

DOES A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT NEED A CENTER?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IDEA FOR LOCATING A CENTER IN THE KARVINÁ-HRANICE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FROM THE 1960S TO THE PRESENT

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Abstract

Using the example of a specific location in the Karviná-Hranice Housing Development, the author chronicles the development of an idea for the use of the unbuilt spaces of the panel-building district and the search for new schemes through architectural competitions after 1989. The development of the area is documented in studies of the neighbourhood from the 1960s to the present. Architects' conceptions about the function and the design scheme for the area are compared with the results of a research survey conducted among the residents of the housing development.

Keywords

Panel-building districts, master plan, city centre, regeneration of housing developments, survey, architectural competition, competition conditions

Index of names

Le Corbusier, Viktor Rudiš, Karviná-Hranice, Tapiola

1 KARVINÁ-HRANICE IS AN ARCHETYPE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ARCHITECTURE ON THE TURN OF THE 60S - 70S OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The Karviná-Hranice Housing Development is the youngest housing development unit that has been built in Karviná after the war. The area built up with a residential complex was included in the 1962 Detailed Master Plan of Karviná-Hranice.¹ The architects of that era were not tied up any more with the morphology of "socialist historicism" of the 50s. At the same time, the authors of the housing estates had to follow the set limits such as the built-up density requirements (number of residents per hectare) and restrictions to the architectural character of buildings given by the prefabrication and panel technology. Nevertheless, within these limits the architects still did search for the ways to respond to the international trends.² The urbanism in the Karviná-Hranice Housing Development set within the contemporary context had been inspired by the radiant cities of Le Corbusier with his idea of large residential houses freely composed in greenery.³ The contemporary examples of similar housing estates can be found in Finland (the best known is Tapiola, near by Helsinki). The Finnish architecture of public housing with the emphasis on integration of the house into the natural environment as well as with its social aspect, was of a frequent model for the Czechoslovak architects, for example Viktor Rudiš states Tapiola as a source of inspiration for the awarded Brno-Lesná housing development.⁴

¹ Detailed master plan of Karviná-Hranice (North), Ing. arch. Zoja Wallerová 1962, approved by the ONV committee in Karviná, in 1963

² In connection to this fact, it is necessary to mention that the housing development architecture was also influenced by the 10 year delay, where the designs made at the beginning of the 60s were used for constructing the housing development at the beginning of the 70s. During this period there were new views arising in the global architectural context, especially in respect to the urban creation of the cities, but these had only started to partially reflect in our housing estate architecture in the 80s.

³ Švácha R., Le Corbusier 1. Published 1989 p. 34, 39 and 79. According to Rostislav Švácha Le Corbusier describes in his book "La Ville Radieuse" from 1935, "the three essential joys" of our meditative life, these are sufficient amount of greenery, air and sun.

From the available archive documentation can be deduced that the concept of the housing development in Hranice was based on a free composition of panel-buildings creating free “blocks” placed in greenery.



(Picture 1)

When looking at the drawings there is evidently differentiated the character of the areas immediately consecutive to the residential houses from the greenery area that separates them. This division though is no longer present in the detailed drawings and this concept has not been any further elaborated. The housing development transport services can use the ring road out of which there are access roads to the residential houses but the inner space of the housing development stays quieter and traffic-free.

There were amenities, mainly schools and kindergartens included in the housing development. The central part of the housing development was clearly identified with a shopping centre “Permon” and connected with the central park area. In addition to this shopping centre there were two other smaller buildings of commerce placed elsewhere in the housing development.

2 CHANGES IN THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AFTER 1989

Following the 1989 in the Hranice housing development, during the so called “small privatization”, the individual shops and buildings of commerce, rather than the whole buildings, had started to be sold out to private owners; likewise it happened in the other parts of the country. Later on, there was privatization of the flats, but that was already processed by a method of selling the individual buildings to housing cooperatives or communities of owners.

2.1 Plans to use the unbuilt spaces of the housing development

At the start of the 90s Karviná city had commissioned a study concerning suitable private enterprise localities.⁵ One of the chosen areas was a vacant locality in the tip of the district nearby nowadays roundabout (Leonovova and Žižkova Street crossroad). This locality has been always stated in the original plans as greenery in continuance with the Dubina forest-park and the town cemetery, situated southeast from the Žižkova Street,⁶ as shown in picture 1.

These localities are listed in the Master Plan, valid during 1977-1985, as “*the areas of communal production and services, technical equipment and construction*”.⁷ The following Master Plan approved on 3rd October 1989 has this area listed as “*the area of basic and more profound civic amenities*”.⁸

In fact, this locality stayed vacant till the beginning of the 90s, it was still an unbuilt area and the original utilization of the place as a clay pit came to an end. In July 1992 Karvina city had put this vacant area out to an urban – architectural competition.

⁴ The authors of the Brno-Lesná housing development are the following architects: František Zounek, Viktor Rudiš, Miroslav Dufek and Ladislav Volák (I. Studio of Stavoprojekt Brno), 1961-1968

⁵ The site selection for private enterprise – permanent structures Karviná – I. and II. phase, Ateliér Linea-spol. s.r.o. Ing. arch. V. Plesník and Ing. arch. M. Kučerová

⁶ This area had been used as a clay pit that gradually disappeared after the housing development had been built. There are complicated foundation conditions in the area.

⁷ Indicative Master Plan of the residential agglomeration processed in 1975 by Ing. arch. Koval

⁸ Master Plan of the residential unit processed during 1985-1988, Ing. arch. Jana Šimíčková

2.2 Assignment of the first urban - architectural competition

The assignment of the urban – architectural competition from July 1992 contained proposals for the Karviná – Hranice shopping centre, which was most probably in connection with the approved Master Plan (stating the basic and more profound civic amenities) and the study concerning the localities suitable for private enterprise. Accordingly to that era visions about the growth of private enterprise – fulfilling the needs of various commerce and services, the conditions for the competition were set as follows:

- shopping centre (department store)
- office building with a parterre for business amenities and services
- hotel with a restaurant
- ecclesiastic building (church)
- parking lot and lay-bys

There were not specified capacities for the required functions. The aim of the competition was *“to gain ideas for socially, technically and economically most effective way to resolve and implement the construction of the residential complex”*. The results were to be used for *“a determination of regulation within the given space and putting the individual buildings out to investor’s auditions”*.⁹

The competition was entered only by two proposals. The jury has evaluated in the final report that their quality was lower and the proposals were appreciated only for their partial contribution. The committee had recommended a 2. round of the competition to be held and specified the needs of the proposals (the use of city-forming elements – streets, squares, greenery, parterre, expressing a broader relationship to the housing development and even to the city, transport solution). The jury had recommended a feasibility study to be done before the actual processing of the assignment for the 2. round.

In the written part of the study both of the competition authors have described the housing development environment as barely legible without municipal elements and they declare for a quest for a municipal organising of the given space with a street and a square. The links to the current transport routes and the existing centre are not specified.

One of the authors literally states that he is not in search for any links to the housing development but he is creating *“new municipal space and out of the space should be unfolding perspectively the next regulations in the area”*.

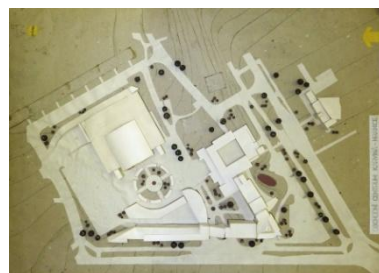
The authors were awarded with two prizes with no statement of their order.



(Picture 2)



(Picture 3)



(Picture 4)

2.3 Assignment of the second urban - architectural competition

There have been new competition rules worked out for the same locality in April 1993. The parish and deanery office in Karviná have got involved in the preparation of the competition. The requirement was to build a church with the capacity of 600 seats and dealing with the arisen problem if the noise from the bells should meet the regulations in respect to the noise limits in the residential

⁹ The competition conditions for the urban-architectural competition proposal for the Karviná – Hranice shopping centre, July 1992

zone. After the noise study report has been processed¹⁰, it has been agreed that there will be no bells included in the church. There was a change to the competition assignment with a requirement for an “*ideological*” solution of the local centre. The purpose of the competition stayed identical with the purpose set in the first competition. The competition has been narrowed down¹¹, i.e. the participants were invited to enter the competition selectively. On the list of selected architects there were six people out of which four people have already entered the previous competition as members of two authorial teams.

The competition assignment was formulated that “*the particular area should be primarily used for localisation of civic amenities*”¹² and the specific requirement for placing the buildings as follows:

- complex of ecclesiastic buildings, roman-catholic church (600 seats capacity) and the vicarage
- business amenities and services
- parking lot and lay-bys

There are no direct specifications for the office building and the hotel, in the competition conditions.

There were assessment criteria set in this order: urban-architectural concept (continuity of the area and achievement of the municipal identity), creative use of city-forming elements – pedestrian routes, views from the streets, squares, streets, greenery, etc.), further more the transport solution, the use of the area and the phasing of the construction while accounting with the unfavourable foundation conditions in the part of the area.

Out of the selected participants the competition was entered by four authorial teams. One of the participants has withdrawn from the competition and three competition proposals were handed in. The jury did not award the first prize and stated that the proposals brought a set of ideas for an overall architectural concept for the operation and transport solutions. There were awarded two 2. prizes (enhanced) and a third prize. The jury has recommended to the awarded by the 2.prize to process the urban project proposal “*with respect to the possibility of an easier implementation through phasing*”



(Picture 5),



(Picture 6),



(Picture 7)

2.4 Urban project proposal for the Hranice local centre

The urban project was prepared by a group of authors that consisted from the representatives of both 2.prize competition teams. The church and the vicarage has become the landmark, the complex consisted of multipurpose buildings, commercial buildings accompanied by sports and social facilities (gallery, social club, sports and leisure centre). There has been a square situated within the space with “the church as the landmark placed on the axis of the boulevard that led into the square”. There has been “a shopping street (boulevard) connecting the square with the Dubina municipal park. In the top part the boulevard terminates by the dominating church. The lower part is compositionally orientated into the space of full-grown greenery of the cemetery. The aim of the project was defined as

¹⁰ The noise study report has been processed by Ing. Jaroslav Vrána from AVAP company, Ostrava

¹¹ The current competition regulations of the ČKA describe this type of competition as “*selected competition*”

¹² The competition conditions for narrower urban-architectural competition with an ideological proposal for the local centre Karviná-Hranice, October 1993

“a humanization of space on the edge of panel-housing district, which is situated on the main pedestrian route to the historical centre”.¹³

The authors of the project have declared in its written part, that “the newly designed structure fluently moves from a scale of the housing development into the scale of the ordinary municipal buildings, out of the chaotic composition of the housing development into a composition of building blocks”.¹⁴ (Pict. 8)



2.5 The Master Plan of the zone - the Karviná-Hranice local centre

The urban project has been transferred into the Master Plan of the zone – the Karviná- Hranice local centre, which was approved on 28th May 1996. The Master Plan of the zone contains set of regulations valid at time of construction in the area. It is architecturally following the previous urban project.

2.6 Amendment No. 1, in the Master Plan of the zone – shopping centre Kaufland

In November 1997, an appendix to the Master Plan of the zone has been prepared –the Karviná-Hranice local centre Amendment No.1. There was a large scale shopping centre Kaufland placed in the area. The Amendment was made on the grounds that the original proposal was relying on the local small and mid-size entrepreneurs with the construction. The large international chain was interested in the part of the area in order to construct a supermarket with a parking space. It has been requested in the Amendment of the Master Plan that the investor should have replaced the taken area with green roof with low to mid size greenery. Bearing in mind that the supermarket's character as a building overcomes the local importance therefore the given entrance and exit roads are accessed from the outer communications. The investor should place a small shop or a workshop – patisseries or florists into the planned area of the “square” with the possibility of entry on the roof of the building in order to enlarge the operating area (from the supermarket floor level on the 2. floor). (Pict. 9)



¹³ Comprehensive opinion to the urban project of the Karviná-Hranice centre, February 1995

¹⁴ Karviná-Hranice – centre, urban project. Original report, October 1994

The supermarket building was constructed and has been in use since, without any major changes. This building has been a solution to supply of food and goods to the housing development residents, seven days in a week.

3 “HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPON A REQUEST “ – SURVEY RESULTS

In 2008 the author has processed the article: “Regeneration plan in the Karviná-Hranice panel housing development”. There was a residential survey done¹⁵ as part of the project. The subjects of the survey were the needs of the residents, their preferences to certain type of living environment and satisfaction with the housing development environment and the availability of the facilities. It is interesting to compare the survey data with placed assignment of the local centre and to compare the priorities for the project evaluation and priorities of the housing development residents.

The survey participants preferred **living in an area surrounded with sufficient open space and greenery**, to be in contact with the nature. The residents emphasized **the importance of care and maintenance of the greenery** and the outdoor space of the housing development. The idea, that the housing development residents would appreciate more dense development in the area with more construction, was not confirmed. The number of preferences to live in a dense development was negligible.

A high proportion of residents did their shopping for food and goods within the housing development, bearing in mind the range of the commercial network, it can be derived that mostly they shop in the supermarket Kaufland. The assumption, that the primary Kaufland customers would be commuters from elsewhere, was not confirmed. The Hranice housing development residents visit the shop regularly and very often walk there by foot. That is the reason for their specific demand – the need for **a sidewalk to Kaufland** to be built from the exit from the Žižkova Street. (Pict. 10)



The housing development residents emphasised the non-existence of small services and cultural centre. They did not feel any lack to do shopping in small shops.

The interesting question, in aspect to the theme of this article, is, if the residents were missing a centre of the housing development. The answers are summed up in the chart below:

¹⁵ The survey had been done by the author of the text in cooperation with PhDr. Martin Jemelka PhD. and was included in the written part of the project. The survey had been done from 16th to 30th of August 2008 and there were 625 respondents participating. 3.212 questionnaires were handed out (to every housing development household).

Chart 1: Survey done in the Hranice housing development (2008)

The answers to a question:

Do you miss a centre within the housing development? If yes, should it be...

Category	Number of polls	
	Exact number	%
squares	64	10,2
Parks	63	10,1
church	14	2,2
shopping centre	43	6,9
cultural and community centre	95	15,2
Sport centre, sports ground	94	15,0
Other buildings	6	1,0
I don't miss any centre.	212	33,9
No answers	34	5,5
Total	625	100

The results on the question concerning the lack of centre in the housing development were evaluated and interpreted as follows:

“Aside from the respondents that did not answer the question (5.5%), the respondents seemingly most represented answered that they don't miss any centre in the housing development (33.9%).

There is though much larger group of respondents that do miss a centre. May it be a building (39.3%) or space in the form of a square or a park (20.3%).

When choosing an ideal housing development centre in the form of a building or complex of building, the respondents primarily prefer cultural or community centre (15.2%) or sport centre or sports ground (15.0%).

The availability of commercial or retail facilities postpones the interest in housing development commercial facilities centre, to one of the last positions (6.9%), further on the religious building (2.2%), or other facilities (1.0%).

There were six respondents expressing the need of housing developments centres that were not offered in the survey. In most of the cases it was a DIY retail facility (Obi, Hornbach etc.).¹⁶

¹⁶ JEMELKA, M. Karviná-Hranice, housing development upon the request, evaluation of the survey 2008

4 HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CENTRE AFTER TWENTY YEARS

The ideas about the possibilities and the appearance of the housing development complex have changed in the past twenty years, as well as the economical and social preconditions for their functions have changed. The majority of the architects have held the opinion over the years that to live in the housing development means to be part of some kind of residue from the socialistic era and that with the help of rebuilding and extensions it can be transformed into a typical city with blocks and squares with little shops on the ground floor. After more than twenty years this assumption has not been filled. Sometimes it seems that the various rebuilding and extensions within the housing development worsen the quality of living there. The residents often perceive negatively the filling of the free space, that in the original concept was suppose to bring sun, light and air to the housing developments and to the residents the feeling of life in natural environment.

4.1 Awareness of the value of the housing development

Only nowadays, it has become obvious that some housing development residents and even some architects place questions in connection to the values of living in the housing development. They are seeing the value that can be represented by the housing development architecture, may it be the panel housing estates or the buildings of commerce, schools and kindergartens and other amenities. The architecture of these buildings was not much different from the contemporary concept elsewhere in Europe at that time. The main difference though was the quality of construction and the architectonic detail, the level of maintenance of the public area and generally the long-term level of maintenance of the buildings and public space.

4.2 Beginnings of privatization

In the text I am looking back at the history of plans and strategies that have been formed and vanished within one housing development which I have chosen to be the example of the evolution. During the time right after the “Velvet revolution” the period concept about the development of small and mid-size entrepreneurship influenced the social idea about the way how this material environment should look like. So it happened that out of the free area intended for the development of “private” business became a “local centre”. The place, where in the original plans the architect had situated “the greenery” and the nature should had been pushed in between the residential houses (in fact it was the contemporary “Brownfield”) that is where the new housing development centre should have been planned.

4.3 The old centre

The original centre of the housing development which the authors placed and built elsewhere (perhaps into a actual middle – centre of the housing development) and which have played its role of a shopping centre at the time, had been sold out to individual owners. Because of this for many years it visually declined and just nowadays there can be seen some effort to repair the neglected buildings. The original centre public space has stayed in the way given by the socialistic building industry.

4.4 Architectural competition

Generally speaking, searching for the visions of the unbuilt land in the public space with the help of architectural competition can be very positive. Here are the questions that arise: What is the level of fulfilling the task and what is the gained quality? It is very important for the competition to form properly the assignment and evaluate the results precisely. It is rather surprising that there have been a very specific assignment formed even though the competition was presented as conceptual (the 1993 competition included it even in the name). This might be the reason that the competitors had no chance to express themselves to the content of the given area and to the original concept.

There were just two proposals in the first competition which is for forming ideas and insufficient number. The second, selective competition followed shortly after the first one. There was just one additional selected team in comparison to the previous competition where the small number of entries was evaluated negatively. The small number of participants is in contradiction with evaluation of the first jury that states the small number of competition proposals with an average quality. In none of the two competitions were enough of proposals for the jury to choose convicting and firm solution.

4.5 The content of the assignment

The stated required features of the “new centre” did not correspond to the needs and possibilities of the housing development as a complex. During the past twenty years there was no large office building or new hotel with a congress hall built in Karivná. The new church for 600

believers was totally out of the possibilities and real needs. Within the housing development there were several sites rebuilt into shops and restaurants and the problem of nowadays is not their capacity but the level of the provided services. The demands of the residents for a cultural or sport centre that could have been part of their leisure time had stayed unfulfilled.

4.6 The view of the architects

The architects in the projects' accompanying texts from the beginning of the 90s have described the housing development as deurbanised, formless mass where it was imperative for the order and system to be applied. They have used more or less traditional city-forming features that are placed on a given area the very free or no link to the surroundings. It is somehow expected that the surroundings would gradually to the new order. The new centre was expected to be just like a magnet for the residents but the initial proposals did not contain the reasons how and why the residents should visit the place. The architects' projects were influenced by the post-modernism that has reached to the country in the 80s.

Even though the final proposal gives the possibility of proceeding in stages there was found no investor who would start such a conceived project and actually construct the boulevard and the square. There was already given a zoning decision for residential houses to be built in part of the area but the plan was not implemented in the end.

4.7 The construction of Kaufland

The requirement to integrate Kaufland into the agreed Master Plan of the zone was incorporated under valid regulations. The shopping centre was placed in such a way so that at least part of the plans to build in the locality could be realized. As a result of this there is a small workshop on the first floor above the shopping area, facing the future "square". Up until now it has been facing an open space used occasionally as parking space (Picture 9). The potentials of the shopping space where residents meet on their way to shops stayed unused. The architecture of the building hasn't enriched the environment. The opportunity to create a small social space with a café near the hallway has not been accepted by the constructor or the author of the building. This kind of practice is usual in similar shopping centres abroad.¹⁷

Out of the survey, it is clear that the shopping area is difficult to reach even though it had been placed within the area. The need for a sidewalk from the west part of the housing development to the shopping centre has not been answered, yet. The residents have to overcome a sloppy terrain and walk on a grass path (pict. 11 and 12). All of the customers must get to the entrance of the shopping centre by walking across a car park and they walk daily along the supply yard to the public transport stations.



Having mentioned all the deficiencies of the Kaufland building, it must be mentioned that the supermarket is a supply of food to the residents which used to be often a problem in the socialistic

¹⁷ I.E. Austrian shopping department MPREIS Warenvertriebs GmbH

housing development. If the building was more favourable to the needs of the people and of a slightly better architecture, it would be the right thing for the right place. In the end it does have the reminiscence of “communal production and services, technical amenities and construction” as determined for this area in one of the previous Master Plans.

5 FINAL WORD

I have tried to describe in this article the development of one fraction of the space in panel housing development. With the respect to fact that in terms of the history of the architecture it is still an open development, the aim of the text is to show the difficulties that extensions and rebuilding in the panel housing development in the past and nowadays can bring (and most probably in the future, too).

Even though all of the participants were of a good will to proceed correctly and have even chosen at same phase an architectural competition to search for the best solution, the result has not solved the problem. The small details in the individual stages of the planning process in the end considerably influenced the expected result.

In the Karviná – Hranice housing development is the notable centre still missing. The residents don't notice it as the biggest deficiency of their living environment. The original centre of the housing development is lacking quality realization and non- conceptional repairs of the commercial area as well as the obsolete and bad maintenance of the public space. The new “centre” is represented by the supermarket even though it is intensely visited the link to the housing development is weak and cultivated pathways for the pedestrians are missing. The architecture of the building fulfils the basic shopping needs under a roofed space. There is missing the quality architectural detail that the residents and the users of the space would have been with daily in contact. The quality details were the weak points of the past housing developments and unfortunately, today the situation has not changed much..

SOURCE OF MATERIALS

The archive documents were supplied by the municipal city Karviná building and environmental department.

The author of all photographs is Eva Špačková.

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