

Housing Typologies and Urban Environment

Large housing settlements consist of self-mirroring urban patterns; they are composed of a repetition of the same building, constructed of the same elements. This symphony of panels and slabs forms the endless carpet of the socialist large housing estate.

What meaning do the grid, the repetition, and the seriality have for the housing itself and the lives that are lived within them? How should the fabric of the large housing estates be transformed, adopting them to the new functional and technical needs without losing their specific character? Can the estates, on the basis of their standardization, serial production, and rationalization, also play an exemplary role for future new residential construction projects?

Today, the variety and size of dwellings in these settlements do not meet modern standards, and the layout of the neighborhoods does not fit people's wishes for privacy and their little interest in shared facilities. If they are not adapted, they cannot, by and large, compete successfully on the market.

How can buildings be transformed, removed, or added in order to meet all the needs of different lifestyles? Prefabricated housing settlements were often discussed as experimental living areas; how can they now become pilot projects for innovative housing types for the future? Which models and new forms of housing can make the settlements more flexible? How are different user groups—those who can enrich the settlements and benefit from the good supply and short distances—addressed?

The other characteristic feature and great asset of the settlements are their open spaces—but these are a problem at the same time, since huge territories of greenery are often abandoned or misused. To ensure that the housing estates are suited for the next generation, the large green areas can play a crucial role in making the estates attractive for different types of users, such as families and senior citizens, who profit from easy access for leisure and recreation. What are the requirements of open spaces, and how should they complement the housing? How can private open spaces allocated to individual dwellings be created without fragmenting the spaciousness of the existing open spaces?

This chapter discusses the aesthetics of mass housing, the importance of public space, and the requirements for sustainable renewal.

Philipp Meuser, German architect and publisher, addresses a relevant topic that has been paid little attention in research thus far—the huge variety of mass housing that was realized between 1955 and 1991 with more than 700 series types. The article looks at different cities, from Moscow to Tashkent, presenting one of the greatest building programs of postwar modernism. In addition to classifying mass housing construction in the architectural-historical context of Soviet modernism, he presents a new approach of classifying and evaluating the specific typology of mass housing.

The contribution by Daniel Baldwin Hess of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo, Tiit Tammaru of the University of Tartu and Maarten van Ham, of the University of St Andrews reviews the formation and socio-spatial trajectories of large housing estates in Europe, casting a detailed eye on socialist-era housing in the Baltic countries. Their article discusses various policies and planning initiatives that have been implemented to prevent the social degradation of housing estates, and these are reviewed along with policy measures that have been used to address challenges in housing estates throughout Europe. The post-World War II predilection for “experimental living” in planned housing can be translated to contemporary interest in sustainable housing types for the future.

Daria Volkova, doctoral candidate at the Institute for European Urban Studies at Bauhaus University Weimar, explores the way to research mass housing through the issue of sustaining materiality. The report focuses on the different institutional actors at the local and national levels that are engaged with sustaining mass housing, each of them having different perspectives and different abilities to influence materiality. Comparing Russia and Germany, this contribution highlights the main methodological and institutional aspects through which the ecology of materiality can be explored and reveals the complexity of maintenance resulting from different property types, ownership structures, and institutional settings as well as stemming from public discourse.

Gavril Malyshev and his co-authors present experiences made by the firm MLA+ of St. Petersburg with new mechanisms and tools for the redevelopment of existing assets. MLA+ is an architectural firm whose vision is that densification—the placement of new objects within already built-up territories—and spatial structuring of such territories can generate the financial resources required for housing renewal. The projects by MLA+ show how new construction

can improve the quality of the existing environment. Furthermore, their report points out the new policies that are needed to enable the local community to become the main actor in the rehabilitation process by providing it with both financial and institutional resources.

