

## Housing strategies in the USSR

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**A**T present the total amount of housing in the USSR is 4.43 billion square metres. There are 83.6 million flats with a total area of 4.2 billion square metres; 81.8 million families live in flats or houses, either rented or owned; 5.2 to 5.5 million families in the USSR are not provided either with a flat or a house.

The housing provision index (living area per person) in the USSR is uneven. The average index is 15.4 square metres per person. However, regional disparities are typical at present. They range from 21.1 square metres per person in Estonia to 8.9 square metres per person in some areas of Central Asia. In Moscow the index is 17.2 but in Tohita (the Far East) it is 10.2. Families who are originally supplied with preferred housing, 15 or more square metres per person, are four times more likely to improve their living conditions than those families who are provided with an inferior housing situation of 11 or fewer square metres per person. As these housing improvements are state funded, the disparities continue to grow.

In spite of its recent growth the index in the USSR remains very low compared to countries with similar social systems, such as Czechoslovakia and the GDR which have an average of 26 square metres per person. In the USSR there are 13.9 million families (about 23% of the total number) whose housing is below 8 to 10 square metres per person. Thus there are 40 million people in urgent need of housing. Apart from that there are 60 million people with housing provisions of only 10 to 16 square metres per person.

Lack of housing has become one of the major social problems in the

country. In accordance with government targeting for the year 2000, each family should be provided with a flat or a house, either owned or rented. Measures to speed up building by 16-17% over the 1985 production levels have been taken. By 1988 the USSR reached an average growth of 0.8 square metres per person. But even now it is confronted with increasing disparity; regions are not adequately provided with housing and have a very slow rate of growth (from 0.54 for Azerbaijan to 0 for Kirgisia). This regional disparity is a cause of national tensions.

### *Prognosis for the year 2000*

In solving the housing problem demographic forecasts are very important. Rough estimates show that by 2000 the number of families will reach 97.1 million with the total population being 313.4 million. This means that an average family will consist of 3.2 persons. Therefore the planned number of flats and houses must be approximately 100 million.

It must be noted that at present the total number of flats is 83.6 million. According to the latest estimates we can expect that by 2000 between 11% and 16% will be lost to the stock and that of the existing flats only 70-75 million will be preserved.

According to the government estimation an additional 25 million flats and houses could solve the housing problem. The state controlled standard will be 16 square metres per person, with an average area of no less than 53 square metres. The prognosis will require financial provisions by the budget for 1.40-1.45 billion square metres. However, a new element in financing the housing construction is private investing. About one third of the housing will

be built at the expense of individual owners who are free to augment the state-secured standard. Including this type of construction, the total housing construction in the next 10 years will reach 1.9 to 2.0 billion square metres.

### *Genesis of housing ideas in the USSR*

Historical experience is of great value for future architectural planning and practice. Political and economic shifts translate into changes in architectural ideas, approaches and methods. They often lead to new designs. Following is a description of two such major turns in the architectural history of housing planning and practice in the USSR.

After the socialist government came to power in October 1917 it declared universal equal rights for social provisions, including housing. The state declared itself responsible for supplying its citizens with housing. The government was faced with enormous difficulties in putting its declaration into practice. The difficulties would have been considerable, even had Russia been an economically advanced country. But after World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia was reduced to the state of economic exhaustion.

That period in the history of the Soviet architecture created a new urban ideology. The power of its statements and social programmes allow us to call it the first revolution in architecture and housing strategy. Its main principles were:

- the state provides housing only for individuals who work;
- the state confiscates housing from individuals who do not work;
- all people who work have an

equal right to be provided with housing;

- communal housing is the solution to the housing problem and the right perspective.

These principles dominated from 1917 till 1955. The environmental ideas of town planners and architects of that time varied greatly. Among them we find a wide range of ideas, often Utopian, from a futurist city to pantheistic garden-city (Cobardian idea). Stylistic views of the architects reflect principles of *proletcult* (proletarian culture) and artistic *avant garde* of 1910-1920.

In spite of the severe restrictions whereby only those who worked were provided with housing, the idea of centralised distribution remained unfulfilled. There was simply not enough housing. The only principle which seems to have been fully enforced was confiscation of housing belonging to "non-workers", i.e. landowners, factory owners, etc. Social stratification in the new state led to huge differences in the standard of living. New Soviet ministers moved into mansions while working families lived in one room. An extremely low technological level of construction had its specific results. On one hand it led to "decorative" constructivism. On the other hand, it greatly expanded the housing paradigm — from a single-family house to a communal block. By the mid-1930s, "ideologically based artistic ideas came to the foreground. It became clear that the aims of the first Revolution had not been attained and could not be attained within the existing social framework.

A new political strategy was created, the concept of an urban environmental facade. Again, we find the concept of the main street and "representative ensemble". Diversion of financing for the construction of this kind of environment made the housing problem still more difficult. It was considerably aggravated by non-economic methods of distribution. By the mid-1940s, as a result of World War II, the housing problem reached a critical point. A

short period of renovation from 1945 to 1955 ended in a revival of "representative" architecture. Hence in the 1950s the country was faced with an enormous housing deficit which threatened the government with imminent catastrophe.

In the period from 1956 to 1989 a new strategy was devised which may be called the second housing revolution. It was the basis of the Soviet housing programme from 1955 until quite recently. The declaration and principles of the first revolution had been considerably enlarged and elaborated. According to the new housing strategy:

- the state provided all citizens with housing;
- every family had the right to be supplied with a flat or a house;
- housing was free but it remained state property.

For the first time in the country's history civil construction attracted a considerable amount of the state budget; the government started investing in housing. Another victory of common sense was the idea of providing families, not simply individuals, with housing.

In 1955 the state started mass-production of prefabs for construction. The building elements, "first generation prefabs," showed very little if any variety. They were simple mass-produced blocks requiring the smallest possible expense. Utilisation of prefabs caused administrative and technological changes in building industries. The rate of growth and the amount of the building led us to expect a quick technological solution of the housing problem.

However, by the mid-1960s prefabs of the first generation showed their faults. The range of constructive ideas was limited. There was no variety in design, outlay, facades, etc., of buildings. The monotonous urban environment began to fall upon the residents. Even if one did not mind a total lack of artistic value in the architecture of the 1960s and

1970s, one had to try hard to find one's way in the new residential areas: all buildings looked alike. An attempt to improve the architectural environment by improving the quality of the first generation prefabs failed because the prefabs themselves became too expensive.

As in the 1930s the government was faced with a problem based on double standards. There was one standard for mass-produced and another for representative buildings which served as a screen to hide the low quality of housing for the majority of the Soviet people. As the stated government principles differed greatly from the reality, the accumulation of negative consequences led to a slowdown in the rate of civil construction. The Soviet Union was ready for a new housing crisis.

### *The new housing programme 1990-2000*

The new programme aimed at overcoming the actual crisis is based on the existing social-economic situation characterised by a considerable budget deficit and a lack of building materials.

The programme includes an analysis of the architectural and building practices of the previous periods during which was experienced both an inadequate capacity of the building industries and a bad quality of construction. The programme has been worked out with regard to the major changes taking place in the social and political development in the USSR, such as:

- growth of economic and political independence of the Soviet republics;
- changes in the position of local Soviets, i.e. municipal authorities;
- growth of economic independence secured for industrial enterprises;
- development of various forms of non-state property in industry.
- stimulating the initiative of individuals and their associations in discussing national and local problems and decision making.

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The task of the new programme is to solve the following major problems in housing construction:

- growth of investment in housing construction;
- as an individual in need of housing;
- as a commissioner constructing a building;
- as a user of potential building site supplied with social, engineering and transport infrastructure;
- investment provisions secured by the state budget for low cost standard housing;
- stimulation of individual or co-operative investments in building single-family houses and blocks of flats free from standard restrictions;
- development of research, design and legal bases for town planning as means to promote housing strategy, creating economic incentives for advanced solutions involving flexible technology focusing the ecological situation;
- improvement of housing by means of expanding the market for design and construction;
- securing economic independence for republics and regions in order to provide variety in the solutions of housing problems;
- promotion of flexible methods for controlling and monitoring housing construction.

In a situation of dominant state building industries and limited financial and building material resources the new housing strategy has a natural orientation to low standard housing. That kind of housing must be financed by budget and granted by the government.

As the new housing construction policy includes private resources, a house or a flat will become a commodity, which people can buy or otherwise pay for while using. It is proposed to solving housing situations with varying proportions of governmental, municipal and private investment. The question is how to give all participants legal provisions for their investment in housing,

social programmes and infrastructure. From this point of view the protection of rights of citizens should include at least the following:

- right of a homeless individual to be provided with standard quality housing;
- right of individuals to buy or build a house or a flat using their own money in which case they are provided with building land and infrastructure. These individuals are also entitled to have improved design and more than standard living space if they choose;
- right of local councils to develop their own housing programmes and promote design within the framework of national legal provisions;
- right of local communities for their own independent expertise based on the opinion of the residents;
- right of government bodies of architectural and building expertise to check the quality of design and construction of housing financed by the budget.

Solving the housing problem requires great financial and labour resources. Since 1956 total investment in housing construction has been 660 billion roubles, by which 3.45 billion square metres of living area of 72.3 million new flats have been constructed. But at the same time the percentage of gross national product for housing has been going down. In 1960, housing attracted 31.7% of the total investment in building industries, i.e. 14.8% of the national budget, whereas in 1987 these figures were reduced to only 13.6% of total investment in building industries and 7.8% of the national budget.

The concentration of all financial and technical resources in state-owned building industries reduced the participation of individuals in housing construction from 52.7% in 1960 to 21.4% in 1987. This has created a new problem — the growth

of government spending on maintaining the already existing housing stock. The current government maintenance costs are approximately 7 billion roubles a year. It will allow the share of state-owned housing to continue growing, it will cause increased spending on maintenance.

The requirements for high quality of housing are also leading to the growth of construction and maintenance costs. In 1961-65, the average cost of producing one square metre of housing was 95 roubles, while in 1975-80 it was 231 roubles. Now it is 257 roubles per square metre. It should be noted, however, that the same tendency is characteristic of the housing finance situation in other countries.

The current situation therefore means that further orientation on budget-financed housing leads to a rapid growth of government investment in housing construction. At the same time, most of the money invested to secure minor improvements in the quality of housing proved ineffective because although a slightly better quality of housing was gained, it was gained at the expense of the available housing stock.

Most of government money comes from the budgets of republics and local councils and from the funds of industrial enterprises. That money is spent on standardised housing. The standards must be established by the republican or regional authorities. The average socially guaranteed standard is predicted to be approximately 16 square metres per person. According to our forecast, provision of the population with standard housing will require for the period 1990-1995 about 450 million square metres, or 7.5 million flats at the cost of 120 billion roubles. During the period of 1995-2000 about 420 million square metres, or 7.0 million flats at the cost of 110 billion roubles.

Help from the central government budget ought to be given only to construction in regions with deficient housing. Often these regions cannot

guarantee even the minimum standard of housing for their residents. The central government will control the use of these budget funds via local authorities. The total amount of this kind of investment is estimated to be approximately 10 billion roubles to produce 30 million square metres by the year 2000.

Local authorities will choose their methods of helping individuals. According to their means they have various options: they can make loans or grants or abolish taxation on private construction of housing.

Construction of social, engineering and transportation infrastructure within the regional standard should be financed either by local or central budgets. More expensive infrastructure should be financed by private co-operative funds.

The Government will be stimulating the creation of housing markets and direct contracts between building industries and customers. That means:

- reduction of government contracts with building industries to 50-60% of the total amount of housing construction;
- reduction of taxation for new building companies dealing with housing for private customers on the basis of government controlled prizes;
- concentrating the government investments on production of building materials, especially foam concrete, lumber, gypsum, local building materials, etc.

The needs of the different kinds of families can only be satisfied with great variety in the typology of housing which will guarantee the creation of a spatially rich urban space. Basic types of housing in the future decades should be as follows:

- single-family houses (1-2 storeys, 600 square metres of building land for each house);
- semi-detached 2-4 flat housing (1-3 storeys, 300-500 square metres of building land for each flat);
- multi-flat houses (1-3 storeys, 100-200 square metres of land for each flat); and,

- multi-storeyed apartment housing.

The results of sociological questionnaires show that people as a rule prefer single-family and semi-detached housing. The high quality of this kind of housing will compensate for the rise of average construction costs (about 40-60% per one square metre). Single-family and semi-detached houses will be financed during 1991-2000 by the residents' money.

From the point of view of spatial norms the new housing policy requires two different standards:

- standard for housing supported by the government; and,
- standard for housing financed by the residents.

It is hoped that the substantial growth of the second type of housing (up to 30-40% in 1991-1995 and up to 50-55% in 1996-2000) will be achieved by means of government credits and by a reduction of taxation on private housing construction.

In the period of 1991-95 the USSR will construct 3.0-3.5 million houses and flats in the rural areas and 19.5-20.5 million houses and flats in the urban areas of which half are to be in towns and half will be in cities. Of all new housing 70% will be in the multi-storeyed houses supported by government, 10-20% in the privately financed multi-flat houses and the remaining 10-20% in the semi-detached or single-family houses.

Government supported housing will mostly be prefabs. Towns of populations less than 50,000 will have houses constructed of brick and foam-concrete.

The share of budget-financed housing will be reduced to 65-70% in 1991-95 and to 50-60% in 1996-2000. Most of new housing construction will be based on direct contracts between families, groups of families or other associations and building enterprises. The government will support the activities of new kinds of building companies, private or co-operative. By stimulating direct con-

tracts with customers we can achieve at least 65-70% reduction in budget contracts for housing construction. This will hopefully also reduce the monopoly of regional building industry giants.

### *Perspectives*

The new housing programme outlined in this paper (home for every family) can be a remarkable step in solving the urgent existing housing problem in the USSR. By magnifying the variety of housing types and by increasing the number of flats compared to the number of families we could help the formation of a real housing market in our country. And within the housing market, the development of alternatives is the best way to meet the real social demands. However, we understand that our programme will be only the starting point in the creation of functional market conditions. In the future we need a growth both in quality and in quantity of design, construction and renovation of the housing sector.

While still working with our new programme we already see the clear need for further elaboration of principles of quality. For this purpose we must keep on searching for —

- (a) More flexible forms of organising the building industry to better serve the needs of individual residents.
- (b) More open forms of architectural design for participation of technologically and ecologically minded customers; and
- (c) More advanced forms of using alternative and co-operative resources in constructing and maintaining the housing stock. ■

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