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## **HOUSING ESTATES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

According to the statistical data of 1991 it was established that there are 62,456 prefabricated blocks of flats in the Czech Republic with 1,138,069 flats – which means that 31.3% of the total of permanently occupied housing is to be found on housing estates. Considering the fact that the average flat occupancy is 2.76 persons, 3,186,590 people live these days in a prefabricated flat. In some cities the proportion of inhabitants who live on a housing estate is – in relation to the total number of inhabitants – even higher: for example, Sokolov 73%, Blansko 56%, Český Krumlov 56%, Klatovy 52%, Hradec Králové 52%, Prague 43%, Olomouc 42%. These statistical data prove that, unlike the situation in the countries of Western Europe, Czech housing estates are characterised by a vast number of prefabricated flats which represent not a social way of living but form the basis of our average housing arrangements.

Because of this quantity, the housing estates in the Czech Republic are characterised by specific social features which have recently revealed several negative effects. These are represented in particular by the insufficient technical state of prefabricated buildings resulting from the low-quality production of prefabricated sections and poor construction work, and also as a consequence of negligence in respect of continuous maintenance work. Another problem is the overall monotonous character of housing estate development areas: These can lack even minimal aesthetical values, community-creating institutions, including job opportunities within the housing, estate, and in any cases also a suitable transport connection between the estate and the city centre. Very often the urban project for a housing estate was not implemented fully in accordance with the original design because of limited financial means. As a consequence of this,

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contemporary housing estates are only urban torsos which especially provide for the residential function. The negative effects of housing estates are reflected in socio-pathological phenomena concerning young people, such as vandalism, terrorism, aggression and drug abuse. Adults are found to be generally more passive and with a high divorce rate.

For the sake of objectivity, it must be stated that housing estates may also show some positive points: prefabricated residential buildings guarantee a standard of living for the majority of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic, the demographic structure of the population of the majority of housing estates is still well proportioned, and in the case of a housing estate located on the outskirts of a city, the environment is of better quality than in the city centre.

**Regeneration of housing estates.** Taking all these facts into account, it is obvious that the housing estate in the Czech Republic is a reality with which we will have to count for some years, and that we will have to use the housing it provides to the optimum extent. Experiences from abroad are proof that it is essential to start the process of the regeneration of housing estates in the shortest possible time so as these structures may become an equal part of a city. The regeneration of housing estates should be a continuous process. Continuous maintenance work and modernisation of individual prefabricated buildings should not be the only parts of this process. The aim of the process should be the conceptual transformation of housing estates into pleasant, practically organised, ecological and safe places for living, with the widest possible range of the functions needed, such as living, working, a health service, an education system, culture, sport and recreation. Unlike the regeneration of the older parts of towns and historical city centres, the regeneration of housing estates represents a specific problem area which has resulted in particular from the absence or the inefficient securing of the above-mentioned functions and from a lack of elements which create a city environment. The process of the regeneration of housing estates is not to be understood only in the sense of urbanism but also as a process for the regeneration of the social life of housing estates. The basic driving force of this process should be participation in the implementation of positive changes by the greatest possible number of estate inhabitants.

It cannot be expected that the process of the regeneration of housing estates will be guaranteed by the mechanisms of the marked economy. Current owners and tenants of residential buildings are not able to provide from their own sources the capital needed, and very often they do not even have the necessary motivation for the regeneration. Incomes from regulated rents are not sufficient even for common maintenance work, the modernisation of prefabricated buildings and infrastructure, not to mention the completion of buildings which are lacking, in housing estates or possibly the cultivation of residential

surroundings in housing estates. The privatising of estate flats is very problematical and will not bring an immediate profit. Unresolved owner relationships to pieces of land on housing estates do not allow the market mechanisms to be effective. In such a situation, it is not possible to invest substantial amounts of capital in the development of housing estates.

In spite of this, the idea of the complex regeneration of housing estates should not be abandoned. The problems of housing-estate living, taking into consideration the quality of prefabricated houses and the number of inhabitants living in housing estates in the Czech Republic, could develop, in the very near future, into a serious political problem. It is necessary to consider carefully and speedily the economic consequences of neglected maintenance work and other negative factors concerning housing estates and start a gradual, but efficiently systematical, process of regeneration in such a way that the economic lifetime of prefabricated houses and infrastructure buildings will not be exceeded, or the possible depopulation of housing estates will not occur as a result of poor housing and the social environment of housing estates.

The aim of humanisation of housing estates is the removal of the causes resulting in the deformation of:

1) the quality of life and of the style of living – the monofunctional housing estate does not create the prerequisites necessary for the creation of a functioning community of people, participating actively in the improvement of ‘their’ environment and conditions of living;

2) the fulfilment of users’ needs – there are no jobs, the structure of trade and services is inadequate, leisure facilities are mostly missing;

3) the appearance, proportions and scale of buildings and spaces creating unfavourable aesthetic impression, which can be characterised either as uniform, stereotype, monotonous, or as chaotic, inorganic, muddled, without any order.

The humanisation of housing estates, consequently, means primarily the creation of a motivating atmosphere for living in the housing estate, which will create the necessary prerequisites for the improvement of the function and the appearance of individual buildings and spaces, the supplementing of insufficient infrastructure (both social and technical) and the improvement of the living environment as a whole. The technical point of view considers the technological possibilities and the optimum methods of execution.

In view of the fact that housing estates are integral parts of communities and cities, municipalities should take the major part in this process. This means that the main supporter of the process of the regeneration of housing estates will be the municipality (in accordance with CNR Law no. 367/1990 in Digest on municipalities). CNR Law 179/1990 in Digest on the transfer of some of the properties of the Czech Republic to the ownership of municipalities, and the authorisation of the principles of the conception of a state housing policy confirm that the responsibility for housing, housing development and housing

economy has been transferred to the municipalities; from the above-mentioned, it is obvious that the problem of the regeneration of housing estates must be dealt with together with the problems of municipal housing policy.

The current financial situation of the majority of Czech municipalities is, and will be for some time in the future, characterised by a lack of usable financial capital for the implementation of extensive regeneration programmes. For the comprehensive process of the regeneration of housing estates co-operation between inhabitants, business people, municipalities and the state is absolutely imperative.