



Research note

The spatial comfort of social housing units in the post-socialist period in Serbia in relation to the applicable architectural norms



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ABSTRACT

The national economic and political conditions of a country inevitably affect the development of its social housing sector. However, in order to prevent social exclusion, the quality of social housing has to at least be similar to the national average quality. As the practice of social housing in Serbia is still in its early stages, and the norms for this type of housing have only applied since 2013, this research strives to influence the formation of a more complete basis for the development of contemporary social housing models in Serbia, with the aim of improving the quality of social housing and achieving the prevailing housing quality in the country. A comparative analysis of the norms defined for social housing and those defined for market housing, as well as the results from the last census concerning the average housing area per member in Serbia, were used to define the position of social housing in comparison to other types of housing in the country. The analysis pointed out that the spatial comfort of social housing units is lower than other forms of housing in the country. In addition to which the unit area and the individual rooms are inadequately defined by the current social housing standard. The second part of the research, which is based on relevant architectural recommendations regarding the functional minimum regarding spatial comfort of the apartment units, aims to point out the necessary minimum of the housing space. The results of this research define recommendations for the minimum spatial comfort of social housing units: 1) the minimum floor area per member; and 2) the minimum floor area and width of the individual rooms.

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1. Introduction

Social housing models based entirely on the need to provide a shelter for socially vulnerable categories in practice have proved to be unsustainable. Today those models are widely abandoned and contemporary social housing models are seen on a much broader sociological level - in addition to providing necessary housing space for socially vulnerable categories they are used as a corrective for other negative social phenomena which accompany those categories. Relevant studies have shown that a quality social housing environment has a positive impact on its users (Ellen, Mijanovich, & Dillman, 2001; Evans, Wells, & Moch, 2003; Marans, 2003; Wilson, Eyles, Elliott, & Keller-Olaman, 2009; Opoku & Abdul-Muhmin, 2010); it prevents their social exclusion (Taylor, 1998), improves their integration into the wider society (Priemus, 1995; Priemus, 1997), and promotes public health (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Oxley, 2000; Whitehead & Scanlon, 2007; Maliene, Howe, & Malys, 2008; Madeddu, 2013; Mulliner & Maliene, 2013). For these potentials to be exploited,

the quality of social housing should be at least at the same level as the average housing quality in the country (Lujanen, 2003; UN, 2006). The architectural regulations that determine the area of social housing, as well as the norms which define the minimum spatial comfort of the units, should give support to the development of 'inclusive' social housing.

2. Research scope

The aim of this research is to give an insight into the spatial comfort of social housing units (SHU) in Serbia through the analysis of applicable architectural norms for this type of housing. As the practice of social housing in Serbia is still very new, in order to provide a better understanding of the current social housing practice in the state, a brief historical overview of subsidized housing models in Serbia is presented: 1) public housing construction in the socialist period; and 2) social housing construction in the post-socialist period (hereinafter the term social housing will relate exclusively to subsidized housing in the post-socialist period in Serbia). Besides elucidation of the subsidized housing construction policy applied, a comparative overview of the minimum floor area per member is given, defined by the standards of each period.

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The research into the spatial comfort of SHU was carried out in terms of: 1) the minimum floor area per member, and 2) the minimum floor area and width of the individual rooms. According to the recommendation that the quality of social housing should resemble the average national level of housing quality (Healy, 2003; Lujanen, 2003; UN, 2006), research of the spatial comfort of SHU was carried out through a comparative analysis of the spatial comfort of: market housing (according to the norms defined for this type of housing); and the average spatial comfort of housing unit in Serbia (according to Census '11 data). One of the goals of this research is to show at what level the spatial comfort of SHU is in Serbia in comparison to the prevailing housing conditions in the country.

The perceived discrepancies, together with the results of relevant architectural studies conducted on the subject of the minimum spatial comfort of the housing unit and its rooms (Ilić, 1991; Čanak, 2002; HATC, 2006; Levitt, 2010) were used as the basis for defining recommendations for the dimensioning of SHU: minimum floor area per member and minimum floor area and width of the individual rooms. The results of this research should contribute to a more complete basis for the development of contemporary social housing models in Serbia, with the aim of improving the quality of social housing and achieving the prevailing housing quality in the country.

3. Overview of subsidized housing construction in Serbia

The development of social housing in Serbia, as a former socialist country, has taken a somewhat different course compared to the established development models of social housing applied in Europe. It can be said that social housing, at least in the way it is known in the Western countries, until recently did not exist in Serbia.

3.1. Socialist period

The beginnings of state subsidized housing construction date back to the period after WWII. The development of housing in Serbia followed the so-called “Eastern – European model” (Tosics, 1998) in which there was a “right to housing” directly guaranteed by the state (Dandolova, 2003; Hegedüs, 2007). Generally, market principles in the residential sector were almost non-existent. It was the state who directly controlled the production and distribution of apartments. Although housing in this period was to a great extent subsidized and accessible to all individuals, it should be noted that the expression ‘social housing’ was incompatible with the political ideology (Dandolova, 2003) because the whole political system was declared to be social.

The first standardization of the minimum area of living space in subsidized housing construction during the socialist period in Serbia was carried out in 1947 (PRRSMS, 1947). This standard defined the minimum floor area of the units depending on the number of household members (Table 1). This regulation defined apartments as: “small” – planned for 3-member households with a floor area of about 50 m²; “middle” – about 60 m², planned for 4-member households; and “big” about 70 m², for 5-member households. The minimum values of floor area per member depending on the household size are presented in Table 1. According to this regulation the kitchen was defined solely for food preparation, while the dining space was integrated into the living

room area (Fig. 1). Also, it should be noted that this regulation prohibited sleeping in the living room area (Baylon, 1975).

Later, other norms were adopted however there were no significant shifts in the values of this period. It is important to note that in all of following standards of that time in Serbia it was common practice to use the living room for sleeping, with the norm that it could be used for sleeping one person (Baylon, 1980).

In the later socialist period, during the '80s, due to the rationalization of public spending, housing was divided into categories (TTSRBD, 1983). In addition to the minimum floor area per member this standard also defined the minimum floor area and the width of the individual rooms. The stipulated values of the unit area and its rooms were unique for all categories. Categorization concerned only the mode in which the apartment was used, i.e. whether the living room was used for sleeping or not. Table 1 presents the minimum floor areas per member, according to household size, stipulated by this standard which defines the use of the living room for sleeping one person. Since the living room was also used for sleeping, integrating the dining space within it was not permitted. According to this regulation, the dining space was positioned either as a part of the kitchen or as a separate room, and it had the possibility of immediate connection with the living room space (Fig. 1). The novelty in this standard was the introduction of an additional toilet to promote the apartment's day and night zoning.

3.2. Post-socialist period

The beginning of the 1990s was a turning point in housing policy – the state began the transition from centrally planned to market oriented housing policy (Musil, 1995). The mass privatization of state-owned apartments was carried out; within five years as much as 98% of housing stock was privately owned (Petovar, 2003). Although the government intended for the privatization to provide the financial basis for a new investment cycle hyperinflation drastically reduced the value of these assets. Without the financial resources and spatial capacity in the period after the '90s the state remained unable to engage in housing policy (Petovar, 2003).

On the other hand, the specific political situation in Serbia highlighted new housing issues – a large number of refugees and displaced persons coming to Serbia in the period after the nineties, creating an additional pressure on the state in terms of solving the housing needs of a large number of people. This problem resulted in new institutional and legal solutions and renewed state intervention in the area of housing, however, now no longer in the ways well known in Serbia during the socialist period, but similar to those in Western Europe.

Adoption of the Strategy for solving the problem of refugees and displaced persons (MINRZS, 2002) creates a foundation for the development of a future social housing system (Damjanovic & Gligorijevic, 2010). One of the practical results of this strategy is the Settlement and Integration of Refugees Programme (Ramirez, Mojović, Galassi, Čolić, & Vuksanović-Macura, 2008). The first SHUs were constructed as part of this project. Experience from this programme was key to adopting the Law on social housing (RHA, 2009) and subsequently the Social Housing Strategy (RHA, 2012), which was the first document that mentioned the obligation to define the standard and norms for social housing construction. In 2013, the Regulation on standards and

Table 1

An overview of the norms stipulated by standards for subsidized housing in different periods in Serbia – minimum floor area per member.

Size of household	Regulations for residential buildings of mass construction/1947	Terms and technical standards for the design of residential buildings and dwellings/1984	Standards and norms for the planning and construction of social housing/2013
	Early socialist period	Late socialist period	Post-socialist period
1-Member	–	33.0 m ²	22.0 m ²
2-Member	–	18.9 m ²	15.0 m ²
3-Member	16.7 m ²	15.0 m ²	13.3 m ²
4-Member	15.0 m ²	13.1 m ²	12.5 m ²
5-Member	14.0 m ²	12.1 m ²	12.4 m ²

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