

SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN HOUSING. SELF-MANAGEMENT AND DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

A wide range of activities from non-governmental organizations in the field of housing has been initiated in the late 1950s in the former socialist Yugoslavia. The industrialization of former agricultural economy was a principal task along the line of official politics by the ruling party, and urbanization with mass scale housing development was seen as a major goal of both political and professional organizations. Therefore, in 1956, Family and Household organization was established to educate, enable and promote new ways of collective life in newly formed urban areas connected to industrial districts. Three exhibitions were organized at the premises of Zagreb International Trade Fair in 1957, 1958 and 1960. Theoretical papers were brought to public and professional and popular magazines were published to stimulate new urban cohesion of working class. This was to be achieved through specific and then innovative interlocking of urban planning, architecture, industrial design and art. These activities gave framework for development of modernist approach to collective housing design and new approaches to product design, both in theory and practice. Controlled by the ruling party on one hand and sliding out of it through non-government founders, activities of Family and Household organization witness efforts to use design values as community activators in

society. Unified in the goal and ambivalent in execution these efforts made path to new ways of social cohesion.

The paper examines these activities, reconstructing the history of events and facts that were part of social activism in housing in the late fifties and early sixties, rethinking them as elements of yet unconstructed history of self-management socialism. Challenging future methods of design as a social practice these experiences could prove valuable as a model that was created in social context which was not market oriented but instead tended to found a economy of exchange. The real results and failures of such efforts during self-management socialism could provide with meaningful lessons for the future of design.

INTRODUCTION

The debate on the construction of concept of design during the 50s in Croatia and Slovenia which were at the time part of the federal Yugoslavia surely has to include one of the specific forms of social activism of that period, which targeted in the domain of housing, and was realized through the exhibition and symposium 'Housing for Our Conditions' in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in 1956, as well as through

Family and Household manifestations at the Zagreb International Trade Fair (Croatia) in 1957, 1958 and 1960. This context formed around the specific issues of housing development and housing, that is- the quantity and quality of housing space, both in terms of its size and interior design and in the social context of that period which brought this issue to the focus of attention. Due to the political orientation for intensive development through industrial modernization, those conditions led to an extreme increase of urban population, while housing facilities at the time were of low quality and considerably destroyed during the war. This context was to a great extent, as shall be seen, connected with the context of applied arts (as perceived at the time) and the context of architecture, which makes it significant in the discussion on the construction of concept of design, so that all the strata of the meaning of the term in the field which it implicated in the 50s would be included.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND HOUSING

The problem of housing and interior design was recognized and elaborated even in the early 1950s, primarily in the context of architecture, and afterwards in the context of applied arts as well. Social activism in housing, however, formed around the initiative of several social organizations which realized their primary activity in the field of social standard, in other words the general level of living standard in the community. In October of 1955, with the initiative of the Permanent Conference of Yugoslav Cities, several social organizations reached an agreement to prepare an exhibition on 'housing economics, techniques and culture' within the annual assembly of the Permanent Conference in Ljubljana. (1.). These organizations were: the Federal Chamber of Industry, the Federal Chamber of Civil Engineering, the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the Union of the Societies of Architects of Yugoslavia, the Union of Civil Engineers and Technicians of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the Union of Women's Societies of

the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The main board and organisational committee were established, and from the very beginning the exhibition was named 'Housing for Our Conditions' and with the following postulate in social reality: 'Taking into account that housing is a complex social problem...the basic goal of the first Yugoslav symposium and exhibition 'Housing for Our Conditions'....that, according to the conclusions of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Socialist Union of the Working Class of Yugoslavia on actual tasks of our economy and bearing in mind the real foundation for quantitative solution of the housing issue which is presented in the Law on Housing Contributions, clarify, coordinate and recommend all those opinions on economics, techniques and culture of housing which would be capable of directing our efforts towards a common goal – to provide our man with housing suitable for our conditions, opportunities and abilities 'Housing for Our Conditions'. (2.).

This ambitious organizational and programmatic framework clearly indicates the goal, but also the methods which can already be anticipated in the very content of the social organisations behind this idea, and also in the thesis on 'economics, techniques and culture' of housing factors which have to be taken into consideration if one wants to solve such a significant problem. The exhibition was from the very beginning designed in two parts- the commercial one, which was held at the Economic Exhibition, and the informative-advertising one which was organized on the premises of the lower three levels of the then unfinished 'Palace Gradis' situated on former Tito's Road and designed by architect Edo Mihevc. The informative-advertising part had the intention of displaying home appliances and furniture, as can be seen in the conceptual idea of exhibiting 'only those individual parts of current production and those products which, however, are still in the developmental phase...'» (3.). In the opening speech of the exhibition the President of the Organizational Committee Marijan Tepina emphasizes that «

the housing issue in its current form is the consequence of industrialization.....and can only be solved by industrialization» (4.). This sentence as well as the majority of his programmatic speech positions the intention of the symposium and the exhibition primarily in the field of construction, or the question how to achieve massivity and economy in terms of housing. The answer to this question was sought in the application of methods of industrial production in construction. Tepina compares typical industrial products such as cars or shoes, when he argues the need for standardisation and typification of housing facilities, because «whoever comes up with the idea to order a suitable car by heart or adjust the foot to the shoe size...» (5.). The informative- advertising part of the exhibition therefore included the presentation of post-war achievements in urbanism and architecture, the part dedicated to the economy of housing construction and horticulture, the part on construction techniques and materials and the «case study» -analysis of the housing issue in Sarajevo. Finally, this part of the exhibition also included the presentation of winners of the competition for terraced houses, serial furniture and a sanitary complex which was carried out on a federal level, and was considered as a preparation for the symposium and the exhibition 'Housing for Our Conditions'. The competition was designed with the purpose to gain qualitative ideas on basis of which a more significant serial production of housing, home appliances and furniture could be started. Therefore, the organizational committee chose a terraced house as the topic of the competition since «due to difficulties caused to communal economy, traffic and agriculture by individual constructions, it popularizes terraced houses, which in itself combine advantages of individual building and more compact construction», a sanitary complex «joining all sewage installations of an apartment into a single rational installation complex represents a very significant rationalization in housing development» and serial furniture in order to «popularize aesthetic

and economic advantages of serial furniture which is the only one that can ensure the advancement of the general standard of interior design» (6.). These were the three components on basis of which it may be possible to establish the standardization and typization in housing construction.

HOUSING AND DESIGN

19 projects arrived at the competition for terraced houses, 4 projects for the sanitary complex and 15 projects for serial furniture. The winners for the project of a terraced house were architects Janez Lajovic, Vladimir Mušič, Anton Pibernik and Savin Sever for the project «Trata». The second prize winners were architects Danilo Furst, Fedor Škerlep, Marjan Ferjan and Danilo Jejčič for the project «18. 28. 38.» and the third prize winners were architect Marijan Šorli and technician Jakob Dobrin for the project «Inter». Several ex equo purchasing prizes were also awarded. The first and second prize winner of the competition, as explained by the jury, for rational housing furniture» as a sort of synonym for «serial furniture», was Niko Kralj, and the third prize winner was the technical bureau of the furniture factory in Nova Gorica. The third and fourth prizes were also awarded for the sanitary complex competition, as can be concluded from the catalogue of the symposium and the exhibition, but without published explanations. All the awarded projects were presented at the informative-advertising part of the exhibition «Housing for Our Conditions» as full-size models. It is important to notice that part of the conception of the manifestation related to «the culture of housing» and «industrialization» of home appliances and furniture, expressed through the complete furnishing of the models of terraced houses with real prototypes of home appliances and furniture, whereas two awarded exhibits of Niko Kralj, one of them the folding chair Rex, supplemented with his other projects, as well as projects of few other authors. In this way, according to the reconstruction from the preserved documentation, projects were exhibited by Janez Lajovic (a lamp), Branka

Tancig, (the kitchen and kitchen chair) and members of the then already existent group in Zagreb Studio for Industrial Design with projects of furniture, lamps, ceramic and woven items and cutlery. (7.).

The presentation of competition projects included protagonists who, in the context of applied arts or the context of architecture, worked in Croatia and Slovenia during the 50s in the form of practical methodical researches, and who understood the idea of design as a creation of industrial products. In this context their ideas gathered around the topic of housing, or the context of social activism in relation to housing. The common topic of all three contexts is industrial production, in this specific context especially observed as means for massive housing construction, home appliances and furniture for apartments. However, industrial production as a method appeared, as we have seen, in elaborations of the concept of design in the previous two concepts, but here serial production was attributed the significance of general orientation in the direction of enabling the more massive housing construction. This orientation is well described in Conclusions from the Symposium which were published as the last section in the catalogue of the manifestation. These Conclusions, namely, contain the totality of the issues of housing or, to be more precise, all problematic elements in the imaginary process of reaching the industrial standard of the housing production, equipment and furniture. From legal relationships in the field of housing, via social management of residential buildings, financing and crediting of housing construction, the construction and production of building material, to urbanism, architecture and scientific research. The Conclusions of the symposium 'Housing for Our Conditions' describe all areas which have to be emphasized in terms of development and in order to achieve the determined goal. On the other hand, all these areas can be observed as weak points of that time, because Conclusions stress weaknesses and necessary actions in every field which should be undertaken in order

to eliminate these weaknesses. However, there is no mention of home appliances and furniture as an integral part of architecture in the Conclusions, despite the fact that the understanding of industrial design as a part of the architectural discipline at that time was already present in the context of architecture as well as the context of applied arts, as was previously emphasized. At the same time the magazine Man and Space carried out a survey among the visitors of the exhibition 'Housing for Our Conditions' and reported on the results in the article with a rather unambiguous title «The Public Requires a More Modern Apartment and Furniture», which can indeed terminologically be connected with the previously emphasized orientation of the magazine editorial as well as with some critics in the differentiation of the 'traditional' (which is often as a determination referred to small series, furniture made in vocational conditions) and «the contemporary as a synonym for the industrially produced furniture in big series. In the same way «the more modern» apartment refers directly to the imaginary standardization and typization of apartments for massive construction. (8.).

Yet, that is why the conclusions of the symposium 'Housing for our Conditions' offered a rather clear view of the issue in the social sphere, as well as in legalisation because «present property relations on urban areas...became an obstacle for planned urban construction. It is necessary to establish land relations especially in bigger cities, on a firmer and more determinate basis, enabling not only expropriation in a narrower sense, but also the comprising of land in cities also for wider needs of communal construction. In this respect, it is not only necessary to establish certain legal regulations, but also develop a more determined policy and practice» (9.). Since a good part of the initiative for the symposium and exhibition in Ljubljana evolved from the fact that loan funds concerning housing matters were introduced in former Yugoslavia in 1955, the following events in the legislative field confirmed the significance of the cites from the

conclusion, because the legislative framework for housing construction developed on the very line of the idea expressed in the conclusion.

"FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD"

Following the symposium and exhibition 'Housing for Our Conditions', and immediately after the Fifth Plenary of the Federal Committee of the Socialist Union in Brijuni, initiated by the social and economic organisations, among which the Union of Syndicates of Yugoslavia, The Union of Women's Societies of Yugoslavia, unions for the care of children and youth of Yugoslavia, the Office for the Advancement of Households, federal industrial chambers, the Union of Trade Chambers of Yugoslavia, a federal organizational committee Family and Household was formed with the task to organize «I International Revue Exhibition Family and Household 1957.» (10.). it should be noted here that the previously mentioned new legislative framework for the development of cities and housing development gained a political foundation in the Resolution of the Federal People's Assembly in February 1957., which made way for the adoption of a whole number of laws in the field of housing development later on, and the exhibition Family and Household was a sort of didactic medium of promotion of the new developmental urban strategy and new forms of mutual living in those cities (11.)

Today it is not possible to reconstruct precisely to what extent the exhibition was really 'international', but it is very easy to determine that it was really held at the Zagreb International Trade Fair, at its old location in Savska Road, from September 7-22, 1957. (12.). The exhibition was held on the premises of 10.000 square meters and comprised the following thematic units: woman in pre-war and socialist Yugoslavia; the equipment and functioning of services and children institutions; diet, home appliances and the organisation of kitchen, food preparation, interior design and the organisation of the apartment, clothing, hygiene, the children fair (13.). «In every group political-didactic, demonstrative and commercial elements should nicely be unified», stated the commentator of the organiser's idea

o and he was probably very near the truth, since according to its organisation the exhibition «Family and Household» turns into a social organisation which via exhibitions communicates ideas because of which it was established. These ideas are in the sphere of social activism in the domain of housing, but are now understood in an even wider sense in relation to the symposium and the exhibition «Housing for Our Conditions». Namely, the very next exhibition Family and Household was held at the new location of the Zagreb International Trade Fair south from the river Sava, at a three times bigger location than the first one (14.). The exhibition was held from September 6-22, 1958. under the slogan «The Community Today Takes Over a Big Part of Care for the Family», and with the following segments: 1.Housing Community – Extended Family; 2.Services Liberate the Family from a Tiring and Unproductive Work in the Household; 3.Children Institutions in the Residential Community; 4.Cheap and Qualitative Social Diet; 5.Department of Household Economy; 6. A Well-Organised Trade – a Help to the Family and Household; 7. An Apartment Economical and Rational; 8.Furniture Cheap and Functional (15.). The extension of the topic when compared to the first exhibition is obvious, and now with the emphasis on «housing community» which was as a model presented in the first section and with a model of such a housing community for 5000 people. A significant segment of the exhibition in 1958 was the domain of housing and furniture in which , if one is to believe the poorly preserved documentation , participated mainly the very same protagonists which had already been described within the context of applied arts and the context of architecture. In the section of housing projects of full-size apartments were exhibited, among others the Institute for Housing Development of Slovenia, based on the project of Milena Mihelić and Ilija Arnautović and two-room and three –room apartments based on the project of Bernard Bernardi (16.). Just as was the case at the exhibition «Housing for Our Conditions» they were also based on

photographs published in magazines, apartment models were completely furnished, mostly by members of the group SIO. The realization of the exhibition Family and Household in 1957 and 1958 was carried out by the firm Interpublic from Zagreb and its numerous associates, among whom were, as can be concluded from poor documentation, also some members of the then already non-existent group EXAT 51 (17. Richter). About the 1958 exhibition Edvard Kardelj wrote «...the fact that the exhibition gives a very correct conception of the housing community- not as an ordinary organisation of citizens for the propaganda of a certain idea, but as a specific form of communal activity, in which the initiative and means of a citizen- based on his own needs- unify with the plan and means of the commune» (18.). These words clearly describe the social and political background of the manifestation Family and Household, in other words social activism which was intended to be encouraged in the domain of housing in big housing communities. This activism also expanded through the network of People's Universities within which after the 1958 exhibition started the initiative to establish the department of Family and Household «with the goal to popularize via them socialist principles and exchange experiences in activities concerning life of a modern family and household organisations» (19.). It has to be mentioned that several months after the second exhibition of Family and Household a law was adopted on the nationalization of rented buildings and construction sites, by which an indirect basis for the realization of the idea of housing communities was set, because from that moment onwards it was possible to get bigger lands for the construction of exactly such communities for 5000 people illustrated by the models at the exhibition, which was not previously possible. (20.). Immediately after the law had been adopted during the year 1959 the following laws were also brought: The Law on Housing Relations, Law on Business Buildings and Facilities, General Law on Housing Communities, Law on Housing Unions, Law on Property on part of the buildings and the Law on

Financing Housing Communities (21.). In this way the basis of creating new forms of social life was sanctioned in bigger housing communities, a residential building as a social phenomenon was sanctioned as well, and in this way the framework for the third exhibition Family and Household was created which was prepared in even a more ambitious way in 1960, especially in the segment of housing and interior design and furniture for the apartment.

THE IDEA ON INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

At the beginning of the year a public competition was published for a ' new type of a modern apartment of the future», an apartment which yet has to appear but as a «modern»one, the term here probably marks its qualities in the sense of industrial production, standardization and typization, if it was already stressed at the exhibition in Ljubljana, «Housing for Our Conditions». A commentator of the time noticed «The task lies ahead of us for' housing for our conditions' to become housing for the condition of every individual user according to his individual wishes and possibilities» (22.). The project An Apartment of the Near Future by authors Bernard Bernardi and co-authors Milica Rosenberg and Adam Petranović was the winner of the competition(23.).

The exhibition Family and Household was held at Zagreb International Trade Fair from April 30-May 15 1960, and was made up of the following parts/ambients: 1.housing community 2. household services; 3.housing; 4.children institutions; 5.family and household in the country; 6.modern trade and supply; 7.fair of consumer goods; 8.we on vacation; 9.social diet; 10.department of family and household (24.). It is worth mentioning that the topic of the exhibition was expanded to the country and vacation which was a new aspect of social life at that time. Six projects were presented in the part «housing» which offered conceptions for mass production of apartments: prefabrication – firm Gradis, Ljubljana; prefabricated construction – firm Jugomont, Zagreb; «an apartment of near future», Bernardo Bernardi and associates, the apartment of the type

«Korbar», Construction company «Tempo», Zagreb; an apartment in the solitaire, firm Trudbenik, Belgrade; an apartment of «concentrated housing development», firm Vranica, Sarajevo and a standard apartment in Belgrade, firm Rad, Belgrade. All apartments were exhibited in full-size models and completely equipped with furniture designed by members of the Association of Visual Artists of Applied Arts of Croatia, the Institute for the Advancement of Households of the People's Republic of Croatia, Centre for the Advancement of Household of the People's Republic of Serbia and the firm Šipad from Sarajevo (25.).

Speaking about the 1960 exhibition Vladimir Nenadović explained the connection of the manifestation Family and Household and the exhibition in Ljubljana «Housing for Our Conditions», and with regard to a «recent housing reform», in other words «introducing economic and democratic relations in housing economy», by which he also pointed out to the realistic political and legal framework within which activities took place within the context of social activism in housing, starting from the Ljubljana exhibition and then continuing through all manifestations of Family and Household (26.)

That this is the case of a wholesome process of social activism is first noticed in the change of the title of the magazine «Family and Household» into «housing community» in October of 1960., and the meaning of this change was elaborated by Džemal Bijedić, Secretary of the Federal Executive Council for Legislation, the very next year on the pages of the previously mentioned magazine, who stated that «there is no reason any more for housing and local communities to be treated separately» (27.). The process of preparation of the spatial, legislative-regulatory, social and architectural density of population in urban and rural residential areas was evident through activism of promoted value – completed, by the third and last exhibition Family and Household.

CONCLUSION

As has been shown, the context of social activism endeavoured to get widely into the structure of the former society and its dynamics, to the greatest extent influenced by the process of industrialization and urbanization. This specific social context which was formed in the second half of the 1950s mobilized within itself theoretical and practical elements of the context of applied arts and the context of architecture. Especially architecture since this very discipline is marked as important for the creation of projects of standardization of typical apartment production. The protagonists of that context, individuals- theorists and practitioners, which sometimes meant the same person, wanted to, by participating in the context of social activism, reveal practical aspects of architecture in the wider sense, with the element of designing utility objects as an integral part. In the same way the protagonists from the context of applied arts who participated in the context of social activism made an effort to argue and show through practical example the need for the conception of «art in industry».

Mainly these three contexts were connected and merged in the domain of designing an apartment and its interior, through constant insisting on a wholesome technical and aesthetic approach to every full-size model which was completely furnished. Through activities in this context, the theoretical construction of the concept of design in Croatia and Slovenia gained a specific social significance.

NOTES

1. Tepina, Marijan and associates (ed.), Housing for Our Conditions, exhibition along with the First General Yugoslav Symposium on Housing Development and the Apartment in Ljubljana, May 1956., Ljubljana 1957., p.9.

2 the same, p.10.

3.the same, p 10-11.

4.Introduction to the exhibition ' Housing for Our Conditions', in: Tepina, Marijan and associates (ed.), see note 1., p.18.

- 5.the same, p. 18 and 20. The author stresses the following thought «Anarhic individualism in the selection of dimension of the apartment and its elements is in direct contradiction with the endeavour to achieve a more economical and more successful housing construction», the same, p.20.
- 6.Yugoslav competition for a terraced house, serial furniture and sanitary complex, in: Tepina, Marijan and associates (ed.), see note 1., p.93.
- 7.This reconstruction was carried out with the help of reproductions in: Tepina, Marijan and associates (ed.), see note. 1, p. 93-131. and article Housing for Our Conditions in the magazine Architecture 1-6, Zagreb 1956., p. 31-56.
- 8.A.M., The Public Requires a More Modern Apartment and Furniture, Survey of the magazine Man and Space at the Ljubljana Exhibition Housing for Our Condition, Man and Space 53, Zagreb 1956., p.4.
9. Conclusions in: Tepina, Marijan and associates (ed.), see note. 1, p.180.
10. The Distance Travelled, offprint in: Family and Household, magazine of the Federal Organisational Committee, issue 1., Belgrade-Zagreb, p. I
11. Noted according to Housing Policy, Yugoslav Overview, Secretariat for Information of the Federal Executive Council and the Publicistic Institute Yugoslav Overview, Belgrade 1967., p. 169.; see also in: Jelinić, Grga, How to solve the housing crisis, AGM, Zagreb 1994., p.20.
12. about this in the Fall catalogue of the Zagreb International Trade Fair, Zagreb 1957.
13. Ž.St., Exhibition Family and Household, Man and Space 65, Zagreb 1957., p. 4-5. Photographs of the works of Niko Kralj, Milan Lentić and Ferdo Rusić were published with the article, so that it can definitely be concluded that these three authors exhibited their projects of furniture and home appliances. About the rest one can only guess, and a research on this topic would certainly be valuable in order to discuss in a more detailed manner the relation of the context of applied arts and architecture towards the context of social activism in housing.
- 14.see note. 10., p I
- 15.same, p. IV-XIV
- 16.Mutnjaković, Andrija, Housing Issue within the exhibition of the II International Exhibition Family and Household, Man and Space 79, Zagreb 1958., p.4-5.
- 17.Man and Space 79, Zagreb 1958., p. 1, reproduced photography signed by «eng. Arh. Vjenceslav Richter, decorative billboard from the exhibition Family and Household.
- 18.Kardelj, Edvard, On the exhibition Family and Household 1958, in the Distance Travelled, offprint in: Family and Household, magazine of the Federal Organisational Committee, number 1, Belgrade-Zagreb, p. XV
- 19.Note of the editorial staff, From practice for practice, Union of People's Universities of the People's Republic of Croatia, Zagreb 1958., without pagination. In the same issue a programmatic article was published written by Vida Tomšič, Problems of our present family, p. 3-18.
20. Noted according to the Housing Policy, Yugoslav Review, see note 11, p.169.; see also in: Jelinić, Grga, see note. 11., p. 20.
21. same, p.20.
- 22.Nenadović, Vladimir, On Housing for Our Conditions, Family and Household 3-4, Belgrade-Zagreb 1960., p. 6.
- 23.Bernardi, Bernardo, An Apartment for Near Future at the exhibition Family and Household, Family and Household 3-4, Belgrade-Zagreb 1960., p. 16-17.; Turina, Vladimir, On the physiomy of one public architectural competition, Man and space 96, Zagreb 1960., p. 1-2.; On the genesis of the idea of the apartment of the near future in: Bernardi, Bernardo, One (Counter)suggestion, Man and Space 74., Zagreb 1958., p.2. and Bernik, Stane, Bernardo Bernardi, Croatian Graphic Institute and the National University Library, Zagreb 1992.
- 24.Family and Household, extra edition, Belgrade-Zagreb, V 1960., A Guide to the Zagreb Spring International Fair and the exhibition Family and Household, without pagination.
- 25.Family and Household 3-4, Belgrade-Zagreb 1960., p.31.
- 26.Nenadović, Vladimir, mentioned work, p. 5.

27. There is no need for housing and local communities to be treated separately, an interview with the secretary of the Federal Executive Council for Legislation Džemal Bijedić, Housing Community, Beograd-Zagreb X 1961., p.1/15.