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Affordable Homes for Everyone? Housing in Socialist Yugoslavia 1945–1975

Introduction

During the meeting of the Executive Committee of the League of Communists in Ljubljana (1956) Tito stressed, “One should be aware of the fact that a standard of living has played a key role in Hungary and Poland. The Russians are a less important element. We should not joke about it and don’t think that, in our country, low standards of living do not have political consequences.”¹ His words briefly summarize the motivation for changes in economic and housing policy that became clearly visible from the mid 1950s. This chapter seeks to partially fill the gap in our knowledge about housing policy, focusing mostly on several important and intertwined themes – legislation on housing and rents, the construction of communal buildings and private apartments, and the consequences of the housing scarcity.

The importance and impact of dwelling space on everyday life, family relations, and standard of living is well known. Despite the significant scholarship on rural-urban migration, the housing policy in socialist Yugoslavia is under-researched in historiography. Existing sociological scholarship addresses topics such as spatial and social segregation in Yugoslav towns, discriminatory housing allocation, slums, housing poverty, and the phenomenon of illegal construction that bloomed during the 60s and 70s. In this chapter I will provide a pan-Yugoslav perspective and address the importance of housing and housing policy both in the terms of its economic and infrastructural importance, as well as on its impact on standard of living and everyday life. Not denying the fact that Yugoslav authorities put significant effort into resolving the acute housing crisis, I will strive to show that official housing policy had numerous unplanned and unwanted consequences such as pronounced class inequalities and urban chaos: consequences that were facilitated by inadequate investments in communal infrastructure and illegal construction. Paradoxically, despite the new ideological and economic setting, it turned out that it was not possible to completely break through from the path dependencies set in the interwar period. Although the majority of

¹ AJ, A CK SKJ, III 8/ 67; Stenografske beleške sa proširene sednice Izvršnog komiteta CK SKJ održane 6.11.1956. u Ljubljani.

Yugoslavs saw significant improvement in standard of living, infrastructural limitations, especially housing scarcity and inadequacy, significantly affected everyday life, impacting working potential and family relations.

The essay is based on sources from the Archive of Yugoslavia and relevant literature.

Mass Migration

At the end of World War II Yugoslavia was one of the least urbanized countries in Europe. The economic policy of the new regime, relative agrarian overpopulation, and excessive poverty in the countryside were only some of the incentives for a mass-scale rural-urban migration that started almost immediately after the liberation. Still, until 1955, the scope of migration in Yugoslavia was on average lower than the natural increase, only to be followed by a period of growth, causing a “massive disintegration of natural production”, accelerated employment outside the agricultural economy, and rapid development and expansion of the market for both industrial and agricultural products. Analyzing the data obtained in the 1961 census, Yugoslav demographers found that the combined total of migration movements, and not only those towards the cities, included around seven million people, that is, as much as 38% of the Yugoslav population.² Belgrade and other republican centers attracted the majority of the newcomers. Thus, only 30% of the inhabitants of Belgrade were born in that city, 35.8% in Zagreb, 38.1% in Podgorica, 40.7% in Ljubljana, 40.8% in Skopje, and 43.7% in Sarajevo.³ However, despite the impressive migration intensity, Yugoslavia, compared to other European countries, struggled in urban development. At the beginning of the 60s, fewer than 96% of settlements had a population of around 2,000 people or less.⁴ Moreover, Yugoslavia, along with Malta, Portugal, and Albania, was also one of the few European countries where less than 20% of the total population lived in towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants.⁵ Although the following decades brought a dynamic increase in the urban population that exceeded the increase in the total number of inhabitants of Yugoslavia,⁶ in 1981 less than 50% of the population (46.5%) lived in cities.⁷ Such an outcome of the urbanization processes in Yugoslavia was undoubtedly the result of not only pre-war backwardness, but also the fact that the rural population did not necessarily move to the towns. Many of them found employment in industry, commuting on a daily basis to the factories where they worked. The low wages of unskilled

² Ivana Dobrivojević, *Selo i grad. Transformacija agrarnog društva Srbije 1945 – 1955* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2013), 369f.

³ Ivanka Ginić, *Dinamika i struktura gradskog stanovništva Jugoslavije. Demografski aspekti urbanizacije*, (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1967), 25f.

⁴ Ibid, 21.

⁵ Andrej Simić, *The Peasant Urbanities. A Study of Rural – Urban Mobility in Serbia* (New York, London: Seminar Press, 1973), 29.

⁶ Ivanka Ginić, “Dinamika urbanizacije u SR Srbiji”, *Stanovništvo*, januar – decembar 1978, 49.

⁷ Sreten Vujović, *Ljudi i gradovi* (Budva: Mediteran, 1990), 33.

workers, awareness of housing poverty in towns, and the possibility of additional income from agriculture were some of the main causes of daily migrations.

From the beginning of the 60s, most of the rural youth dreamed of moving to the towns. Even the children were no exception. In 1962, pupils in village elementary schools in Serbia were asked to write an essay about their career plans. Although they expressed positive attitudes towards their home villages, no one wanted to remain in the countryside or work in agriculture. A boy from a remote mountain village wrote, “I do not want to become a peasant or agricultural worker, for I want to be somebody. This can be done only by going to the city. Those who remain in the village have a difficult life, with much hard work.” Another noted, “My desire to continue my studies becomes greater when I see how hard workers have to labor with a pickaxe. If I graduated from a higher school, I would become a gentleman. This is my greatest wish.” Others simply aspired to a better living standard. One of the interviewed boys expressed his desire to become an engineer, to live in a comfortable apartment, buy a television, go to the movies, own a motorcycle, travel throughout Yugoslavia, and learn foreign languages. Another comment was short and to the point: “I wish to dress nicely in city clothes and be able to eat my fill.” In a 1957 survey of rural youths, 70% expressed the desire to move to a town to get a job. The aspirations of the younger generation were widely discussed at all Party levels. Party activists had no hesitation in talking about the widespread belief that the only people staying behind in the Yugoslav villages were those who, for various reasons, were unable to move to towns and cities, and that young people were ready to move even if they knew that life there would be more difficult.⁸ The prevalence of such social attitudes resulted in “one of the most turbulent economic exoduses that economic history can remember.” Namely, in the period from 1948 through 1981, about 6.5 million Yugoslavs moved from villages to towns. Migrations severely reduced agrarian overpopulation and low employment in the countryside, but also generated new problems such as a proportional increase in the aging population of the countryside, a lagging rate of agricultural production, a housing crisis, and unemployment in the towns.⁹

Housing and Housing Policy in the Period of Early Socialism

The housing fund, deficient even in pre-war times, suffered significantly during the war. The pace of reconstruction of houses and apartments was sluggish, and the huge facilities of heavy industry were consuming the scarce financial resources that were available. The reconstruction of damaged buildings, apart from financial problems and shortage of basic construction materials, was slowed down and hindered by the state’s low rents policy, since a large part of residential buildings, especially in Belgrade, were built between the two wars exclusively

⁸ Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić, “From Peasants to Builders of Socialism: The Mobilisation of Young Workers in Socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1965)”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 74:7 (2022), 11.

⁹ Vujović, *Ljudi i gradovi*, 40f., 50.

for the purpose of renting. In the new political circumstances, pre-war renters did not have much reason to invest in the reconstruction of residential buildings. Although the Constitution of 1946 formally guaranteed private ownership, many residential buildings were confiscated or nationalized. Thus, in Belgrade alone, by the spring of 1946, as many as 12,000 apartments became state property.

The impoverished housing stock, inherited from the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was inadequate. Most of the buildings were built before 1919, and many of them “were inhabited only by necessity,” since “on regular occasions,” they would be impossible to live in. Part of the housing stock was damaged during the war, and part was decaying, primarily due to years of lack of maintenance and the carelessness of the tenants. The impossibility of procuring construction materials in free sale and the Party's position that the pursuit of a private house or apartment is an expression of “petty-bourgeois aspirations” had such an effect that, in the first post-war decade, almost the only constructor of new apartments was the state. Aware of the political and social implications of housing poverty, the authorities, starting in 1949, tried to find a way to provide dwelling space efficiently and cheaply for many residents. Industrial production of typical residential buildings was favored, and prefabricated construction was popularized. The first prefabricated buildings appeared on the outskirts of towns, and this remarkably fast construction method was popularized by the press.

The conflict with the Soviet Union led to an atmosphere of partial liberalization and democratization. The Decree on the Construction of Residential Buildings (1951) opened the way to loans for private construction. Loans could be taken on 30 year terms with an interest rate of 1-2%, contractors were granted donations of 80% of the value of the installed material, and if necessary, they were also allocated land for construction. In order to make sure that the workers would continue to work for the same company, and to keep daily migrations to a minimum, the future house was supposed to be located at a maximal distance of 5 kilometers from the place of employment. The initial interest was significant, and citizens would mostly build single-story buildings with one apartment. Despite its commercialization, prefabricated construction did not attract potential contractors, partly because of suspicion in the quality of the new type of building, partly since such buildings were no cheaper than the standard ones. Anyone who wanted to build had to refer to the local people's committee, which checked the data and made decisions based on the requests. However, the funds allocated from the budget were limited, and construction was hampered by the fact that small areas of land were owned by the state.¹⁰

While newspapers reported almost daily on the construction of the new flats by the state, the construction rate in the early 1950s reached only 70% of the pre-war pace, even according to official statistics. The combination of rapid population growth, slow building, and the poor quality of housing maintenance led to a steady decrease in dwelling space available to each person. Thus, in the period between 1949/50 and 1954, the amount of space available to an individual

¹⁰ Dobrivojević, *Selo i grad*, 398-405.

on average dwindled by as much as 22% (i.e. from 11.6 to 8.7 square meters), leaving an amount which was far below the minimum defined in sociological theory. The situation in Yugoslav cities was almost identical — in front of the administrative bureaus that were in charge of housing, people were constantly queuing, waiting for a solution to their accommodation problem. The shortage of housing space was exacerbated even further by the needs of the state administration and industry: previously expropriated houses and flats were often allocated for office use by government administrators and socialist companies. The only solution the Party was able to offer to the housing space crisis was the institution of the “communal flat.” A communal flat was established in two ways — by confiscating it from the former owner, in the case of which he retained the right to continue to use part of the flat by living next to the new tenant, or by deciding that an empty flat is to be jointly used by two unrelated households.¹¹ However, communal living represented more than just a practical solution to the housing crisis. It also fit into an ideological agenda: the Party was not only trying to create a classless society, but also punish, repress, and place under surveillance the members of the old bourgeoisie defeated in the revolution. Thus, according to the newly created social hierarchy workers, military officers, and all other members of the partisan movement were regarded as the most meritorious citizens, who were entitled to living in flats completely or partly expropriated from their prewar owners. Shared flats, especially in big cities, became so common that the government in the mid 1950s estimated that more than 30 percent of all flats were shared by two or more families.¹² Under such circumstances, even the state officials feared the possible political consequences of the housing crisis. In closed sessions, high ranking Party officials concluded that the prevailing living conditions impinged not only on the comfort of tenants and their right to privacy, but also had a direct impact on the health of people and “their morale and ability to work.” Official estimates from 1955 spoke eloquently on the gravity of the crisis. According to these assessments, 200,000 new apartments were supposed to be constructed in towns throughout Yugoslavia in order to achieve a “tolerable, but not satisfactory standard.” In terms of the amount of available housing space, Yugoslavia was at the very bottom of the European ladder, with only Greece lagging behind it. Under such circumstances, even the journalists who skillfully glossed over reality could not pretend to be optimistic. Thus, prominent political magazine NIN assessed that the housing crisis could be resolved in 1980, after the construction of three million new houses.¹³

¹¹ Sreten Vujović, “Gradsko stanovanje i privatnost u Srbiji tokom 20. Veka”, in Milan Ristović (Ed.), *Privatni život kod Srba u 20. veku* (Beograd: Clio, 2007), 293.

¹² Ivana Dobrivojević, “Urbanization in Socialism. Everyday life in Yugoslav Towns 1945 – 1955”, in Katrina Gulliver, Helena Toth (Eds.), *Cityscapes in History. Creating the Urban Experience* (London: Ashgate, 2014), 84f.

¹³ Id., “Changing the Cityscapes: The Ruralization of Yugoslav towns in Early Socialism”, in Włodzimirz Borodziej, Stanislav Holubec, Joachim von Puttkamer (Eds.), *Mastery and Lost Illusions. Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe* (Munich: De Gruyter, 2014), 139-157, here 151.

Paradoxically, the newly built apartments, not only in numbers, but also in terms of structure, did not contribute to the solution of housing poverty. Despite the visions of 'housing factories and tenant collectives', new settlements appeared on the outskirts of towns, usually without electricity, water, paved streets and the adjacent infrastructure. The tendency to reduce the area of apartment as much as possible, the short design deadlines and the inexperience of the designers made the apartments, even those in the capital, uncomfortable and inconvenient. The location was chosen haphazardly, the towns grew wider than it was necessary, and no attention was paid to the location of the buildings considering the sides of the world and the direction of the strongest winds. Architects warned in vain that the new settlements were 'plain and ugly', especially criticizing the absence of even a minimum effort to fit the constructed buildings into the environment architecturally.¹⁴

Socialism with a Human Face

Gradual democratization and liberalization of society also affected housing policy. The notion that rents must become an economic category, instead of a social one, became more pronounced. All apartments were divided into six groups according to the material from which they were built, the devices they were equipped with, the layout of the rooms, health conditions, the position of the apartment in the building, but also according to the city zone and the density of communal facilities in it.¹⁵ However, until 1959, the regulations on rents and building maintenance were passed by municipal people's committees, and the differences in the amount of rent the citizens had to pay were considerable.¹⁶ Equating the desire to own one's own apartment with petty-bourgeois and bourgeois aspirations was gradually abandoned. Already at a consultation of architects held in Dubrovnik in 1950, it was heard that one's desire for their own home was "natural and justified".¹⁷ Comprehensive construction of residential areas was increasingly recognized as a condition for solving the acute housing crisis. At the meeting of the Permanent Conference of Cities and Municipalities in April 1953, it was stated that administrative measures could only "partially, but not entirely solve" the housing problems.¹⁸ However, in the mid-1950s, extensive housing construction was hampered by difficult financial situation resulting from the Soviet style economic policy defined by the first Five-Year Plan, the absence of clear regulations on housing ownership¹⁹ and the lack of construction land in state ownership. Even in Belgrade, there were only 120 lots on which it was possible

¹⁴ Id., *Selo i grad*, 420-421.

¹⁵ Uredba o upravljanju stambenim zgradama, *Službeni list FNRJ*, 26.12.1955.

¹⁶ AJ-495-6; Usavršavanje u oblasti stambene izgradnje i korišćenja stanova. Osnovni referat.

XIV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština Jugoslavije, Zagreb 24 – 26.10.1963.

¹⁷ "Savetovanje arhitekata i urbanista u Dubrovniku 1950", *Arhitektura* 11-12 (1950), 16.

¹⁸ AJ-130 – 749 – 1209; Nezavedeno, bez datuma.

¹⁹ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Referat o principima zakona u stambenoj oblasti.

to build residential buildings, so appeals were made that the entire land fund in the city intended for the construction of apartments should be "put out of circulation", i.e., 'nationalized with fair compensation to its owners'.²⁰ The change in housing policy, which occurred at the end of 1955, was part of an overall economic turnaround executed under a Tito's slogan that "the current generation has invested a lot of effort in building the country, that it now deserves to live better and that some tasks must be left behind to future generations". "Socialism does not mean", noted Tito in Zvornik, "just having large and modern factories", but it was necessary to provide "better living conditions" for "our working people".²¹ A contribution of 10% was introduced for housing construction, required to be paid by "business organizations, institutions, state bodies, social and cooperative organizations, as well as other persons who employ other people's labor".²²

In the middle of the 1950s, housing was recognized as one of the most important components of the standard of living and the construction of new settlements benefited not only citizens as individuals, but also numerous Yugoslav companies. The growth of the construction industry increased the volume of work for construction material factories, but also for those that produced furniture and other goods needed to furnish an apartment. An exhibition was organized in Ljubljana to stimulate consumption but also to provide citizens with a vision of a beautiful life under socialism. "A Dwelling for Our Conditions" (1956) which 'provided a graphic representation of the architectural profession's idea of what a home should be like: modern, compact, efficient, and relaxing'.²³ Although the new five-year plan envisaged greater investment in housing construction and the construction of as many as 200,000 apartments (1957–1961), the increased investments were not proportionally reflected in the increased number of newly built apartments. Thus, in the period from 1955 through 1958, the value of invested funds increased by 47%, and the number of newly built apartments only by 25%. The increase in the price of construction materials, the delay in the modernization of the construction sector and the individual design of residential buildings were just some of the factors that influenced the increase in the average price of a built apartment. At the initiative of the Trade Union, the Federal Executive Council passed a series of regulations with the aim of preventing the "appearance of luxurious and wasteful constructions", introducing tighter controls and accelerating the resolution of the severe housing crisis by building more modest apartments.²⁴ The extent to which poor housing conditions made the daily life of many Yugoslav residents difficult was realistically shown in the data of 1964—16.6% of apartments in towns with over 50,000 inhabitants were used by two households, while 8.2% of apartments in towns with over 100,000 inhabitants were

²⁰ AJ-130 – 749 – 1209; Broj 4042 od 14. 5. 1953.

²¹ Dobrivojević, *Selo i grad*, 186–193.

²² Zakon o doprinosu za stambenu izgradnju, *Službeni list FNRJ*, 29.12.1955.

²³ Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital: Urban Planning, Modernism, and Socialism in Belgrade* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 90.

²⁴ AJ-117 – 263 – 487; Životni i radni uslovi.

used by as many as three families.²⁵ Particularly difficult conditions prevailed in Belgrade, which annually attracted thousands of newcomers. “In the last seven or eight years, 20,000 to 30,000 people have come to Belgrade each year,” explained Mayor Branko Pešić in 1965. “That equals an entire small town [...] And all of these people find shelter somewhere, hole up someplace. Some get an apartment, but that is the smallest percentage of them. A great number however are forced [...] to house in basements, in unhygienic apartments and barracks. And whoever has not yet seen this should definitely once examine what this looks like [...] Something like this doesn’t even exist in Africa.”²⁶

To overcome the problem of housing shortage as easily as possible, individual construction, considered as the cheapest, was encouraged. Employees received building land or loans from companies. Statistical data testified best to the immensity of this phenomenon. In the middle of the 1960s, more than half of the buildings in cities were built by private individuals for their own needs. Many of these buildings were built illegally, in the outskirts of towns, primarily due to the inability of a great number of Yugoslavs to solve their housing problems in another way. Most of them did not have the money for the expenses that legal construction involved. Moreover, the emergence of illegal settlements was, in a way, supported by the state itself, considering the incompleteness of urban plans, the vagueness of local regulations, and the disorganization of communal and inspection services.²⁷ Since issuing building permits was a long and hard process, and the punishments of illegal builders were symbolic. Already in the mid-1960s, many Yugoslav towns were surrounded by illegal settlements built without any order and the most basic communal utilities. The quality of the illegally erected buildings was different. In most cases, dilapidated buildings were made of weak or mixed materials such as adobe, piles, old boards and bricks, which could not satisfy the basic technical and construction requirements. In such a housing turmoil, some saw an opportunity to make good money. After obtaining a permit and land for the construction of a family building, most often with two apartments, individuals started building buildings with a larger number of apartments for persons with whom the owner of the building permit and land signed an agreement on joint construction, with appropriate compensation. After the completion of the rough construction works, local authorities were asked to acknowledge the existing situation, that is, to issue a new construction permit and thus legalize the deviation from the original design.²⁸

Realizing that chaotic ‘illegal construction’ created a serious problem that was increasingly disrupting the structure of towns, the Permanent Conference organized a survey in 73 Yugoslav urban centers at the beginning of 1967. The data obtained were devastating - the construction of illegal buildings spread to

²⁵ AJ-495 – 7; Problemi urbanizacije u Jugoslaviji. Osnovni referat podnet na XV skupštini Stalne konferencije gradova i opština, Ljubljana 5-7.11.1964.

²⁶ Marie-Janine Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2019), 197.

²⁷ AJ-130 – 749 – 1210; Osnove politike urbanizacije i prostornog uređenja (1969).

²⁸ AJ-495 – 7; Bespravna gradnja u gradovima. XV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština, Ljubljana 5-7.11.1964.

such an extent that in larger towns, almost half of the individually built apartments were without the compulsory permits. Although this phenomenon was justified by the rapid influx of the rural folk, it proved that most of the constructors were aware they had violated the law and that the building could be demolished at any time. Regardless of whether it was a local or a newcomer, the main incentive that encouraged Yugoslavs to consciously break the regulations was a desire to provide housing for themselves and their families. The survey confirmed that the illegal builders were newcomers from the countryside who worked as industrial workers (over 50%) or craftsmen (12%). They were mostly family men, aged 26-45, with extremely low incomes. Despite widespread belief, most of them (70.3%) were not in the possession of any land in the countryside.²⁹

The fact that the development of the accompanying communal infrastructure, along with the construction of new settlements, was not considered at all contributed to the urban chaos that was perceptible in the largest Yugoslav towns already during the 60's. According to the official data, out of a total of 1,568.948 apartments in 862 towns and urban settlements, only 48% (1964) were connected to the water supply network.³⁰ The absence of facilities, insufficient space suitable for children and the neglect of the health and cultural needs of families, and the reduction of green areas represented only some of the most pronounced problems of newly built settlements - dormitories. An assertion was stated at the discussions and meetings, that the needs of the Yugoslavs were not considered enough during the construction of the residential blocks. 'The built apartments do not always meet the needs of our people, especially workers, both in terms of price and types of apartments'.³¹ After the housing reform (1959), the so-called 'double rents' appeared, since the rents in old buildings remained the same, while those in new ones, erected after 1960, followed the cost of construction, which increased by around 40%.³² The rents in new, well-furnished buildings became too high for some Yugoslavs during the crisis they felt increasingly more in the early 1960s. Thus, some of them with the lowest wages were compelled to refuse to move into an apartment they were offered.³³

The laws that regulated housing issues and the amount of rent were rapidly transformed. In 1962, the Law on Housing Relations was passed,³⁴ and already in 1965, in accordance with the guidelines of the economic reform, a radical reform of the legislation that regulated that area was executed. Starting from the principles stated in the Resolution on the further development of the housing economy system, the Federal Assembly passed four laws in July 1965: on setting the value of residential buildings, apartments, and business premises; on the

²⁹ AJ-495 – 56; *Bespravna gradnja* (1967).

³⁰ AJ-130 – 749 – 1210; *Osnove komunalne politike* (1966).

³¹ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Odbor za narodnu privredu Veća proizvođača.

³² AJ-495 – 6; *Usavršavanje u oblasti stambene izgradnje I korišćenja stanova. Osnovni referat. XIV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština Jugoslavije, Zagreb 24-26.10.1963.*

³³ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Odbor za narodnu privredu Veća proizvođača.

³⁴ "Zakon o stambenim odnosima", *Službeni list SFRJ* 17 (1962).

termination of the Law on Financing Housing Construction; on the economic management of communal residential buildings and on the allocation of funds for housing construction. At the end of the same year, amendments were made to the Law on Housing Relations, the Law on Establishing the Interest Rate on Funds in the Economy and the Law on Allocation of Funds for Housing Construction. Although it affected the living standard of citizens, especially of those with the lowest incomes, the increase in rents, which, since 1966, depended on the policy of municipalities and thus ceased to be equal for the entire country, improved the maintenance of residential buildings. The funds for housing construction were abolished, and their funds were transferred to banks. The contribution paid by all the employees of Yugoslav companies was supposed to be used specifically for housing construction, and the rent was supposed to become one of the basic sources of income from which the construction of new buildings would be financed. Commercial banks, in accordance with the Resolution, offered citizens loans with a 60% down payment, a repayment term of thirty years and an interest rate of 2%. It was estimated that this kind of policy would motivate both citizens and companies to invest their money in the construction of apartments. However, due to the skyrocketing price, especially in the period from 1960 through 1966, despite the greater financial allocations, only about 42,000 so-called apartments were constructed annually.³⁵

The same construction rate continued in the following years. A bit over 50,000 apartments were built in 1964 and 1966 due to the elimination of the consequences of the earthquake in Skopje, that is, the acceleration of construction before the abolition of municipal funds for that purpose. The average size of communal flats was around 55 square meters,³⁶ and most were built in larger urban centers.³⁷ Under those circumstances, companies tried to assign apartments for use mainly to highly qualified workers and officials,³⁸ that is, those employees who were considered essential for the production process. The slow pace of construction also encouraged discrimination when solving the housing issue, affecting the already visible social stratification.³⁹ Paradoxically, the more privileged social classes moved into new apartments paying a monthly rent they could easily afford. Unlike them, unskilled workers were in a twice as disadvantaged position since they were forced either to be tenants for years or to solve their housing issue by individual construction, investing in it their own funds and work. The housing crisis, which could not be solved at the current rate of construction of new buildings, was realistically evidenced in statistical data. Compared to other European countries, as regards the number of completed apartments in 1962, Yugoslavia

³⁵ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Informacija o sprovođenju Rezolucije o daljem razvoju sistema stambene privrede (1966).

³⁶ AJ-495 – 69; Uslovi stanovanja i stambena izgradnja u gradovima (1975).

³⁷ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Informacija o sprovođenju Rezolucije o daljem razvoju sistema stambene privrede (1966).

³⁸ AJ-495 – 6; Stenografske beleške sa XIV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština Jugoslavije, Zagreb 24-26.10.1963. Izlaganje Milijana Neorčića.

³⁹ Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić, "Harbingers of Crisis", *Istorija 20. veka* 1 (2019), 163f.

was at the very bottom of the ladder with the construction of about 5.6 apartments per 1,000 inhabitants, leaving behind only Portugal, Spain, Poland and Bulgaria.⁴⁰

By the mid-1960s, several larger, specialized companies distinguished, each building 1,000 to 2,000 apartments for the market. Belgrade's "Kongrap", "Rad" and "Impros", Sarajevo's "Vranica", Novi Sad's "Neimar", Zagreb's "Jugomont" and Ljubljana's "Giposs" represented some of the biggest socialist giants. Along with them, there were also many smaller construction companies operating in the Yugoslav market, which built only a few dozen apartments per year.⁴¹ The cost of construction, and therefore the price of a square meter, was rapidly growing year in year out. In addition to the local monopoly, since the companies built facilities almost exclusively at their headquarters,⁴² the rise in prices was influenced by several other factors. The backwardness of the construction industry and its poor mechanization represented the main, if not a crucial, cause of construction inefficiency.⁴³ The unfavorable educational structure of construction workers,⁴⁴ the poor quality of construction materials produced by the Yugoslav industry, as well as unresolved issues regarding the financing of utility works, land development and the displacement of tenants from buildings that were to be demolished, further slowed down construction and prevented the well-organized construction of residential areas.⁴⁵ However, the acute housing crisis and the discrepancy between supply and demand allowed companies to sell as much as 75% of the apartments that had yet to be built before the start of the construction season.⁴⁶ The living conditions in the new residential areas were far from ideal, and research by sociologists showed that such settlements did not represent an 'adequate basis for everyday life at the local level'.⁴⁷ Novi Belgrade, the finest example of socialist modernism, was no exception. The shortage of commercial, cultural, educational, turned out to be 'systemic and not a temporary phenomenon'. Not only theaters, cinemas and restaurants, but also schools were not being built sufficiently quickly. As a consequence, some schools were operating on three shifts of students per day.⁴⁸

The notion that the price of urban construction land should be economic prevailed after the economic and housing reform. Therefore, it was necessary to cede free space for use to the most favorable bidder through a public bidding. The insufficient number of apartments, and their inadequate structure and equipment, influenced a few municipalities to transfer the expenses for the construction and

⁴⁰ AJ-495 – 6; Usavršavanje u oblasti stambene izgradnje I korišćenja stanova. Osnovni referat. XIV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština Jugoslavije, Zagreb 24-26.10.1963.

⁴¹ AJ-495 – 55; Rezultat sprovođenja stambene reforme (1967).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ AJ-495 – 6; Stenografske beleške sa XIV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština Jugoslavije, Zagreb 24-26.10.1963. Izlaganje Đure Matića.

⁴⁴ AJ-495 – 69; Uslovi stanovanja i stambena izgradnja u gradovima (1975).

⁴⁵ AJ-495 – 6; Stenografske beleške sa XIV skupština Stalne konferencije gradova i opština Jugoslavije, Zagreb 24-26.10.1963. Izlaganje Đure Matića.

⁴⁶ AJ-495 – 55; Rezultat sprovođenja stambene reforme (1967).

⁴⁷ Vujović, *Gradsko stanovanje*, 304.

⁴⁸ Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital*, 132, 134.

development of communal infrastructure as well as supporting facilities - schools, health institutions and business premises to investors, in addition to the costs of land development. The increase in housing prices therefore had an impact on the reduction of construction, since companies, as the main buyers, were able to buy lesser square footage year in year out. Although the aim of the housing reform was to stabilize prices and encourage citizens to solve the housing issues themselves, the constant increase in housing prices was an accidental and undesirable phenomenon. Official reports stated that the prices did not fit the Yugoslav standard. Workers with average incomes had to invest their nine-year earnings to get an apartment,⁴⁹ which was much longer than in the Western and Eastern European countries.⁵⁰ In such circumstances, most Yugoslavs could not get a privately owned apartment, even with comparatively favorable loans.⁵¹ Although the funds allocated from workers' wages to contribute to the construction of apartments were not small - for example, in 1969 a total of 2,800 million dinars were allocated for those purposes, Yugoslav companies were, only formally, equal in terms of the possibility of solving housing problems of their employees. Moreover, instead of investing in communal housing where workers would have tenancy rights, state companies increasingly gave loans to employees for the construction or purchase of buildings. Namely, such policy was considered more cost-effective since loan beneficiaries usually, in addition to the money received, also invested their own funds, or their own work, if they decided to build. On the other hand, many Yugoslavs were not interested in investing in their own apartment. Despite the increase, the rents were still relatively low considering that the prices of apartments and their maintenance increased on an annual basis, while the rents remained at the level established by the reform (1965).⁵²

Conclusion

Although around 120,000 apartments (communal and private) were built annually in Yugoslavia, the housing standard was not satisfactory even at the end of the 1960s. Infrastructural limitations influenced all segments of everyday life, proving once more that the leap towards fully industrialized and modernized society was not possible without building the basic facilities. The average living space per resident was less than 12 square meters (1969), and according to some estimates, 710,000 more apartments had to be built so that every household would have a roof over its head.⁵³ In 1971, in nine cities of Serbia (Belgrade, Niš, Kragujevac, Čačak, Leskovac, Šabac, Novi Pazar, Svetozarevo and Vranje), 10% of apartments were shared by two or more households. Furthermore, housing

⁴⁹ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Informacija o sprovođenju stambene reforme (1970).

⁵⁰ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Osnovna pitanja režima stanarina i reprodukcije stambenog fonda.

⁵¹ AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Cena stana (1968).

⁵² AJ-130 – 750 – 1211; Informacija o sprovođenju stambene reforme (1970).

⁵³ Ibid.

conditions in many cases stayed between two extremes, so some families lived in overcrowded, cramped apartments, while others had excessive housing space for the local Yugoslav conditions.⁵⁴ Although it was difficult to provide a roof over one's head, mass migration took its toll. The housing culture was low, so even at the end of the 60s, despite accelerated modernization, the same problems were present in new and relatively modern residential buildings like a decade and a half earlier. The residents developed a careless attitude towards the apartments and it was generally normal that, after only two or three years of moving in, overall repairs on the utilities had to be done. The data on the social structure of the users of the housing fund also demonstrated that it was much easier for civil servants' households to obtain apartments for use than it was for workers. Namely, out of 921,751 households living in communal housing, only 38% were workers, and 62% were households of other categories, primarily employed as administrative and managerial staff.⁵⁵ According to Sreten Vujović, the housing issue had become one of the main sources of class stratification in society. Workers and officials with lower qualifications and low incomes were forced to wait a very long time for a solution to their housing issue. In the event of a favorable outcome, they often had to settle for an apartment of inadequate structure. On the other hand, there were privileged and better-educated classes who, far more easily, became holders of tenants' rights in new and comfortable apartments.⁵⁶ Spatial segregation accompanied social segregation. The upper and middle social classes lived in the central city municipalities, while the lower classes had to settle for apartments in the outskirts.⁵⁷

The prevailing share of one and two-room apartments in the housing stock had an effect that, despite the construction of a relatively large number of apartments, the housing structure was not favorable. The practice of building smaller apartments, which did not correspond to the size of an average Yugoslav family, 'transformed' the housing crisis instead of 'solving it'.⁵⁸ Kardelj's promise given at the 8th Congress, according to which, by 1970, the living space per inhabitant could have been increased from 9.4 square meters (1963) to around 11.5 square meters, also testified to the seriousness of housing poverty.⁵⁹ The continual lack of apartments additionally deepened the already existing social divisions since the conditions in which the workers lived were extremely difficult. As many as a quarter of working households in cities had less than 8m² of living space available per person (1971). The awareness of difficult life conditions of workers as a class was clearly visible in the official reports. In one of them, the assessment was made that the housing conditions of that social class would have been even more difficult if many workers had not turned to individual

⁵⁴ Vujović, *Gradsko stanovanje*, 296.

⁵⁵ AJ-495 – 58; *Grad i elementarna kultura njegovih stanovnika* (1968).

⁵⁶ Sreten Vujović, *Stambena kriza i ljudske potrebe* (Beograd: Arhitektonski fakultet, 1980), 31.

⁵⁷ Miloš Bobić, Sreten Vujović, *Krov nad glavom. Ogledi o stambenoj bedi i siromaštvu* (Beograd: Zavod za izdavačku delatnost "Filip Višnjić", 1985), 59.

⁵⁸ Vujović, *Stambena kriza*, 18f.

⁵⁹ *Osmi kongres SKJ* (Beograd: Kultura, 1964), 66.

construction to solve their housing problem.⁶⁰ Single workers for whom apartments (apart from a few singles hotels) were almost never built lived in particularly disagreeable conditions. They were forced to live ‘in unsanitary and unfit premises’ and pay high rents, which affected not only their actual earnings, but also their ‘health and ability to work’.⁶¹ By the middle of the 1970s, it became clear that the problem of ‘housing misery’ could not be solved without a radical change in the perceptions and expectations of people shaped in the socialist period. Paradoxically, it turned out that the reckless attitude towards private property and real estate ownership manifested in the first years after the end of the war had long-lasting and unforeseeable consequences. Once created belief that solving the housing issue was ‘exclusively the responsibility of the social community’, and that personal funds should be invested only in case there was no other solution,⁶² was almost impossible to modify.

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⁶⁰AJ-495 – 69; Uslovi stanovanja i stambena izgradnja u gradovima (1975).

⁶¹ AJ-117 – 263 – 487; Životni i radni uslovi.

⁶² AJ-142 / II – S 385; Magnetofonske beleške sa sastanka u saveznoj konferenciji SSRNJ sa predstavnicima republika i pokrajina održanog 12.10.1976. sa početkom u 9 časova.

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