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A HOUSING HABITAT IN A MODERN CITY

Our cities must be places where human beings lead their lives in dignity, good health, safety happiness and hope.

(The Declaration of Human Habitations,
Item 5, Istanbul 1996)

We can look at housing conditions from several different angles. In the strictest sense housing conditions of a given area are defined by size, the number of appliances in households, flats and population ratio, the number of independent families. The subject, however, has been considered in a broader meaning for some time now. The dwelling, having many functions, is associated with the environment. A wide range of relations between the dwelling and the environment accounts for creating the appropriate living conditions. Modern housing conditions can be defined as: "a certain way of living in which both the dwelling as shelter and the environment are used methodically and purposefully. At the same time it is a definite space occupied by the city's inhabitants. It is an area where people as biological and social beings fulfil their needs." [Wódz, 1996]. A housing habitat is a kind of environment "which is defined as shaping space for living contributing to the need for privacy and individuality of a human being in the community and as creating acceptable ways of community life and services in the area" [Śliwińska-Ładzińska, 1992]. A housing habitat is considered in many dimensions as a spatial-technological and social-cultural structure. The question of architectural-spatial and social-cultural relations in a housing habitat is of an interdisciplinary nature and it requires the expertise of many specialists. The variety of approaches to a housing habitat can be found in a wide range of international initiatives and documents issued over the last twenty

years, which deal with the factors that determine the quality of life, health, ecology and spatial planning. The most important ones are: The European City Planning Charter signed on 20 May 1983 in Torremolinas [*Planowanie przestrzenne...*, 1989]. The Global Programme of Activities – June 1992 – Agenda 21 [*Agenda '21*, 1993], Ottawa Charter issued in 1986 [*Ottawa Charter...*, 1986]; Aalborg Charter for sustainable development in cities and small towns, Denmark 1994 [Kozłowski, 1993]; The Declaration of Human Habitations by UN conference – Habitat II, June 1996 [*The Declaration...*, 1997]; The World Declaration of Health including twenty one objectives of health policies in UN member countries – “Health 21”, WHO May 1998 [*Zdrowie 21...*, 2001].

All these documents highlight different aspects of the influence of the environment on the conditions of living in cities and the key feature of the documents is a holistic approach. The major concept of shaping man's habitat is the concept of sustainable development defined as the activities combining economic, social and ecological aims without thwarting the opportunities of the future generations. The concept of sustainable development with reference to a housing habitat includes as, A. Baranowski [1997] emphasises, three basic issues. The first one concerns the development of cities and housing estates, where the priority is to restructure and shape the area already in use without exploiting and destroying the natural environment and new grounds. The second one deals with combining different aims such as economic and social ones as well as environment protection. With regard to a housing habitat it means that all the parties are required to participate in the process of shaping, exploiting and transforming the environment. The third issue touches upon the necessity of taking into consideration the environment's transformation in terms of its limited life span within all the phases of the process (programming, planning and designing).

Housing conditions should be considered in three aspects:

- a micro-housing habitat including the dwelling and its surroundings such as the type of architecture, building etc;
- a broader housing habitat consisting of some type of architecture in the neighbourhood;
- a micro-housing habitat including different facilities and transport systems in a city [Turowski, 1979].

What are the living conditions in the Polish cities like in view of the political and economic transformation? The answer is quite complex, because new problems of the housing industry which appeared in the new era must be added to the old ones. The current housing conditions in Poland have been a legacy of the post war era and housing policies of the Communist regime. These policies resulted in a multidimensional crisis

of the cities, which was caused by the different levels of their development. Throughout the period of communism there was a huge population growth which resulted in the dense concentration of some functions of urban space and the deficiency of other ones. The population's comfort including housing was neglected and industrialisation on the large scale prevailed at the same time. The fruit of such a policy was an increasing crisis of the cities especially in the technological (facilities and transport) and social spheres (the lack of flats resulting from housing deficit and nationalisation).

One of the key problems responsible for the quality of the housing conditions affecting people's lifestyles is the housing situation. The dwelling is a value as such and it determines almost every aspect of human life, hence poor housing conditions influence individual's access to other social rights. Indeed housing conditions constitute the physical and mental state of an individual, a group of individuals or the whole society. Looking at the Polish housing situation we can say that there has been a serious housing crisis in this country. The above can be supported by the statistics based on the results of the national census. In 1995 housing deficit amounted to 1,444 thousand dwellings, including 948 thousand flats in the cities. If we assumed that every single family and other households should possess a dwelling of their own, then the figures in the cities would go up by 12 thousand. The housing deficit is mainly due, first of all, to a relatively small number of new flats. Considering the great demand for new homes the situation appears extremely gloomy. Also it is predicted that in the years 1995–2005 the population aged between 20 and 29, when getting married is most common, will increase by 1.2 million people. In the meantime the housing crisis in Poland is on the increase. In 1996 the figures in the housing industry equalled those from the 1950s. In the following years the situation improved slightly, but the number of new flats stood at less than 30% in comparison with 1978 when the results were the best. Table 1 shows these statistics.

Poland is rated very low among other European countries as far as the number of new dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants is concerned. In Europe the number reaches 5 or 6 flats annually, whereas in Poland it is 2.1.

The housing deficit is due to nationalisation, lack of maintenance and low living conditions in many flats. Table 2 shows the distribution of the facilities in some dwellings.

4.3 million people live in flats with no bathrooms (2.3 million people in the cities) and 10 million Poles live in flats of low living standards. Maintenance and renovation were mainly carried out in the city buildings of some architectural value or classified as the national heritage. Other buildings because of constant lack of funds were prey to negligence and

Table 1. The number of new flats

Years	New Dwellings		Previous period = 100
	in thousands	yearly on average	
1945-1950	600	100	100
1951-1955	342	68	57
1956-1960	622	124	181
1961-1965	754	151	122
1966-1970	942	188	125
1971-1975	1137	227	121
1976-1980	1308	262	115
1981-1985	954	191	73
1986-1990	850	170	89
1991-1995	507	101	60
1996-1998	202	67	40

Source: W. Urbańska, "Changes in the housing industry" in: *Flat Matters No. 2-3*, 1999.

Table 2. Dwellings with some facilities

Specification	1950	1960	1970	1978	1988	1995
% of flats with a pipeline						
total	—	29.9	47.3	67.4	84.2	90.2
urban areas	42.3	55.4	75.2	87.2	94.8	97.1
rural areas	—	3.7	12.1	35.8	63.7	75.9
% of flats with bathrooms						
total	—	13.9	29.5	51.3	71.5	77.6
urban areas	14.2	26.0	48.4	68.3	82.3	86.0
rural areas	—	1.4	5.8	24.1	50.7	60.2
% of flats with central heating						
total	—	7.0	22.2	45.1	61.4	66.0
urban area	4.9	13.2	36.2	56.9	72.7	74.8
rural areas	—	0.6	4.5	17.0	39.5	48.1

Source: H. Kulesza, "The Housing situation in Poland in the second half of the 20th century", in: *Flat Matters No. 2-3*, 1999.

deterioration. According to IGM (The Institute of Housing Policy) maintenance costs equal construction costs of 350 thousand flats. Thus the repair costs should be 1% of the reproductive value, whereas in practice they do not exceed 0.5% of this value [Korniłowicz, 1996].

With time the lack of maintenance policies in the case of old buildings made them fall into disrepair. It is estimated that 3.88 million dwellings date back from before 1948 and every seventh or eighth flat is at least 80 years old. As a result, in the years 1994–2010, as estimated by the IGM, 10% of dwellings (1.1 million) should be replaced [Żarski, 1995]. In the cities of approximately 7,040 thousand flats, 820 thousand should be pulled down and 570 thousand flats require immediate renovation [Skalski, 2000]. The above numbers show that the task is not feasible in the present situation.

Public housing projects elaborated in the 1960s, 70s and 80s pose a big problem for most Polish cities, where the majority of urban space is occupied by such projects. 80% of dwellings built in the years 1971–1988 are blocks of flats [Kulesza, 1999]. The research carried out in such projects points out the fact that such places do not create social space. The social side effects of public housing projects have many dimensions. Incompatibility between the human needs and unfriendly buildings strewn in inappropriately designed surroundings does not enhance social bonds. The projects are dull, ugly and with no character. Politically conditioned egalitarian conception of housing estates realised by mixing people of different social status resulted in the so-called “social vacuum”. The lack of informal social checks and balances, the alienation and the anonymity of the dwellers let all kinds of social ills feed on the housing projects.

One of the drawbacks of this type of housing habitat was the architects' intentions to mainly place families with young children in the projects. In practice the limited and cramped space made it difficult for the parents to keep an eye on the children playing outside. The present ageing dwellers, often disabled and in bad health, have a hard time in their flats. The research on the ambitions of the young generation concerning their housing habitat shows that standardised and cramped public housing projects are disapproved of by this age group. Young people aspire to living in detached or semidetached houses. Only a small percentage of those surveyed have approved of living in a block of flats and mainly they are people who cannot afford a flat of their own [Domiński, 1997].

The further deterioration of the housing projects and the degradation of the environment, the process turning the projects into slums, and the application of the market economy to a housing industry have made better-off dwellers move to better and friendlier neighbourhoods. This leads to social stratification which, as K. Skalski emphasises, “results in specific migration of social groups in a city. Professionals and middle class members will move to the residential areas. Nearby in outer suburbs there will be dilapidated public housing projects. Not far from city

centres there will be other blocks of flats in a slightly better condition, once belonging to housing cooperatives. And finally inner cities will be occupied by social outcasts." [Skalski, 2000] K. Duffy's [Council of Europe, 1998] report concerning the changes in the former communist countries puts emphasis on the relationship between housing market and social stratification, which leads to an increasing number of homeless people. To this high risk group belong those not paying rent, or evicted with no right to public housing, or living in houses below any living standards. The above phenomena are more and more common in public housing projects.

At the same time they are accompanied by increasing unemployment as the projects are often inhabited by people who were made redundant. Severe impoverishment of the population, the increasing number of people being evicted from dwellings in total disrepair and squatting contribute to crime.

The factor which is responsible for bad living conditions in a housing habitat is the lack of access to infrastructure. The deterioration of services, liquidation of many outlets and commercialisation of other ones is an obstacle to make the most of the urban infrastructure. This leads to social alienation of the poor dwellers defined as unequal distribution of the welfare and dramatic deterioration of the social relationships.

The basic problem of most Polish cities was ecological crisis understood as the violation of the balance in a housing habitat. It is due to the fact that in most cases industry accounted for founding cities. Hence in most Polish cities the industrial zone is prevailing. A high rate of industrialisation in Poland in the post war era made the cities expand. As a result industrial zones and the housing estates surrounding them turned into urban sprawls. The lack of grounds appropriate for housing disturbed space relations between a place of living and an industrial zone. Overlapping of different urban functions like housing, industry and transport is a negation of sustainable development. The economic transformation in the last decade slightly changed the nature of the issue. At present the ecological problem is of a smaller concern as it is the closed down, deserted factories and plants that are the towering eyesore in the post-industrial era. The question is whether industrialisation is a blessing or a bane of modern civilisation. As P. Zaremba puts it, "urbanisation is not comparable to natural disaster which should be either headed off or curbed. It is an unavoidable symptom of modern civilisation and it should be pre-planned in such a way that the best living conditions could be created and the balance between nature and the human activity could be kept." [Zaremba, 1974].

New problems connected with a human housing habitat and resulting from the current changes appeared in addition to the old ones. Due to the free market economy soaring rents are an important factor which affects the population's living standards. In the years 1990–1994 rent and utility bills increased by 619% and central heating increased by 2,815%. Normative prices for central heating and hot water pose a special problem. They resulted in bills twice as high as the rent itself.

Buying flats by elderly citizens who want to secure their grandchildren's future as well as theirs leads to the lack of maintenance due to having not enough money. So far maintenance has been very neglected, which leads to further deterioration of the flats.

The residents in housing projects to a large extent represent the demographic structure of the area. A modern housing habitat should meet the needs of all kinds of dwellers regardless of their age, health condition, profession, education or social status.

As it was mentioned earlier more and more city dwellers are getting older and they are very often disabled. The ageing process is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The population aged 60 and above in the years 1950–1997

Specification	Years					
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1997
Total						
Population total, in thousands	25035.0	29892.8	32657.1	35734.9	38183.2	38660.0
Population aged 60+, in thousands	2074.1	2883.2	4234.6	4726.6	5727.8	6269.3
Population aged 60+,%	8.3	9.7	13.0	13.3	15.0	16.2
Urban Areas						
Population total, in thousands	9243.0	14245.1	17088.0	20978.5	23614.5	23922.8
Population aged 60+, in thousands	739.5	1302.3	2036.0	2464.8	3197.4	3679.8
Population aged 60+,%	8.0	9.1	11.9	11.7	13.5	15.4
Rural Areas						
Population total, in thousands	15792.0	15647.7	15569.7	14756.4	14568.7	14735.3
Population aged 60+, in thousands	1334.6	1580.9	2198.6	2258.8	2530.7	2589.5
Population aged 60+,%	8.4	10.1	14.1	15.3	17.4	17.6

Source: *Senior citizens in the Polish Society*. GUS (Central Office of Statistics) Warsaw 1999.

In the years 1996–2020 it is predicted that the ageing population will increase further (based on GUS findings, 1997). In 2010 elderly people above 60 years old in cities will form 18% of the whole population, and in 2020 the number will increase by 23,4% [Bolesławski and Marciniak, 1997]. It means that every fourth city dweller in Poland will be an elderly person. This fact entails some consequences. Increased longevity and reduced mobility of the elderly people due to their being disabled and in bad health makes them confined to their flats.

Table 4. Mobility of Adult Citizens in Poland in 1996

Age Group	Persons of limited mobility	Persons whose living space is confined to		
		their bed	their home	their home and its surroundings
Percentage				
50–54	7.5	0.2	1.5	5.8
55–59	10.5	0.6	1.4	8.9
60–64	14.9	0.7	2.8	11.3
65–69	20.3	1.5	4.6	14.3
70–74	25.5	1.0	5.6	18.9
75–79	32.7	3.4	6.4	23.0
80 +	52.9	8.2	15.5	29.2

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Health Service 1997*. GUS (Central Office of Statistics) Warsaw 1998.

But physical disability does not only concern the elderly. Accidents caused by the development of technology and car industry account for the increasing numbers of disabled people in the younger population. Although today's highly developed medicine saves more lives than ever it cannot always prevent physical disability.

Every disabled person needs the environment without any barriers from educational to professional, social, economic and legal to architectural ones. Without doubt the friendliness of the environment underlies full participation in a social life. The social activity of the disabled person will depend on their access to the infrastructure and their ability to get about and move freely in a flat or a building in their housing habitat.

It is an area where the right living conditions for the disabled can be created. This is a programme of community based rehabilitation [Majewski, 1997] which assumes providing all the needs, if possible, for the disabled in terms of health, job opportunities and a social life in a place

of living. The programme comprises the whole families of the disabled and other social groups, both formal and informal, including local government (special services responsible for public health, education and employment in particular). The programme is directed to the whole community and families of the disabled.

These days the common opinion is that shaping the environment should be based on the concept of an accessibly built environment where both the flat (together with its surroundings) and infrastructure are friendly to the disabled.

The awareness of the friendly environment to all its occupants has been reflected in European Manual for an Accessibly Built Environment, which constitutes European standardisation of the methods contributing to reducing the number of typical barriers in the disabled-friendly environment [*European Manual...*, 1984]. This kind of approach is considered to be integrative or universal and is based on the idea that the environment should be shaped in such a way that everybody could function independently there.

This changing attitude towards shaping the human environment treated as universal planning means that all human needs are taken into consideration regardless of the dwellers' physical or mental abilities. The bottom line is that the dwellers' needs should be considered at the very first stages of designing a flat or building rather than incorporated into already existing dwellings. The starting point of this kind of thinking is increasing awareness that practically every human being can face the problem of physical disability. As H. Syrkus stressed, "people who have never been disabled this way or another are in a minority. Many children faced various problems because the environment was unfriendly. Many people broke their hands or legs or suffered from other injuries and they had to struggle with everyday life. Besides we are all getting old, weaker and mentally less efficient." [Syrkus, 1984]. Thus a housing habitat should be designed according to the principle that "everybody will be disabled somehow at some point".

The housing standards especially affect the quality of life of the disabled who spend most of the time in their flats and very often it is the only place where they lead their lives. On the other hand, it is known that the flats are not adjusted to the needs of the disabled, which makes their lives extremely hard. This is why it is very important to adjust the flats to the needs of the disabled, first of all, removing different kinds of architectural obstacles. In many cases it is a difficult thing because in the past individual needs of the dwellers were not taken into consideration in the housing industry. As J. Bojanowicz puts it, "architectural barriers are in houses, public buildings and even health service and

sports facilities. For centuries buildings were not adjusted to the needs of the disabled, and physical disability was kept behind closed doors. Time passed and steep narrow stairs and other inconveniences remained and new housing projects, equally inconvenient, were built where the disabled are at a disadvantage." [Bojanowicz, 1991].

The holistic approach to shaping a housing habitat requires all the aspects contributing to good quality of life. Over the recent years there have been a lot of conceptions on creating the right habitat fulfilling all the dwellers' needs. It is important to create a healthy environment and eliminate bad things. When all these aspects are taken into consideration while designing a housing project the person feels good and healthy in the broadest sense of the word. First of all, it is necessary to provide everybody with housing, design environmentally friendly areas, build an infrastructure, electricity and transport systems and develop a housing industry based on ecology. Further on ecological threats (resulting from air and noise pollution, water contamination, ultraviolet radiation etc.) must be reduced and programmes on improving living conditions in housing projects must be carried out. The concept of a healthy environment is based on the idea of health promotion endorsed over a quarter of a century. It is understood as taking decisions on health in the broadest sense of the word and is based on the activity of local communities. The idea of health promotion defines health as the basic value of any individual, local community and the whole society and it must be endorsed by improving living conditions. Such a definition of health promotion underlies the so-called settlement approach. WHO defines a settlement as "a place where people live, work and make the most of the many services [Karski, 1996]. A settlement is an area which consists of different kinds of environment occupied by a certain social group or groups." The city is one of these types of environment. Healthy City Project is a new concept for transforming a current city into a healthy city where there are better environmental conditions and people can support each other to achieve the best results [*Promocja zdrowia*, 1999]. The idea of Healthy City assumes that the basic feature of the city is its ability to change and in a healthy city this changeability creates conditions for a person's health to thrive.

Another idea of the so-called Cities with no Barriers is worth noting. The idea which deals with keeping balance between private and public zones for all dwellers was defined in the Agreement on Cities with no Barriers signed on 21 December, 1994 in Warsaw. The main objective of the agreement is to create a city with no barriers, accessible to all dwellers, especially the disabled ones. In practice it means that a city with no barriers is one where the disabled can move freely and have an access to

infrastructure like the able-bodied dwellers, facing no obstacles which might make it impossible to get about in a city. Adjusting a city to the needs of the disabled means the implementation of different technological undertakings enabling the disabled citizens to get around freely and use the city's facilities. While designing a city, the following factors are important as far as making infrastructure accessible to every dweller is concerned:

- adjustment of the pavements for the disabled;
- accessible means of transport;
- easy access to facilities and public buildings [Kotela, 1997].

Obviously these are general guidelines stressing the importance of the changes, but each city should concentrate on its most vital issues. Another important aspect of the programme is a collaboration of organizations and institutions working for the disabled, and the disabled themselves and their associations should take active part in the programme.

Shaping a human friendly environment, foreign countries' experience should be taken into consideration. The programme of revitalisation and rehabilitation of the public projects' environment in France which has been underway for dozens of years is especially worth mentioning (DSQ – *Developpement Social des Quartiers*) [Zrałek, 1991]. The core of the programme is to prevent the housing projects from further deterioration and to get all the parties of the programme (dwellers, local and national governments) to enhance living standards in their neighbourhoods. The advantage of the programme is that not only the flats, but also the social issues of the area to be solved by the local community are taken into consideration. In most countries where the programmes are being implemented the main objectives are connected with improving the quality of the dwellings by modernising them, renovating old buildings and raising living standards in the flats occupied by the poor dwellers.

The main idea combining a variety of trends to improve living conditions of the city population should be "comprehensive treatment of all aspects of the community life *i.e.* social, economic, cultural, architectural, technological and ecological based on commonly approved ecological ethics and the community's participation in shaping the environment." [Baranowski, 1997].

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