Elman Zarecor, Kimberly: Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960.

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"Few building types are as vilified as the socialist housing block" (p. 1), asserts Kimberly Elman Zarecor in the first sentence of her book on the evolution of architectural practice and housing design in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1960. Indeed, some readers might already be thinking there is little worth examining in the history of Eastern Bloc residential architecture, but Zarecor demonstrates this is a subject relevant for deepening scholarly knowledge of substantive topics. Careful study of Czechoslovak socialist housing design sheds further light on opportunities for professional and artistic autonomy from strict Communist Party control in Eastern Europe, the fragmented, non-monolithic nature of party power, and Czechoslovakia's unique path to socialism independent of Soviet dictates. It also uncovers the long- and short-term ingredients that combined together to create a hous-

ing policy privileging the construction of large prefabricated, standardized apartments over smaller, more artistic dwellings.

This richly illustrated book outlines an important development in Czechoslovak architectural practice during the first fifteen years after World War II – one with ties to interwar modernism. In her introduction Zarecor writes that she "chronicles changes in the [architecture] profession following the transition to state socialism, when architects became technicians and industrial producers rather than artists and individual creators" (p. 5). Five chapters comprise the book's body. Moving chronologically, they introduce Czechoslovak modernist architecture in the interwar period, delve into design and professional practice in the immediate post-war years before the Communist takeover in 1948 and the period of socialist realism, and introduce housing during the thaw when the panel house (the "panelák") became ubiquitous in socialist Czechoslovakia. Zarecor draws evidence from a rich variety of sources, including "Architektura ČSR", the leading architectural journal in socialist Czechoslovakia, and the archival collections of the Ministry of Building and the Ministry of Technology, among others.

Chapter 1, "Phoenix Rising: Housing and the Early Debates on Socialist Modernity," introduces the Block of Progressive Architectural Associations (BAPS), formed shortly after the end of Nazi occupation. Members included important left-wing modernist architects from the interwar period, many of them members of the Union of Socialist Architects which initiated BAPS' creation. Their political orientation contributed to their calls for industrially produced housing for the masses, design based on scientific research and analysis rather than artistic considerations, close working relations between architects and the state, nationalization and state control of the economy, and "reorganizing the mechanisms of architectural design and construction along a collective model" (p. 14). Zarecor argues that due to BAPS "the architectural profession had already started the transformation from capitalist to socialist practice even before the Communist takeover" (p. 15). The Litvínov Collective House in northwestern Bohemia, and Model Housing Developments in Most, Kladno, and Ostrava illustrate the chapter's main points.

Czechoslovak architectural practice and housing design during the two years after the 1948 Communist takeover are discussed in Chapter 2, "Typification and Standardization: Stavoprojekt and the Transformation of Architectural Practice." In June 1948 the Czechoslovak Building Works was created and placed under the Ministry of Technology. This national enterprise consolidated formerly private construction businesses and design firms under state control and absorbed them in the growing planned economy. In September 1948 the enterprise's design wing, Stavoprojekt, began operation. The Czechoslovak Building Works was dissolved in 1951, but Stavoprojekt existed until after 1989. Zarecor writes that, despite state efforts to constrain architectural practice, "hesitancy allowed the architectural leadership to act relatively independently and with its own agenda, at least for a few years" (p. 72). Even so Stavoprojekt architects, many with ties to left-wing interwar modernism, pursued standardized models, scientific inquiry, and collective work – all key ingredients in socialist housing policy in Czechoslovakia. Stavoprojekt designers created

housing types, known as the T-series, which initially consisted of six basic models that could be built using industrial methods.

Chapters 3 and 4, "National in Form, Socialist in Content: Sorela and Architectural Imagery" and "A Vision of Socialist Architecture: The Late Career of Jiří Kroha," treat architectural practice and housing design during the period of socialist realism in Czechoslovakia. At this time "a virulent campaign was under way to purge 'class enemies' from the party" (p. 115) and "the government's relatively hands-off approach of the previous two years gave way to a concerted effort to force architects to comply with socialist realist methods" (p. 131). Still, Zarecor portrays architectural practice in this brief period as more artistic than in other postwar years covered in the book. Rather than merely imposing a uniform Soviet template onto Czechoslovakia, socialist realism also pushed Czech and Slovak architects to find unique national solutions to design, often borrowing from the past. Kroha's housing development in Nová Dubnica in northwestern Slovakia is one example of socialist-realist housing with artistic touches.

Chapter 5, "The Industrialization of Housing: Zlín and the Evolution of the Panelák," details the early history of large panel-house construction and introduces Czechoslovak housing design during the thaw when, after socialist realism, architects returned to standardization and typification. Discussed here are international examples of panel housing, research in the Institute of Prefabricated Buildings around 1950, and the "G-buildings" series developed in Gottwaldov (formerly Zlín and home of the capitalist Baťa Shoe Company, one source of inspiration for socialist housing). Institutional changes affecting architectural practice and housing are also presented, including the 1956 establishment of the Central Administration for Housing and Civic Building, which managed all aspects of housing in a single body (it was placed under the State Committee for Construction in 1958). The Central Administration ignored aesthetic questions and "focused on improving fulfillment numbers, decreasing unit size […], and implementing new building technologies such as structural panels and lightweight concrete" (p. 290).

The book contains a conceptual tension. Zarecor often argues that architects were able to maintain some relative professional autonomy or agency in the face of Communist Party power. Her introduction tells us the shift from artistic to technical practice was not caused by "the Communist Party as the single entity driving cultural production;" it resulted in significant part from some architects' "long-held political beliefs about the potential of socialist society" (p. 6). Yet, in the volume's final pages she concludes, "In the end, architects' concerns for aesthetics had no traction against the budgetary and material constraints imposed by the planned economy" (p. 292). Revision of the introduction could help resolve this tension, as could more attention to how socialist housing policy in Czechoslovakia resulted from complex ongoing power struggles, in which state-society relations and party ideology were mutually constituted. More details about the extent of need for housing and alternative architectural visions in postwar Czechoslovakia would further illuminate opportunities architects had to affect policy and determine cultural politics in the socialist period and enrich this well-researched, significant book.

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