Restituting the Initial Function to the Historical Rental Houses

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Abstract. The subject being addressed in this article is timely because it suggests not only the search of resolutions for the dwelling problems, but also the preservation of historical and cultural environment in Russian cities and towns by returning the initial functions to rental houses. References are made to the RF approved government programs providing restoration of the rental houses institute as the only civilized mode for existence of the rented-dwelling market. Based on the analysis of the rental house construction history in pre-revolution Russia, the article presents the evolution underwent by the structure of multi-apartment dwelling houses. The author has addressed the perimeter-type construction of houses with well-like yards, housing & social complexes for proletariat (the so-called “people’s complexes), rental houses for wealthy citizens, multifunctional complexes of rental houses, as well the condition thereof in the Soviet period. Restitution of initial functions to historical rental houses will help to resolve partially the housing shortage problem and to preserve the historical environment that would comply with the major principle of the sustainable architecture.

1. Introduction
The housing problem has always been a topical issue for Russia. It was quite recently that the possibility of buying the housing through mortgage loan was widely promoted among the population. However, at the present time only 8% of the RF residents have a sufficient level of income enabling them to buy commercial housing [1, 2]. At the same time, in European countries the bigger part of citizens having the lower than average income (or unwilling to burden themselves with real-estate property) use to rent apartments and do not worry about a possible growth of the family size or a change of the job. In foreign countries, rent of housing is the most popular and the most efficient way of using the housing real-estate facilities. And, the higher the economic growth rates of the region, the higher is the percentage of the leased housing [3]. In Moscow, only about 2% of the housing fund is being leased, and only 20% of that volume is being leased legally. The rest deals use to be made in the “grey market”, which does not protect people against all sorts of slander and manipulations and usually offers to the renters the low-quality apartments at irrelevantly high prices. It goes beyond saying that no tax payments are made in the given cases [4, 5, 6, 7].

2. Theoretical basis
Revival of the rental houses institute has nothing to do with the category innovations, and this is evidenced by the reviewed construction history of such buildings’ evolution in Russia. The rental houses – i.e., a multi-apartment dwelling houses, meant for the apartment lease, were set firmly in
European countries by the 1830s-1840s. In Russia, the active construction of rental houses was underway in the second half of the 19th century – in particular, in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other big cities, such as Kiev, Odessa, and Rostov-on-Don [13].

The first rental houses in Russia had two or three floors (with shops on the ground floor and apartments for lease on the upper ones) started to be built as early as after the edict of 1769, which allowed “to set shops in dwelling houses and to trade therein” [2]. Apartments of the monastery-cell type were united by the gallery and had the exit to open stairwells. After the fire of 1812, the number of apartment renters in Moscow was supplemented by the ever poorer nobles, for whom the rental house looked rather as a mansion divided in several apartments. Evolution of rental houses in Moscow was as well typical of many provincial cities in Russia and proceeded rather slowly [10]. The process of rental-house formation was more intensive owing to the orderly and systemic urbanization of the northern capital city, which did not have the developed-type nobles’ houses similar to the mansions in Moscow. In St. Petersburg, houses used to be built without gaps, and were of the same “uninterrupted façade and height” [9]. Only such type of housing “for the residents’ taste” could provide the city with the necessary amount of housing on the land plots of comparatively small space.

Eventually, there started construction of four- and even five-storey buildings with the formed 2-apartment sections with closed stair-wells which were easily adapted to the conditions of the perimeter-type development of the land-plot. Thus there appeared the unity between the voluminous-spatial structure of the dwelling house and the composition of its order-free façade as the frequency of equipollent details did not limit the dimensions of the construction. The houses’ facades, looking to the red line of development, were performed in the then dominating classical style. Seeking to raise the yield, the house-owners started to construct on the land-plots the inner transversal buildings, which in the architectural terms were quite plain. [9]. These buildings broke the initially integrated space into separate, poorly ventilated, half-light, and non-greened up closed well-like, which became a typical feature of the urban landscape in capitalist St. Petersburg (Figure 1).

Figure 1. F. I. Tanskoy’s Rental House in St. Petersburg, 1910. Architect K. V. Baldi.

In the 1870s, in connection with the increased population influx to cities after the serfdom abolition, the volumes and rates of housing construction grew up to the level of “construction fever”. In such conditions, the architects’ strive to build houses with due regard of functional expediency and convenient living was nullified. Meanwhile, the government almost entirely opted out from controlling the cities’ development. The social composition of the rental houses residents was featured by strong diversity caused by the volume and planning of buildings. The first floors of two-section houses, looking to the red line of development, accommodated the “lordly” 5-7-room
apartments, in which the two stair cases (the grand one and the back-stairs for servants) divided such apartment into the “lordly” and household zones. The flankers in the yards were populated by low-rank officials, common people of different sorts, and students, all of whom nestled in the rooms, which were uncomfortable in terms of proportions, actually deprived of daylight, and exited to the equally gloomy and sometimes stinking stair-wells. Quite often, a tenant, having rented an apartment from the house owner, leased it room by room to his own tenants, who on their part could lease the so-called “corner” and receive money for themselves. Such pattern of rent was not regulated by any laws and resulted in the absolutely insanitary density of rental-house populating.

In the last third part of the 19th century, the social contradictions of that epoch were as well reflected in architecture: composition of facades represented the started decay of the architectural aesthetics fundamentals, and this was revealed in “liberation” from the canons of orderly composition and unjustified use of the past forms. At the juncture of the 19th and 20th centuries, not only wealthy people and partnerships, but also educational institutions and even monasteries enthusiastically started to invest capitals in construction of rental houses. Such investments were highly profitable, because the demand for such housing always surpassed the supply.

By the 1890s, there appeared the new social order for designing of dwelling buildings, townships, and town-lets for workers. The homogeneous daily-life needs, modest budget of tenants, in whose families not only men, but women, too, used to work, and their higher cultural level (than the one of peasants) — all these factors required to work out new architectural and planning techniques for organization of the living environment. In 1896–97, the contests were held in Moscow and St. Petersburg for designing and construction of housing-and-social complexes for proletariat, in which the housing was planned together with inexpensive canteens and snack-bars, kindergartens, out-patient clinics, pharmacies, libraries, laundries, public baths, shops, churches and even something like culture clubs — i. e., everything that was necessary in order to organize the cultural and daily-life service of the residents. Some of those projects were realized in the outskirts of Moscow (Taganka, Syromyatniki, and Lefortovo). In such complexes — the remote precursors of contemporary mini-districts — the prerequisites of the new esthetic ideal were formed, such as: expressiveness of the ensemble rather than of an individual building, replication and interconnection of homo-type buildings rather than the unique composition and decoration of an individual building, and creation of living environment in the entire territory of development. The efficient use of the land-plot space was attained through compact planning, shortening of the premise height to 2.8 and 3.3 meters (instead of 4.26 m), waiving of back stairs, reduction of the living rooms number to one–three, as well as arrangement of the adjoining rooms, combination bathrooms, and niche-like kitchens (Figure 2).
Another typical trend, featuring the juncture of the 19th–20th centuries, was the search of techniques helping to proceed from the abutting construction with secluded inner yards to the disengaged deployment of separately standing buildings. The new elements that appeared in the quarter planning included the open front yards, and the bigger dimensions of inner yards, in which gardens were laid out. Owing to the fact that part of the new buildings were constructed as T-shaped, it became possible “to break” the abutting-construction view of the streets. Other gains included the throughout ventilation of apartments, reduced number of dark rooms, and improved shapes of sections and rooms. The most prestigious houses were had elevators with mirrors and leather sofas, spacious balconies, telephones and electricity, fireplaces, fountains, and steam-heating systems, refrigerator cameras in the basements, as well as parking lots for carriages and cars. Built by the leading architects of the time, the rich comfortable and economy-class rental houses of that period, today are deemed deservedly as architectural monuments (Figure 3) [10, 11, 17].
Bit by bit, the central districts of Moscow were becoming featured by the higher density, and were changing the scale, quality and comfort grade of development. The land-plots with manors were being bought-up and overbuilt be multi-storey houses “for the taste of” different-type residents. With the start of the World War 1 (owing to which not all of the manors in Moscow were destroyed), the civilian construction stopped almost entirely, while the growth of the urban population accelerated because of the refugee influx. In the circumstances of blistering devaluation of money and banned (in 1915) build-up of rent payment and eviction of tenants, the apartment lease not only did not generate the net revenues for the house-owners, but even did not enable them to cover the operating costs for the house maintenance. Thus the houses started to be self-destroyed [10].

Apart from rental houses as such, there existed the multi-functional complexes of rental houses, which had both the housing function and manufacturing or social one and included all kinds of workshops, offices, theaters, public baths, and even factories. For instance, the house of the Officers’ Economic Society at Vozdvizhenka Street in Moscow accommodated shops and stores on the first floor, offices on the second floor, while the upper floors were taken by tailor’s and footwear workshops [10].

Such multifunctional complexes of rental houses were especially typical of Saint-Petersburg in late 19th–early 20th centuries. For example, the “A. I. Nissen Factory of Silk Items and Rental Dwelling house” was located in the Fontanka River Embankment (Figure 4). The complex was comprised of
three buildings – the four-storey “philistine house” with the two-storey annex, the four-storey throwing-mill and the five-storey out-house, while the household ice cellar was located in the center of the yard. The complexes, which existed in the capital city, included the ones with workshops and small factories (Lipgardt’ Rental House-Mansion & E. K. v Workshop”, “Rental House with Mosaic Workshop of the Frolovs”, “Volodikhin’s Own Rental House & Studio”, “Schtern’s Rental House, Max’s Letter-Foundry & Mechanic Workshop”, “Ottowean Tobacco Factory & Lishnevski’s Rental House”), with spectators’ facilities (Bourtsev’ Rental House & Big Puppet Theater”, “Foox’ Rental House & Footlights Movie Theater” ), as well as with social and daily-life facilities (“Count Fermon’s Public Baths”, “Pelle’s Rental House & Pharmacy”) [11].

Figure 4. A. I. Nissen’s factory of silk items and rental dwelling house. 1872-1873. 183, the Fontanka River Embankment, Saint-Petersburg. Façade and plan of the 1st Floor.

Together with slum quarters, Soviet Russia inherited the dwelling buildings that were the world-level monuments of architecture. After 1917, apartments in rental houses were transformed into “Soviet communal ones”. As for the three- and four-storey houses, several floors were built thereon and thus their initial architecture was totally disfigured. The higher houses were “luckier”: a part of decorum thereof, which dilapidated and had all chances to fall down, was simply destroyed. The only elements, which remained intact in the old rental houses, were the incredibly beautiful front entries and caracoles [2]. Today, in most cases the former rental houses are functioning as trade-and-office, exhibition, and other public buildings having nothing to do with housing.

3. Materials and methods
What could help in the partial resolution of the housing-shortage problem is revival of the rental-houses institute – the only possible way to develop the civilized housing-rent market. In 2007, the RF Government has reviewed the strategy for development of the mass housing construction for the period through to 2025, which includes construction of rental houses [6, 7, 8]. In 2014, the Ministry of Construction has approved the entire regulatory framework for rent of dwelling premises of the
social-use housing fund. Realization of the government program for restitution of the rental-house function provides for resolution of this task by such means as: *construction of new modern rental housing; modifying the dwelling buildings constructed in the Soviet period for the purpose of apartments lease; and, restituting the initial functions of the historical rental houses*. Depending on the provided level of housing, rental houses may by classified by three groups, such as the elite-class, business-class, and economy-class houses.

As of today, the first modern rental houses already function in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Surgut, Novosibirsk, Khanty-Mansiysk, Nefteyugansk, Leninsk-Kuznetsk, and Nizhny Novgorod. Notwithstanding the high (in some cases) rent price, apartments in such houses do not stay idle, and this fact serves an evidence of the actual demand for the given kind of housing [16].

The dwelling houses of the Soviet period, such as skyscrapers of the Stalinist years, brick-laid apartment houses built in the pre- and post-war years, as well as the five-storey houses built in the first phase of industrial housing construction can all be modified to become the rental houses. All of those will have their renters – people with different level of financial wealth as well as company employees, who are not the local residents and therefore need temporary housing.

The special position in this context is taken by the historical rental houses, which are the highly capital buildings. They were constructed under the designs drawn by both the unknown architects and the future maestros of architecture – such as Fyodor Schechtel, Fyodor Lidval, Roman Klein, the Vesnin brothers, Ivan Kuznetsov, as well as Leon and Albert Benois [9, 10, 11]. Today, many of these buildings are either the cultural heritage objects, or the objects of the valuable city-forming housing in historical cities that is may not be destructed. Restituting the initial function of the historical rental houses would help not only to resolve partially the housing problem for a certain population group, but also to preserve the historical environment in the cities and towns. Preservation of cultural heritage, which includes the architectural monuments, is laid in the basis of the contemporary principles for the sustainable architecture [12].

4. Discussion
While restoring the historical environment in central parts of cities, it is most important to *preserve the atmosphere of the environing buildings* [14, 15, 16]. Together with restituting the initial function of rental houses, the non-housing premises of multi-functional complexes, too, must be revived as well and get the function similar to the initial one. They can quite well serve the basis for development of the modern multi-functional housing complexes, which would offer not only the housing, but also the space for employment and leisure time as well as medical and public institutions. The production premises with high ceilings and large free spaces allow the highly variable use. All these factors would make it possible to concentrate the basic living function in one and the same locality. The only thing that is necessary is to comply with the current norms for exploitation of buildings.

5. Results
- the rental houses, where apartments are provided for temporary use under the agreements of lease and commercial rent, are an important element in resolution of housing problems for the population and the only civilized mode for existence of the rented housing market;
- restituting of the initial housing function for historical rental houses may be considered not only as one of the options for resolution of the housing problem, but also as preservation of the historical and cultural environment in the central parts of cities, which is a component of sustainable development.

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