

Housing as a Living Part of Industrial Heritage: Contemporary Approach in Company Town of Zlín

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The town¹ of Zlín is undoubtedly the most complex and extensive urban project of a production company in the territory of former Czechoslovakia: it is a model example of a “company town.” Zlín experienced its greatest boom in urban development from the 1920s to the 1940s. This text describes the comprehensive approach to protecting and presenting this historical heritage that has developed in the town over the last fifteen-plus years. We are particularly interested in the part of the heritage connected with the everyday life of its inhabitants, both in the past and today. We are focusing on how the employee housing² that the company provided for some of its employees is presented as heritage. The article argues that while the more informal and personal approach of civic initiatives (professionals in architecture and history of architecture, etc.) is inherently more effective in sustaining this heritage, the fact that a larger cultural institution does not cover these activities makes the quality and significance of the professional work of local civic actors less visible and renders its future uncertain. To address this issue, our perspective combines social scientific and architectural-historical approaches, considering the current theoretical discourse on historic preservation.

Company Town

From a sociological point of view, one can consider the *company town*³ as a specific urban type that emerged under the developing industrial modernity of the 19th century.⁴ Western society was undergoing a fundamental transformation that resulted in a completely new social order. Observing the social structure of company towns suggests what this change entailed.

As the name suggests, a company town is connected to a company and its factory or factories, and is built and managed by the company in its interest. The concept of such a town is linked to the paternalistic approach of entrepreneurs who understood that a well-functioning factory

1 The terms *city* and *town* are often used interchangeably both in the context of industrial planning and in relation to the Baťa company. We prefer the term *town* for Zlín, which corresponds more to the size of the settlements planned by the Baťa company.

2 In the case of Zlín, employee housing is a more accurate designation than workers' housing. Not only people from the working professions lived in the houses, but also civil servants, teachers, doctors and service workers. For employees with a higher position in the hierarchy of the company, there were so-called *single-family houses*, i.e. detached family houses, and for the working professions, typically smaller flats in two houses or so-called *four-family houses*. At first glance, Baťa's town seems full of identical houses; a closer look reveals that similar brick facades conceal different types of houses reflecting the internal social stratification of the company and the town. Housing was not egalitarian, although it may seem so at first glance.

3 John Garner, ed., *The company town: architecture and society in the early industrial age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Marcelo Borges and Susana Torres, eds., *Company towns: labor, space, and power relations across time and continents* (Springer, 2012).

4 For the description of industrial modernity, see e.g. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

needed a well-functioning workforce. Thus, providing for all the living needs of workers within their town appears to be a strategic and progressive act that supports both (1) the interests of the company and (2) the quality of life of the workers and their families. While we do not wish to challenge these basic premises, it is nevertheless possible to adopt a critical perspective on this model and the developments that led to its creation.

The company town represents in many ways the essence of modernity as it gradually took shape during the 19th century and as it was interpreted by the elites of the time — intellectual, business, and political — who were in process of establishing themselves. It was a period in which society was transforming in all its spheres, changes that became visible in the urban space. In the economic sphere, the principles of industrial production and related consumption were definitively settled. All this is reflected, among other things, in the development of industrial cities: entirely new places appeared, such as factory districts or employee housing districts. Gradually, negative aspects became apparent, such as poor living conditions, broader social deprivation, and health and environmental problems. For these problems, various solutions were sought but the main denominator was the desire to rationalize and organize the processes taking place in the town. New types of urban policies, social policies, and urban planning came into play. However, urban space also reflected the existence of newly emerging large social groups, which we have come to refer to as the middle class and the working class; if we use the Marxist division, we can speak of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The living space for both was gradually cultivated during the 19th century.⁵

However, in addition to changes in the material nature of modern cities, other changes took place in the political sphere: society was democratizing, which in this context meant that more and more actors were involved in the governance of society, as exemplified by the extension of the right to vote to an increasing number of groups. At the same time, new actors emerged, such as political parties, trade unions, etc. If the company town is a model solution to the first problem — the material quality of life in cities —, it can also be an example of undermining this democratization process. For example, this is the case when urban governance is linked to corporate governance, blurring the distinction between the interests of the town and its citizens and the interests of corporate owners. From the point of view of the functioning of a democratic society, this linkage is problematic, but in the case of a company town, it is typical.

We can see that company towns were — in some cases still are — complex social systems that tell us a lot about the nature of modern society: we can trace in them economic principles and class divisions, but also the changing ideas about the minimum standard of living of these classes, about what a “proper” modern urban life should look like. In their complexity, company towns witnessed a critical phase in the history of our society, the effects of which we still feel in our contemporary life. As such, they also deserve comprehensive protection; to protect certain factory buildings regardless of their interconnection with the social facilities of the town and the types of housing provided, or to select only exclusive and extraordinary examples of housing for those at the top of the stratification ladder is to extract these unique buildings from their context without which their meaning is impoverished or completely distorted. To fully understand social life in the past, the non-exclusive, standardized, and often minimal forms of housing must also be embedded in the collective cultural memory, testifying to the everyday life surrounding them. In the following text, we aim to highlight the pitfalls we encounter when protecting and presenting this everyday dimension of historical heritage.

Methodologically, the text is based on a long-term research interest in the town of Zlín, the construction and social activities of the Baťa company, and historical research on the work of “Baťa” architects.⁶ Thus, the text draws on the results of earlier research, current participant

5 For deeper insights into the process of creating the middle-class living space see e.g. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

6 E.g., Lucie Galčanová and Barbora Vacková, “Changes in Housing Culture in Zlín,” in *A Utopia of Modernity: Zlín. Revisiting Baťa’s Functional City*, eds. Katrin and Kerstin Gust (Berlin: Jovis Verlag,

observation, expert interviews⁷ with actors involved in presenting the historical heritage, and, finally, reflections on our own experience with this kind of presentation.⁸

Baťa Company Town Zlín: Socio-historical Context

The Baťa company was founded by the Baťa siblings in 1894. The general director, Tomáš Baťa,⁹ made at least two trips to the USA in the early 20th century. Among other things, he visited Ford's car production, and brought back and implemented the method of the assembly line into his own company. He turned small-scale shoe production into an automated and standardized process. The company received its first large orders during World War I, and its growth did not stop even after the end of the war.

In the first half of the 1920s, the company began building the first housing project for its employees. Besides the growing factory space, residential districts mainly consisting of so-called "half-houses" (semi-detached houses), gradually emerged. Visually, these neighborhoods make up the bulk of the town as it developed by the 1940s: the population of what was originally a town of about 4,000 grew to 40,000 inhabitants. Most of these newcomers were employees of the Baťa company.¹⁰ During the 1930s, a new town center also took shape, providing all the consumer facilities, as well as recreational and educational amenities — a significant part of the company's employees were students (young boys and girls aged about 14-19) of the "Baťa schools of labor" (gender divided). The company's impact on the lives of its employees, both at work and in their free time, is well illustrated by their everyday lives. All activities were managed by the firm or at least provided by the firm, from housing to culture, healthcare, and education. It is also evident that Baťa towns (see note 13) were designed to fulfill the principles of functional zoning, typical of modernist urbanism.

Then, in the late 1920s, the company began to expand, first to other parts of Czechoslovakia, then to other European countries, and finally to the world. This expansion always meant building a new factory and a whole new company seat — a small company town.¹¹ Based on its experience with the construction of Zlín, the company's construction department developed several models of "ideal industrial towns,"¹² especially adapted to different climate zones and their conditions. Here, we can see even more clearly the emphasis the company placed on the form of its towns, as they resembled each other.¹³ From the perspective of cultural

2009): 243-47; Barbora Vacková and Lucie Galčanová, "The Project Zlín. Everyday Life in a Materialized Utopia," *Lidé města / Urban People* 11, 2 (2009): 311-37; Barbora Vacková and Nina Bartošová, "Baťovany – Partizánske: The Contemporary Re/invention of the Heritage of a Baťa Company Town," *Český lid/Czech Ethnological Journal* 111, 2 (2024): 199-219.

- 7 The expert interview method is a frequently used tool for obtaining data on specific issues directly from interested and knowledgeable experts on the subject. In our case, we describe the interviews as expert because they involve professionals in the field of architecture and architectural history. For more on the expert interview method, see Stefanie Döringer, "The problem-centred expert interview. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 24, 3 (2020): 265-78.
- 8 Barbora Vacková is the co-author of the exhibition in the Baťa House and has experience with the method of educational walks and excursions, also in Zlín.
- 9 In urban mythology he is referred to as the founding father, even though Zlín is a town with a history of more than 600 years.
- 10 However, most of the employees did not live in these highly visible houses, which were almost exclusively for the families of loyal and long-term employees.
- 11 Ondřej Ševeček and Martin Jemelka, *Company Towns of the Baťa Concern: History – Cases – Architecture* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012).
- 12 In 1937 the building department prepared the three-volume handbook *Industrial city*, that was never published. The 400 page manuscript is deposited in the MZK (Moravian Provincial Archive), pracoviště Zlín, fond Baťa, Osobní oddělení, II/6 – Publikace, tiskoviny, in.č. 56.
- 13 Even though Henrieta Moravčíková mentions only three towns – Baťovany (now Partizánske in Slovakia)

sociology, we can say that this was a specific form of space colonization. It is just an example of the typically modernizing tendency that characterizes the globalization process.¹⁴ The war put an end to this boom.

Along with the company's boom after World War I, the administration of Zlín and the company management became intertwined. Since 1924, every mayor of the town of Zlín was also a director of the company. The situation changed during the Second World War, when the company was taken over by a German administrator in the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and then the company was nationalized in 1945. However, during the interwar period and until the nationalization, almost three thousand flats had been built in Zlín, mainly in houses with two workers' flats.

Zlín employee housing was based on the principle of standardization, both from the point of view of construction — a precise plan was drawn up for the construction of the houses, which made it possible to build one house within six weeks, with the help of standardized elements¹⁵ — and from the point of view of the inhabitants. The company implied in the materiality of the houses a clear idea of who its employees were, what their needs should be, what their lifestyles should be, and what form their family life was to take. This makes clear that employee housing, of which company towns are the most modern examples, does not authentically represent the working-class. On the contrary, we can see that employee housing is defined and planned by members of the middle and upper classes, among whom we can count Tomáš Baťa himself, despite his artisanal origins. It's because of him and through him (although not exclusively) that the company, or its senior management, adopted the paternalistic entrepreneurship that had developed in the Western business environment before the company was founded. From this point of view, the existence and functioning of the company were not original; however, the fact that the managers applied principles typical of a specific type of entrepreneurs active in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century is interesting in itself.

The intentions behind the standardized form of housing are well described in the surviving archival materials, in company executives' speeches, articles in the company press, and books devoted to the construction of industrial towns and the building of their society; they clearly reveal the contemporary norms and values associated with the everyday life of the company's employees. The houses, their architecture, the urban design of their sites, their serviceability, the formal requirements that tenants had to meet, and also the systems of control¹⁶ to which

and Zruč nad Sázavou and Sezimovo Ústí (both now Czech Republic) – to be built according to the Industrial town handbook ("Baťovany – Partizánske: Vzorné slovenské priemyselné mesto. Baťovany – Partizánske: An exemplary Slovak industrial town," *Architektúra & urbanizmus* 37, 3-4 (2003): 116), there are more company towns that followed its principles. As the handbook was written short before the outbreak of the World War II, it was more of an retrospective summary of what the company planning practice in the 1920s and 1930s, and the ideal town was not a project of a specific town, but a rational diagram, as Ondřej Ševeček explains in the book chapter "The ideal industrial town" – on the systematization of the concern's program at the end of the 1930s," in *Company Towns of the Baťa Concern: History – Cases – Architecture*, eds. Ondřej Ševeček and Martin Jemelka (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012): 39-44). Before World War II, apart from several company towns in former Czechoslovakia, also Borovo (now Croatia), Hellocourt (France), Chelmek nad Ottmuth (Poland), Möhlin (Switzerland), Batadorp (Netherlands), Tilbury (Great Britain), but also Batawa (Canada) and Batanagar (India) were built (Zdeněk Pokluda, Jan Herman, and Milan Balaban, *Baťa na všech kontinentech* (Zlín: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, 2020), 48-49).

14 Markéta Březovská, "Exported City," in *Baťovský domek. Mizející prvky zlínské architektury* [The Baťa Home: Zlín's Vanishing Architecture Elements], eds. Barbora Vacková et al. (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2017), 270-76.

15 Klára Eliášová, "Planning and building a family house," in *Baťovský domek. Mizející prvky zlínské architektury* [The Baťa Home: Zlín's Vanishing Architecture Elements], eds. Barbora Vacková et al. (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2017), 244-52.

16 We can find examples of surveillance in the preserved records of the personnel department, which recorded personal information about employees and their families, parents, and siblings. Because employees lived in rented houses, the personnel department inspected the household homes to check the furnishings' condition and assess the apartments' cleanliness. The officers also asked neighbors about possible

they were subjected in their private lives are valuable evidence of the contemporary values and social norms. At the same time, they are highly revealing about the conditions of their inhabitants' everyday lives.¹⁷

As such, we consider the houses to be important witnesses of the interwar Zlín social and cultural arrangement. Therefore, the following questions arise: How can we protect such housing heritage that was — and still is — a regular part of everyday life? How do we present something that is still in use and represents the private space of its nowadays dwellers with new living standards? Is it possible to show the everydayness as a museum exhibition, or is it possible to get to know it only through direct contact?

The standardized housing we are analyzing does not present great narratives or highly original architecture; quite the opposite. It embodies the stories of people whose names we no longer remember, whose authorship is often unclear, and is frequently attributed to institutions rather than to individuals; by its very nature, it is a massively repeatable product. Conventional presentations in galleries and museums do not necessarily match this character. The best efforts to show everyday life in its typical setting resulted in a kind of inanimate open-air museum,¹⁸ or imitating the interior of flats in museum halls¹⁹ filled with untouchable exhibits. Strictly speaking, they create a simulacrum of original housing which, in the case of exhibitions devoted to the 20th century, is likely to evoke nostalgia – as when viewers exclaim: “This is the chair my grandmother had!”

The Regional Gallery of Fine Arts and the Museum of South East Bohemia in Zlín did not attempt something similar; the exhibition does not attempt to recreate working-class or middle-class interwar housing. Nor does it attempt to reproduce or simulate everyday life in Zlín during the heyday of Baťa's corporation. This observation is not intended as criticism, since in the current Museum exhibition, attention is primarily paid to the town's overarching urban and social concept. The Regional Gallery mainly presents the architecture and urban planning, focusing on original solitary buildings, such as the Zlín skyscraper (the headquarters of the company since 1938),²⁰ and the Tomáš Baťa Memorial (an impressive glass block dedicated to the figure of the founder after his untimely death in a plane crash in 1932, unveiled in 1933).²¹ Regarding residential architecture, the gallery presentation focuses mainly on original houses that are not repeated in the urban structure. They are unique houses/projects, such as: the director's villa and some other villas of important inhabitants, the designs of employee houses from an international competition that took place in Zlín in 1935, or experimental buildings the realization of which was meant to test innovations and new construction methods.²² Both the

problems, such as marital disputes or leisure activities. The prohibition of alcohol was also introduced in Zlín itself. For more details, see Klára Eliášová, Barbora Vacková, “Getting a house, living in a house,” in *Baťovský domek. Mizející prvky zlínské architektury* [The Baťa Home: Zlín's Vanishing Architecture Elements], eds. Barbora Vacková et. al. (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2017), 256–59.

17 For an extraordinary overview of the social life of Baťa employees see Zachary Austin Doleshal, *In the kingdom of shoes: Bata, Zlín, globalization, 1894–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

18 One of such as examples is the Museum Het Schip in Amsterdam, Netherlands (<https://www.hetschip.nl/en/>), Worker's Museum in Helsinki, Finland (<https://workerhousingmuseum.fi/>) or Amuri Museum of Historic Housing in Tampere, Finland (Paula Leinonen, “Presentation of workers' living in an open air museum,” *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 55, 2 (2010): 417–32). Another example is the Kortedala Museum in Gothenburg (<https://kortedalamuseum.se/in-english/>).

19 In the Czech environment, it is an exception, and most successful example of a temporary exhibition of this type was “Husákovo 3+1,” which presented standardized housing in prefabricated buildings in the 1970s; see Lada Hubatová-Vacková, “Husákovo 3+1: bytová kultura 70. let” [Husák's 3+1/Two-bedroom flat: 1970's housing culture], 1st ed. (Praha: UMPRUM). It stood out in terms of its theme, but in fact it was a classic museum presentation where visitors viewed objects.

20 Pavel Novák, *Zlínská architektura 1900–1950* [Zlín architecture from 1900 to 1950], 2nd ed. (Zlín: Pozimos, 2008).

21 *Ibid.*

22 For example, the experimental unite of the Zlín collective house (1948–1950), the collective house itself and other building.

museum and the gallery are spaces dedicated to these unique, or rather unrepeatable, objects, which thus retain an aura of uniqueness akin to that of other works of art,²³ even though they are commonly lived in today.

In addition to these presentations within specialized institutions, there is also a presentation *in situ* of the 20th century architectural heritage. However, even in this case, the presentation of housing often mirrors practices encountered in castles and palaces, where everyday life is depicted as it took place within highly luxurious and exclusive spaces; this is the case, for instance, of original works by renowned architects such as Mies van der Rohe²⁴ or Adolf Loos,²⁵ to name only the most popular in Czechia. Modern townhouses, villas, or apartments are generally presented in this way — unique objects that reflect the lifestyle of a relatively narrow social class.

Standardized houses and the mass repetition of architecture remain neglected in these presentations; their undeniable impressiveness is often shown only from a bird's eye view, not in a more detailed perspective. Or, standardized housing areas impress primarily because they simply exist, in Zlín or elsewhere. Standardized housing is a part of urbanism, a commonplace that we tend to overlook, like other naturally routine elements of everyday life.²⁶ Yet, over the last fifteen years in Zlín, the public discourse has developed a sophisticated presentation of this often-overlooked or underappreciated heritage, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Contemporary State and Presentation Modes of Baťa Houses

Before we get to the topic of the residential houses' presentation, we will focus on the current state of this heritage in Zlín. Most of Baťa's architectural heritage, including extensive residential districts, is now part of the Zlín urban conservation area. The area was declared in 1990, and Baťa buildings make up about 70% of its total area, approximately 480 ha. The area also includes residential development from the 1940s and 1950s — high-rise buildings and one of the two Czech full-size collective houses.²⁷

The protection of the Baťa housing districts is based primarily on the desire to preserve the qualities associated with the original idea of building a “town in gardens.”²⁸ At the beginning of the 20th century, this was undoubtedly inspired by Ebenezer Howard's popular concept, which, after the publication of the book *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902), quickly spread throughout Europe and beyond, but in variously truncated versions that lacked its original social reform dimension. In Zlín, this idea was extended in a specific way by the concept of the “factory in the gardens,” where not only the residential areas were surrounded by green plots — they were not private gardens and their maintenance was subject to town rules —, but the town gardeners also maintained the factory spaces. The particularly characteristic and protected feature is the combination of low-rise, unplastered brick houses, “red cubes” set in green areas. The 2024 Zlín regulations allow for certain types of house modifications, such as extensions and insulation, which must be covered with cladding imitating a brick wall, while internal alterations

23 These houses have more stricter protection than the standardized houses.

24 Vila Tugendhat, Brno, UNESCO site since 2001.

25 Series of residential interiors in Pilsen, Müller's villa in Prague.

26 However, particularly in the field of architectural history, there is a growing interest in socialist modernism of the second half of the 20th century in Czech scientific literature. They are often part of exhibition projects. E.g. Lada Hubatová-Vacková, *Husákovo 3+1: bytová kultura 70. let*. (Praha: VŠUP, 2000); Irena Lehkoživková, Lucie Skřivánková and Rostišlav Švácha, *Paneláks: Twenty-Five Housing Estates in the Czech Republic* (Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum, 2018).

27 *Hlavní zásady památkové péče pro typové rodinné domky na území městské památkové zóny Zlín*. [Main principles of monument care for standardized family houses in the urban preservation area of Zlín] (Zlín: Magistrát města Zlína, 2024).

28 A term used by the company building department to describe their approach to urban development, which adopted some features of Howard's Garden City.

are entirely the homeowners' responsibility.²⁹ In the document "Main principles of monument care for standardized family houses in the urban preservation area of Zlín", it is stated that the subject of preservation is mainly concerned with:

"the preservation of the principle of the garden city; urban structures with a regular pattern of development, their spatial and material composition, urban interiors, and respect for the natural configuration of the terrain; individual examples of immovable cultural monuments; objects contributing to the character of the UPA [urban preservation area], and their architectural expression; facade made of brick masonry with white windows of typified size and articulation, characteristic details, the dimensions of Baťa houses and their plots, and modular unification; public and designated greenery, which must be preserved to the greatest extent possible." [at the same time] "an integral part of heritage care involves cooperation with property owners in the UPA, including advice on the restoration of objects that shape the atmosphere of the urban preservation area Zlín."³⁰

To create the "Strategic Plan for the regeneration of the urban preservation area," a count of the Baťa houses was carried out in 2015 to monitor the degree of preservation of the original architectural elements. It became apparent that there were few surviving original houses, and the changes taking place in the neighborhoods were rapid. Out of the roughly 2,500 units, 46 units were still owned by the municipality in June 2015; by 2021, there were only 16. Most units are semi-detached houses; at present, the city owns only one entire semi-detached house and one single-family house.

It is not only the private ownership³¹ of the houses that causes the disappearance of original details and their replacement by contemporary variants, mostly according to valid regulations. In the case of houses originally built for a limited period and in accordance with the basic housing standard of their time, the modifications are not surprising. Their current inhabitants have different demands for living comfort: economic reasons and the desire to improve conditions lead to insulation, replacement of windows, and extensions. The character of the gardens is also changing, with carports, garages, garden ponds, etc., appearing alongside the garden houses that were added in the second half of the 20th century. Living in Baťa houses is popular with Zlín residents, but this entails necessary changes in their functioning and form. The consequent question is how do we present a living, inhabited space that is constantly changing?

There is a meaningful system of presentation of standardized housing in Zlín, different from the one of original non-standardized Zlín architecture already mentioned, especially the one in the Gallery. It is based on the principle of *in situ* presentation, in places that are not necessarily perceived as prestigious buildings and interiors. In Zlín, a small group of locally anchored experts — architect Jitka Ressová and art historians Lucie Šmardová and Klára Eliášová — began to take care of this way of presenting historical heritage. Then, Lucie Šmardová became the main driving force behind the activities of the association *aArchitektura*, especially the web database Zlín Architectural Manual. Other experts, mainly historians, art and architecture historians, collaborate with Lucie on this website on a short-term basis. We emphasize this individual involvement partly because we want to express the appreciation of their work. Above all, we want to clarify that this is not an institutionalized activity or belonging to memory institutions based

29 The original company flats were nationalized with the company after 1945 and became part of the housing stock, which was transferred to the town ownership after 1989. After 1990, Zlín, like the vast majority of other Czech cities, began to sell off this housing stock, and most of the houses became privately owned. However, individual flats were sold off and sold, i.e. one house usually has two (or more) owners.

30 *Hlavní zásady*, 8.

31 From their construction until the 1990s, the houses were either owned by the company or the state. Their residents were tenants. The first sales of houses took place sporadically in the 1960s, with massive privatization occurring in the 1990s, when not only Zlín but also most other cities in the Czech Republic sold off their housing stock. (Martin Lux and Martina Mikeszova. "Property Restitution and Private Rental Housing in Transition: The Case of the Czech Republic," *Housing Studies* 27, 1 (2011), 77-96, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2012.629643>).

in Zlín, but a personal commitment of individual professionals. This is what we call “expert activism,” which is one of the crucial aspects we will examine in the final part of this text.

The activities of these three experts and their collaborators gradually crystallized the shape of the current presentation of standardized housing — not only Baťa’s housing but the architecture of the town in general. *aArchitectura* organizes guided walks through the town, which today focus on many phenomena of pre-war and post-war Zlín architecture. On a few occasions, they have also organized visits directly to inhabited houses. Finally, in cooperation with the town of Zlín, the only single house owned by the town was transformed into an “InfoPoint of Baťa housing.” We shall investigate these two basic forms of in situ presentation — exhibitions in the Baťa house, walks, or excursions.

The House – InfoPoint of Baťa Housing

In the town center, between the dormitories, stands one of the smaller single-family houses built for the company’s employees. It is currently owned by the municipality and it hosts the architectural studio *element architects* on the second floor — some members of this studio, including Jitka Ressová, are also members of *aArchitektura*. The architects inhabit the house “in exchange” for the care and management of the exhibition dedicated to Baťa’s housing, on the first floor. The exhibition opened in 2017 and presents the conditions the tenants have to meet, the basic types of houses, and information about their construction and design. In addition to the general presentation of the Baťa houses, which establishes a connection between the architectural studio and the exhibition, one of the aims is to familiarize the new owners of these historic buildings with their architectural and cultural context and can capture its essence. Those interested in renovating their houses thus gain relevant historical information and are guided toward more informed and sensitive interventions.

The present approach of the *InfoPoint* differs greatly from the exhibition presented from 1990 to the 2000s. At that time, an exhibition organized on a standard display model was placed inside one of these original houses, managed by the Regional Gallery. The interior contained period furnishings and furniture from the 1930s and 1940s, and some artifacts reminiscent of women’s domestic work, such as ironing boards and irons. It was impossible to touch the exhibits, while the furnishings were meant to evoke a period atmosphere. However, it conveyed nothing about the real life of the inhabitants of the houses. The exhibition was cancelled at the turn of the century, after the wooden parts of the house, were infected with woodworm. The remediation of the house took place in connection with its new use after 2017, as *InfoPoint’s* activity. The *aArchitektura* members are still striving for the town to use the last half-house similarly. (Fig. 1-3)

Walks and Visits

One of the methods of spatial exploration developed in anthropology is the “go-along” method.³² It is a method in which data are collected during a stay in the area of interest. It may involve research interviews conducted while walking in a key location; however, it can be adapted in different ways, e.g., having research participants record their journeys on video with commentary. The method assumes that walking is one of the basic human experiences with space and that it is not only a professional way of cognition, but also part of our everyday experience, and at the same time, a way to get acquainted with a new place. For all Baťa’s cities (see note 13), walkability was one of their main features.³³

32 Margarethe Kusenbach, “Street phenomenology: The go-along as ethnographic research tool,” *Ethnography* 4, 3 (2003): 455-85.

33 Nina Bartošová, Barbora Vacková, and Veronika Rypák Vaňo, “From Past to Present — the Walking Phenomenon in the Identity of Partizánske / Baňovany,” *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation History, Theory, and Criticism* 20, 1-2 (2023), 64-81.

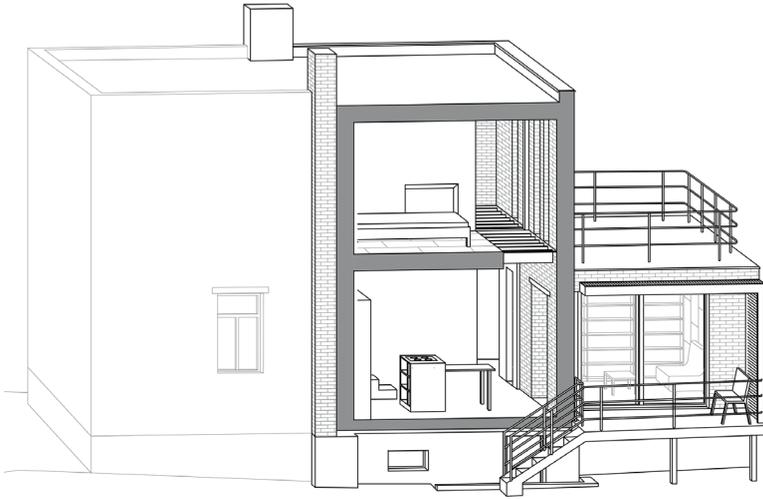


Fig. 1: ellement architects: Remodeling of a semi-detached house in Lesná quarter in Zlín for a young couple. Axonometric drawing showing the interior of the house.

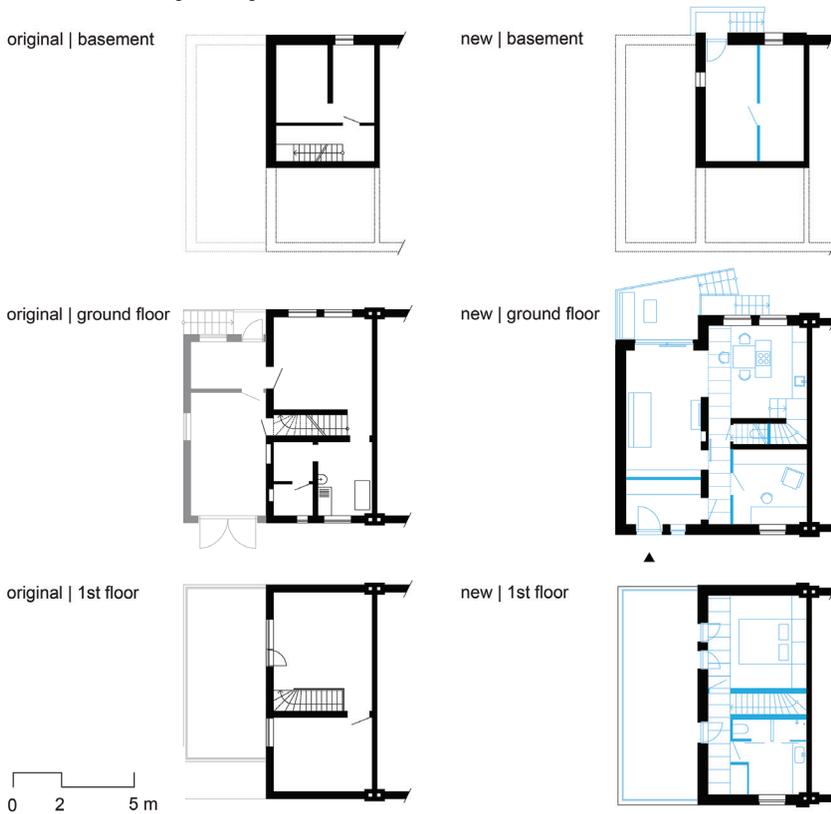


Fig. 2: ellement architects: Remodeling of a semi-detached house in Lesná quarter in Zlín for a young couple. Plans of the original state (left) and the remodeled version (right).

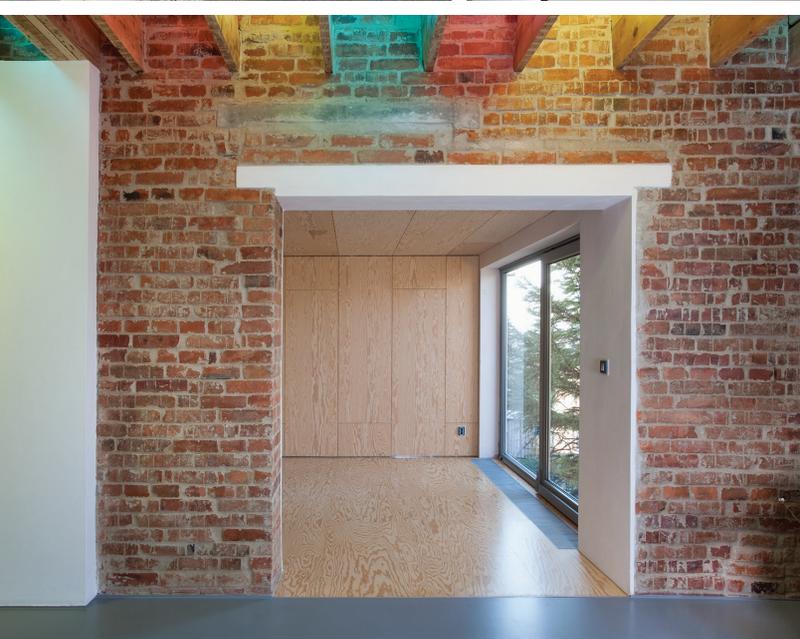


Fig. 3.: ellement architects: Remodeled interior of a semi-detached house in Lesná, 2011. Interior photographs.

One of the coauthors of this text, Barbora Vacková, has a personal experience with the walking methods in Zlín. As a sociology student, she participated in an educational excursion in Zlín, focused on the explanation of the main principles of modernist urbanism and organized modernity,³⁴ as described above. Later, she herself became one of the lecturers of these sociological excursions still organized by the Department of Sociology at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech republic. Together with Jitka Ressoová and Lucie Galčanová (sociologist from the Faculty of

³⁴ Sociologist Peter Wagner uses the term “organized modernity” to describe modern society in the first half of the 20th century, when large organized masses, such as the working class, emerged. See more in Peter Wagner, *A sociology of modernity : liberty and discipline* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Social Studies, Masaryk University), Vacková also carried out a similar walk during the international symposium *Utopia of Modernity: Zlín*³⁵ in May 2009. An exceptional tour of the Baťa houses was the *Open Houses Day – Around Letná with Mrs. Baťa* in June 2018.³⁶ Zlín theatre actors representing Tomáš and Marie Baťa, a married couple, guided the visitors through the private houses.

Obviously, organizing the opening of private homes is a challenging event that raises both security and ethical issues, as we will show below. However, such walks and visits have become an essential part of the way Zlín and its industrial heritage are made accessible to visitors, as well as residents. At present, guided walks are offered by both the Town of Zlín for a fee (the content and concept are prepared by Lucie Šmardová), and the *aArchitektura* (until now free of charge). The *aArchitektura*'s walks are characterized by the richness of themes (which are not repeated) and are attended by a regular audience, including inhabitants of Zlín.

The Zlín Architectural Manual: ZAM

The *Zlín Architectural Manual* (www.zam.zlin.eu) is one of a series of “architectural manuals” created in the Czech Republic,³⁷ each dedicated to a specific city as an online guide to the 20th century architecture. The first of the manuals was created in Brno and represents a methodological basis for the others, whose number is gradually growing. The creation of the manual culminated in the presentation of the of the 20th century architectural heritage, which from the beginning adopted the idea of walks that interested visitors could undertake on their own, with the help of texts in the manual (later translated into audio versions). By now, the *Brno Architectural Manual* (www.bam.brno.cz) has three printed publications that serve as classic book guides to the city.

Lucie Šmardová is the main producer, but also one of the authors of the ZAM. Her original aim was to secure for the manual the institutional backing of the regional gallery, which failed. Along with other activities, a model gradually crystallized where the ZAM content is created and supplemented under the initiative of *aArchitektura*'s, with subsidy support from various institutions ranging from the town of Zlín to the state of Czech Republic. However, it must be said that despite the relatively strong support from the municipality, funding through one-year grants is uncertain and does not allow for stable long-term strategies.³⁸ Unlike in other places, here, the project has been implemented from the beginning with the support of the Department of Tourism (not the Department of Culture), which has ensured more stable support, as tourism has long been perceived as a priority in the town of Zlín.

ZAM also differs from other manuals in its content: the manual does not focus “only” on architecture, but also on the historical, cultural and social context of its creation. It contains not only walks and descriptions of individual buildings but also interviews with the witnesses (professionals and residents of the town), and short original expert studies. It thus takes the presentation of the historic architectural heritage to an interdisciplinary level that is both attractive from the audience's point of view and opens up wider possibilities for understanding the development of the modernist city. Last but not least, the manual focuses not only on exclusive and well-known buildings, but also on buildings used on a daily basis, such as garages, convenience stores, and other commonly used buildings in the town. (Fig. 4)

35 For more information go to: https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/de/projekte/transformation_und_zukunft/detail/utopie_der_moderne_zlin.html, last accessed 12 April 2025.

36 To see photos from the action visit: <https://www.aarchitektura.cz/prispevek/detail/46-den-otevrenych-domk-po-letne-s-pani-batovou>, last accessed 12 April 2025.

37 Every one of these is an autonomous non-profit project carried out by active local professionals who draw on the expertise developed in Brno (<https://www.bam.brno.cz/en/>).

38 This form of subsidy programs is typical in the Czech Republic (not only in the field of culture) and often leads to the fact that the final budget for the current year is known in March or even later, so the funds arrive late and should be exhausted before December.



Fig. 4: Zlín Architectural Manual (ZAM), an online guide of 20th century architecture of Zlín

Challenges in Presenting Everydayness

Zlín can undoubtedly be considered an example of good practice in the presentation of standardized housing and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Yet, reflection on this good practice also reveals some potentially problematic aspects. The experience of the professionals involved points to the specific pitfalls associated with these activities. These will be addressed in the last section of this text. The first theme concerns the tension caused by the fact that this heritage is still actively used. The other two themes relate more closely to its public presentation.

Semantic Problem of the Inhabited Heritage in Zlín

The first problem we have identified relates not to the practice of presentations itself, but to the nature of a heritage that is still actively used, managed and modified, and remains part of the life of its inhabitants, a space of intimacy and home. In earlier research, which focused on the perception of houses by their current users, it was shown that for some the motivation was simply to purchase “their own house with a garden.” In the Czech Republic, owning a family home has long been one of the most common aspirations, although its availability has declined substantially in recent years. For some owners, the Baťa house represented an alternative to suburban living: the small size of the house was offset by its proximity to the town center and its amenities.

However, during our expert research interview, Lucie Šmardová identified here what she referred to as a “semantic problem.” And this is also visible in a more critical reflection on the creation of the semi-detached houses themselves. They did not originate as regular family houses (and were never intended to be), although the narrative around their architectural form was based on the emphasis on individual family life; in fact, they were never meant to be fully controlled by their occupants. After 1990 and beyond, as the real estate market developed in the Czech Republic, what had been a corporate apartment in a semi-detached house began to be marketed as a town-house. This shifted the perception of the house and raised the expectations of its new residents, who associated it with a higher living standard, and with the sought-after ideal and value of home ownership. This was also reflected in our earlier records by the legitimization of relatively arbitrary treatment of houses, including the circumvention of some regulations.³⁹

39 Barbora Vacková and Lucie Galčanová “Inovace, rutiny a cihly: Současnost zlínského baťovského bydlení,”



Fig. 5: Two examples of semi-detached houses in Zlín

For meaningful preservation of these houses, even within the relatively narrow confines defined in the Main Principles of Preservation in the UPA (see note 27), it is necessary to recognize that these houses — primarily the semi-detached units — never possessed the qualities of upper-middle-class urban dwellings. They represent a local version of minimal housing concepts that were both attractive and necessary solutions to the housing crisis of the time. Moreover, at the time these houses were built, it was assumed that they would be temporary structures, which was reflected in the economy of building materials. However, this is no reason to question their historical value. From today's perspective, research on “ordinary” housing has become an increasingly significant topic for both sociologists and architectural scholars in the last decade.⁴⁰ (Fig. 5)

Ethics of Presenting Private Housing

As already noted, Baťa residential districts and houses are not only to be regarded as historical heritage tied to the industrial past of the company town; they are also home to families and individuals. The fact that they are mostly privately owned is only one aspect of this reality. The home is a space of intimacy — in many respects, the last place people retreat to be alone with themselves. At the same time, home is also a normative concept in our society, part of which means that it is a space over which one holds power and can organize, influence, and control access —

in *Československé město včera a dnes: Každodennost – reprezentace – výzkum* [Czechoslovak city yesterday and today: Everydayness – Representation – Research], eds. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová, Lucie Galčanová and Barbora Vacková (Červený Kostelec, Brno: Pavel Mervart, Masarykova univerzita, 2010), 77-112.

40 Dana Vais and Gaia Caramellino, “Looking at the Circulation of Models and Ideas Beyond Political Barriers Is of Crucial Importance,” *sITA. Studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 9 (2021), 24.



decide how and where it is presented and who enters and when. Regardless of the legal conditions that protect private property, this exclusivity of home is also part of our cultural experience.

This characterization of houses as homes raises fundamental ethical questions regarding their presentation. They should not be presented without the consent of the owners, mainly because, as researchers, we have an obligation not to endanger our research partners and others who may be affected by our professional work. The presentation of this type of heritage is therefore a challenge in terms of professional ethics.

Recognizing the Professional (Cultural) Work

The last key theme that emerged in the interviews with Lucie Šmardová and Jitka Rellová was the appropriate recognition of the professional work that this kind of presentation really involves, which is not understood by the traditional research institutions, and the employees of memory institutions as museums or galleries. For this almost invisible professional work we use the term “expert activism”. There are probably several aspects to this issue, and we admit that at this point it remains speculative and requires further verifications. However, in the context of the situation in Zlín, the term seems appropriate for many reasons.

(1) The professional work of experts at ZAM is not regarded and valued in the same way as it would develop within official heritage or research institutions, despite the fact that the texts presented on the website require the same level of historiographical expertise and work as the texts for professional journals. Even the work to translate the scientific information in a language suitable for a general audience requires a specific expertise. Moreover, texts and photographs are often requested from outside, or used by relevant municipal departments but without proper credit. They are perceived as a kind of a public good, free of charge and outside the scope of copyright.

(2) This situation is probably due to a general low awareness of the rules governing the use of publicly available textual, visual or audiovisual resources, especially online. If the same work were produced under applied research grant schemes, public officials' attitudes toward these outputs would likely differ substantially.

(3) We believe that another reason for the unjust depreciation of this work resides in the fact that the application and the website are produced with the support and under the auspices of the tourism industry. This is the other face of the coin — while this support provides a relatively stable municipal backing (not only financial but also in terms of assistance), it also presents the disadvantage that the environment of tourism and tourism promotion belong in fact to the cultural industry, rather than to the culturally oriented research.

Or, the researches and other professional activities undertaken and discussed in this text have a clear educational value — they aim to foster culture and appropriation. To understand the environment in its cultural, social and historical contexts benefits not only visitors but also local residents, for whom such work strengthens belonging and local identity. However, the output of this activity is almost immediately commodified in the cultural industry, treated by other actors as goods to be marketed to customers. This commodification risks obscuring this orientation, even as it underscores the tension between cultural industry and cultural research.

Conclusion: Preservation as a Process

From the point of view of current theories of historic preservation, activities such as those carried out by representatives of civic initiatives are important precisely because heritage values are no longer perceived solely in relation to the physical fabric (architectural and urban), but as complex phenomena embedded in cultural and social contexts. However, in the Czech and broader European area, there is no document comparable to the *Burra Charter* of the Australian section of ICOMOS,⁴¹ meant to clarify the role of social values in preservation practices. In recent decades, cultural heritage has increasingly been understood as a process — something that becomes heritage through diverse activities, rather than by the mere existence of a monument. This shift reflects the move from *fabric-centered* to *values-centered* preservation, underpinned by a broader understanding of values.⁴²

As archaeologist Ayesha Pamela Rogers points out, the recognition and development of less formal modes of engagement are crucial for integrating social values into value-centered preservation.⁴³ Although some scholars believe that neither the Burra Charter nor value-centered preservation are fully sufficient,⁴⁴ these reservations are primarily related to the situation that arises in post-colonial contexts, where the values of local communities must be explicitly recognized.⁴⁵ From the perspective of maintaining the historical value of the housing in Zlín, the

41 Australia ICOMOS, "The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance," available from: <https://australia.icomos.org/publications/burra-charter-practice-notes/>. For more detail see Australia Icomos, "Practice Note" (version 1: November 2013), available from: https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Practice-Note_Understanding-and-assessing-cultural-significance.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

42 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 3.

43 Ayesha Pamela Rogers, "Values and Relationships between Tangible and Intangible Dimensions of Heritage Places," in *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions*, eds. Erica Avrami, Susan Macdonald, Randall Mason, and Daivid Myers (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2019), 184.

44 Emma Waterton, Laurajane Smith, and Gary Campbell, "The Utility of Discourse Analysis to Heritage Studies: the Burra Charter and Social Inclusion," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12, 4 (2006): 339-55.

45 Ioannis Poullos prefers the concept of "living heritage approach" which emphasizes the concept of continuity and sees the values in the present, in the way they are perceived by the community that is tied to a particular place. Ioannis Poullos, "Moving Beyond a Values-Based Approach to Heritage Conservation," *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 12, 2 (2010), 181.

key is to approach preservation as a process, ensuring heritage management not only through formal regulations, but also through diverse activities. It is especially important not merely to address visitors to Zlín but, above all, to engage residents, whose daily practices most directly influence the extent to which original values are preserved. Fieldwork, as emphasized by Brent R. Fortenberry in the context of preservation practice,⁴⁶ takes on particular significance in Zlín through the work of the *element architects* studio, whose members develop tailored solutions for individual clients.

With the concept of “housing in gardens,” Baťa did not seek to design superior employee housing in typological terms, although the standard of living for his workers coming from the countryside has undoubtedly been a better one for that time. From the perspective of preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the company town of Zlín, the houses play an important role, all the more since they serve their original function. However, to prevent the original character of the modest “red cubes” from being entirely eroded by alterations driven by contemporary demands, it is essential to maintain a narrative that avoids constructing a false image of a superior family-house standard. Such a narrative cannot be secured through an installation in an exhibition; it requires ongoing engagement by those committed to heritage preservation.

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