



AVION AFTER COMPLETION IN 1932


AVION PO DOKONČENÍ V ROKU 1932

Source Zdroj: Josef Hofer, inv. no. 3242.
Archive of the city Bratislava

Housing Cooperatives in Slovakia 1918 – 1969: The Case of Avion

Bytové družstevníctvo na Slovensku
1918 – 1969: Prípád Avion

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Bývanie reprezentovalo úlohu, ktorá v rámci sociálnej politiky prvej Československej republiky (ČSR) postupne nadobúdala širší význam. Družstvá predstavovali na Slovensku stále pomerne nový model dostupného bývania s veľkým potenciálom. Zatiaľ čo do vzniku ČSR v roku 1918 sa diskusia o sociálnom bývaní zameriavala hlavne na robotníkov, vďaka formovaniu strednej vrstvy v medzivojnovom období vznikla potreba zabezpečiť bývanie aj pre túto spoločenskú skupinu na úrovni zodpovedajúcej jej statusu. Prejavilo sa to prirodzene vo väčších mestách a najintenzívnejšie v Bratislave – metropole slovenskej časti novej republiky –, kde sa koncentrovali okrem robotníctva aj ďalšie segmenty obyvateľstva, najmä početné úradníctvo.

Tému bytového družstevníctva na Slovensku ilustrujeme na príklade bratislavského družstevného domu Avion z roku 1932 z viacerých dôvodov. Nielenže tento bytový dom vnímame ako hodnotné funkcionalistické dielo architekta Josefa Mareka (1889 – 1966), no na skúmanie sme si ho vybrali aj pre úctyhodný počet bytov (118) a rozmanitosť jeho obyvateľov meniacu sa v čase, čo determinovalo náročnosť riadenia družstva a podpory pozitívnej klímy jeho komunity, údržby domu, riešenia finančných tokov spojených s úvermi a štátnymi dotáciami určenými na družstevnú výstavbu. Dom teda skúmame v troch rovinách – ako inovatívne architektonické dielo, podnikateľský počin – družstvo (spoločnosť s ručením obmedzeným) a domov pre rôznorodú komunitu obyvateľov. Prípadovú štúdiu zasadzujeme do širšieho historického kontextu od vzniku ČSR v roku 1918 až po inváziu vojsk Varšavskej zmluvy do Československa v roku 1968 a na následný vznik federatívnej Československej socialistickej republiky. Fungovanie družstva teda skúmame na pozadí viacerých politických režimov či historických a hospodárskych zlomov, ktoré mali prirodzene dopad aj na štruktúru a financovanie iných obdobných družstiev založených v demokratickom medzivojnovom období. Okrem ekonomických a organizačných zmien tieto kľúčové momenty iniciovali aj niekoľko vln vystaňovania z Avionu z politických dôvodov, čo násilne narušilo pôvodné zloženie spoločenstva domu. Išlo najmä o nútený odchod Čechov a židovských obyvateľov cez 2. svetovú vojnu, ale aj ľudí – príslušníkov inteligencie – vyhnaných z domu v rámci Akcie B na začiatku päťdesiatych rokov. Napokon spomeňme emigračnú vlnu po udalostiach roku 1968, keď viacero rodín alebo jednotlivcov utieklo na západ dobrovoľne či z donútenia totalitným režimom.

Na vznik družstva v roku 1929 a jeho hospodárenie v prvých rokoch existencie nazeráme aj z pohľadu hospodárskej krízy, ktorá v Československu vrcholila práve počas výstavby Avionu. Realizácia tohto domu napriek kríze priniesla vitálny a inšpiratívny koncept sociálneho bývania pre strednú vrstvu, ktorý reflektovali aj dobové architektonické periodiká Slovenský staviteľ a Forum. Zakladatelia družstva, ktorého úplný názov znel Stavebné družstvo pro výstavbu nájemných domů v Bratislavě na Cihelném poli a v okolí, mali od začiatku vysoké ambície založené aj na znalosti významu spojenia sociálnej otázky s aktuálnym architektonickým diskurzom. Preto na začiatku roku 1930 zorganizovali architektonickú súťaž, ktorú vyhral práve Josef Marek. Archívny výskum však ukazuje, že na vývoj podoby domu v priebehu dvojkoľovej súťaže mal vplyv aj Klement Šilinger, ktorý bol napokon poverený vypracovaním návrhov moderného pavlačového domu pre obyvateľov vystaňovaných pred realizáciou Avionu zo starých, hygienicky nevyhovujúcich domov. Josef Marek musel v návrhoch Avionu zohľadniť platné zákony (predovšetkým Zákon o stavebnom ruchu č. 45/1930), ktoré určovali, koľko bytov a akej veľkosti môže dom obsahovať, aby spĺňal podmienky sociálneho bývania, na ktoré bolo možné dostať štátny príspevok.

Avion bol premysleným projektom, za ktorým stálo silné družstvo na čele s právnikom Josefom Rubínom, predsedom Rady Štátnych dráh v Bratislave. Napriek tomu jeho realizácia a následná prevádzka neboli bezproblémové hlavne pre spomínanú hospodársku krízu komplikujúcu fungovanie akokoľvek dobre nastaveného financovania. Naznačili sme už, že družstvo okrem Avionu postavilo aj iné domy – okrem spomenutého domu navrhnutého Šilingerom a realizovaného Slovenskými stavebnými závodmi na Kalinčiakovej 2 – 4 aj dom na Českej ulici 19 – 23 (dom navrhol A. J. Ceplecha, realizoval staviteľ František Kadeřávek). V týchto domoch však bývali sociálne najslabší obyvateľia, ktorí v priebehu silnejšej krízy prichádzali o prácu. Hoci ekonomický koncept Avionu bol nastavený tak, aby „uživil“ nielen seba, ale aj ostatné dva domy, vybalansovanie tohto modelu trvalo niekoľko rokov. Obchodné priestory, ktoré architekt umiestnil do parteru Avionu a mali zabezpečiť vysoké výnosy z nájomného, sa totiž na počiatku nedarilo prenajať všetky. Keďže viacerým nezamestnaným družstevníkom hrozilo vylúčenie z družstva a vystaňovanie z bytov, predstavitelia družstva vyzývali zámožnejších Aviončanov, aby im pomohli nájsť prácu.

Považujeme to za pozoruhodný moment ilustrujúci pridanú hodnotu idey družstevníctva presahujúcu jeho primárnu finančnú stránku.

Predseda družstva Josef Rubína sa v roku 1938 vzdal svojej funkcie a odišiel pracovať na riaditeľstvo železníc do Prahy. Nevedno, či išlo o plánovaný krok vyplynúvší z protičeskeho politického trendu pred vypuknutím vojny na Slovensku, no jeho odchod vnímame aj ako symbolické uzavretie kapitoly družstva v jeho pôvodnom nastavení. Hoci dom naďalej slúžil svojim obyvateľom a jeho architektonické hodnoty sa nestratili, postupom času sa podpísali na jeho technickej kondícii dôsledky nedostatočnej údržby. Tá sa stala jedným z najdiskutovanejších problémov povojnového bytového družstevníctva najmä v starších domoch ako Avion. Pôvodné družstvá sa v staršej zástavbe

transformovali na ľudové bytové družstvá snažiace sa nadviazať na kontinuitu dobre zabezhnutej starostlivosti o domy. Strata ich ekonomickej sebestačnosti a podliehanie rozhodnutiam národných výborov im to však celkom nedovoľovali. Atmosfére v družstvách neprosplievala ani spomínaná výmena obyvateľstva, ktoré opakovane muselo hľadať cestu k sebe aj k podstate družstevníckej myšlienky. Konkrétnejšie návrhy na zlepšenie prišli až po ďalšom náročnom období rokov 1968 – 1969 a nasledujúcej prvej etape normalizácie na začiatku sedemdesiatych rokov. V záveroch XV. zjazdu Komunistickej strany v roku 1976 sa konštatovala nutnosť nielen stavať nové domy a čeliť tak bytovej kríze, ale aj modernizovať tie staršie. Revitalizácia bytového fondu bola zakotvená vládny uznesením č. 196/79 a naplánovaná do siedmej päťročnice (1981 – 1985).

The cooperative apartment block Avion in Bratislava, dating from 1932, has an exceptional position in domestic architecture of the interwar years in Slovakia for a variety of reasons. For one, it is an important example of Functionalist architecture, designed by the Moravian-born architect Josef Marek (1899 – 1966). Underscoring its architectural value is the matter of the locality – the suburb of Blumental – where the building was constructed, another matter to be discussed further in the present contribution. No less impressive is the building's size, whether the number of flats' or the range of its inhabitants, a factor that contributed to the demanding nature of administering the cooperative, maintaining a positive climate in the community of members, or resolution of the financial flows related to the loans and state subsidies intended for cooperative housing construction.

Approaching the theme of Avion as a case study of interwar cooperative housing could be performed through several differing methods. Architectural-historical research (relying primarily on archival sources) is supplemented by ethnological and anthropological surveys, in which oral history methods are employed to collect the memories of the building's residents about life in it. Though the very first residents are no longer alive or, for various reasons, no longer live in Avion, we still have the possibility of capturing the recollections of the oldest living Avion-dwellers, born around the year 1940, whose entire life has been connected with the building. This combination of methods has turned out to be notably beneficial in gaining new insights, which without the combination would probably have been lost. Chronologically, the present study concentrates on the period from the founding of the cooperative (1929) up to the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 and the following events of the changing political situation in Czechoslovakia (the creation of a federal state and the start of the "normalisation" era), definitively confirming the transformation of how housing cooperatives were organised within the system of the socialist planned economy. At the same time, the many points of historical crisis in the 1930-1968 timeframe, chief among them World War II, the Stalinist 1950s and the massive emigration after August 1968, caused several politically motivated waves of change in the building's inhabitants, which likewise had an impact on the situation in the cooperative. For the introduction, though, we have outlined the matter in the wider historical context starting from 1918, in other words, the founding of the Czechoslovak state, which represented a major stimulus for the growth of housing cooperatives in Slovakia.

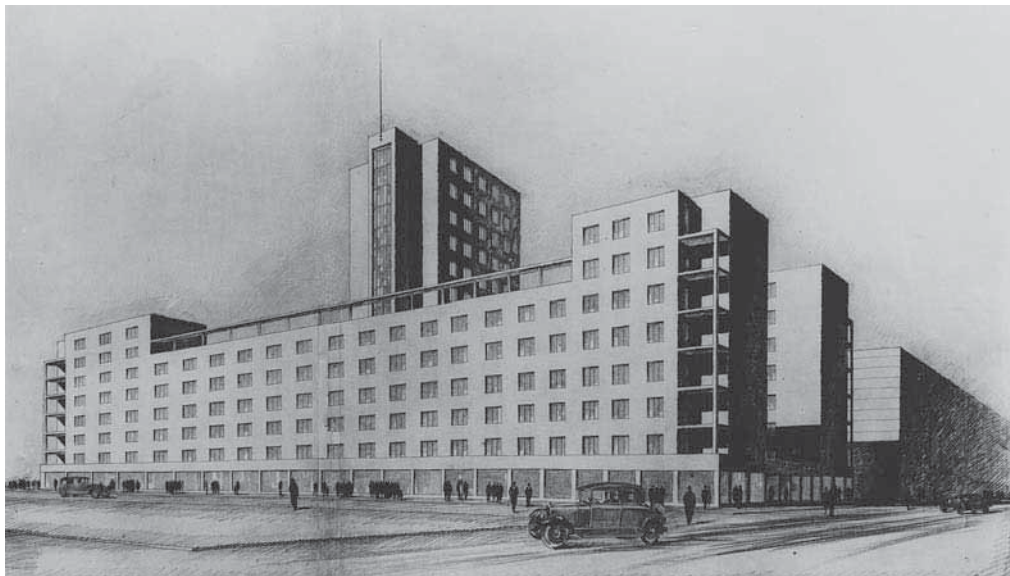
Within the social policies of Czechoslovakia enacted after 1918, the housing question gained a wider importance, reaching beyond the previously dominant theme of addressing specifically worker housing. Thanks to the emergence of a middle class, a need emerged to ensure this social stratum housing on a level corresponding to its status. The architectural designs of cooperative apartment buildings, consequently, placed much stress on reflecting the differences in incomes among middle-class individuals through varying floor areas of the given flats. At the same time, though, both architects and cooperative representatives had to pay attention to the current legislation determining how many flats and of what size the building should contain to meet the conditions for classification as social housing, and thus eligible for state subsidies. In the case of Avion, this aim was met in a genuinely unique manner. And to be sure, there was also the question of the struggle for prestige among the various cooperatives. While from the start of the 1920s, Bratislava witnessed the founding of many housing cooperatives, far from all of them succeeded in

COMPETITION DESIGN BY KLEMENT
ŠILINGER FROM ROUND 1
OF THE COMPETITION

SÚŤAŽNÝ NÁVRH KLEMENTA

ŠILINGERA Z 1. KOLA SÚŤAŽE

Source Zdroj: The Collection of
Architecture, inv. no. 3038-2.
Archive of the SNG

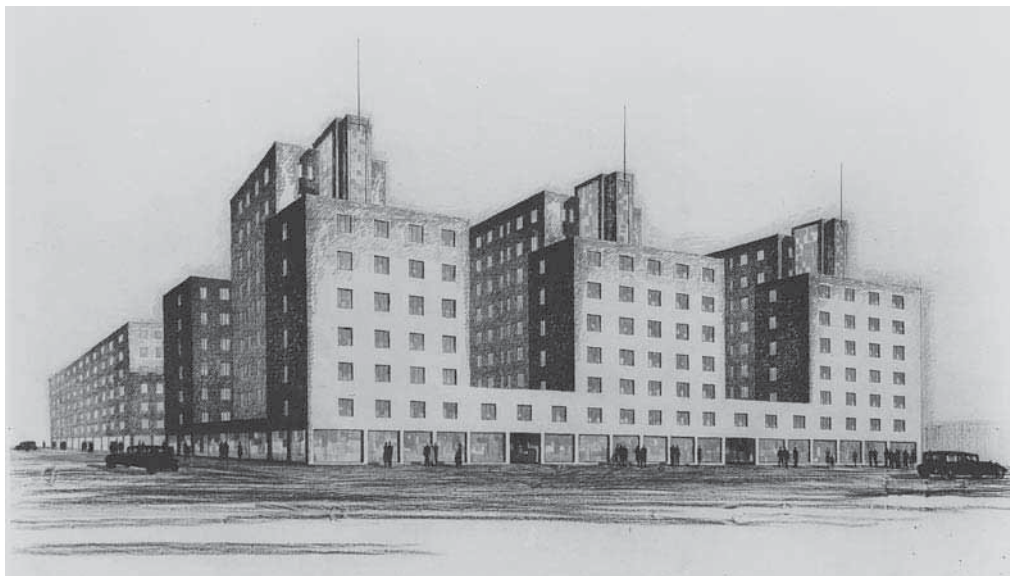


COMPETITION DESIGN BY
KLEMENT ŠILINGER FROM ROUND 2
OF THE COMPETITION

SÚŤAŽNÝ NÁVRH KLEMENTA

ŠILINGERA Z 2. KOLA SÚŤAŽE

Source Zdroj: The Collection of
Architecture, inv. no. 3038-1.
Archive of the SNG



realising an exceptional architectural project. Among the best-known was the Cooperative of Czechoslovak Legionnaires, for veterans of the armed groups fighting against Austro-Hungary in World War I, and their “Legiodomy”. Others included the cooperative of private employees and workers “Nová doba s.r.o.” or the similar Unitas, both of which, unlike Avion, took up the matter of housing for the very poorest in society. These cooperatives erected apartment blocks or larger complexes that entered public awareness through their architectural and technical innovations, mentioned as often in the daily press as professional architectural journals. And Avion itself was published in both of the professional journals active in Slovakia in the interwar years, *Slovenský staviteľ*² and *Forum*³, forming a valuable reference for the cooperative. To ensure the formulation and completion of such projects, these cooperatives worked toward acquiring the services of prominent architects: the “Legiodomy” arose from the design of Dušan Jurkovič (1868–1947) and Jan Pacl (1877–1938) in 1923–1924, while the Nová doba complex (1934–1942) and Unitas (1932) were the work of the partnership of Friedrich Weinwurm (1885–1942) and Ignác Vécsei (1883–1944).

The founders of the “Construction Cooperative for the Building of Rental Apartments in Bratislava in Tehelné pole and the Vicinity (*Stavební družstvo pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě na Cihelném poli a v okolí*)⁴”, whose main realisation was Avion, had from the outset high ambitions grounded in a knowledge of the importance of connecting social problems with the latest

architectural discussions, and hence at the start of 1930 organised an architectural competition for the building.⁵ It is evident that the intention was to raise a monumental modern residential block with an inner courtyard or courtyards that would provide quite in the otherwise busy urban setting. The course of the competition is still uncertain, as no records have been preserved that would let us know the full details. At the same time, a significant finding was made in our research: the Archive of the Slovak National Bank (Archív NBS) held several previously unknown competition designs, proving that more architects participated in it than merely Klement Šilinger (1887–1951) and Josef Marek (the winner), as was previously believed. Though it is unlikely that the cooperative would have invited into the competition for such an important structure only Šilinger and Marek, clear evidence on who the other participants were was long missing. Now, as our findings show, alongside these two architects, other participants included A.J. Ceplecha, Jiří Grossmann (1892–1957) and a third architect whose identity is unclear. Despite this discovery, the question still remains open as to who was on the competition jury. Since the competition designs were published in the survey by Ladislav Foltyn,⁶ there exists the possibility that he was a member, or perhaps even the chair. In any case, the final form of the designs and the selection of the architect for the realised project were also significantly influenced by the cooperative itself, as can be discerned from its charter stating that the cooperative board decides on the realisation of all construction plans.

In shaping the vision of the form and function of the building, another likely factor could have been that the chair of the cooperative board was a lawyer working for the railway. Rail transport was a prosperous sector of the economy in the First Republic, leading to the creation of one of the strongest systems of social support for state employees in Czechoslovakia, created by the rail workers themselves. Apartment blocks for railway staff formed a significant part of cooperative construction, indeed a noteworthy chapter in the history of interwar architecture in Slovakia. And not surprisingly, both architects to enter the final round of the Avion competition – Josef Marek and Klement Šilinger – had designed apartment blocks for rail employees during the 1920s. Avion, though, was not a homogeneous employee residence, but the home of a diverse professional community – lawyers, doctors, journalists, bank officials, architects, artists, and others. In our examination of the process of registering applicants for membership, we found that a certain number of flats were reserved for employees of Hypotečná banka, the bank that provided the loan for Avion's construction. Among the first members of the cooperative were also employees of the social insurance office, which had also provided financial support for construction.

The selection of the site for a project of such size and importance was hardly accidental, as confirmed not only in the research on the Avion building itself, but also through knowledge of the wider contexts in the development of the urban form of Bratislava as a whole through the 20th century. The specific locality, the suburb of Blumental, had been intended at the end of the 1920s as the new city centre, the site of a new city hall and major theatre.⁷ The overall character of construction, previously marked by low, usually two-storey townhouses and industrial complexes, was to be replaced with a modern block fabric. Though these ideas were never fully realised, Avion fit well into these city block concepts, perhaps even exceeding them.

The Founding of the Cooperative

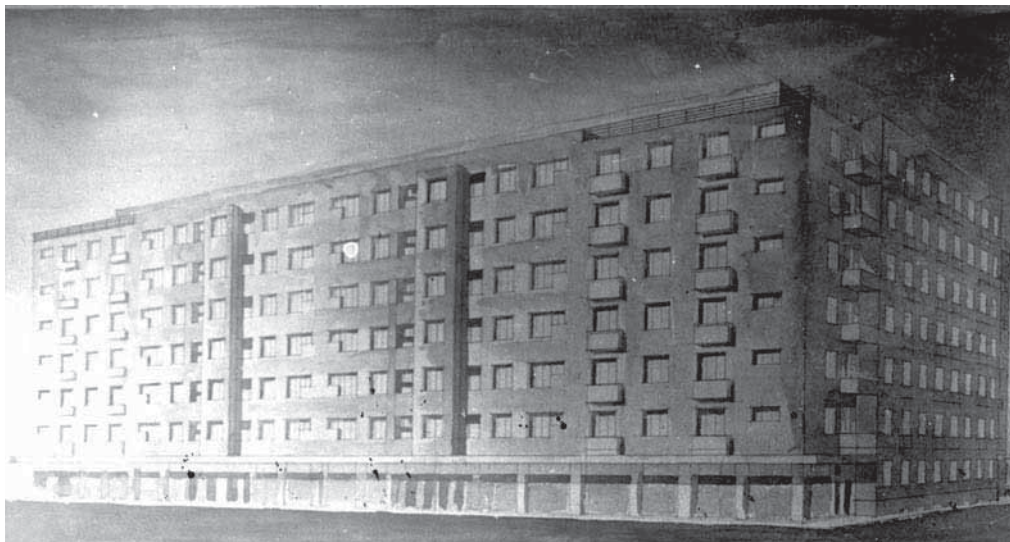
Legally, the cooperative was a limited-liability corporation, founded 24 October 1929 based on Article § 223-257 of Act XXXVII/1875 of the old Hungarian Commercial Code.⁸ The purpose of the cooperative was to ensure its members, as less prosperous members of society, accessible and health-promoting flats in a rental block with a prevalence of smaller flats. Toward this end, the cooperative could purchase extant buildings or erect new ones, the latter being the case with Avion. In addition, the cooperative built and operated further buildings at the addresses Česká 19–23 (designed by A.J. Ceplecha, realised by contractor František Kadeřávek) and Kalinčiakova 2–4 (designed by Klement Šilinger, built like Avion by the Slovak Construction Works - *Slovenské stavebné závody*). In the block on Česká were only single-room flats and one commercial space, while at Kalinčiakova were 61 one-room and 7 two-room flats with two small commercial spaces.

The capital for the cooperative consisted of member payments, inscriptions fees, terminal accounts, non-refundable construction deposits, loans, excess margins from maintenance costs, donations, and other funds. As for its organisational structure, the cooperative had, as required by law, a board, an oversight committee, and a general assembly. The board, elected by the general assembly, held their office for 2 years. Its chairman was JUDr. Josef Rubína, chair of the State Rail

**COMPETITION DESIGN BY
J. MAREK FROM ROUND 1 OF THE
COMPETITION**

SÚŤAŽNÝ NÁVRH J. MAREKA
Z 1. KOLA SÚŤAŽE

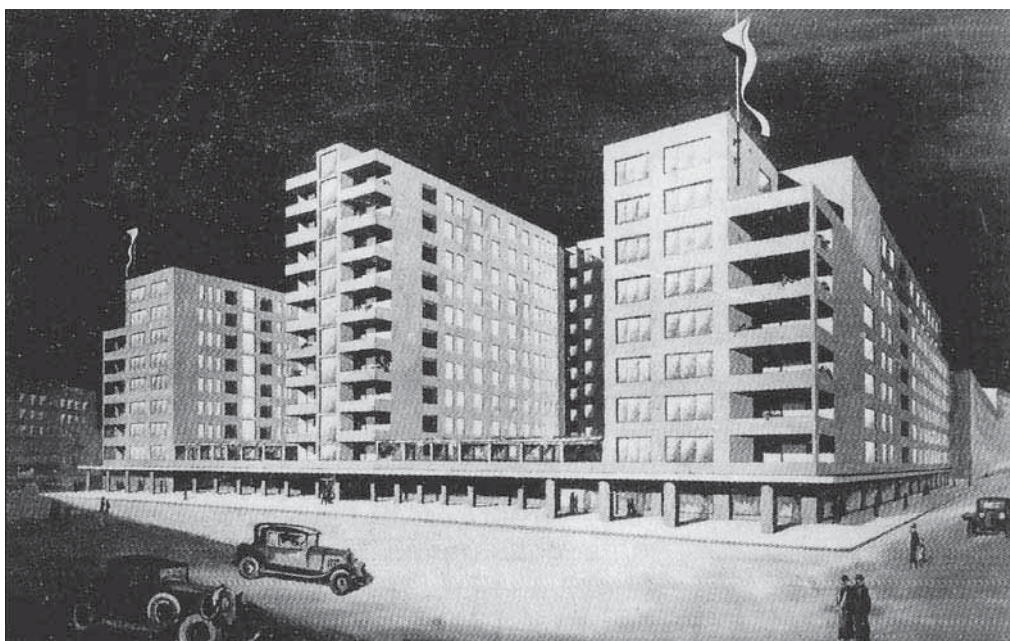
Source Zdroj: Walterskirchen-Avion,
inv. no. 000-000-003-133.
Archive of the NBS, Fund



**DESIGN BY J. MAREK FROM
ROUND 2 OF THE COMPETITION**

NÁVRH J. MAREKA Z 2. KOLA SÚŤAŽE

Source Zdroj: FOLTYN, Ladislav.
1993. Slovenská architektúra a česká
avantgarda 1919 – 1939. Bratislava:
SAS, p. 117



Council in Bratislava.⁹ Applicants for membership in the cooperative had to submit a written application, after which they were assigned a place on the waiting list. If, however, they were unable to pay the inscription fee by a set deadline, they were eliminated from the list; they could apply once again when their financial situation improved. In the event of a member's death, the cooperative share became the subject of inheritance – following the then-common procedure of inheritance first by the wife and then by the children. At the same time, the heirs were liable for all financial obligations of the deceased member for the period of at least one year after death. At this point, they had the choice of giving up the membership or continuing with it. The board had the right to exclude any member who performed a “dishonest action” against the cooperative, failed to meet the obligation to make payments, or violated other stipulations of the charter.¹⁰

In April 1930, the cooperative made a request for a loan from the Hypotečná banka. Their application stated as their reason the construction of an apartment block for the cost of approximately 14million crowns (with the bank loan amounting to around 4 million). They declared an interest in a loan with state backing, as allowed by the new Construction Act (no. 45/1930). As noted in the introduction, for the provision of a loan of this size, the cooperative agreed to set aside a certain number of flats for any bank employees who decided to become members. Assumed maintenance

THE APPEARANCE OF AVION AS REALISED

REALIZOVANÁ PODOBA AVIONU

Source Zdroj: Fund Walterskirchen-Avion, inv. no. 000-000-003-130. Archive of the NBS



costs for a two-room flat (including a bath, hall, servant's room and loggia) was 300 crowns, while a one-room flat was approximately 200 crowns.¹¹ A construction deposit at four percent interest was calculated for the two-room flats at around 10,000 crowns and for the one-room ones about 7,000 crowns.¹² The mandatory payment that cooperative members had to pay at the start ranged, per size, from 8,000–12,000 crowns (though it was not demanded from employees of Hypotečná banka, who had their flats in Avion assigned). In its loan request, the cooperative emphasised that there were seven heavily trafficked streets heading toward the city from the site where the building was planned and that the entire ground floor would have retail units along its perimeter, thus bringing in a significant income and reducing the rent for the flats. The land for the building was purchased from its original owners, the aristocrats Ida Henrietta Walterskirchen and Josef William Walterskirchen by the cooperative, the surrounding land necessary for building and expanding the surrounding streets based on the valid regulation were purchased from the Walterskirchens by the city. Based on the surviving documentation and the minutes from cooperative meetings, it seems that the decision to place the shops along the entire ground level was the idea of the cooperative's chairman, Josef Rubína.¹³ It was also at his initiative that a petrol station was built in front of Avion: since it stood on land owned by the cooperative, it was a source of rental income. In addition to Hypotečná banka, the cooperative requested financial support from the General Pensions Fund and other public institutions. As of 31 October 1932, the cooperative held its annual meeting in the Hall of Mirrors at the Primate's Palace, where Josef Rubína evaluated the course of construction of all buildings of the cooperative, including those in Česká and Kalinčiakova.¹⁴ He was not stinting in his praise, describing them as the most modern apartment blocks in the city, yet with relatively low rent.

However, the effects of the Great Depression soon began to impose themselves on the realisation of the building and its financial backing. The assumed costs began gradually increasing. Already by June 1930, the cooperative made a request to increase its bank loan by 6,800,000 crowns, for the reason that the planned costs had been recalculated at 16,000,000 crowns.¹⁵ And the same process was repeated regularly, every few months during the entire construction period. At the same time, it became gradually evident that even the many retail premises at parterre level would not inevitably supply sufficient revenue for operating and maintaining all buildings of the cooperative. It was in the buildings on Kalinčiakova and Česká that the poorest tenants lived, usually manual workers who were the worst-hit by rising unemployment as the Depression continued. It is worth mentioning that at the cooperative meetings, the board appealed to the more affluent residents of Avion to try to find work for the unemployed members, since without an income they

would be unable to pay their mandatory contributions and would be threatened with expulsion from the cooperative and eviction. From a survey report dated April 1935, it seems that many of the shops remained empty. Lost income from the shop rentals in Avion represented, for the year 1934, over 120,000 crowns and losses from rent for empty flats reached around 35,000 crowns, while the total profit from rent in Avion amounted for the same year to over 1,400,000 crowns.¹⁶ The financial situation of the cooperative was partially revived by state support (guarantee) by the Ministry of Social Care issued on 30 October 1934.¹⁷ Also helping to improve matters was the eventual success in finding tenants for all the shops in the parterre, while before the outbreak of World War II only a few flats remained untenanted, which did not significantly reduce the rental income.

In June of 1938, Dr. Rubína left his post as chair of the cooperative board, as he was moving to Prague to take up an appointment at the national rail directorate. Nonetheless, he remained a member of the cooperative. With the departure of the first chair, a symbolic end was indicated for the interwar stage of the cooperative's existence, still grounded on the original principles conceived in a democratic social and political order.

The Idea of the Cooperative over Time

In contrast to the interwar years, where we had the possibility of relying in our archival research on the documentation of the cooperative preserved in the Archiv NBS, the functioning of the cooperative during the war itself has left no documentation. This lack is, at least partially, compensated by the recollections of eyewitnesses, among them memories of the departure of Czech tenants after the dissolution of the joint state, or the disappearance of Jewish neighbours during the Holocaust.¹⁸ A few reports, though, also include memories of soldiers raiding Avion at the war's end. "But we could maybe recall the robberies in 'forty-five, once the German army had retreated and the Allied troops come in, in other words primarily the Soviet army and Romanian divisions, and they raided the Avion, because here there was something to steal. Well, simply it was drunken soldiers grabbing what they can, just like in any invasion. Or at least most of the time", recalled Gabriela K.¹⁹ Similar findings occur during the period of political repressions at the start of the 1950s, when as part of "Action B", the new Communist regime forced members of the intelligentsia out of the main cultural and economic centres to small towns and villages. Illustrating this chapter in Avion's history is the relatively well-known story of the state eviction of artist Ester Martinčeková-Šimerová, who in 1952 was forced, along with her husband, lawyer (and later known photographer) Martin Martinček, to leave Avion for a village in Liptov.²⁰

The loan provided to Avion in the 1930s was, after nationalisation, transferred in December 1951 to the competence of the Central National Insurer – National Insurer in Bratislava.²¹ By 1954, ownership of the building was shifted from the original cooperative to the "Publicly Beneficial District Housing Cooperative" (*Obecné prospěšné okresné bytové družstvo - OBD*). In 1961, the successor to Hypotečná banka, Investiční banka in Prague, cancelled the reserve rights for the cooperative's property, with the justification that the debts had been paid in full.²²

The legislative framework for post-war housing cooperatives was shaped after 1959 by Act no. 27/1959 Coll., the Cooperative Housing Construction Act.²³ In the introductory stipulation, it states that "a significant increase in the development of housing construction assumes that, to the widest possible extent, financial and material resources and labour forces be freed, and that the construction of housing involve the widest masses of the workers. The use of these possibilities ensures the best cooperative housing construction organised by construction cooperatives and directed by the national committees". At the start, all housing cooperatives were "people's cooperatives", but later divided into people's cooperatives (LBD) and construction cooperatives (SBD). The former, the LBDs, were created in extant apartment buildings built before the war and during the first post-war two-year plan, which was the case for Avion.²⁴ The main task of the SBDs, in turn, was to construct new buildings. In terms of financing, at first glance there appeared to be no change, as they continued to consist of the three main sources as before – member contributions, state subsidies, and bank loans. However, the finances were no longer under the competences of the individual cooperatives, which not only had lost organisational independence, but even their financial autonomy, since per a previous law, Act no. 67/1956 on Housing Economics²⁵, these competencies were assigned to the state, represented by the local national committees. And these organisations not only kept the registers of tenants and cooperative members, but also the waiting lists for applicants, directly deciding the assignment or exchange of flats. An entirely different

STAMP OF THE CONSTRUCTION
COOPERATIVE

PEČIATKA STAVEBNÉHO DRUŽSTVA

Source Zdroj: Fund Walterskirchen-
Avion



matter was the stipulation in the previous act on “excess size” of flats, derived from earlier legislation (Act no. 163/1946 Coll., on exceptional measures for housing care and Act no. 138/1948 Coll. on housing economics). These paragraphs were often invoked to force tenants to accept other tenants into their “excessive” flats or to move to smaller ones so that the number of persons in residence would remain in proportion to the floor area. This aspect of the housing policy from the Stalinist 1950s had its own impact on the families living in Avion, as confirmed by several personal testimonies. “And even if someone, say whose spouse died, this person would have preferred to stay there, then somehow they used it that you had excess space and needed to move, and if not, you wouldn’t have the money for it. Basically, always the pressure came only from the [LBD], that it was only them that got them to leave, since everyone would certainly have preferred to stay, including the old tenant”, stated respondent Naďa F.²⁶

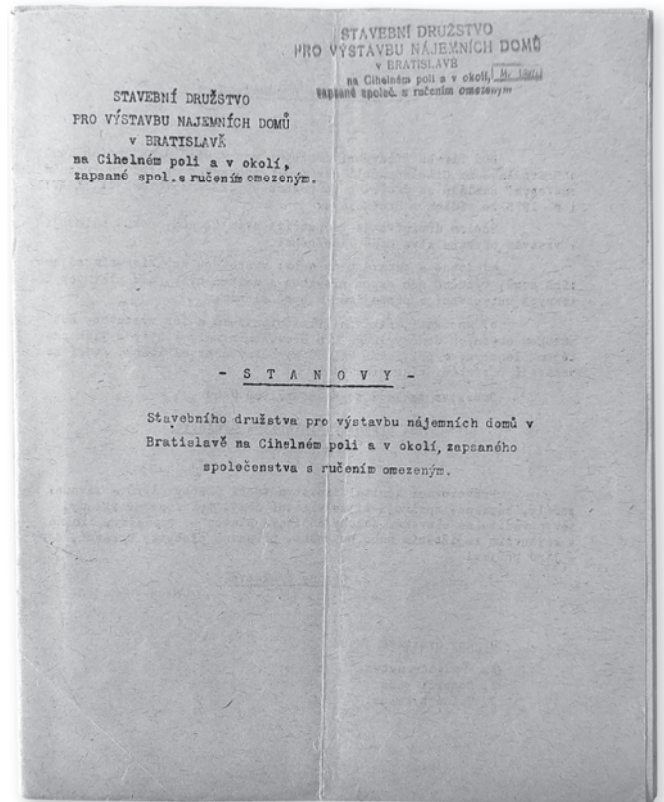
Although Slovakia already had a sizeable extant housing fund, during the second half of the 1960s there were, alongside the construction cooperatives, only 13 people’s cooperatives, administering 4950 flats inhabited by 17 433 tenants. Maintenance and repair to extant buildings largely continued during World War II, though at the very end of hostilities many, like Avion, were attacked during the final battles or the previously mentioned looting by the Red Army, which certainly caused no small share of damage. And even though the cooperatives worked to maintain the pre-war level of care for their housing fund, in the new political and economic situation this goal, over the long term, proved impossible. The chief cause was the limited production capacity of state contractors, who could not complete repairs and maintenance to the extent needed. Nor was it possible to plan for general reconstruction of the buildings: these projects were financed until 1967 by the Czechoslovak State Bank, yet as of 1 January of that year, regular maintenance had to be financed from the operating resources of the cooperative themselves. State companies often failed to meet the agreed deadlines, extending the work or leaving it undone. As such, decay of housing was already visible at the end of the 1960s. Per the Civic Code, no. 40/1964 § Article 161, paragraph 2, the payment of small repairs of a value up to 60 Czechoslovak crowns was the obligation of the tenants.²⁷ Larger repairs in common building areas were financed by the state except for cases in which it was proven that the damage was intentional: this being a matter understandably complicated to confirm and prove, it was a lively area for speculation and corruption. And the ongoing dilapidation of older buildings began to prevail over the advantages of accessible housing. As the income of the LBDs fell far short of covering operating costs, they were forced to apply for state assistance, per cabinet decree no. 40/1964 Coll – to the amount of 1370 crowns per flat. And this state subsidy was itself insufficient. As of 1967, the housing cooperatives in Bratislava alone needed an increase in the state contribution of 4 million crowns. Additionally, the financing system did not sufficiently account for the lowering of building value through wear, nor that the wear level was not equal over time. Members of the LBDs were also discouraged by other aspects of their work for the cooperative: their activities were exclusively on a voluntary basis, while in the construction cooperatives they received (at least symbolic) compensation.

Another instrument of support for improvement of the maintenance of earlier cooperative buildings was that of the “socialist competition”, an activity involving primarily the youth who would assist with maintenance as volunteer work brigades. “Competition entry, primarily of competitions organised for stimulating increased productivity at work, formed a significant cultural element of socialist everyday life”, notes Magdaléna Paříková.²⁸ As also observed by Lenka Bobulová, this trend culminated during the normalisation years after 1968, when the Communist Party realised the need for further stimulation of waning workplace productivity.²⁹ Of course, this form

**CHARTER OF THE CONSTRUCTION
COOPERATIVE**

STANOVY STAVEBNÉHO DRUŽSTVA

Source Zdroj: Fund Walterskirchen-
Avion



of voluntary assistance in maintaining apartment buildings did not match in quality the work of trained builders, and the contribution to the buildings themselves remained merely at the formal level. Nor did the competitions limit themselves to maintenance, including, for instance, who was most regular and timely at paying cooperative fees. Similarly contributing to improvement of payment morale was the personal collection of the fees by representatives of the individual cooperatives, a method seen as advantageous equally from the standpoint of ensuring more personal contact between the cooperative boards and the individual members.

As of 1 January 1969, there came into existence (in parallel with its Czech counterpart) the Slovak Union of Housing Cooperatives (*Slovenský zväz bytových družstiev* - SZBD) as the supreme organisation for cooperative housing in Slovakia.³⁰ The SZBD sent delegates to congresses of the national cooperative organisation to represent the interests of Slovak cooperative members. For the two largest cities, Bratislava and Košice, there were city associations, while all other apartment construction fell under the district associations. With the founding of the SZBD, a space emerged for reflecting on how the housing cooperatives had functioned ever since the war's end and their plans toward the future. Marked as the chief hindrance for the housing cooperatives was, in fact, the poor maintenance of the buildings, especially the older ones, where these deficiencies had lasted longer and had an increasingly severe impact on the quality of life in them. Indeed, recollections of how weak the maintenance of buildings was in the post-war years occur in participant testimony from tenants of Avion. One of them, Juraj Gašperík, stated: "Since the building was constructed exceptionally well, for several decades it didn't need any larger repairs and all the finances that came in from the tenants went into the common account and were divided among the other buildings. And whenever anything was repaired, it was just a kind of patching up, without any aesthetic sensitivity, only to make sure that it somehow kept working."³¹

It was in Bratislava that the initiative emerged for creating a maintenance centre that would be able to respond more quickly to the needs of common repairs in older cooperative buildings. In the district of Trnávka, the building workshop "Stavoprava" was created in 1965, with various facilities and equipment to provide construction work for the cooperatives. Between 1965 and 1967, Stavoprava repaired, among other buildings, the Unitas apartment complex, constructed at the



AVION TODAY

AVION DNES

Photo Foto: Anton Sládek

same time as Avion.³² In later years, though, the enterprise came up against “political difficulties”. The chair of the SZBD, Rudolf Holec, summarised in his speech upon election in 1969 several other measures realised in the later 1960s towards improving the financing of housing cooperatives: creation of a “fund for cooperative finances”, improvements to the conditions for building insurance, or the promise of the state energy inspectorate that only the countervalue would be paid for actually supplied heat. Similarly, preparations were made for creating a Cooperative Bank (Družstevní banka) with branch offices for Moravia and Slovakia.³³ And in 1968, possibilities emerged for entrepreneurial activity by the cooperatives, in response to the growing voices that criticised their organisation as too passive and centralised. It was primarily the younger generation of cooperative members, among them the active members of the SBD for staff and instructors at Bratislava’s Comenius University, that called for democratisation in the Central Council of Cooperatives (Ústredna rada družstiev - ÚRD), hoping for a method that would resemble a kind of cooperatives’ parliament.³⁴ After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, these reformist tendencies understandably were slowed. Meanwhile, the subsequent wave of emigration brought another problem: what to do with the flats vacated by emigrants. A special act no. 15/1970 Coll., invoked the termination of the right of personal use of a flat and the confiscation of the property from persons who illegally remained outside the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.³⁵ Unlike the period of forced departures and disappearances from Avion during World War II and after, where only the oldest inhabitants had any recollections, many current residents shared authentic memories from their childhood of this period. “Mišo..., why he, he was super. The family lived where the household goods shop is. They left in sixty-nine, emigrated to Germany. And with their two sons. Mišo was in my class at school, the other one was older, such a handsome boy. All us girls were in love with him. He was also at the ZDŠ (primary school -author’s note) with us. We all cried when he left...” recalled Naďa F.³⁶

On both the symbolic and the practical level, the post-1968 “normalisation” implied a diversion away from the original principles of the cooperative, which were still cited as valid, yet the concrete measures that would have resolved the lacking construction of new flats or the maintenance and financing of older ones never arrived.³⁷ A significant breakthrough and a new chapter in caring for the fund of extant collective apartment buildings came only with Congress XV of the Communist Party in 1976, which insisted on the need not only to build new structures but also modernise the older ones. Revitalisation of the housing found was legally anchored by a cabinet decree, no. 196/79 and integrated into the seventh Five-Year Plan (1981 – 1985).

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- 1 Originally, the building was designed with 118 flats, though over time the number increased with division of the largest ones. Splitting up the larger flats in Avion was intended to ensure higher income from rents. With the division of two four-room flats into two-room and studio configurations, the cooperative gained 23,000 crowns per year, while adjustment of the rubbish disposal fees in 1935 caused a savings of 20,000 crowns, thus in total 43,000 crowns. See "Zápis o řádné valné hromadě Stavebního družstva pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě na Cihelném poli a v okolí" dated 6 June 1935, Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod, box U 0000-2557. Archive of the NBS.
- 2 Stavba družstevného bloku na tzv. pozemkoch Walterskirchenových. *Slovenský staviteľ*, 3(2), 1932, pp. 41 – 49.
- 3 MAREK, Josef. 1932. Genossenschaftswohnblock auf den „Walterskirchen“ Gründen in Bratislava von Arch. Josef Marek. *Forum*, 2(2), pp. 290 – 294.
- 4 It is worth noting that the official name of the cooperative was given in Czech rather than Slovak.
- 5 Architectural competitions organised by housing cooperatives were not common in this era, though the ones aware of the importance of improving the quality of health-promoting housing for all social classes held them. Another cooperative apartment building of similar size and architectural value as Avion is the Self-Employed Trades Building (Živnostenský dom) on Kollárovo námestie in Bratislava completed in 1929 – its design is by Klement Šilinger and, just as in the case of Avion, it ensued from a competition held in 1927. See DULLA, Matúš. 2019. Klement Šilinger: nedokončené dielo. In: Dulla, M. (ed.). *Zapomenutá generace. Čeští architekti na Slovensku*. Praha: ČVUT, pp. 102 – 105.
- 6 FOLTYN, Ladislav. 1993. *Slovenská architektúra a česká avantgarda 1918 – 1938*. Bratislava: SAS, pp. 117 – 118.
- 7 Viz. MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta, SZALAY, Peter, HABERLANDOVÁ, Katarína, KRISTEKOVÁ, Laura and BOČKOVÁ, Monika. 2020. *Bratislava (ne)plánované mesto / Bratislava (un)planned city*. Bratislava: SLOVART, pp. 365 – 366.
- 8 Ján Husár writes that the essential part of the stipulations of this law were rescinded only with the Civic Code of 1950, taking effect as of 1 January 1951, while the rest were cancelled by Act no. 53/1954 Coll. on people's cooperatives and cooperative organisations with effect as of 1 January 1955. Despite the efforts to unify legal codes in the first Czechoslovak Republic, no single Czechoslovak commercial code was ever adopted, with only a draft being published in 1937. See HUSÁR, Ján. 2017. Zákonný článok XXXVII/1875 a jeho vplyv na vývoj slovenského obchodného práva. In: *Právny obzor: teoretický časopis pre otázky štátu a práva*, 100(1), pp. 38 – 58.
- 9 "Výťah z registra friemu strana 2-3, zápis z nariadeného uznesenia z 30. januára 1930", Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod, box U-0000-2557. Archive of the NBS.
- 10 Stanovy Stavebního družstva pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě na Cihelném poli a v okolí, zapsaného společenstva s ručením omezeným, Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod., box U-0000-2557. Archive of the NBS.
- 11 For a sense of what this sum for housing costs meant in relation to the average salary, we should note that the average weekly wage of a manual worker in Bratislava at the start of the 1930s ranged from 120 Kčs to 150 Kčs. Monthly earnings of a worker in the capitol city would thus have been 480 – 600 Kčs, while white-collar earnings were roughly four times the amount. For more detail note: ROGUŠOVÁ, Jaroslava and LETZ, Róbert. 2014. Nezamestnanosť ako sprievodný jav hospodárskej krízy. In: Letz, R. (ed.): *Slováci vo víre tridsiatych rokov*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, p. 227.
- 12 List Stavebního družstva pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě na Cihelném poli a v okolí Hypotečnej banke českej z 30. apríla 1930, Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod., box U 0000-2556. Archive of the NBS.
- 13 Zápis o řádné valné hromadě Stavebního družstva pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě, 31. októbra 1932, p. 10, Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod., box U 0000-2556. Archive of the NBS.
- 14 Zápis o řádné valné hromadě Stavebního družstva pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě, 31. októbra 1932, p.8, Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod. box U 0000-2556. Archive of the NBS.
- 15 List Stavebního družstva pro výstavbu nájemních domů v Bratislavě na Cihelném poli a v okolí Hypotečnej banke českej z 10. júna 1930, Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod, box U 0000-2556. Archive of the NBS.
- 16 Zpráva z revízie 3. a 5. apríla 1935, p. 6., Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod box U 0000-2556. Archive of the NBS.
- 17 List Ministerstva sociální péče o vyhotovení dlžného úpisu z 25. júna 1935, Fund Hypotečná banka česká, Praha, filiálky Bratislava, Užhorod, box U 0000-2556. Archive of the NBS.
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