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The Ideas of Comfort in the Soviet Architectural Discourses of the 1920s-1930s

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Abstract. The article examines the problem of improving housing conditions for Soviet citizens in the 1920s-1930s. The authors note that after the Bolsheviks came to power, immediate attempts were made to improve the living conditions of the working people. Initially, however, the authorities were forced to limit themselves to relocating workers into the apartments of the bourgeoisie. The emergence of communal apartments (kommunalki) led not so much to the improvement in the lives of the masses, but rather to the establishment of social justice in its Bolshevik understanding. The new government was only able to begin creating new housing stock after the end of the Civil War and the rollout of the New Economic Policy. The article examines plans for building garden-cities. Relocating workers from the overpopulated center to green cottage settlements could have improved the quality of life, but the implementation of this idea was a financially unfeasible task. The article presents designs for house-communes, through which it was intended to reshape the daily life of Soviet people, but which had little in common with the traditional idea of comfortable housing. The article addresses the influence of politics, economic priorities, and ideology on the development and implementation of housing projects for the working population. The authors conclude that in discussions about improving the living conditions of the masses, the issue of comfort was at best secondary. Architects were primarily concerned with how to economically address the housing shortage and design new types of dwellings that would contribute to Soviet ideals of social transformation based on collectivist principles. Central to architectural debates were questions of rationalizing the use of living space, hygiene, restructuring everyday life, and aligning housing with modern standards, including references to Western achievements in architecture. The article emphasizes that with the onset of industrialization, resources were directed toward the creation of heavy industry, while funding for housing construction was reduced to a minimum. The majority of Soviet citizens lived in cramped conditions in barracks, dormitories, and communal apartments, where the notion of comfort was not considered at all. Truly comfortable living conditions were reserved for the Soviet elites. The article demonstrates that in the case of "houses for officials" and foreign specialists, architects largely abandoned innovative ideas and designed projects that reflected notions of bourgeois prosperity. Housing for the elite was to be spacious, of reasonable layout, bright, well-ventilated, and finished with natural materials. It is indicative that Soviet architects included quarters where servants would live. Examples of Soviet comfortable housing include the Narkomfin Building, the House on the Embankment, and cottage developments in socialist cities and settlements.

Keywords: USSR; housing; Soviet architecture; garden city, communal house; socialist city; comfort; urbanization

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Комфортты құрастыру: 1920-1930 жж. кеңестік архитектуралық дискурстар

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада 1920-1930 жылдары кеңес азаматтарының тұрғын үй жағдайын жақсарту мәселесі қарастырылады. Авторлар большевиктер билікке келгеннен кейін еңбекші халықтың тұрғын үй жағдайын жақсарту бағытында дереу әрекеттер жасалғанын атап өтеді. Алайда бастапқы кезеңде билік жұмысшыларды буржуазияның пәтерлеріне көшірумен шектелуге мәжбүр болды. Коммуналдық пәтерлердің пайда болуы халықтың тұрмысын жақсартудан гөрі әлеуметтік әділеттілікті большевиктік түсінікпен орнатуға бағытталды. Жаңа билік тұрғын үй қорын құруға тек Азамат соғысы аяқталып, ЖЭС басталғаннан кейін ғана кірісе алды. Мақалада "қалалар-бақтар" салу жоспарлары қарастырылады. Жұмысшыларды халық тығыз орналасқан орталықтан жасыл коттеджді қоныстарға көшіру қалалықтардың өмір сапасын шынымен жақсарта алар еді, бірақ бұл идеяны жүзеге асыру қаржылық тұрғыдан мүмкін емес еді. Мақалада кеңестік адамның тұрмысын қайта құруға бағытталған "үйлер-коммуналар" жобалары талданады, алайда олардың дәстүрлі қолайлы тұрғын үй ұғымымен аз байланысы болғаны көрсетіледі. Тұрғын үй құрылысы жобаларын әзірлеу мен жүзеге асыруда саясаттың, экономикалық басымдықтардың және идеологияның ықпалына ерекше назар аударылады. Авторлар халықтың тұрғын үй жағдайын жақсарту мәселесін талқылауда қолайлылық факторы ең жақсы жағдайда екінші кезекте тұрғанын атап өтеді. Архитекторларды тұрғын үй тапшылығын үнемді шешу және қоғамды коллективистік негізде қайта құруға ықпал ететін жаңа типтегі тұрғын үйді жасау көбірек назар аудартты. Архитектуралық дискурстардың орталығында тұрғын кеңістікті рационализациялау, гигиена, тұрмысты қайта ұйымдастыру, тұрғын үйдің заманауи стандарттарға сәйкестігі мәселелері тұрды, сонымен қатар Батыс архитектурасы мен дизайнының жетістіктеріне де назар аударылды. Индустрияландыру басталғаннан кейін барлық қаржы ауыр өнеркәсіпті дамытуға бағытталып, тұрғын үй құрылысына қаржы бөлінуі минимумға дейін қысқарды. Кеңес азаматтарының басым бөлігі ұзақ жылдар бойы барактарда, жатақханаларда, коммуналдық пәтерлерде тұрды, мұнда қолайлылық мәселесі мүлде қойылмады. Шын мәнінде қолайлы тұрғын үй жағдайлары кеңестік элита үшін ғана қарастырылды. "Басшыларға арналған үйлер" мен шетелдік мамандарға арналған жобаларда архитекторлар көбіне жаңашыл идеялардан бас тартып, буржуазиялық тұрмысқа тән кең, жарық, дұрыс жоспарланған, табиғи материалдармен әрленген үйлерді жобалады. Мұндай үйлерде қызметшілерге арналған бөлмелер де қарастырылды. Инфрақұрылым элементтері ретінде асханалар, кір жуатын орындар, балабақшалар болды. Кеңестік қолайлы тұрғын үй үлгілері ретінде Наркомфин үйі, Набережнаядағы үй, сондай-ақ соцқалалар мен соцқоныстардағы коттеджді құрылыстар қарастырылады.

Түйін сөздер: КСРО; тұрғын үй; кеңестік архитектура; қала-бақ; үй-коммуна; соцқала; қолайлылық; урбанизация

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Конструирование комфорта: советские архитектурные дискурсы 1920-х-1930-х гг.

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется проблема улучшения жилищных условий советских граждан в 1920-е-1930-е гг. Авторы отмечают, что после прихода большевиков к власти были немедленно предприняты попытки улучшения жилищных условий трудящихся. Однако первоначально власти были вынуждены ограничиться переселением рабочих в квартиры буржуазии. Появление коммуналок привело не столько к улучшению жизни народных масс, сколько к установлению социальной справедливости в ее большевистском понимании. К созданию жилого фонда новая власть смогла приступить только по мере окончания Гражданской войны и развертывания НЭПа. Рассматриваются планы строительства городов-садов. Переселение рабочих из перенаселенного центра в зеленые коттеджные поселки действительно могло улучшить качество жизни горожан, однако реализация этой идеи представляла собой финансово невыполнимую задачу. В статье представлены проекты домов-коммун, посредством которых предполагалось перестроить быт советского человека, но которые имели мало общего с традиционным представлением об удобном жилье. Уделяется внимание влиянию политики, экономических приоритетов и идеологии на разработку и реализацию проектов по строительству жилья для трудящихся. Авторы приходят к выводу, что при обсуждении вопроса об улучшении жилищных условий народных масс вопрос об удобстве жилья был в лучшем случае второстепенным. Архитекторов скорее интересовало, как можно экономично решить проблему дефицита жилья и создать новый тип жилых помещений, который способствовал бы советским идеалам трансформации общества на коллективистских началах. В центре архитектурных дискуссий оказывались вопросы рационализации использования жилого пространства, гигиены, переустройства быта, соответствия жилья современным стандартам, в том числе с оглядкой на западные достижения в области архитектуры и дизайна. В статье подчеркивается, что с началом индустриализации все средства были направлены на создание тяжелой промышленности, а финансирование жилищного строительства свелось к минимуму. Долгие годы основная масса советских граждан проживала в весьма стесненных условиях в бараках, общежитиях, коммунальных квартирах, где вопрос о комфорте в принципе не ставился. Действительно комфортные условия проживания предусматривались для советских элит. В статье показано, что в случае "домов для начальников" и иностранных специалистов архитекторы преимущественно отказывались от новаторских идей и создавали проекты, которые соответствовали представлениям о буржуазном благополучии. Жилье для элиты должно было быть просторным, разумной планировки, светлым, хорошо проветриваемым, отделанным натуральными материалами. Показательно, что советские архитекторы предусматривали помещения, где проживала бы прислуга. Элементами такой инфраструктуры были столовые, прачечные, детские сады. В качестве образцов советского комфортабельного жилья рассматриваются "Дом Наркомфина" и "Дом на набережной", а также коттеджная застройка в соцгородах и соцпоселках.

Ключевые слова: СССР; жилье; советская архитектура; город-сад; дом-коммуна; соцгород; комфорт; урбанизация

Introduction

After coming to power in 1917, the Bolsheviks immediately turned their attention to improving the housing conditions of the working masses. These conditions, inherited from tsarist Russia, were indeed deplorable. Workers in large cities lived in overcrowded basements, semi-basements, barracks, and modest dwellings on factory outskirts. Before the First World War, Moscow had 327,000 residents living in lodging houses, while in St. Petersburg in 1912, there were 150,000 destitute individuals renting corners in shared apartments (Orlov 2014: 78).

Following the Revolution, the Bolsheviks – being neither the largest nor the most popular party in the country – sought first to consolidate and expand their social base by demonstrating zeal in the immediate improvement of the living conditions of the working people, those disadvantaged and oppressed under the old regime. Among the priority issues was housing. Improving housing quality and eliminating this crucial aspect of social inequality could win sympathy for the new government among the urban population. Resolving the housing problem outright was, of course, impossible. In the context of revolutionary upheaval, economic decline, and civil war, new construction was out of the question; thus, the initial focus was on redistributing the existing housing stock. The essence of housing policy, openly class-based in character, was to curtail the privileges of former elites and resettle workers from basements into the bourgeoisie's well-appointed apartments.

The starting point of Soviet housing redistribution is often associated with Lenin's statement that a "rich apartment" was "any apartment in which the number of rooms equaled or exceeded the number of residents living in it" (Lebina 1999: 179). This gave impetus to the relocation of workers from the outskirts to the city center. In some cases, vacant housing was occupied (Lebina 1999: 179), while in others, apartment owners were forced to make room. Initially, owners were asked to find tenants themselves, a process known as *self-consolidation.* If they failed, the authorities would assign strangers to live in their apartments.

The once "rich apartments," converted into communal flats, gradually lost any resemblance not only to comfortable housing but even to basic civilized living. Workers relocated from slums had no idea how to adapt to aristocratic conditions. Into the shared space, they brought their own notions of convenience and hygiene. Unsanitary conditions soon prevailed, expensive interiors deteriorated, plasterwork crumbled, and heating was provided by makeshift stoves.

For decades, communal flats became a defining reality of Soviet and post-Soviet cities – a symbol of discomfort, disregard for personal space, endless quarrels, and everyday stress.

As the situation in the country stabilized, Soviet authorities faced the need to create a new housing stock. Architects were tasked with designing dwellings that would serve not only as places to live, but also as manifestos of modernity and foundations for shaping the Soviet individual and society.

Methodology of the Study

The theoretical foundation of the article is modernization theory, since Soviet housing policy was implemented against the backdrop of the USSR's modernization and was shaped by the specific features and turning points of modernization processes. Housing design was also closely linked to ideas about the necessity of social transformation and the creation of a new Soviet society. Architects, at least episodically, sought not merely to meet the needs of the population but to design genuinely innovative housing in both architectural and functional terms.

The methodological basis of the study rests on the principles of objectivity and historicism, combined with a value-oriented approach. The authors employed a systemic approach, aiming to demonstrate the influence of political and economic factors, Soviet ideology, utopian social projects, and contemporary architectural trends on the design and construction of housing in the USSR during the 1920s-1930s. The historical-genetic method was also applied, enabling the tracing and explanation of the emergence of particular views on what Soviet housing should look like, the transformation of values underlying design, and the evolution of state priorities that defined housing policy. The historical-comparative method made it possible to contrast different conceptions of acceptable living conditions for ordinary workers and for the Soviet elites.

The study further employs a contextual method, through which Soviet housing architecture is analyzed within its socio-economic and political framework. This method also highlights the connections between Soviet architecture and certain aspects of Western architectural thought. Soviet architects did not develop their projects in isolation: they were influenced by demands from both society and the state. Moreover, after the Revolution, Soviet architects-maintained ties with architectural thought in Western countries. They traveled abroad on official assignments, studied the works of foreign colleagues, and participated in international exhibitions. In turn, Western architects were admitted to Soviet architectural competitions and invited to work in the USSR.

Discussion and Results

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the ideas of Ebenezer Howard's garden city enjoyed great popularity in Russia. The essence of the concept was that those in need of housing would form cooperatives, whose members contributed certain sums toward the purchase of land and the construction of individual family houses. The remaining amount was provided by a bank at a low interest rate. By repaying the loan, cooperative members became homeowners. The garden city was intended to combine the best features of both city and countryside. Located on the outskirts of a metropolis, it represented a cottage settlement with all necessary infrastructure. Around the well-maintained houses, residents had plots of land where they could cultivate gardens and plant orchards.

In the early years of Soviet power, it was assumed that garden cities would become the foundation for solving the housing problem, and that small houses would be the primary form of housing for Soviet workers. The initiators of such settlements were not only housing cooperatives but also government departments (commissariats) and municipal authorities (Meerovich et al. 2019: 21). A number of Soviet architects (G.B. Barkhin, V.N. Markovnikov, M.G. Dikansky, among others) believed in low-rise construction (Yakovleva 2018: 784). Several settlements were built, the most famous being Moscow's *Sokol,* Dukstroy, and the settlement near the *Krasny Bogatyr* factory.

The garden city was designed to include cottages of various types, both single-family and multi-apartment (2-4 units). It was assumed that, given the country's overall situation, cottages should be built cheaply and with minimal amenities (Yakovleva 2018: 785). Nevertheless, providing Soviet citizens with even simple individual houses proved an impossible task for a country devastated by revolution and war. The housing standards developed by the People's Commissariat of Labor and the People's Commissariat of Health, though not always observed, were still too generous. A small worker's apartment was supposed to include two rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and an entrance hall. A medium-sized family apartment of 61–66 m^2

consisted of a kitchen-dining room, two bedrooms, a vestibule, a pantry, and a bathroom. A multi-family apartment was expected to have a kitchen, a separate dining room, two bedrooms, an entrance hall, and a bathroom (Yakovleva 2018: 784). Architects also considered the future improvement of cottages and the everyday life of their residents. For example, V.N. Markovnikov envisioned abandoning the traditional Russian stove in favor of modern heating systems, rationalizing kitchen design, and incorporating the latest technical innovations in future construction (Markovnikov 1928: 106).

It cannot be said that comfort was the central narrative in discussions and designs of garden settlements. The focus was rather on reducing social tension and the severity of the housing problem, on economical construction, and on the social aspects of such resettlement. However, in the historical context – and especially compared to the housing situation during the era of industrialization – the ideas of cottage settlements appear as an extraordinary concern by the authorities for their citizens. From the mid-1920s, garden settlements began to give way to departmental settlements, where housing was built by the state, and the right to occupy living space was directly tied to employment in the Soviet national economy.

Another striking phenomenon of Soviet housing thought in the 1920s was the communal house *(dom-kommuna),* which had a rather tenuous relationship to notions of comfortable living. Here, the emphasis was on transforming Soviet everyday life from individualist foundations to collective ones. Communal houses were intended to facilitate the creation of Soviet society. The general idea was to reduce personal space and expand communal space. Residents of such houses were expected to eat in common dining halls, spend leisure time in libraries or recreation rooms, and place their children in shared nurseries and kindergartens. The most radical projects reduced the living unit to a sleeping cabin (Milyutin 1930: 40) or, for example, envisioned a common dormitory with the possibility of privacy for married couples in special "double bedrooms" (Lebina 1999: 169). A more balanced approach proposed using the living unit for sleeping, studying, individual activities, and storage (Milyutin 1930: 40). Throughout the 1920s, communal houses were the subject of debate, as such a radical restructuring of everyday life seemed excessive to many. They never became a mass phenomenon, and by the early 1930s, communal houses were abandoned as a utopian idea.

With the onset of industrialization and the expansion of industrial construction, the urban population grew rapidly. Around industrial facilities, *socialist cities (sotsgoroda)* and *socialist settlements (sotsposelki)* emerged, raising the urgent question of providing housing for vast numbers of people. In the 1920s, Soviet authorities and architects looked to German experience, particularly to standardized workers' settlements, which embodied key principles such as maximum economy, standardization, rationality, technological efficiency, and the fastest possible pace of design and construction (Konysheva et al. 2011: 231). German projects were attractive because they eliminated "overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, excessive density, and high land rents of existing cities; they ensured the decentralization of cities and offered 'brilliant prospects… for improving health and physical development… and relocating the permanent residence of inhabitants and their families beyond the congested urban core'" (Konysheva et al. 2011: 231).

In 1930, German architect Ernst May arrived in the USSR to implement the principles of German standardized construction as quickly as possible. He and his team developed plans for a dozen socialist cities, including Avtostroy, Magnitogorsk, Stalingrad, Kuznetsk, Nizhny Tagil, and others. Very soon, however, it became clear that the state lacked the resources to build even moderately high-quality housing. "May's architects were forced to design housing not only from

brick and concrete panels (following May's Frankfurt prototypes) but also from cheap local materials such as wood and clay. One-story houses with wooden frames, boarded walls filled with clay, shavings, or peat for insulation differed little from ordinary barracks built by workers or prisoners themselves without architects' involvement" (Khmelnitsky 2008).

The Germans were disappointed but still tried to adapt to Soviet realities. In 1932, May's associate W. Schwagenscheidt wrote: "In recent months… behind closed doors I developed a proposal for a new type of socialist city, which naturally runs counter to the Party line. Based on real life in developing regions, I say, the Soviet Union will long be able to build only primitive barracks. Available materials and resources must be used for industrial construction. The people inhabiting socialist cities are at a very low cultural level; they do not understand (though it is assumed they will build multi-story houses) how to live in such houses. One-story construction from local materials is the right path" (Wolters 2007).

Schwagenscheidt was mistaken about the Soviet government's attitude toward barracks: for many years, they became an integral part of urban life. Moreover, in the 1930s, the state, which otherwise strictly controlled construction and housing distribution, partially withdrew from solving the housing problem, leaving the population to fend for itself. In new industrial cities, self-built housing and dugouts appeared, tolerated by local authorities. Needless to say, Soviet realities of the 1930s had nothing in common with comfortable living conditions.

Industrial construction and military priorities were paramount. From the second half of the 1920s, the construction of new towns and workers' settlements at enterprises was classified as "industrial" and incorporated into the production and financial plans of sectoral commissariats. Civil housing and public utilities were assigned a secondary role (Meerovich et al. 2006: 96). Funding for housing construction was therefore carried out on a residual basis.

Conceptions of comfort for ordinary workers and for the Soviet elite – party and state officials, managers, and highly qualified specialists of industrial enterprises, security service leadership, and loyal intelligentsia – differed dramatically. The upper strata of Soviet society were provided with housing unimaginable to the average citizen. The living conditions of officials and those close to power were not openly discussed. Unlike the propagandistic promotion of mass housing and the modern everyday life of workers and employees, projects for elite settlements and high-comfort housing were scarcely publicized. When they were mentioned, it was never acknowledged that such housing was reserved for the few. For example, architect A.S. Urban, presenting in the 1930s a project for a luxurious 107.5 m^2 apartment, did not fail to reference "the growth of the general welfare of the working people" and "the new socialist person" who would live in modern, comfortable conditions (Urban 1936). Even in subsequent decades, architectural researchers referred to housing intended for the privileged stratum as "workers' housing."

Ideas about what constituted "housing for officials" were shaped not so much by social experiments aimed at creating fundamentally new dwellings to foster a new type of personality, but by ordinary, practical notions of good living conditions. Such housing was expected to be a spacious apartment for a family, with ample light and air, or a detached house with extensive grounds. Careful planning, all modern amenities, and high-quality construction and finishing materials were assumed.

The stratification of housing conditions between ordinary citizens and officials emerged immediately after the Revolution. For temporary accommodation of new leaders, elite hotels such as *Astoria* and *Evropeyskaya* in Petrograd, or *National* and *Metropol* in Moscow, were converted into so-called *Houses of Soviets.* For example, in the Second House of Soviets, located in the *Evropeyskaya* hotel, rooms could be occupied by members of the All-Russian Central Executive

Committee, the Central Committee of the RCP, provincial committees, regional bureaus of the Central Committee, provincial executive committees, heads of departments and their deputies, members of departmental boards, Cheka and Air Defense staff, district committees of the RCP(b) and district soviets, and high-ranking officials on assignment. In exceptional cases, a room could be granted to a particularly valuable specialist, but overall, such housing was intended for the ruling elite. Beyond the privilege of residing in a hotel of *Astoria's* caliber, tenants could also count on a certain level of everyday comfort. In particular, the Houses of Soviets had communal dining halls and kitchens, allowing residents to devote themselves fully to state and party affairs without distraction from domestic concerns (Lebina 1999: 161).

For the resettlement of responsible Party officials, mansions of the old nobility were also used, such as the houses of Count Sheremetev and Prince Kurakin in Moscow. Part of the Bolshevik leadership lived in buildings within the Kremlin itself (Ovsyannikova et al. 2014: 102).

This well-appointed housing stock was clearly insufficient, and subsequently, new housing for the chosen few began to be constructed. A prime example of such a "house for officials" is the famous Narkomfin Building. Designed by architects M.Ya. Ginzburg, I.F. Milinis, and engineer S.L. Prokhorov, built between 1928 and 1930, it is best known for its constructivist architecture and innovative ideas in organizing living space and everyday life. Yet it should not be forgotten that the apartments in the Narkomfin Building were intended for employees of the People's Commissariat of Finance of the USSR, including its highest-ranking officials. Ginzburg's views on what Soviet housing should be were set out in his theoretical work Housing. The creator of the Narkomfin Building acknowledged the strengths of contemporary Western European housing construction and the general level of housing culture, manifested in attention to detail, quality building materials, and diverse furnishings (Ginzburg 1934: 40). As often happened when Soviet authors needed to speak favorably of Western achievements, Ginzburg noted that capitalism had prepared the ground for industrialized construction, but that the internal contradictions of the capitalist system would prevent it from reaching the heights attainable under socialism (Ginzburg 1934: 42).

Ginzburg classified his residential project as a "transitional" type of housing. He disapproved of communal houses, believing that premature total collectivization of everyday life would discredit the very idea of reformatting society on collectivist foundations. The architect argued that it was necessary to create "a series of elements stimulating the transition to a higher form of social and everyday organization, but not decreeing this transition" (Ginzburg 1934: 68). According to Ginzburg, the residential units were designed for families and were to include all amenities, including a kitchen and bathroom, albeit in simplified form. Even if small apartments replaced kitchens with niches and bathtubs with showers, the unit was self-sufficient for comfortable, isolated living. The apartment sizes far exceeded the wildest dreams of ordinary Muscovites. The smallest unit type F, intended for one person or childless couples, had an area of 27, 30, or 31 m^2 (Ginzburg 1934: 72). The largest units type K, three-room apartments, reached a remarkable 78 m^2.

The project envisioned greater involvement of residents in collective life than before. A communal block connected by a heated passage to the residential building was planned, to house a gymnasium, kitchen, dining hall with recreation rooms, and a rooftop summer dining area. A separate children's home was to be built, along with a service yard with laundry and other domestic facilities. Not all of these plans were realized: the dining hall never opened, and the nursery was located not in a separate annex but in the communal block (Ginzburg 1934: 82). By the 1980s, the Narkomfin Building was in disrepair but was saved thanks to the

efforts of Ginzburg's grandson, contemporary Russian architect Alexey Vladimirovich Ginzburg. Restorers claimed to have recreated the original layout, interiors, and finishes. Today the building impresses with its beauty, harmony, and thoughtful design. The rooms are literally flooded with light. It is reported that after the reconstruction completed in 2020, all apartments were sold (Online tour of the Narkomfin Building). Evidently, the comfort envisioned for residents of the 1930s proved equally appealing to modern people.

The Narkomfin Building was not only housing for the elite but also the realization of a bold modern architectural project, an experiment in new social and everyday organization, and a reflection of certain ideals of the era. Later in the 1930s, "houses for officials" no longer bore pronounced innovative features and instead corresponded to notions of bourgeois lifestyle and prosperity. A striking example is the House on the Embankment (the First Residential Building of the Council of People's Commissars), designed by B.M. Iofan. It became an emblem of the era and a witness both to the rise of its residents and to their tragic downfall during Stalinist repressions. Apartments, with areas reaching 200 m^2 and up to seven rooms, were intended for Soviet intelligentsia, high-ranking officials, and generals. Among its residents were Stalin's children Svetlana Alliluyeva and Vasily Stalin, Alexey Stakhanov, and L.P. Beria. Ceilings were decorated with murals, floors with oak parquet, and bathrooms had windows. Residents were provided with luxurious furniture and high-quality household items. Apartments were equipped with all necessary appliances and even garbage chutes. Many included a maid's room. The building offered extensive services: a club, the *Udarnik* cinema (the first designed for sound films), a department store, nursery, kindergarten, clinic, solarium, library, laundry, post office, and even tennis courts (Ovsyannikova et al. 2014: 102-103).

Although the Narkomfin Building and the House on the Embankment were contemporaries, they reflect different epochs. The Narkomfin Building marked a farewell to the avant-garde experimentation of the 1920s and a kind of constructivist austerity. The Sovnarkom House signaled the step into the 1930s, with its opulent style, heavy luxury, and widening gap between the upper and lower strata of Soviet society.

Another example of elite housing is the House on Mokhovaya Street for employees of the Moscow Soviet, designed by I.V. Zholtovsky and built between 1932 and 1934. Its costly design was evident from the neoclassical façade. The building served as residential housing only briefly before being converted into the U.S. Embassy.

When designing high-comfort apartments, architects did not limit their imagination. A rare example of a candid description of elite housing is found in architect A.S. Urban's article, where he outlined his vision of modern Soviet housing. In a 4½-room apartment, there was to be a living room, study, bedroom, children's room, and maid's room. The entrance hall was to contain a table with a telephone and two armchairs. The apartment was also to include a heated loggia with a winter garden, oak doors in carved frames, and a children's room with a bay window (Urban 1936).

Elite housing could take the form not only of apartments in individual buildings but also of cottage settlements that appeared in socialist cities or settlements around enterprises built during industrialization. The contrast in housing standards between different social groups was striking. Workers and managers lived not only in different buildings but also in different parts of the settlement, spatially separated from one another. Settlements were typically divided into three categories of housing. Housing for top officials consisted of compact, isolated neighborhoods of detached or semi-detached houses. Lower-ranking officials and skilled specialists lived in sectional 3–5-story stone buildings or two-story wooden houses. The

majority lived in barracks, dormitories, and hostels.

Cottage developments existed in Orsk, Sverdlovsk, Kamensk-Uralsky, at DneproGES, in Chelyabinsk, and in Avtostroy near the Nizhny Novgorod (Gorky) automobile plant, among others. The most famous cottage settlement, a garden suburb, was Magnitogorsk's *Berezki*, where the leadership of the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Combine, NKVD officials, and highly qualified foreign specialists resided. Initially called "Amerikanka," it was built to house specialists from the American firm McKee. After their departure, the houses were fully transferred to the local elite. While builders and workers of the plant survived in barracks and dugouts, managers lived in separate well-appointed houses designed for single families. The amenities of these cottages fully corresponded to Western standards of comfort. In 1930-1931, about 1,500 people lived in *Berezki,* no more than 2% of the city's population. The director of the Magnitogorsk plant, A.P. Zavenyagin, enjoyed privileges that could be considered truly regal at the time. His three-story mansion had 14 rooms, including a billiard room, children's playroom, music salon, and study. Behind the house was a deer reserve, and in front a garden (Meerovich 2016).

In the socialist city of Kamensk-Uralsky, built around the Ural Aluminum Plant, the cottage settlement consisted of two-story sectional houses designed for two families. Apartments included rooms for domestic workers and balconies on the second floor. The housing was equipped with all necessary engineering and technical facilities as well as built-in wardrobes. The neighborhood was landscaped with pedestrian paths, flowerbeds, small architectural forms in front of the main facades, and croquet courts behind the houses. In the public recreation zone, there were volleyball courts, gazebos, and hammocks. Notably, outsiders had no opportunity to enjoy this oasis amid the harsh realities of the socialist city alongside the residents: the settlement was fenced and guarded around the clock by paramilitary security (Gavrilova 2011). The settlement for foreign specialists and managers of the automobile plant in the socialist city of Avtostroy in Gorky was likewise surrounded by barbed wire.

The proclaimed equality of the workers of the Soviet state found no reflection in everyday practices and was clearly manifested in the housing sphere. Throughout the 1920s-1930s, the contrast between the housing conditions of ordinary citizens and privileged groups only intensified. The layout, amenities, and technical equipment of "houses for officials" increasingly acquired a classical bourgeois appearance, and the comfort of elite housing grew into outright luxury. In the 1930s, the idea of relieving Soviet citizens of domestic concerns was transferred into the notion of equipping elite houses with auxiliary services such as dining halls, communal kitchens, nurseries, and so forth. In the House on the Embankment, for example, luxurious apartments had tiny kitchens of 4-6 m^2, since it was assumed that residents would primarily eat outside their homes. In this case, the goal was not collectivization of everyday life but rather concern for the convenience of the residents.

Conclusion

In the 1920s–1930s, the housing question remained one of the most acute social problems in the Soviet Union. The shortage of housing for the urban population was inherited by the Bolsheviks from tsarist Russia, where workers were forced to live in barracks, dormitories, or rent corners in shared apartments. Initially, the improvement of conditions for those whom the Bolsheviks considered their social base occurred through the redistribution of the existing housing stock. However, as the situation in the country stabilized, construction of Soviet housing began. The main task was to provide workers with decent living conditions, with the

expectation that new housing would be economical, rationally organized, hygienic, and aligned with contemporary architectural and design trends. Through the organization of everyday life, housing was also expected to contribute to the formation of the new Soviet person and society. Considerations of comfort played only a secondary role. Examples of projects from the 1920s include garden cities and communal houses.

With the onset of industrialization, the state's priority became the rapid creation of heavy industry, and ordinary workers, virtually abandoned to their fate, were forced to crowd into overpopulated apartments, barracks, dormitories, and dugouts. The new houses built for workers and employees were maximally simplified, turning modest projects into miserable ones. In the 1930s, the issue was survival rather than comfort for the masses.

The history of Soviet housing is a history of inequality under the declared goal of creating a classless society of equals. The Soviet government began by attempting, after the Revolution, to erase differences in living standards between classes, including resettling workers from slums into "rich apartments." Yet immediately, a new stratification appeared among those loyal to Soviet power. While workers and minor employees crowded into communal apartments, those holding high positions in Soviet institutions received individual housing of substantial size. A narrow stratum of Soviet leaders moved into buildings in the Kremlin and expensive pre-revolutionary hotels. By the 1930s, it became even more evident that the authorities held different notions of comfort and prosperity for the masses and the elites. For officials, industrial managers, the upper intelligentsia, figures embodying Soviet achievements (famous pilots, Stakhanovites, etc.), and foreign specialists, housing was built to a standard of comfort that remains comprehensible to modern people. "Houses for officials" were distinguished by large areas, thoughtful layouts, technical equipment, and infrastructure that eased everyday life. And, of course, apartments and houses for the chosen few, designed for individual families, ensured complete isolation from any outside interference.

Thus, in the period under consideration, when the authorities did attempt to address the housing problem, they primarily sought to provide citizens with at least minimally decent living space and, in principle, to resettle people somehow and somewhere. In designing mass housing for workers, discussions focused mainly on sanitary norms, rational use of living space, and alignment with idealized notions of what Soviet everyday life should be. Comfortable living conditions became an exclusive privilege available only to a narrow group of the Soviet elite.

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