

UDC: 332.8:339.133.3(497.4)

DOI: 10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2013-24-01-002

Received: 16 December 2012

Accepted: 6 March 2013

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The low housing standard in Slovenia: Low purchasing power as an eternal excuse

This article advances and argues the thesis that Slovenia has a low housing standard and that the majority of people live in dwellings that may be described as overcrowded according to internationally recognised standards. Evidence supporting this thesis is provided with the help of statistical data, a comprehensive literature review and a review of the views of various Slovenian authors that have discussed the subject in the past. In addition to an extensive review of domestic and foreign literature, I also highlight the major historical factors that have significantly influenced the implementation and maintenance of the current housing standard. The final part of the

article identifies and discusses a widely held false conviction that I characterise as the major obstruction to the introduction of a higher housing standard in Slovenia. In this section, I suggest alternative theoretical explanations for the continued maintenance of the low housing standard. The final aim of the article is to spur concrete actions that will lead to implementing appropriate measures and eventual improvement of the housing standard.

Key words: housing standard, housing space standard, overcrowding, purchasing power

1 Introduction

The literature review shows that numerous studies have been conducted on the quality of the living environment in Slovenia and several research and discussion articles have been written on the subject (including Mandič et al., 1988, 1998, 1999; Verlič Christensen, 1989, 1996; Sendi, Požnel et al., 2000; Sendi, Šašek-Divjak et al., 2000; Sendi, Černič Mali et al., 2002; Šašek-Divjak et al., 2002; Sendi & Černič Mali, 2003; Sendi, 2005; Mandič, 2006, 2007; Filipović & Mandič, 2007; Mandič & Cirman, 2012, Cirman et al., 2012). Irrespective of the various views expressed by the individual authors, all of these analyses or discussions address quality of life from the perspective of the location of residential buildings in space and assessment of the quality of a specific residential environment. This article describes this approach as a focus on the “macro segment” of the residential environment. At the narrower level, it identifies a “micro segment” that relates to the quality of the dwelling itself and the living space within it (Blejc, 1984; Klemenčič, 1985; Verlič Christensen & Mandič, 1986; Verlič Christensen, 1992; Mandič & Kraigher, 1992; Mandič, 1994; Mandič & Filipović, 2005; Mandič & Cirman, 2006; Mandič & Cirman, 2012). The discussion focuses on the micro segment; that is, on the quality of living in terms of adequate residential space standards in Slovenia’s current housing stock. The fundamental hypothesis for the discussion is that Slovenia has a lower housing standard in comparison with the older member states of the European Union (the EU 15). In addition to lagging behind the EU 15 countries, statistical data show that Slovenia’s housing stock is also of a lower standard with regard to the international standards that define adequate housing or residential overcrowding.

In the more developed EU countries, providing and maintaining an appropriate housing standard is one of the most important elements of national housing policy. As shown below, all of the EU 15 countries have a higher average usable floor area per person than the average for Slovenia. A comparative analysis of statistical data shows that average area per person in some of these countries exceeds that of Slovenia by a factor of ten. This state of affairs is a manifestation of the inappropriate attitude of the political institutions responsible for these matters as well as the result of mistaken standpoints on the part of the professional community regarding residential space standards. At the time of writing this article, there has been no national housing policy for over three years. It is also important to note here that housing standards were not granted much attention even in the previous national housing programme. Although the objectives and goals of the previous national housing policy (2000–2009) did include the “promotion of a better quality of housing and the living environment and also the guarantee of an appropriate housing standard with respect to adequate

dwelling size” (National Housing Programme, Sln. *Nacionalni stanovanjski program*, Ur. l. RS, no. 43/2000: 5768), this is all that was written about the issue and nothing more. There is no further mention of the subject in the subsequent detailed presentation of the programme.

The discussion starts by defining the term “housing standard”. It is important to stress here that this discussion is not about the need to “standardise housing construction”, nor is it about categorising dwellings according to their quality. The article addresses the need to improve the “residential space standard”, with the principle aim of improving the quality of living space. As such, the issue of the housing standard is primarily addressed from the viewpoint of the use of residential space and the comfort of living in it. Likewise, this article does not set out to propose concrete new standards. The aim is to draw attention to the unacceptability of the current housing standard and to promote activities that will lead to the eventual implementation of more appropriate standards. Proposing alternative higher standards requires the performance of appropriate preliminary analyses, which will enable the accurate identification of the real needs of residents regarding the desired quality of dwellings and their optimum functionalism.

1.1 Defining the key notions

In the general sense, the notion of a “housing standard” covers a broad spectrum of the various elements that determine housing quality. The most important among these are structural characteristics; hygienic and sanitary aspects; locational, environmental and spatial characteristics; and housing furnishings. This article addresses spatial characteristics and housing furnishings because these are the two elements that define the housing space standard discussed here. In order to achieve an adequate housing standard, the dwelling must satisfy the residential needs of the household with respect to its size, the concept of its plan and the functionality of its spaces, furnishings and comfort. In addition to these requirements, the dwelling must not be overcrowded (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 2009). This concerns the relation between the net usable area, the number of rooms and the number of persons living in a particular dwelling. Together, these aspects present the most important indicator of the standard of a dwelling, especially its density of occupation. In 1980, the housing density criterion was adopted by the Council of the OECD as a key indicator of the housing space standard (OECD, 1980). This indicator is particularly important when considering the rights of children to adequate housing. This right specifically concerns guaranteeing the conditions required to ensure the children’s physical, intellectual, mental, moral and social development (OECD, 2009). This document specifies that “[c]hildren live in overcrowded condi-

tions when the number of people living in their homes exceeds the number of rooms in the household (excluding kitchens and bathrooms) Overall, on average around one in three OECD children live in crowded conditions. Children in Eastern Europe experience overcrowding the most” (OECD, 2009: 37).

The OECD position was also adopted by Eurostat (2011), which recognises the appropriateness of housing space as a key criterion in the assessment of potential overcrowding. This primarily refers to the relationship between the specific characteristics of the inhabitants of a dwelling and its size. This relationship determines whether the size of a dwelling and its spaces at a particular time are appropriate for its occupants or whether it may be classified as overcrowded. As such, the indication of overcrowding depends on the number of rooms in the dwelling, the size of the household (number of persons in the household) and the ages of individual members of the household. According to the Eurostat definition (Rybkovska & Schneider, 2011: 3) “a person’s living conditions are considered as overcrowded if the household does not have at its disposal a minimum number of rooms equal to:

- one room for the household,
- one room per couple in the household,
- one room for each single person aged 18 or more,
- one room per pair of single people of the same gender

between 12 and 17 years of age,

- one room for each single person between 12 and 17 years of age and not included in the previous category,
- one room per pair of children under 12 years of age”.

According to the 2011 Eurostat data, Slovenia ranked among the upper half of EU countries that show a higher level of dwelling overcrowding (Figure 1). It may be pointed out here that the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia does not collect data on overcrowding in terms of inappropriateness of special housing standards. It does, however, publish data on overcrowding in relation to the age and sex of inhabitants, household type (number of members and total household income), the tenure characteristics of the household (ownership with or without a mortgage, tenancy) and household income quintiles. Otherwise, the issue of overcrowding in Slovenia has previously been addressed by Srna Mandič and Maša Filipović (2005).

In addition to data on dwelling overcrowding, Eurostat also collects data on severe housing deprivation. Severe housing deprivation is an indicator that, in addition to overcrowdedness, also takes into consideration other housing standard indicators such as the absence of a bathroom, absence of an indoor flushing toilet, leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundations,

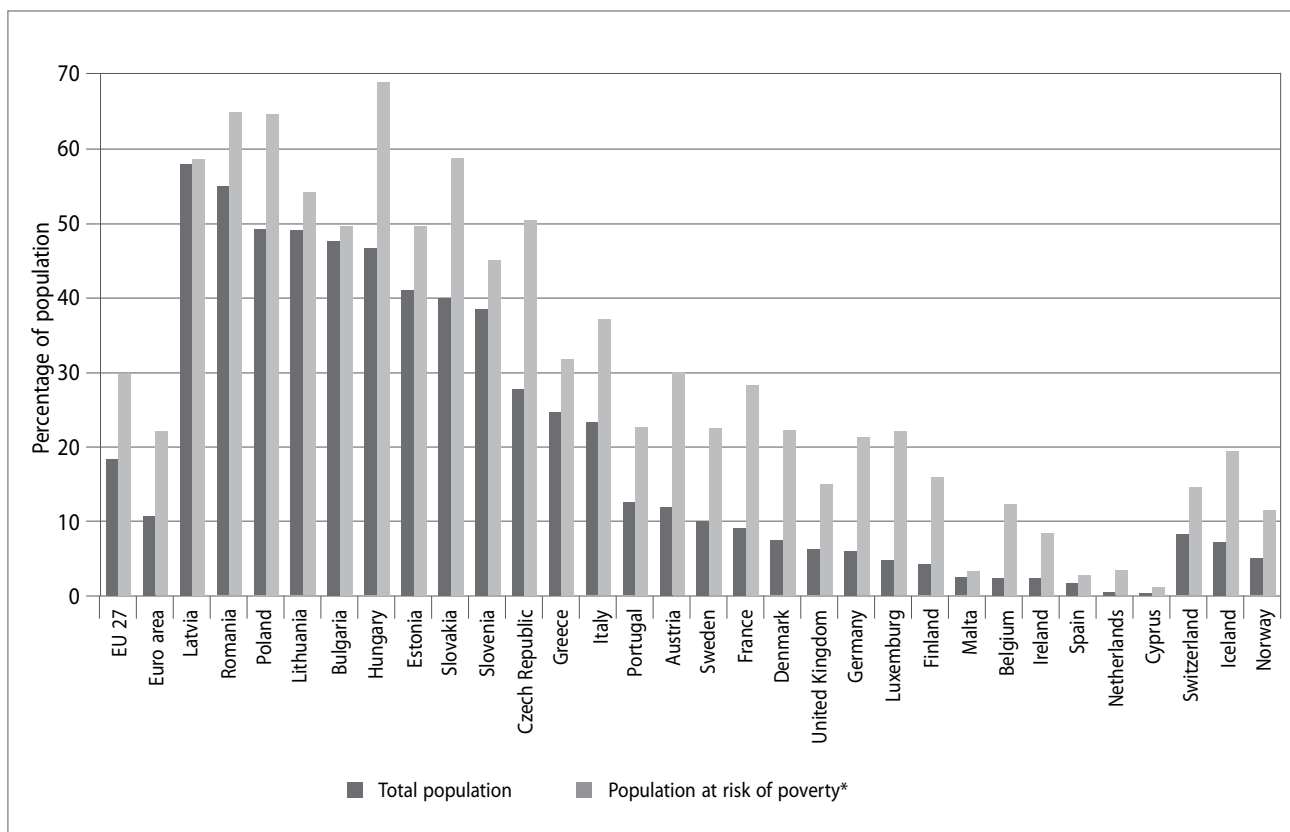


Figure 1: Overcrowding in EU member states (source: Eurostat, 2011).

Note: (*) Population below 60% of median equivalent income.

and dwelling darkness. With respect to this indicator of the housing standard, Slovenia is classified by Eurostat even less favourably, occupying a place among the EU countries with a lower standard (Figure 2).

The severe housing deprivation indicator of housing quality relates to building-construction standards, which are not the subject of this discussion. This does not, however, mean that this aspect of housing standard is less important. Indeed, this may be the subject of discussion on another occasion. However, as already stated, this article focuses on the first indicator, which directly relates to the housing space standard. The housing space standard is addressed in this article from both the quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

It is also important to explain that, in this discussion, the expression “small dwelling” does not refer, for example, to a bedsit or one-bedroom unit. Likewise, “large dwelling” does not necessarily refer to a unit with several bedrooms. It is vital to understand that a one-bedroom unit may be a large dwelling in terms of available usable space if it is adequately large in size and is occupied by a single person. On the other hand, a five-bedroom dwelling that is occupied by eight persons may, according to the Eurostat criteria, be classified as too small for such a large household, especially if the rooms are not sufficiently large. As already stated, the key indicator of an adequate housing standard is not only the size of the dwelling but also the ratio between the number of rooms and number of people in the household, also taking into account the criterion of usable space per person.

Although Eurostat collects data on the indicators of the housing standard mentioned above, the European Commission does not prescribe any common standards with which all member states would be required to comply. This is because housing care is one of those areas for which, under the principle of subsidiarity, member states independently adopt legislation and implement policies. Nonetheless, Valerie Karn and Louise Nystrom (1998) report that in 1985 the EU adopted several non-binding recommendations for developing and implementing higher technical housing standards. They also observe that the recommendations are being taken into account by a growing number of member states when preparing and adopting national regulations. Slovenia is, regrettably, not among these.

2 Theoretical background

Irrespective of average living standard, every country has a significant proportion of people that, without state help, are not capable on their own of covering all the costs necessary to guarantee what is usually defined as an “adequate housing standard” (Franck & Ahrentzen, 1991). For this reason, the role of the state in prescribing appropriate standards and supervising their practical implementation is vital, especially in the case of housing provided or subsidised by the state (Karn & Nystrom, 1998). Among the most important elements that determine an adequate housing standard is available space. The amount of available space significantly impacts the housing density and comfort of the occupants of a specific dwelling. Robert Cassen and Geeta Kingdom (2007) stress the impor-

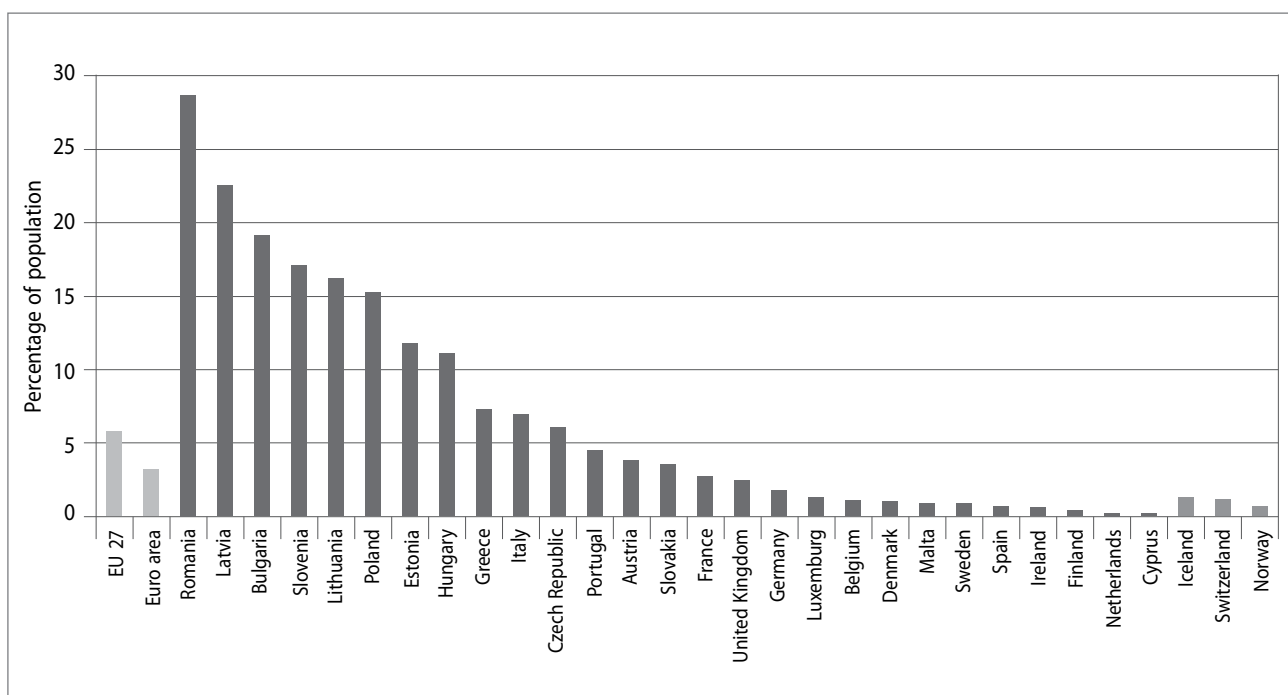


Figure 2: Severe housing deprivation (source: Eurostat, 2011).

tance of guaranteeing adequate housing space because this:

- Allows the occupants a comfortable living;
- Allows privacy and contributes to better health and state of mind;
- Guarantees better conditions for children's learning and play;
- Allows flexibility of the dwelling and its adaptability to changing needs;
- Reduces the potential for conflicts within the family or household, which may lead to antisocial behaviour;
- Contributes to more efficient operation of the housing market, with respect to the provision of a diversified supply and facilitating easier mobility of the population.

The authors of the report on the study of housing space standards in London (Greater London Authority, 2006) identified, among other things, several potential consequences of an increase in the number of people living in a dwelling that exceeds the acceptable level. They found that non-compliance with an appropriate housing standard may lead to "interpersonal aggression, withdrawal from the family, sexually deviant behaviour, psychological distress or physical illness" (Greater London Authority, 2006: 9). The report's recommendations point out the following potential consequences:

- The number of forced social contacts increases;
- The number of unwanted social interactions increases;
- Privacy decreases;
- Parents may be unable to monitor children's behaviour;
- Access to simple goals such as heating or watching television may be frustrated (due to the various needs of individual members of the household);
- Activities such as the use of the bathroom have to be coordinated with others;
- Sick persons may not receive the care they require.

Although experts recognise some difficulties in establishing clear causal relations, some studies (e.g., Bulos & Teymur, 1993; BurrIDGE & Ormandy, 1993; Reynolds et al., 2004; Petticrew et al., 2008, Gibson et al., 2011) have shown that certain connections exist between the housing space standard and the general state of health of the people living in a particular dwelling. Liam Reynolds et al. (2004) found that overcrowding may cause sleeping disorders and increase the spread of diseases. Research has also shown that substandard dwellings may cause very serious mental disorders in adults as well as younger members of the household (Petticrew et al., 2008). The same authors have also established that tensions within the household progressively grow, and that living in overcrowded spaces increases stress and impacts the mental health and comfort of the members of the household, especially children.

Providing an appropriate housing space standard is regarded as one of the key elements of guaranteeing children's rights. The findings of the OECD publication referred to above draw attention to this housing standard indicator and its potential influences on children's development. Inappropriate housing standards may have an unfavourable influence on academic performance and other opportunities for children. Petticrew et al. (2008) have found that the home learning environment plays a very important role in improving or harming academic performance. It has also been found that there are connections between living in overcrowded conditions and children's social and emotional development. This observation has been supported by Liam Reynolds (2005), who states that living in overcrowded circumstances may have a detrimental influence on a child's health, education and general wellbeing. Reynolds further explains that, because such circumstances impact the privacy of all members of a family or household, living in such a dwelling may present an obstacle to children at play or in their search for a peaceful corner for reading or doing homework. Such circumstances, he continues, may also influence the quality of relations between parents and children as well as among children themselves. Gary Evans (2003) has made reference to similar problems that arise as a consequence of living in dwellings shared by more than one household. In such cases, there is a high potential for inter-household and inter-generational conflicts in addition to the usual conflicts within single households. According to Yung Yau (2012), such situations may also result in antisocial behaviour within the dwelling.

Another aspect that has a significant impact on the housing standard is housing furnishings. Andrew Drury (2008) has stated that the size of a dwelling depends, above all, on the size of the household and the furnishings that the household wants to have in the dwelling. Drury calls this aspect of the housing standard the "usability factor", which he defines as the basis for discussing housing space standards. He argues that the "usability factor" must be taken into consideration as a compulsory segment in the planning housing space in order to provide users with adequate space for their basic daily activities and for satisfying their needs. This includes the furnishings required for sleeping, preparing meals, storing personal belongings and socialisation within the household as well as with friends. As such, an appropriate housing space standard must guarantee functionality and flexibility of the spaces in order to satisfy the needs of the family or household. Special attention must be paid to the needs of children, elderly persons and persons with functional impairments (Heywood, 2004).

The third important aspect of the housing standard is the recognition that living space is not a fixed space, but a "flexible space". This recognition is vital for understanding the nature and function of dwellings. An accurate understanding of the

nature and function of housing is a precondition for developing and introducing more appropriate housing space standards. As such, I dwell slightly longer on this aspect. This also calls for the need to recognise and take into account new circumstances that urgently require the introduction of fundamental changes in attitudes about and understanding of the function of dwellings and dwelling space. This consequently represents a need for adopting and implementing new standards that will better satisfy people's new needs. Today's lifestyles and the changing demographic structure of households present a major challenge to both spatial planners and housing designers. The traditional economic class has been shrinking for decades, with various new types of households emerging. The changes in the living circumstances of the inhabitants call for the need for alternative solutions that are more appropriate for satisfying the new needs (Bulos & Chaker, 1993). Information technology development has enabled the performance of various types of work from home that previously could only be performed in the office. These changes in lifestyles call for the development of new housing types that will be more appropriate for new types of households and new functions of housing (Franck & Ahrentzen, 1991). This means that these changes must be taken into consideration when planning housing space in order to ensure delimitation of space between social, family and working areas. In guaranteeing such optimal functionality of housing space, it is important at the same time to maintain the conception of the entire dwelling as common household space.

The functionalist style in designing housing space precisely determines the relationship between space and function and was strongly expressed at the beginning of the twentieth century (Bernard, 1993). Barbara Verlič Christensen (1992) has observed that Swedish functionalism, in particular, greatly influenced the development of housing standards in Europe. Its essence was that each individual room in a dwelling was to be designed according to the function it was intended to perform. The shape of the room was thus to be adapted to its specific use. During the 1970s, however, some architects and sociologists started to express doubts about the justification of such a rigid system of housing space design (Bernard, 1993). As a consequence of these doubts, there later emerged, in addition to functionalism, the notion of "flexibility in housing space use". In contrast to strict functionalism, the principle of flexibility in housing space use introduces a different method of planning dwellings that makes it possible to change the uses of space with respect to life cycle, to choose between various uses of space and to change the spatial arrangement and furniture (Barlow et al., 2003). Sam Davis (1995) describes flexibility as an "aspect of dignity and choice". In some cases, especially in the case of single-family housing, flexibility even allows the enlargement of dwelling space if such a need arises at a later stage.

The flexibility of the use of housing space can be determined at several levels. The first, general level, relates to the possibility of changing the use of dwelling space at different stages in accordance with changes to the structure of the household, and also the age and number of persons composing it. In the case of smaller dwellings, this means the possibility to change a bedroom into a living room, for example, or a study into a bedroom and so on. The need to change the use of a particular room in a dwelling may arise after a certain period when a certain inadequacy or new need emerges (Schneider & Till, 2005). A bedroom located next to the living room may be a functionally acceptable arrangement until the birth of a baby, when the nearness of a source of noise becomes a disturbing factor. Sickness among members of the household that requires preventive isolation of the patient may also be a reason for a need to change the use of dwelling space, if only temporarily. The most common reason for changing the use of dwelling space arises when, at a certain stage of the lifecycle, a particular space loses its original function. After a grown-up child leaves home, his or her room may be turned into any other possible use with respect to the spatial needs of the remaining members of the household. A flexibly planned dwelling enables the users to change living spaces and their internal organisation by moving the furniture from one room to another (Bernard, 1993). On the other hand, such rearrangement of space may be difficult or even totally impossible if dwelling space is primarily planned on the basis of standardised measures of individual elements of furniture. Andrew Drury (2008) specifies housing furnishings as one of the key aspects for determining the size of a dwelling, whereas Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2007) argue that the general standardisation of housing furnishings often turns out to be a factor that restricts the flexibility and adaptability of living space.

As shown later in this discussion, the principle of flexibility has not been successfully implemented in Slovenian housing planning practice. Today, the principle of flexibility may be regarded as the predecessor of the principles of "lifetime home", "inclusive design" or "universal design". I present and describe the basics of these principles in the final section of the article and argue that these approaches to housing design urgently need to be adopted in Slovenia.

3 Review of the current situation in Slovenia

As stated in the introduction, this article discusses the current inappropriate housing space standards in Slovenia. This section presents a detailed analysis of statistical data, providing evidence in support of the principle hypothesis of the discussion, which is that Slovenia has a low housing standard and that

the majority of the population live in dwellings that may be classified as overcrowded according to international standards. The analysis begins with a comparison between the average housing standard in Slovenia and that of the older EU member states (Table 1). The comparison includes the following indicators of housing standard:

- Average usable floor area (dwelling area);
- Average number of rooms in a dwelling;
- Average number of persons in a dwelling;
- Average number of persons in a household;
- Average usable floor area per person.

With respect to average usable space in a dwelling, the data presented in Table 1 show that all EU 15 countries have larger dwellings, the only exception being Finland, which has about the same average size as that of Slovenia. Regarding this criterion, Denmark (114.4 m²) and especially Luxembourg (133.3 m²) far exceed the European average (about 36.5 m²). It may also be observed that all EU 15 countries have a higher average number of rooms per dwelling, ranging from 3.5 in Denmark to 5.6 in Ireland. The average for Slovenia regarding this indicator is 3.3 rooms per dwelling (an average of four rooms for single-family houses and 2.4 rooms for multifamily residential blocks). The housing quality indicator with which Slovenia evenly compares with the other countries in the table is the average number of persons per household. Regarding this indicator, Slovenia (with 2.5 persons per household) ranks somewhere in the middle of the entire list, whereas

Portugal (2.8 persons per household) and Spain (2.7 persons per household) top the list.

The data presented in Table 1 thus show that Slovenia has a comparatively lower housing standard. Additional evidence for this may be provided by making further comparisons between individual countries. The comparison between Slovenia and Finland is particularly interesting. Although both countries have approximately the same average useful floor space, the figures presented show that Finland has a higher average number of rooms in a dwelling, a lower average number of persons and also a lower average household size. An additional comparative calculation thus reveals that, on average, the Finnish inhabitant has 7.1 m² more available than the Slovenia inhabitant living in a dwelling approximately the same size as that of his or her Finnish counterpart. With respect to average usable area of the dwelling, a comparison between Slovenia and another country – say, Germany (ranked somewhere in the middle of the list of the EU countries examined) – shows that the German inhabitant has on average 11 m² more than the Slovenian.

Once again, it is vital to stress that what matters most when reading the figures presented in Table 1 is the relationship between the number of persons in a dwelling, the number of rooms in it and its usable area. It is important to understand that the size of a dwelling (its total usable area) on its own does not say anything about its standard if no information is available on the number of people living in it or the number

Table 1: Indicators of housing space standard in the EU 15 and Slovenia.

Country	Average usable area of dwelling (m ²)	Average number of rooms	Average number of persons in a dwelling	Average number of persons in a household	Average usable space per person (m ²)
Austria	98.5 ^j	4.1 ^j	2.3 ^j	2.3 ⁱ	42.9 ^j
Belgium	81.3 ^b	4.7 ^b	2.3 ^g		
Denmark	114.4 ⁱ	3.5 ^j	2.1 ^j	2.0 ⁱ	51.4 ^j
Finland	79.4 ⁱ	3.7 ^j	2.1 ^j	2.1 ⁱ	38.9 ^j
France	91.0 ^g	4.0 ^g	2.3 ^g	na	39.9 ^g
Germany	89.9 ^g	4.4 ⁱ	2.1 ^g	2.1 ⁱ	42.9 ^g
Greece	81.3 ^b	3.8 ^b	Np	na	30.6 ^b
Ireland	104.0 ^d	5.6 ^c	2.9 ⁱ	na	35.0 ^c
Italy	96.0 ^b	4.2 ^b	2.4 ⁱ	2.4 ⁱ	36.5 ^b
Luxembourg	133.5 ⁱ	4.5 ⁱ	2.5 ⁱ	2.5 ⁱ	66.3 ⁱ
Netherlands	98.0 ^a	4.3 ^j	2.4 ^j	2.2 ⁱ	41.0 ^a
Portugal	83.0 ^b	4.8 ⁱ	2.9 ⁱ	2.8 ⁱ	na
Spain	99.0 ⁱ	5.1 ⁱ	2.8 ⁱ	2.7 ⁱ	33.0 ⁱ
Sweden	92.8 ⁱ	4.2 ⁱ	2.1 ⁱ	2.0 ⁱ	45.2 ⁱ
United Kingdom	86.9 ^b	4.7 ^b	2.3 ⁱ	na	44.0 ^b
Slovenia	79.6	3.3	3.0	2.5	27.4

Note: a = data for 2000, b = data for 2001, c = data for 2002, d = data for 2003, e = data for 2004, f = data for 2005, g = data for 2006, h = data for 2007, i = data for 2008, j = data for 2009, k = data for 2010, na = not available.

Source: Dol & Haffner (2010); Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2011).

of rooms in it. It is only when all three of these indicators are compared that it can be established whether the conditions that determine an appropriate housing standard are fulfilled. In the case of Slovenia, the comparatively lower housing standard is further illustrated in Table 1 by the data in the fifth column, “average usable space per person”. Regarding this indicator, Slovenia’s average is far below that of any of the EU 15 countries. It may be interesting to note that Luxembourg has the highest average (66.3 m² usable space per person), which is almost 2.5 times as much as the average for Slovenia (27.4 m²).

Regarding the housing standard indicators, it is also important to pay attention to one other characteristic of Slovenia’s housing stock. This concerns the definition of the purpose or use of the dwelling space usually referred to as the living room. A review of the literature shows that different countries have different definitions of what counts in their statistical records as a living room (i.e., common space for the entire household and for socialisation purposes) and a bedroom as a space used exclusively for sleeping purposes. As such, some countries have published statistical data on the number of rooms with reference only to the bedrooms, thus excluding the living room. In such cases, the living room always serves as a space for socialisation and never as a sleeping space. A clear definition of the purpose or function of the living room is vital in determining the housing standard of a particular dwelling. This information is vital in establishing the possible overcrowding of a dwelling. In Slovenian terminology, the living room is included in the number of rooms when presenting statistical data. It is also frequently used as a bedroom. This, in Slovenian terminology, concretely means that a “two-room dwelling” has one living room and one bedroom, a “three-room dwelling” one living room and two bedrooms, and so on. A review of statistical data (Table 2) shows these two dwelling sizes – that is, three-room (27.1%) and two-room (25.4%) – dominate. Given that the highest demand on the housing market is for these two dwelling sizes, it may be hypothesised that a significant share of the population live in these two dwelling types, including those households with four or more members. This almost certainly means that the living room is also frequently used as a sleeping space. Such dwellings are clearly substandard and may be classified as overcrowded. Regrettably, however, it is not possible on the basis of available statistical data to establish precisely which household lives in which concrete dwelling. Nonetheless, it is highly likely that large households live in dwellings that do not meet the required housing space standards – thus the relatively high level of overcrowding in Slovenian dwellings shown by the Eurostat data presented earlier.

In addition to the above, there is also another indicator of Slovenia’s inadequate housing space standard. This concerns

the method of categorising dwelling sizes with respect to number of rooms. Slovenian terminology includes the categorisation of a “half room”. Such categorisations are legally provided for by Article 6 of the Housing Act (Sln. *Stanovanjski zakon*) as follows: “Housing units in multifamily residential buildings shall be dwellings categorised as bedsit, one-room, one-and-a-half-room, two-room, two-and-a-half-room, three-room, three-and-a-half-room and multi-room apartments” (Ur. l. RS, no. 69/2003: 3). Regrettably, the Housing Act does not define exactly what is meant by half a room, one and a half rooms, two and a half rooms, and so on. It is, however, generally understood that the “half-rooms”, which are also occasionally referred to in Slovenian as *kabineti*, are meant to serve as workrooms or study rooms. It is also generally known that these “suffocating” tiny spaces are more often than not used for sleeping purposes, sometimes even for two persons (normally children sleeping on bunk beds).

Reflecting back on the Eurostat definition presented earlier, a dwelling has an appropriate standard if includes a room per couple in the household, a room for each single person 18 or older, a room per pair of single people of the same gender between 12 and 17 years of age, a room for each single person between 12 and 17 years of age and not included in the previous category, a room per pair of children under 12 years of age and a common room for the entire household. Due to the aforementioned lack of precise data regarding the actual distribution of dwellings among households, it is not possible to establish whether all one-room units are actually occupied by one-person households or whether five-room dwellings are occupied by five-person households. These issues must be the part of the major focus of future research on the subject. In the absence of appropriate data it may, once again, be presumed that a considerable proportion of larger households live in one-room and two-room dwellings while, on the other hand, a one-person or two-person household may be living in a large dwelling, in terms of both dwelling size and number of rooms. Despite the lack of appropriate data, the figures presented in Table 2 provide some indication that these presumptions are not entirely groundless.

As may be gathered from Table 2, more than one-quarter (26.6%) of the total number of households lived in three-room dwellings in 2011, and just under a quarter of them lived in two-room dwellings. Still more indicative is the finding that almost two-thirds (60.3%) of all the households lived in dwellings with three rooms or less. Such households constituted 54.2% of the total population. This is a much lower standard than that of the more developed EU countries. In their commentary on the findings of a study conducted in England, which showed that the share of two-room, four-bed dwellings accounted for 22% of the total stock, the researchers refer to Valerie Karn and Louise Nystrom, who wrote that

Table 2: Dwelling occupation: number of dwellings, number of households, number of inhabitants by number of rooms (per Slovenian terminology), 2011.

Number of rooms in dwelling	Dwellings		Households		Inhabitants	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	78,373	11.8	83,923	10.8	150,065	7.5
2	169,315	25.4	185,727	23.5	409,313	20.7
3	181,395	27.1	205,324	26.0	517,622	26.0
4	114,900	17.1	139,902	16.8	387,899	19.6
5	63,290	9.3	83,189	10.6	241,638	12.1
6	37,178	5.5	54,012	6.9	161,532	8.1
7	13,558	2.0	20,265	2.7	62,172	3.1
8	7,132	1.1	11,234	1.5	34,540	1.7
9 or more	4,986	0.7	8,474	1.2	24,560	1.2
Total	670,127	100	792,050	100	1,989,341	100

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2011).

“... these properties will be very cramped unless occupied by two adults and one child” (Leishman et al., 2004: 14). It is important to recall the previously explained Slovenian situation, whereby the living room also counts as a “room” and is frequently used as a sleeping space instead of a space for socialisation. It is also generally known that even kitchen space is used for sleeping purposes in some cases. In this regard, it is also important to make reference to providing a room for small children, separate from that of the parents. This is another reason that further contributes to the low housing standard in Slovenia. Reporting on the results of a survey conducted in Ljubljana on the housing standard of the city’s dwellings, Srna Mandič (1994: 27) stated the following:

The need to separate sleeping areas from the other spaces and their functions within a dwelling was recognised a long time ago and this requirement was accepted as the norm in Europe at the end of the twentieth century (Pugh, 1980). Among other questions, our questionnaire included a question on whether the dwelling had a kitchen and a living room and whether these spaces were also regularly used for sleeping purposes. With regard to the kitchen, half of the respondents stated that they did not use it for sleeping. Among the remaining half, it was found that some of the dwellings either did not have a kitchen and, in the case of those that had one, it was also permanently used as a sleeping space. Regarding the living room, the majority of respondents whose dwelling had such a space stated that it was used to serve as both a common space and a sleeping space. The other important fact in this regard is that 60% of the respondents stated that their dwelling did not have a living room. This would mean that the social life and symbolic outward presentation of the household – the usual function of the living room – was seriously curtailed in such dwellings. The final aspect of the examination of the dwelling standards concerns the separation of the children’s room from that of the parents. When asked whether a child older than one year still sleeps in the parent’s room, 50% of the respondents answered “yes”.

The importance of providing separate rooms for small children and their parents was also addressed by Barbara Verlič Christensen (1992: 924): “Whereas the English housing reformers included the requirement to provide separate rooms for children and their parents as long ago as the end of the twentieth century, the new [Slovenian] definition of a ‘suitable dwelling’ totally ignores this requirement. Such an inadequate definition makes it possible to classify a bedroom for a single parent that is separate from the child’s bedroom as a ‘surplus space’. The worry here is that such a dwelling may be subject to taxation under the provisions of the regulation concerning the ‘uneconomic use of a dwelling’”. As shown below, an analysis of the relevant data reveals that this state of affairs continues to persist.

In addition to the situations described above, the inappropriateness of Slovenia’s housing standard may also be demonstrated with the help of concrete data on the usable floor area per person (Table 3). The figures presented in Table 3 show that almost 7% of the total population live in dwellings that offer only 10 m² or less usable floor area per person. Continuing with this analysis, 14% of the inhabitants have 10 to 14.9 m² usable floor area per person, 19% have 15 to 19.9 m², 30% have 20 to 29.9 m² and so on. The majority of the inhabitants live in dwellings with 20 to 29.9 m² usable floor area per person. The most important finding of this analysis, however, is that 70% of the entire population lives in dwellings in which each person has, on average, less than 30 m² usable floor area. The average for the EU 15 is 36.5 m² usable floor area per person.

The above data provide further proof of Slovenia’s lower housing standard in comparison to the EU 15 countries as well as with respect to the OECD and Eurostat standards. The following pages present a brief historical review of the development of housing standards in Slovenia. The review highlights the most important processes that laid the foundation

Table 3: Usable floor area per person.

Floor area per person (m ²)	Number of inhabitants	%
Less than 10	131,985	6.6
10–14.9	288,889	14.5
15–19.9	371,792	18.7
20–29.9	593,157	29.8
30–39.9	293,720	14.8
40–59.9	203,362	10.2
60–79.9	65,384	3.3
80 or more	41,052	2.1

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2011).

for introducing the housing standards that were applied in designing residential buildings and planning dwellings after the Second World War. This review helps explain the reasons for the adoption of previous housing standards. At the same time, the review sets the ground for the final and key thesis of this article. The conclusion hypothesises and argues that the notion of the “low purchasing power of the population” has been and continues to be popularly, but wrongly, promoted as the major explanation for the persistence of low housing standards in Slovenia.

4 Historical review

The low housing standard in Slovenia is, above all, the consequence of specific historical processes that were dictated by the political system of the period after the Second World War. First, I review some of the key findings of the literature review, which help in understanding the background and political considerations that represent the basis for developing the housing construction industry and the resulting housing standard.

In an introductory speech at an expert briefing, Boris Mikoš, the secretary for urban planning of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, stated:

In the coming years, priority should be given to building smaller dwellings, especially those that have fewer rooms. This principle must be adopted irrespective of the fact that the structure of the current housing stock does not require cutting down on the production of dwellings with four or more rooms. Such a measure is, nonetheless, necessary due to the acuteness of social needs. It is thus necessary to examine all the housing construction projects waiting to be carried out and, if necessary, adjust them accordingly. I wish to stress here that this measure is intended to last only a few years in order to avoid causing damage elsewhere. (Mikoš, 1973: 10)

The secretary for urban planning (today this function is performed by the minister of infrastructure and spatial planning)

was thus recommending the construction of only dwellings with a smaller number of rooms although, at the same time, he admitted that there would still be a demand for dwellings with four or more rooms. He also recommended re-examining and re-drawing dwelling plans in the process of being carried out, so as to cut down on the number of rooms. Although the measures were intended to last only a few years, it is not possible to establish from the available sources exactly how many years they were actually implemented, or if and when the recommendations were officially revoked.

The first extensive study of housing standards in Slovenia was conducted by Meta Blejc (1984). In her discussion of the normative definition of the housing standard, Blejc made reference to an extensive study conducted in 1973 by the Slovenian Construction Centre (Sln. *Gradbeni center Slovenije*) and the IMS Belgrade Housing Centre (*Center za stanovanje IMS Beograd*). The study, entitled *Privremeni standard stana usmerene izgradnje*, was conducted in Yugoslavia with the goal of defining what constituted an adequate dwelling standard (referred to in the study as a “standard dwelling”) and how large a dwelling should be with respect to the size of the household. The authors of the study recommended introducing a common housing standard that would apply to all state-regulated housing development activity, irrespective of type of construction (mass housing or single-family). According to their recommendations, the common standard would apply to:

- Rental dwellings, let out at cost rent or with subsidised rent;
- Privately owned dwellings within the framework of mass housing construction;
- Regulated single-family housing construction.

The housing standard recommended by the study would:

... apply to state regulated housing construction; that is, the one that is foreseen in the mid-range plans of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and for which prices are determined by the state. The elements of the standard dwelling they are proposing differ between themselves only with respect to size and internal organisation of the dwellings, whereas a common standard applies for dwelling furnishings as well as for dwelling design and general urban design. From the perspective of the entire community, the construction of dwellings of different standards is not acceptable because these are built with a substantial amount of public funds. (Blejc, 1984: 4)

In spite of their ambiguity, these recommendations did actually represent the basis for planning and building dwellings in Yugoslavia and, of course, Slovenia. The greatest ambiguity of the recommendations is in the statements that describe the elements of a standard dwelling as differing only in terms of size and internal organisation, whereas a common standard

applies for dwelling furnishings and dwelling design. If the elements of a standard dwelling are allowed to differ in size and internal organisation, one then wonders how this works out with the application of a common standard for dwelling furnishings and dwelling design. This is already an indication of the (subtle) aim to limit the size of dwellings via the instrument of housing furnishing standardisation.

The recommendations presented above also provided the basis for preparing the document entitled *Družbeni dogovor o skupnih osnovah za zagotavljanje in usklajevanje samoupravnih družbeno-ekonomskih odnosov na področju stanovanjskega gospodarstva v SR Sloveniji* (Ur. l. SRS, no. 15/1981), which prescribed the criteria for a standard dwelling. The aim of the document was to determine the criteria for allocating rental housing and for granting housing loans to potential buyers of condominium dwellings and housing developers (Blejc, 1984).

Regarding the influence of the provisions of this document on developing the housing space standard in Slovenia, Tone Klemenčič (1985: 615) made the following observations:

Public housing construction practice in Slovenia applies the “maximum housing standard” norm. In accordance with the social consultation on the common basis for guaranteeing and harmonising self-management socio-economic relations in housing care in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, there is a need to ensure the implementation of housing standards that correspond to the actual material economic capabilities of associated labour. In determining the housing standard, the social consultation pays particular attention to the relation between the number of members in a family and the total dwelling area. As such, it applies the maximum housing standard norm, which does not exceed 16 m² usable floor area per person. Dwelling size may be increased by a maximum 15 m² for each additional person above the four-person family.

The most important thing to note from the above quote is that the maximum usable floor area per person was set at 16 m² of usable floor area per person for a four-member family, allowing for an additional 15 m² per extra person. The other political orientation expressed in the statement above is the requirement the requirement for the “implementation of housing standards that correspond to the actual material economic capabilities of associated labour”. This guideline refers to economic considerations, which had a strong influence on the quality of the new construction and the consequent housing space standard that was realised on this basis. It is also important to stress that compliance with the standards adopted was a key condition in allocating public rented dwellings and granting loans to condominium buyers. As shown below, this condition continues to apply today.

Various authors have discussed the economic considerations in planning and building housing. A review of these sources reveals that the construction industry played a major role in formulating the housing policy and determining the consequent housing standard. During the post-war period and all throughout the period that preceded Slovenia’s independence, public housing construction was aimed primarily at producing multifamily, high-rise residential buildings located in collective residential areas, usually referred to as housing estates. Drago Kos (1984: 18) observed: “Due to the distinct influence of the logic of profit, these developments are frequently characterised by an extreme concentration of dwelling both horizontally and vertically.” The extreme concentration of dwellings, he continued, was facilitated by building construction technology, which at the time was considered very efficient for producing mass housing buildings at minimum cost. It is important to point out here that the economic effect was two-way. In addition to the construction of housing at the lowest possible cost, the other economic objective was to secure work for the construction industry and thus create employment opportunities. This therefore means that housing construction activity was subordinated to minimum cost economic considerations as well as to the employment requirements for the construction industry. As such, specific research projects were commissioned towards these objectives, including one that aimed at establishing:

... the maximum proportion of industrially manufactured prefabricated housing in specific sections of the Yugoslav housing market. There is a need to establish the absorption force of the market, taking into consideration transportation distances, the amount of available investment resources, the relative shortage of housing, socio-psychological problems, urban planning and communal infrastructure problems ... When conducting the research, entrepreneurial economics factors and the interests of Gorenje [a multi-product company] will play a vital role. Specially focused research is urgently required in order to clarify some fundamental issues concerning the urban planning and communal-technical conditions related to industrially manufactured housing and its exogenous economic indicators. (Mušič, 1973: 5)

These statements clearly show that the principle aim in designing and building housing was to realise optimum economic effects for the construction industry, whereas the quality of construction was not given much consideration. The interests of companies such as Gorenje had priority over all other aspects. Lučka Šarec-Rozin (1976: 50) provided the following description of the approaches that were adopted in carrying out the housing construction activity based on the above principles: “When choosing the type of residential building (when designing multifamily housing estates), the economic considerations are always put at the forefront: the plan of the building

is determined by the construction technology (primarily Outinord), low construction costs and the application of typical plans. In the course of the construction process, these economizing aspects frequently led to the degradation of building plans (e.g., reduction of the plan area and non-realisation of planned building-height variations, randomly increasing building height, execution of alternative (less appropriate) building types, etc.).” The majority of public housing construction was essentially executed with the application of typical plans and realised using Outinord construction technology. The quality of the dwellings produced in this way is described by Drago Kos (1984: 22) as follows: “In spite of a few undoubtedly high quality achievements in designing collective residential buildings and their surroundings, it is generally too obvious that priority consideration was given, in the majority of cases, to quantity; that is, the number of dwellings produced and other than/but not.”

In addition to minimising construction costs and subordination to the needs of the construction industry, designing mass residential buildings and planning dwellings were also subordinated to another powerful economic sector: the furniture industry. This subordination is also provided for by the 1973 recommendations referred to above, which proposed implementing a common standard for housing furnishings. As such, the furniture industry also had a significant influence and played a major role in designing dwelling space and determining its effective function.

Before concluding the presentation of the literature review, it is vital to point out that standardisation of housing construction also extended to family housing construction. The 1973 study also recommended applying a common housing standard for building family houses. In this regard, Drago Kos (1984: 23) wrote: “It makes sense that the construction industry is proposing the concentration of family housing construction because such concentration most appropriately suits the popular construction technology. At the same time, this is direct proof that the building construction industry, which has been seriously hurt by the economic crisis (reduction of investments), is attempting to break its way into a sphere that has always been almost exclusively operated by the individual builder.”

The reference to an economic crisis (although less relevant to this discussion) with serious consequences for the construction industry is striking because we are currently experiencing the same phenomenon. What needs to be addressed in connection with the extension of the activities of the construction industry into the family housing sphere is the intensification of the processes of “typifying” family housing construction, which, according to Dušan Černič (1951), started soon after the Second World War. This process does not, however, involve

the large-scale participation of construction companies in the actual building of family houses. Instead, the typifying process is primarily conducted through the practices of planning experts (especially the architects) and their influence on designing family houses and the quality of the dwellings within them. The design profession enters this field with “typical plans” or “technical plans”, as Pavel Göstl (1951) called them. The debate about the quality of family houses built with the application of typical plans normally concerns their external appearance. Rarely, if ever, does the discussion focus on the quality of the family house with respect to its housing space standard. Due to their nature, family houses normally have a larger net usable area in comparison to dwellings in multifamily buildings. As such, it is generally believed that all people living in family houses are guaranteed an appropriate housing standard. We argue that this is not always the case. A closer analysis of the plans of family houses would immediately reveal that they frequently have minimum-sized rooms, often with more than one bed in the small bedrooms. There is also a great likelihood of overcrowding in family houses that accommodate multi-generation families, which is a common occurrence in Slovenia and a long-established tradition. Together with the other issues raised earlier, this area also requires thorough investigation in order to empirically establish whether family houses actually fulfil the required housing standards.

Summing up the historical review, it may be reiterated that the primary objective housing policy regarding the implementation of publicly regulated housing construction was to achieve the highest amount of new construction at the lowest cost. The major political goal was to provide housing, irrespective of quality. These are the key considerations that presented the basis for developing and adopting the standards that were implemented in housing care. The influence of these considerations is manifested in the general low housing space standard of Slovenia’s current housing stock. To conclude the historical review, I draw attention to two important aspects that continue to influence the quality of the housing standard today. The first concerns the aforementioned criteria for allocating rental dwellings. This activity is performed based on the application of extremely modest housing standards in a manner similar to what was practiced over thirty years ago. This state of affairs provides evidence to support the remarks by Barbara Verlič Christensen (1992), who observed that, instead of guaranteeing an appropriate dwelling standard, housing standards are used in Slovenia primarily for setting the limit for which housing policy allows state support – for example, rent subsidisation, or loans for housing purchases or construction. Table 4 shows the current housing space standards used in allocating rented housing (Regulation concerning the allocation of not-for profit rented dwellings, Sl. *Pravilnik o dodeljevanju neprofitnih stanovanj v najem*, Ur. l. RS, no. 14/2004). A look

at Table 4 immediately reveals that the calculated usable floor space averages indicate an incredibly low standard of Slovenia's housing stock in comparison with the housing standards of the EU 15 presented at the beginning of this article. The regulation does, however, provide for an additional 6 m² per extra member of a specific household group, but this still remains far below the acceptable standards. As if this were not bad enough, point 3 of Article 14 provides that: "... the landlord may allocate for rent a smaller dwelling if the applicants accept the offer or so choose" (Ur. l. RS, no. 14/2004: 1386). This provision, of course, offers the landlord legal grounds to crowd more people into even smaller dwellings. The allocation of a dwelling smaller than the already inadequate 55 m² for a three-person household is completely unacceptable. The provision of point 3 of Article 14 effectively legalises the overcrowding of low-income households, which usually have no choice other than to accept whatever is offered.

Another important aspect to be noted from the historical review concerns the impact of industry, especially the furniture industry, on designing dwelling space and determining its function. Although the adoption of a market economy system was accompanied by the introduction of market competition, which facilitates a greater supply and broader choice of furniture on the market, the design of dwelling space – especially in mass residential buildings – continues to heavily depend on housing space standards, which effectively determine the dimensions of dwelling spaces on the basis of prescribed "standard measurements" of furniture. Concretely, the current regulation concerning the minimum technical requirements for building residential buildings and other dwellings (Regulation concerning the minimum technical requirements for housing construction, Sln. *Pravilnik o minimalnih tehničnih zahtevah za graditev stanovanjskih stavb in stanovanj*, Ur. l. RS, no. 1/2011) prescribes precise dimensions for the furniture that inhabitants may have in their dwellings. Article 24 of the regulation stipulates, among others things, that the living room must have space for sitting furniture sized 80 cm by 80 cm per bed in the dwelling; a space for one TV set 60 cm by 40 cm per bed, a living-room table sized 60 cm by 60 cm and so on. One may wonder here, for example, why the sitting furniture must be 80 cm by 80 cm? To my knowledge, no detailed study was ever conducted specifically to establish that these dimensions are the most appropriate. The 60 cm width for the TV set is certainly inappropriate at this point in time, given the extensive use of popular wider-screen plasma televisions. A key important inadequacy of current standards is also the absence of provisions in the standards for ecological sorting of waste within the dwelling space. The current standards do not envisage enough space for an appropriate number of waste bins (at least three), which would contribute to more efficient waste sorting.

Table 4: Dwelling area criteria for allocating not-for-profit rented housing.

Household size	Dwelling size (m ²)	Max. average usable floor area per person (m ²)
1-person	20–30	30.0
2-person	30–45	22.5
3-person	45–55	18.3
4-person	55–65	16.3
5-person	65–75	15.0
6-person	75–85	14.1

It is appreciated that the regulation prescribes the "minimum standards" that must (or ought to) be complied with when designing residential buildings and the dwellings inside them. This means that these standards may be arbitrarily raised during the design process. The problem is, however, that common practice shows that designers mostly stick to the minimum and there are also cases in which even the minimum is not reached. The question thus arises why this is so. There are several explanations for this. The first and logical one is that investors seek to minimise construction costs. Larger dwelling spaces mean a larger building area, which in turn means fewer housing units per gross area of the building plot. Fewer housing units mean a lower yield from the available land, which in the end means a higher share of the cost of land within the total construction cost. The second explanation is, of course, the higher price of the housing unit due to the higher cost of land and higher costs of construction of a larger dwelling. Minimising housing space thus reduces the final price of the dwelling to a level that enables the developer to sell the dwelling more easily. The third explanation is people's lack of knowledge about what constitutes to an appropriate housing standard. Because most people have never experienced a better housing standard, they are not aware of the fact that they live in dwellings that do not meet internationally recognised housing standards. This lack of awareness has been previously established in various studies. For example, the analysis of data on the quality of living in Europe showed that, with respect to the number of rooms per person, Slovenia ranked 23 among the 28 countries covered by the survey (Mandič & Filipović, 2005). Despite being ranked so low, the authors found that "Slovenia paradoxically ranked much better because only six countries expressed more satisfaction with the amount of available housing space" (Mandič & Filipović, 2005: 712). Another survey on living conditions that was conducted by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia in 2007 revealed that those that were "satisfied" and "very satisfied" with their dwelling accounted for 88% of all the respondents. A similar survey conducted by the same institution in 2009 included the question "Do you consider your dwelling small?" The "no" response (those that did not consider their dwelling small), presented according to dwelling type, was as follows: one-room dwellings 73%, two rooms 84%,

three rooms 84%, four or more rooms 96%. Similar results were also obtained from various surveys (Sendi, 2002, 2004, 2009) conducted in this area. The high level of satisfaction with housing conditions expressed by the inhabitants in the various surveys is a reflection of their modesty and their lack of awareness about the criteria that determine an acceptable housing standard. This modesty and lack of awareness is, conveniently, exploited by developers in housing construction. Why should they build higher-standard housing (which would be more expensive) when the majority of people are satisfied with the current low standards?

5 Conclusion

It has been shown with the help of comparative analyses of statistical data that Slovenia lags far behind the more developed EU countries with respect to the housing space standard. Further proof of this has been provided by additional analysis of statistical data for various housing standard indicators. The brief historical review of developments in this area has helped highlight the political background, which represented the basis for implementing measures for adopting housing space standards. The historical background continues to have a strong influence on maintaining inappropriate housing standards. To this effect, I highlighted two current regulations (the Regulation concerning the allocation of not-for-profit rented housing and the Regulation concerning the minimum technical requirements for the construction of residential buildings and dwellings) that stipulate housing space standards that conflict with internationally established standards. This background is a “political-systemic factor”. In conclusion, another factor is a major obstruction to improvement in this area: the popular attitude towards housing standards.

It is generally believed by certain experts that there is no need to build large dwellings in Slovenia because of the “low purchasing power” of the inhabitants. The proponents of this thesis are constantly trying to convince everyone that larger dwellings are unnecessary because consumers cannot buy them. This standpoint is primarily advocated by representatives of municipal housing departments, who frequently claim that council housing tenants already have problems covering the housing costs for the (small) dwellings they currently live in. With these arguments, they have succeeded (without much effort, anyway) in convincing lawmakers that the current standards are the most appropriate for Slovenia and that there is no need to change them. I have refuted these views and argue that rejecting the introduction of higher housing standards is essentially driven by the conservative attitudes of politicians and experts. The application of higher standards is also significantly blocked by people’s modesty and their lack of awareness, as already explained. The notion of low purchasing

power is therefore used as a convenient excuse for maintaining a low housing standard. The maintenance of low housing standards is a deliberate policy that thrives on exploiting the dire situation of a large proportion of the population that have no alternative but to accept whatever is available. This especially concerns the substandard criteria for allocating council housing presented above.

Low purchasing power cannot be a permanent excuse for maintaining inappropriate housing standards. It is true that the purchasing power of the population was quite low throughout the post-war period until independence in 1991. Under the communist regime, this was a normal and desired state of affairs. Such was the official doctrine, which propagated the equality of all citizens. During that time, high purchasing power was not required because the state was responsible for providing all goods – including housing – at a low cost. However, the situation radically changed after independence. A new political doctrine was introduced that no longer sought to guarantee citizen equality. On the contrary, the new system allowed citizens’ incomes to differ and rise unrestrictedly, which meant the eventual rise of purchasing power. In the area of housing care, an “enabling” policy was adopted, which was based on the principle of individual responsibility for solving one’s housing needs. The state was no longer responsible for providing housing for all, apart from those specific categories of the population that, due to their low economic status, cannot take care of themselves (National Housing Programme, Sl. *Nacionalni stanovanjski program*, Ur. l. RS, no. 43/2000). The changes to the political system thus also meant radical changes to people’s socio-economic lives and status. The new economic opportunities that emerged (including joining the EU) also enabled an increase in people’s purchasing power. According to the report from the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development for 2009, by 2008 Slovenia had made considerable advancement towards achieving the average level of development of the EU. “A comparison of the level of development achieved by Slovenia during this period with that of the countries that were at a comparable level with Slovenia in 2003 shows that Slovenia has been the fastest among them in catching up with the EU average” (Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, 2009: 56). In this regard, one of the most obvious indicators of the increase in purchasing power is the data showing that the number of privately owned cars increased from 606,245 in 1991 to 1,066,495 in 2011 (an increase of 76%, while there was only a minimum – almost negligible – increase in the population). Although the process of the rise of purchasing power was halted by the global financial crisis in 2007 (Sendi, 2010; Kušar, 2012), the fact remains that purchasing power considerably increased from 1991 until 2008 and it is believed that it would have continued to increase if there had been no economic crisis. Irrespective of all these

changes, housing space standards remain the same as those from the period of “low purchasing power”. The only changes that have been implemented in this area concern the increase in the number of private parking spaces. It is important to stress here, however, that I am not arguing that the purchasing power has (or had) risen so much that households could purchase dwellings without any problem. I am not aware of any country in the world where that is possible for the majority of the population. Instead, the argument concerns the exploitation of the notion of purchasing power as such. I am primarily interested in the never-ending reference to purchasing power as an explanation for rejecting the introduction of higher standards. This excuse is not convincing. Low purchasing power is not a constant phenomenon. It is a variable that changes with respect to the cyclical economic developments of a particular country. At the same time, it is vital to realise that residential buildings normally have a minimum lifetime of sixty years. Every substandard dwelling that is built today will remain as such for at least the next sixty years while, on the other hand, there is a considerable likelihood that the purchasing power might significantly increase during that period. Due to these reasons, the eternal use of this excuse to defend, sustain, and continue producing substandard dwellings is a totally inappropriate and mistaken stance.

In addition to the above, there is another vital aspect of the housing situation. Housing in Slovenia is too expensive with respect to the quality of life it offers to the majority of households. Moreover, after independence, Slovenian households with low purchasing power bought dwellings at prices comparable to those paid for considerably higher dwelling quality in some European countries. Concretely, prior to the emergence of the economic crisis, the price of a square meter of a substandard dwelling was higher than the price paid for a considerably higher-quality dwelling in Berlin, Brussels, or Vienna (Pahor, 2007). Yet these are cities in countries where citizens have significantly higher purchasing power than that of Slovenian citizens. This fact further proves the senselessness of the notion of low purchasing power as an excuse for rejecting the introduction of higher housing standards.

Although this article does not propose concrete new standards, it is necessary to point out a few key orientations that need to be taken into consideration in any future undertakings aiming to introduce higher housing standards. The flexibility and adaptability of dwelling space discussed in the article constitutes the basic elements for guaranteeing an appropriate housing space standard. Housing is a complex phenomenon with very strong links with numerous spatial and societal dynamics. For this reason, appropriate consideration must be given to setting the background for addressing adequate housing standards. The evaluation of dwelling quality is, above

all, aimed at establishing the adequacy of living conditions in order to guarantee the realisation of housing space needs of various users. This essentially requires the understanding that dwellings must satisfy the specific needs of a variety of users, be they households, families, children, older people, functionally impaired persons or otherwise. When establishing the housing space needs of various users, it is important to recognise that these are also catered for in the future, and not only for here and now. Dwellings that only satisfy the needs of today’s households might not satisfy the needs of the households thirty years later if they are not designed in a way that enables their subsequent adaptation to changed circumstances. There is therefore a need to ensure that dwellings offer a high-quality living to all categories of users, throughout their entire lifetime. In addition to taking into account the principle of flexibility, modern standards also require taking into account new principles of housing planning and dwelling space design. This especially concerns ensuring a housing standard based on “lifetime homes” (sometimes also referred to as the “lifelong design concept”). The lifetime home design concept enables the gradual adaptation of dwelling space according to the changes that occur during the lifetime of its users (Carmona et al., 2003; Barlow & Venables, 2004; Milner & Madigan, 2004). In order to achieve this objective, some more developed European countries (e.g., Norway, Denmark and Sweden) have adopted legislation for implementing “inclusive design” or “design for all” housing design practices. In these countries, architects are legally required to comply with these principles when designing housing for which state funding is involved. Inclusive design requires planning dwellings in such a way for them to be suitably used by all categories of users, including the elderly and people with functional impairments (see Brewerton & Darton, 1997; Coleman, 1997; Mace, 1998; Hanson, 2001, 2004; Sandhu et al., 2001; Chan et al., 2009; Gosset et al., 2009; Goodall & Pottinger, 2010; Hemingway, 2011; Imrie, 2011; Lombardi & Murray, 2011). Given the current demographic trends, which indicate a sharp growth in the share of the elderly population, attention also needs to be paid to these issues and serious efforts made to implement the new dwelling design approaches in Slovenia. As has been pointed out by Boštjan Kerbler (2011, 2012), demographic trends are increasingly becoming more important in evaluating and planning future housing needs. These aspects can no longer be ignored. Action must be taken.

Regulations that would introduce appropriate housing space standards can be adopted in a relatively short period (of course, on the basis of appropriate preliminary analyses). Abandoning the “low purchasing power” excuse is the first step. These negative attitudes present the biggest obstacle to introducing higher standards. The transition from the communist to capitalist system was not accompanied by an appropriate transi-

tion in the manner of thinking of the major decision-makers. The housing standard continues to be understood as simply having a sleeping space, a kitchen, a toilet and a bathroom, and maybe also a balcony or some basement space. People are not bothered by sleeping in the living room, they are not bothered that grown-up children of the opposite sex share the same bedroom, that a three- or four-year-old child sleeps in the parents' bedroom and that small children do not have space where they can play without disturbing or even annoying the other members of the household. It must be recognised that the current housing standard is not appropriate and needs to be urgently improved. It must also be recognised that the low purchasing power excuse is no longer legitimate. The first step to be taken towards improving the situation would, of course, be carrying out detailed analyses of the current situation in order to obtain precise information on the real living conditions and people's precise housing space needs. These analyses would create a basis for formulating recommendations for politicians, who would then prepare and adopt the necessary standards. This would require adopting higher minimum housing space standards prepared in compliance with internationally recognised standards, especially concerning dwelling overcrowding and usable floor area per person.

As already stated, overcrowding may cause uneasiness, ill health, children's poor academic performance, tensions among household members and, eventually, potentially irreparable consequences. As a country striving to achieve a living standard comparable to that of the more developed European countries, Slovenia cannot afford to sustain the current housing standard forever. Action urgently needs to be taken, taking into consideration the new approaches to dwelling design that guarantee optimum modern housing standards.

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