Jak žijeme — jak bydlíme

Průřez činžovním domem v 11 hodin dopoledne. Tento obraz života ve dvacátém století, znásoben desettisíckrát, stotisíckrát a ještě vícekrát, je příznačný pro současné „národní hospodářství" svojí znamenitou „ekonomii"

Kreslil F. Bidlo

V. patro (nástavba): *pí. Pfeifenstengelová, manželka cestujícího ve vyssavačích prachu, převinuje svoje robátko. Pomocnice v domácnosti, stojíc u sporáku, připravuje oběd pro dvě osoby. Ráno byla pí. Pfeifenstengelová nakoupit. Dnes a denně odbývá se v této šťastné rodině prádlo.*

IV. patro (nástavba): *pí. zvěrolékařová, stojíc u sporáku, připravuje oběd pro sebe a svého manžela (Dr. Otakar Audolenský). Ráno byla pí. Audolenská nakoupit. Ve volné chvíli chystá prádlo pro pradlenu a výbavu pro budoucí robátko (pí. zvěrolékařová se čeká).*

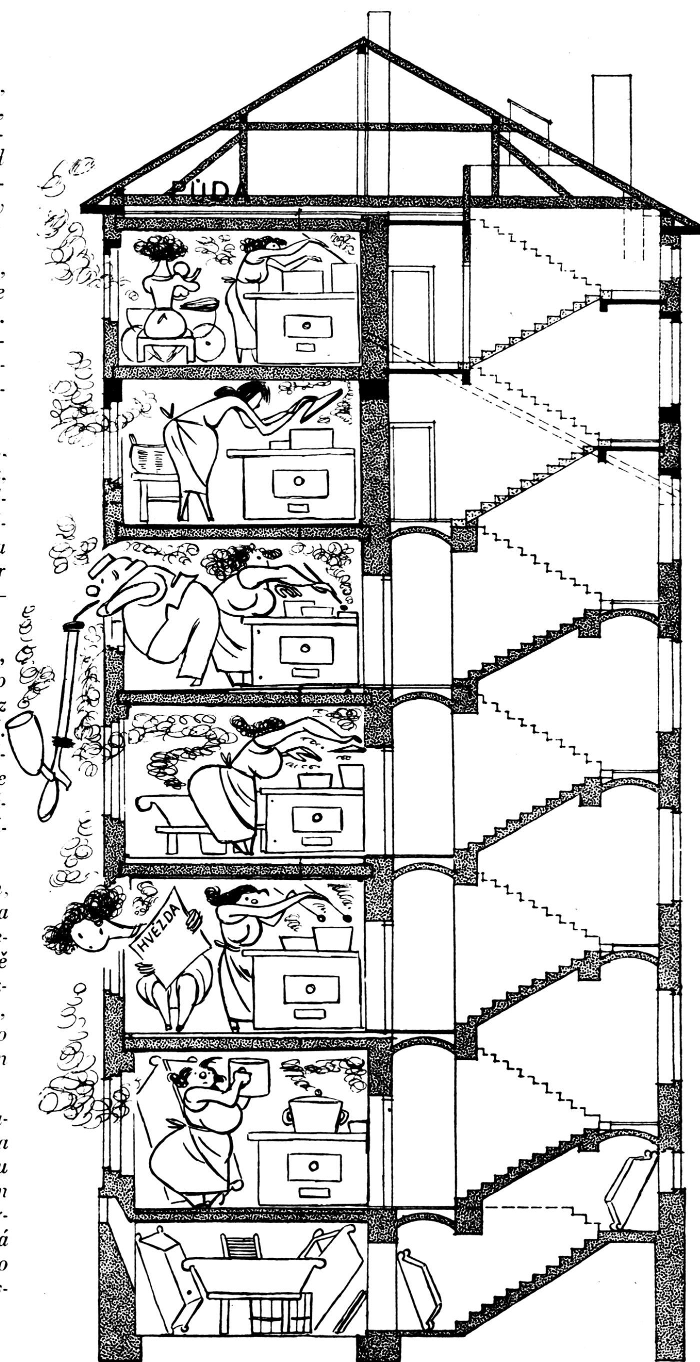
III. patro: *pí. Rozsivková, stojíc u kamen, připravuje chutný oběd pro svého manžela, dvě děti a sebe. Pan Čeněk Rozsivka, podúředník, zaměstnanec ČSD, maje právě volno, dýmku v ústech, hledí z okna. Ráno byla pí. Rozsivková nakoupit, v poledne a večer skočí pí. Rozsivková pro pivo přes ulici. — Minulý týden bylo prádlo.*

II. patro: *pí. Habásková, stojíc u kamen, připravuje chutný oběd pro sebe, svého manžela (p. Habásko Josef, krejčí, t. č. bez zaměstnání) a svoji sestru, zdepřítomnou pí. Šefelínovou, vdovu po vrchním zřízenci. Ráno byla pí. Habásková nakoupit, v poledne skočí pí. Šefelínová pro pivo přes ulici. Právě je v této rodině prádlo, pere pí. Šefelínová.*

I. patro: *pí. nadstrážníková, stojíc u kamen, připravuje chutný oběd pro svého manžela (Faktor Jan, nadstrážník), sebe a svoji dceru, kterážto slečna, sedíc u okna, střídavě hledí na ulici a čte krásný román ve Hvězdě. Ráno byla pí. nadstrážníková nakoupit, v poledne a večer skočí řečená paní pro pivo přes ulici. Příští týden (některý den s neděle) bude u Faktorů prádlo.*

přízemí: *pí. správcová domu, stojíc u kamen, připravuje chutný oběd pro svého syna (p. Dynybyl Alfons, úředník), svoji dceru (tato slečna má vážnou známost s pánem v zajištěném postavení) a pro sebe (pí. Dynybylová je vdova). Ráno byla pí. správcová nakoupit, v poledne a večer skočí pro pivo přes ulici, minulý týden bylo u paní správcové prádlo.*

suterén: *každá partaj má sklep a necky.*



53

František Bidlo, How we live – how we dwell: a cross-section of an apartment house at 11 am. This representation of life in the 20th century, multiplied ten thousand times, a hundred thousand times, and *even more* on top of that, is characteristic of today's "national economy" by its excellent "thriftiness". 1933, cartoon. Reproduction: Magazín DP, vol. 1, Praha, Družstevní práce, 1933–1934.

Ignoring and erasing: collective housing in 20th century Czechoslovakia

BY HUBERT GUZIK

A concept of a collective house that would include apartments and a wide array of communal facilities was a topic of intensive debate in Czechoslovakia throughout the 20th century. This topic was popular not only among architects, but most importantly among feminists, social activists, sociologists, politicians or businessmen. Debaters projected onto these houses their ideas of a future political and social system of Czechoslovakia. For some, shared living was a way to facilitate the arrival of communism, for others it represented a means to develop liberal capitalism. This article presents the political framework behind the idea of collective housing in Czechoslovakia.

During the period of the lingering state socialism of the 1980s, mass housing development became heavily criticized by the intellectual elites of Eastern Europe. The Russian-born poet, Joseph Brodsky, at that time already living in the United States, had nothing but disapproval for what he called "ubiquitous concrete, with the texture of turd and color of upturned grave"[1]. A few years later, in February 1990, Václav Havel, the newly-elected president of the now democratic Czechoslovakia, voiced a similar opinion, calling the prefabricated housing estates a rabbit hutch, "suitable only for spending the night and watching TV, but not for living in the true sense of the word"[2]. The largest Czech collective housing building, erected in the town of Litvínov between 1946 and 1958, did not escape criticism either. Eva Kantůrková, writer and co-signatory of Charter 77 — a pivotal initiative of the Czechoslovak anti-communist civic opposition — called the building "an attempt at socialist coexistence, an attempt destined for failure, because we cannot be innocuously erecting a socialist collective house while condemning to death Záviš Kalandra and Rudolf Slánský"[3], two key officials of the Czechoslovak Communist Party who fell victims to the purges of the 1950s.

This text aims to present several chapters from the history of Czech collective housing and to show how generations of intellectuals and architects ignored and erased their predecessors' experience with this specific architectural type. It should help us understand why in the present-day Czechia there is basically zero demand for collective housing, and also why only three out of dozens of collective housing buildings currently enjoy the status of national cultural monument. In the 1980s, after decades of a remarkable boom, collective housing lost not only its appeal, but also any credibility it might have previously had. The technocratic model that saw collective houses as vanguard cells of redistribution, was not compatible with the "economics of shortage"[4], characteristic for the late stages of Eastern European socialism. And, due to the lethargy of the political establishment of 1980s Czechoslovakia, there was effectively no room for any bottom-up initiatives of those few communities that might have wished – despite the growing atomization of the society – to actually share living space. Thus east of the Iron Curtain we find virtually no reflections of the German *Gemeinschaftssiedlungen* or of Scandinavian co-operative housing. The consequence of this phenomenon can be felt even today: despite all efforts there has been virtually no project that would at least attempt to imitate the German concept of *Baugruppe*.

Neoliberal politicians and journalists managed to inoculate the post-1989 Czech public with a mental stereotype, in which collective housing was synonymous with a forced Soviet import, and as such it was supposed to be discarded by the Czechs, during their "return to Europe", in the same way the East Germans abandoned their Trabants in the streets of Budapest and Prague in the late summer of 1989. The proposition of the Czech sociologist Ilja Šrubař that the process of transformation, begun after 1989, is not leading "to the liberal end of history"[5], has till recently seemed to be no more than an unproven hypothesis. And yet, just last year (i.e. after the last economic crisis), the former representative of the Czech Republic to the World Bank, Miroslav Zámečník, claimed that "the collective house has been fully rehabilitated". The economist pointed out that the idea of collective housing is now making a comeback, not so much because of any growing affection with shared economy, but simply because of the intolerably high housing prices in European capitals[6]. Here it might be worth mentioning that, in the first two decades of the 20th century, collective housing buildings were meant to play

an important role in the liberal economic-social system of the newly independent Czechoslovakia. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, at that time a sociologist and future president, and Inocenc Arnošt Bláha, a disciple of Émile Durkheim, introduced collective housing to the Czech public in the form of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's American apartment houses and Berlin *Einküchenhäuser* of Hermann Muthesius and Albert Gessner. The Czechs saw them as a micro-model of a liberal society. All housework in *Einküchenhäuser* was going to be performed by professionals in communal facilities. According to the tenets of liberalism that meant that division of labor was both the source and guarantee of the inner solidarity within the modern society.

This geopolitical "framing"[7] of the Czech collective houses is necessary if we wish to understand not just the value of the projects that were actually built but, more importantly, the discontinuity, ignoring and erasing of individual chapters in the story of collective houses. Masaryk's concept of collective housing was put into practice after WWI when the so-called *Červené domy* [red houses] were built in Prague (1919–1923, Rudolf Hrabě). This perimeter block with communal facilities soon proved unprofitable; however, the reason why it disappeared from the history of Czech architecture within only ten years' time has nothing to do with finances – the building simply never found its way onto the list of the predecessors of avant-garde housing-communes compiled in the mid-1930s by Augusta Müllerová, an architect with radical leftist views[8]. In a similar fashion, Karel Teige, the famous Marxist critic, omitted Masaryk and Bláha from his account of the history of collective housing projects presented in his *opus magnum*, the 1932 treatise *The Minimum Dwelling*. The liberal *Einküchenhaus* was simply incompatible, both strategically and tactically, with the leftist concept of a house-commune as a place for refinement of class consciousness of the working class, for generating momentum of the proletarian revolution, and for architectural framework that would fulfil Friedrich Engels' idea of the dissolution of the family[9]. Inspired by Teige, Moisei Ginzburg and Hannes Meyer, the Czech left-leaning architects Jan Gillar, Karel Honzík and Ladislav Žák designed, in the 1930s, several high quality collective housing projects. However, unlike their liberal predecessors, they were not able to get any of them built. Curiously enough, the working masses themselves were not particularly interested in the "grand domestic revolution"[10], or in Teige's one-person units for emancipated proletarians, nurseries open seven days a week or, indeed, in clubrooms intended for political activities. In 1931, when the communist cooperative *Včela* [the bee] announced a competition for the design of a housing-commune in Prague, the winner was a project of traditional family apartments by Josef Karel Říha while the most radical proposals failed[11]. Unlike the Marxist architects, Včela was well aware of the conservative turn in the Stalinist Soviet Union in the early 1930s.

The importance of the Soviet model for the story of Czech collective housing went beyond the period of the Great Depression. Its impact could be felt even more intensely in the late 1950s, when Prague reverberated with Nikita Khrushchev's address delivered at the 1958 *All-Union Building Conference*. In his attempt to mitigate the housing crisis, Khrushchev gave his blessing to various experiments of architectural typology[12]. In the same year Oldřich Černík, a communist official, demanded from Czech architects "types [of housing] suitable for single people, the elderly and newlyweds"[13]. Similar to the *avant-garde* concepts, the minimal living space of the proposed one- or two-person units was to be complemented by a wide array of facilities available either in the building itself or in its close proximity. Hotel-type houses, as these buildings were called based on Soviet terminology, were supposed to make up to 15 % of the sum of building development. Dozens of high-quality collective houses were built in the following years, such as starter apartments for young families (Prague-Invalidovna, Vojtěch Šalda — Josef Polák, 1960–1963) or living units for employees of industrial plants (hotel-type housing for the *Hlubina* [deep] coal mine, Ostrava, Zdeněk Kostecký, Architectural Studio of Jan Chválek, 1963–1966). The history of Czech architecture has, until recently, been quite reluctant in admitting the political context of these housing schemes; the 1960s have always been regarded as the true "golden age" of Czech architects' growing, if still limited, creative freedom, and not as the time when the process of Sovietization of mass housing was completed. Yet it was precisely this political shift in the Soviet Union which defined the limits for experimenting with architectural typologies in Eastern Europe. Architects Tomáš Černoušek, Karel Dolák and Jiří Zrotal, the authors of the first hotel-type housing scheme, which was built in Olomouc between the years 1959 and 1963, designed it for free as a part of the socialist self-obligation program. The enthusiasm with which the Czechs approached these experiments might have been rooted in genuine belief in the feasibility of the reform of the political system and in the possibility of rectification of existing housing development strategies through technological and typological innovations. At the same time there was a revival of the older concepts of the architects and theoreticians that had been erased from the accounts of history by the socialist realism and that were — in some extreme cases, like Karel Teige's — even accused of Trotskyism. Czech architects turned to the Swedish *kollektivhuset*, Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation*, and houses built during the first Soviet Five-year Plan. There was a surge of renewed interest in older boarding houses, such as *Ženské Domovy* [women homes] (Prague, Josef Hlaváček — Vlastimil Lada, 1931–1936) inspired by Masaryk's ideas of feminism and social activism[14]. The interest in this housing type was, however, limited to its functionalist architectural solution and operation – not even the relatively liberated atmosphere of the 1960s was a safe enough place to remember the social policies of a discarded democratic regime.

The hotel-type housing of the 1960s is even now eluding the attention of historians and, for the Czech public, they are virtually indistinguishable from the panel housing estates of the same era. In contrast, there are two collective housing projects, both built in the post-WWII years, that have always been appreciated by the local patriots and

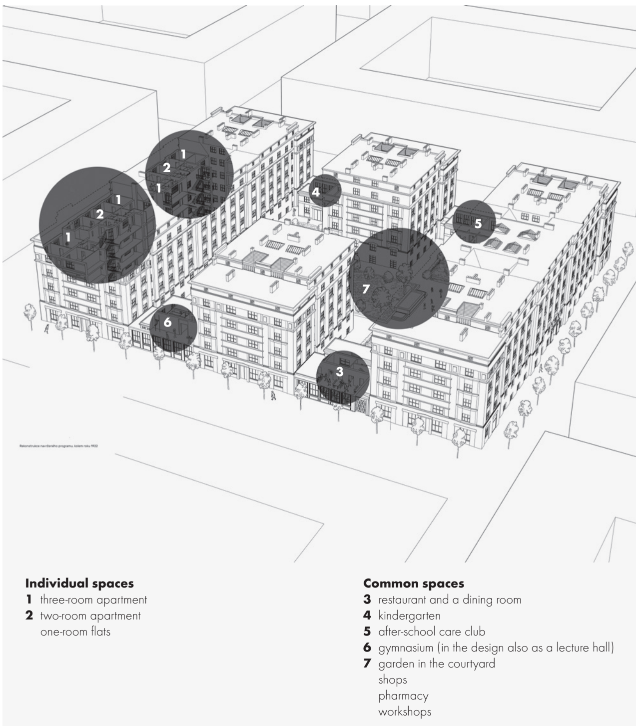
occupied a prominent place in the Czech canon of cultural history. Built in Litvínov (Václav Hilský — Evžen Linhart) and Zlín respectively (Jiří Voženílek, 1947–1951), these two housing schemes cannot be regarded as a straightforward follow-up to the *avant-garde* projects of the 1930s. Their authors played high-profile roles in the architectural establishment of the 1960s. Hilský was the architect of an important housing estate in Kladno, Prague's coal mining satellite town; Voženílek was the Chief Architect of Prague. The fact that their iconic creations (designated national cultural monuments in 1963) drew from the mid-1940s theories formulated in the Baťa Shoe Company — Czechoslovakia's largest capitalist concern — was tactfully overlooked at the time. It is worth mentioning that in the pre-WWII Zlín, redistribution policy was mainly based on the lease of family houses. Tomáš Baťa, the founder of the shoemaking empire, was himself opposed to the idea of his employees living in multifamily apartment houses. He believed that because the work environment emphasizes "the collective instinct at the expense of individual development", life in single-family houses functions as an antidote to the social homogenization represented by the factory work[15]. Le Corbusier created an urban development plan of Zlín which included collective houses, but Baťa eventually decided against its implementation. In the end, it was WWII that ushered in collective housing in Zlín. The breakdown of societal norms brought about by the wartime chaos and "amoral familism"[16], seen as impediments of the dynamic development of the industrial city, made the management redefine the goals of the company's redistribution policy. One of the company's directors, Hugo Vavrečka, a pre-war secretary in the Czechoslovak government and grandfather of Václav Havel, was the co-author of unpublished comments in the study, *Problémy průmyslového* města [problems of industrial city], written in 1942–1943. Here we can read:

> *cluster of garden houses represents in itself a totally anarchic unit, not unlike mountain villages with the scattered dwellings and the egoistical mentality of their inhabitants (…). If we aim to create a modern industrial man, a man civilized, cultured, economically-minded, socially and politically balanced, we must let him live not just in a "garden-like" environment, but also in a socially cohesive community (…)*[17].

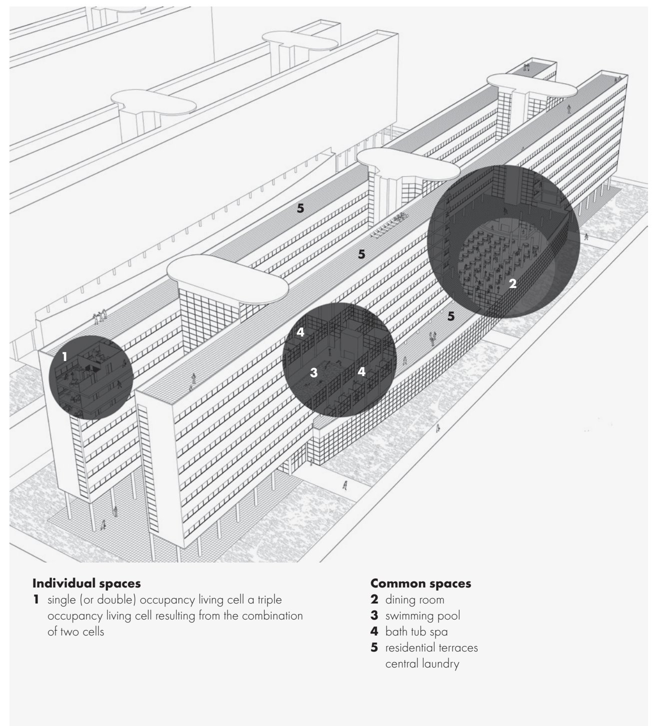
The heart of such a company town was to be formed by collective housing with hotel services, canteens, laundry rooms, nurseries, reading rooms, gyms and playrooms. The collective house in Litvínov, built for the chemical plant *Stalinovy závody* [Stalin works], followed an identical goal. The question of homogeneity and stability of working collectives was even more pressing in the case of Litvínov, as the Stalin Works was a successor of the German *Sudetenländische Treibstoffwerke*, a concern built in 1939 after the Northern Bohemian coal mining region was annexed to Germany. The post-WWII displacement of the German population from Czechoslovakia resulted in severe workforce shortages. The collective house – whose construction was lobbied for by the director of Stalin Works, Miloš Svitavský, himself an employee of the Baťa Company in the late 1930s[18] — was supposed to function as a generator of social and economic regeneration of the Czech border areas, even before the communists took power in February 1948.

The architects of the "golden" 1960s who liked to look up to the Litvínov collective house as their architectural model, also liked to forget that the building became one of the protagonists of the first Czech socialist realist novel *Cesta otevřená* [open road]. The author Alena Bernášková painted an image of transformation of the post-German industrial behemoth into a socialist enterprise, built on the superficial Stalinist style of collectivism[19]. The Stalinist era of exhausting industrialization and social engineering was to be forgotten in the 1960s, when "socialism with a human face" was introduced as the latest political development. Architects of the incoming generation thus preferred to remember that the construction of the Litvínov collective housing was delayed in the years of the Stalinist regime because of the formal references to the cosmopolitan Le Corbusier and objections that "the architectural style of this housing block signifies that one could very well find it also in Finland or Argentina"[20]. The end of socialist realism helped put the Litvínov collective housing back in the limelight — it was precisely this building which reconnected Czech architecture with Western Europe.

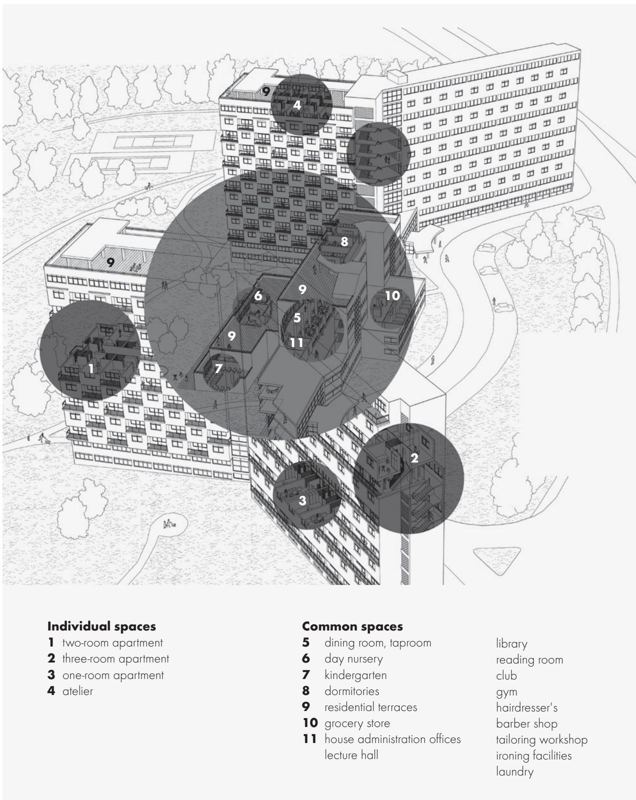
When discussing ignoring and erasing in the context of Czech collective housing, we must consider one other aspect, namely that of the inhabitants of these houses. Nearly all of the projects were guilty of ignoring social demands. Sociologist Jindřich Hoffmann, who was involved in research of unemployment during the Great Depression, pointed out that the workers "will not be interested in freedom, unless this freedom can provide bread and work"[21]. Contrary to Hoffmann, Karel Teige believed that collective housing would precipitate society's leap into the Marxist "kingdom of freedom", ignoring the pressing social problems of the Great Depression and, instead, turning their attention to the "'new, socialist man' as a statistically determined and historically predestined abstraction in the grand game called the 'classless society'"[22]. Before the housing in Litvínov and Zlín was built, no surveys among their future inhabitants had been carried out; no one deemed it useful to ask the workers whether they were interested in participating in this experiment. Collective housing represented materialization of a project whose goal was to discipline the working class; the function of this housing was to imbue the proletariat with specific political, sociological and moral roles[23]. These concepts and projects were also intricately connected with the processes of industrialization: mechanized canteens and laundry rooms, professional staff of the nurseries and cultural establishments in this housing was meant to take on the role of service and pastime activities that had previously been performed on an individual basis. The distinctively technocratic nature of the Czech collective housing, however, stands in stark contrast to the memories of their former inhabitants. The appreciation of the communal spirit and mutual supervision of the past



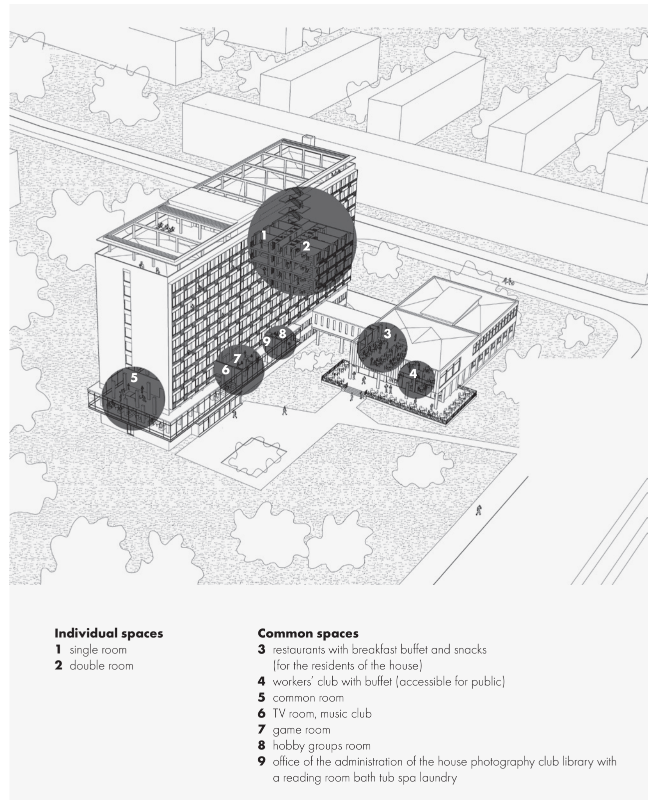
01 Rudolf Hrabě, *Červené domy* [red houses], Prague, Czech Republic, 1919–1923. Reconstruction of the planned functional arrangement of apartments and community amenities. Drawing by Ondřej Dušek and Bohdan Dušek. © Muzeum umení Olomouc, Ondřej Dušek, Bohdan Dušek, 2017.



02 Josef Havlíček, Karel Honzík, Collective house Koldom, 1928–1930, unrealized. Reconstruction of the planned functional arrangement of apartments and community amenities. Based on plans and descriptions published i. a. in Josef Havlíček, Karel Honzík, ***Hotelové domy typu "Koldom"***, ***Stavitel***, vol. 11, Praha, Sdružení architektů, 1930, s. 61–66. Drawing by Ondřej Dušek and Bohdan Dušek. © Muzeum umění Olomouc, Ondřej Dušek, Bohdan Dušek, 2017.



03 Václav Hilský, Evžen Linhart, Collective house Koldům, Litvínov, Czech Republic, 1946–1958. Reconstruction of the planned functional arrangement of apartments and community amenities. Drawing by Ondřej Dušek and Bohdan Dušek. © Muzeum umení Olomouc, Ondřej Dušek, Bohdan Dušek, 2017.



04 Zdeněk Kostecký (Architectural Studio of Jan Chválek), Hotel-type housing for the Hlubina [deep] coal mine, Ostrava, Czech Republic, 1963–1966. Reconstruction of the planned functional arrangement of apartments and community amenities. Drawing by Ondřej Dušek and Bohdan Dušek. © Muzeum umení Olomouc, Ondřej Dušek, Bohdan Dušek, 2017.

is perhaps equal to the sense of disillusion with the present-day entropy of neighborly relations and the disappearance of communal facilities[24]. Indeed, most of the shared spaces of these houses are now frequently leased out to various businesses and shops. The hotel-type housing of the 1960s, which was privatized after 1989, is now often used as substandard housing for low income households.

Still, if we consider for a moment the gradual dilapidation of The Narkomfin Building in Moscow, we can say that Czech collective housing was treated relatively kindly by the post-1989 economic transformation. The transition from communism to liberalism in Czechoslovakia was accompanied by a specific model of "post-soviet social"[25]. The deconstruction of the socialist welfare state was a rather slow process: the state subsidisation of prefabricated housing development was discontinued in 1993 but rent regulation, in larger cities, continued until 2012. Paradoxically enough, in the same year the collective houses in Litvínov and Zlín were joined by a third building of this type with the status of national cultural monument — a collective house in České Budějovice, built in 1959–1963 and designed by Bohumil Böhm, Jaroslav Škarda and Bohumil Jarolím.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

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