Housing construction issues in Irkutsk province (based on Vlast Truda materials)

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Abstract. The article aims to select and study negative and positive materials on housing construction policies in Irkutsk province in 1921-1922 published in the Vlast Truda newspaper. These are materials on redistribution, preservation, and renovation of apartments, reconstruction of buildings, construction of affordable housing for workers and employees. Special attention is paid to the housing construction stages: building design by drawing and design offices, production of building materials, selection of qualified personnel, tendering for construction works. An analysis of living conditions of urban and rural residents is carried out. In this period, the systems of housing distribution and accommodation payment were based on the differentiated principle, taking into account the privileged party and government support. Newspaper periodicals as the most accessible and prompt source can help to recover lost information and find new facts when assessing the new national housing policy. At the same time, materials were presented on behalf of the editorial board which speaks for their subjectivity. There were no critical materials, but there were unverified facts. The article emphasizes the continuity of the Communist Party and Soviet press of the 1920s and modern Russian newspaper publications on the issues of housing construction whose improvement can raise the level of economic development and living standards.

1. Introduction
The issue of housing construction and provision of housing has been acute throughout the history of Russia. It remains unresolved. Historians have attempted to find new sources for studying strategies and tactics of the new housing policy in Irkutsk province in 1921-1922. This was a period of the acute housing crisis, when civil war and interventions hindered the development of the construction industry and increased the number of destroyed houses. In addition, the study of this issue is not possible without source studies as a special branch of historical science that provides historians, builders, and architects with new facts on the housing policy and life of Siberian people. In this regard, it is necessary to study the information potential of various sources, especially newspapers, that contain additional information on the strategy and tactics of the housing construction policy in Irkutsk province. Newspapers often publish materials presented by the editorial staff who express views of the central and provincial authorities, unverified and censored information. Despite this fact, periodicals as an additional source provide data on everyday routine of workers and peasants, Red Army soldiers, village and worker correspondents. They describe events in a chronological order. It should be emphasized that newspapers are studied by researchers when it is difficult to get an access to other sources (archives and memoirs). Some state
and party archive documents were destroyed during fires or are not readable. Newspapers contain more complete data and there is a free access to them. They are stored in central archives and libraries, available on the Internet. Nevertheless, their use is hampered by the lack of adequate data processing methods and large volumes. Computer technologies made it possible to collect, systematize and analyze newspaper materials for the 1921-1922 period.

Additional sources are crucial in studying the context of past events of the 1920s, searching for new facts to assess the housing construction policy.

The present article attempts to study the housing construction policy of that period and analyze decisions made by the party and state authorities to eliminate the housing crisis in Irkutsk province.

2. Materials and methods

When studying newspaper materials, the authors rely on the scientific principles of historicism, objectivity and consistency. The housing issue is considered as part of social measures based on a rejection of political and ideological factors of the party and state policy in the early NEP years. The authors use a huge number of newspaper publications. The retrospective, comparative and content analysis methods make it possible to conduct qualitative and quantitative studies.

The methodological basis of the study is the interdisciplinary approach that allows us to analyze the issues of housing construction from various perspectives, relying on the methods and possibilities of source studies, the history of Russia and urban planning and architecture.

3. Results

In Russian historiography on the architecture and construction issues, the works by M.G. Meerovich and S.O. Khan-Magomedov S.O. [1] are of interest. They deal with peculiarities of architecture and construction in the early NEP years. The role of the Party in implementing the new housing policy [2] is described. There are many studies covering the characteristics of newspaper publications, especially the representation of Siberia. In Russian historiography, newspapers as an additional research source for construction issues have never been studied. Among the available scientific sources, there are some works which contribute to the theoretical studies of newspapers as a source the authors rely on [3]. In Russian historiography, the issues of history, architecture, and construction covered by newspapers have never been dealt with.

Newspapers of Irkutsk province issued in 1921-1922 were used as research materials. There were 43 printed editions issued in Irkutsk province: party, trade union, peasant-cooperative, departmental, industrial, and Red Army ones. There were ten provincial and district newspapers (e.g., Gudok, Rosta, Slovo, Nedelya proftvzhenia, etc.). There were no specialized newspapers for builders, architects, engineers and technicians. Information about Siberian newspapers issued in 1921-1922 can be found in the Annals of periodicals [4]. Information about Siberian newspapers can also be found in the multivolume Siberian encyclopedia [5]. It should be emphasized that the data on newspapers of 1921-1922 are contradictory due to the fact that the press departments describe only those newspapers that were published regularly with a large circulation. Bulletins, supplements, and one-day editions are not described. Many printed editions have defects. Not all issues have survived. Many of them can be found in various regional and federal archives and libraries. The issues of Vlast Truda (Irkutsk) can be found in the regional archive. It was the main provincial newspaper.

"Vlast Truda" is a daily body of Irkutsk Provincial Committee of the Party, the Governmental Executive Committee and the Governmental Professional Union. In different years, its circulation was 1000-3000 copies. It was often issued on four pages, and had the following sections: "Leading editorial materials", "Food taxation", "Sowing campaign", "Economic construction", "Cooperation", "Letter to the editor", "Rural life", Working life", etc. There are no photographs, except for portraits of state and party leaders; there are many ideological slogans such as "Iliteracy is a sister of devastation", "To build, you need to know; to know, you need to learn." In quantitative terms, the NEP issues were leading in the newspaper. The issues of housing construction were rarely dealt with. They were covered on the third or fourth page in "Economic construction" section, notes, announcements, letters from readers.
Note—a short message that sets out a fact or raises a specific question, its volume is about 40-50 characters, without a signature. The authors of the notes are the editor-in-chief or members of the editorial Board of the newspaper. The material is presented in the form of answers to three questions: what, where and when happened, but there is no question why it happened or what conclusions will be drawn. A lot of information about mechanical carpentry, woodworking workshops, production of building materials (wood, brick, stone), old primitive means of labor (shovel, axe, stretcher), the material is submitted without conclusions and assessments. Of great interest are notes on the main task of housing policy—the relocation of the proletariat to "lordly apartments", redevelopment in apartment buildings. The notes describe the residential buildings of workers, employees, and peasants, often with figures on how many people get housing, how many are evicted, and indicate the period—two months. On the last page of the newspaper "Power of labor" there are many ads about new buildings and structures made of stone, about the date and place of construction, land surveying courses. In ads, you can find interesting information about the cost of water in apartments, the price for one bucket is 100 rubles, for using a communal bath-2000 ruble.

The newspaper encourages and praises working people and criticizes the wealthy class. It should be noted that working with newspapers as a source of information requires compliance with certain source-studies rules. It is necessary to use research materials in a proper way. However, this issue is still debatable. In some studies, where the newspaper acts as one of the types of sources, there are many controversial points about the method of its analysis. Taking into account the experience of Russian source researchers [3] and our own experience, the research was divided into several stages: search for sources and description (circulation, publication frequency, editorial staff), selection of information, analysis, determination of a degree, completeness of covering and reliability of data, genre identification (article, report, summary, operative material, note, letter, etc.).

Source studies is an exact discipline and requires every researcher to thoroughly re-check all the facts used in the newspaper. Unfortunately, in the 20s, methods of silencing and distorting socially significant information on housing construction are used. The editor of the newspaper "Power of labor" and his assistants constantly subject the texts of published materials to editing, which in some cases affects their content. Therefore, it is necessary to compare and compare the texts of published messages with their party and state archival materials, correspondence, and memoirs. Such comparison allows to establish the degree of conformity that informs the worker and village correspondent, that is placed in the newspaper to determine how much influence the editorial changes to put the material.

In 1921-1922, in Irkutsk province, the issues of housing construction, its pace and volume depended on the general level of development of the productive forces in the country, economic management methods, material and technical resources, labor skills, etc. In the early NEP years, these factors changed. In 1921 Vlast Truda wrote that new houses were not built, the construction organizations were engaged in re-planning and repairing the old housing stock funded from utility charges (50 % of these charges were used for repair works). In 1922, industrial enterprises, new public, trade, and medical facilities began to be built in Irkutsk province. Moreover, a large number of seasonal and permanent workers arriving from the countryside needed cheap housing. In March 1921, the party resolution "On improving the living standards of workers and needy peasants" was issued. The enterprises were obliged to provide their workers with "money, means of transportation and communication, housing, and even theater tickets." Departments strengthen their control over employees by creating departmental housing. According to the decision of the Governmental Executive Committee of January 5, 1922, students as a socially vulnerable group got the right to housing. You can find interesting information about the place of residence of urban workers. For example, low-paid workers lived in uncomfortable barracks in the suburbs or in temporary dormitories with a minimum of architectural features. Each month "Vlast Truda" reported on the number of barracks built [7].

Houses that belonged to individuals or enterprises were built and rent for highly paid workers. Some houses were built using the budget funds. These were mainly brick or wooden low-rise houses for one or two families. Sometimes two families lived in one room, hostels, barracks without basic amenities and light. The room was used as a warehouse for food and a place for cooking and washing clothes. This
determined the sanitary conditions of living quarters of the 1920s. In addition to brick and wood, small cinder blocks and various stone materials were used in the construction of houses. According to the newspaper descriptions, these were gray, "dull houses". They were not attractive and liveable. The cost of one square meter is unknown; although information on the number of people who received housing allocation orders was published once every two months. The class principle was used when distributing the housing allocation orders. The number of orders varied from 1500 to 1700. For example, from 1 November to December 1, 1922 1683 housing allocation orders were issued [8]. In "For the townsfolk" section, there was an announcement "The commandant's administration gives free slag for sprinkling sidewalks, estates and streets" [9].

It should be emphasized that the unemployed lived in shelters, temporary dwellings. The decree of August 8, 1921 contributed to the development of private housing construction and consumer cooperation [10]. Construction tenders were held. By summer of 1922, the new housing policy recognized private ownership of residential buildings. Landlords became entitled to rent or sell their apartments. Some residential buildings and apartments were returned to their former owners, some houses remained at the disposal of communal authorities. Some apartments were allocated by district councils in accordance with housing standards. The authors believe that the institution of landlords encouraged the development of market relations in the housing sector.

In Irkutsk, houses had simple optimal design features. The projects did not require additional investment. "Vlast Truda" provides information on the establishment of drawing and calculation offices [11], the development of standard designs of residential buildings, cheap and fast-to-build working palaces in Novikolaevsk (the capital of Siberia), without "decorative elements". Architects were awarded 6,000 gold rubles [12] for residential housing projects, while the dates of construction of residential premises were not indicated. They used the word "soon" instead. Special attention should be paid to the issue of personnel in the construction industry. There were a large number of professional and technical institutions: the Polytechnic Institute, the workers' technical school, the evening forestry technical school, land surveying and construction courses for training engineers and builders. Almost each issue of the newspaper invited Siberians to take further training courses in construction. In 1921, the party and state authorities of Soviet Russia did not determine tasks for housing construction; they were only engaged in reconstruction. However, by the end of 1922, the construction program was gradually being implemented in Irkutsk. It was aimed at building new dwellings, although there was a shortage of housing, and housing prices were higher than in cities of European Russia. Irkutsk lagged behind in housing construction.

Representatives of other social groups of the population of Irkutsk province lived in more difficult conditions. For example, in "Commandments of the Red Army soldier" section, the newspaper described conditions in which Red Army soldiers lived in barracks: "they sleep on bunks, while the walls are pasted over with ideological posters, drawings, and slogans." Houses were not built for soldiers. The Governmental Soviet Economic Department and the Governmental Land Department provided the Red Army with building materials for the repair of barracks: brick, lime, nails, pipes, door blocks [13]. Later, the newspaper [14] reported on the works done, indicating the cost of works and materials. The week of Comfort of the Red Barracks was held in the province. The newspaper published materials of district working correspondents in the form of letters, notes, messages on the solution of housing issues that indicated when and where the event was held. The letters were published in full, but sometimes only excerpts from these letters were published. They described apartment conflicts between neighbors. Housing disputes were deliberately presented as a class struggle. There were denunciations with claims of bourgeois origin, propaganda of bourgeois ideology and views.

A special issue of the Supplement to the newspaper "Power of labor" in December 1922 is dedicated to the adoption of the land code, which explains the legal basis of the document in fairly accessible language. Small letters written by sulkers are dedicated to holding non-partisan peasant conferences and meetings to promote the code. The peasants are quite friendly to the provisions of the law, but there were many disputes about the principles of land redistribution between villages, when land could be
divided, sold or rented, although they unanimously supported the land code in their decisions taken locally.

Responses to the speeches on activities of construction organizations, letters of appeal to the editorial office with a request to assist in solving housing issues are a valuable source of information. In addition, the newspaper contains information about mistakes in publications, inaccuracies in "Measures taken" and "Our answers" sections. They often contain notes about wrong actions of officials or institutions in solving housing issues. Within six days, the official had to find excuses for his actions confirmed by the facts. Otherwise, the Revolutionary Tribunal brought him before the court for the committed crime [15].

Siberians do not want to work, drink, loaf, hack, do not want to know what labor discipline is, spoil the construction material, material incentives do not work, the wages of workers, engineers and technical workers do not provide a decent standard of living. There are many reports of work correspondents on negligent bosses that were criticized and shamed. These publications contained demands to punish the guilty, bring to trial, expel, etc. Such decisions were made by editors, correspondents, and volunteer assistants, who took upon themselves the right to sentence the guilty instead of applying to court. This practice is unlikely to differ from the democratic management methods used in modern Russia, when Internet sites criticize city mayors and governors for the improper use of money or land.

It should be added that letters to the editor have advantages over other sources, they are more accessible and offer the researcher the author's text of the correspondent, but there are disadvantages - the newspaper often takes short quotes out of the context of the letter. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to study two documents in order to understand what was made public and what prohibition exists in the text of a newspaper letter.

In general, "Vlast Truda" was the main instrument of political manipulations, since it had rich and unlimited opportunities to influence the mass consciousness using party ideas. There are some other interesting features testifying to the continuity of Soviet and modern newspapers; this can be an avenue for further research.

In our opinion, the housing construction program for the construction of affordable and comfortable housing does not receive wide coverage in the newspaper, although the construction process includes a number of stages: design in drawing and calculation offices, project approval in party and state structures. Construction is carried out by specialized structures at the expense of public or private funds using backward methods of organizing production, there is a shovel, a wheelbarrow, an axe, a stretcher on construction sites, there are no new technologies, and all construction operations are carried out manually.

Although there is a gradual transformation of housing construction, reforms are being carried out, departmental housing is being reset, private entrepreneurship is emerging, and most importantly, the mentality of the local population is changing, people are learning to live, build and work in the new economic policy. Although there are no deadlines for commissioning houses, you can find small details with figures on the number of people provided with free housing for workers, while it is not indicated which housing is secondary or new, although there is material about the commissioning of industrial plants, factories, workshops. At the same time, we add that residential buildings (except for barracks and dormitories) built before the NEP are distinguished by non-standard architectural solutions, a large area, and original architectural design.

4. Conclusion
The housing construction policy which was being implemented in Irkutsk province in 1921-1922 failed to improve the living conditions of people. The Vlast Truda as the most accessible and prompt source covered the main issues of housing construction: compaction, redistribution, preservation of the housing stock and renovation of apartments, construction of affordable housing for various social groups of the population. Meanwhile, in Irkutsk province, the housing construction policy had specific features. Firstly, it was not widely covered by the "Vlast Truda" newspaper that was filled with the pathos of ideological NEP programs of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Only small notes and announcements contained information about housing construction issues. Secondly, special attention
should be paid to the organization of housing construction, which included several stages: design of cheap temporary dwellings and barracks by drawing and design offices, approval of construction projects by Communist Party and government departments and construction of buildings (selection of materials, contractors, builders and construction works). Thirdly, construction works were funded by public or private funds using backward production management methods. Primitive building tools (shovels, wheelbarrows, axes, stretchers) were used at construction sites. All construction works were manual, there were no qualified building workers. Houses were built of brick, wood, cinder blocks, and stone. The terms of construction and location of construction sites were not indicated in the newspaper. By the end of 1922, gradual changes in the construction industry began. Tenders for construction works began to be held; new factories producing building materials were opened, and the staff training system was improved. Fourthly, there was a differentiated approach to housing problems: the type and size of housing and the accommodation payment were dependent on the social status. Workers and employees were considered a privileged social group. These factors forced us to use newspapers as an additional source for studying the issues of housing construction. In the age of new information technologies, printed publications have been replaced by the Internet, which serves as a place for discussing acute issues of housing construction.

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