

# Multifamily Housing Complexes in Slovenia

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Multifamily housing complexes were built as collective high density residential neighborhoods as a solution to the post-Second World War (post-WW2) housing needs of people all over Europe. Popularly referred to as large-scale housing estates, they have been often seen and described as deprived residential neighborhoods that house mostly low-income households, as areas of concentration of ethnic minorities and, in many cases, also as neighborhoods with above average unemployment rates and social exclusion.

Keywords: large-scale housing estates ; multifamily housing ; post-socialist transformation ; housing policy ; Slovenia

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## 1. Introduction

The incentives and reasons for the creation of multifamily housing complexes were diverse. Five important factors that together influenced their development, especially in the first two decades after WW2 <sup>[1][2]</sup>, can be highlighted; namely, the need to resolve and alleviate the demand for housing which resulted from war damage; poor housing conditions and population growth; the greater role of the state in providing housing, especially in financing its construction; a modernist view of what was considered good residential architecture/residential environment and political support for mass housing complexes, largely provided by the state and, occasionally, also by the private sector.

While post-WW2 large housing estates in Europe have some similar physical characteristics, there are several aspects that are especially characteristic of those of Central and East European countries (CEE). First and foremost, their development, in the latter, was grounded on a (Communist) political doctrine that sought to guarantee equality of all citizens in all spheres of life, including housing provision. Towards this aim, state authorities designed and implemented elaborate processes of access (waiting lists) which were intended to ensure that housing was allocated in an orderly and just manner. Secondly, post-WW2 large housing estates of CEE countries were, for decades, seen as modern, high-quality housing, suitable for providing accommodation for all sections of the population, i.e., low-, middle- and high-income groups. As such, these were socially inclusive residential neighborhoods which, initially, displayed no form of segregation due to class or income. Furthermore, CEE large housing estates played a different role on the housing market as compared to that played by their counterparts elsewhere. They dominated the entire rental housing market and the production of rental housing, and its allocation was fully controlled by the state <sup>[2]</sup>.

The problems of post-WW2 multifamily housing neighborhoods, generally, were first highlighted by sociologists, who started to raise questions about the quality of life in large housing estates. Harsh criticism of such forms of housing solutions gradually forced the politicians and planners in western Europe to reconsider the suitability of mass housing provision in large housing estates. Later, this led to the beginning of the process of renewal and regeneration of large housing estates in Western European countries. Various scholars have, over the years, conducted detailed analyses of the problems of post-WW2 housing estates. While some <sup>[3]</sup> discuss demolition as a suitable solution in extreme cases, many have attempted to provide proposals of potential approaches and a variety of recommendations for improvement have emerged. For example, the study by Dimitrovska Andrews and Sendi <sup>[4]</sup> focused on the design and development of a methodology for the regeneration of large housing estates. They define the key stages which the renewal process should follow (situation analysis, determination of renewal goals, designing of renewal programs, implementation and evaluation of the impact of renewal activities). Power <sup>[5]</sup> (p. 161) proposes that approaches which treat large housing estates as "live communities rather than inanimate monoliths" are likely to be more successful in stabilizing conditions in marginal residential neighborhoods. Others <sup>[6][7][8]</sup> stress the importance of appropriate neighborhood governance and put emphasis on the efficient organization and management of regeneration programs. Similarly, Warchalska-Troll <sup>[9]</sup> highlights the efficiency and speed of implementation of rehabilitation programs as key factors for the success of the renewal actions. And while Trumbull <sup>[10]</sup> explores the viability of the collaborative planning model in the context of the regeneration of post-WW2 housing estates, there is a consensus among numerous authors <sup>[2][11][12][13][14][15][16]</sup> who foreground a participatory approach to solving the problems of post-WW2 large-scale housing estates. It is commonly

agreed by them that programs for the regeneration of large housing estates can be successfully implemented only on the condition that the residents are mobilized and actively involved from the beginning and throughout the process of their development.

The typical negative aspects of large housing estates include physical and ecological problems as well as economic, housing standards, social issues, and other similar problems <sup>[17]</sup>. The physical and environmental problems relate to the monotonous appearance of residential buildings in large housing estates, intrusion into green zones, and the use of hazardous pollutants (e.g., asbestos) and low-cost, unsustainable building materials. Economic (financial) problems are associated with high maintenance costs resulting from the use of less sustainable building materials and the premature deterioration of building parts (e.g., facades, roof structures) after only a short time <sup>[18]</sup>. The housing standards problems relate primarily to the inadequate living space standards which create overcrowding. Social problems are usually associated with the high concentration of certain minority groups and economically disadvantaged households <sup>[13]</sup>.

It is worth noting here that while the implementation of the various programs of the regeneration of large-scale housing estates started in the 1970s in Western European countries (where these account for just 3–7 percent of the total housing stock), the regeneration of post-WW2 mass housing complexes was embarked on much later in CEE countries, after the socialist political system was abandoned at the beginning of the 1990s. This type of housing generally represents 20–40 percent of total housing stock in CEE countries, where it has also been found to be of a comparatively poorer quality <sup>[13]</sup>. And yet according to Gorczyca et al. <sup>[7]</sup>, some of the countries in the region are yet to implement any serious large housing estate refurbishment measures.

As the bulk of the literature has mainly concentrated on the analysis of the situations and problems of post-WW2 estates, there is a lack of comparative analyses examining their merits or shortcomings as compared to the multifamily housing types that have been designed and developed after the transition to a market economy system. Szafránska's <sup>[19]</sup> study is a rare example of such an analysis. This paper attempts to contribute to filling this knowledge gap in the current literature. Using Slovenia as a case study, it begins with a comprehensive review of the rise and development of post-WW2 housing estates. It is important to note here that Slovenia was, during that time, one of the constitutive republics of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This therefore means that the beginnings of post-WW2 large housing estates in Slovenia are rooted in the political and economic circumstances that prevailed in Yugoslavia at the time.

## **2. The Evolution of Multifamily Housing: Post-Second World War Large Housing Estates versus Post-Socialist Multifamily Housing Types in Slovenia**

The construction of large residential complexes with the use of prefabricated building elements to solve the housing needs of the labor force is, undoubtedly, one of the most important characteristic features of post-WW2 development in Slovenia. Through the application of the principles of the CIAM movement in the designing of mass housing estates characterized by the strict functional segregation of residential areas and settling residents in high-rise housing blocks surrounded by expansive green spaces was seen as a symbol of modernity that would result in the improvement of citizens' housing conditions. Departing from a situation of ruin caused by the War and a critical shortage of adequate housing, the construction of mass housing complexes did indeed initially result in the improvement of living conditions. However, several weaknesses of post-WW2 large housing estates soon began to be observed.

First, as was noted by Kristiánová <sup>[20]</sup> the concept of large-scale socialist housing estates located in broad green open spaces also had failings and shortcomings. Already by the end of the 1950s, urban sociologists started to voice their criticisms of such housing solutions. Jacobs <sup>[21]</sup> for example, described them as settlements with a sterile atmosphere, rigid aesthetics and inflexible monofunctionality, repulsive to the residents and inappropriate for establishing a local community. Musterd <sup>[22]</sup> appears to somehow confirm this criticism with the argument that large housing estates offer only a modest effect on social opportunities within the neighborhood. Indeed, other studies <sup>[23]</sup> found that a large majority of people living in large housing estates in Slovenia would prefer to live in their own house if they had that opportunity. A study by Musterd and van Kempen <sup>[24]</sup> also revealed that a large share of residents of large housing estates actually aspire to leave these residential neighborhoods as soon as they can. These shortcomings of the post-WW2 housing estates have been further accentuated with the emergence of new types of post-socialist multifamily housing types, as the comparative analysis below demonstrates.

The comparative analysis of post-WW2 and post-socialist mass housing typologies focuses on the key aspects of each of the housing typologies that have been discussed above. These are: political ideology, neighborhood planning system, the

architectural design of residential buildings, construction methods, financing, resident composition, quality of housing and housing standards (as summarized in **Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Summary of the key characteristics of post-WW2 and post-socialist mass housing typologies.

	<b>Post-WW2</b>	<b>Post-Socialist</b>
<b>Political ideology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- housing for all—housing a right to be guaranteed by the state</li> <li>- housing provision a prerequisite for industrial development</li> <li>- egalitarianism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enabling principle—housing problem to be solved by individuals on their own</li> <li>- state support provided only for those that cannot cater for themselves</li> <li>- free market, free choice</li> </ul>
<b>Neighborhood planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CIAM model—location of mass housing buildings in expansive green areas</li> <li>- greenfield land use</li> <li>- dispersed development at urban fringes</li> <li>- provision of basic social and commercial services within the neighborhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- concentration/densification to achieve maximum use of available land in built-up areas</li> <li>- infill development</li> <li>- brownfield land use within existing urban fabric</li> <li>- greenery and social service provision no longer a requirement</li> </ul>
<b>Quality of construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- state directed housing construction</li> <li>- monopolistic state-owned construction companies</li> <li>- industrialized construction techniques with prefabricated elements</li> <li>- cheaper/poor quality building materials</li> <li>- low energy efficiency of residential buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free market production</li> <li>- competitive housing construction companies</li> <li>- in situ construction methods</li> <li>- diversity of housing types</li> <li>- better quality building materials</li> <li>- higher energy efficiency in compliance with prescribed building standards</li> </ul>
<b>Quality of architectural design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- monotonous architectural design</li> <li>- high-rise, high-density buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more attractive architectural designs</li> <li>- more attractive building designs</li> <li>- low-rise, low-density buildings</li> </ul>
<b>Housing standard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- generally low</li> <li>- restricted dwelling sizes</li> <li>- minimum usable space</li> <li>- over crowdedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- comparatively higher</li> <li>- larger dwellings</li> <li>- more floor space per person</li> </ul>

It has been shown that post-WW2 large housing estates were planned and developed on the basis of a political doctrine which sought to provide housing for all citizens. The most important goal was to ensure that people of working age had a job and an apartment, no matter the quality. Notwithstanding the merits of the CIAM models of planning of mass housing

neighborhoods, a variety of problems soon emerged, and the critical views aired, by urban sociologists especially, prompted policy makers to devise and implement measures for their rehabilitation in an attempt to prevent them from becoming undesirable.

In terms of quality, the key difference established by the comparative analysis between the post-WW2 and post-Communist mass housing neighborhoods is that the latter are relatively smaller, both in terms of built-up space and density of construction. It is also common to find new multi-family housing types built as freestanding, detached buildings that are not part of a specifically planned and connected system of residential buildings. All this means that the term "large housing estate" as was previously used to describe post-WW2 collective housing neighborhoods has also undergone major transformation.

Another important difference between the two types relates to the quality of building materials. While post-WW2 construction is known to have utilized mostly cheaper (and in many cases also hazardous) materials, post-socialist multifamily housing is normally constructed with better building materials, taking into consideration also energy conservation objectives. Generally, the post-socialist housing neighborhoods thus offer a comparatively better housing standards.

The findings of this analysis lead to several questions that need to be seriously considered. First, what has been the impact of the new multi-family housing types that have emerged in the post-socialist period on those who continue to live in the post-WW2 large housing estates? In other words, do the residents of high-density, lower-standard post-WW2 housing estates consider themselves disadvantaged in comparison with the residents of the lower-density, higher-standard post-socialist multifamily residential neighborhoods? Second, have the post-socialist mass housing types triggered changes in the attitudes of residents of post-WW2 large housing estates with regard to their expectations and levels of satisfaction with their living environment? More concretely, have there been changes in the mindset regarding what people, generally, perceive as quality housing and quality living? These important questions cannot be responded to through a comparative analysis focused on the review of the development of the two housing typologies. There is, therefore, a need to conduct a thorough empirical study that will focus on investigating the impact of the evolution of multifamily mass housing on the attitudes and values of the residents of post-WW2 large housing estates.

As it accounts for 36% of the total housing stock in Slovenia <sup>[25]</sup>, it is crucial to recognize that post-WW2 housing estates constitute a very important segment of housing provision and will continue to play an important role as one of Slovenia's major housing typologies (single family housing accounts for 61%, mixed use 3%). In order for them to be able to continue to successfully perform that role, they need to be granted priority consideration as a key public housing policy issue. To this effect, measures need to be taken to ensure their elevation to such quality as may be able to minimize, as much as possible, the comparative advantages of the post-socialist mass housing developments. Failure to achieve what Šimáček et al. <sup>[26]</sup> have called the "humanization" of large housing estates may result in an increase in the departure of the higher-income earners from these areas to more preferable residential locations. Such a course of events may eventually lead to the concentration of low-income residents in the post-WW2 large housing estates, followed at a later stage by the all too well-known negative attributes of such socio-economic residential segregation. As Trumbull <sup>[10]</sup> (p. 15) rightly observed, the rapid adaptation of post-socialist cities to the external economic forces of the global market has led to "an internal shift in values and a significant rise in urban residents' expectations of what are desirable, and acceptable, residential living conditions. Indeed, improvements in housing conditions are almost unanimously viewed as one of the fundamental steps for improving an urban resident's standard of living." The underlying thesis here is that the transition from a planned to a market economy system may have led to changes in values and attitudes, which may be also reflected in residents' housing preferences. The observed gradual departure of higher-income households from post-WW2 is a clear indication that some of the residents aspire to live in better quality housing and enjoy a better housing standard.

Although we have focused primarily on the evolution of multifamily housing in Slovenia, it is useful to acknowledge that similar developments have occurred in the recent decades also in other post-socialist countries. One of the commonly discussed issues in the literature in this regard is the desire of the residents of post-WW2 housing estates to improve the exterior image of their housing. In the case of Romania, for example, Marin et al. <sup>[27]</sup> describe individual interventions (piecemeal thermal insulation of the façades, changing windows and doors, closing off balconies with glass additions) which are very similar to those that have been undertaken in Slovenia, with the intention to improve sections of the facade belonging to a particular apartment. The contribution by Bouzarovski et al. <sup>[28]</sup> demonstrably highlights the problem of inadequate dwelling floor-space in post-WW2 housing estates. Their comparative study on Skopje (Macedonia) and Tbilisi (Georgia), which examined the growing phenomenon of apartment building extensions, established that these interventions on the facades of multi-family buildings were being made for the purpose of enlarging dwelling space in order to improve the living conditions of the occupants. Hirt and Petrovič <sup>[29]</sup> discuss the differentiation in the quality of

multi-family housing and forms of neighborhood planning that emerged in Belgrade (Serbia) after the shift to a market economy. They describe a notable increase in the occurrence of what they call “gated housing” multifamily developments, as opposed to the previous open-access mass housing neighborhood types. Residential differentiation is also the subject of Spevec and Klempić Bogadi’s <sup>[30]</sup> contribution which addresses the new tendencies in residential segregation in Croatian cities. The study by Kristiánová <sup>[20]</sup> focuses on the vulnerability of open public spaces in post-WW2 housing estates in Slovakia, which are increasingly seen by potential investors as sites available for the realization of the densification policies that are being promoted by the new urban land-use policies. The densification of the existing urban fabric has also been observed to be intensive in Slovakia by Šuška and Stasiková <sup>[31]</sup>. In the discussion on the future of large housing estates in Budapest (Hungary), Benkő <sup>[32]</sup> poses some important questions about the values of large, prefabricated housing estates; what they previously were, what they could be, what elements of the existing built environment are likely to disappear and what needs to be adapted in the transition process?

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