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LABOUR

DWELLINGS FOR THE INDUSTRIAL
SOCIETY IN BRNO

LD 000

Prokop Matěj

Independent Group

Interiors Buildings Cities, TU Delft

2018/2019

Industry of the 19th century influenced not only the city landscape but especially its inhabitants that were streaming to the future metropolis of Moravia. The first generation of textile workers was coming from western Europe (Rhineland, Belgium) and was appropriately skilled in textile production.¹ These workers settled in special apartments located usually on factory premises and they established a new social group that gradually shaped into factory owners. Therefore, they had completely different housing requirements that will be described later in this chapter. After that first generation came and set up prosperous industry in Brno, a massive wave of low-skilled workers hit city of Brno. It was the largest social group that soon outnumbered high-skilled foreigners and unfortunately Brno of that time was not prepared to handle their housing needs.

1. Tomáš Zapletal and Andrea Březinová,
Brno - moravský Manchester, Brno 2014,
p. 47.

4.1. Labour housing

If there was any darker side of the industrial boom in Brno, textile labour was the clearest example of that. Unfortunately, a rapid development of the city was not able to ensure better conditions for its inhabitants. In opposite to influential but rather single entrepreneurs, a new immense social group of labour workers emerges. It was not certainly an immediate shift, but workers were continuously coming so that city had to sooner or later accommodate their needs. Suburban areas could not saturate a demand for labour force and workers were coming from more distant rural areas. Villagers were looking for a new source of livelihood. As for example local weavers that lost their job because of the city manufactories or simply newcomers that were attracted by higher earnings. Textile labour was one of the least stable labour groups in Brno of that time. In comparison to workers from heavy industry or railways for instance, they were low-qualified and in general less paid. Therefore, textile workers rather shifted to other professions instead of fighting for their rights. To better understand the social group of textile workers, observing housing conditions could be an essential help.

Labour colonies

The oldest labour colony was founded in the *Červená* alley (*already mentioned in chapter 3.1.*). It deserves more attention because of its long lifespan and extraordinary proof of worker's life. Thankfully, a complete description of this colony was elaborated by Karel Fojtík in 1959 soon after its demolition.

In the end of the 18th century, when the colony was built, a number of workers in Brno was much more sustainable and that had also a positive impact on their housing conditions. Early 44 single storey houses in the colony were laid in two parallel rows that formed an inner world of gardens between them. There was enough space for a fruit tree and a vegetable patch. From each other they were divided only by fences and the whole colony was very compact, that improved cohesiveness among neighbours. Although the houses were very small, they were not given less care. Every year the plastering was restored and limewashed. It was in strong contrast to the sewage system, which ran on the main road in the middle of the gardens. This open sewage system was common for all other outskirts of Brno.

Despite its original purpose as a housing for textile labour, almost no textile worker lived here in the middle of the 19th century. Ethnic composition of residents also changed and Czech names prevailed over German names. As a result, the colony had a character of typical Czech village that lived its own life and people even stick to rural customs as erecting maypoles and others. Inhabitants could live their idyllic life in the walls of the colony only until the second half of the 19th century. Gardens, a main livable element of the colony, were substituted by new bigger and taller residential housing. Old residents were then looking into new walls instead of lush gardens and the open sewage system was running beneath their windows. It became a settlement with no direct sunlight, no courtyards and no basic hygiene facilities. Surprisingly, neighbour cohesiveness was not ruptured and the residents were true neighbours. They still paid attention to the tidiness of their properties and surroundings and did the cleaning at least once a week.

Apartment blocks

Next dwelling typology that appeared with preceding industrial expansion were apartment blocks. In particular

blocks with courtyard balconies (in Czech *Pavlače*, in Austrian Deutsch *Pawlatsche*) were very local building type specific for the whole area of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Examples could be found in every bigger city of that time. Why they became so common, had a simple reason. Compared to older housing typologies, they were able to accommodate a higher amount of people. Labour families lived there stuffed on a very small floor area and since these houses were composed of rental apartments, they became a very lucrative business. As a result of immense demand for cheap apartments and insufficient wage for workers, a housing crisis was soon a major problem for Brno. A rent for smallest apartments compared to square meters was paradoxically much higher than in bigger normal flats in the city center. House owners were of course very aware of that and abuse this unfavourable position of workers.² New apartment blocks were erected in the outskirts next to the factories.

2. Karel Fojtík, *Tři typy dělnického obydlí v Brně*, In: *Brno v minulosti a dnes : sborník příspěvků k dějinám a výstavbě Brna*, Brno 1959, p.28.

A typical apartment for labour family consisted of two rooms. One kitchen that served as a common room, where all activities took place. In some cases, it was also used as a workplace for women, so that all furnishings and finishes had to be very utilitarian. Less equipped was the second room that served mainly for sleeping. Even in the most humble and poor families, there was still a visible effort for tidiness as it was apparent in first labour colonies.

The housing crises culminated in the end of the 19th century after population almost doubled from 1857 till 1900 and number of housing units experienced moderate growth. Even Austrian statistical office was concerned about this issue and described a housing situation in Brno as one of the worst in the whole monarchy. Insufficient housing conditions then became an interest for the municipality that founded preventive measures and special inspection institutions, although it did not really work in Brno. Bad working conditions in combination with bad housing were unsustainable and endanger the future of the whole city. As one of the solutions municipality came with an intention to build city apartments for workers and some of them were indeed realized. Nevertheless, these apartments

were not a big success and workers rather refused to move in. A maintenance of the house was the responsibility of municipality officer, who instead of taking care of the property had to also “take care” of the residents. In other words, the officer was informing municipality about all activities of residents, so that they were not liberated from supervision even at home.³

Where the city failed, factory owners tried to take over a responsibility. In general working conditions in factories were very tough, but some factory owners respected the value of human labour. Especially, Jewish entrepreneurs perceived a potential danger of social imbalance for a stability of the society.⁴ For instance, at the beginning of the 20th century, the company Aron und Jakob Löw-Beer's Söhne built a settlement of five workers' houses in Brno Jundrov. This settlement was intended for elderly workers that served the company for many years. Another maybe

3. Karel Fojtík, *Tři typy dělnického obydlí v Brně*, In: *Brno v minulosti a dnes : sborník příspěvků k dějinám a výstavbě Brna*, Brno 1959, p.30.

4. Tomáš Zapletal and Andrea Březinová, *Brno – moravský Manchester*, Brno 2014, p. 38.

more beneficial example was the settlement at the top Černá Pole district co-funded by the Association for Affordable Housing Development. An influential member of this association was Hermann Tugendhat, who was aware of a housing shortage for workers. As a result, fifty family houses were built for those in needs between 1891 and 1906.⁵

Insufficient housing units were not the only issue that made worker's living harder. Public realm of the 19th century was still much more distant from ideals of a habitable street. Firstly, streets in new suburban districts were not paved and left without any other treatment, so even lighter wind caused a very unpleasant dusty environment. Moreover, open sewage systems and cesspit were an enormous hotbed for diseases. As a stable phenomenon of summer periods epidemic of cholera outbreak several times because of the bacterias in drinking water. In 1866 the worst epidemic wiped out 1,9% of city population (1436 inhabitants), which maybe does not seem so horrific, but the general number of

5. Petra Svobodová and Veronika Lukešová, *Exploring the History of the Textile Industrialists in Brno: Löw-Beer / Stiassni / Tugendhat*, Brno 2017, p. 77 and 93.

infected definitely paralysed the whole city.⁶

As a more spontaneous response to the housing crisis of the late 19th century was a development of new colonies in adjacent borders of the city. In size there were comparable to former colony in Červená alley but originated more likely from bottom-up direction without an initiative of factory owners. Two types of labour colonies could be observed. Firstly emergency colonies that were rather temporary and illegal, but the municipality narrowed its eyes and provided some municipal land. A typical resident was usually unemployed without any funds to pay rent and therefore chose a living in the colony as his only possible option. It was no surprise that shelters were built in a peculiar “do it yourself” way from a leftover material, but in our current view in a very sustainable way. In the end, municipality appreciated this solution to hide a poverty behind the city. Undoubtedly, this type of housing had a secret charm that could not be found in overcrowded apartment blocks and then even people with more stable employment started to

6. *Epidemie cholery v Brně v 19. století*, from http://www.archaiaibno.org/home_cs/?acc=zapisnicek&blog_id=357&blog_date=2009-08-26&blog_archive_date=200908, Retrieved 18.1.2018.

settle in colonies permanently. The second type of colonies emerged and it was composed of small single-storey houses with two rooms but built from good materials. They were built from regular bricks with good insulation against moisture and they had small courtyards enclosed by farming facilities like a hatch, henhouse or woodshed.⁷ After all, they were very similar to rural settlements.

Labour colonies did not have characteristics of neglected ghettos or slums, as we could imagine them nowadays, but they had rather an appearance of rural settlements. A village was a symbol of something certain and traditional compared to the endlessly changing city, where a lot of people could not identify themselves. It could be concluded that 19th century was not able to satisfactorily solve housing problems caused by surges of new inhabitants and until 1918 the crisis was permanent. Society of that time was not able to change this state without a major transformation. As one of the main factors was a gradual separation of society into the German one and Czech one. The society of

7. Karel Fojtík, *Tři typy dělnického obydlí v Brně*, In: *Brno v minulosti a dnes : sborník příspěvků k dějinám a výstavbě Brna*, Brno 1959, p.36.

possessors and non-possessors. Already after the arrival of first foreign workers, the distribution of power was given. It was, of course, possible for Czech inhabitants to become a part of this powerful group under certain circumstances of “Germanization”. This social imbalance that accompanied whole Europe in the 19th century was enriched in Brno and other Central European cities by different ethnic origins that made Austro-Hungarian monarchy indefensible.

4.2. Exclusive architecture for factory owners

In the same context but under completely different conditions exclusive architecture of textile entrepreneurs had been formed from the early 19th century till the beginning of the Second World War. An exclusive residential architecture of the late 19th century and interwar period in Brno was abundantly researched and probably does not require more elaboration. Nevertheless, a brief introduction of this field would be appropriate.

Architecture of that time was an ideal tool for a representation of power and influence and factory owners utilized it. A high concentration of capital in Brno was capable to attract renowned architecture names as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and brought many to settle down in Brno as for instance Josef Arnold, Rudolf Baumfeld or Ernst Wiesner. Residential architecture of entrepreneurs is possible to divide in two different types in terms of typology and time origin.

Firstly, these residences were designed as urban palaces that were an integral part of factory premises. For example Bochner Palace (already mentioned in chapter 3.3.) built for Bochner brothers in the Neo-Renaissance style from 1867 or another palace in the same style for Gustav Adolf Schoeller from 1868.⁸ Both of them were built by Josef Arnold and survived till nowadays.

The second type were residences with a villa typology built usually at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Between the years 1903 and 1904 according to the design of Viennese architect Alexander Neumann, villa for Moritz Fuhrmann

8. Tomáš Zapletal and Andrea Březinová, **Brno – moravský Manchester**, Brno 2014, p. 54.

in Art Nouveau style was built. Later sold to Alfred Löw-Beer so nowadays is known as Löw-Beer House. Another appropriate example would be recently restored Villa Stiassni as a typical villa fitted into an extensive garden. Last but not least example of that kind is of course famed Villa Tugendhat by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Residential architecture for factory owners overshadowed in most cases disappeared industrial architecture and common dwellings architecture. It is a crucial task for contemporary historians to treat them equally and clarify their importance for the overall development of the city of Brno.



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A labour colony "Červená" alley
1906



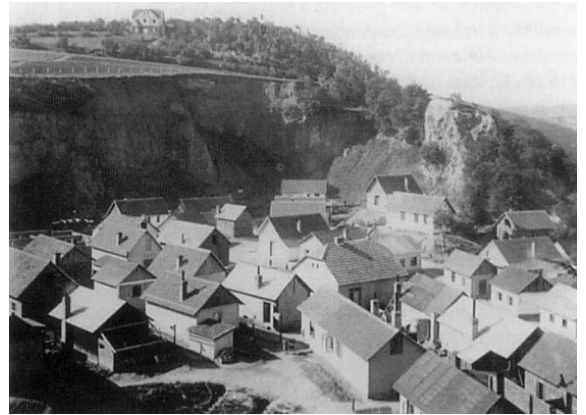
LD 002
A labour colony "Červená" alley
1906



LD 003
home of poor labour family



LD 004
workers's settlement at Černá Pole
1920s



LD 005
Kamenná district, labour colony in a former quarry from 1920s



LD 006
Children's Rehabilitation Centre in Villa Tugendhat
1959

Figures

- LD001** **A labour colony “Červená” alley**, from Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014.
- LD002** **A labour colony “Červená” alley**, from Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014.
- LD003** **home of poor labour family**, from Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014.
- LD004** **workers’ settlement at Černá Pole**, from Petra Svobodová. Exploring the History of the Textile Industrialists in Brno: Löw- Beer / Stiassni / Tugendhat. Brno 2017.
- LD005** **Kamenná district**, <http://www.bam.brno.cz>
- LD006** **Children’s Rehabilitation Centre in Villa Tugendhat**, from <http://www.tugendhat.eu/en/the-building/after-the-departure-of-the-family.html>

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