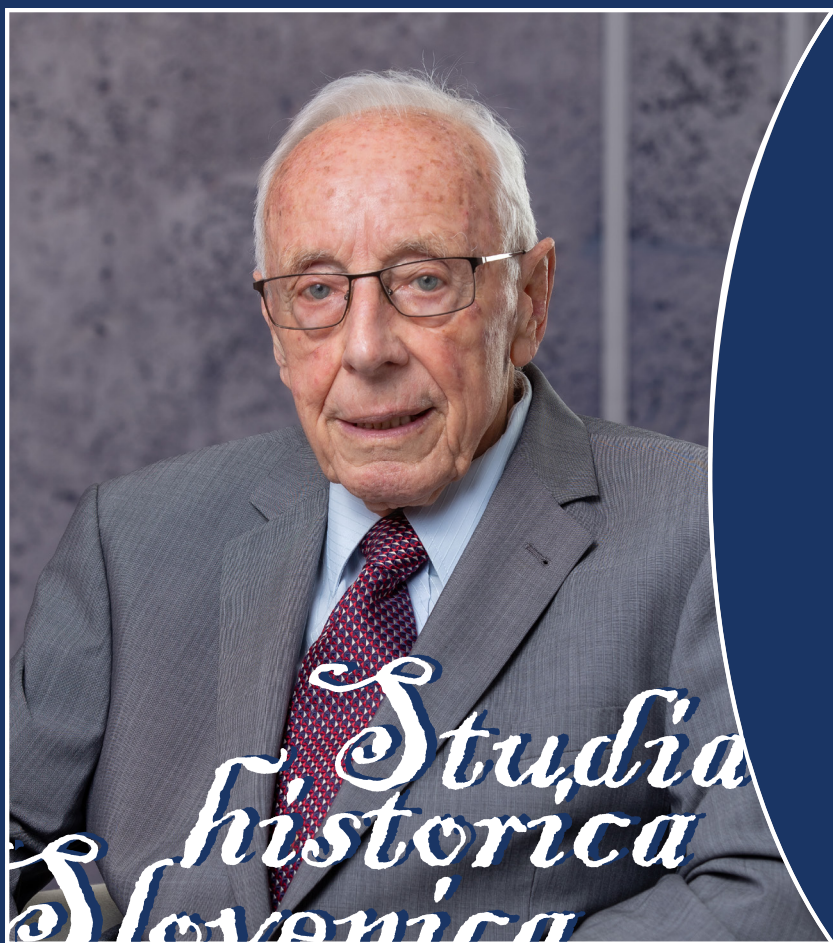


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Ivan Vurnik's Workers' Colony: The Socio-Political Role of Architecture in Interwar Social Housing in Maribor

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Abstract:

The article examines political and architectural-historical questions of social housing in Maribor during the interwar years. Using an analysis of original plans and architectural tendencies from that time, different aspects and examples of social housing in Maribor and Slovenia are presented. Additionally, there are foreign influences, with the original projects from Vienna and other countries included in the wider theoretical context. With that theoretical base, architect Ivan Vurnik's work is represented in the context of a wider architectural question of social housing, and thus interweaves with then present political obstacles, found in the archival and newspaper sources of that time.

Keywords:

social housing, interwar era, Maribor, architecture, Ivan Vurnik, political context, housing law, Red Vienna, architectural developments, architectural history of 20th Century

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Maribor, 25 (2025), No. 1, pp. 153–210, 122 notes, 20 pictures

Language: Original in English (Abstract in English and Slovene, Summary in Slovene)

Introduction

Numerous texts have been published on social housing in Maribor during the 20th century, in particular on Ivan Vurnik's workers' colony. However, an architectural perspective on this topic remains underdeveloped. This article addresses this gap by studying social housing through the lens of architectural history, contending that plans, and spatial organization of housing are essential for comprehending its socio-political function.

While the majority of research on social housing in Slovenia to date has been historical, ethnological, or art-historical, this text aims to emphasize the architectural aspect. The aim is therefore to analyse the history of architecture in Maribor, considering the political, cultural and social influences of the interwar period. It attempts to explain the concept of social housing through the integration of humanistic and architectural aspects and to understand through architectural arguments how the challenges of social housing in Slovenia were tackled using the example of Maribor.

Due to its geopolitical position, Maribor has experienced one of the most striking historical developments in Slovenia. It is necessary to look back to the 19th century, when Maribor became a railway junction between Vienna and Trieste in 1846 and a hub between Carinthia and Hungary in the 1860s. This made Maribor an important trading centre and promoted economic and cultural growth. However, this position changed drastically after the First World War, when Maribor became a peripheral location due to disintegration of Austro-Hungarian Empire. Despite the limitations of the previous trade routes, new prospects emerged for the city, particularly in the field of industry, which was facilitated by the Fala hydro-electric power plant and the city's proximity to the Drava River.

Maribor's urban expansion beyond its historic core was directly driven by the establishment of industry both within the city centre and on its periphery. This development precipitated the construction of residential structures, notably on the right bank of the Drava River, intended primarily for the workforce employed in these factories. The city's expansion during the interwar period was a particularly significant phase in its urban history, even though this pattern of growth was initiated in the 19th century upon the establishment of the Southern Railways and the first industries. However, this rapid urbanization resulted in a significant influx of migrants that significantly exceeded the supply of suitable housing and fundamentally reshaped Maribor's social and demographic fabric, creating a stark spatial division that was as much about class as it was about urban planning. This resulted in a clear social differentiation between the two banks of the Drava River. The left bank, with the historic core, was characterized by an "older, more orderly, and architecturally more ambitious built environment", housing the bourgeoisie, capital, and public admin-

istration. In stark contrast, the right bank, where industry and railways were concentrated, developed in a "less orderly, in some parts even chaotic" manner, becoming the primary settlement area for the industrial working class. This social and architectural duality is the essential context for understanding all subsequent efforts in social housing construction, which were overwhelmingly focused on the right bank to accommodate the growing, and often impoverished, lower-income population.¹

This outcome led to a severe housing crisis that persisted until the 1950s and disproportionately impacted the city's poorer residents. Notwithstanding these profound social challenges, the period was also marked by significant architectural developments that provide the foundational basis for this study's architectural analysis.

The research began with a systematic literature review, supplemented by archival material, photographs, and newspaper articles as well as field trips to architectural sites that revealed connections between the historical, political, social, cultural and architectural developments in Maribor. Based on these sources, especially documents from the regional archives in Maribor, this text attempts to identify the influences on the development of social housing, the architectural considerations behind such buildings and the architectural arguments for their outcomes.

To make these connections, we need to ask: what architectural and non-architectural concepts expanded the field of architecture during this period, and what spatial examples illustrate these concepts in practice? The first investigation focussed on residential buildings constructed in the first decade after the First World War. During this period, Ivan Vurnik's workers' colony was a remarkable example of social housing that combined both architectural and non-architectural ideas. However, the workers' colonies must be understood within the city's broader, heterogeneous landscape of lower-class housing. The majority of Maribor's workers resided in various temporary accommodations, including rented rooms in tenement houses, factory-owned flats in converted military barracks, and, for the most vulnerable, makeshift settlements in cellars, barracks-huts, and waggon settlements, rather than planned colonies. In order to assess planned housing, it is imperative to consider this fragmented reality.

The aim is to uncover the architectural dimensions of earlier research and to explore the architectural thinking of the time. Considering the fact that

¹ Marjeta Ciglencečki, "Urbanistična podoba Maribora v 19. in 20. stoletju", *Studia Historica Slovenica* 6, No. 2–3 (2006), pp. 531–556 (hereinafter: Ciglencečki, "Urbanistična podoba Maribora v 19. in 20. stoletju"), according to Jelka Pirkovič-Kocbek, *Izgradnja sodobnega Maribora, mariborska arhitektura in urbanizem med leti 1918 in 1976* (Ljubljana, 1982), p. 13 (hereinafter: Pirkovič-Kocbek, *Izgradnja sodobnega Maribora*).

today's architectural education often emphasises the political and cultural influences on architecture – a perspective that was not so widespread at the time, especially given the new trends that were emerging across Europe – it is possible to identify original ideas and thought processes that were specific to this region. While there were similar forms and trends in other countries, some architectural elements were unique here and emphasised the need for further architectural exploration.

The originality of this text lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which connects a detailed architectural perspective – including the analysis of original plans, spatial configurations, and built forms – with political, social, and cultural history. This synthesis offers a convincing argument for recognizing social housing in Maribor, arguing that the architectural objects themselves are key documents of the socio-political forces that shaped them. By offering new perspectives for historical consideration, it opens up new possibilities for recognizing this important architectural heritage.

Consequently, the article focuses on Ivan Vurnik's workers' colony as a pivotal case study. Through a detailed analysis of this and other examples, it deciphers how the city's specific political circumstances and cultural pressures directly influenced the conception, design, and ultimate reality of social housing between the two world wars.

The rise of industry

After the First World War, the issue of reconstruction and renovation was present all over the world, especially in Central Europe, where the war had left behind ruins and dilapidated cities. This was not just about architectural and structural problems, but above all about social, cultural and economic ones. Maribor has undergone intensive development, especially since the mid-19th century, when the city played a critical role due to its geopolitical position and the newly established railway junction of the Austro-Hungarian Southern Railway in 1846, when the line between Graz and Celje was built. As the city of Maribor was initially an important trade and transport hub between the Vienna and Trieste line, it also acquired an important industrial role from the second half of the 19th century.² With the industrial development of important factories such as the Scherbaum mill company (*Fig. 1*), the Badl leather factory, the Bros soap and fat factory, the brick factory in Kamnica and others, the industry

² Maja Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij: o življenju in kulturi mariborskih delavcev v letih od 1919 do 1941* (Maribor, 1992), pp. 17–23 (hereinafter: Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*).



Scherbaum's mill on the former Svetožarevskega street (*Kulturno medijski center Slovenije*, available at: <https://homocumulat.com/2019/06/22/definitovno-najvecja-zbirka-starih-fotografij-maribora-na-nem-mestu-osvezeno/>, accessed: 17. 8. 2024)

in the 19th century was mainly represented by leather factories, steam mills, timber and brick factories. However, in the course of fifty years, many of them moved to Vienna or collapsed due to bankruptcy.³ Although Maribor was generally known as a commercial city even before the 20th century, industry in Maribor was already richly developed and only began to take off in the 20th century, especially after the First World War.⁴ Industrialization also led to substantial historical, political, and economic changes in the city, with the issue of social housing being one of the most significant developments for architectural and urbanistic historical research.

Social housing and political influences

Questions about social housing began firstly with the industrial development of foreign countries, which began in the first half of the 19th century with the

³ Antoša Leskovec, "Razvoj gospodarstva v Mariboru 1752–1941", in: *Maribor skozi stoletja, Razprave I*, eds. Jože Curk, Bruno Harman and Jože Koropec (Maribor, 1991), pp. 339–347 (hereinafter: Leskovec, "Razvoj gospodarstva v Mariboru 1752–1941").

⁴ Maja Godina-Golija, "Stanovanjska kultura mariborskih industrijskih delavcev v obdobju med obema vojnama", *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 62=Nv27, No. 1 (1991), pp. 88–94 (hereinafter: Godina-Golija, "Stanovanjska kultura mariborskih delavcev v obdobju med obema vojnama").

Industrial Revolution. Secondly, the same question arose again with the second industrial upswing in the 1920s. This time, the issue of social housing was also the result of the post-war crisis with the loss of jobs and homes, the financial instability of countries, the low purchasing power of the majority of the population, general inflation and the influx of people into the cities searching for work, which brought many new problems for modern industrial cities, but at the same time opened up new development opportunities.⁵

As Maribor developed into a transport hub in the second half of the 19th century, the city's development was driven by its central geopolitical position, which led to urbanisation and the connection of the old town with the suburbs, which developed rapidly.⁶ (*Fig. 2*)

This was further reinforced when construction of the first hydroelectric power plant began in 1913 to supply the city with electricity. However, the First World War changed this completely and the city's development was interrupted for another four years and further influenced by the most important political change after the First World War. Maribor's new geopolitical position took form as a component of the newly established State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs and, effective December 1, 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes following the breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁷ Nevertheless, the war left behind ruins and extreme changes that brought the spatial development of the city to a standstill.

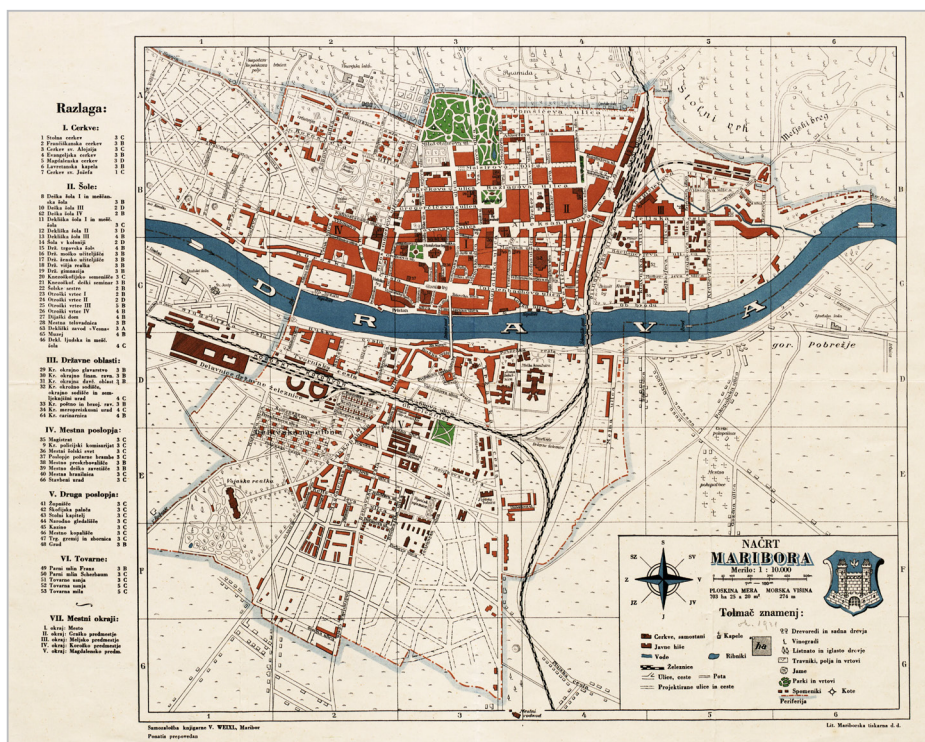
As already mentioned, the post-war crisis, the global and local cultural changes, the newly established country, the political-cultural changes in the population of Maribor and the resulting industrial boom led not only to the beginning of urban redevelopment, but also to new trends in architecture, new materials and a socio-cultural relationship to building, with a clear focus on workers' housing.

The history of social or public housing dates to the 16th century, when the first example was found in Augsburg, known as the Fuggerei, where the concept of today's definition of social housing was first introduced. A member of the wealthy Fugger family founded a settlement where people in need could be

⁵ Jackson J. Spielvogel, "The industrial revolution and its impact on European society", in: Jackson J. Spielvogel (ed.), *Western civilization, Volume C, Since 1879* (Boston, 2005), pp. 583–608 (hereinafter: Spielvogel, "The industrial revolution and its impact on European society").

⁶ Jože Curk, "Urbana in gradbena zgodovina Maribora", in: *Maribor skozi stoletja, Razprave 1*, eds. Jože Curk, Bruno Hartman and Jože Koropec (Maribor, 1991), pp. 542–556 (hereinafter: Curk, "Urbana in gradbena zgodovina Maribora").

⁷ Leskovec, "Razvoj gospodarstva v Mariboru 1752–1941", pp. 339–347; Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 17–23.



Plan of Maribor, 1921, Knjigarna V. Weigl (*dLib*)

housed.⁸ There are other sporadic examples, but we can start with the actual history of social housing in the 19th century, as a result of the early development of capitalism during the industrial revolution in England.⁹

And so we have our conundrum: as posed by Marx's colleague Engels in 1872, the 'housing question' comes down, as we shall see, to a critique of housing as ideology. This critique pertains equally to utopian socialists and to the bourgeoisie, against whose daydreams Engels asserts the universality of the class struggle and of scientific Marxism.¹⁰

⁸ Jennifer Billock, "After Almost 500 Years, the World's Oldest Social Housing Complex Is Still Going Strong", *Smithsonian*, 19. 12. 2019, available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/after-almost-500-years-german-utopia-is-still-going-strong-180973787/>, accessed: 31. 7. 2024.

⁹ Spielvogel, "The industrial revolution and its impact on European society", pp. 583–608.

¹⁰ Can Bilsel and Juliana Maxim, *Architecture and the Housing Question* (London, 2022), p. 22.

The "housing question" later became part of the socio-political debate in England, the Netherlands, France, and Germany as well as in other European countries until the beginning of the 20th century, mainly due to industrial development and the need to provide housing for workers.¹¹

Since the Industrial Revolution, there has been a desperate need for housing in our cities and people who have been prepared to address the problem in different ways. In the 19th century it was the industrial philanthropists whose patronage first brought about affordable housing responding to the dire conditions of the poor, these charitable – but primarily commercial – men of enterprise formed the basis of social provision both in the UK and in Europe in the form of housing associations and co-operatives. They were the pioneers, not only in championing the cause of the poor and identifying an acute market failure, but also in putting architects to work in the development of so-called 'model dwellings', and in doing so, delivering homes to a previously unseen standard.¹²

Originally, there was almost always talk of wealthy upper classes and philanthropists setting up non-profit housing associations and providing housing for poor people, mostly labourers. Due to political developments in the countries, especially after the First World War, this slowly evolved to a municipal or national level. Philanthropic clubs such as Rotary were still present and offered better opportunities to poorer people, which also played a strong role in Maribor, especially in the interwar period.¹³ Today, however, we are talking about social housing on a larger scale and under official management.

Spurred on by activists and voters, city councils and the state realized in the 20th century that better housing and planned development could play a role in creating a more egalitarian society. Housing was a moral and political crusade, and the bipartisan consensus made for a mid-century 'golden era' in which the public sector zealously drove construction and brought to life the radical ideas of a new generation of designers and urban reformers.¹⁴

In the first half of the 20th century, many countries introduced housing laws and policies that enabled the development of social housing, such as the

¹¹ Ivan Vurnik, "O reševanju stanovanjske krize v zapadni Evropi", *Dom in svet*, 15. 5. 1927, No. 4, pp. 145–148 (hereinafter: Vurnik, "O reševanju stanovanjske krize v zapadni Evropi").

¹² Paul Karakusevic and Abigail Batchelor, *Social housing, Definitions and Design Exemplars* (London, 2017), p. 20 (hereinafter: Karakusevic and Batchelor, *Social housing*).

¹³ *Rotary klub Maribor: 1930–1993* (Maribor, 1996).

¹⁴ Karakusevic and Batchelor, *Social housing*, p. 20.

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Opozicija izključena iz Državnega odbora

Borba se parlamentarno zastopstvo v odboru – Usodni sklep ministri-kega sveta – Nesporazum v vladi koalicijski

Beograd, 20. maja. Pionirski odbor bo na svoji današnji popoldanski seji izjavil 11 članov v Državni odbor za reorganizacijo državne uprave in državne gospodarstva. Volitev bi se bila morala vršiti že v torek, a je bila takrat in nato še enkrat odložena, ker se parlamentarne skupine niso mogle zrediti o načinu volitev.

Opozicija je del volitve koalicijskega zahtevala naj se voli po proporciji kakor v vse druge parlamentarne odbore, vlada sama pa je zahtevala izključiti opozicijo. Zato pričašajo popoldansko sejo s precejšnjo napetostjo, posebno še, ker se govori, da se tudi radikali in davidovičevci med seboj še niso sporazumeli o razdelitvi mandatorov. Ni izključeno, da bo volitev radikalov že tretjič odložena.

Maribor dobi ekspozituro Državne obrtne banke

Vatna planarna seja centralnega upravnega odbora Državne obrtne banke – Razprava o volitvah v ljubljansko podružnico in o obrtni ekspozituri v Mariboru

Beograd, 20. maja. Za nedolgo, dne 25. t. m. je sklicana v Beograd planarna seja upravnega odbora Državne obrtne banke. Poleg drugih važnih zadev je na dnevnem redu tudi verifikacija volitev v upravni svet ljubljanske podružnice.

Seja bo dale razpravljala o otvoritvi podružnic. Oni del prišli bo najprej na razgovor tudi zahteva obrtniškega sveta mariborske oblasti, da omesti 25. t. m. je sklicana v Beograd planarna seja upravnega odbora Državne obrtne banke. Poleg drugih važnih zadev je na dnevnem redu tudi verifikacija volitev v upravni svet ljubljanske podružnice.

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Napetosti v naši notranji politiki

Borba za velike težave – Radikal se upira spremembam – Nove volitve bodo sprejemljive

Beograd, 20. maja. Med demokratami in radikalnimi volitvami vlade koalicijske se vrši ostra kontroverza o spremembah na notranji volitvi.

Demokrat zahtevajo za seboj in nov v Srbiji. Volitvi, Bost in Hrcovci v Beogradu. Čladi Srbije se v Hrvatske izjavljajo davidovičevci, da so neustrešni razni Odbori. Suska, ki ji tudi zahtevajo za seboj.

Radikal se tem zahtevam upira. Zato je tolikrat napovedoval, nova imenovanja volitvi izjavil se vedno niso izjavila. Žli se, da se ministri.

Ali bo stanovanjski zakon podaljšan?

Zmede v sedanjem nejasnem položaju – Jeseni grozi večja kriza – Obnovljena borba za stanovanjsko zaščito – Potreba pravičnega kompromisa

Z 31. oktobrom, torej že čez dobrih pet mesecev, preteka veljavnost današnjega stanovanjskega zakona, ki je že fin kontinjen kot likvidacijski zakon. Postopoma likvidacija stanovanjskega zakona, ki je bil namenjen zaščiti bi se morala začeti že v 1. juniju, a kakor vidimo drastičnih niti v skrajni nastali skrajnih zakonih in uredbi, je tudi stanovanjski zakon niti povsem in neizodan, da danes notranji stanovanjski sodniki niti ne vedo, kako naj postopka. Področja je, da se podaljšalo v stanovanjski krizi vedno večje zmede, ki upravičeno razburja občinstvo in deluje na krizi in pri bližnjih lastnikih in pri nametnikih.

Ako bi to trajalo samo teh par mesecev do 31. oktobra, bi se dalo še kako prenesti. Upravičeno pa se bojimo, da bo po inkonizaciji stanovanjskega zakona nastopila še hujša zmeda.

Vlada in starija vlada, da omili stanovanjsko krizo; občasno se začne v svadlini skrajni prenos in radi pomankanja finančnih sredstev tudi v prejemalnih obdobjih.

Dobri smo v zadnjem letu in bo mo deloma se dobili povod, tudi v Mariboru, precej novi stanovanji. A to je še vse premla. Stanovanjski protesti bodo gotovo močnejši, ki imajo danes manjša in slabša stanovanja, kakor jih rabijo in kakor bi jih lahko privlačili, porabili za to, da si bodo prišli več in bolj stanovanjsko zaščito.

Tako se bo v sedanjem brezstanovanjskem področju še mnogo voliti.

Odvajeno se je začela tudi vladi odlatati vent. Minister za socijalno po področje in namre prireditelji ankete v tem, ali naj se stanovanjski zakon zopet podaljša in v kateri obliki. Razstali ankete se niso zna, umerno na je, da je ta ministru skla morda morda vlada borbo za stanovanjsko zaščito.

Vse organizacije matronov v naši državi so se vrje na dolo, da se stanovanjska zaščita podaljša, hini lastniki pa so orientirali ravno tako od boje borbe proti podaljšanju.

Kot nepristransko in pravično preproja ta spor, mora priznati, da bi bilo vsekakor prebruto in prevereno, ako bi s 1. novembrom res prenehala vsaka stanovanjska zaščita brez omejitve.

da bi gospodinja družinam novih stanovanj

French law that established public offices for low-cost housing in 1912, the *Housing and Planning Act* in the United Kingdom in 1919, the *Gemeindebauprogramm* in Vienna in 1923, etc.¹⁵ In Slovenia, the new *Housing Act* was enacted in 1925, which provided housing protection for the poor and anticipated the equal distribution of housing, but at the same time made the management of housing and rents rigorous, which led to forced evictions.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 154–163; Margaret Haderer, *Rebuilding cities and Citizens, Mass Housing in Red Vienna and Cold War Berlin* (Amsterdam, 2023), pp. 48–50 (hereinafter: Haderer, *Rebuilding City and Citizens*).

The housing court has over 900 applications for housing. In the past two years, i.e. since 15 May 1925, when the new Housing Act came into force, over 300 flats have been terminated in Maribor. Almost a quarter of the cancelled flats had to be vacated due to forced evictions. If housing protection is really to end on 1 November, those familiar with the situation estimate that at least 300 new evictions are to be expected this year.¹⁶

The administration did not do much and after only two years the housing protection ended, which led to even more homelessness and housing disasters in Maribor.

The government did nothing to alleviate the housing shortage; the municipalities started their measures too late and too little because of a lack of funds. We got plenty of new flats everywhere last year, including in Maribor, and some of them are still pending. But that is still not enough. Many people who today have a smaller and worse flat than they need and can afford will certainly use the flat they have to find a bigger and better one. This will add many more to the existing homeless.¹⁷

The abolition of housing protection (*Fig. 3*) rather led to people living in barrack-huts and waggons, or rather many different temporary or inadequate forms of housing, as in rented parts of the cellars, temporary flats in abandoned buildings or even under the bridges, while the strict building law unfortunately prevented possible successful housing examples due to the extreme requirements for building regulations in the city.

The housing shortage from which workers and part of the petty bourgeoisie suffer in our modern big cities is one of numerous smaller, secondary evils which result from the present-day capitalist mode of production. This exploitation is the basic evil which the social revolution strives to abolish by abolishing the capitalist mode of production.¹⁸

The political influence on architectural development was initially strong and was also evident in the development of Maribor, which experienced the industrial revolution in full almost a hundred years later than other European cities.

¹⁶ "Stanovanjska beda v Mariboru", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 24. 5. 1927, No. 20, p. 2.

¹⁷ "Ali bo stanovanjski zakon podaljšan?", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 20. 5. 1927, No. 17, p. 1.

¹⁸ Frederick Engels, "The housing question" (English translation of the second German edition of 1887), in: *Marxist Library volume XXIII*, ed. Clemens Palme Dutt (New York, 1935), p. 22.

The many 'riots' and 'outbreaks', spontaneous or organized strikes that accompanied the introduction of labour into the industrial way of working always indicate, in principle, a 'lack' of socialization, which was carried out primarily with economic coercion. Capital has begun to resort to mechanisms of socialization that operate more covertly. One such mechanism is housing construction or the housing question.¹⁹

The housing issue clearly had a double face in the case of Maribor. Simultaneously, there exists the aforementioned "capitalist" approach to "monitoring" its workers through supposedly favourable housing conditions, which is more evident during the latter half of the interwar period.²⁰ The crisis in the first 10 years after the war is completely unresolved, and despite the large amount of housing and housing construction, poverty and homelessness prevail due to the unprecedented influx of people. Statistical figures prove the lack of flats in Maribor. "In 1910, Maribor had 27994 inhabitants with 1296 houses, in 1921 30739 with 1455 houses and in 1931 33921 inhabitants with 1834 houses"²¹ This shows the general housing shortage, despite higher construction activity than before.

In the past six years, the population has certainly grown again by a few thousand. The number of dwellings in the city today is 1422, compared to 824 in 1890, but this increase is not as great as the increase in population. The difference has been particularly great in the post-war period because since 1921 we have had a total of only 74 new houses and only 265 flats in new, extended and remodelled buildings. The natural consequence of this is that we have far too few flats, that the flats are too full, and that people are crammed into unhealthy, rather uninhabitable spaces.²²

Construction and urban development in interwar Maribor

Despite the still unresolved spatial problems in the first 10 years after the war, the spatial deterioration caused by the "industrial revolution" in Maribor was quickly

¹⁹ Pavel Gantar, *Urbanizem, družbeni konflikti, planiranje* (Ljubljana, 1984), p. 37 (hereinafter: Gantar, *Urbanizem, družbeni konflikti, planiranje*).

²⁰ Darko Friš, Gregor Jenuš and Ana Šela, "Maribor med prevratom in senžermensko pogodbo: 'Zasijalo nam je sonce svobode: Maribor je jugoslovanski!'", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 60, No. 3 (2020) pp. 110–148.

²¹ Godina-Golija, "Stanovanjska kultura mariborskih delavcev v obdobju med obema vojnama", p. 27, according to Franjo Baš, "Razvoj Maribora v l. 1918–1938", in: *Prispevki k zgodovini severovzhodne Slovenije*, ed. Franjo Baš (Maribor, 1989), p. 268.

²² "Stanovanjska beda v Mariboru", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 24. 5. 1927, No. 20, p. 2.

restored by the necessary connection to the suburbs. Those finally connected to the city urbanistically and spatially, after being administratively part of the city since 1850s. After breakdown of Austria-Hungary and Maribor's designation as a Slovenian city in Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, its economic, geopolitical, and transportation functions changed. Maribor gained importance as a border town, while it was marginalized in the transport sector. Nevertheless, Maribor retained its role as the centre of Slovenian Styria, which was important for politics after the war. Since, as already mentioned, the city had lost its function as a transport hub and its commercial status began to decline, Maribor became vital for industry.²³ "The period of systematic Germanisation during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy ended in 1918 with the annexation of Maribor to Yugoslavia, the city came under Slovenian control and began to grow rapidly. Nevertheless, industrial magnates remained foreigners, mainly Germans and Jews²⁴, with Czech capital also playing a significant role. A large part of the middle class also considered themselves German."²⁵ Despite the great post-war crisis, this wealth enabled the steady development of industry, and there were many individuals at the top of business and industry who "managed" the economy of Maribor. These were mainly wealthy foreigners, but also people who slowly climbed the social ladder and eventually achieved success through industrial development, such as Josip Hutter, important Maribor industrialist.²⁶ When Maribor lost its strong connection to the northern part, to Vienna and Graz, it became politically and economically tied to the south. At the same time, Maribor stagnated and had to compensate for its lack of development, which led to competition with Ljubljana, which had developed mainly during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and was now a central point in this part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.²⁷

²³ Franjo Baš, "Razvoj Maribora v l. 1918–1938", in: *Kronika slovenskih mest* 6, No. 2 (1939), pp. 57–68 (hereinafter: Baš, "Razvoj Maribora v l. 1918–1938").

²⁴ Almost all Slovenian sources describe the first industrialists in Maribor as being of Czech, German and Jewish origin, with many from the Jewish community being "very active in business, especially in the textile industry, either as factory owners or in prominent positions, although most belonged to the bourgeois middle class." These industrialists came mainly from various regions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, including present-day Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary, but also from cities such as Vienna and, in some cases, Italy. One of the most important personalities in this respect, Marko Rosner, who founded one of the largest textile factories in Maribor, was born in Iacobenii, Romania, for example. Given the evolving understanding of national and religious identities, it is now more accurate to refer to these important industrial magnates as Germans, Austrians, Poles, Czechs, and Romanians. In the remainder of this essay, they will be referred to as foreigners rather than Slovenians, as this distinction also influenced the political environment and architectural developments in Maribor ("Jews in Maribor", available at: <https://www.sinagogamaribor.si/dediscina-sinagoga/judi-v-mariboru/>), accessed: 14. 8. 2024).

²⁵ Pirkovič-Kocbek, *Izgradnja sodobnega Maribora*, p. 11

²⁶ Jerneja Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor* (Maribor, 2008), pp. 7–10 (hereinafter: Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*).

²⁷ Baš, "Razvoj Maribora v l. 1918–1938", pp. 57–68.

The interwar period was characterised by brisk construction activity in Maribor, which brought both economic and spatial growth to the city. An important development was the completion of the Fala hydroelectric power plant in 1918, which supplied Maribor with electricity from 1920. This "powerful" addition, combined with the city's strategic location on the river, facilitated the development of various industries and marked the beginning of a flourishing chapter in Maribor's economic history.²⁸ "In 1922, foreign textile factories began to settle in Maribor. This phenomenon was attracted by the city's favourable conditions, which included an affordable electricity supply, cheap land and an abundant supply of cheap labour."²⁹

In the 1920s, various types of industry developed in the suburbs and the influx of workers from neighbouring municipalities to Maribor increased. At the same time, the Slovenisation of Maribor was the result of a large influx of Slovenes from the northern Littoral and coastal regions. Most of them moved away from the Littoral region due to the rise of fascism, and Maribor offered numerous jobs.³⁰

A large part of the bourgeois class counted themselves among the Germans because the Slovenes who emigrated from the Littoral region represented a new cultural and social factor. Together with the influx of people from the surrounding countryside, they created a new middle class that was culturally less authentic than the old Austrian one. This was one of the main reasons why cultural lethargy, provincialism, reticence, and conservatism prevailed in the old Yugoslavia.³¹

Many people also moved to Maribor from abroad, as the city's industrial boom demanded qualified specialists and engineers, most of whom were foreigners with higher status who also needed living space in Maribor. The fact that Maribor became such an industrial force in this part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes posed a drastic challenge to the architectural and spatial development of the city, especially in terms of housing, which was desperately needed for many of the workers who had either immigrated to Maribor or were already living here but could not afford a decent life. The city had not foreseen such a development and was not prepared for this influx, which led to a lack of housing for people and a lack of the necessary infrastructure for housing construction.³²

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, p. 17.

³⁰ Dragan Potočnik, "Primorski Slovenci v Mariboru 1918–1941", *Annales. Series historia et sociologia* 21, No. 1 (2011), pp. 55–70.

³¹ Pirkovič-Kocbek, *Izgradnja sodobnega Maribora*, pp. 11–12.

³² "Stanovanjska beda v Mariboru", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 24. 5. 1927, No. 20, p. 2.



Postcard of Maribor: factories in Melje and Pobrežje, 1930s (PAM, SI_PAM/1693 Zbirka fotografij in razglednic 19.–21. st., sign. A1.3.3-30, SI_PAM/1693/001/003_00030, 1 postcard)

Large factories were built in the suburbs of Orešje (today's Melje) (*Fig. 4*), Tezno, Studenci and Tabor, as well as in Pobrežje. The older factories: Mills, breweries and the food industry began to shrink as import/export was almost impossible due to the Austrian protection policy. Trade began with other parts of Yugoslavia, but competition in Belgrade and Sarajevo quickly cancelled this opportunity. Nevertheless, the new state opened other opportunities in the textile and metal industry, which, as already mentioned, was mainly run by foreigners in Maribor. Many of them were of Jewish descent, which led to further political changes before the Second World War, that we will discuss later in the text.³³

As industrialisation and urbanisation in the 1920s raised numerous questions about social housing and how to accommodate the influx of migrant workers attracted to the cities by the demands of the factories, there are several examples from abroad that influenced social housing construction in Slovenia and especially in Maribor. During this period, architects in Slovenia were mainly concerned with this topic and adopted ideas from abroad.³⁴

³³ Baš, "Razvoj Maribora v l. 1918–1938" pp. 57–68.

³⁴ Marjeta Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru* (Ljubljana, 2014), pp. 6–11 (hereinafter: Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*).

Architectural currents and trends from abroad

Foremost, it must be mentioned that the period after the First World War was also a great time of change in architecture, when modernism emerged as a new and fresh style with the use of new materials. As the industrial revolution brought technological advances in many sciences, architecture was not forgotten. Cast iron, drywall, glass panels and reinforced concrete were revolutionary innovations that led to thinner, stronger, taller and lighter structures. After a few examples of new ideas in architecture and design in the second half of the 19th century, the trend towards modernism flourished after the First World War. With the work of Le Corbusier and other architects such as Adolf Loos, representatives of the Bauhaus, Mies Van der Rohe, etc., new ideas also emerged in south-east and Central Europe, making new architectural designs possible. However, the tendencies and acceptance of the new styles differed among the architects, which consequently led to different ideas on how to solve the housing problems in the cities.³⁵

Two common building types were block and perimeter development and gap development. In addition to public housing, new social, cultural and commercial hubs were created, which transformed entire areas that were once designated as industrial zones into multifunctional urban quarters. Instead of inserting itself into the city centre, the residential quarters created socialized urban islands on the industrial fringes of the city.³⁶

The architectural landscape of interwar Slovenia was profoundly shaped by foreign influences, which local architects adapted to regional needs. Ivan Vurnik's career exemplifies this trajectory. His core architectural philosophy remained consistently engaged with international socio-urban ideals. This framework, that will be expanded in further chapters, which he advanced through his teaching and public writing, makes his work – and the Maribor colony in particular – a vital starting point for understanding the translation of global housing concepts into the specific political and cultural context of interwar Maribor.

³⁵ Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture, a critical history* (London, 2020); Karl-Heinz Hüter, *Architektur in Berlin 1900–1933* (Dresden, 1987).

³⁶ Eva Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna. 1919–1934* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), p. 282 (hereinafter: Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna. 1919–1934*).



Red house, arch. Vladimir Mušič (*Ilustrirani Slovenec*, 15. 2. 1931, No. 7, pp. 54–55)

Social housing development in Slovenia with a focus on Maribor

The migration of the surrounding population to Maribor was spurred by the rapid development of industry, particularly the textile industry, from 1922 onward, as previously mentioned. A comparison of population growth data with occupational statistics reveals that the city's working-class districts grew the most. In 1931, only 30.9% of the population in the city of Maribor itself was employed in trade and industry, compared to 40-50% in the municipalities of Pobrežje, Tezno, and Radvanje, and as much as 63.3% in the municipality of Studenci.³⁷

The social background of this workforce is equally critical to understanding their housing needs. The majority of textile workers were of agrarian proletariat descent, with parents who were vineyard laborers, day laborers, or cottars. A smaller, but still significant, proportion of textile workers were from semi-peasant families or those of small craftsmen. This meant that they would have desired to live with gardens and animals, as Ivan Vurnik had envisioned in

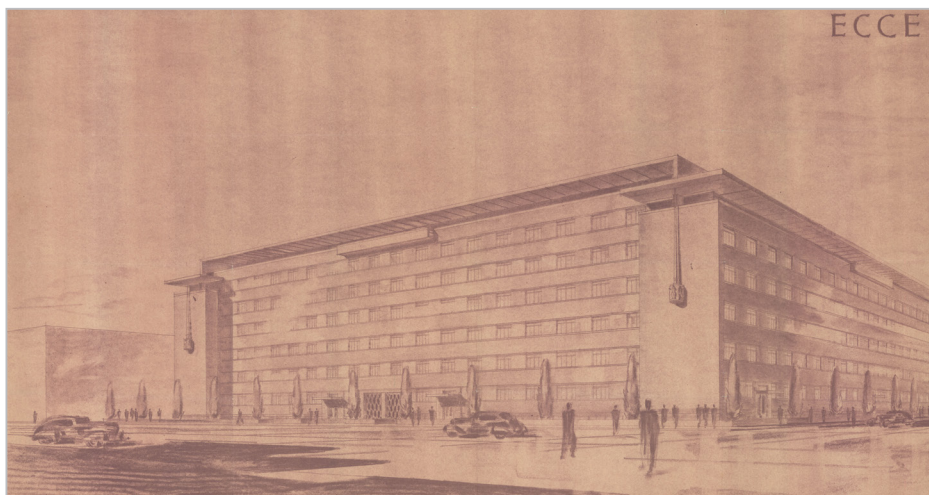
³⁷ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, p. 27, according to *Gospodarska struktura Slovenije v luči poklicne statistike in delavskega zavarovanja* (Ljubljana, 1939), p. 18.



Meksika building, arch. Vladimir Šubic (*Architectuul*, available at: <https://architectuul28.21.com/architecture/meksika/media/53024a10-bcb8-4b31-882d-46b06d7b5e1b>, accessed: 25. 3. 2025)

his ideas, which were later discussed at Vurnik's workers' colony.³⁸ Although the majority of Maribor's workers did not live in planned workers' colonies, they occupied a diverse range of housing, including modest rental flats, unsanitary rental rooms, cellars, and attics, as well as the most primitive accommodations, such as barrack-huts, waggons, or even under bridges. This was true even for the two most important groups of the city's industrial workforce – the textile and railway workers. While some, particularly qualified textile workers, lived in factory-owned apartments near their workplace, this was not the norm. For instance, in 1924, the owner of the Doctor & Drug factory built a residential house for foremen and clerks at Tvorniška cesta 12, containing one two-room flat, twelve one-room flats, and four attic rooms. For its technical staff, the same owner purchased another 48 uncomfortable apartments on Ruška cesta. Since these specialists mostly came from Czechoslovakia, the building was nicknamed the "Czech House," a name that persists to this day. In similar strategy of repurposing existing structures, the industrialist Ehrlich adapted spaces in the former Dragonska military barracks on Jezdarska and Žolgarjeva streets,

³⁸ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, p. 30; Ciglencečki, "Urbanistična podoba Maribora v 19. in 20. stoletju", pp. 531–556.



Gradišče (now known as Hutter blok), arch. Saša Dev and arch. Jaroslav Černigoj (PAM, SI_PAM/0011 Uprava za gradnje in regulacijo Maribor 1840–1963, SI_PAM/0011/056/00011, gradbeni načrt Hutter bloka, [1940], MA/614 – Maistrova ulica 10 v Mariboru, [1940])

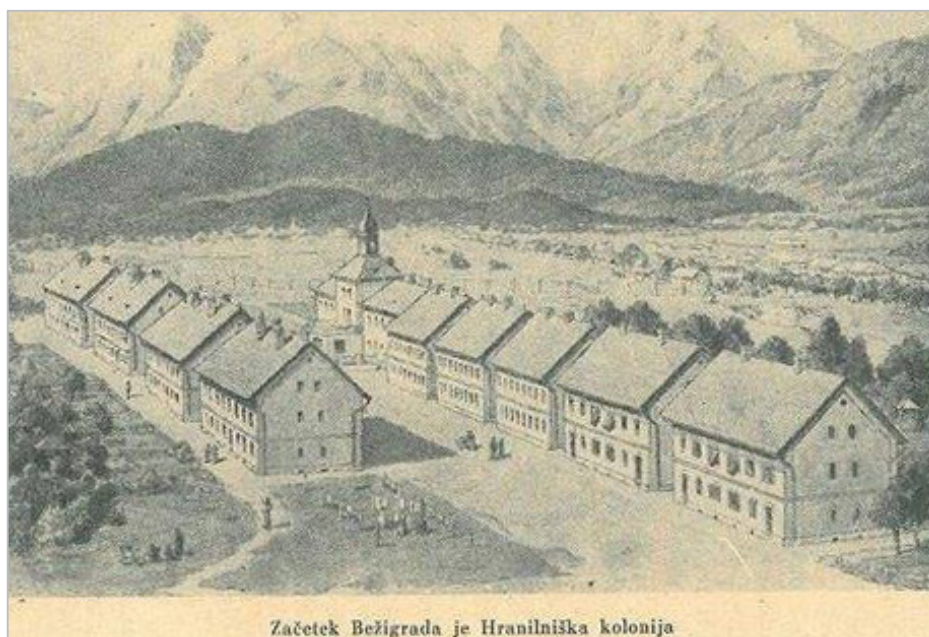
creating 115 apartments. These were typically larger rooms that tenants subsequently partitioned into a kitchen and a living space.³⁹ This proliferation of various forms of emergency housing underscored the sheer lack of opportunities to live in adequate accommodation at a price the burgeoning working class could afford.⁴⁰

This context of industrial growth and worker influx framed a divisive debate among Slovenian politicians and architects over which building trend could best solve the social problem. In Ljubljana, the authorities were more enthusiastic about the third trend of the apartment block and tried to realize a similar project with the Meksika building by architect Vladimir Šubic and the Red House by Vladimir Mušič.⁴¹ (Fig. 5, 6, 7) Unfortunately, unlike the Viennese example, these buildings were mainly inhabited by civil servants and the upper class, while the workers were housed in suburban blocks, small houses or even barrack-hut settlements on the outskirts of the city. In the (then) up-and-coming suburb of Ljubljana – Bežigrad – for example, there was already a first colony in Hranilniška ulica in the 19th century, similar to the railway colony in Maribor, but much smaller. However, there was also the railway colony in Ljubljana, the Ford colony and the Zelena jama, which were established at the

³⁹ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 48–49.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 52–66; Jerneja Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru* (Maribor, 2009), pp. 48–162 (hereinafter: Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*).

⁴¹ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, p. 19.



Hranilniška colony in Ljubljana (*Stare fotografije in razglednice Ljubljane*, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ljubljana.nekoc/posts/hranilniška-kolonija-za-bežigradom-je-nastala-po-letu-1880-kar-štejemo-za-zamete/839874809461554/>, accessed: 18. 6. 2024)

beginning of the 20th century.⁴² (Fig. 8, 9, 10) This shows the necessary development of housing construction between the two world wars and the need for new housing in this geographical area.

In Maribor, a similar architectural trend emerged from an urban planning vision to expand the city with residential and industrial areas. Districts like Koroška vrata, Studenci, Tabor and Pobrežje, expanded the previously small city centre. The apartment blocks on Smetanova ulica 30, 32, and Prežihova ulica 9–11, which were designed by Maks Czeike for the Municipality⁴³, Smetanova 34–38⁴⁴, which were designed by Albin Černe for the Municipality, and Maistrova ulica 6⁴⁵, which was designed by Josip Makišić for the First Croatian Savings Bank of Zagreb, are all key examples of this urban densification. These devel-

⁴² Nevenka Židov, "Bežigrajsko predmestje od konca 19. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne", *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 62=Nv27, No. 1 (1991), pp. 124–127.

⁴³ Pokrajinski arhiv Maribor (PAM), fond Uprava za gradnje in regulacijo Maribor (1840–1963), AŠ 325, 292, 293, Gradbeni spisi in dokumentacija za Smetanovo 30 in 32 ter Prežihovo 9 in 11.

⁴⁴ PAM, fond Uprava za gradnje in regulacijo Maribor (1840–1963), AŠ 325, Gradbeni spisi in dokumentacija za Smetanovo 34–38.

⁴⁵ PAM, fond Uprava za gradnje in regulacijo Maribor (1840–1963), AŠ 183, Gradbeni spisi in dokumentacija za Maistrovo 6.



Vurnik's workers' colony Maribor (PAM, SI_PAM/1889 Zavod za urbanizem Maribor, SI_PAM/1889/001/001/00003, photo, author: Anton Vončina, 1954)

opments were also in accordance with infrastructural regulation plans during the interwar era, but they lacked true urban planning regulation plans. On the other hand, the peripheral suburbs of Studenci, Tabor, and Pobrežje were characterized by smaller terraced or single-family houses.⁴⁶

However, it is important to emphasize that this development obscures a much harsher and more complex reality. The majority of Maribor's industrial workforce navigated a precarious housing that extended far beyond the formal rental market. The experience of renting itself was highly segregated. The account of Branka Jurca vividly illustrates the stark contrast, even in the middle class, between a prestigious rental apartment in the city centre and a suburban rental home. In the latter, the multipurpose "living kitchen" was the hub of daily life, while other rooms were used only for sleeping. In the upper-class apartment, the kitchen was exclusively the cook's domain, and family life unfolded in a series of specialized, often opulently furnished rooms like the reception room, dining room, and bright girls' room.⁴⁷ Social conditions in tenement houses on streets like Maistrova and Smetanova were mixed, housing families of police officials, actors, professors, a district governor, the propertied owner, and a caretaker or carpenter in a court-

⁴⁶ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, pp. 48–162.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.



Josip Hutter's colony in Maribor (PAM, SI_PAM/1889 Zavod za urbanizem Maribor ca. 19. st.–1990, TE 4/55, Hutter kolonija na Pobrežju, photo, 1937)

yard cottage, revealing a microcosm of urban society.⁴⁸ All were tenants, paying rent that was a heavier or lighter burden depending on their means, a financial commitment that could change with shifting family or economic circumstances.⁴⁹

For the most vulnerable – recent migrants, underpaid workers, and the destitute – the situation was dire. The city's infrastructure was overwhelmed, leading to the proliferation of informal settlements in converted cellars, attics, and former military barracks, where large rooms were partitioned by tenants into minimal living spaces.⁵⁰ Smaller, lower-quality apartments were created in the less visible areas of the city by property owners commissioning plans to add storeys to courtyard tracts or new buildings in the back of plots. These apartments were then rented to the lower classes and incoming migrants.⁵¹ The most visible symbols of the crisis were the barrack-hut and waggon settlements, such as those in Dajnkova ulica, where families lived in conditions described as "unworthy of a human," with multiple individuals often sharing a single room and sleeping on straw on the floor.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 106–107.

⁵⁰ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 48–49.

⁵¹ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, p. 103.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 169–186; Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 52–66.

And so, as here, people live in barracks in Dajnkova street, in the Dragonska and Dravska military barracks, in all the innumerable cellars and laundries... The number of families living in spaces unworthy of a human being in the entire city amounts to 500, if not more. There are families who live in just a single room with a stove, and besides that, have ten workers lodging with them, who sleep on the floor, on straw and rags.⁵³

This complex mosaic, ranging from crowded rented rooms to temporary shacks, reveals that the workers' housing question was not a single problem but a stratified crisis, where one's position within the lower classes dictated a vastly different lived reality.

In the context of social housing in Maribor, the Studenci and Tabor neighbourhoods are particularly worth mentioning, as they were the first Maribor neighbourhoods with a workers' colony, first the 19th century railway colony and then the Vurnik workers' colony, which we will discuss in more detail later in the text.

During these 20 years of industrial boom in Maribor, there were also several other colonies, such as the famous colony of Josip Hutter, alongside other alleged workers' housing, such as the Smetanova street blocks and Maistrova street mentioned earlier and even, Josip Hutter's apartment block, known as Gradišče, now "Hutterblok". Additionally, there were other multi-apartment houses that were constructed during this period, primarily by the municipality or banks and loans.

However, the term "workers' housing" is often a misnomer. These larger housing estates, while possibly comparable to the Karl-Marx-Hof in Vienna in scale, were not built for industrial workers. Examining the actual residents reveals they were intended for wealthier municipal workers, the middle class, bureaucracy, higher-paid engineers, and the free market for higher class in case of "Hutterblok", having been built either by industrialists or by banks and loans.⁵⁴ This strongly suggests that the housing crisis affected not only the workers, but also the middle and upper classes, as there was a significant shortage of housing. Suddenly, the number of inhabitants increased so much that the city was no longer able to build or offer a sufficient number of new flats.⁵⁵ The fact that even flats in colonies like Vurnik's and Hutter's were often unaffordable for lower-paid workers and were instead occupied by higher-paid work-

⁵³ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*, p. 67; Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 52–66.

⁵⁵ "Stanovanjska beda v Mariboru", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 24. 5. 19257, No. 20, p. 2.

ers and retailers,⁵⁶ leads to the need to examine the socio-political and cultural influences on the architectural development of housing construction during this period.

Initiatives to solve the housing shortage typically came from the city itself, which constructed residential buildings for the lower classes, facilitated individual construction through favourable credit and land purchases, and engaged in repurposing buildings with different original functions. Though these were often still meagre and temporary solutions. The Vurnik colony, while pioneering, was an exception. The profound housing crisis and the pronounced economic stratification within Maribor's lower classes are underscored by this fragmented reality, which ranges from the relative comfort of planned colonies to the squalor of temporary shelters.⁵⁷

The examples of workers' colonies in Maribor are presented in different variants, which were characterised either by the industrialists and their relations with the workers or by influences from abroad. From Ivan Vurnik's colony to Josip Hutter's colony and other attempts to build larger apartment blocks, the topic of social housing raises the important question of how it was actually dealt with, what it meant for architectural development and how the political influenced the spatial when combining the sociological with the architectural.

It is crucial to understand that the development of social housing was profoundly shaped by the city's unique political and cultural landscape. Maribor was characterized by a significant duality: a politically dominant Slovenian administration following the post-WWI Slovenisation policies, and a demographically and culturally persistent German-Austrian character among a substantial part of its populace. While political institutions were systematically Slovenized after 1918, the city's everyday culture, social networks, and economic foundations retained a strong German-Austrian imprint. This created a complex environment where political will often was tempered by socio-economic realities. Economically, the German-speaking bourgeoisie and industrialists remained a powerful force, influencing urban development through their control of capital and industry. Their continued presence in the public sphere, through various organizations and associations, ensured that their interests could not be ignored, creating a certain political instability and reinforcing the city's distinct character within the region.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*, pp. 67–68; Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 52–66, "Stanovanjska beda v Mariboru", *Mariborski večernik jutra*, 24. 5. 19257, No. 20, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, pp. 169–186; Ciglencečki, "Urbanistična podoba Maribora v 19. in 20. stoletju", pp. 531–556.

⁵⁸ Žarko Lazarevič, "Nemci in mariborsko gospodarstvo", in: *Nemci in Maribor: stoletje preobratov: 1846–1946*, ed. Jerneja Ferlež (Maribor, 2012) pp. 87–90.

This socio-political context also dictated architectural influences. Although the city competed economically and culturally with Ljubljana and other "Yugoslav" cities, its most significant cultural and intellectual reference points remained Vienna, where most of its educated elite, including engineers and architects, had studied. The Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana, founded only in 1920, had not yet produced a critical mass of graduates to shift this professional paradigm. Consequently, architectural ideas, including those concerning social housing, were filtered through a Viennese-educated lens, directly linking Maribor's built environment to the intellectual currents of the former imperial capital.⁵⁹

As in Vienna, attempts were also made in Slovenia, particularly in Ljubljana and Maribor, to solve the necessary social issues in connection with the building industry. Due to the extreme increase in industrialisation and urbanisation, the latter did not have sufficient infrastructure for mass housing construction, so the city leadership had to tackle this problem inconspicuously. Although the city council was in the hands of social democrats after the First World War, the mayor was a pedagogue, so they were mainly concerned with the education of the lower classes and often forgot about the housing aspect. The first party to work on this was the Slovenian People's Party (*Slovenska ljudska stranka* – SLS) with the mayor Dr Josip Leskovar in the period from 1924 to 1927, but the greatest progress was made during the time of the mayor Dr. Alojzij Juvan, a progressive lawyer who wanted to make Maribor a cultural and metropolitan city. In the first period after the First World War, a large part of Maribor's population was affected by the crisis, which led to poor living conditions for the lower classes and the new emigrants from the Primorska region, which was exacerbated by the global economic crisis from 1929, which led to an even more extreme decline in labour and flats. Good living conditions prevailed only among the Germans and Slovenes, who still counted themselves as Germans even after Slovenisation, and the upper class.⁶⁰

During this period, the city administration built many apartment buildings and suggested banks and companies to invest in flats for their workers and civil servants, which led to the construction of many apartment buildings in the city centre, which the majority of the population could not afford. These flats were mostly for the middle or upper classes and not for the workers who came from the periphery or the countryside.

'Some banks built for their employees – the first Croatian savings bank in Mastrova Street, the Commercial Bank renovated the former Hotel Stadt Wien in

⁵⁹ Pirkovič-Kocbek, *Izgradnja sodobnega Maribora*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Maksimiljan Fras, *Mariborski župan dr. Alojzij Juvan in njegov čas* (Maribor, 2013), pp. 54–57 (hereinafter: Fras, *Mariborski župan dr. Alojzij Juvan in njegov čas*).

Aleksandrova Street, the Ljubljana Credit Bank renovated the former Hotel Erzherzog Johann on the corner of Herrengasse and Slovenian Street.⁶¹

According to civil law, the city was divided into several municipalities, namely the municipality of Maribor and the suburban municipalities of Pobrežje, Tezno, Studenci, Radvanje and Krčevina. Immediately after the war, an attempt was made to unite the districts, but the proposal failed because the workers, who had the upper hand in the suburbs, could outvote the number of councillors, which the ruling parties could not allow. The division of the urban area into several administrative units led to inconsistencies in building and municipal policy, which only increased the confusion in the area and prevented a comprehensive intervention.⁶²

The exploitation of the housing crisis and the economic boom was not only the result of property owners, but also of private developers who built for individual investors and invested the profits in their own rental flats.

Between the two wars, the economic, social and cultural conditions mentioned above led to lively building activity, the city grew beyond its mediaeval boundaries and merged into suburbs. As a result, single-family house building took up most of the urban area, mostly in the form of suburban neighbourhoods, which made up almost two thirds of the city. However, this was due to extreme fragmentation and inadequate public utilities and urban planning regulations. The poorest population continued to live mostly in poor conditions, in the barrack-hut settlements, in temporary flats in converted factories, barns, etc.⁶³

The influence of Red Vienna

Based on the writings of the architect Ivan Vurnik, many ideas for new architectural trends originated in Vienna, where the examples of the three trends were successfully utilized by the city authorities. The basis of the social housing policy that became active after the First World War, at the time of Red Vienna, became a model for the successful management of housing, not only in Europe but throughout the world.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, p. 175, according to "Kdo zida in kdo izrablja stanovanjsko bedo", *Slovenec*, 8. 9. 1922, No. 196, pp. 5–6.

⁶² Pirkovič-Kocbek, *Izgradnja sodobnega Maribora*, p. 12.

⁶³ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 52–66; Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, pp. 169–186.

⁶⁴ Vurnik, "O reševanju stanovanjski krize v zapadni Evropi", pp. 145–148; Haderer, *Rebuilding City and Citizens*, pp. 27–36.

The era of Red Vienna, which brought about major changes in the field of social housing, historically began after the First World War, between 1918 and 1934, when the Social Democrats took the lead. They championed social values, emphasised culture, defended social and health services, a balanced tax policy and, above all, public housing. "Instead of regarding access to decent housing as a privilege, the Social Democrats stipulated housing as a right."⁶⁵ Over the next decade, from 1919, they built 382 *Gemeinedebauten* (municipal housing blocks), to which they added communal facilities such as kindergartens, libraries, theatres, shops, public gardens, sports facilities, social clubs and polyclinics. "Neue Menschen"⁶⁶ were expected to flourish in the new housing complexes, men, and women surmised, to actualize the promise of socialism."⁶⁷ The workers' flats were built within the existing urban structure, as urban extensions or on the outskirts of the city. The so-called *Gegenbauten* (counter-buildings), thus complemented the existing buildings and developed into socio-spatial complexes that characterised the existence of the working class in the city.

The systemic changes had already begun during the First World War, but 1922 was a turning point for most social legislation and enabled the flourishing of social housing in Vienna. The first law, initiated in 1917 but not enacted until 1922, was a federal rent control law with tenant protection, which was one of the most important measures and most successful achievements for workers and the poorer classes. At the same time, the new laws of 1922 gave workers voting rights. "The right to vote. politically enfranchised workers while rent control reversed the power relations between landlords and tenants, power relations that fuelled competing political camps and, on the urban scale, social-spatial segregation."⁶⁸

The aforementioned policies in the city of Vienna opened up new opportunities. (*Fig. 11*)

These developments, coupled with the fact that in 1922 Vienna also became a federal state equipped with extra fiscal prerogatives a municipality does not have, put Vienna in an advantageous financial situation to acquire the land and build the industry necessary to realize its comprehensive public housing program. By 1928, the municipality owned approximately one-quarter of the total area of Greater Vienna.⁶⁹

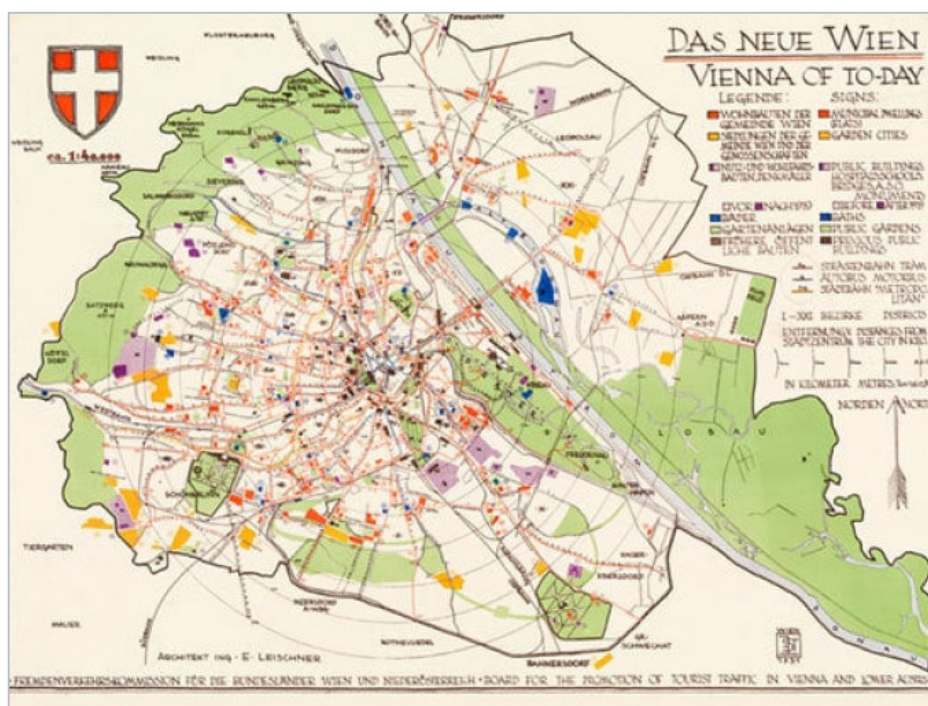
⁶⁵ Otto Bauer, "Der Weg zum Sozialismus", in: *Werkausgabe*, 2, ed. Otto Bauer (Vienna, 1976), pp. 89–131.

⁶⁶ Max Adler, *Neue Menschen: Gedanken über sozialistische Erziehung* (Berlin, 1924).

⁶⁷ Haderer, *Rebuilding City and Citizens*, p. 28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁹ Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna. 1919–1934*, p. 141.



Plan of new regulation plan for Vienna under social-democrats (*Werkbundsiedlung*, available at: www.werkbundsiedlung-wien.at/en/background/the-housing-programme-of-red-vienna, accessed: 12. 1. 2025)

In addition to these factors, the decisive part of the reforms was the introduction of the "Housing Construction tax", which directly raised the money needed for housing construction (around 40%). This progressive tax, introduced in 1923, is also known as the "Breitner tax" and is calculated based on the annual rent for flats and commercial premises. Within a decade, the Social Democrats were able to exceed their housing targets and built a total of 64,000 flats, making Vienna the largest landlord by 1934 and providing more than 11% of the population with affordable housing.⁷⁰

This robust, tax-funded model stood in stark contrast to the situation in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. As mentioned earlier, they tried to achieve similar goals through its Housing Act of 1925, but it took barely two years before tenant protection was abolished, preventing further progress. The tenant protection (*stanovanjska zaščita*) importantly influenced the housing crisis at the time, and partially succeeded to solve it: the housing crisis was, as

⁷⁰ Ibid.

mentioned earlier, a problem also due to the First World War, not only due to the industrial boom at the time.⁷¹

The Slovenian approach relied not on public construction, but on legislating control over the existing private housing stock. The legal framework of tenant protection evolved through several key laws. As France Kresal documents, the first intervention came swiftly: "Due to the severe housing shortage in cities and industrial centres after World War I, the National Government of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in Ljubljana issued a decree on December 6, 1918, on the right of municipalities to intervene in housing matters."⁷² This decree empowered municipalities to requisition empty and underutilized apartments, stipulating that "Each adult [was entitled to] one room, as were two children."⁷³ A housing office could evict both owners and tenants to reassign space based on family size. This system of requisitions was abolished for new buildings by the Housing Act of December 30, 1921, but protection for existing housing stock remained. The pivotal Housing Act of May 15, 1925, further refined these controls.

"The new Housing Act /.../ continued to restrict owners' freedom to dispose of apartments in old buildings,"⁷⁴ while exempting all new constructions from regulation. The law established a housing court and contained strict provisions: "The owner of the house had to report every apartment that became vacant due to a move to the housing court; /.../ Only those designated by the housing court could move into a vacant apartment."⁷⁵ Priority was given to civil servants, war invalids, widows, orphans, and workers whose family income did not exceed 3,000 dinars.

Crucially, this regulatory system lacked a sustainable financial foundation. In contrast, taxes were not increased in Slovenia. The cheap land and cheap labour meant that the wealthy no longer cared for the welfare of their workers, but made them work more. This economic reality fostered a particular ideological view of the housing problem.

Poor housing conditions (housing shortage as a result of massive migration to the cities and poor housing conditions as a result of the social situation of tenants began to function in the ideological lens of capital as a reason for low productivity, revolts, and strikes. In this view, the elimination of poor housing condi-

⁷¹ France Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike v Sloveniji od liberalizma do druge svetovne vojne* (Ljubljana, 1998), p. 71 (hereinafter: Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike v Sloveniji*).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 72

⁷⁵ Ibid.

tions should also mean the elimination of the causes of the inactive behaviour of the working class. The slogan "good housing makes a good worker" emerged. In other words, it is not enough to control the worker at work, but it is above all necessary to control his living or housing conditions.⁷⁶

The fundamental issue remained that properties were predominantly private, and municipalities lacked the financial resources to invest in social housing, as was the case in Vienna. This situation was also a consequence of the legislative framework itself, beginning with the first Housing Act of 1921, which left the management of the rents to the property owners; people who could no longer pay the rents were evicted one month after the first reminder. Although the 1925 law temporarily reinstated rent controls, but only for a short time, with the law that abolished rent regulation in 1928.

The inherent instability of this system was fully exposed when core protections lapsed. Following the official expiration of tenant protection on November 11, 1926, Kresal records that "the residents' anxiety has risen again due to pressure from landlords, who have threatened to terminate their leases and raise rents."⁷⁷ While mass protests forced a temporary ban on evictions until May 1, 1928, the state-mandated control over private housing allocation ended permanently thereafter.

Ultimately, the system of tenant protection was progressively hollowed out, not only by direct legislative relaxation but also by a parallel reality: the proliferation of new construction that operated entirely outside its regulatory scope. As Kresal notes: "The very lively construction activity in the first decade after World War I greatly changed the numerical ratio between old and new and adapted dwellings."⁷⁸ This wave of building, undertaken by a diverse coalition of state, municipal, corporate, and private actors, may have increased the housing stock, but it fundamentally failed to address the affordability crisis for the city's most vulnerable residents.⁷⁹

Local attempts to replicate Vienna's financial model were thwarted by higher state authorities. During Alojzij Juvan's term of office, the Maribor city administration tried to introduce a tax similar to that of the Vienna Social Democrats, where rents were taxed above the golden parity. Unfortunately, the administration had to withdraw the decree because the Ministry of Finance presumed that the decision meant a restriction on the free disposal of property

⁷⁶ Gantar, *Urbanizem, družbeni konflikti, planiranje*, p. 37.

⁷⁷ Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike v Sloveniji*, p. 73

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. after France Kresal, "Stanovanjska zaščita in gradnja stanovanj v važnejših delavskih središčih v Sloveniji od leta 1918 do 1930.", *Kronika* XVIII, No. 2 (1970), pp. 105–112.

for owners. With the unsystematic political solutions, which also depended on the Dravska Banovina government, the administration in Maribor could neither manage social housing nor financial investments in social housing, as was the case in Vienna.⁸⁰

Despite its eventual end, the legacy of Red Vienna was profound, not least in its architectural influence. Although the Red Vienna social housing came to an end in the 1930s, its legacy is still present today: "Black Vienna, an anti-marxist and antisemitic alliance of which had mobilized against Red Vienna throughout its existence, was to ultimately bring an end to the experiment in democratic municipal socialism, but not to one of its legacies: the decommmodification of one quarter of the city's housing stock."⁸¹

This architectural connection was personal; the intellectual foundation for many Slovenian architects was formed in the same Viennese milieu. Important for Slovenian architecture was the fact that almost all the architects of Red Vienna, including the Slovenian architects, were former students of Otto Wagner at the Vienna Technical School (today's Vienna University of Technology). In their plans, there was a clear line of thought from Otto Wagner, who created a balance between modern urban life, locality, and history in his urban planning and design. In contrast to his colleague Camillo Sitte, he was still future-orientated and wanted to build for modern people. However, Wagner was not the modernist architect of the 1920s and did not try to invent new forms but wanted to teach his students to work creatively with the given local, material and financial conditions. He always encouraged his students to ask themselves an important question before embarking on a new project:

How will this solution relate to modern men, to the assignment, to the genius loci, the climatic conditions, the materials at hand and the financial means? Only thus can you hope to elicit true appreciation, and only then will the works of architecture that today are met for the most part with incomprehension or a certain tentativeness become generally understandable, original and even popular.⁸²

The pioneers of Slovenian architectural modernism were also students of Otto Wagner – the oldest Maks Fabiani, later a professor at the Technical University in Vienna, the most famous of them Jože Plečnik and the youngest Ivan Vurnik, the founder of the architecture programme at the Technical University

⁸⁰ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 11–18; Fras, *Mariborski župan dr. Alojzij Juhan in njegov čas*, pp. 54–57.

⁸¹ Haderer, *Rebuilding City and Citizens*, p. 29.

⁸² Otto Wagner, *Modern Architecture: A Guidebook for his Students to this Field of Art*. (Santa Monica, CA, 1988), p. 160.

in Ljubljana. Despite their extremely different architectural styles, which they developed as individuals, each of their architecture reflects the upper thinking of Otto Wagner. This is also a key element of social housing in Slovenia, which Ivan Vurnik was instrumental in solving.⁸³

Ivan Vurnik and his architectural vision

Ivan Vurnik was initially a student of Karl Mayreder and Karl König, but later also joined Otto Wagner's seminar. Nevertheless, one has to ask whether he did not identify himself as a student of Maks Fabiani, who was initially König's assistant and later became a professor. Vurnik came to the Wagner School through his intercession. Vurnik always spoke very respectfully and kindly about Fabiani and regarded him as a mentor: "/.../ Professor Fabiani was always friendly to me /.../ Fabiani orientated me towards Wagner, so that by 1911 I too had already joined this 'circle of thinking'".⁸⁴

In 1911, he undertook a three-month study trip to Rome, as he had received a travelling scholarship from König. There he explored the monuments of antiquity and the Renaissance, which later became clearly visible in his work. He then worked in Baumann's architectural office in Vienna until 1915, when he returned to his home town of Radovljica and was drafted into the war. After the First World War, he moved to Ljubljana in 1919, where he founded the architecture programme at the Technical School in Ljubljana and invited Jože Plečnik to teach there. During their years at the faculty, differences, and competition grew considerably, which led to the development of two architectural currents from which the graduates emerged – Plečnik's and Vurnik's school.⁸⁵

Vurnik's early style was clearly Art Nouveau (Secession), especially for Slovenia, while he also wanted to establish the Slovenian national style, in which he emphasised ornament and sculpture and, above all, patterns derived from Slovenian folk culture, which are clearly recognizable in his architecture. One of the most striking examples of this style is the Cooperative Business Bank building in Ljubljana. He had his own style, in which he used various artistic elements that other architects in the area did not utilize. His architecture is not comparable to that of other architects in Slovenia, as Fabiani confirms:

⁸³ Marko Pozzetto, "Ivan Vurnik and the Technische Hochschule in Vienna", *Arbitektov bilten* 24, No. 119–124 (1994) – *special edition: Ivan Vurnik, 1884–1971, slovenski arhitekt, compendium*, ed. Janez Koželj, pp. 53–58 (hereinafter: Pozzetto, "Ivan Vurnik and the Technische Hochschule in Vienna").

⁸⁴ Pozzetto, "Ivan Vurnik and the Technische Hochschule in Vienna", p. 55.

⁸⁵ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 18–26.

During his last visit to Ljubljana, in July 1960, he answered a direct question concerning his opinion of Vurnik: 'It is not yet possible to speak of Vurnik; he has talent, but of a different sort, of a different quality, from that of Plečnik. If I say Plečnik, I cannot speak of Vurnik; it is a different system, a different world. Vurnik has particular decorative talent, and with that, I am not reducing his stature, but I cannot compare him to Plečnik.'⁸⁶

In 1925, he was invited to take part in the international exhibition in Paris, whereupon he visibly turned to functionalism. Vurnik initially remained theoretical with his examples of functionalist building but began with the aforementioned "garden cities" – settlements of terraced houses with gardens for workers. He wrote about his findings and examples from abroad in several articles in newspapers and magazines, *Dom in svet*, *Slovenec* and *Koledar družbe sv. Mohorja*, with which he defended low-cost social family housing that only the workers could afford, while they kept the house after paying off the rent or loan.

Ivan Vurnik and his view on social housing

Ivan Vurnik was undoubtedly one of the most important advocates of social housing, that he also taught at the faculty he founded in Ljubljana in 1920.⁸⁷ He wrote numerous articles in public newspapers in which he presented this type of housing to the common people and showed possibilities for the working class, who were in urgent need of affordable housing. Ivan Vurnik studied garden cities and other settlements in England, the Netherlands, Germany, and France and presented, explained and proposed these concepts in his articles. From his articles it is clear, he knew Ebenezer Howard's book *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1898) very well and read the German magazine *Deutsche Gartenstadts-Gesellschaft*, in which such settlements were presented. However, he had already become familiar with the concepts during his studies in Vienna, and he also followed the international housing congresses in Vienna in 1910 and 1926 – although the sources are not clear rather, he was a participant there or he followed them through architectural writings and media. The examples from the neighbouring, then extremely social-democratic Vienna, the so-called Red Vienna, where housing policy was widespread and showed good examples of workers' housing in industrial cities and successful urban planning solutions

⁸⁶ Pozzetto, "Ivan Vurnik and the Technische Hochschule in Vienna", p. 58.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

for connecting different social classes, gave him the idea of implementing such planning in Slovenia. By researching garden cities and terraced housing estates, writing in the aforementioned newspapers, he developed his own example of a small, 34.5 m² terraced house that could be built in any Slovenian town, with the plans freely available.⁸⁸

He defended low-cost social family housing that workers could actually afford, while keeping the house after paying off the rent or loan.

In my opinion, the solution to this question lies in how to build a fully furnished house with the technical means available today for so much money that every hard-working labourer can afford the payment and interest. All the aesthetic and economic problems we talked about in the introduction are possible if the main obstacle is removed, and that is the financial question. /.../ As far as payments are concerned, they should be so low that the housewife can pay for the whole house alone if she rents the room and the study on the first floor and takes care of these two cells alone.⁸⁹

In his writings he defended the quality of life, cosiness and even self-sufficiency because with a garden, the family can help itself to survive. He did not agree with the large workers' "*Kasernes*", as he called the Viennese perimeter block developments, for example Karl-Marx Hoff. (*Fig. 12*) Rather, he defended the fact that having an own house with a garden meant a much better quality of life, even if it perhaps had a smaller floor plan than the flat in the "*Kaserne*".

The advantage of this small house over the small flat in the "*Kasernes*" is obvious. It's just a question of how we build them, together or separately. Spreading this kind of change across the whole city would definitely be bad /.../ If, on the other hand, these houses are grouped into an organic whole, if they are condensed to 8–10 in a row and these rows are grouped evenly around a central core that must belong to the whole colony, where young and old meet to spend time, and if around the whole colony is clearly drawn – i.e. according to the architect's ideas – species of tall trees are planted around the whole colony, then the group of this change, like the houses built only over 33 square meters, can lead to an organically composed and, in other urban bodies, organically placed part of the city.⁹⁰ (*Fig. 13*)

⁸⁸ Ivan Vurnik, "K vprašanju enodružinske delavske hišice", *Dom in svet*, 15. 3. 1927, No. 3, p. 82–84; Ivan Vurnik, "Za lasten dom in vrt", *Slovenec*, 25. 3. 1928, No. 71, p. 3; Ciglenečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 33–44.

⁸⁹ Ivan Vurnik, "K vprašanju enodružinske delavske hišice", *Dom in svet*, 15. 3. 1927, No. 3, p. 82–84.

⁹⁰ Ivan Vurnik, "Za lasten dom in vrt", *Slovenec*, 25. 3. 1928, No. 71, p. 3.



Karl-Marx Hof, arch. Karl Ehn, one of most known examples of apartment blocks also called "super-blocks" of 1920s Vienna (*Das Rote Wien im Waschsalon*, available at: <https://dasrotewien-waschsalon.at/karl-marx-hof>, accessed: 25. 8. 2024)

During the planning phase, Ivan Vurnik reviewed the preliminary estimates of construction costs and adhered to the principles he had learnt at the International Congress of Housing and Urban Planning in Vienna. The proposal for the houses was to be accessible to all workers, thanks to the active role of the city administration.

In the aforementioned article, whose data he had taken from the magazine *Deutsche Gartenstadts-Gesellschaft*, Vurnik cited data on the size of the plots, the level of rents, tax and other concessions, credit conditions and the like based on selected English and Dutch examples. It was obvious that he was following (probably in person or at least in print) an international congress on housing construction that took place in Vienna in 1926.⁹¹

⁹¹ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, p. 18.



Weissenböckstrasse settlement in Vienna, arch. Alfons Hetmanek, Franz Kaym, colony example in contrary of "Kasernes" or superblocks (*Werksbundsiedlung*, available at: <https://www.werksbundsiedlung-wien.at/en/background/superblock-versus-garden-city>, accessed: 25. 8. 2024)

The shortage of social housing solutions for workers

The government in Ljubljana generally did not do much to solve the housing problem. The social policy on this issue was poorly maintained and led to even more people becoming homeless with the abolition of housing laws, tenant protection and rent control.⁹² The change in social housing in Maribor began in 1927, when the aforementioned lawyer Dr. Alojzij Juvan took office as mayor. He declared in his victory speech that he would address the social and economic needs of the city. Throughout his tenure, he initiated numerous significant construction projects in Maribor and surrounding areas that facilitated the city's growth. Notable examples are the construction of the first airport in the suburb of Težno, as well as one of the most contemporary outdoor swimming pool complexes in Slovenia on Mariborski otok (Maribor Island). At the same time, the municipality bought the large area in the suburb of Tabor to sell smaller plots and finance the construction of houses so that workers could

⁹² "Ali bo stanovanjski zakon podaljšan?", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 20. 5. 1927, No. 17, p. 1.

build or buy their own homes.⁹³ They only sold the plots and in some cases co-financed the construction of converted makeshift housing or barrack-hut and waggon settlements that did not meet building code standards, so they were only given to people on a temporary basis. However, the Municipality of Maribor took up the idea of architect Ivan Vurnik and invested in the workers' colony between Fochova, Betnavska and Delavska streets and built more than 100 flats in 1928. The area that the municipality bought was divided into two areas, one for the labour colony and the other that they sold to people for their own homes. As mentioned earlier, they were unable to service other loans and financial investments, so despite the need and interest in the houses, they could not build more settlements.⁹⁴

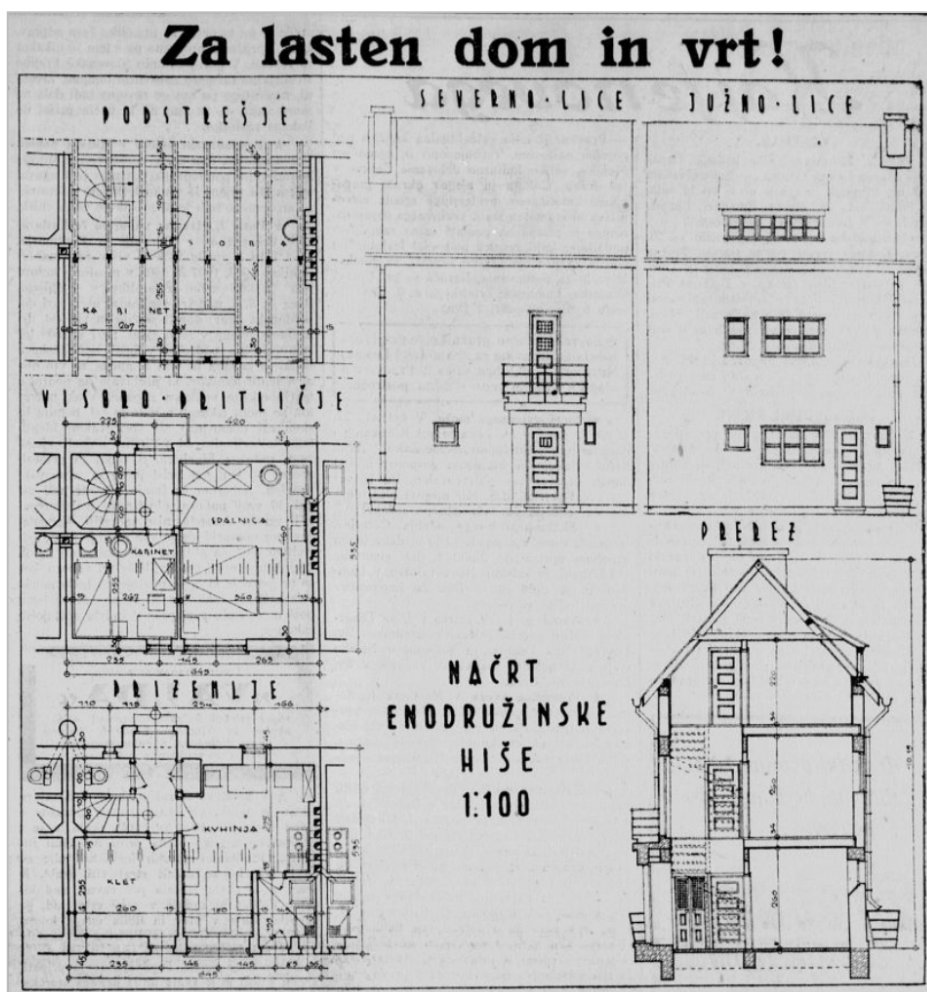
However, Dr. Juvan realized that it was necessary to support the construction of the workers' colony in Magdalena. The flats were intended for members of the district workers' insurance scheme. In 1927, his predecessor Dr Leskovar succeeded in obtaining a commitment from the Ministry of Finance for an interest-free loan of two million dinars.⁹⁵ Despite the reduction of the floor area in the building plan, all the design elements of Vurnik's plan (*Fig. 14*) and the location of the rooms were retained with only minor changes. The building plans are not signed by Albin Černe, the city's head of building, as the author, but only as the project manager. However, in the first plan, which envisaged the construction of 75 terraced houses, the administration later took out a new loan of five million dinars to build twice as many. Vurnik's plan served as the basis, which they modified slightly and reduced the floor area to 27 m². The city council decided to award the work to the building consortium from Maribor – Ivan Živic, Ubald Nassimbeni, Rudolf Kiffmann, Accetto in drugovi and eng. arch. Jelenec and eng. Šlajmer. The consortium from Ljubljana had also taken part in the public tender, but the city council wanted to award the contract to the team from Maribor. Because of the price, the houses were built with traditional materials – bricks and wood – and were one or two storeys high to ensure a varied townscape. Behind the houses were plots of land with gardens. The estate of 147 houses was completed at the end of 1928 and 64 more were added by 1933. The houses were numbered and allocated by lot to the city council parties, who distributed them to their supporters according to the division in the city council.⁹⁶

⁹³ Fras, *Mariborski župan dr. Alojzij Juvan in njegov čas*, pp. 54–57.

⁹⁴ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, pp. 169–186.

⁹⁵ Fras, *Mariborski župan dr. Alojzij Juvan in njegov čas*, pp. 54–57.

⁹⁶ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, pp. 172–174; Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 33–44.



Ivan Vurnik's plans on family detached house for the colony, presented in *Slovenec* newspaper (Ivan Vurnik, "Za lasten dom in vrt", *Slovenec*, 25. 3. 1928, No. 71, p. 3)

Ivan Vurnik's workers' colony

The Vurnik workers' colony represents a pivotal moment in Slovenian architecture, as the first realized example of a terraced housing settlement in the country and the only built representation of Ebenezer Howard's "garden city" concept in Slovenia. In addition, it is one of the most coherent and early examples of modernist, functionalist principles in Slovenian residential architecture. This sets it apart from earlier planned settlements, such as the 19th-century railway colony at Studenci, which, despite its systematic layout and func-

onal intent, was executed in a more traditional architectural idiom. Vurnik's colony, built between 1928 and 1933, embodied a new architectural paradigm: its design prioritized economical construction, standardized floor plans, and the integration of essential amenities such as private gardens, aligning with a functionalist ethos aimed at addressing the social and practical needs of the working-class resident. Over this five-year period, 211 houses were constructed based on Vurnik's original concept, forming a cohesive urban plan for the Tabor district and marking a definitive turn toward modernism in Maribor's urban fabric.⁹⁷

The entire colony covers the land between Fochova Street in the north and Delavska (Labourers) Street in the south, Koseski Street in the west and Betnavska Street in the east. It is divided into two unequal parts in a fan shape, with Cesta Zmage (then Jerovškova Street) in the centre. In the smaller part, the houses are aligned in groups of 7 to 9 oriented from east to west, with the gardens on the inner side and the entrances facing the street, as Vurnik predicted. In the larger part, the houses on the eastern, western and southern edges are also orientated from east to west and on the northern edge from north to south. In the south, there are houses in four rows in both parts. Some houses are two-storey, while some of them also have an attic for living, as in Vurnik's original plans.

/.../ when the small houses are grouped into an organic unit in which they are condensed in a row of 8–10, when these rows are evenly arranged around a common nucleus, which must become the property of the whole colony, where old and young spend time together, if clearly drawn lines with tall trees are planted around the colony – drawn in such a way that the architect's point is recognizable – then the group of such tots as these 33 square metre houses can form a beautiful, organically built part of the city, that also blends organically into other parts of the city. Such a group can then create a vibrant culture that makes those who live there and those who are just passing by happy.⁹⁸

In the centre of the settlement there is a square that was to be used by the residents for social gatherings and other purposes. Unfortunately, the settlement never received a more comprehensive town plan and other infrastructural elements such as shops, a market or a cultural centre, as Vurnik idealized in his writings. But there are two kindergartens and the first modernist church in Maribor, the Parish Church of the Holy Body of Salvation by architect Herbert

⁹⁷ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 33–44; Ciglencečki, "Urbanistična podoba Maribora v 19. in 20. stoletju", pp. 531–556.

⁹⁸ Ivan Vurnik, "K načrtu in proračunu za enodružinsko hišico", *Slovenec*, 1. 4. 1928, No. 77, p. 8.

Drofenik from 1938. However, there are tree-lined avenues in all the streets in and around the colony, as predicted by Vurnik.⁹⁹

An analysis of the original urban plan reveals Vurnik's adherence to Ebenezer Howard's Garden City principles (1898), albeit on a smaller, neighbourhood scale. The colony's layout, with its fan-shaped organization and houses oriented both east-west and north-south, was a deliberate urban-planning choice. This configuration ensured excellent natural lighting from different angles throughout the day, giving each unit a unique character while maintaining a high standard of living quality. The incorporated central square intended as a social and communal heart, directly echoes Howard's model. In contrast to the Garden City's ideal of a self-contained community, Vurnik's colony was not conceived as a segregated entity but was meant to form a new connection within the expanding city fabric of the Tabor district. While the subsequent urban development of Tabor failed to realize this integrative potential fully, the original plan possessed a clear vision for a cohesive neighbourhood.¹⁰⁰

As for the houses, the residential units differ only in the use of the attic, which can be either used or unused, and thus in the height of the buildings. Otherwise, all units have a floor area of 27 m². As already mentioned, this was smaller than originally planned due to budget cuts. The façades have remained largely unchanged; with a few exceptions, they were originally painted in different colours, which they still are today. The interiors, however, have been significantly altered over the years.

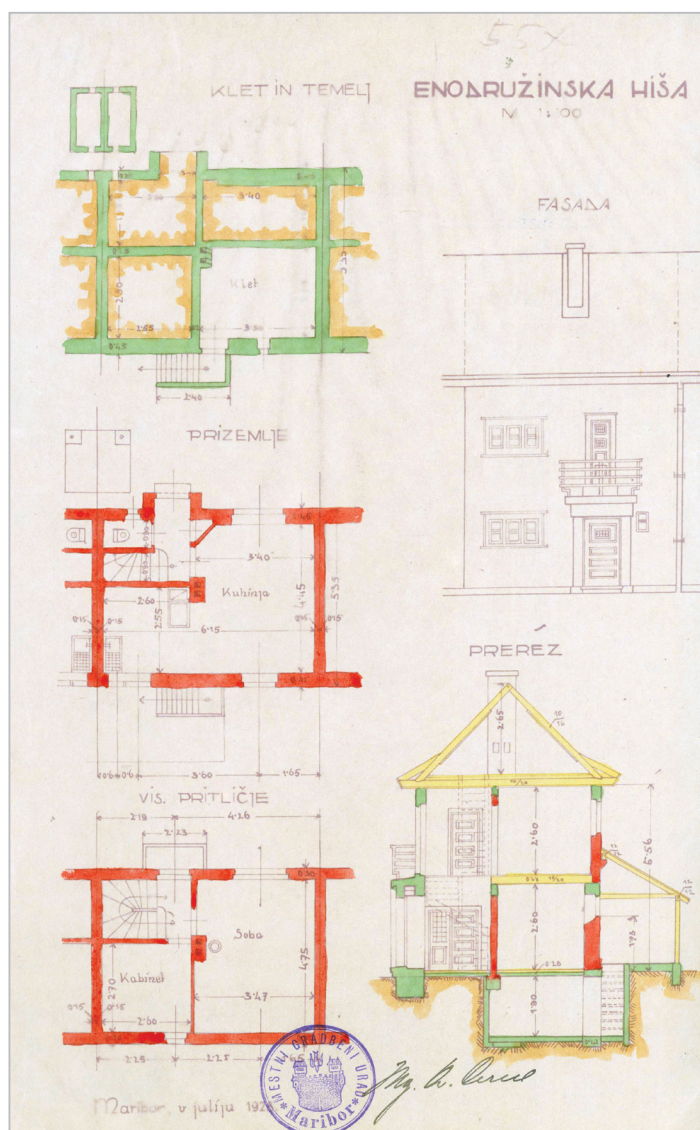
The original plans¹⁰¹, which were modified and signed by the engineer Albin Černe (*Fig. 15, 16*), are kept in the regional archives in Maribor. These plans show simple front elevations with entrance doors that are slightly off-centre depending on the position of the house, and are generally connected in a mirror image. The entrance is emphasised by a distinctive door frame with lintel and crowned by a roof projection that also serves as a balcony. The front façade has two windows: a kitchen window on the ground floor and a bedroom window on the first floor. There is also an opening on the side of the entrance for ventilation of the toilet. Originally, each window had six panes, but many residents later replaced them with single panes for more light.

Upon entering the house, one finds a small vestibule lit by the glazed upper part of the entrance door. Directly behind the entrance (to the left or right, depending on the orientation of the house) is a wooden spindle staircase lead-

⁹⁹ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 33–44.

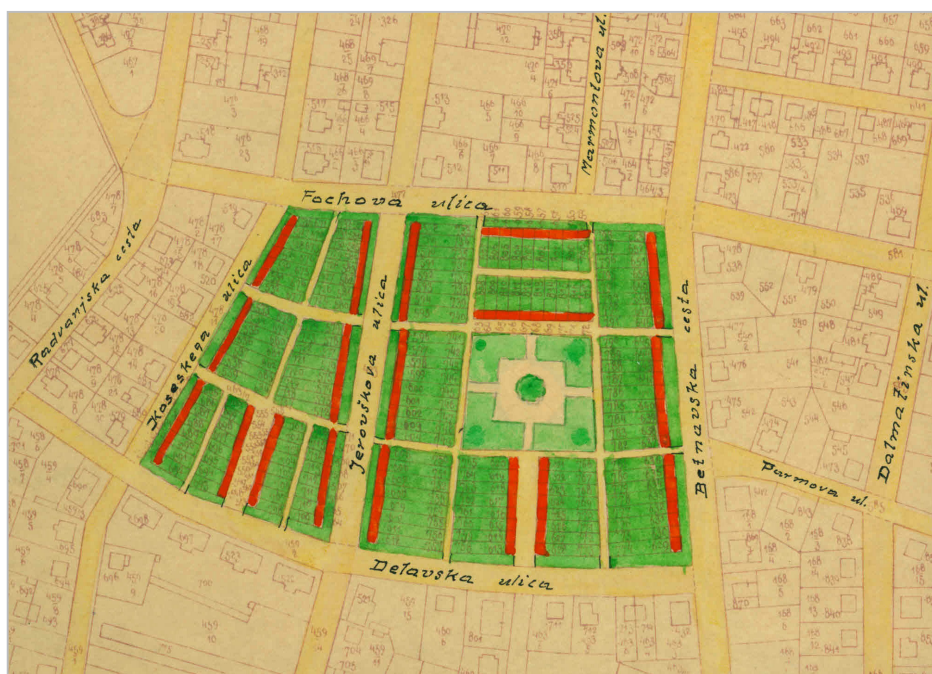
¹⁰⁰ Ebenezer Howard, "Garden cities of to-morrow", *Organizator & Environment* 16, No. 1 (2003), pp. 103–107.

¹⁰¹ PAM, fond Uprava za gradnje in regulacijo Maribor (1840–1963), AŠ 564, 592, Gradbeni spisi in dokumentacija za Mestno delavsko kolonijo.



Final plans for Ivan Vurnik's colony built in Maribor, signed by engineer Albin Černe (PAM, SI_PAM/0011 Uprava za gradnje in regulacijo Maribor 1840–1963, AŠ 567, SI_PAM/0011/445/0008, gradbeni načrt hiše Vurnikove kolonije na Betnavski cesti 90 v Mariboru, TA/115 Betnavska cesta 90, 1928)

ing to the first floor, under which there is just enough space for a toilet. Opposite the staircase is the kitchen with an alcove that is used as a washroom and laundry room and leads to the garden exit. The kitchen is lit by windows on both sides – one facing the street, the other the garden. There is a cellar under the kitchen, which is accessible via a staircase from the garden side. The exit to the garden and the cellar stairs are protected by a canopy that was originally supported by two wooden posts.



Final plans for Ivan Vurnik's colony built in Maribor, signed by engineer Albin Černe (PAM, SI_PAM/1889 Zavod za urbanizem Maribor ca 19. st.–1990, TE 3/79, načrt in fotografija Delavske kolonije ob Betnavski cesti v Mariboru, photo, 1954)

On the first floor there is a large and a small room and an exit to a balcony. The window of the larger room looks out onto the street, while the smaller room overlooks the garden. In the higher buildings, there is an additional large and a small room in the attic. A central chimney heats all the rooms. The original plans did not include bathrooms. During the construction phase, a cooker, and sink were installed in the kitchen, as well as water, sewage and electricity, and the residents had tiled stoves in their rooms when they moved in. Due to the limited floor space, the laundry room next to the kitchen was not used in many of the flats. This was one of the problems Ivan Vurnik pointed out in his article in the *Slovenec* newspaper, where he also mentioned problems with an unnamed municipal official (possibly engineer Albin Černe) who had overlooked the importance of the laundry room.

As a result, within a year of moving in, many tenants built sheds in their gardens to wash clothes and store supplies, or they closed off the sides of the roof over the garden exit. Future tenants who knew their new address before moving in could apply for minor changes. These included changes such as a different cooker in the kitchen, altered electrical wiring, a different arrangement of light fittings or the installation of a bathroom or study on the ground floor

in the laundry room area. All additional construction costs were then added to the monthly rent.¹⁰²

After construction was completed, rents for the working-class flats were relatively high, ranging from 350 to 475 dinars per month. Therefore, many families opted for subletting from the beginning. However, there was a social benefit on the part of the municipality that was in line with Ivan Vurnik's ideology: after 20 years of paying rent, the residents became owners of their buildings, which meant that they did not have to worry about their pensions. (*Fig. 17*)

The flats were not uniform from the start, as they may have been altered before the move. But the standard of living has changed over the years. Some residents have even joined two houses together, which can also be seen from the outside. Despite that, the primary urban planning structure stays the same. However, the colony's overall appearance is compromised through various colours of facades. There have also been numerous changes to the garden side of the houses with the addition of new garages and sheds. From the most recent viewing analysis, it is evident that there has been a significant amount of remodelling, primarily on the rear side of the houses that face the garden. The houses are renovated to accommodate the contemporary need for a larger floor plan. Consequently, the ground floor and potentially the first floor are augmented to increase the quadrature. Barbara Glavič, an architect and resident of the colony, has identified several contemporary renovation and rebuilding options for the houses. The community of the Vurnik colony is interested in incorporating these options into the municipal detailed spatial plan (OPPN) to ensure the integrity of the entire colony, in collaboration with the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (ZVKDS).¹⁰³ Despite these changes, it is still considered a nice neighbourhood with pleasant living conditions, even due to contemporary standard.

The public reaction to the original colony is mainly known from the newspapers. Slovenian newspapers generally reacted favourably and appreciated the opportunities it offered the residents. The *Marburger Zeitung*, on the other hand, mocked the colony and criticized the size of the flats. Nevertheless, interest in the houses remained greater than the supply.¹⁰⁴ However, there are few sources that describe how the colony was received by its residents shortly after it was built. There are also no mentions of the colony among the architects of the time, possibly due to discrepancies between the authors of the project. At the time, the colony was not generally recognized as Vurnik's work. Indeed, a

¹⁰² Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 33–44.

¹⁰³ Field notes, 2025, Barbara Glavič.

¹⁰⁴ Ciglencečki, *Vurnikova kolonija v Mariboru*, pp. 33–44.



Photo of newly built Ivan Vurnik's colony built in Maribor (PAM, SI_PAM/1693 Zbirka fotografij in razglednic 19.–21. st., sign. A1.3.12.2-3, novozgrajena Delavska kolonija na Betnavski cesti v Mariboru, reproduction of photo, 1928–1935)

search of architectural journals from the interwar period shows no mention of the Colony among the notable works.

Vurnik's contributions were not fully recognized until after his death in 1971 and were thoroughly researched in the 1990s. According to a biographical article in the special issue of *ab – Arbitektov bilten* (*Architect's bulletin*), the colony in Maribor is recognized as one of Vurnik's first significant urban planning projects, similar to his later regulatory plans for other Slovenian towns (Bled, Grosuplje, Hrastnik, Trbovlje), although these plans were not realized. However, it remains unclear who was the actual author of the final urban planning in Tabor, Maribor.¹⁰⁵ Slovenec published the original plans of the house and the written idea of the colony by Ivan Vurnik, but the final plans were not approved by him. Historically, according to the archives, Vurnik is considered the author and all sources indicate that the engineer Albin Černe acted only as an intermediary between the plans and the construction. Nevertheless, it remains unclear what role Ivan Vurnik ultimately played in the final form of the project.

¹⁰⁵ Dušan Blagajne, "Ivan Vurnik, the architect", *Arbitektov bilten* 24, No. 119–124 (1994) – special edition: *Ivan Vurnik, 1884–1971, slovenski arhitekt, compendium*, ed. Janez Koželj, pp. 10–48 (hereinafter: Blagajne, "Ivan Vurnik, the architect").

The colony was his only realized plan that combined elements of architecture and urban planning and was one of the few examples of the time, or possibly the only one, that focused entirely on the problem of social housing for workers. Although this was Vurnik's first urban design and the first Slovenian attempt at a terraced housing estate, experts consider the estate to be theoretically and artistically outstanding.¹⁰⁶

This ambiguity opens a controversial debate about the political interference in the plans that were openly publicized and used by the Maribor city administration. The successful influence of architecture in this case of Ivan Vurnik's colony can be seen in the question of the intertwining of architecture and politics. The architect himself presented a good practise from abroad and wanted to bring the idea closer to the people who needed housing. His article successfully convinced the Maribor City Council to adopt the experts' opinion and try to partially solve the socio-political problem of housing shortage in the city. The architecture itself was also the first example of functionalist building in the city, which expanded in the 1930s.

The impact of social housing on Maribor's regulation plans

This probably also had an impact on further regulation plans in Maribor, which the city lacked almost until the 1930s. The regulation plans used until 1928 dated from 1863–1885 and were completely inadequate for the rapid development after this time. The first regulation plan by Jože Jelenc and Maks Czeike from 1928 and several regulation plans by Jaroslav Černigoj, then by Marjan Mušič between 1939 and 1941, all remained unused or were only created for small parts of the city.¹⁰⁷

From the outline of Maribor's architectural, communal and urban development in the interwar period, it becomes clear that a more modern concept of architecture and urban development in the city was slow to establish itself due to the administrative, political and economic conditions, despite considerable building activity. The latter was also unable to fully develop because the city had no master plan throughout the interwar period. The political boundaries therefore also played the role of municipal boundaries, dividing the city's settlement area and depriving it of broader development (design) opportunities. The discontinuity of population (the emigration of Germans and the immigration of Slovenes,

¹⁰⁶ Blagajne, "Ivan Vurnik, the architect", pp. 10–48.

¹⁰⁷ Curk, "Urbana in gradbena zgodovina Maribora", pp. 542–556.

especially from the Littoral region), tradition (Graz and Vienna were replaced by Ljubljana and Zagreb as well as Prague) and capital (since large-scale industrial accumulation only took place shortly before and especially after the world crisis of 1929) as well as the general level of social and cultural life and its changing atmosphere played an important role in this.¹⁰⁸

So, there was no real urban regulation plan in the city, apart from the 19th century plans and the regulation plans for the smaller areas, but there was no comprehensive urban plan for the suburbs either.

Apart from the emergency shelters for the displaced individuals in Jadranska Street and Delavska Street, the city administration did not build more housing, but tried to curb uncontrolled construction and prevent land speculation by selling building plots at lower prices in two different suburbs. This way of solving the housing problem was tried after 1925 in the Magdalena neighbourhood in Betnavska Street, where the city administration sold 133 plots by 1940. In 1930, the municipal property in the suburb of Koroška vrata was parcelled out. At the same time, the municipality provided both neighbourhoods with municipal utilities.¹⁰⁹

The Koroška vrata and Magdalena neighbourhoods were also strictly parcelled out into rectangular or fan-shaped street networks based on the 50-year-old regulation plans, which were slightly adapted for these areas. Between 1927 and 1929, a regulation plan was adopted for Fochova and Metelkova Streets, and in 1928 a narrow plan was adopted. Arch. Jože Jelenec and Maks Czeike prepared a new regulation plan for the suburb of Koroška vrata. In this case, the new workers' colony of Vurnik is well integrated due to its own good design, but not so well into the wider urban context. Based on the regulatory plan for the smaller area, the entire Tabor neighbourhood has developed rather insensitively and has not yet undergone a complete urban renewal, which is clearly reflected in the lack of squares, public and green spaces.¹¹⁰

Despite some existing examples, the city administration, as in other Slovenian cities, did not succeed in solving the housing problem because it did not have sufficient resources and a greater political vision. Despite their efforts, in the two decades between the wars, the city administration did not succeed in solving the problem of the homeless and poor population caused by the economic crisis after the First World War and the Great Depression of 1929, that lasted in Maribor until 1933, as well as two wars that led to terrible housing

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 554.

¹⁰⁹ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, pp. 172–186.

¹¹⁰ Curk, "Urbana in gradbena zgodovina Maribora", pp. 542–556.

conditions. Since the 19th century, the population of Maribor has quadrupled, while the number of flats has only doubled.¹¹¹

The pragmatic solution to this problem led to poor barrack-hut and waggon settlements in Tezno, Upper Radvanje, Studenci (near the railway) and in Tabor, which were named after the conditions and the generally known poorer population – the so-called "Abesinija (Abesiny)" in Tezno, the so-called "Cigojnerhof (Zigojnerhoff)" in Upper Radvanje, while the settlement in Tabor was called Dajnkova.¹¹² (Fig. 18) The areas were mostly communally owned and were burnt down and devastated before the Second World War. "The municipality helped to solve the problem by building communal houses. Some of them were for the middle class of Maribor, but many were like emergency shelters for the lower class, homeless, displaced individuals and settlers from the barrack-hut and waggon settlements."¹¹³

At the same time, in the 1920s, there were some initiatives by a kind of credit and housing co-operative called Marstan and Mojmir, who proposed to build the houses for slightly richer people, so that the rental flats would be empty and poorer families could rent them. During this time, they then helped with loans to build a whole series of detached villas. At the same time, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, on their initiative, the owners renovated their villas with bathrooms and kitchens on each floor so that some houses could be converted into apartment blocks and more people could live there. In 1925 and 1935, the Municipality of Maribor built around 240 flats in various neighbourhoods of Maribor, not counting the Vurnik colony. Other municipal aid enabled the construction of private houses with good credit conditions and with the organization that the city attracted Maribor builders, such as in the Tabor area and on the left bank in Vrbanska and Mladinska streets. They built 147 houses in the workers' colony and in Gregorčičeva Street they built a workers' camp building with a workers' shelter and a shelter for the homeless. In 1938, a housing settlement for emergency accommodation was built in Pregljeva Street. There were 364 tenants living under the roof of the municipality, 74 tenants in four municipal barracks and 29 tenants in railway waggons. Most of the applicants were labourers, railway workers, state employees and others. In 1927, there were 873 unresolved housing applications, including 2747 people in desperate housing situations. Among them were 27 applicants who were completely without a home and living in cellars, woodsheds, attics, or barns. 416 of them lived in rented flats, others in cramped, unhealthy one-room flats or with parents and relatives. Despite the housing crisis and a lot of information about

¹¹¹ "Stanovanjska beda v Mariboru", *Mariborski večernik Jutra*, 24. 5. 1927, No. 20, p. 2.

¹¹² Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, p. 176; Godina Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, pp. 36–40.

¹¹³ Ferlež, *Stanovati v Mariboru*, p. 172.



Children playing in one of the poor waggon settlements in Maribor at Dajnкова street (PAM, SI_PAM/1698 Zbirka negativov na filmu, TE 1, SI_PAM/1698/001/003/013, Maribor: barake v Dajnkovi ulici in otroci pred barakami, photo, author: Franjo Pivka, Maribor, before the burning in 1938)

the minimum living space, in 1935 every person in Maribor supposedly had 17 square metres of living space, which is not exactly a small amount. But there is of course a second piece of information from the decade before, which states that the living space for a labourer was 2 m² and for a capitalist 30 m².¹¹⁴

The city council built tenement houses with rental flats either in the city centre or in the suburbs, but as already mentioned, they lacked finances and structure. In addition, most of the flats were actually intended primarily for the middle class, although they were known as workers' flats. Beyond the city administration's efforts, private industrialists also engaged in housing construction, with Josip Hutter being the most prominent example. His involvement, however, reveals a clear stratification in housing provision for different classes of employees. It is crucial to distinguish between his two major projects: the "Hutterblok" (Gradišče) (*Fig. 19*) and the "Hutter Colony" (*Fig. 20*) in Pobrežje.

Contrary to the enduring urban legend, the Hutterblok was not built for his factory workers. Designed by architects Jaroslav Černigoj and Saša Dev, this large apartment complex was conceived as a set of tenement houses with flats for the free market. "Since the apartments were meant for tenants of a higher social class, they are, for the most part, much bigger than the ones in the Pobrežje workers' colony. /.../ Over five storeys, the plans show a diver picture

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 174–177.



Photo of newly built Gradišče (now known as Hutter blok) (Archives of MAO, available at: https://www.ugm.si/fileadmin/_processed_/a/4/csm_Sasa_Dev__Hutterjev_blok__1940-45__foto_arhiv_MAO_kuverta_10_20220323_10553772_db0ab90c98.jpg, accessed: 23. 2. 2025)

of flats, one-, two-, three-, four- and five-roomed apartments in a building ..."¹¹⁵ While a smaller number of apartments may have been intended for higher-ranking employees or foreign engineers of Hutter's factory, the primary purpose was commercial investment.¹¹⁶ This is corroborated by its construction timeline; begun just before World War II, it was completed during the war¹¹⁷ by new builders and was reportedly inhabited by German families and military personnel, finally being officially finished in 1944.¹¹⁸ After the war, with Hutter expelled, the block received new residents who were not industrial labourers, further cementing its character as a middle-class residence.

Alongside this market-driven project, Hutter also addressed the housing needs of his workforce more directly, following his socially oriented business philosophy.

As a manufacturer, Josip Hutter had an ear for solving dwelling problems of his employees /.../ 1937 marked the growth of the so-called Hutter colony in

¹¹⁵ Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*, p. 67

¹¹⁶ Field notes 2023 – Boris Hajdinjak.

¹¹⁷ Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*, p. 63, according to field notes 2008 – Majda Štajmer Japelj.

¹¹⁸ Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*, p. 63, according to "Hutterjev stanovanjski blok", *Slovenec*, 3. 9. 1944, No. 202, p. 5.



Photo of opening of Hutter colony in Maribor, 1934 (Domoznanska zbirka Primoža Premzla)

Pobrežje district. /.../ he wanted to erect twenty-five houses with fifty flats /.../ It is a uniform settlement of single-storey houses, each of them divided into half in the middle, and each part inhabited by a family.¹¹⁹

The official constructor of the colony was the Society of the Supply of Old-Age Workers, Hutter&Partner in Maribor. According to the original plan, the workers would, through time, become owners by paying off the rent, but this solution was not realized following the disbandment of the society. The houses and flats remained the property of Hutter's factory.¹²⁰

The simultaneous development of these two projects – the spacious, market-rate Hutter Block and the modest, purpose-built Pobrežje colony – serves

¹¹⁹ Ferlež, *Josip Hutter and the Dwelling Culture of Maribor*, p. 51

¹²⁰ Godina-Golija, *Iz mariborskih predmestij*, p. 48.

as a perfect illustration of the period's housing stratification. While there was great interest in this colony, the rents were very high, as in Vurnik's colony, so that only qualified workers could afford to live there. The social outcome is less fortunate, as people were removed from the buildings after they stopped working in the factory and especially after the dissolution of both society and the factory after the Second World War. This contrast underscores that true, affordable social housing for the average industrial worker remained the exception, even in the initiatives of a supposedly socially conscious industrialist.

In summary, the interwar housing landscape in Maribor and Ljubljana was one of profound stratification and widespread inadequacy. While it is true that workers were often pushed to the suburban peripheries into lower-standard housing, it is crucial to recognize that substandard living conditions were not confined to the outskirts. A significant number of low-quality dwellings existed within the city centre itself – in overcrowded courtyard tracts, emergency apartments, and converted former barracks.¹²¹ The workers' colony in Vurnik is therefore one of the relatively comfortable exceptions during this period. It stands in stark contrast to the pervasive reality of inadequate housing that spanned the entire urban fabric.

Conclusion

To summarize, it can be said that the period after the First World War was characterised by great diversity in the construction industry. Maribor developed rapidly in the field of construction, but the sheer quantity of buildings could not cope with the quality of housing or the political challenges related to social housing, which ultimately affected the cultural and social image of the city. While Maribor upgraded its cultural landscape with new architectural projects such as the swimming pools on Mariborski otok (Maribor Island), the persistent problem of homelessness overshadowed the city's political and economic successes.

Social housing never flourished in Maribor to the same extent as in Vienna, which led to an ineffective social housing policy on the part of the city administration. Political factors played a role, such as the financial scarcity of the municipality and the state and the fact that a large part of Maribor's population, especially the German part, later supported National Socialism, which rejected progressive social and spatial practises. As a result, unlike in Vienna, there is still no regulated social housing in Maribor today. Although Maribor can claim the

¹²¹ Jerneja Ferlež, *Mariborska dvorišča, etnološki oris* (Maribor, 2001), pp. 151–176.

Vurnik workers' colony as the first and probably only real example of social housing in Slovenia, the lack of coherent urban planning and the lack of attention to social and spatial issues illustrates the city's lost potential.

Ivan Vurnik's workers' colony is an example of architectural progress that showed the possibility of quality living in the area and demonstrated effective co-operation between politics and architecture. The influence of architectural discourse on municipal decisions shows how professional insights can have a positive impact on the socio-political landscape of a city like Maribor, especially during the turbulent interwar period.

This project is a successful and perhaps unique example of social housing in Slovenia at the time and demonstrates the potential for architectural development in Maribor. It emphasises the importance of social and cultural considerations in the design of single-family houses. However, studies of school records from nearby primary schools indicate that the Vurnik's workers' colony was not exclusively intended for industrial workers, but rather appealed to the middle class¹²², further illustrating the strong political influence on architecture at the time.

Despite this complexity, from an architectural standpoint, the colony remains an outstanding example of urban design that incorporated social factors, influenced later architectural development in Slovenia and inspired the architectural trends of the interwar period in Maribor, especially functionalism and the concept of the colony. This legacy shaped architectural practice until the Second World War and confirms that the Vurnik's workers' colony is one of the most significant architectural examples of this period that deserves to be highlighted in this discussion.

Beyond its historical significance, the case of the Vurnik colony offers a powerful, enduring lesson on the agency of architecture as a socio-political force. The colony's physical structure, which included terraced houses, private gardens, and a communal square, was not merely a stylistic decision; it was a materialized argument. It was an architectural manifesto advocating for dignity, self-sufficiency, and community for the working class, standing in direct opposition to the prevailing *laissez-faire* approach. This demonstrates that architecture is never simply a response to conditions; it is a form of discourse. Vurnik's plans, published for public consumption, and their subsequent (even if compromised) realization, show how architectural ideas can actively shape political agendas, translating a social vision into a buildable, tangible reality that forced municipal authorities to engage with a progressive housing paradigm.

Consequently, this study asserts that the architectural object itself must be recognized as a primary historical document. The spatial organization, modest

¹²² Field notes 2024 – Maja Godina-Golija.

yet humane floor plans, and urban integration of the Vurnik colony eloquently embody the intricate political negotiations, cultural aspirations, and social limitations of its era. In a manner that is comparable to that of any single policy document. By analysing the space as much as the archives, we gain an indispensable, three-dimensional understanding of history. This architectural-historical methodology reveals not just what was built, but what was *imagined* and what was *possible*, thereby uncovering a layer of Maribor's interwar narrative that has remained hidden in plain sight. It challenges us to read the city's fabric as a palimpsest of competing social projects, where Vurnik's colony remains a powerful, physical testament to a road not fully taken.

The study of social housing and the conclusions drawn from it should be more widely recognized in architectural history, especially given the lack of such studies in Maribor, a city that has been studied primarily from a historical perspective. The significant building activity that took place there is largely unknown to many inhabitants. It is important to uncover this aspect and present it to the public in order to illustrate the architectural dimensions that Maribor achieved in the interwar period.

Ana Lovrec Medved

**DELAVSKA KOLONIJA IVANA VURNIKA: DRUŽBENO-POLITIČNA
VLOGA ARHITEKTURE V SOCIALNI STANOVANJSKI GRADNJI
MEDVOJNEGA OBDOBJA V MARIBORU**

POVZETEK

Članek obravnava razvoj socialne stanovanjske gradnje v Mariboru v obdobju med obema vojnama, s posebnim poudarkom na ključnem primeru – delavski koloniji Ivana Vurnika. Kljub mnogim raziskavam na to temo, v večini zgodovinskih, umetnostno-zgodovinskih in etnoloških, primanjkuje arhitekturne perspektive s poudarkom na prostorski organizaciji, zgodovini urbanističnega načrtovanja, tipologiji stavb in oblikovnih odločitvah. Zato ta članek z interdisciplinarnim pristopom naslavlja povezavo med pristopi in združuje arhitekturno analizo z zgodovinsko kontekstualizacijo, da bi razkril dialekt med družbeno-političnimi vplivi in arhitekturno produkcijo.

Raziskava temelji na sistematični analizi primarnih virov iz Pokrajinskega arhiva Maribor, vključno z originalnimi gradbenimi načrti in fotografskim gradivom, ki jih dopolnjujejo tedanji časopisni zapisi in sekundarna literatura ter ogledi današnjega stanja. S to metodologijo članek rekonstruira arhitekturni diskurz in procese odločanja, ki so oblikovali urbani razvoj Maribora.

Maribor je doživel enega najbolj izjemnih zgodovinskih razvojev v Sloveniji predvsem zaradi svojega geopolitičnega položaja. Od leta 1846 kot železniško in trgovsko stičišče med Dunajem in Trstom, in nato še Koroško in Madžarsko, po prvi svetovni vojni, s priključitvijo h Kraljevini Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev, kot jugoslovansko industrijsko središče. Čeprav je novi status mesta prekinil obstoječe trgovske poti, je mesto dobilo nove priložnosti, predvsem na področju industrije, ki sta jo še dodatno spodbujali novo obratujoča hidroelektrarna Fala in bližina reke Drave.

Z razvojem industrije po prvi svetovni vojni pa se pokaže tudi novo obdobje socialne gradnje, saj so množične selitve v mesto povzročile hudo stanovanjsko krizo. Odziv nanjo je bil kompleksen in večplasten. Urban razvoj kaže heterogeno družbeno sliko, od načrtovanih delavskih kolonij, do nehumanih oblik bivanja v začasnih bivalnih prostorih. Članek podrobno opisuje to raznolikost, pri čemer poudarja, da stanovanjska stiska ni bila enovit problem, temveč stratificirana kriza, kjer je položaj posameznika znotraj delavskega razreda določal njegove bivalne razmere.

Besedilo zato poskuša razložiti koncepte socialne gradnje skozi integracijo humanističnih in arhitekturnih aspektov ter razumeti arhitekturne argumente

skozi temeljito analizo mariborske zgodovine arhitekture, upoštevajoč politične, kulturne in socialne vplive obdobja med obema vojnama. Na podlagi dokumentov iz Pokrajinskega arhiva Maribor, poskuša opredeliti vplive na razvoj socialne gradnje, arhitekturne premisleke za tovrstnimi stavbami in arhitekturne argumente, ki stojijo za njihovimi rešitvami.

Za vzpostavitev interdisciplinarnih povezav je primerno vprašanje: kakšni arhitekturni in nearhitekturni koncepti so v tem obdobju širili področje arhitekture in kateri prostorski primeri predstavljajo tovrstne koncepte v praksi? Ta raziskava se posledično osredotoča na stanovanjske stavbe, zgrajene v prvem desetletju po prvi svetovni vojni.

Vurnikova kolonija je v tem kontekstu predstavljala izjemen in napreden poskus sistemske rešitve. Članek podrobno analizira njeno urbanistično zasnovo, ki na manjšem merilu uporablja načela Howardovega koncepta vrtnega mesta. Z radialno ureditvijo, centralnim trgom namenjenim družabnemu življenju in različno orientacijo hiš je kolonija zagotavljala optimalno naravno osvetlitev in krepila občutek skupnosti. Analiza originalnih načrtov razkriva tudi neskladje med Vurnikovimi ambicioznimi ideali in politično-realno izvedbo. Kljub temu kolonija ostaja eno prvih in najbolj koherentnih del funkcionalistične stanovanjske arhitekture v Sloveniji.

Poleg arhitekturno-urbanistične analize članek postavlja Vurnikovo kolonijo v širši družbeno-politični kontekst. Preučuje vpliv "Rdečega Dunaja" na slovensko stanovanjsko zakonodajo in poudarja, kako je pomanjkanje ustreznega davčnega sistema onemogočilo obsežnejšo javno stanovanjsko gradnjo. Prav tako raziskava analizira kompleksno politično-kulturno podobo Maribora, kjer se je slovenska politična oblast po letu 1918 prepletala z gospodarsko močjo in kulturnim vplivom nemško govorečega prebivalstva. To dvojnost je mogoče zaslediti tudi v arhitekturi, kjer so bili mnogi projektanti, tako tuji kot domači, izobraženi na dunajskih tehničnih šolah, kar je okrepilo kulturno in estetsko povezanost z avstrijsko prestolnico.

Cilj tega članka je odkriti arhitekturne dimenzije prejšnjih raziskav in raziskati arhitekturno razmišljanje tistega časa. Upoštevajoč dejstvo, da današnje arhitekturno izobraževanje pogosto poudarja politične in kulturne vplive na arhitekturo – pogled, ki takrat ni bil tako razširjen, zlasti glede na nove trende, ki so se pojavljali po Evropi – je mogoče prepoznati izvirne ideje in miselne procese, ki so bili značilni za to regijo. Kljub podobnim oblikam in trendom, prisotnim v drugih državah, so bili nekateri arhitekturni elementi tukaj edinstveni in poudarjajo potrebo po nadaljnjem arhitekturnem raziskovanju.

Za zaključek lahko trdimo, da Delavska kolonija Ivana Vurnika ni bila le prostorska rešitev stanovanjske stiske, temveč tudi materializacija določenih družbenih idealov in arhitekturnih načel v specifičnem zgodovinskem trenutku. Njen pomen presega zgolj lokalni okvir; predstavlja pomemben primer

srednjeevropskega prenosa arhitekturnih idej in njihove prilagoditve lokalnim razmeram. Članek s svojo interdisciplinarno naravo in poudarkom na arhitekturni analizi prispeva k poglobljenemu razumevanju ne le zgodovine arhitekture, temveč tudi družbene zgodovine Maribora in širše regije v medvojnem obdobju.

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V SOCIALNI STANOVANJSKI GRADNJI MEDVOJNEGA OBDOBJA V MARIBORU**

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Ključne besede: socialna gradnja, obdobje med obema vojnama, Maribor, arhitektura, Ivan Vurnik, politični kontekst, stanovanjski zakon, Rdeči Dunaj, razvoj arhitekture, arhitekturna zgodovina 20. stoletja

Izvleček: Članek obravnava politična in arhitekturnozgodovinska vprašanja socialne gradnje v Mariboru medvojne obdobja. Z analizo originalnih načrtov in arhitekturnih teženj v tistem obdobju so predstavljeni različni vidiki in primeri socialne gradnje v Mariboru in Sloveniji. Ob tem so v analizo širšega teoretičnega konteksta vključeni tudi tuji vplivi, z izvirnimi projekti z Dunaja in drugih tujih mest. S tovrstno podlago je delo arhitekta Ivana Vurnika predstavljeno znotraj širšega arhitekturnega vprašanja socialne gradnje in se tako prepleta s takratnimi političnimi ovirami, ki jih najdemo v arhivskih in časopisnih virih tistega časa.
