Child Psychology, the Internal Trade Research Institute, the Ministry of Culture, the Institute of Studies and Standardisation, etc.).⁸ Experts in the field commented on questions pertaining to cultural and social changes in the near future, including the transformation of the family ensuing from full employment of women and the institutionalisation of

7 R. U., "K problémům bytové výstavby: Civilizaci i na sídliště", *Večerní Praha* II, 1956, no. 92, 18 April 1956, 2.

8 NA [National Archive], f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 1, a. j. 4, zasedání 16. 9. 1959, bod 7: Návrh na uspořádání soutěže na projekty obytných domů z hlediska kultury bydlení v přechodu od socialismu ke komunismu, fol. 11–14; see also Jiří MUSIL, "Diskuse o základních faktorech určujících budoucí formy bydlení", *Architektura ČSSR* XVIII, 1959, nos. 5–6, 352–357; Jiří MUSIL, "Diskuse o základních společenských, biologických a technických faktorech určujících budoucí formy bydlení", *Architektura ČSSR* vol. XVIII, 1959, no. 7, 412–417.

child-rearing, the planned reduction of working hours, and the development of services. Population growth forecasts, estimates of consumer habits in relation to the development of services and anticipated behavioural changes (a preference for collective ways of spending leisure time, a greater need for increased qualifications and the educational or self-study requirements ensuing therefrom, an increased interest in culture, etc.) were important development indicators. Doctors were to focus on the pillars of a healthy life (e.g. sleep, nutrition, relaxation), including the cultivation of interpersonal relations and childcare. Criticism of the childcare that was being provided in crèches and kindergartens at that time was voiced by Professor Josef Švejcar, a leading Czech paediatrician, who emphasised the need for far greater bonding with the mother, as well as greater freedom for preschool children, free movement and independent play outside the controlled collective.

Sociological survey of selected housing estates

A sociological survey conducted in late 1959 and into 1960 provided a real insight into the existing conditions in new apartments on housing estates, the opinions of their inhabitants, and overall housing conditions. The survey looked at post-war housing estates in six locations (four in the Czech lands and two in Slovakia). It was organised by a team of architects and sociologists from VÚVA working in collaboration with Univerzita Karlova (Charles University) in Prague and Univerzita Komenského (Comenius University) in Bratislava. The researchers selected a diverse sample of apartments on the basis of their layout, fittings and furniture, type of household and type of development. They monitored specific apartments and families in the Rozdělov housing estate in Kladno, older developments in Prievidza, the Dukla estate in Pardubice and Havířov, buildings constructed during the two-year plan (1947–1948) and more recent experiments in Zlín (at that time Gottwaldov) and Bratislava. Researchers and university students visited individual families, helped them complete questionnaires, and mapped out the utilisation by individuals of the space of the apartment on its floor plan.⁹ The survey was the most ambitious ever carried out, not only in Czechoslovakia but in the West also. One thousand respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire, which contained more than 200 questions (928 forms were completed and returned), while each household was visited twice by interviewers, who utilised a different data collection method each time. A significant part of the research was quantitatively based. This included a technical survey of the apartments (heating method, fittings and furniture, storage space, etc.), which was compiled in the field by students of architecture and civil engineering in Prague and Bratislava under the supervision of Zdena Červenková. The sociological surveys and questionnaires were filled out with respondents by students of the art faculties of Prague and Bratislava. The forms were carefully compiled by a team of sociologists from VÚVA headed by Jiří Musil (the team included Eva Librová, Jaroslav Klofáč and Karel Brix) so as to best reflect the real-life conditions in selected apartments, the daily regime, behavioural patterns, as well as the wishes and criticisms of the inhabitants. The researchers set themselves the task of discovering how the apartments facilitated and influenced the course of life functions – the preparation and consumption of food, dining, sleep, hygiene, housework, hobbies, family life together, child-rearing and social life. The aim was to evaluate the temporal

9 LIBROVÁ – KLOFÁČ – BRIX, *Jak bydlet*, 9–21.

and spatial course of functions in an apartment, their mutual influence on its layout, and to identify functions that could be transferred from the apartment to the housing block and estate. This last point is related to the overall trend in post-war housing development, which to a greater or lesser extent factored in the “communalisation” of certain functions of an apartment – home cooking and meals were to be replaced by works canteens and cafeterias, washing, repair and cleaning services were also to be separated from the apartment, etc. The aim was to create conditions for the development of a socialist way of life, the form of which would contribute to stronger links between personal and societal interests. The premise of this way of thinking traces its roots back to the belief held by left-wing architects and Marxist theoreticians in the strong social role of architecture and its power to shape people’s way of life and thinking. In addition, in the early 1960s, architects were aware of the contribution of their work to the transformation of society and were aware on a visceral level of how rapidly forms of accommodation, life and culture were evolving. They were thus faced with the question of how the intellectual and physical concept of the housing estate still in use could embrace and even accelerate these changes. Until then, this concept had either involved the principles of functionalism, a transitionally valid doctrine of Socialist Realism, or a combination of the two. However this did not allow for the full development of the much sought after way of life of a modern society, i.e. a far more comfortable and cultured lifestyle with easier access to services facilitating the running of a household and childcare. The prototype of such a well functioning housing unit was presented by architects at the start of the 1960s in an experimental project in the Invalidovna building, Prague. The project drew on the latest ideas of Soviet urban planners and the success enjoyed by the Czechoslovak teams in the large international competition for a residential district in the south-western part of Moscow in 1960. The idea of a comprehensively equipped housing district that could be divided into smaller residential zones and multiplied into larger districts, including the necessary volume of services and facilities, proved to be the optimal solution in respect of the need for the strict rationalisation and industrialisation of the construction of such units. The selection of functions, which were separated from the apartment themselves and placed within a central location on the estate, also underwent rationalisation. The architect Jiří Voženílek was one of many who defended this procedure before the Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party:

It would appear that the joint provision of certain services, in particular childcare, laundry and food preparation, would be advantageous for the majority of households, since they are most needed by working women with several children. It will gradually become necessary to provide amenities of a similar quality for most of the apartments, in purpose-built facilities that do not serve a single block but a residential zone or entire district.¹⁰

In this context, the sociological survey referred to above provided valuable information on just how satisfied people were with the existing range and location of amenities

10 NA [National Archive], f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 2, a. j. 9, zasedání 23. 5. 1960, Jiří Voženílek, *Zpráva o komplexním vyhodnocení pokusných projektů bytové výstavby*, 21.

(schools, kindergartens, crèches, shops, services, cultural and sports facilities, etc.). By means of the completed forms, the researchers discovered what experience people had with the services on offer, and in a special “prospective” questionnaire they enquired to what extent and under what conditions people would use certain services or whether they wished to organise them for themselves (meals, laundry, ironing, housekeeping and cleaning). One of the survey’s conclusions was that, despite a lack of trust in certain services and a number of bad experiences and entrenched ideas,

we need not fear that the progressive plans of architects to transfer some of the functions burdening women and the apartment into public amenities and thus free up the apartment so that it can be used for other, more pleasant activities, will encounter serious resistance. However, what is important is that society ensures that these functions are made accessible to as wide a circle as possible, at the highest quality, and for all strata of society.¹¹

When evaluating questionnaires with multiple choice and open-ended questions and rating scales, the researchers attempted a deeper, qualitative analysis of housing and architecture, and strove to pin down certain social phenomena. The volume of data obtained, along with a record of the architectural solution of a particular apartment and the actual running of a household, including photographs of individual fittings, meant they could look for concrete links between the type of household, lifestyle, and the way the dwelling was furnished and arranged. In this respect, the team of sociologists at VÚVA shifted empirical research for the first time closer to a comprehensive analysis of social phenomena, thus enriching the study of housing in Czechoslovakia by reflecting developments taking place in Western sociology and theory, for instance the Chicago School.

The Department of Sociology at VÚVA led by Jiří Musil¹² was at the same time involved in an evaluation of the First National Housing Debate, and systematically linked up the opinions expressed by the general public with the theoretical conclusions of its research. The outcomes of both projects were summarised in a manual entitled *První celostátní diskuse o bydlení* (First National Debate on Housing) and the publication *Jak bydlet* (How to Live), both of which also offered suggestions as to how to reflect the research findings in future construction projects. For example, the latter drew attention to the “improper use” of an apartment, an inappropriate choice of furniture or tasteless fittings that would need to be addressed through the targeted “re-education of residents” and the precise specification of the dimensions of an apartment depending on the type of household (number of children, childless couples, individuals, etc.). However, as Jiří Musil later recalled, it was sociologists who were sceptical about the mechanical application of sociological data to architecture and the pursuit of a universal model of “off-the-shelf” apartments according to type of household. “Sociologists, however, were less normative

11 LIBROVÁ – KLOFÁČ – BRIX, *Jak bydlet*, 120.

12 Of his many studies from the 1960s, see for instance MUSIL – POLÁČKOVÁ, *První celostátní diskuse*; Jiří MUSIL, *Sociologické problémy asanačních čtvrtí*, Praha: Ústav normování ve stavebnictví 1966; Jiří MUSIL, “K otázce bydlení rodin s dětmi ve výškových domech”, *Architektura ČSSR*, vol. XXIV, 1965, no. 10, 710–716; See also Lucie ZADRAŽILOVÁ, “Sociologie bydlení v 50. letech”, in: Igor JANOVSKÝ – Jana KLEINOVÁ – Hynek STRÍTESKÝ (eds.), *Věda a technika v Československu v letech 1945–1960*, Praha: Národní technické muzeum 2010, 151–169.

and technocratic than their architectural partners” and during the 1960s they used their analytical empirical research to probe more deeply into housing and later included soft data in the housing question.¹³ In 1962–1963, Eva Librová and Libuše Macková, members of the sociology department at VÚVA, followed up on the first research, drawing for the first time on the technique known as sociometry, the aim of which was to refine still further the findings of the spatiotemporal records of apartment utilisation by individual members of a household and to pin down the influence of spatial layout on lifestyle.¹⁴ The outcomes of the sociometric measurements, including records from experimental apartments in the Invalidovna building, and the careful analysis thereof, then enabled a decision to be taken as to which of the individual functions would be merged into the layout of new types of apartment, and which would be separated from it. Great efforts were made during preparations of the base types of prefab buildings category T06–T08 B, intended for construction sometime after 1963, to expand 3+1 apartments¹⁵ by what was called a “half-room”, which was to serve as a small study with a sofa for guests. The newly prepared types, on the other hand, did not separate the cooking and dining areas and proposed flexible solutions for dining areas.

Other metrics that began to be used in the design of apartments and housing estates included demographic forecasts, which were used to model future development of the population structure of an estate. This went hand-in-hand with a debate that was taking place in architectural circles at that time regarding the standardisation of prefab estates and the (in)ability to reflect lifestyle changes yet to take place in the layout of apartments, buildings and services.

First national housing debate

The first national housing debate was closely related to the conclusions of the 11th Congress of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Government Resolution on a Resolution of the Housing Problem, enacted in March 1959, which was followed by a host of legislative and systemic amendments, including the renewal of cooperative building construction and the release of funds for experimental construction. This was to verify new construction technology, building materials and urban concepts in selected projects. The main aim of these new centralised requirements was to achieve greater efficiency in industrial construction work and in the newly prepared types of apartment intended for mass construction after 1963, as well as a higher standard of accommodation. All the endeavours of sociological surveys, experimental projects and residential districts, as well as the preparation of the new building categories T06–T08B, were to focus on this objective.

At the highest levels, the debate was overseen by the Ministry of Construction, the Svaz architektů ČSSR (Association of Architects of the CSR) and the State Planning Commission. After a national briefing, organisational matters were left in the hands of

13 E.g. Libuše MACKOVÁ, *Bydlení v experimentálních domech*, Praha: Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury 1964; Libuše MACKOVÁ, “O kolektivních domech dnes”, *Domov*, vol. I, 1960, no. 6, 35–39.

14 LIBROVÁ – VESELÁ, *Režim dne*.

15 In Czech real estate terminology, the first numeral refers to the bedrooms, living room and dining room (the hall, bathroom and toilet are separate), the second to the kitchen, which is classified either as kk, i.e. a kitchenette, or given its own numeral, in which case it is separated by a wall from the other rooms.

the regional national committees, design institutes, trade-union councils, as well as the Výbor československých žen (Committee of Czechoslovak Women) and the Svaz socialistické mládeže (Czechoslovak Socialist Youth Union). Between October and December 1960, approximately 1,019 debates took place in all of the regions, at which more than 100,000 participated.¹⁶ The issue of housing was discussed at special meetings of party cells and at meetings of the Revoluční odborové hnutí (Revolutionary Trade Union Movement). Publicising the national debate, especially its outcomes, was the task of television, radio and the daily press. Some people also participated in writing and sent letters expressing their opinion on the current and future development of housing directly to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Office of the President, and the editors of newspapers, radio stations and television.¹⁷

Participants in the housing debate were perhaps most vocal regarding the layout of apartments and their fittings. They expressed a desire for larger kitchens with a dining area, more rooms, storage space, a pantry, and balconies or loggias. They also asked for modern furniture to be made available and the establishment of “ideal home advice centres” that would help them furnish their new apartments through the provision of samples and catalogues (in the manner of an exhibition). On the basis of bad experiences with developments up till then, in debates and surveys the public most often made reference to the low quality building work and the poor finish of new builds, including the poor quality of the paints used on floor coverings and tiles, window seal failure, leakage into the central core, and poor acoustic insulation.¹⁸ From observations made at the time it also appears that members of cooperatives, who acted in the position of a stronger “client”, emphatically rejected poor quality building cores. People at the meetings proposed tightening up the building inspection regulations and technical supervision of building sites, and sometimes even suggested participating in the building inspection proceedings themselves. An interest was often heard expressed in various forms of collective accommodation and in hotel-style buildings for young couples, while families with multiple children pushed for terraced housing.

Particularly interesting are the isolated observations regarding architecture and urban planning, in which people expressed their disapproval of the uniformity and austerity of existing estates. “They therefore recommend a more expressive composition and greater contrast between the buildings in the development, along with greater use of colours and small architectural features and greenery so that the estates express the optimism and beauty of our era.”¹⁹ We may assume from the way the recommendation is formulated that when evaluating the results of the debate, architects utilised ideologically appropriate rhetoric in order to achieve the desired outcome when submitting applications to centres

- 16 I obtained most of my information regarding the course of the debate from the materials of the Komise pro řešení bytového problému ÚV KSČ: NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, and from the publication MUSIL – POLÁČKOVÁ, *První celostátní diskuse*. I also drew on many observations from daily newspapers and from magazines. See, for example, Vladimír WYNNYCZUK, “Na okraj diskuse o bydlení”, *Československý architekt*, vol. VII, 1961; “Otvíráme výstavy Nové bydlení”, *Československý architekt*, vol. VII, 1961, no. 15, 1; “Výstavy Nové bydlení”, *Československý architekt*, vol. VII, 1961, nos. 18 and 19, 1–3.
- 17 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 1, a. j. 5, zasedání 16. 9. 1959, bod 1: Kontrolní zpráva o plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ v řešení bytového problému v ČSR, fol. 54.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 10.

of power. When all is said and done, it was architects, planners and specialists who led the debate in the provinces, who were able to some extent to take advantage of the situation to obtain support for their own architectural projects. In the Commission's materials we read only high praise for the fact that the national debate was able to take place as it did thanks to the great work done by the Association of Architects and employees of VÚVA. The other organisations invited were only minimally involved in the preparations and debate.

It appears that the participants in the debate prompted by the sociological survey were not afraid to point to a number of shortcomings in housing construction, and to specify some of the reasons. Their opinions and suggestions for improvement basically overlapped with those of the architects and planners, a fact that benefitted both groups when putting their case to the central authorities or building contractors during the 1970s. The involvement of architects in the organisation of the national debate and their subsequent contribution to the attractiveness of exhibitions helped to raise the social standing and prestige that they enjoyed in the 1960s.

Just how important the debate had been was summed up by the Minister of Construction Oldřich Beran in the final report to the party leadership: "the national debate on housing has increased the awareness of workers that housing construction is and will remain under the broad and objective control of the people as a whole".²⁰ In the same spirit, the Minister then decided to incorporate the "objective" comments of the general public (i.e. the professionally and politically "correct" opinions) into the mass construction plans already drawn up and into preparations of future types T06–T08 B. Among other things, he recommended "more effective coordination of all the central bodies and industries" that would be involved in the construction and furnishing of apartments, and "influencing the quality of supplies" or repeatedly testing the progressive proposals by means of experiments.²¹ Given the much criticised lack of amenities on housing estates, the Ministry has called for the development of new standards that would cover the range of services provided in residential zones and districts. These guidelines were later independently drawn up by the Research Institute for Building and Architecture, whose urban planners quantified the extent and type of amenities down to the smallest detail, including the surface area of a supermarket, laundry, repair shop, canteen, post office, hairdresser and cultural centre on the basis of population density. Among the conclusions of the debate reflected in the party's demands was the need to pay increased attention to "the aesthetic education of residents and improvements in their taste". The ethos of re-education promoting a tasteful, i.e. modern and functional environment in the apartments, was in line with the opinions of the architects themselves, who had already criticised the persistence of "petty bourgeois" habits, such as the inclusion of heavy furniture and decorations in the apartments, during the course of the sociological surveys.

Of the shortcomings identified in housing construction, the authorities incorporated only those that could be easily quantified and universally applied into individual measures aimed at resolving the housing crisis. Increasing the surface area per person from 9 m² to 12 m² and ensuring a greater proportion of three-room [not including hallway, bathroom and kitchen] apartments were proposals included in the post-1963 housing plan and also in practice. The new guidelines were thus intended to ensure better coordination of

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

contractors in the pre-construction preparation of the building site and the completion of new developments, including landscaping, roads, green spaces and the simultaneous completion of amenities (distribution centres and educational facilities).

The first national debate on housing was intended to provide planners with information regarding what people thought about the current situation and what changes they would like to see made. It was also intended to test the extent to which they would accept the introduction of co-operative building and co-financing, while massively publicising this type of development during the debate itself. As archival material shows, the debate was intended to function essentially as a way of encouraging people to build houses on their own and persuading individual companies to construct corporate housing.²² Outwardly, the debate bore witness to the democratisation process in society and the socialist state's concern for the living needs of the population. This last point was also to be heard in the rhetoric of the time concerning the competition between East and West and in the question of which political system was best able to provide a higher quality of life for its people.²³

Under the slogan “housing construction, a national task”, the media at that time was promoting all the measures referred to above that the central authorities were preparing to solve the housing crisis and raise the living standards of the workers.²⁴ Not only was the topic of housing discussed on television and radio programmes, but architects and sociologists increasingly featured too, and the entire subject took off.²⁵ Promotional materials and advertising posters presenting new building technology and co-operative loans were created. The issue of mass housing and the construction of new estates even featured in children's books.²⁶ Exhibitions proved to be a popular format and were used in the second phase of the national debate. In May 1960, the Ministry of Construction Oldřich Beran opened a permanent exhibition entitled *Stavebnictví* (Construction) on Letná Hill in Prague, which included a new pavilion called *Stavíme budoucnost* (We are Building the Future), and in 1964 this was joined by the exhibition *Dokončovací práce dnes a zítra* (Finishing Touches Today and Tomorrow).²⁷ The general public was offered the opportunity to visit apartments in selected experimental buildings in Prague, Brno, Gottwaldov [today Zlín], Hradec Králové, České Budějovice and Tábor, and to inspect the interiors fitted out with modern furniture, textiles, lighting fixtures, etc.²⁸

22 *Ibid.*, 8.

23 On this point see, for example, David CROWLEY – Jane PAVIT, *Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970*, London: Victoria and Albert Publishing 2008; Ana MILJÁČKI, *The Optimum Imperative: Czech Architecture for the Socialist Lifestyle, 1938–1968*, London – New York: Routledge 2017.

24 For the period 1959–1960, the central committee, in collaboration with employees of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party, drew up a “Plán politické agitace a technicko-ekonomické propagandy na úseku bytové výstavby”, NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 1, a. j. 5, zasedání 16. 9. 1959, bod 1: Kontrolní zpráva o plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ v řešení bytového problému v ČSR, fol. 54.

25 See, for example, the documentaries made by Czechoslovak Television: *Města, byty, lidé, bydlení*, 1960; *Jak budeme bydlet*, 1961. <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1063990460-mesta-byty-lide-bydleni/>

26 See, for example, Václav KOVAL, *25 divů v našem domě*, Praha: SNDK 1961.

27 Information was provided on these exhibitions in, for example, *Pozemní stavby* 1964, no. 8, unpag.

28 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 3, a. j. 14, zasedání, 7. 3. 1961, bod 6: Zpráva o vyhodnocení výsledků celostátní diskuse o bydlení, fol. 1–73.

The Nové bydlení (New Housing) Exhibitions

The first national debate on housing was followed a year later by what was called the second phase of the debate. As we have seen, the first phase took the form of discussions and identified how the public felt about existing and future housing conditions. The second phase was intended to act as a means of correcting these feelings, and demonstrating everything the central authorities and architects had already done and were planning to do in order to improve housing conditions. It lasted from August to September 1961 and took the form of a series of exhibitions organised in Prague and regional towns and cities, at which proposals were presented for new standards for housing construction after 1963. At these *Nové bydlení* (New Housing) exhibitions, people had the opportunity to inspect a life-size model of a new apartment, while in Bratislava they could see examples of four and in Prague seven model apartments. In total, the exhibitions contained 42 new apartment projects, including modern fittings and furniture as well as plans for entire residential districts and amenities. They met with huge interest and were visited by over half a million people. They featured guided tours and discussions with architects. People's views of the plans were then evaluated by the ministry together with the Association of Architects on the basis of 35,000 completed questionnaires, entries in visitors' books, and the notes made by informers. Most people expressed their hope that building work would begin soon on the basis of the plans exhibited. Respondents were especially taken by the size and number of rooms in the new class of apartment, but wanted to increase the storage space and connect up the kitchen with the dining area. The improved model of a building core was surprisingly well received, with critical comments reserved for the size and shape of the bath and sink. The comments included frequent requests for expanded services, including milk and bread home deliveries and the location of food vending machines near the apartment blocks.²⁹

The exhibition format was very attractive, no doubt thanks to the artistic way it had been put together and the quality of exhibits on show. The exhibitions represented an impressive synthesis of installation skills, graphic design and large-format photography. The fact is that the presentation of architecture, the latest technology and modern lifestyles proved to be successful in the 1960s, even at world expos and foreign and domestic fairs and shows, which were very well attended.

Although the promotion of architectural work itself, modern housing trends, new types of prefab apartment blocks and plans for housing estates in the form of exhibitions appeared to herald long awaited improvements in standards of living, prospects did not look so bright in the materials of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. As early as 1961, the State Planning Commission had declared that the planned construction of T06–T08 B apartments in 1963–1965 could not be realised due to the lack of materials. There were not enough funds in the state budget for the new facilities, and the production of Formica and the quality of adhesives and sealants also left a lot to be desired.³⁰

29 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 4. aj. 17, zasedání 20. 11. 1961, bod 3: Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích druhé fáze diskuse o bydlení, fol. 34–67.

30 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-K 1945–1989, Komise pro řešení bytového problému 10/22, sv. 4. aj. 17, zasedání 20. 11. 1961, bod 4: Zpráva o stavu prací na zajišťování bytové výstavby podle nových typových podkladů od roku 1963 s návrhem usnesení politického byra ÚV KSČ, fol. 1–33 a 73–88.

Progressive types of prefab construction with higher housing standards required that the contractors switch immediately to a new “technical production base”, a plan rejected by almost all the ministries and especially the regional national committees, which claimed that this was unfeasible under the current economic, material and technical conditions.³¹ After all, even during the *Nové bydlení* exhibitions, as records never made public show, the organisers were unable to secure from the manufacturers a model of the new type of building core, because its proposed quality exceeded the possibilities of the companies. The State Planning Commission repeatedly objected to raising the standard of housing, as this would have raised the price of apartments to prohibitive levels and exceeded the economic possibilities specified in the 3rd five-year plan.

An objective survey, or the shaping of public opinion?

In the latter half of the 1950s, the opinions of “ordinary” people found their way onto the pages of magazines, where surveys or letters from readers revealed the fault lines of the period and the fractures in state socialism, especially the time lag between demand and supply, long waiting times for an apartment, the limited range of new apartment size, the unavailability of modern furniture, and the poor quality of amenities. An awareness of public opinion was increasingly necessary for the regime, since it revealed the “unhealthy” moods in society and people’s different needs and preferences. This then allowed the regime to devise a campaign downplaying these preferences, or meet the requirements in question and thus improve its image (e.g. by listening to people’s demand for the distribution of Western films in cinemas). Public opinion polls, as sociologist Dragoslav Slejška wrote in *Nová mysl* (New Thinking), the flagship journal of the Communist Party’s central bodies, among other things helped to assess the “ideological and educational” effects of the press, radio and television, and represented one of the “tools for the implementation of progressive changes in society”.³²

The party had been putting sociological surveys to such use since soon after [the takeover in] February 1948. Leaving aside a myriad of consumer questionnaires, sociologists had been commissioned by the central state authorities to survey public attitudes to sensitive issues, e.g. the employment of women, the collectivisation of agriculture, alcoholism, or the function of people’s judges and punishment meted out to “enemies of the Republic”.³³ The results of such surveys remained secret and were used by the party in order to improve the effectiveness of propaganda or for the targeted re-education of specific attitudes taken by certain groups of the population.

However, the situation in the 1960s was different, and the campaign for the completion of socialism, a rise in living standards and increased prosperity, did not fall on fertile ground. The inflexibility of companies, low production levels and the inability of the market to respond to changing demand was a huge problem. Even the realisation of a promising model of a comprehensively fitted out housing estate soon revealed the

31 To get an idea of what was involved, the Regional National Committees had asked that investment be increased by almost Kčs 100 million, and the total investment costs for the new base were Kčs 310 million! *Ibid.*, 73–88.

32 Dragoslav SLEJŠKA, “Proč výzkumy veřejného mínění”, *Nová mysl*, 1964, no. 6, 756–762.

33 See the documents available via the digital repository of the *Národní úložiště šedé literatury* (National Repository of Grey Literature): <http://invenio.nusl.cz/search?ln=cs&p=Ústav+pro+výzkum+veřejného+m%C3%ADnĚn%C3%AD&jrec=1&f=author> (accessed on 3 November 2021)

problems of a socialist economy. Right from the start, the civic amenities of an estate, a compulsory part of the planning stage within the framework of comprehensive residential construction, found itself up against a poor level of services and trade, a shortage of goods and problems in food supplies. What was new, however, was that more and more was being said and written about these “fractures in socialism”. The magazine *Domov* (Home) was founded in 1960, and in its very first issues printed a series of critical letters from readers. As in the national debate, people’s complaints related above all to the limited range of furniture and other fittings available on the market, as well as deeper, structural problems, especially the level of the services provided. One reader wrote:

The services on offer – cleaning and laundrette with delivery – are available during working hours, as are apartment repair services and shopping. Some types of meat are only sold in the morning. Nurseries and crèches are far apart. All in all, an employed woman does not get much out of the services on offer, and housework remains kind of second shift for her...³⁴

The reader ends her letter by writing that there is still a long way to go before a “liberated household” is achieved in which a woman has time for a well deserved rest and for working to improve her qualifications.³⁵

It is interesting to compare the above with the words of the economist Radoslav Selucký, who in a previous issue had written:

We might define services as a tool by which the working person in a socialist society is able to realise and consume with minimum loss of time the level of material and cultural well-being achieved.³⁶

To this Selucký adds that, unless women make use of the mass services (laundrettes, canteens), their “time pool” is squandered along with their labour and intellectual potential, thus endangering their productivity. So what lesson should be learned?

This means nothing less than scientifically influencing the structure of consumption, determining its optimal form and proportions, and drawing up an integrated, long-term plan for the development of living standards (which will include a concept for the development of services).³⁷

He adds that the new form of the housing estate already shows signs of fulfilling this scientific intent, since the apartments are designed as “an organic part of perfect public services”.³⁸ However, the residents of the estates were to wait in vain for these perfect services for decades. Not to mention the fact that by the early 1970s society had turned away from the concept of public services and was withdrawing into the privacy of its own homes.

34 “Dopisy čtenářů” (Květa Kobrová, Praha–Střešovice), *Domov*, vol. II, 1961, no. 1, 70.

35 *Ibid.*, 70.

36 Radoslav SELUCKÝ, “Hospodaření časem a služby”, *Domov*, vol. I, 1960, no. 5, 3.

37 *Ibid.*, 4.

38 *Ibid.*, 4.

Many scientific studies in the 1960s assumed that, thanks to services and the time saved, people would devote more time to their own education and skills, which would in turn lead to increased productivity at work and thence to a higher standard of living. However, surveys from the 1970s showed just how mistaken were both this assumption and ideas regarding the possibilities of scientific prediction and control over all aspects of human life and behaviour.

Conclusion

The national debate was one of the communication channels between the general public, the state and experts in the sphere of housing. The need for feedback was necessitated in particular by an official change in the housing policy and the organisation of housing construction, namely, the transition to cooperative and company apartment construction. Interest in public opinion and systematically undertaken sociological research into the housing saturation and future development of needs was logical at the end of the 1950s for several reasons. The first was ideological, or as the case may be, pragmatic. In the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, the party used social research as a means of achieving the sought after social revolution. In addition, statistical data along with demographic and sociological forecasts allowed the authorities to plan construction work more effectively, refine their technical and economic indicators, and to translate people's needs into the desired universal architectural and construction system.

Architects were motivated to use sociological data for other reasons. They wanted to base planned developments not only on progressive technology and construction principles, but also on the opinions of doctors, social scientists and the residents of apartments themselves. Through research and debates they acquired valuable information regarding the way of life in Socialist Realist estates (categories T12–T20) and in the first prefabricated blocks categories G40 and G57. This showed them to what extent these apartment categories met the needs of ordinary people and whether they were functioning as their designers had intended. Subsequent sociometric studies of the apartments made possible an understanding of the influence of layout and ways of life in minute detail, including different requirements for the utilisation of kitchen, balcony and storage space. However, architects and sociologists held different views regarding the use of the data thus acquired and the extent to which it could be applied across the board. Architects saw their role as being determinative, to guide and instruct people as to how they should live correctly, while sociologists were more interested in the lived experience of respondents and in identifying and understanding relationships between the various findings. This meant that the real outcome of the debate and the associated events was that the state increased the standard of housing across the board, focused on the construction of larger apartments (predominantly 3+1 apartments), and transferred responsibility for the provision of housing to building cooperatives and individuals. Thanks to the public space provided and the valuable analytical work carried out, architects, professionals and expert institutions then acquired more of a say in the decision-making process and more social capital.

I am of the opinion that what was at the very least a conscious effort to raise the standard of living of all the people involved resulted in a degree of tension between the central authorities, the general public, architects and researchers, and the construction industry. Individual bodies invoked common goals and expectations during their dialogues, but kept rubbing up against the inflexibility and low efficiency of the tools selected to achieve these objectives.