

Reviewed utopia. Historical background and project on a prefabricated housing district in Moscow

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Our work deals with policy and architecture.

Urban planning and architecture in Moscow, twelve years after the fall of Soviet Union, are in deep transformation, at the mercy of speculation.

To understand this brand new world, the history and transformation of housing system is particularly helpful.

We refer to permanences and discontinuities in history through soviet and present times: redistribution of houses in war communism, vanguardist utopias; from stalinism, which made worse the lack of houses to the diffusion of mass prefabricated houses during Khrushchev's years.

All these considerations are closely linked, especially in Moscow, to the explosive superpopulation, due to the role of great catalyst that "the city" has always played.

We analyzed the turning point of '50's since this fact led to the creation of the complex system of planning, standard design and construction which would have undoubtedly conditioned the urban shape of all the socialist cities.

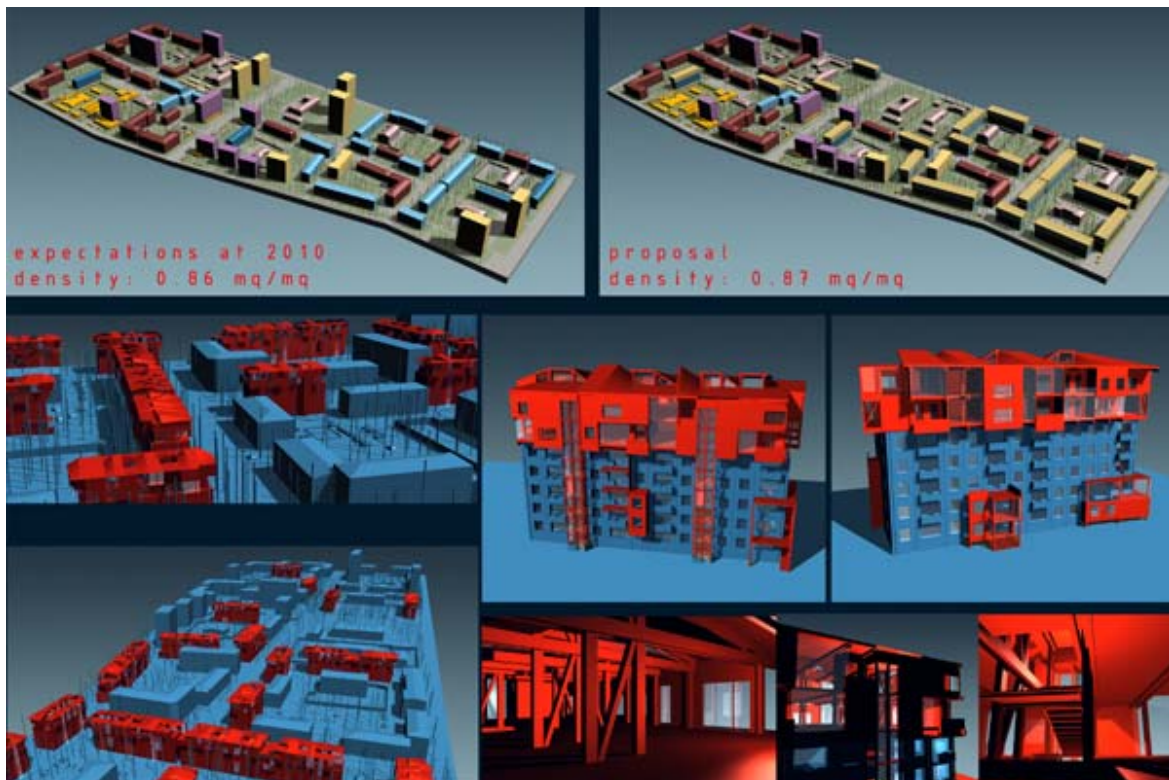


We investigated the present situation by different means. First we tried to identify the various actors in the real estate market: municipality, private investors, new users.

Then we tried to lighten regulations and norms in architecture and to underline all the distance between real life; new forms of self-organization in urban space, which are witnesses of the new political meaning.

So we demonstrate how the fact that mass housing of '60's is, in fact, the evidence of a strong attempt of social equality which cannot be liquified as it use to happen today with massive demolition of entire districts.

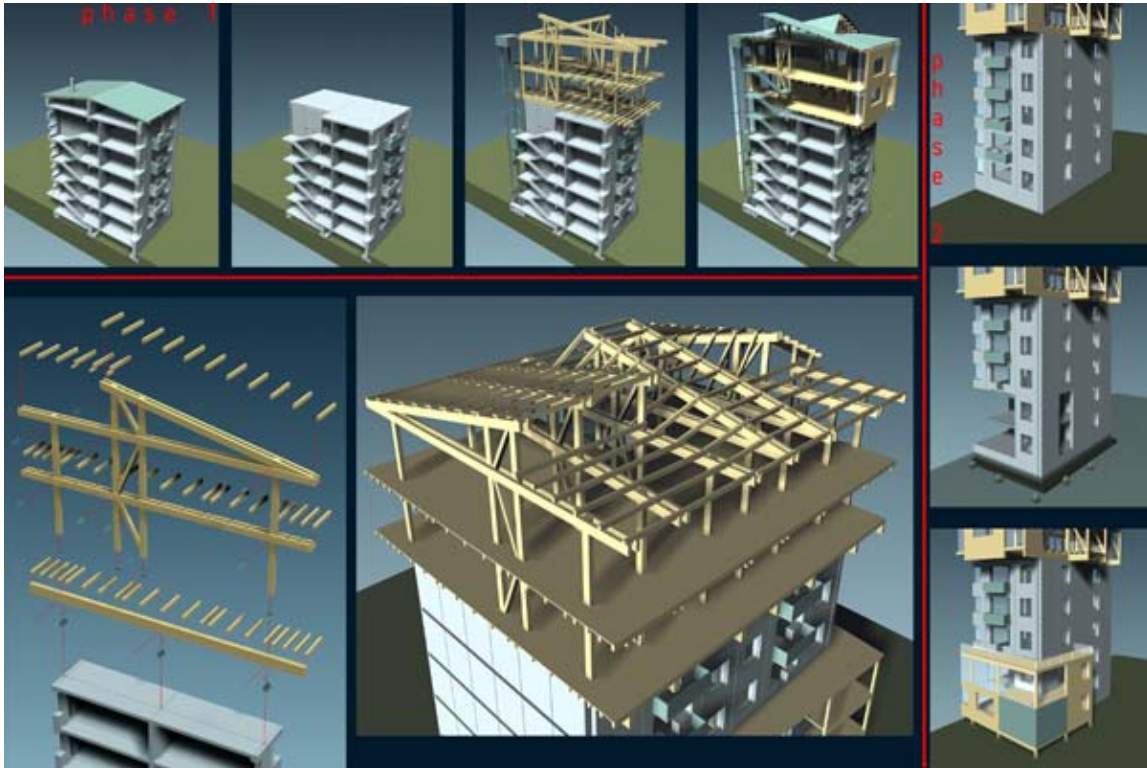
Beside this we document the present trends in expensive architecture of a capital city that is still under a fast construction (so called "moscow style"). This is exactly one of those permanences in the imagine itself of the city (Moscow) that russian people always had. The most important contribution in this work of analysis is due to all architects in Moscow, which have made possible to explain the real situation beyond official propaganda.



Our intervention, in design, is directed to exploit the repetitiveness of standard design to offer the wider fan of possibilities to renew the mass housing districts.

We realized that the problem resided into the enormous dimension of urban void: in our analysis we underline how, thanks to speculation and laws, it is still today growing, against every logic motivation and common sense. Industrial prefabrication technology (which is working still today) is a cause for this situation.

So we tried to keep a small scale of intervention: the project offers an alternative model of densification that doesn't increase the height of buildings or the dimension of urban void. In order to verify the material possibility of the project itself we analyzed the anatomy of a widespread category of standard types, which present a common structural model (three rows of load-bearing walls in longitudinal direction). So the project is a kind of typification which reacts against omologation.



About laws, we decided to follow all the rules which demonstrate to be still useful: usually norms are inherited by ancient soviet times, and today are obsolete and little followed in practice. We followed the opposite behaviour towards those long gone practices, like wooden architecture, which are today not in use but still alive among people.

In extreme synthesis, our proposal refers to an alternative densification to serve an increase of approximately 100000 people per year: this process, instead of demolishing the existent and constructing high rise buildings, obtains the same volumetry by adding two extra-storeys to the standard five-storey building (we took, as the example of this possibility the standard type 1-515). However this is only the first step of a process: the residential volume obtained, in fact, can attract investment for the renewal of the all building and his adaptation to new needs and functions: so the second step is focused in particular on the transformation of the ground floor in order to create spaces for trade and public services.

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