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RESIDENTIAL HOUSING CONSTRUCTION IN THE FILM PROPAGANDA OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (PRL)

Abstract: Housing construction in the PRL was treated as a priority investment, reflected in media coverage. Showing new “bright” houses and flats had a dimension of propaganda, especially compared to the “dull and damp” ones from before the war. This was a measure of success and modernity. Simultaneously, the current housing policy was promoted in the media, showing its qualities and successes. There was a focus on mass housing, and housing estates, which is reflected in the materials presented here. In the 1970s, the pinnacle of modernity and resilience came from blocks of flats built of large prefabricated concrete slabs, whose production ultimately changed the urban landscape. It was not until after December 1981 that the promotion of housing as one of the major investment successes ceased. Thus, the materials presented here are more of a testimony to its failure. Although, on the other hand, they are also a testimony to the changes taking place: criticism of the big plate, decentralization, and promotion of small, local construction companies.

Keywords: housing development, film, propaganda, Polish People's Republic, large panel housing estates.

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INTRODUCTION

“We are building a second Poland” – that was one of the slogans of the 1970s, ideally suited to the climate of success propaganda. It made sense in many ways, but generally referred to the idea of “Poland as a great



construction site". New investments, more or less successful, popped up like mushrooms after the rain. Some were forgotten, turning out to be completely misguided, but some are still in use today. However, this idea of "building a second Poland" also had a more literal meaning, which had to do with housing development. At the end of the 1970s, there were to be as many new flats as at the beginning of the decade. Indeed, more flats were built then than in any other decade of the People's Republic of Poland, however, there were still too few relative to the needs. Housing construction had been the Achilles' heel for the entire forty-five years, although at the same time, it was constantly talked about, written about, discussed...

It can be said to have been one of the largest ongoing investments of post-war Poland. Despite this, the housing problems were not solved: the queue of those waiting for their "own M" (M – from the Polish word *Mieszkanie* = Flat) grew longer. The reasons for this situation were, rather complex. On the one hand, they resulted from the authorities' constant underestimation of the population's accommodation needs and growing aspirations, and on the other hand, from the social changes that were occurring at that time. Meanwhile,

one of the most significant factors in shaping the acuity of the housing problem in the country was demographic development and urbanization processes. Between 1950 and 1970, there was a very rapid population growth, which caused new housing needs to emerge (Zapart, 1999: 26).

At the same time, however, such – rather than any other – investments in construction, proved to have far-reaching consequences. The urban landscape was permanently altered, and the traditional urban fabric based on tenements lining the streets was torn apart (Sennett, 1996). There is no easy retreat from the construction of so-called city-girt blocks, often built in the middle of nowhere, outside urban boundaries if there was one possible at all. Perhaps the investment decisions taken before 1989 permanently changed the character of urban development. New housing development has also changed the face of the countryside, albeit in a different way to the cities. For this reason, the focus here will be solely on what was built in the cities.

It is impossible to respond unequivocally to the above supposition. Instead, it is worth examining the media propaganda, which, for forty-five post-war years, told Poles what the People's State was doing to provide them with a roof over their heads. They tried to convince Polish peo-

ple that particular decisions, generally political, were right and that the offer of housing was very attractive. For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted here that in the People's Republic of Poland, there were also critical voices pointing to the fact that housing development is still too little and too slow. As the years went by, there were also hints of the anonymity of life in blocks of flats. Despite this, the building policy was not changed.

RECONSTRUCTION FROM THE DESTRUCTION AND STALINISM

After the war, housing development became a political issue and the decisions made were ideological. Of course, Poland was in ruins and had to be rebuilt. However, how it was rebuilt was determined not only by economic or social considerations but very often by political ones. It is estimated that as a result of the war 295,400 buildings in towns and cities were demolished, approximately more than 50% of the houses were destroyed, and in the case of Warsaw or Gdansk, more than 80% of the city lay in ruins. Poznań, Lublin, Wrocław and many, many other cities were destroyed (Marciniak, 2018: 37–38). Initially, the private construction sector began to develop intensively in the immediate post-war period, however, the boom did not last long. There was swift action to nationalize construction companies and although some private companies survived, it was to a very limited extent. Andrzej Basista writes:

State-owned construction companies, regardless of to whom they were subordinate, were granted numerous privileges, which favor them over the private companies still in operation (Basista, 2001: 14).

Basista goes on to state that

the system of legislation relating to architecture, construction, town planning and housing reveals another peculiar feature, also evident in other areas, namely that the law was intended to protect not only citizens and their public interests but also, and perhaps even primarily, the interests of the state... (Basista, 2001: 31).

For it was the state that became the main investor, reigning over the housing economy, as it decided on housing and resource allocation for their

construction, set directions and had concepts. It used the means of mass communication to convince society of its concepts and to explain their validity.

In this respect, particular importance was attached to film, both fiction and documentary, including the Polish Film Chronicle [*Polska Kronika Filmowa*, PKF]. The film existed, for many years, before television became widespread in the 1960s, as the main source of audiovisual information and “one of the most important instruments of exercising communist power”, and as such it was used with full awareness to “satisfy and realize both immediate and long-term political goals” (Cieśliński, 2006: 9). Thus, the materials appearing in the Chronicle were not accidental, but selected carefully following political guidelines. And it is in PKF that we find the first information on housing. Here, in issue #9 of 1947, new blocks of flats in Warsaw are shown. We learn that they are being built by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative. The buildings are two and three-storey high and look clean and inviting. The picture is accompanied by a comment that there is a “healthy, modern workers’ housing estate” being built. In the same year, 1947, the Chronicle reported that in Warsaw alone “more than twenty dwelling rooms are being added every day” (PKF 1947, No. 39).

The material in the above-mentioned Chronicles set how housing was talked about and presented for the next few years. It was invariably emphasized that the new dwellings were “bright” and “healthy”, which was contrasted with the pre-war dwellings that were dark, damp, cramped and unhealthy. In general, one can sometimes, listening to the comments, come to the surprising conclusion that so many ugly and damp flats have been eliminated thanks to the war. Housing estates are also dominant. No new townhouses are shown unless it is a matter of rebuilding the old districts of the city. The preference is for housing estates, which fully reflects the political assumptions in this regard. Grażyna Kodym-Kozaczko writes that “the social housing estate has become the primary method of urbanization” (Kodym-Kozaczko: 2018: 12), although it is worth mentioning that this was not a new idea, and goes back to the pre-war period (Barczykowska, 2018).

The idea of housing estate construction is also promoted by material presented in the PKF of 1950. It is devoted to the Workers’ Estates Establishment [ZOR; Zakład Osiedli Robotniczych], which was set up in 1948 and was to perform “the function of a central investor on a national scale”, with the aim of “increasing the size of housing estate development” (Mar-

ciniak, 2010: 71). PKF portrays ZOR's activities as a great success. We learn that ZOR will hand over 60,000 living compartments nationwide, which will be "bright and modern". The commentary is accompanied by an image of 3-storey blocks with flat roofs. A construction site in Rzeszów is also shown – here ZOR is also the builder.

The PKF material from the following year is narrated in a very similar vein. It is entitled 'From Suterynes to Bright Flats' [Z suteryn do jasnych mieszkań] (PKF 1951, No. 18). At the beginning, we see the working-class Szczęśniak family, living in a basement, which is described as a "burrow". The son, little Jureczek, is sitting on the windowsill. A close-up of the child looking out of the window follows. This is accompanied by the comment: "If little Jureczek had lived in a country of exploitation and injustice, he could have so searched for air, sunshine, a patch of blue sky" all his life. Then we see the Szczęśniak family against the backdrop of the new blocks of flats and learn that 50,000 working-class people will live in Muranów. The Szczęśniaks, together with Jureczek, enter the staircase and then we see them opening the door to their new flat. They are all happy and smiling, walking around the flat and finally looking out the window with Jureczek also in his mother's arms. This is accompanied by the comment: "Look Jureczek, it's closer to the sun here".

In the above-mentioned Chronicles, housing development is treated as a success of the new government. It is this authority that provides people with healthy and bright housing and, thanks to the socialism that now prevails in Poland, it has been possible to lead the working class out of dampness and filth. The new flat in a block symbolizes progress and the liberation of the working class. It is also worth noting the metaphorical nature of the language. These 'bright', "new", and "sunny" signify the profound transformation taking place in post-war Poland, related to the construction of the new man, the rejection of the past (referred to as dampness and basement) in favor of socialism, where the emancipation of workers occurs (Mazur, 2009: 224–241).

The 1950 film 'Nowe domy' [New Houses] is even more interesting. It was made as a school etude at the Łódź Film School and directed by Stanisław Kokesz. The film's protagonists are two workers walking among the new houses that are being built. One of them is enthusiastic while the other criticizes the competition of labor, the new methods implemented on the construction site, exceeding the norm and busting out after hours. The other worker looks at him critically, nods disapprovingly and explains the reasons for being a foreman, beating the standards, etc. The screen shows

old hovels, and crumbling houses accompanied by the comment: "This is how or worse we all lived before the war", then we see an elegant villa and the commentator states: the factory owners lived luxuriously. Then, with a group of new residents, we admire the blocks of flats under construction, where the flats are "comfortable and bright" and the windows overlook "lawns and children's playgrounds". More houses are being built, work is in full swing, bricks are being laid, mortar is being mixed, and the enthusiasm is underlined by lively music. Finally, it is explained that the new houses are for Łódź Fabryczna (a city district) and metal workers, and are being built in Bałuty and Stoki. The houses are 2 and 3-storey high, sometimes with pitched roofs, although flat roofs also appear, the flats are, evidently, taller than those built later with large slabs. The grumpy worker is convinced and at the end, we can see a textile rationalist moving into his new, elegantly furnished flat (leather armchairs), accompanied by pathetic music that emphasizes such a mood.

One more documentary is worth noting. It is titled 'Kierunek Nowa Huta' [Direction of Nowa Huta] from 1951, directed by the later famous author of 'Eroica' and 'Zezowate szczęście' [Squinty-eyed Happiness], Andrzej Munk. Nowa Huta was one of the high-profile projects carried out as part of the 6-year plan. It was conceived with tens of thousands of workers in mind, a huge steelworks complex being built next to Krakow. A whole new model city, built from scratch, was to be created here. And, by the way, its establishment and settlement with new people, newcomers from everywhere, was supposed to change the social fabric of Krakow, which, at that time was a bastion of tradition and conservatism (Cymer, 2018: 105–119). Munk's film stylistically does not deviate from the PKF material. All the previously used phrases and schemes are here, although this time they are applied with even greater pathos. Thus, we have the initial situation, which is a reminder of the poverty that prevailed in the interwar period, which is juxtaposed with the new city under construction. We are then immediately introduced to the momentum of a major investment under construction in a city of one hundred thousand people. We observe the construction sites, the rising skyline, and the efforts of the builders. We learn that along with the city's development, man is also being changed. Just like the houses, he grows upward, and develops, realizing the "great vision of the architects." A "bright city" is being created, becoming a "forge of cadres." Nowa Huta is being built by the juniors from the Polish Service, but the Soviet Union also comes to the rescue, so that Polish-Soviet friend-

ship develops beautifully. There is also no shortage of slogans about the competitiveness of work and joint effort, thanks to which the present tents will soon be replaced by "bright houses". The time of "black poverty" experienced by the builders of Nowa Huta before the war will come to an end.

What is interesting, on the other hand, is that virtually no mention is made of housing development in PKF editions and documentaries devoted to the so-called reclaimed lands. Here, the dominant narrative is about rebuilding industry, taking over mines, starting factories, and settling abandoned buildings. Only in the 1952 Chronicle, can we see the material titled 'Wrocław będzie odbudowany' [Wrocław will be rebuilt]. It is a brief information about the construction or rather plan to build a large residential district in Psie Pole. A layout of the future development is also shown on this occasion (PKF 1952, No. 44).

Housing construction, on the other hand, as a great and necessary investment, appears in feature films. Here, in 'Skarb' [Treasure, 1948, directed by Leonard Buczkowski], the entire plot revolves around the housing problems of Krycia and Witek (Danuta Szaflarska and Jerzy Duszyński), who have just got married but have nowhere to live. 'Skarb' is a comedy and approaches the issue with a sense of humor, without pushy propaganda. The whole thing was shot in the autumn of 1948 before socialist realism became the prevailing style in art. The search for one's own dwelling place and the rebuilding of Warsaw have an authenticity and perhaps unforced sincerity here. Krycia and Witek observe the city under construction and dream of their apartment. Looking at the ruins they state: "W ruinach rośnie nasz dom" [Among the ruins, our home grows]. 'Skarb' ends optimistically: the characters get their own apartment in a new block of flats.

Soon after the release of Buczkowski's film, rapid changes began to take place culturally. The time of the so-called gentle revolution, branded by Jerzy Borejsza, came to an end. Socialist Realism became the official and only permitted style. And it was in the spirit of socialist realism that another comedy was filmed, in which the protagonists are Warsaw male and female bricklayers. We are talking about 'Przygoda na Mariensztacie' [Adventure in Mariensztat, 1954, directed by Leonard Buczkowski], one of the most popular Polish films of the first half of the 1950s. The film is a propaganda film, promoting the hard physical labor of women, the competition of labor and the beating of the norm (over 300% as a model). The houses being built in Mariensztat are conceived with the working class in

mind. Moreover, the social advancement resulting from the communist regime is emphasized. The handing over of keys to the new apartments is ceremonial. Shocked workers get their “first” obviously “new” apartments. They come to the ceremony with their whole families and the other workers clap enthusiastically, while they receive their keys from the hands of the party and state authorities. And the slogan reigns supreme: “The people will enter Downtown.” This is meant to symbolize the social advancement that is taking place: homes in the city center will now house the working class, rather than the bourgeoisie and capitalists. The new apartment, in turn, seems to be a kind of gift from the socialist state, rising here to symbolize the victorious revolution.

In the first half of the 1950s, housing also found its way into songs, which were now supposed to perform “ideological and educational” functions (Bittner, 2017: 55). This is especially true of the genre known as the mass song. A few of the best-known were about housing construction: ‘We are building a new house’, ‘Song about Nowa Huta’, and ‘Houses are growing in the cities’ (also known as Stalin’s Lullaby) (Bittner, 2017: 54–61). These songs were usually in the repertoire of popular performers: Andrzej Bogucki, the Czejanda Choir, the ‘Mazowsze’ Song and Dance Ensemble, and the content was similar to that of the movies. They sang about the erection of new houses, made of red brick, built joyfully, accompanied by cheerful masonry songs. In turn, everything was watched over by the army, so that “the enemy would not threaten the progress.” It is worth noting that these songs usually concerned priority investments, namely, construction in Warsaw and Nowa Huta. Their overtones were optimistic, references were made to a bright future, and, interestingly, threads related to the pre-war period were omitted. So there are none of those dark and damp hovels here. Instead, there is cheerful and lively music, full of joy and optimism.

It should be mentioned here that many years later, in a completely different political situation, in 1981, these songs lived to see a kind of parody. Izabela Trojanowska sang ‘Pieśń o cegle’ [A song about a brick, words by Andrzej Mogielnicki; the title refers to a social-realist painting by Aleksander Kobzdej], which was a virulent criticism of the Stalinist period and the so-called bricklaying triplets. The public was delighted; at the Festival of Polish Song in Opole, it was Trojanowska who won the audience award. However, such criticism did not please the authorities. The Union of Polish Socialist Youth protested. As a result, this meant the destruction of the singer’s career who had to leave Poland.

Until the mid-1950s, investments in housing were presented with great enthusiasm. The worker, hitherto – as it was said and shown – stripped of his property, stuck in an unremarkable burrow, now had a chance to live as he should, in a bright, sunny, clean apartment. And this is all thanks to the party and its concerted effort. The apartment thus becomes a symbol of social advancement and emancipation of the working class.

At that point, it is worth noting that these “new ones” were not yet the block of flats built of large prefabricated concrete panels, which eventually became the epitome of construction in the People’s Republic. The emerging housing estates consisted of 2-, 3-, 4-storey buildings, often with sloping roofs. There are no skyscrapers or so-called boards here. Everything is much more intimate than the later gigantic apartment blocks. And it’s built with bricks by masonry triads working in competition with each other.

“BRIGHT NEW APARTMENTS” FOR ONLY A FEW. A BRIEF PERIOD OF THAW

The situation changed abruptly in 1956 – the breakthrough moments were the revolt of Poznan workers in June ‘56 and Władysław Gomułka’s coming to power in October (Skotarczak and Jankowiak, 2016). But the signs of a “thaw” in culture were already visible earlier; in the mid-1950s, socialist realism ceased to be the only valid creative method. Among the numerous symptoms of the “thaw”, it is worth mentioning here Adam Ważyk’s ‘Poem for Adults’ published in 1955, which contained a very sharp criticism of the conditions of life in Poland, and especially those in Nowa Huta (Julkowska, 2015). The weekly magazine *Po Prostu* and a series of documentaries referred to as the “black series” remain peculiar symbols of those years (Leszczyński, 2000; Nastalek-Zygadło, 2013). Both the magazine and the film documentaries (later also feature films) described poverty, alcoholism, hooliganism and the general hopelessness of ordinary people’s lives.

Criticism was also directed at architecture, and a significant moment was the National Meeting of Architects in March 1956, during which Józef Cyrankiewicz, then prime minister, called for novelty and creative freedom (Cymer, 2018: 122–125). However, this did not change the fact that it was in 1956 that there was another decline in the number of housing units

being built, and the shortage in this regard proved to be "one of the most characteristic features of communist reality" (Basista, 2001: 67).

The effect of the political change, and – on the occasion of another underinvestment in housing – was a strong criticism of the living conditions. It suddenly turned out that these "bright new" apartments were only for a few, and the majority of the population was still nestled in those "damp hovels." The talk of "bright" apartments, moreover, stopped altogether. Instead, documentary films of the black series showing how Poles live after ten years of living under socialism were created, e.g. 'Warsaw 1956' [Warszawa 1956] (1956, dir. Jerzy Bossak and Jarosław Brzozowski), 'Gdzie diabeł mówi dobranoc' [Where the Devil Says Goodnight] (1956, dir. Kazimierz Karabasz and Władysław Ślesicki), 'Ludzie z pustego obszaru' [People from an Empty Area] (1957, dir. Kazimierz Karabasz and Władysław Ślesicki) and 'Miejsce zamieszkania' [Place of Residence] (1957, dir. Maksymilian Wrocławski).

'Warsaw 1956' begins with a picture of the rebuilt capital, but soon the commentary informs that "the chronicler in 1956 sees what he tried not to notice before." The melody of the song 'Jakoś to będzie panie Zielonka' [It will be somehow Mr. Zielonka] resounds in the background. We move to Warsaw hovels, where people live. They are awful, dark, dirty, full of cockroaches. What's more, the hovels are dangerous: you can fall and break a leg (like the boy shown), but you can also get killed. Mothers, to protect their young children, tie them to their beds with cords. The commentary states: "the string will be his guardian angel," while the tune of the famous mass song 'Warszawski Dzień' [Warsaw Day] plays in the background. Finally, we learn that "6,000 Warsaw cavemen are waiting for the living quarters still occupied by offices and bureaus." The overgrowth of bureaucracy is criticized, but so are misguided investments. Instead of putting up new houses for people, office buildings were erected. The situation in Targówek, a poor Warsaw neighborhood, is equally dire. Nothing has changed here since pre-war times: crumbling shacks, without running water or electricity. This is the picture shown in the documentary 'Where the Devil Says Goodnight'. It turns out that people still live as shown just 2–3 years earlier, talking about the interwar period. Hence, the success of the investment in housing construction turned out to be very limited.

In contrast, 'Ludzie z pustego obszaru' shows young people from indigent families who can't find meaning in life. One of the reasons, however, is the housing problems: we see families nesting five people in one

room. However, the real highlight was 'Miejsce zamieszkania' This time the documentarians took a look at the most prestigious construction site of the time, Nowa Huta. The whole thing is depressing: workers live for years in squalid barracks, marriages are often separated, and in the workers' hotel, where families are together, there is one kitchen for every forty rooms (that is, for forty families). Life here is hopeless, flowing alcohol, and entertainment are despicable. Nevertheless, from the megaphone, we hear solemn words: "1,500 housing chambers this year", "We are building a city worthy of our era, bright chambers for workers". Yes, we see new houses, however, there are not enough of them. The film ends with the comment: "The main attention was turned to machines (...) and people are waiting."

The above statement is a clear criticism of the 6-year plan, which was geared toward investment in heavy industry, while construction and light industry were underinvested. That is those branches of the economy, which concern providing the basics of existence.

Interestingly, what was possible to say in a documentary became impossible in a feature film. Shot by Aleksander Ford, 'Ósmy dzień tygodnia' [Eighth Day of the Week] waited 25 years for its premiere, from 1958 to 1983. The film's protagonists, young people, have nowhere to go. We see overloaded apartments with several people in one room, hovels that lack basic comforts, the absence of any prospect of getting their own roof over their heads. The house where Piotr (Zbigniew Cybulski) lives, incidentally, collapses, and the protagonist rescues a child tied to a string at the last moment (as in the documentary 'Warsaw 1956'). Such a picture of reality was unacceptable and 'Ósmy dzień' was placed on a shelf. After all, it was impossible to show that people often live worse than before the war.

On the other hand, the comedy 'Ewa chce spać' [Eve Wants to Sleep] (1958, dir. Tadeusz Chmielewski) did not have trouble reaching the screens, perhaps because it was set in a "strange city" and was a kind of metaphor, hiding serious content under a comedic form. One of the themes was the housing problem: the title character seeks a room in a hotel to await assignment to a boarding school. There were, however, no available rooms and the workers' hotel vividly resembles those shown in the documentary films of the black series.

The housing problem was shown in an even different way in 'Szczęściarz Antoni' [Lucky Anthony] a decisively underrated 1960 comedy directed by Halina Bielińska and Włodzimierz Haupe. Although the protag-

onists, newly married, get an allotment for a small house, but instead they find a T-34 tank on the plot of land. They are unable to get rid of it and finally decide to put a house around it. The tank becomes part of the dwelling, covered gracefully with a napkin and its elements serve as shelves for books and the telephone. In this case, the house becomes a symbol of Poland, while the Soviet tank becomes a symbol of the eastern neighbor. Not being able to get rid of it, society decided to live with it somehow, to arrange, to neutralize it if possible.

Of course, reviewers of the time, even if they recognized the parabola contained in the film, could not write about it. Instead, they criticize the problems of housing construction: "satirical bullets from the barrel of a T-34 are aimed at the reckless abuses of housing development builders and bureaucrats" – declared the author of a review published in the popular weekly *Film* (Ozimek, 1961).

1960S: LARGE RESIDENTIAL ESTATES

The period in which the lack of proper investment in housing was fundamentally criticized did not last long. "Thaw" in culture ended at the end of the 1950s, although fortunately there was no return to socialist realism and the worst practices of the Stalinist period. In the case of film, as early as October 1958, a meeting of the Cinematography Committee spoke of an oversaturation of the "black series" and emphasized the lack of films explicitly advocating socialism (Madej, 1994: 11–12). Doom-mongering was also criticized in the thesis: 'O sytuacji programowej i organizacyjnej polskiego filmu' [Theses on the Programmatic and Organizational Situation of Polish Film] (AAN, KC PZPR, WK 1959), and finally the "thaw" became history following the promulgation of the 'Resolution of the Secretariat of the Central Committee on Cinematography' in June 1960 (AMKiS, NZK).

The turn of the 1950s and 1960s also marked significant changes in the issue of housing construction. In 1962, "the housing estate was accepted as the basic unit of the structure of residential areas" (Marciniak, 2018: 86), howbeit from the late 1950s onwards, housing cooperatives became the most important investors, subject, however, to top-down decisions and planning (Jarosz, 2010: 45–51). This is also the period in which the

production of large-scale prefabricated elements was increasingly talked about, although the time of the so-called big plate was yet to come. All the above issues are reflected in the films made at the time.

In 1963, Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych [WFO – Educational Film Studio] made a 20-minute film entitled ‘Budynki szkieletowo-ramowe’ [Skeletal-frame buildings]. At the time, WFO was the main producer of educational, scientific and instructional films, in which case the films produced there were supposed to “serve for the education of the masses under the cultural policy of the People’s Republic of Poland” and as such were in line with the policy of the authorities (Dondzik et al., 2011: 11) where the construction of a four-storey house for several dozen families is depicted. The use of small prefabricated elements of up to 500 kg is lauded here. The whole thing was built by six workers over a period of seven months, and this advertised block of flats was built in Stylowa near Łódź. It’s not a large slab yet, however, you can see that there is an immensely positive attitude toward typical prefabricated construction. It is interesting that attention is also paid to the economic aspect: a square meter of construction is priced at 1800 PLN. This is worth noting, as the price of a square meter of usable housing space had been quoted systematically since 1960, and this 1800 zł was definitely favorable here (Basista, 2001: 37, 40). The 1967 ‘Budowlane zapiski’ [Construction Notes], another WFO production, also fits in perfectly with the politics of housing. Here, we first watch the traditional production of bricks before moving them to a factory where string-concrete slabs are made. We can see modern production and hear about new technologies and materials. Finally, we admire the panorama of new houses stretching along the streets. These are no longer three- and four-storey blocks of flats, but skyscrapers grouped together in housing complexes. Everything makes an impression of grandeur, the blocks of flats are bright, soaring, in great numbers. Poland appears here as a highly modern country, and the construction industry seems to have been invested in. We have no doubt that one lives well and comfortably in the blocks shown.

Prefabricated-materials factories were also shown in the series ‘Barbara i Jan’ [Barbara and Jan] (1965, dir. Jerzy Ziarnik and Hieronim Przybył). This was the first Polish TV series about the adventures of a pair of journalists, where the topics of the individual episodes were very carefully chosen. In the third episode, the protagonists visit a gas-concrete slab factory praised as a state-of-the-art investment.

Housing construction is also mentioned in PKFs. We find interesting statistics in a 1965 chronicle devoted to Warsaw (PKF 1965, No. 3B, presented by Olgierd Budrewicz). We learn that every second Varsovian lives in a new house, that there are 830,000 living quarters in the city, that one square meter of floor space costs 2,400 zlotys, that one in four people lives in a one-room flat and one in three in a two-room flat, that the population per room is one of the highest in Europe, that one in 100 flats has no electricity and 30 have no sewerage ("but that's better than in Paris", adds the commentary). All were maintained in a cheerful tone. It seems somehow justified, taking into consideration the enormity of the war damage alluded to here.

In 1967, in turn, we learn about another building experiment. Here, after four years, a so-called three-rope house, i.e. a house whose elements were hoisted on ropes and whose construction is based on narrow steel rods, was put into use in Wrocław. The commentary is highly critical of the building's finish (thick pipe as "experimental decoration", narrow doors, windows under the ceiling), although the construction itself is not questioned (PKF 1967, No. 17B). A new trend is evident in this material – the quality of the finish of the dwellings will increasingly be questioned, without, however, undermining the state's investment policy on the matter. So, all the faults of the system were neatly blamed on individual people. It is our imperfection, laziness, etc. that causes something to be constantly missing or badly done. This was a method used throughout the PRL, not only about housing and its finishing.

However, there was no criticism of the Warsaw building presented in 1966 as a great technological success. The chronicle informed by word of mouth of the commissioning of the tallest residential building in Poland, which was located on Marszałkowska Street on the Eastern Wall (PKF 1966, No. 16A). It was one of the three planned here and was mainly inhabited by teachers and education workers from the teachers' cooperative. The high-rise building had what was considered the height of modernity, automatic and self-propelled lifts from Sweden and an intercom. We admire the beautiful, bright flats with "amphitades of windows" and marvel, along with the teacher who had just been introduced, at the bird views of Warsaw ("as from the top floor of the Palace of Culture"). In addition, the intercom as an extremely modern solution also appeared in an episode of the TV series 'Wojna domowa' [Civil War] entitled 'Zagraniczny gość' [The Foreign Guest] (1965–1968, dir. Jerzy Gruza).

Documentary films and Chronicles devoted to the Recovered Territories form a separate group. There are not many of these, apart from the immediate post-war period, and they mostly concern the history of liberation and reconstruction. However, there are times when houses are shown, indicating the need to think about the comfort of the inhabitants. Thus, for example, a Chronicle from 1958 (PKF 1958, No. 19A) shows Nysa, the destruction and reconstruction, but also mentions that new neighborhoods are being built on a medieval plan. The documentary film *'Na przykład Kołobrzeg'* [For Instance Kołobrzeg] (1958, dir. Jadwiga Plucińska) also largely recalls the liberation of the city, although it also tells of the construction and plans for subsequent housing estates. We can see the houses that have already been built, and hear that soon there will be other "new housing estates that are economical, aesthetic, and with no ornaments, but lots of greenery and sunshine" – all under the supervision of a group of young architects. A year later, the chronicle (PKF 1959, No. 9B) shows Kłodzko, in turn, mentioning the construction of 700 compartments at a cost of 4 million zlotys. The chronicle devoted to Nysa and Opole, 11 years later, also focuses on liberation and reconstruction, but we also see new housing estates, framed from various sides to give the impression of being bright, spatially distributed, modern (PKF 1970, No. 6B).

Housing construction was not a particularly prominent theme of propaganda in the People's Poland. Watching for example Chronicles, one can see that there was a preference for showing big industries, factories, steel mills, mines and so on. In some way, this reflected the preferences of those in power. Investment for the convenience of everyday life was not a priority, although there were better and worse periods in this respect. Usually, housing problems were revisited during periods of political breakthroughs by pointing out that insufficient attention had been paid to "secure the needs of the population" in the past. Hence, it became the norm to complain about the poor finish to housing and the bureaucratic absurdities of housing allocation. The latter is the subject of the popular film comedy *'Człowiek z M-3'* [A Man from M-3] (1968, dir. Leon Jeannot), whose protagonist has to get married in order to receive a cooperative flat. He has one month to do so.

There were exceptions to this approach on the subject. In the 1967 documentary *'Dom'* [The Home], which was a school etude directed by Andrzej Titkow and produced by him during his studies at the Łódź Film School, a workers' hotel is shown. Conditions here are harsh, there is incredible overcrowding, and a complete lack of privacy, with 12 men living

in one room. One of them expresses the hope that lightning will strike and burn down all the workers' hotels. None of the residents have any hope for their own apartment.

As I have already mentioned, the subject of housing tended to recur during periods of political change. This was also the case in the early 1970s after Edward Gierek became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. This was at the same time the moment of another decline in the number of housing completions, which occurred in 1970–1971 (Basista, 2001: 67). This was traditionally considered to be the result of mistakes made during the previous regime. Another important issue was the development of large-panel construction. As Zdzisław Zblewski writes:

The implementation of this technology on a mass scale began in 1967, the rapid development of the large-panel building, however, did not occur until the early 1970s (...) (Zblewski, 2000: 170).

It is another matter that the housing estates built during the Gierek era were designed and planned in an earlier decade. This was the case, for example, with the two major housing estate projects in Poznań: Rataje and Winogrody. Construction of both was still underway at the end of the 1960s, although indeed the peak of development occurred in the following decade (Marciniak, 2010: 103–122).

However, the 1970s was also a time of so-called success propaganda and slogans about building a second Poland. The development and large-scale investment in housing estates perfectly fit the climate of the era. And living in a "plank" block housing estate was treated as a kind of social advancement. It should be remembered that these were investments run by housing cooperatives, and to "get" a flat you not only had to wait in line but also pay your membership fee. This was an amount of money that usually corresponded to several average salaries and not everyone could afford it. These new blocks were, therefore, inhabited by a broadly defined middle class. Alongside skilled workers, there were teachers, civil servants, engineers, scientists and so on. And the housing construction itself was impressive in its size.¹ Alongside the other great

¹ In the early 1960s, between 89,000 and 170,000 new housing units were completed per year (Dębowski, 2012), by the mid-1970s it was over 200,000 with a record year of 1978, when 284,000 were completed (Jarosz, 2010: 101).

constructions of its decade, it also became an increasingly frequent focus of successful propaganda authors (Kunicki and Ławecki, 2018).

TIME OF ACCELERATION

The early 1970s, however, brought with it some criticism of the past decade. In 1971, a documentary film entitled 'Jak będziemy mieszkać w roku 2000' [How we will live in the year 2000] was shown on television. It begins with views of large western conurbations characterized by "noise, poisoned air and arteriosclerosis. We should try to avoid such a situation," the voiceover informs us. We then go back to the post-war period and learn that, although not a great deal has been done, rebuilding and building has so far been done "with more effort and at a greater cost than it should have been". However, even though a lot of "sunny and green estates" have been built, still "too little" has been built. There is a shortage of building materials for individual construction, and so-called wilderness neighborhoods are growing around cities. Finished flats are sometimes "non-functional". An example of the latter is provided by the pilot flats in the high-rise building on the Eastern Wall, the same ones that were shown with such enthusiasm in PKF a few years earlier. The solution to housing problems – modern technology i.e. the big plank and house factories. By 1975, 1,000,000 new flats are planned to be built, which will reduce the current waiting time (7–9 years on average) and influence urban development and urbanization (it was predicted that the Tri-City would become Six-Towns by the end of the 20th century).

So they have been building up until now, albeit not enough, but now there will be an acceleration. So we have a rather mild criticism of the past period, but a very optimistic view of the future. Modernity will enter urban construction and the countryside. More house factories are to be expected. The film is very typical of the propaganda of the 1970s decade. Yes, the mistakes of the past are pointed out, although not very aggressively. Above all, however, enthusiasm about expectations for the future dominates. This time, housing development was to become one of the most important investments, and the party and the government announced a solution to the housing problem (Kunicki and Ławecki, 2018: 25–40).

Similar in tone is 'Skąd mieszkanie' [Where is the House From] from 1972, produced by WFO. It begins gloomily with people complaining about the long waiting time for an allocation, which is 8–10 years in cooperatives, the lack of prospects, and the hopelessness associated with living with a family in one room. But it turns out that there is hope. Here are plans to build many house factories, which means betting on modern technology that will provide faster housing and shorter waiting times. What's more, the residents of the large slab blocks of flats are very complimentary about their new homes. The whole thing is one big paean to the new large-panel blocks – we are looking at bright, modern buildings on the screen, by the way – and ends with an optimistic summary: "We are, therefore, approaching a time of housing abundance." Thus, gentle criticism of the past and a lot of optimism for the future. This optimism was combined with the person of the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Edward Gierek. PKF liked to show him visiting new housing estates, taking a keen interest in the living conditions in the blocks of flats and their finishing (e.g. PKF 1971, No. 6 and PKF 1972, No. 24A).

In any case, a similar approach can also be found in feature films. In 1976, television began broadcasting a 7-episode series titled 'Daleko od szosy' [Far from the Road] (dir. Zbigniew Chmielewski). The protagonist is a young boy Leszek (Krzysztof Stroiński), born in the countryside, who, thanks to his great efforts and abilities, experiences social advancement: he leaves the village, graduates from a technical school, will probably go to college and become an engineer. Leszek marries a girl from the big city, a student from a good and wealthy family. The young couple has great housing problems. The mother-in-law does not approve of Leszek hence the couple nestles in a rented room in the attic with little comfort, and damp. The conditions of life are portrayed very realistically in the series, and it's not easy. However, with the advent of the seventies hope returns: Leszek passes his high school diploma, he is encouraged to go to the polytechnic, his wife Anka will probably write a doctorate and stay at the university, and finally the young couple will live to have their own apartment. The series, by the way, a very good and well-liked one, here fit perfectly into the time of success propaganda, while indicating that in the current decade, all livelihood problems will certainly be solved.

The mid-1970s brings with it a whole series of documentaries repeating propaganda content. Poland is presented in them as one big construction site. Here is the title of one of the films made in 1976, commissioned by the Central Construction Information Center: 'Plac budowy Polska'

[Construction Site Poland] (dir. Bonawentura Szredel). Here we have a whole series of panoramas showing new blocks of flats and housing estates, some standing in an open field, others already nicely developed. Construction is defined here as "the beginning of civilization." This is followed by a whole series, traditional in this type of film, of information accompanied by relevant images. And so, there is talk of modern technologies ("bricklaying triples are a thing of the past"), automation, mechanization, modern equipment, and house factories. On top of that, the message repeated everywhere is that a million housing units were completed in the first half of the 1970s, while by the end of the decade, there will be a million and a half more. The only thing that might raise some doubts is the quality of housing, but this too is going up. There is a slogan about "building a second Poland," and the whole thing ends with the line: "Vision to vision, brick to brick, this is how we build an independent country."

A common phrase – a slogan that appears all too often – is "time of accelerations." Here in Poland in the mid-seventies, there is a great acceleration of all investments, ports, steel mills, roads, and railway stations are being built, but new houses and apartments as well are the object of "everyday concern" of those in power 'Czas przyspieszeń' [Time of Acceleration] (1975, dir. Jerzy Ziarnik). The content presented in documentaries and educational films is very similar, that it is even difficult to distinguish one film from another. 'Na nowoczesnej budowie' [On Modern Construction Site] made at WFO, recalls all the earlier patterns: modernity, big construction, impetus, big panels, house factories, professionals replacing bricklayers laying bricks, etc. On top of that, young surveyors are measuring something in the middle of nowhere along with young architects – the place where the housing development is to be built. The youth of the designers here symbolizes the youth of People's Poland and the youth of Polish society. And everything is accompanied by cheerful background music. Interestingly, in place of parquet flooring, lentex is advertised as more modern. This is worth noting because lentex and various types of carpets began to be used in apartments from the mid-1970s increasingly not out of modernity, but rather out of frugality! The film, of course, does not mention this ('Na nowoczesnej budowie' [On a Modern Construction Site] (1976, dir. Wiesław Drymer).

Similar in its tone is 'Nasze osiedla' [Our Estates] (1974, dir. Wiesław Drymer), in which the idea of "social housing estates" appears. We see a group of young architects and their very modern designs, which are still impressive today. The settlements are spatially designed, inscribed in the

natural relief of the area, with lots of greenery and parks. Then the existing estates are shown: beautiful, bright and young. They are juxtaposed, moreover, with pre-war and gloomy workers' apartments. All are accompanied by appropriate music: gloomy or joyful. 'Nasze osiedla', however, is a praise and at the same time propaganda of housing cooperatives, which were the most important housing investors at the time. Hence the encouragement of social work for the estate, a social act, a joint effort. On the other hand, it is interesting to note the fact that a select group could count on housing "to a higher standard" or adapt to their profession. In this case, we have an artist in a larger-than-average apartment. Thus, the existence of some sort of upper middle class in the People's Republic was officially noted. This is worth noting because, in the decade of Edward Gierek's rule, a certain official consumption was condoned, which was no longer viewed negatively. This also applied to housing, which was now to be primarily cooperative, of a higher standard, single-family construction was also looked upon more favorably. Such an approach was also motivated practically: the post-war baby boomers were just entering the workforce and were looking forward to housing (Jarosz, 2010: 60–61).

At this point it is good to mention the feature film by Stanisław Bareja titled 'Poszukiwany, poszukiwana' [He is Wanted, She is Wanted] from 1972, in which the main character, a doctor of the history of art, accidentally advises the director (incompetent) about the latest trends in architectural design. There he just mentions the inscription of new settlements into the natural relief of the land and the preservation of old buildings and not necessarily the demolition of everything, but the coexistence of the new with the old. In fact, the problem of housing construction in Bareja's films appears more than once. In another comedy titled 'Nie ma róży bez ognia' [There is no rose without fire] from 1974, we see a new apartment finished in a hopeless way: the taps are leaky, the doors don't close, and one of the partition walls falls over. Poor workmanship of apartments was a very common problem at the time.²

Still returning to 'Nasze osiedla', a film undoubtedly promoting the successes of Edward Gierek's team in the field of housing construction (200,000 apartments a year! – the voiceover extolled), one more thing draws attention: a new church with modern architecture has also been built on the new cooperative estate. This is not annotated, but shown, and

² This can be seen by looking at the memories of tenants Kęcińska-Lempka (2018); Sobierajska-Mormol (2018).

an old roadside shrine and cross have also been left, which apparently is completely safe here and there are no plans to remove it. This is very interesting and may be the result of a peculiar *detente* in relations between the state and the Church in Poland in the 1970s.

PKF shared this enthusiastic tone depicting Poland as a huge construction site. All over the country, new young housing estates are springing up on empty fields. It is constantly emphasized that housing investments are among the most important. The image of Poland is changing, the novelty is even coming to Warsaw's Targówek. Next to the old one, the New Targówek is being built, with apartments for tens of thousands of tenants (PKF 1976, No. 42A). In another PKF, in turn, we see railroad single-family houses lined up along a wide street in Legnica (PKF 1975, No. 50A). Such an atmosphere also persists until the end of the 1970s, in no way reflecting the times of the collapse of the Gierek-era prosperity and deteriorating social mood. On the occasion of the XXXV anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland, a special PKF was created as a commercial regarding the achievements of the ending decade. We see the now traditional sights of modern Poland: the Łazienkowska Route, ports, the reconstruction of the Western Territories, and a Fiat 126p speeding along the highway. And then there's the information that while housing needs are huge, "we're building a lot and fast... in 11 years every family is to have its own M3" (PKF 1979, No. 29B). It is worth noting that, according to the authors of the chronicle, the Osiedle Młodych in Poznań, i.e. the cooperative that is an investor in the Rataje settlements, can serve as a positive example.

The Osiedle Młodych housing cooperative is also presented as exemplary in the 1975 PKF. This is a special edition of the chronicle on the occasion of the seventh congress of the Polish United Workers' Party devoted entirely to the housing problem. Young couples have nowhere to live despite more new housing. However, there will be even more of them. The chronicle repeats everything we have known from other PKFs and documentaries: images of beautiful new housing estates, young architects, bold designs, house factories, new technologies, etc. In turn, these images are accompanied by cheerful background music, listening to jazz or old songs (such as "We are building a new house"). We also admire the mass production of home furnishings, and the quality control of toilet seats, especially, draws our attention. In an enthusiastic voice, the newsreader informs us that a toilet seat must withstand 45,000 strokes! (PKF 1975, No. 47A).

Of note is the prominence of the Poznań cooperative Osiedle Młodych. It also appears in a special edition of the 1975 chronicle devoted to Greater Poland (1975, No. 7 in the series *Chronicle of the 30th Anniversary. Poznańskie*). Rataje housing estates appear (especially Piastowskie housing estate) spectacularly shown in the final shots of PKF. Two large housing complexes were built in Poznań during the communist period: Rataje and Winogrady, and at the end of this period they were joined by the settlements in Piątkowo, which are still being expanded today. But why was Rataje shown and not Winogrady? Both projects were started as far back as the late 1960s, continued in the 1970s, and finished in the 1980s. Rataje was a project conceived for 140,000 people, i.e. larger than the prestigious Nowa Huta and Nowe Tychy, while Winogrady was more modest – about 75,000 people were to live there (Marciniak, 2010: 103, 116). The Winogrady housing estates, on the other hand, were much more modern: the blocks did not stand one behind the other in rows, they were integrated into the natural relief of the area, and the spacing between buildings was maintained so that no more than two stood next to each other. Despite this, however, this large investment in Rataje was shown as exemplary. One may suspect that ideological considerations were the deciding factor here. Rataje was conceived as a housing development whose residents (from outside of Poznań) would affect the social change in Poznań itself, a very conservative and Catholic city at the time. Thus, “Rataje was to be to Poznań what Nowa Huta was to Kraków” (Matusik, 2021: 241). Thus, it ceases to be surprising that they were promoted in the media of that period; they were just ideologically particularly correct.

A peculiar curiosity on the other hand is the advertisement ‘Dacza polsku’ [Dacha in Polish] from 1976 (dir. Stanisław Kokesz), in which we see a wide range of wooden houses for immediate purchase. It would seem that this is a commodity that is not only readily available but also “for the pocket” of the average viewer. After all, it is explained that these cottages, manufactured by Stolbud, are offered for export by Budimex’s Foreign Trade in Construction Headquarters. For the sake of accuracy, however, it should be added that some of the models – the smallest ones – found their way to the resorts of individual workplaces and are still in service today. However, they remained definitely beyond the reach of the Polish middle class at the time.

A slightly more critical approach to the housing problem was taken in feature films, usually comedies. But here, too, the criticism was limit-

ed to a few subjects. I mentioned 'Nie ma róży bez ognia', which shows the disastrous finishing of apartments. In turn, in the TV series 'Czterdziestolatek' [A Forty-Year-Old Man] (1974–1976, dir. Jerzy Gruza) in episode no. 7, entitled 'Judym, czyli czyn społeczny' [Judym or Social Action], the problem of alienation of people living in blocks of flats made of large slabs is taken up. However, it is carried out so cleverly that the endpoint is unambiguous and alienation in the modern city is a phenomenon typical of highly developed countries. Thus, Poland of the Gierek decade is just such a country (Skotarczak, 2024: 64–66).

However, several films appeared in the 1970s that presented a slightly different view of life in large-panel apartment blocks. It should be remembered here that large-panel construction and house factories were treated as a prestigious investment, and those millions of housing units put into use (actually) were a source of pride. The films I'm thinking of here were made at the very end of the decade: 'Paciorki jednego różańca' [Beads of One Rosary] (1980, dir. Kazimierz Kutz), 'Dziecinne pytania' [Childish Questions] (1981, dir. Janusz Zaorski) and 'Filip z konopi' [Philip of the Hemp] (1981–1983, dir. Józef Gębski). Only the first one premiered while Edward Gierek was still the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), the second one was released in the cinemas during the "Solidarity" period, the third one was completed in 1981 but was stopped during the collation and shelved for two years.

The end of the 1970s was marked by the worsening economic situation in Poland and increasing shortages of supplies. Queues in front of stores grew longer and so did the waiting time for housing. In particular, the 1979–1982 period saw a decline in the number of housing units completed (Basista, 2001: 67). This is an unusual time in Poland's recent history and there is no room here to recall the well-known facts concerning the development of the democratic opposition after 1976, the birth of the Solidarity Trade Union in August 1980 and the departure from office of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Edward Gierek barely a month later, and finally the introduction of martial law and the pacification of society in December 1981. It is worth noting, however, that

housing demands constantly accompanied social protests in the People's Poland. The fact that they occurred rather so often indicates the importance of the problem and the sense of dissatisfaction with housing policy (Jarosz, 2010: 143).

The end of the 1970s also saw the development of the cinema of moral concern and the appearance on the screen of a number of films critical of the existing reality, although obviously careful to avoid questioning the foundations of the system.

In 'Paciorki jednego różańca' the idea of mass housing made of large slabs is questioned. An old miner forcibly evicted from his single-family house – a so-called familok – and moved to a new apartment in a block of apartments suffers deeply. He has neither intimacy nor familiarity. The blocks of flats seem to be a kind of modern moloch, and the people living in them are like ants in a huge anthill. The miner is dying. In a comedic version, the problem returns in 'Filip z konopi' which depicts life in a large housing development in a block of flats colloquially known as an "anthill" or "plank." Here there is a lack of basic infrastructure, water, everything breaks down, the nagging cramped conditions and lack of intimacy turn life in the block into a nightmare. The director of "Filip..." had previously made a documentary 'Skupisko' [The Cluster] (1980) depicting life in Warsaw's Ursynów district, but now he has developed all the themes in his popular comedy. It is worth noting that "Filip..." waited two years for its premiere, as it was stopped in October 1981 by a collation committee. It was alleged that Gębski's film was artistically poor, but the director had no doubt that the sociological observations contained in it did not please the colluders (Skotarczak, 2004: 217–218).

On the other hand, 'Dziecinne pytania' shows a group of young architects getting their big professional chance: they are to design a large housing estate. At first, everything looks just like in the documentaries from the 1970s (e.g. 'Our Housing Estates'): young people, enthusiasm, impetus, funds, invoking Le Corbusier... But as time goes by, it gets worse. Construction is decided by local arrangements and influence, new investments are constantly falling off the plan. Architects experience constant disappointments, some seep into the local elite, others revolt. Either way, it becomes clear that ideas of lofty realization cannot be realized: the people's state no longer has the money for them. The crisis of the late 1970s begins. Less is being built and things are getting worse.

THE FALL AND NEW PROPOSALS

The lack of enthusiasm that was characteristic of earlier periods also affected PKF developers. In the period from the autumn of 1980 to December 1981, instead of announcements of further successes in housing, there is despondency. Poles are shown preparing for winter in their block apartments: sealing windows, fixing stoves to get warm, since the heaters don't work (PKF 1981, No. 46A). And an utterly tragic situation is described in PKF 1981, No. 49B. Here is the story of a married couple who cannot wait for their housing passbook to be fulfilled. They have been waiting for 9 years, they are crammed into a room of about 10 sq. m. with their children, the children are ill, she had to quit her job at the university. "We trusted the authorities and lost" – says the wife. Of course, the odium falls on Gierek's team, and all the material is part of the climate of settling accounts with the former First Secretary (Szumski, 2018). The chronicle's lector, on the other hand, states: "If we have few investment opportunities today then we should concentrate them primarily on housing" (PKF 1981, No. 49B).

Housing construction is also present in the chronicles during the 1982–1989 period. Traditionally, the poor quality of housing finishing, tardiness and poor work organization are stigmatized, for which the responsibility often falls on both individuals or institutions. In such cases, the materials in PKF are interventionist in nature. This is the case of the story in Warsaw's Stawki housing development, where pipes had to be replaced. This had been going on for two years, and the residents are bogged down in ditches into which occasionally playing children fall (PKF 1985, No. 6), or the tardy insulation of blocks of flats with Styrofoam without concern for the freezing tenants (PKF 1987, No. 52), or the ghastly affair of a housing development in Łódź located next to a factory of carcinogenic asbestos that pollutes the neighborhood (PKF 1985, No. 12).

What is noteworthy, however, is the beginning of a deeper criticism of large-panel construction, which had previously been an object of pride. This criticism came from the community of architects themselves pointing out the monotony of housing developments, the repetitiveness of intrusive elements, the dehumanization of life in so-called ant-houses, as well as the depreciation of the architectural profession (Cymer, 2018: 354–355). On the other hand, the economic crisis created the need for changes in the field of housing investment. In 1982, the government criticized the

previous centralization in housing management, the neglect of individual construction, and pointed out the ill effects of the "domination of the big slabs." However, this did not result in any particular investment in housing; the heavy industry remained dominant. Subsequent attempts at economic reform to introduce the "marketization" of socialism also failed, and in 1987 there was another collapse in production, although at the same time it was observed that small private companies often did better than large state-owned enterprises (Skodlarski, 2000: 507–512).

All these new developments and trends were directly reflected in PKF. The 1983 material devoted to a seminar of architects in Rybnik is particularly interesting. It is accompanied at first by images of large, monumental apartment blocks described as a "concrete fortress," and then we hear statements by the architects themselves as well as the voiceover that smaller, lower, more diverse houses should be built. In turn, one of the Silesian housing estates is a positive example: the buildings are much more intimate with traditional sloping roofs (PKF 1983, No. 45). In turn, four years later, the chronicle compares a settlement in Poland with a Dutch settlement, which is an occasion to criticize block housing, sameness, lack of infrastructure, pervasive mud, and typification (PKF 1987, No. 10).

The series of chronicles that fit in with the climate of changing economic assumptions, thus promoting grassroots initiatives, small housing cooperatives, and the equally interesting second stage of the reform. So, one by one, we learn about the bankruptcy of the Katowice-based Budopol, which fell after the economic reform, and was left with an unfinished housing estate. We watch blocks of flats without roofs, windows, between which, the narrator informs us, 8,000 abandoned elements lie, from which seven buildings can be made. The narrator ends the material with the statement: "This has to be dealt with, because the reform counts on profits not losses" (PKF 1984, No. 1). However, about a year and a half later, everything looks much more optimistic, you can see the reform and decentralization are effectively working. A small cooperative in Sochaczew, one of the few that have succeeded, is being built efficiently. And that's because the houses are built largely by the tenants themselves every spare moment, on free Saturdays, and on Sundays until 3 pm (PKF 1985, No. 22). The authors of the chronicle are clearly delighted, although the thing seems actually frightening. For it means that as a result of poverty, which is affecting the majority of families at the time, there has been a phenomenon described as a renaturalization of consumption, or "a return to meeting the needs of the family through one's own labor" (Bojar,

1991: 44), thus going back decades, if not hundreds of years. People are forced to build their own houses. This can hardly be considered an objective socialist success of the economy. A similar situation is described a year later: we meet the SAM-81 housing cooperative, described as a "small construction miracle" (PKF 1986, No. 24). Here the cooperatives – as we watch in the film – are also building by themselves. They have their own brickyard and are putting up houses in Jozefów. There are already 39 of them, with 500 more planned. So the investment is growing.

It's not bad in Iława either – there are two cooperatives here and the wait for an apartment is shorter than elsewhere. Maybe this is because the cooperatives organize their own brigades (PKF 1985, No. 38). We also admire the mining housing estate Wilcze Gardło in Gliwice put up as a model (PKF 1985, No. 40). The full optimism is breathed by the material from 1987 entitled 'Odbudowa budownictwa?' [Reconstruction of Construction?], in which we first learn about the collapse and failure of the Kombinat Budownictwa Mieszkaniowego Zachód, but soon we find out that the whole thing was taken over by Sp. z o.o. Warszawskie Przedsiębiorstwo Budowlane, and work has moved on (PKF 1987, No. 29). Ursynów is also developing, where there is, admittedly, a lot of mud, nevertheless efficient communications, supplies, and even its own theater is operating (PKF 1988, No. 3).

In contrast, we learn nothing about housing construction from the documentary film titled 'O jutro dla siebie' [Tomorrow for Yourself] (1986, dir. Włodzimierz Kołodziejczak), which was made at WFD on the occasion of the 10th party congress. The authors consider what Poland will look like in the year 2000. We watch a shipyard, Bełchatów, the construction site of a nuclear power plant in Żarnowiec (two more were to be built in the 1990s), and the computer industry. Although the film begins and ends with a panorama with large blocks of flats, nothing is said about them. Apparently, housing construction has ceased to be a priority investment and a matter of concern for the authors of the "laboriously implemented reform".

At this point it is still necessary to mention the TVP series 'Alternatywy 4' [Alternatives 4], (dir. Stanisław Bareja). The idea was born back in 1979, but the realization – appropriately modernized script – began only in 1981, and was finished in 1982, and the whole thing was edited in 1983. The action takes place on one of the large Warsaw housing estates, and the whole story told in the series is one big metaphor of the fate of Poland at that time, which includes both "Solidarity" and all the social protests.

So, a housing estate made of large panels has become the epitome of People's Poland. Life here is not easy: people sink in the mud, the heating goes out in the middle of winter, apartment allocations are not fair, and in addition, residents are tyrannized by the caretaker (totalitarian authority). Thus, the apartment block has grown into a mere symbol – a decidedly negative one. Although people eventually organize themselves in effective resistance, after all, they won't move anywhere else from here, and neither can they get rid of the authorities.

The series was stopped and ended up on the shelves of the TV house. Its premiere did not take place until 1986, and one of the key conditions for releasing it on the television screen was the inclusion of a caption at the very beginning clearly suggesting that the whole event took place in the past decade: "Once upon a time, in the period of success propaganda" (Skotarczak, 2022: 209–223).

CONCLUSION

For a very long time, housing construction in the People's Republic of Poland was treated as a kind of priority investment. Showing new "bright" blocks of flats and houses had a propaganda dimension, especially in comparison with the "dark and damp" ones from before the war. It was viewed as a measure of success and modernity. At the same time, the current housing policy was clearly promoted in the media, showing its qualities and successes. There was a focus on mass housing in the form of housing estates, which is reflected in the materials presented here. In the 1970s, the pinnacle of modernity and resilience came in the form of large-panel blocks of flats, whose production ultimately changed the urban landscape.³ It was only after December 1981 that the promotion of housing as one of the major investment successes ceased, and the materials presented here are more of a testimony to its failure. On the other hand, they are also a testimony to the changes taking place: criticism of the prefabricated concrete blocks, decentralization, promotion of small, local construction companies.

³ Besides, not only in Poland (Wojtkun, 2024).

There was always too little housing in People's Poland and references to this were sometimes made in films, but usually the previous ruling class was blamed, without questioning the point of mass housing itself. The criticism of mass housing did not take place until the late 1980s and early 1990s (Marciniak, 2018: 158–163). Although, over the years, large-panel blocks of flats have returned to favor and housing estates from the People's Republic of Poland have undergone a process of rehabilitation (Kanoniczak and Marcinkowski, 2020; Mochocka, 2019).

From today's perspective, feature films, documentaries and Chronicles constitute an extremely interesting historical source, being, on the one hand, a record of the official interpretation regarding housing construction, however on the other hand – taken as a whole – somehow reflecting housing conditions and the level of investment success in this matter in People's Republic of Poland.

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