

SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE CASE OF REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Kaltrina Elezi Kuliqi^{1*}, Arbnoze Elezi²

¹FAS- Architecture, SUT Tetova, RNM; Faculty of architecture AUE- FON University Skopje

²PhD candidate at the Faculty of Law, Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje, RNM

* Corresponding author e-mail: kaltrina.elezi@unite.edu.mk

Abstract

One of the biggest goals in any human's life is to live in a satisfactory dwelling. Housing is one of the essential means considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs, covering physiological needs such as shelter, a place for sleeping, rest, eating, clothing, raising a family.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the right of every citizen to a humane home is in the very spirit of the Constitution, and socially vulnerable groups are protected by specific Laws. In this paper we try to explore the social housing in the case of the RNM. We analyse the actions that the state has employed to address this issue: building social housing for low-income citizens and the strategy 'Buy a house, buy an apartment. In this analysis, we can notice that the solution is not perfect, and other issues emerge from it. In a brief review of a case study from Chile, we find the participatory design as a successful strategy to translate the elementary needs of social cases into architecture. Incremental growth in this case is the ultimate tactic that enabled the architects to fulfil what initially seemed like an impossible design task.

Keywords: social housing, the right to housing, vulnerable groups, incremental growth, flexible design

1. Introduction

By social housing are understood the houses and apartments which are owned by central government, local government or any other non- profitable organization that are rented to people with low income.

According to Reeves, the key feature of the products and services provided by social housing providers is that 'these activities and products are non-market, in that they cannot be obtained by bidding with cash or other financial resources in competition, and that the products are allocated principally on the basis of housing need rather than effective demand' (Reeves 2005). A blurring of the boundary is noticed with the prominence of low-cost home ownership in general and shared ownership housing.

Historically speaking, modern social housing is seen emerging with the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 19th century, which brought to a rapid increase of urban population, and degradation and dehumanization of the residential quarters. Another peak of need for social housing was reached after the First World War in several European cities and the US, and finally, with the Second World War, social housing became globally spread, in the form of government's help for war veterans.

Despite its beginnings, social housing at present is provided in different forms and for different reasons. Today's world is a dynamic one, with many changes happening very fast. People's everyday needs are different, the lifestyle is different. Although in the Republic of North Macedonia everything happens slower than in other parts of the world, the lifestyle change is evident and inevitable here as well. While previous generations of our parents and grandparents used to live together in larger families, nowadays everyone prefers to live only with the closest members of the family. In the past, family members took care of others: the members that worked shared their earnings with the rest of the family. Today, everyone tries to make their earnings and spend them in the way of their choosing, which has brought to a different type of family – a smaller one.

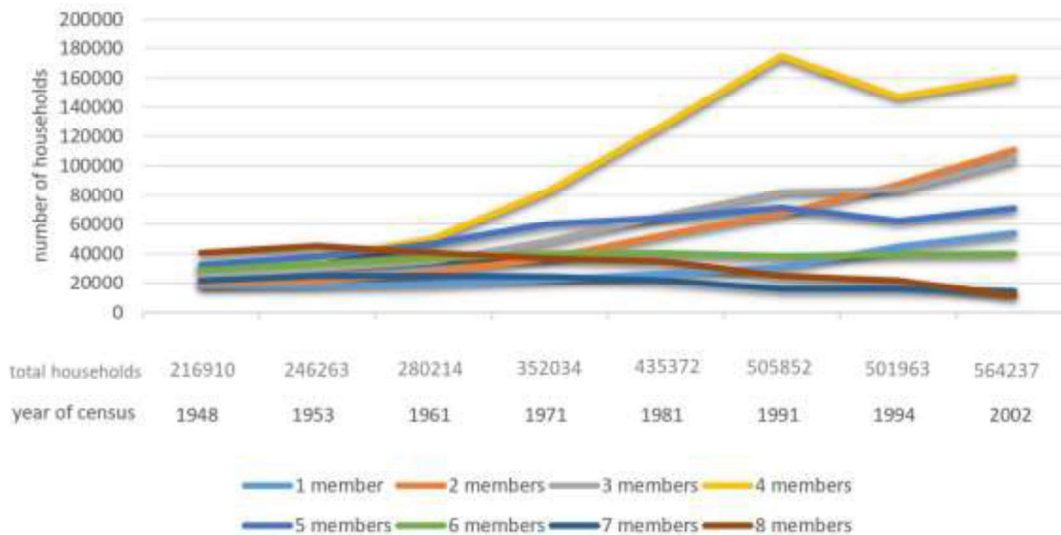


Chart 1. Households according to number of members by censuses (data was retrieved from www.stat.gov.mk)

In Chart 1, the number of households according to the number of members of the family in RNM is analysed, from 1948 to 2002 [1]. A drastic increase in smaller families (four-member, three-member, and two-member families) is seen, as opposed to a decrease in larger families. With that increase, the number of households has grown as well, resulting in an increased need for housing solutions.

The main reasons behind the difficulty of the citizens of RNM to secure a dwelling are:

- high unemployment rates,
- low salaries,
- the lack of economic support system that larger families used to provide,
- rural-urban migration,
- a higher standard of life.

These citizens and families are compelled to secure a dwelling for themselves through the support system of social housing that is provided by the government.

[1] The study is limited to this time period because the last census in RNM was conducted in 2002, and the methodology for the following trends in population growth for the last 18 years is limited in birth rate and mortality rate only!

2. Housing as a fundamental value, as a lawful right

Among the fundamental values of the constitutional order of the Republic of North Macedonia in Article 8 of the constitution, humanism, social justice, and solidarity are listed as well. This is the main legal document and the source from which derives people's right to have proper housing and the state's duty to provide one. Then, these provisions are followed by laws and regulations which regulate this subject more closely.

As it happens with many other subjects, social housing isn't regulated with one integral document, there are provisions in The Housing Law (Закон за домување - Службен весник на Република Македонија“ број 99/2009, 57/10, 36/11, 54/11, 13/12, 55/13, 163/13, 42/14 199/14 и 146/15), in The Law on Sale and Lease of Business Buildings and Business Premises of the Republic of Macedonia (Законот за продажба и давање под закуп на деловните згради и деловните простории на Република Македонија Службен весник на Република Македонија“ број 13/13 и 69/13), and in The Law on Managing Housing and

Business Premises of the Republic of Macedonia (Закон за стопанисување со станбениот и деловниот простор на Република Македонија - Службен весник на Република Македонија 2/1994).

The positive provisions in the Republic of North Macedonia, provide the possibility of paying a small rent fee (depending on the size of the social house that is being lived in, as well as the social category the applicant belongs to, which range from 25 den to 190 den per square meter). The option of buying off the social house by paying a certain price and paying the rest through bank credit (for a period of payment of 30 years and fixed 4% of interest) was possible until 2011 with the new law changes. Today, the option of buying off social houses is only possible as an exception under particular circumstances, but not as a given rule.

3. The stand of RNM towards social housing

Under the previous system, before the independence in 1991, with the laws that were positive until recently, other categories of people were given the possibility of using social housing, or sometimes it was more of a community housing where being a social category as we know it today – wasn't obligatory. Such examples are members of the army and members of their families. They would live in such housing for a small or no fee, and later they had the possibility of becoming owners. There were given deadlines until recently, for those users to regulate their status and buy those houses, but this process showed to be slow, ineffective and is ongoing still.

As it was mentioned above, social housing is an emergent need, but the process of providing one seems to be very slow. There is a particular agency responsible for this area, JSC for the construction and management of housing and residential premises of importance for the Republic – Скопје (АД за изградба и стопанисување со станбен простор и со деловен простор од значење за Републиката – Скопје), which works under government instructions. The project which started in 2009, was to provide housing to socially vulnerable groups and is partially funded by Bank for development (European Council), and half by the Government of RNM. A total of 32 buildings were to be finished by 2018, but only 20 are finished as of now. The gross area of the apartments ranges from 35- 45m². It intends to provide a home to people with low income, children without parents, single parents, blind people- users of social aid, young married couples, etc.



Figure 1. Social housing built in Skopje (left) and Ohrid (right)

In the public database of JSC, there are data on the completed social housing projects and those that are in the process/ are planned. Overlooking the built and planned projects, it can be concluded that there is an arrangement of social housing projects on ethnic bases. They are only built-in municipalities mostly ethnically Macedonian. The layout of the completed social buildings by cities, included in the governmental program FP1674 (2009) is as follows:

1. Skopje - Gjorce Petrov, Jurijska 3.1 and Jurijska 3.2-Skopje - a total of 102 apartments (2×51 apartment), number of floors: G+4+attic.
2. Bitola, BLR 1 C1 - 78 apartments, number of floors G+4.
3. Resen, Kumsal 2 - 18 apartments, number of floors is G+4.
4. Demir Hisar, Block 2 (5a) - 25 apartments, number of floors is G+4+attic.
5. Ohrid, Block 3 - Nursery - 71 apartments, the number of floors is G+5.
6. Prilep, Block 2-4 Tochila - 76 apartments, number of floors is G+4.
7. Kicevo, Kalenderica 2 first building - 32 apartments, number of floors is G+4.
8. Makedonska Kamenica, building 1 Prvomajska bb- 29 apartments, the number of floors is G+4+attic.
9. Kocani - Dracevik B 2.1 XIII Brigade - 29 apartments, number of floors is G+3 + attic; Dracevik B 2.2 XIII Brigade - 43 apartments, number of floors is G+4 + attic.
10. Berovo, st. Mosha Pijade BB - 51 apartment, number of floors is G+4.
11. Kriva Palanka, st. Marshal Tito BB - 46 apartments, the number of floors is G+5.
12. Stip, building B-10 settlement Senjak 2 - 91 apartment, number of floors is G+4.
13. Kavadarci, B-2 Blazo Aleksov bb - 30 apartments, number of floors is G+4 + attic.
14. Makedonski Brod, building 6.15 UE No. 2 - 10 apartments, the number of floors is G+2.
15. Strumica, Gjorgji Vasilev 44 - 41 apartment, number of floors is G+5.
16. Gostivar, Toskalar A2 building 5 and 6 - 70 apartments, no. of floors is G+ 4 (Anon, 2020).

In total, 842 buildings are already finished momentarily. A construction of other social buildings is planned in Skopje, Veles, Gevgelija, Debar, Demir Kapija, Sveti Nikole, Vinica, Pehchevo and other social buildings are already under construction in: Negotino (62 apartments), Probistip (48 apartments), Sveti Nikole (48 apartments), Skopje- Butel (312 apartments).

Total population of the Republic of North Macedonia according to declared ethnic affiliation, on those municipalities, according to the administrative-territorial organization from 2004, as abovementioned is mostly ethnic Macedonians, as follows:

1. Skopje Gjorce Petrov has a total number of population of 41 634 people from which 35 455 are ethnic Macedonians or 85.15%;
2. Bitola has a total number of population of 95 385 people from which 84 616 or 88.7% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
3. Resen has a total number of population of 16 825 people from which 12 798 or 76.06% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
4. Demir Hisar has a total number of population of 9 497 people from which 9179 or 96,65% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
5. Ohrid has a total number of population of 55 749 people from which 47 344 or 84,9 % of them are ethnic Macedonians;
6. Prilep has a total number of population of 76 768 people from which 70 878 or 92,3% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
7. Kicevo has a total number of population of 30 138 people from which 16 140 or 53,55 % of them are ethnic Macedonians and 9 202 or 30.5% of them are ethnic Albanians;
8. Makedonska Kamenica has a total number of population of 8 110 people from which 8 055 or 99.3 % of them are ethnic Macedonians;
9. Kochani has a total number of populations of 38 092 people from which 35 472 or 93.1% of them are ethnic Macedonians;

10. Berovo has a total number of population of 13 941 people from which 13 335 or 95.6 % of them are ethnic Macedonians;
11. Kriva Palanka has a total number of population of 20820 people from which 19 998 or 96.05% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
12. Stip has a total number of population of 947 796 people from which 41 670 or 87.1% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
13. Kavadarci has a total number of population of 38 741 people from which 37 499 or 96.7% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
14. Makedonski Brod has a total number of population of 7 141 people from which 4 929 or 68.9% of them are ethnic Macedonians;
15. Strumica has a total number of population of 54 676 people from which 50 258 or 91.9% of them are ethnic Macedonians and only
16. Gostivar stands with a different structure of population where the total number is of 81 042 people from which 15 877 or 19.6% of them are ethnic Macedonians, 54 038 or 66.7% of them are ethnic Albanians, and 7 991 or 9.8% of them are ethnic Turks (Statistical yearbook of The RNM, 2019).

As can be seen, there is a disproportional distribution of public social housing buildings regarding ethnic structure. The percentage of ethnic Macedonians in the cities where social housing is built, varies from 76%- 96%, with exception of Gostivar (19.6%) and Kicevo (53.5%). Social housing is not built in the vicinity of Albanian dominated neighborhoods, or Roma-dominated neighborhoods (whose unemployment rate for the age group 15-64y is 53%).

With the law changes of The Social Protection Law (Закон за социјална заштита Сл.Весник на Република Северна Македонија 146/19), other categories of people are incorporated as possible users of social housing such as the socially disadvantaged Persons of the Roma community (according to the "Roma Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia"), but the application of this provision remains to be seen.

Another state assistance to help citizens become owners of their dwellings, houses or apartments or help owners upgrade their existing houses, is the governmental project "Buy a house buy an apartment", which is a project that provides support to citizens who do not have their own home, on an easier and cheaper way to solve the housing issue by providing subsidized housing loan which enables users to buy an apartment or a house, or upgrade an existing one. The amount of participation on housing loan and the interest depends on many factors among them the monthly income. But although it is a welcome assistance for some, it has some disadvantages for others. The long payment period of the bank loan, minimum of 20 years, the non-fixed loan interest after 3 or 5 years, the impossibility of selling those dwellings before the total payment of the housing loan. Although it was envisioned as a project of helping younger people under 35 years old, or under other conditions people over 35, to start a family and build a home, it still needs many changes. The right of ownership of property is guaranteed under article 30 of the Constitution, it must be made easier for people to own their dwellings.

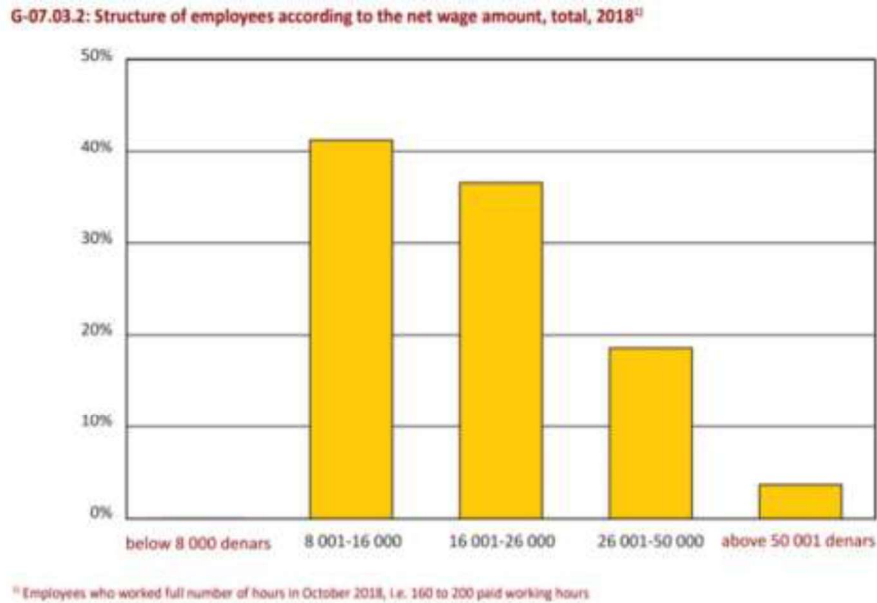


Chart 2. Structure of employees according to the net wage amount, total, 2018

4. Leaning from abroad

Brussels - Adaptive reuse

The Savonnerie Heymans public housing in Brussels is considered one of the most successful social housing projects.

The project consists of several buildings: a part of them are facilities of an old, deserted soap factory, adapted into housing apartments, and the rest are newly erected buildings with the same function. In total, the complex includes 42 social housing units. There is a wide palette of different typologies of apartments offered, such as studios, one-bedroom apartments, two-bedroom apartments – to six-bedroom apartments, lofts, duplexes, etc.

Complementary to the apartment buildings, the architectural firm has designed various communal facilities such as: a game library, a mini-forest- garden, a playground, a landscape park, and a promenade. These areas are intended to help form a sense of community among the future dwellers.

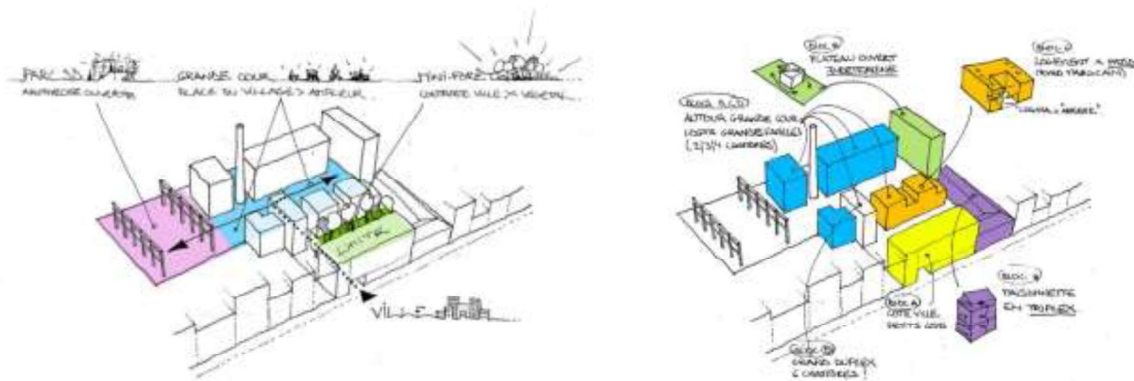


Figure 2. Courtesy of MDW architecture

The complex is enclosed with low maintenance glazing which provide thermal and acoustic insulation, resulting in energy saving at the same time. There are also solar panels and rain water is harvested for sanitary use.



Figure 3. Courtesy of MDW architecture

The complex is a good example to be learned from and used in the case of RNM due to its smart use of existing infrastructure. In Macedonia there are many deserted industrial buildings, which with time passing are being degraded structurally, they occupy the much-needed urban land (which is decreasing very rapidly, especially in larger cities), but at the same time, most importantly, they have a negative effect on the urban life as they are seen as unsafe areas. The strategy of adaptive reuse could be very helpful in solving the problem of social housing and old un-functional factories simultaneously, be ‘reviving’ the ‘dead’ urban buildings and districts.

Chile- Incremental growth

Pritzker prize winner Alejandro Aravena and his office Elemental have done a tremendous job towards social housing through their design process, in incremental growth and participatory design. Participatory design is the approach to design, in which all stakeholders are encouraged to participate and are included in the decision-making process of the designs (local communities, urbanists, local governments, citizens, etc.), to ensure the resulting project meets their needs.

For the project of Quinta Monroy in Iquique, they were given a task to settle 100 families, on the same site that they had occupied for the last 30 years, of 5000m², but the budget for the project was only 7500\$ per family, which in the Chilean building industry would allow building only 30m². What they did, is they designed only ‘half’ houses, building only the essential amenities and keeping the solution flexible, and they foresaw the final result as a ‘whole’ house, which the residents would build on in the future, with their expenses and according to their needs, thus achieving a certain level of personalization of the houses. They achieved a fast, flexible, incremental, and economical solution by:

- increasing density to be able to pay and keep the site, which was important for the network of opportunities which it offers, in order to strengthen the family economy
- providing collective space, a common property for 20 families, which support each other, and are considered as ‘extensive family’,
- a supporting framework is provided for the 50% of the unit that remains to be built by the residents, to facilitate the future expansion
- a final scenario of 72m² house is projected for the future, and the essential amenities are provided: the stairs, kitchens, bathrooms, partition walls.



Figure 4. Home before and after extension by residents, Quinta Monroy, Iquique, Chile (courtesy of The Guardian)

The success of Quinta Monroy was overwhelming, and the firm was asked to design for multiple cities with similar situations, in Chile and abroad, and the ‘half-finished home’ has become a signature for the firm. ‘The typology began life as a way of dealing with extremely low budgets, allowing governments to provide housing to citizens at incredibly low prices, but creating homes that would provide for the needs of residents and even gain value over time’ (Stott 2013). In 2016, Elemental has made public four designs and details of incremental growth social houses to the public, for open source use. With this, they stress the need for cooperation to tackle the problem of rapid population migration worldwide.



Figure 5. Four projects by Elemental, the designs of which are released for public use (courtesy of Archdaily)

Conclusion

In this paper, it was managed to see how important social housing is for a healthy society in all its participants. In the case of Macedonia, where a high unemployment rate is encountered (21.58% in 2019), which, among other things, results in the inability to provide a humane home to live and raise a family in, the need for social housing can be seen as an emergency.

It has been overviewed that state bodies in the past and present have taken some initiatives to address this issue, such as the social housing projects built by the Agency (JSC for construction and management of housing and residential premises of importance for the Republic – Skopje), which are built and managed by the republic, and the project ‘Buy a house, buy an apartment’, also a project that is pompously promoted as state aid to young families to resolve their housing issue.

However, looking at the ongoing problem of social cases increasing day by day, these two state actions do not seem to be able to address the problem in its entirety. We see the system failing in social housing projects in these lines:

- The first lies in their inadequate, geographical and ethnic distribution,
- Secondly, no effort regarding the functionality and sustainability of the design of provided apartments for social housing is apparent- anything in 40m² is small and requires a thorough analysis of different levels,
- Thirdly, the ‘Buy a house, buy an apartment’ project, where the duration of the return of the fund received from the state is so long that, it ‘binds’ or blocks new families for a very long period up to 30 years. The unpredictability of the increase in interest rate by banks (in the period after 5 years from receiving the grant), as well as the general feeling of job and life insecurity in RNM, is one of the reasons for discouraging young families from taking advantage of this opportunity.
- Last but not least, the delay until the provision with social housing to social cases, considering how urgent the need for housing is to them, while on the other hand how complicated and time-consuming is the process of designing and implementing decent housing building.

On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that these citizens who are offered social housing and receive social assistance from the state, could remain only passive users of state social assistance, having difficulty paying for basic necessities, like electricity fees, water consumption fees, etc. We consider sustainable design as a means of preventing these groups from becoming a burden to the state economy. However, this is another important issue, which could be widely explored in other research.

As a result of these key problems, and learning from the successful examples of Chile and Brussels, this paper comes with a recommendation for exploring new, more effective methods of designing and building social housing by the state, which as a common denominator would have:

- an adequate geographical distribution of social housing, in the vicinity of vulnerable groups,
- rapid response by applying modular design of social housing using prefabricated elements - which significantly shortens the duration of the construction process;
- reducing the costs of the construction grant by applying the principle of incremental growth, where the state would provide the essential living spaces and equipment and the module of complementary spaces that would be built in time by the residents themselves would remain empty;
- adaptive reuse of existing deserted factory buildings, for wise use of land and infrastructure, and
- a possibility for a shorter and more flexible time to return the funds for ‘buy a house, buy an apartment’.

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