

Marijke Martin, Cor Wagenaar

Building a New Community – A Comparison Between the Netherlands and Czechoslovakia

Keywords:

- The Netherlands:
 - o “personalist socialism”
 - o “neighbourhood unit”
 - o “housing unit”
- Czechoslovakia:
 - o Sorela
 - o “humanizing sixties”
 - o “normalization”

Most important statements:

- After World War II. Europe was divided physically (Iron Curtain) and ideologically in two distinct parts which are represented by the Netherlands and Czechoslovakia. Although they were not on the same side of the Wall there were many similarities in their architecture and urban planning of housing estates.
- Architecture was used as tools for propaganda and community building was top priority in both countries and the post-war housing estates were built in new historical context.
- The Netherlands:
 - o in the late 1930s modernism had disappeared
 - o from 1945 “personalist socialism” (inspired by Christianity and Humanism)
 - o The “neighbourhood unit” was a good device to divide the mass into smaller parts.
 - o Next level the “housing unit”: homes of all sizes and a mixture of all housing typologies.
 - o From the early 1950s criticism (Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck) “architects were becoming slaves...” – architecture is art
 - o From 1959 modern architecture, Important:
 - living in close harmony with nature
 - healthy social relations
 - mix as many functions as possible
- Czechoslovakia:
 - o Pre-war modernism hadn’t disappeared, good example: Zelená Liška (Green Fox) a low-income housing estate
 - o from 1945 Socialist realism = Sorela, behind the decorated “curtains”, the socialist realist facades we can recognize the continuity (the second, sorela phase of sídliště Zelená Liška, Solidarita)
 - o Mid 1950s functionalism, industrialization, large panel structures
 - o since the late 1950s - fighting for “de-vulgarization” of the built environment
 - o “humanizing sixties” (Jiří Voženílek, Jiří Novotný) – visiting conferences and world exhibitions (Prague Pankrác district, “Etarea- A study of Environment”, Invalidovna)
 - o 1968. Prague Spring - “normalization”

- The keywords for the architects were same in both nations: nature, psychology, spontaneity, the participation of the inhabitants, but in Czechoslovakia the Prague Spring interrupted the development.

My opinion:

It's very interesting to see the similarities and the differences of the architecture of this two nations and see the parallel progresses. Of course in my mind appears our country from the beginning of the text and I compare them continuously at every statement. I think we also had this continuous modernism in the Socreál (like Sorela) until the mid1950s, like the MOME building (arch: Zoltán Farkasdy) and many others where we can recognize modernist buildings in socialist dresses.

We can recognize that the idea of building with the participation of the inhabitants is not a new born idea, but I think we have to talk about it more and we have to do for it more.

But the main issue for me is that I have to read more, especially outlook for foreign architecture and comparisons.