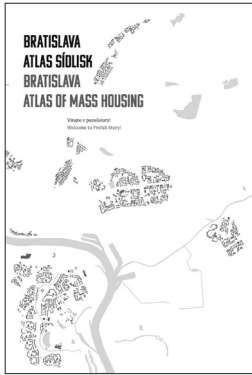


Bratislava Atlas Sídľisk – Bratislava Atlas of Mass Housing, 1950–1995

By Henrieta Moravčíková, Mária Topolčanská, Peter Szalay, Matúš Dulla, Soňa Ščepánová, Slávka Toscherová, Katerína Haberlandová
Publisher: Slovart Publications
ISBN 978 80556 04787
Language: Slovak and English
Year: 2012



Sine ira et studio: documenting mass housing in a socialist city.

The mass housing complexes that formed so huge and, often, controversial element in the built production of the postwar Modern decades in many parts of the world have never sat easily within the mainstream trends of MoMo heritage, either at a national level (in government designation strategies) or internationally (in the proselytising and research of **docomomo**) [...]

The book is both a thematic monograph and an area-based gazetteer. Its first section contains a range of essays on the historical and cultural context of postwar housing in socialist (Czecho-) Slovakia, appropriately highlighting the special emphasis on standardisation and industrial pre-fabrication within Soviet-bloc housing of the post-Khrushchev era. Then follows the main 'atlas' itself, filling 206 of the book's 343 pages: a comprehensive chronologically-arranged inventory of the 21 housing schemes constructed in Bratislava over the 4 decades 1955–1995, complete with maps, statistics and historic photos and text summaries. Pride of place, of course, belongs to the vast and celebrated Petržalka, whose 50,000 flats were built in 1973–80 following a famous 1967 competition, but this is placed in its proper context of more everyday developments, up to the concluding Dlhé diely project of 1979–95, with its distinctly Postmodern detailing. The small overall number and large size of postwar developments in Bratislava—far fewer

than the equivalent number in many major western cities (think of the countless small and large housing schemes and redevelopments in a city such as Copenhagen or Birmingham or!)—emphasises the highly concentrated, coordinated character of Eastern-Bloc housing production. The final section of the book, which presents type-plans of standard housing blocks and social institutions, and images of public art projects, underlines the socialist countries' characteristic combination of extreme type-plan standardisation and ambitious, usually half-realised landscaping and social provision schemes—and, more generally, the vast spaciousness and restrained height of housing slabs and towers. Considering the politically contentious status of these developments in the post-1989 years, the dispassionate character of this book, aiming (in an echo of Tacitus) 'not to romanticise... but instead to analyse truthfully and without prejudice', is a remarkable achievement. Overall, the book provides the most comprehensive coverage yet of mass housing in a single city, with very few identifiable flaws. Only the maps themselves might perhaps have been enhanced: an overall map of the city would have been helpful, as would more explicit captioning of the useful layout plans of the individual housing schemes.

Could this book serve as a fieldwork aid as well as a desk research guide? Probably, although it would certainly not fit in even a large pocket, and weighs over 1 kg! But—the electronically-minded reader might object—is not a published book, in any size or shape, an obsolete form in which to present topographical information of any sort, information that more properly belongs in GIS-type databases, accessible via internet links, 'tagging', portable devices and so forth? Maybe—but one could counter that old-style publication still offers a far more palpable, 'concrete' way of accessing a diversity of visual and textual material—as resoundingly demonstrated in the Bratislava Atlas. Perhaps the ideal formula is a combination of the two, as with the recent English Heritage/RCAHMS-backed programme to make available on-line the text of Tower Block, and convert its Gazetteer into a pilot on-line database covering several regions of England and Scotland (see www.towerblock.org) The **docomomo**-ISC on Urbanism and Landscape (of which Henrieta Moravčíková is an active member) is currently investigating the potential of on-line databases: maybe Bratislava's achievement of the most comprehensive published inventory to date could serve as the foundation for a Slovak database initiative of equivalent international exemplar status?

Miles Glendinning
Chair **docomomo** ISC/U+L

Unfinished Modernisations. Between Utopia and Pragmatism

By Maroje Mrduljaš, Vladimir Kulic
Publisher: Croatian Architect's Ass.
ISBN 978-9-5366-4624-1
Language: English
Year: 2012



This brilliant research into the architecture and urban planning of socialist Yugoslavia has claimed and revealed a number of 'unfinished modernisations'. The significance of the work, then, has to be assessed at several levels: of architectural history during the Cold War, architectural history in relation to politics and society, and of the projection of a hope for new relations between architecture, urban planning, society and politics. In the history of architecture during the Cold War, the reception of Yugoslav architecture mostly associated it with the Communist Bloc. The hegemonic western definition and selection of architecture of the second half of the century was to emerge during this process. Western overviews and standard works on architecture have at least marginalized, if not entirely obliterated, the achievements of the East. Here I have to admit that at the moment I am unfamiliar with the forms and contents of the reception of Western architecture in the East, a gap that needs to be filled in further research.

A project of this kind is accordingly of immense value. It ambiguously shows that the architectural achievements of the East, until the end of the 1980s, are on an absolutely equal footing with those of the West and in some cases even more visionary. In a single sentence, the project Unfinished Modernisations is an essential contribution to the obvious demand that the architectural history of the 20th century should be written anew, as a common history of East and West, of capitalist and communist architecture.

Dietmar Steiner
Director Architekturzentrum Wien