
Management and modernization of housing facilities: specific features of central and eastern European countries

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Abstract

Housing and housing facilities are defined as the object of management science. Some specific features of modernizing housing and housing facilities in Lithuania and other countries of central and eastern Europe are described. Major problems of achieving better quality and higher rate of innovation in this sphere as well as some marketing problems are considered. A number of suggestions concerning the improvement of housing facilities management are also made.

Introduction

Political, social, economic and technological changes taking place in Lithuania and other central and eastern European (CEE) countries are diverse and manifest themselves in practically all spheres of human activities and social life. The development of housing and housing facilities is one of the fields largely determining the dynamic changes in everyday life, as well as indicating the tendencies for transformation of the material and social environment.

Housing and housing facilities are complex concepts establishing physical, biological and social limits for biosocial life of the individual and society. In general, these concepts may be defined as follows:

- A house is a concrete and relatively limited and closed physical, biological and social space where individuals and groups can live their biosocial life embracing certain production, services, housekeeping and other biosocial activities. A house is usually associated with a structure, part of a structure or a complex of structures (except natural shelters), because the latter always present restricted areas intended for biosocial life of individuals and their groups.
- Housing facilities are defined as a type of physical, biological and social area representing technological and organisational forms of biosocial life and indicating a certain way of life for the individuals or society. Though any housing may be considered a system, with system approach applied to its analysis, a concept of housing facilities in general is associated with the types of biosocial life (this definition allows housing facilities to be related to the way of life of an individual or society, as well as determining the ecological dimension of housing, either from a biological or social perspective).

The development of a house or housing facilities in Lithuania and some other countries of central and eastern Europe is characterised both by general features typical of most western countries and also by specific dimensions attributed to the transformation process taking place in the CEE countries. These special characteristics play a most important part in determining the major trends of housing facilities development, as well as causing

specific management problems associated with a transition period.

It may be stated that the development of housing and housing facilities in Lithuania and some countries of central and eastern Europe should be directly related to management science for the following reasons:

- the need for preparing and implementing major strategic decision in the sphere of housing and housing facilities is growing and the development of strategies requires comprehensive scientific management support;
- the improvement of a house and housing facilities can be carried out only if rather limited resources are efficiently used. This in turn depends on the availability of adequate management procedures chosen in the course of developing well-reasoned management decisions;
- the development of a house and housing facilities has various effects on large biosocial systems which may often change irreversibly. Taking into account this great influence on large biosocial systems and high responsibility of decision-making in this field, it is possible to affirm that management of housing facilities should be based on thorough theoretical grounds.

The above considerations make it possible to conclude that the problems of housing and housing facilities development in Lithuania and some other countries of central and eastern Europe are of vital importance and should be considered the subject of management science. The priorities of research carried out in this field are as follows:

- the investigation of the specific character of housing facilities management and modernisation in Lithuania and other countries of central and eastern Europe;
- research into the improvement of housing quality, methods of stimulating innovations in housing facilities development and marketing from the perspective of their modernisation.

These priorities are dealt with in more detail below.

Specific features of housing facilities management and modernisation under conditions of transformation

When transformations are taking place in Lithuania and other CEE countries, the

processes of housing facilities modernisation and their management development acquire some special characteristics which determine their specific character. Among the most important are:

- deunification and the priority of diversity, a high rate of introducing new elements and the increasing dispersion of housing and housing facilities characteristics;
- orientation of the market at the improvement of quality and a higher rate of introducing new elements.

These specific features are closely connected with the transformations of political, social, economic and technological processes taking place in some CEE countries. A detailed survey of the above features will throw more light on the problems of housing and housing facilities management and modernisation.

Deunification and growth of diversity in housing and housing facilities under the conditions of transformation are characterised by the process of rejection of earlier existing unified standards determining to a large extent the uniformity of buildings in central and eastern Europe. These tendencies were based on political, social and economic structures characteristic of the pre-transformation period, which were aimed at unifying the lifestyle of the whole of central and eastern Europe.

The processes of deunification and diversity of housing and housing facilities now taking place in these countries indicate that:

- regional and national (characteristics of individual CEE states) specific development of housing and housing facilities and their modernisation is becoming more popular. This means that mass construction of unified buildings is gradually disappearing, giving way to new standards of housing construction which take into account specific local conditions;
- the development and modernisation of housing and housing facilities is carried out taking into account the cultural needs of various countries and separate social groups. This in turn leads to deunification and differentiation;
- the development and renewal of housing and housing facilities are increasingly being connected with environmental problems which are known to be quite diverse. Therefore, it is possible to state that this

contributes to the increasing diversity of the processes under consideration;

- differentiation of housing and housing facilities being modernised is based on the increasing social and economic differentiation of the society, as well as on the growing number of various lifestyles and ways of life;
- the variety of housing and housing facilities being modernised is brought about by the influence of growing international relations.

The above factors determining deunification and differentiation of housing facilities and indicating the specific character of their development and modernisation in the transition period are increasingly affecting the entire sphere of housing development.

The latter is also characterised by a feature which could be defined as “the formation of new criteria of rationality in housing facilities development”. This means that under the conditions of transformation the criteria of rational development and modernisation of housing and housing facilities in some CEE countries have changed. At present among the most important criteria may be mentioned those which:

- orientate housing and housing facilities development towards higher economic and technological levels. This means that any housing should be economical as concerns the expenditure on its construction and maintenance;
- orientate housing and housing facilities development at harmonising every building with its biosocial environment;
- guide the development of housing facilities along the path of adaptability to advanced social, economic and technological needs, so that these needs could be satisfied both inside and outside any housing.

The recognition of the above criteria indicates that when changes are under way in the decision making of CEE countries in the sphere of housing, these are on the same basis as that of other western countries.

In addition to the above peculiarities of housing facilities management and renewal in the period of transformations in Lithuania and some other CEE countries, other factors connected with raising quality standards and the increase of the rate of innovation become prominent. These newly created priorities reflect the efforts of the above countries to

integrate socially, economically and technologically into the western world, as well as adopting western experience of housing facilities management and renewal. It is even possible to affirm that the problems of raising quality standards and increasing the rate of innovation in the field of housing facilities should be considered a matter of vital importance. The possibilities of the above countries to integrate into the western world mainly depend on their capability to solve them.

The above statements make it possible to conclude that the trends, in raising building quality and introducing new elements in housing facilities management in countries undergoing transition, reflect an important general tendency towards improving housing facilities management. This is directly connected with social, economic and technological achievements of the CEE countries.

Major problems of management development: innovations, quality, marketing

Innovations in housing facilities management as an indicator of efficient development

The quality of housing facilities, the innovative character of their development, as well as the extent of an innovative market and the result of marketing largely determine the standard of life and social, economic and technological advance of the nation. It is the efficiency of housing facilities management and maintenance that enables one to forecast the trends and scope of social, economic and technological development of society.

The sphere of housing facilities is susceptible to innovations. The rate of their introduction and the efficiency of marketing are major indices of progress, especially for societies undergoing transformations. In this respect, it is expected that the above index should be closely connected with planning and control of social, economic and technological development of Lithuania and other CEE countries.

Such factors as the quality of housing facilities, the innovative character of development and marketing of innovations may be considered in the context of the most urgent problems of modern management science. The emphasis on this sphere can stimulate the search for more efficient ways of social, economic and technological development.

A number of priorities may be established in solving the problems of housing facilities quality, innovative development and the marketing of innovations. They are as follows:

- valuation of housing facilities quality standards and the innovative character of their development;
- programming and normalising (standardising) of housing facilities quality and renewal;
- understanding the dynamics of housing facilities;
- assessment of the specific features of housing facilities and their innovative development marketing.

Housing quality and innovations in the development of housing facilities

In determining the standards of housing facilities quality, as well as the innovative character of their development and the problems of innovation marketing, adequate assessment of the specific features of housing quality and innovations in housing facilities development is of vital importance. The above specific features are closely connected with the following factors:

- housing and housing facilities as man-made biosocial spaces and environment for performing human biosocial functions cannot avoid strong integration into the natural environment of human and biosocial activities;
- housing and housing facilities as man-made articles, produced by human economic and social activity, possess both the characteristics of market goods and their own distinctive features which are not inherent in common market products;
- housing and housing facilities may be considered both as man-made products and as external (preliminary) conditions needed to make these products.

The above factors are directly related to the concepts of housing quality and innovative development of housing facilities.

These concepts may be defined as follows:

- housing quality may be determined as a number of characteristics pertinent to housing as a consumer good and its conformity to the norms accepted by society;
- the development of housing facilities may be defined as the process of changing quality standards;

- the innovative character of housing facilities development may be determined as the manifestation of innovations in the process of changing quality standards.

Major characteristics of the innovative character of the development of housing facilities and their quality may be defined as follows:

- (1) Permanent character of quality improvement and the introduction of innovations in the sphere of housing facilities which manifests itself as:
 - the formation of certain quality standards and innovation concepts of housing facilities over the period of life and biosocial activities of several generations (unlike other man-made products the above characteristics may be formed during many years);
 - physical and social life of housing and housing facilities may last much longer than the existence of those structures, technological and organisational forms whose activities are going on inside the buildings;
- (2) Environment-friendly formation of quality and innovation standards of housing and housing facilities manifesting itself as:
 - the valuation of quality and innovations in the above system may be carried out only with account of the extent of its integration into the natural environment;
 - close connection of housing quality and innovations in housing facilities with the natural environment extends both to physical, biological and social, economic and technological spheres. In this respect, the environmental problems of housing quality and innovations in housing facilities may be considered as biosocial;
- (3) Economic, social and technological aspects of housing quality and the innovative character of housing facilities development manifest themselves in the facts that:
 - their valuation may only be based on the efficiency of housing facilities assessed from economic, social and technological perspectives and indicated by the results of quality improvement and renovation obtained taking account of the expenditures;
 - economical, social and technological aspects are perceived as closely

- connected with the idea of saving the resources in the process of creating housing facilities and their maintenance, as well as with higher standards of comfort provided for the occupants;
- (4) Cultural and spiritual aspects of creating quality and innovative buildings which are associated with the effect made by this process on the cultural and spiritual life of society.

The above features represent a number of problems associated with the improvement of housing facilities quality, renovation and marketing of innovations characterised by their complexity, versatility, conflicting nature and also because they are of great importance for Lithuania and other CEE countries.

Normalisation and programming of housing and housing facilities renewal

These problems are closely related to the improvement of quality and the increase of the rate of renewal of housing and housing facilities. The latter require the development and application of normalisation and programming methods.

The concept of normalisation as applied to better quality housing and the higher rate of its renewal may be perceived as the need to work out and use in the process of management, methods which are intended to:

- stimulate the achievement of much higher quality standards from architectural, urban, design, economic, technological, sociological and other perspectives;
- orientate the housing facilities market towards adopting modern ideas, values and priorities associated with social, cultural, ethical, ethnic, aesthetic, psychological and other aspects;
- achieve the suitability of housing for its intended purpose. This aspect also reflects functionality and economic efficiency of the housing (the former being the total of functions performed by the users, while the latter is perceived to be the efforts to perform these functions as economically as possible);
- ensure the continuity of the creation and operation of housing, interrelating its construction and maintenance, which should make an indivisible technological complex, as well as promote the harmonisation and integration of housing into the environment. This seeks to promote the

idea of creating ecologically friendly housing facilities.

Programming, as applied to the improvement of housing quality and increasing the rate of renewal, is perceived as the need for introducing into the process of housing management and refurbishing some means of control, aimed at:

- intensification of reproduction and modernisation of housing facilities ensuring their timely refurbishing according to the changing needs;
- providing the interrelation of all means used for housing facilities management and modernisation from the perspectives of time, space and supply of resources;
- the development of ideas that efficient housing facilities management and modernisation manifest a qualitatively new way of life and result from changes in the social and economic situation. This approach indicates a general trend of using various means for housing facilities development.

Programming in the areas of improvement of quality and increase in the rate of renewal may be considered a very important means of controlling the process of refurbishment. Both programming and normalisation, with respect to housing facilities, should be based on the assessment of the dynamics of the biosocial functions performed. This should bear in mind that these functions, as well as major trends of their development, largely determine the solution of problems of actual normalisation and programming.

The dynamics of biosocial human functions as the basis of housing facilities development

The advance of technology, as well as social and economic life, leads to essential changes in biosocial functions performed in buildings. Their structure and shifts, largely determine the development of technological and organisational forms of the functioning of society and separate social groups, as well as conditioning the dynamic changes in their interests, aims and priorities.

In general, biosocial functions performed in buildings may be perceived as complex characteristics of a way of life embracing diverse human activities, the relationship of man and environment, as well as various types of human interrelations.

With respect to housing facilities biosocial human functions may be divided into three groups:

- (1) Biosocial functions of reproduction, subdivided as:
 - physiological (biological) reproduction functions;
 - social reproduction functions.
- (2) The function of isolation (protection) of people from external biosocial environment, subdivided into:
 - the functions of creating physiological (biological) living space;
 - the functions of creating space for social activities.
- (3) The functions aimed at extending external human communication, including:
 - physiological (biological) communication of man and environment;
 - communication of man and environment in the area of production, services and other social activities.

The above biosocial functions, as well as the change in their contents, play a vital role in determining major tendencies of housing facilities development. Therefore, they should be described in more detail.

The functions of biosocial reproduction being performed in the buildings are associated with biosocial and social aspects of the formation and development of new generations and new social groups. The concept of housing facilities, therefore, embraces the environment in its urban, architectural, structural, technological, economical and other dimensions, which reflects its suitability and modernisation. The emphasis is made on the necessity of the above characteristics of housing facilities to meet the requirements of society representing the highest standards of their adaptability to further biosocial reproduction. Among the functions of biosocial reproduction some may be ranked with top priorities. They are associated with the main requirements which housing should meet. The functions of top priority include those of production, services, health care, social maintenance, education, culture, etc. which are closely connected with biosocial reproduction. The recognition of these priorities allows the evaluation of the major requirements for housing quality in those aspects which are associated with production, health care, education, services, etc. and technological changes.

The functions of isolating (protecting) people from the external biosocial environment which are performed in housing facilities, are associated with the idea that any housing facility localises some space for biosocial activities. This localisation allows the assessment of all biosocial functions as a whole which are related to an enclosed space (usually identified as a specific unit). The latter is represented by a flat, a house or an area used for production, services, administrative purposes, etc. Space localisation also separates certain housing facilities from the external environment which allows the determination of the contents of biosocial activities performed within a specific enclosed space. Also, space localisation helps to establish limits, thereby ensuring the protection of people from undesirable external effects. Therefore, it may be concluded that space localisation may serve as the basis for determining the requirements for housing facilities depending on the functions performed within, while the dynamics of the development of these requirements may be taken as a basis for predicting the development of typical units of enclosed spaces and specifying standards of quality.

The functions of external communications performed within housing facilities imply that every housing unit should be adapted to human communication with the external biosocial environment. Any technological changes in the means of communication cause corresponding changes in demands for housing facilities. Any housing unit should provide the conditions adequate for modern means of external communication. It may be concluded that the development of the means of communication determines the ways of developing the major characteristics of housing facilities associated with their quality. A housing facility system should not only provide the conditions for external communication of the tenants but also create an integral whole for an individual, various social groups and society as a world to make biosocial exchange and contacts.

Both functions of human isolation (protection) from the external environment and external communication are interconnected and form a complex integral function of housing facility space optimisation. The latter may be defined as follows: housing facilities divide the space for biosocial activities into separate sectors or cells and provide them

with various means of interconnection, communication and integration. Any changes in this division and interconnection reflect the response of housing facilities to the dynamical development of biosocial activities and functions.

The development of housing facilities as a response to the changes taking place in human activities and functions may be expressed as follows:

- the introduction of a new technology or structure aimed at saving energy or other resources at various stages of construction or maintenance of housing facilities;
- the introduction of a new structure or technology, as well as urban or architectural solutions, adapted to satisfy the changing needs, interests and aims of man and society;
- harmonisation of the relations between housing facilities and biosocial environment to satisfy growing demands for environment protection from the effects of human activities;
- realisation of new aesthetic concepts adapted to the changing spiritual life of the people;
- increasing housing facilities adaptability to faster and more sophisticated communication systems, especially in the conditions of social changes.

Various trends of housing facilities development, as a response to constantly changing biosocial functions and activities, represent a wide scope of innovations introduced in housing facilities: in this respect, defining the changes in biosocial functions and enabling the assessment of the problems encountered.

Innovation marketing in the sphere of housing facilities

To raise housing facility quality standards and introduce innovations, the innovations from the market should be made available. This should stimulate the renewal of housing facilities and ensure wider scope of innovation, with the aim of achieving a higher standard of life for the inhabitants. Having in mind that the concept of marketing may be perceived as the activity aimed at the formation of a new approach to consumption, as well as a new way of life, the marketing of innovations in the sphere of housing facilities may be defined as follows: innovation marketing in relation to housing facilities

includes all activities intended to form a qualitatively new approach to housing facilities production, operation and maintenance, to ensure their higher quality and a more advanced lifestyle for the people and society associated with these facilities.

The above definition allows some major fields of the marketing of innovations in the sphere of housing facilities to be distinguished. They are as follows:

- the marketing of architectural, urban, technological as well as economic, social and other innovations directly connected with housing and its quality. In this case, housing is considered a product, the evaluation and distribution of which needs some marketing methods to be applied;
- the marketing of innovations referring to the creation of housing and housing facilities. Here marketing deals with such processes as the creation of housing and housing facilities, as well as the subjects and technological and organisational means of its realisation;
- the marketing of innovations referring to housing and housing facilities as biosocial environment. In this situation marketing deals with the products developed and consumed inside the environment of a building which serves as the external space for their development and distribution. This means that products created and used by man and society are made and consumed in a certain housing environment which, treated as external, may be characterised by some innovations;
- the marketing of innovations connected with the biosocial environment of housing and housing facilities. Here the external biosocial environment is meant; the marketing being associated with the development of spaces surrounding the buildings from the outside. It is known that housing facilities makes an interior of a certain biosocial space, therefore the innovations in this area may affect the housing and housing facilities which are inside;
- the marketing of innovations concerning the way of life of man and society in the aspect closely connected with the evolution of housing and housing facilities. In this case, marketing deals with the innovations in the areas of biosocial life embracing production, services, etc., as their technological and organisational development. Therefore, it is necessary to consider housing and housing facilities modernisation.

The above-mentioned and other marketing areas connected with innovations in housing facilities represent a wide scope of management and development problems pertaining to housing facilities.

A comprehensive study of marketing along the directions outlined should make it possible to solve a number of theoretical and applied management problems associated with housing and housing facilities development areas.

Perspectives and ways of modernising housing facilities and their management

Complex modernisation and the improvement of the management of housing and housing facilities in Lithuania and other CEE countries may be based on the following issues:

- (1) The state should identify housing facilities modernisation as a social and economic development area of top priority which requires:
 - a policy of support and assistance in the form of tax allowances, state subsidies and credits on favourable terms;
 - efficient management aimed at the accumulation of state-owned and private resources and the development of various means (including long-term state programmes) for solving housing facilities modernisation problems;

- provision of laws and legislative documents supporting the idea of the priority of housing facilities modernisation;
 - ecological measures ensuring environment protection in modernising housing facilities;
 - economic and technological support of housing facilities modernisation programmes.
- (2) New research areas have been outlined for solving such problems as:
 - achieving a higher innovation rate based on the implementation of new architectural, urban, design, technological, as well as social and economic solutions;
 - the use of more efficient methods of marketing, taking into account the specific characteristics of housing facilities development, as well as constantly changing market conditions and lifestyles of the individuals and society;
 - modernising human way of life by improving housing and housing facilities.
 - (3) To establish special courses of studies centered round acute problems of housing facilities modernisation for training adequate numbers of specialists in this area.

The conclusions presented and the suggestions provided help outline general strategies to be followed by Lithuania and other CEE countries in the field of housing and housing facilities modernisation.