

UPPER SILESIA TYPICAL COLLECTIVE HOUSING SETTLEMENTS AND THEIR SENSITIVITY TO POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the causes of the emergence of typical collective housing patterns and the process of adjustment to altering requirements evoked by changes of a global nature: migrations in search for work, relocations and resettlements in the aftermath of World War Two and the demarcation of new borders. The four basic periods of the emergence of typical houses and multi-family estates are distinguished. Each of them has created characteristic types of housing settlements. The described housing patterns and models have been perceived in diverse ways. The living conditions have been subject of alterations caused by political and economic changes, changes in the life cycles of the inhabiting generations, metropolis formation processes occurring in the Silesian conurbation. The administrative bodies and communities inhabiting the settlements react differently to variable demographic phenomena and respond in a various manner to the requirements that the ageing of society imposed on buildings. The analysis leads to the conclusions useful in modernization of the buildings as such, as well as of their urban surroundings.

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia przyczyny powstawania charakterystycznych wzorów budownictwa mieszkaniowego zbiorowego na Górnym Śląsku oraz procesy dostosowawcze do zmieniających się wymagań pojawiających się pod wpływem zmian o charakterze globalnym: migracje za pracą, przesiedlenia spowodowane II wojną światową i wywołane zmianami granic wschodnich kraju. Można wyróżnić cztery podstawowe okresy powstawania charakterystycznych typów domów i osiedli wielorodzinnych. Każdy z tych okresów wykształcił charakterystyczny typ siedlisk. Omówione wzory budownictwa mieszkaniowego, w swojej historii rozwoju, były i są różnie postrzegane. Warunki mieszkaniowe w budynkach ulegały przemianom w zależności od zmieniających się sił politycznych i ekonomicznych oraz od różnych potrzeb kolejnych, zamieszkujących pokoleń. Administracje i społeczności zamieszkałe w tych osiedlach w różny sposób reagują na zmienne zjawiska demograficzne oraz w różny sposób radzą sobie z wymaganiami jakie stawia budynom starzenie się społeczeństw. Analiza tych wszystkich wymienionych przypadków pozwala wyciągnąć wnioski do modernizacji samych budynków jak i ich urbanistycznego, zróżnicowanego otoczenia.

Keywords: Housing patterns; Building quality; Upper Silesia housing settlements.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global changes that affect housing architecture in Upper Silesia include:

- Changes caused by migrations in search for job markets – increased demand for flats in the times of intensive migrations, often at the cost of the quality of housing;
- Changes in the inhabitants' (users') expectations concerning housing standards – higher requirements set for housing facilities;
- Changes in the ownership structure of housing as an outcome of political changes – the transition from capitalism (before World War Two) to socialism, and, conversely (after the recent political transformations), different approach towards private and state property;
- Economic changes – higher level of affluence is reflected in the quality of housing architecture.

The history of collective housing in Upper Silesia dates back to the early 19th century being, first and foremost, a response to the development of industry in this region and workers' migrations before World War One, World War Two and the ensuing period. There are four main phases of the emergence of typical collective housing and multi-family settlements in the previous century. They result from mass demand for flats for workers employed in heavy industry (coal mining, iron and steel) especially at the turn of the 19th / 20th century, for people resettled from Poland's lost eastern territories and due to borderline changes after World War Two, for people migrating in search for employment during the Polish People's Republic times, as well as after the 1990s political and economic transformations when some social groups enriched in the course of the economic transition looked for better standard of living and higher social status in gated communities.

2. PERIODS OF THE EMERGENCE OF TYPICAL HOUSES AND MULTI-FAMILY ESTATES

2.1. The pre-war developing industry period settlements

The housing settlements erected in response to the development of industry in Upper Silesia in the 19th and 20th centuries still exert an impact on the look and character of streets, districts or even whole towns. To secure qualified labour, Upper Silesian employers had to provide a housing base. Accordingly, in the vicinity of employers' establishments- especially coal mines and steel works – so called: “patronage housing settlements” were erected (by the employers' establishments) with unified outlays and standard, at first in the form of typical “multi-family houses” (Załęże, and Wełnowiec in Katowice, settlements in Zabrze, Bytom and Gliwice), built without any service infrastructure; and, later – beautifully designed settlements such as: Murcki, Giszowiec and Nikoszowiec. Nikiszowiec is a compact settlement resembling a small town, whereas Giszowiec reflects the concept of the Garden City, being a complex of semi-detached or detached houses with full services infrastructure [1]. Many housing settlements erected at that time were financed by industrial establishments, solely for their employees, i.e. working in a given coal mine or steel factory, and being obliged to behave in accordance with the rules and regulations of a given settlement. Thus, the emerging housing estates or even entire districts had

identical multi-family 2 or 3 storey brick houses, with timber floors and roof structure, covered by gable roofs made of ceramic tiles, with basements and cellars. Irrespective of the urban layout or the type of architecture- modest or more decorative – the flats usually consisted of two or three bedrooms and a kitchen with a pantry. Sanitary facilities were initially located in separate buildings in the same yard, whereas sinks with cold running water in shared corridors. Later solutions provided modest bathrooms or flush toilets. Each flats had its allotted utility room in the form of a cubby-hole or coal hole located in the yard. A good example of such settlement is Zatorze estate in Gliwice (Fig. 1) analyzed under the framework of PolSenior project [2], consisting of 3 urban quarters and 3-storey houses with typical cubby-holes located in the yard. It contains 300 flats with 3-bedrooms, with no central heating, no bathrooms and toilets accessible from the balconies. Such low standard of living still functions to date. Many inhabitants of this collective settlement have low incomes and poor education. They abide there, because they cannot afford better housing. For many years the houses have been exposed to negative environmental impacts from the industry and their location within the industrial protection zones, which although designated at later times resulted in a ban on building new housing facilities, as well as on planning future resettlements and other functions in land and urban development plans. After World War Two housing settlements built by specific employers remained the property of nationalized, yet Polish parent enterprises, becoming a part of their housing resources still occupied by the employees. However, the owners did not invest in the houses, or modernized them, limiting their activities only to most essential repairs and small redecoration works. The housing complexes did not keep up with the new standards. The majority of these housing resources had flats of very small square feet area and their location at the boundary of industrial zones meant limited access to recreational and green areas. Nowadays most of these housing complexes are not only technically worn and torn, but also devastated by unapproved reconstructions, modernizations and demolitions, due to negligence and misuse by the inhabitants. A similar situation may be observed in the collective housing settlement in Gliwice subjected to the analysis under PolSenior project [2], where the inhabitants show a lot of initiative in the reconstruction and adjustment of the flats to their particular needs. However, these processes have a spontaneous and uncontrolled nature and generally exert a nega-



Figure 1.
Patronage housing settlement in Gliwice, erected in 1927

tive impact on sustaining the historical nature of the settlement.

After the political and economic transformations in Poland, the fate of multi-family patronage estates got even worse. For economic reasons, employers' establishments started to dispose of their non-commercial property, including the social and housing resources occupied by their employees, which should have been maintained and renovated, despite the fact that the incomes from them were incompatible with the outlays [3]. Yet, according to the binding laws and regulations at that time, the pre-emptive right for the purchase of the flats was vested in their tenants, which, in case of the 19th century settlements were people of low incomes, poor education level, big and extended families the elderly, solitary, retired ex-workers of a given industrial establishment. Fearing the loss of housing, they often made a decision to purchase their flats, especially that, after some allowances, they were offered at available prices. However, they did not realize that taking over the flat for ownership also involved responsibilities of financial outlays for the renovation of the parts constituting joint use of old, decrepit buildings, such as: partially rotten timber roof structure, covered with ceramic bricks; wide façade surfaces with coming off plasters, cornices and other decorative elements that, in view of their heritage importance, should be preserved or reconstructed. Likewise, big and littered courtyards that should be rearranged from scratch and then maintained in a proper condition. The inhabitants and co-

owners of the buildings cannot afford such investments, so the settlements keep falling into ruin, although they constitute valuable heritage in view of their location, history or aesthetic and architectural form. Also, arbitrary attempts at dealing with repairs and modernizations of flats, uncontrolled walling off balconies, replacing the original window frames with different forms chosen on flat-to flat basis, adapting cubby/coal holes for garages, and arranging bathrooms, individual heating systems, etc. do not improve the overall quality of the estate.

The condition of the patronage settlements consisting of small houses is different [4]. Upon obtaining the property title, former tenants have taken care of the houses, carried out extension works or adjusted them to new standards. The changes in the ownership structure seem to be very advantageous for detached and semi-detached houses, although they often contribute to the loss of the original historical look of the settlements, because the extension and reconstruction works performed in old houses are not subjected to strict control.

A problem arises: how to save historical collective housing settlements which, although constituting an important element of local traditions and culture, do not comply with the civilization requirements set forth for modern housing. Studies and analyses conducted in the former patronage settlements indicate many maladjustments of the buildings to their inhabitants' needs. In view of their structure, construction technology and technical condition any moderniza-



Figure 2.
Housing estate of social-realism aesthetics, Tychy, erected in 1950s

tion works are very expensive. However, the competitive edge of such settlements is their location – often in downtown areas – their urban and architectural qualities, not to mention their social capital. The old houses are usually inhabited by the people who worked or are still working at the same employer’s establishment and have occupied the same flat or house for many years, know their neighbours and register all changes in their surroundings. The inhabitants do not assess their housing as critically as experts. The main reason for some neglects are financial, but also the disappearing sense of identity, of identification with the place of living and responsibility for it. The areas are not fenced, and remain generally accessible, without clearly defined semi-public or semi-private zones so typical of their early years of existence. The main problem is not too small size of flats that does not comply with European standards, but the inhabitants’ helplessness and no prospects for better solutions: “No, never, I have been living here for 50 years, since 1960. I have no choice. Where else could I go?” (an 82-year old woman interviewed in an estate in Gliwice) [2]. Unlike other European countries where such collective housing estates are renovated and brought to excellent quality standard, Poland has not any consistent state policy concerning such type of cultural heritage.

2.2. The post-war migration period settlements

Another model of collective housing in Poland are housing estates constructed in the 1950s and reflecting Social Realism aesthetics. In a same way they continue the tradition of replicating the “multi-family house” model, yet with good urban planning, complete installations, decent size of flats (Old Tychy, Koszutka estate in Katowice). In response to the Post-War demand for flats and migrations from rural areas to cities, whole districts of 4 or 5-storey multi-family blocks of flats were erected in the traditional technology, i.e. in brick but with ferro-concrete floors, with basements or cellars, utility attics, laundry and drying rooms shared by the inhabitants. Sometimes, the buildings constructed at that time held cellar shelters with emergency exits to the yard of the quarter. The flats had variable size: from one-bedroom studios to three-bedroom ones, each equipped with a furnished bathroom, separated kitchen and balcony or loggia. Some flats had built-in cabinets or closets, fitted kitchen furniture and floors covered with woodblocks [5].

The buildings constructed at that time were financed by the state budget and, in the majority of cases, owned by local community administration. The flats were leased and allocated by Municipal Communal Authorities. According to the Polish law, the flat may be purchased from the state/local authority by its inhabitants, therefore, with the passage of time, most of the flats were transferred for ownership and the

owners formed their associations, with the local authorities (i.e. local commune holding some stock and the owners/physical persons holding the rest). As in case of the patronage estates, the co-owners do not always realize the necessity of investing in the renovation of the whole building, but, if the facility is still under the administration of the local authorities, the buildings are maintained in good condition. Step by step, internal installations are revamped, staircases, roof covers and facades renovated. Many of the buildings have already undergone or are in the course of undergoing thermal-insulation of their exterior walls, drying and sealing the cellar walls. Thanks to the funds provided by the local authorities, access roads and parking lots, as well as playgrounds for children are modernized.

The discussed buildings have good location – often in the vicinity of city centers – good urban layout – in line with other street settlements they create internal courtyards that offer semi-public space to be used for parking lots, utility squares and recreation. The estates have some trees that provide protection against excess sunlight, streets, pavements and recreation areas for children and the elderly. As the buildings are not very tall (not more than 5-storeys) the estates do not seem overcrowded, although there is already a shortage of parking places, because the design did not provide them. The flats built in the 1950s are commodities highly valued on the real estate market due to good location, a lot of green, an impression of coziness that evoke the feeling of privacy and the spatial qualities of the flats- proper height, quite big and well laid out rooms, good furnishing in installations, traditional construction materials such as brick and timber.

2.3. The new industry development period settlements

In the third phase of the collective housing boom in Poland the erected estates reflect Le Corbusier's urban aesthetics based on the "Marseille Unit" [6]. The housing complexes are dense, often produced in the slab technology. Although equipped with full technical infrastructure, including central heating and hot running water, lifts, rubbish chutes, etc., the flats were designed on the grounds of a very poor standard as to their height and space floor area [7]. Thus, the flats offer a very low standard of living, with tiny and blind kitchens, or very narrow kitchens accessible from living rooms. Moreover, environmental stress evokes the feeling of being overwhelmed by the quantity of flats in the surroundings – dozens or

scores of dozens on each floor. The buildings were often equipped with shared functional facilities located on the ground floor or in the cellars, yet, after several years this solution turned out to be impractical. Baby carriage and bicycle stores, laundry and drying rooms which were originally designed as shared functional zones were adapted for commercial or other facilities for rent.

In view of many people inhabiting a relatively small area, the estates also offered accessory functional facilities such as: shops, service outlets, outpatients' clinics and surgeries, kindergartens, primary schools. The zones around the buildings were generally accessible and covered by greenery and trees, incorporating recreational space for children and the youth – sports grounds, football pitches, bicycle tracks.

The origin of the ownership structure of the estates is different from those constructed before, as they are a product of cooperative building, meaning that in order to acquire a flat potential inhabitants had to become members of a given cooperative and to make some financial contribution. The political and economic transformations have also made their mark on the ownership structure and, despite the fact that part of the flats have been purchased by their owners, the cooperative is still responsible for managing the buildings and their surroundings. Accordingly, the buildings are duly administered and maintained. The cooperative, acting as an entrepreneur and a legal person has more assets and financial means for repairs and modernizations, thanks to which the buildings are repaired on current bases, the surroundings are lightened and properly managed – with new parking places and playgrounds for children.

Nonetheless, one of the problems of the estates constructed in the 1970s is that their grand scale – high intensity of buildings evokes in their inhabitants a feeling of a loss of privacy [8]. The lack of control over the surroundings where hundreds of people and vehicles come and go, does not contribute to creating a sense of familiarity and homeliness of place. In such huge habitation zone people have no chance of getting to know one another and of creating close-to-home zones, as well as a sense of natural supervision. They do not recognize the inhabitant from the intruder. The inhabitants' attention is mainly focused on their flats, thus there are several spatial zones which are neither used for particular functions, nor identified with, and often which become crime generating zones.



Figure 3.
Slab technology houses in Tychy and Gliwice, erected in 1970s

All the above reasons, coupled with the construction technology which is hard, unfriendly and aesthetically poor concrete – have contributed to the perception of slab housing estates as substandard habitation space from which one should run away if possible. However, studies show that the estates, so severely judged by architects, are much better assessed by their inhabitants, who focus their opinions on the social qualities rather than on the features of the built environment [2]. Because of full technical infrastructure and small sizes of flats, the estates provide good place of living for the following groups of people: the elderly, the solitary, singles, workaholics, students. Convenient access to transport connections, the vicinity of the city centre with its administrative, cultural and services units, or, even, a view from the window on a busy street or square, especially from higher floors, constitute the strengths of this type of housing. Seemingly poor quality of architecture and environmental stress caused by the congestion of buildings are compensated by other, objective factors. A good example is provided by the Super-Unit block of flats in Katowice. Situated in the very centre of a voivodeship city, this 15-storey building is surrounded by urban transportation routes, as well as by office and service facilities. The building does not really comply with the binding standards for housing, especially as far as the location is concerned, yet this location is its biggest attribute [9]. The availability of transport, the vicinity of the city centre and all its administrative, cultural and service functions, even a

view on the streets from the upper floors, are all attractive to some groups of users. This is substantiated by a reply of one of the respondents – an 83-year old woman who lives in the Super-Unit: “Have you ever considered moving out? – No, I have never considered that, because I like the place. My close friend lives nearby, I have easy access to a tram, a bus, my family doctor. The city centre, the market square are close, it’s a good habitation place, except for the noise” [2].

2.4. Contemporary housing settlements

The fourth and most recent phase of collective housing settlements are so called: “developers” and “gated” houses, offering high technical standard, proper spatial and functional quality of flats, but devoid of basic urban infrastructure. They emerged in response to the demand for the need of running away from city centers and from slab tower blocks to find space that offers a sense of comfort, privacy and safety. Furthermore, such new estates provide clean, spacious semi-public spaces, modern finishing materials, new technology equipment, opportunity of free creation of the interiors at the customer’s wish. Each flat has its own assigned parking place, which reduces possible conflict areas. The zone is fenced, secured, guarded and monitored. Despite high prices, the flats and houses sell well on the Polish real estate market as they seem to be an alternative for never ending repairs and modernizations of older housing facilities.



Figure 4.
Gated settlement in Gliwice, erected in 2009.

Yet, the estates built by developers have a number of drawbacks, mainly for economic reasons. The first limitation is their location. Sometimes they are built in accidentally chosen urban or suburban areas, not previously considered for housing developments – at big crossroads, on brown fields, city peripheries, etc. The economic aspect is decisive – as it is this particular site that a given developer managed to purchase at low price. The outcome is, a small but relatively well designed and well- finished housing estate, with no connection to the city transport system, far away from the centre, in the vicinity of disadvantageous functional zones (petrol stations, industrial establishments wastelands). Another limitation is the determination at maximizing the use of land, including parking and maneuver spaces, living little, or even no space for the arrangement of green or recreation zones. Even the width of access roads and parking lots is limited to minimal dimensions, to maximize profits from the investments. The layouts do not provide any spatial reserve for leisure, recreation, or sport facilities. Developers do not consider the future needs of the inhabitants, such as: nurseries, kindergartens, grocery stores. Even if there is a grocery shop nearby, it offers higher prices, and, in the absence of the store, there are no binding legal regulations that oblige developers to secure space for supporting services.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The discussed various types of collective housing settlements constructed in particular periods of time show different sensitivity to global changes. It may be stated that this sensitivity – especially as far as migration processes are concerned – has often been a reason of their emergence, as proved by the analyzed collective housing estates. The sensitivity of the buildings to further global changes, such as: different lifestyles, new needs and new civilization requirements, improved standard of living, adaptation capacities of housing, depend, first and foremost, on the affluence of their inhabitants and the efficiency of the authorities that manage the buildings. Because of constant insufficiency of flats and the market demand for them in Upper Silesia, the problems involved in demolishing housing resources in the face of their desertion by the inhabitants has not been experienced so far. The thoroughgoing analysis of the above mentioned cases are very important and necessary to draw the conclusions useful in modernization of the buildings as such, as well as of their dissimilar urban surroundings:

- the majority of the existing housing tissue is not adjusted to the needs of the elderly and disabled – no elevators, ramps, too high thresholds in apartments, bathrooms and kitchens not giving opportunities to be adapted for people using a wheelchair – nevertheless the inhabitants do their best to adapt the flats to their special needs and assess

their housing much better than the experts do [2], adaptation of historical buildings and flats to modern European demands and physical disabilities of inhabitants is quite impossible due to economic and technical reasons and often presents bad impact to the overview of the old buildings and old urban complexes; the models of new housing should be developed in order to meet the future needs of both elderly and younger people,

- due to the dispersion of forms of property in Poland (private owners associations, cooperatives', municipal, and mixed types) the management of the housing is difficult; there is a demand for new regulations to shorten the way of taking decisions about improvements and refurbishments of the old buildings.

The results make it also possible to draw conclusions for the formation of the social politics concerning restoration, energy policy improvement of those housing estates. The analyses may also contribute to the creation of the laws regulating the processes of flat provision in a new demographic reality (ageing of the society, changes in family structure) in the market dominated by developers who, so far, have not been interested in utilizing the conclusions from research into current social needs.

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