

LIVING SPACES

An exhibition exploring the transformations of a modernist panel block neighborhood.



30% of the population of Bulgaria lives in panelki. Constructed en masse, the concrete residences gained a reputation for monotony and lifelessness. The neighbourhood of Trakiya, designed in the 1970s, attempted to differentiate. The architects experimented based on their ideas of social living, stepping the blocks, and placing them in organic configurations to create contrast and a sense of individuality. The inhabitants moved in eagerly, carrying with them their own ideas of living. The small apartment boxes were quickly filled, and the transformations seeped beyond their walls. The balconies pushed out and were glazed in, becoming kitchens, kids rooms and bedrooms, layering them with sun blocking fabrics, foils, lace, solar panels and parasols. The facades started reading like a patchwork, as the people living within expressed themselves. Around the blocks, neighbors planted gardens together and built structures for gathering with any materials they could find. Moving throughout the neighbourhood, they forged their own paths diverting from the planned sidewalks and walking through the meadows. In the course of the 40 years of its existence the residents significantly altered the original spaces of Trakiya. Led by ideas of ownership, individuality and the changing needs of everyday life they created, and continue to create their own living spaces.

“LIVING SPACES” uses the neighbourhood of Trakiya as a case study, presenting the coexisting work of architects and inhabitants as equally valuable. The exhibition unfolds the processes of design and adaptation, overlapping them to reveal a new perspective of how we understand housing.

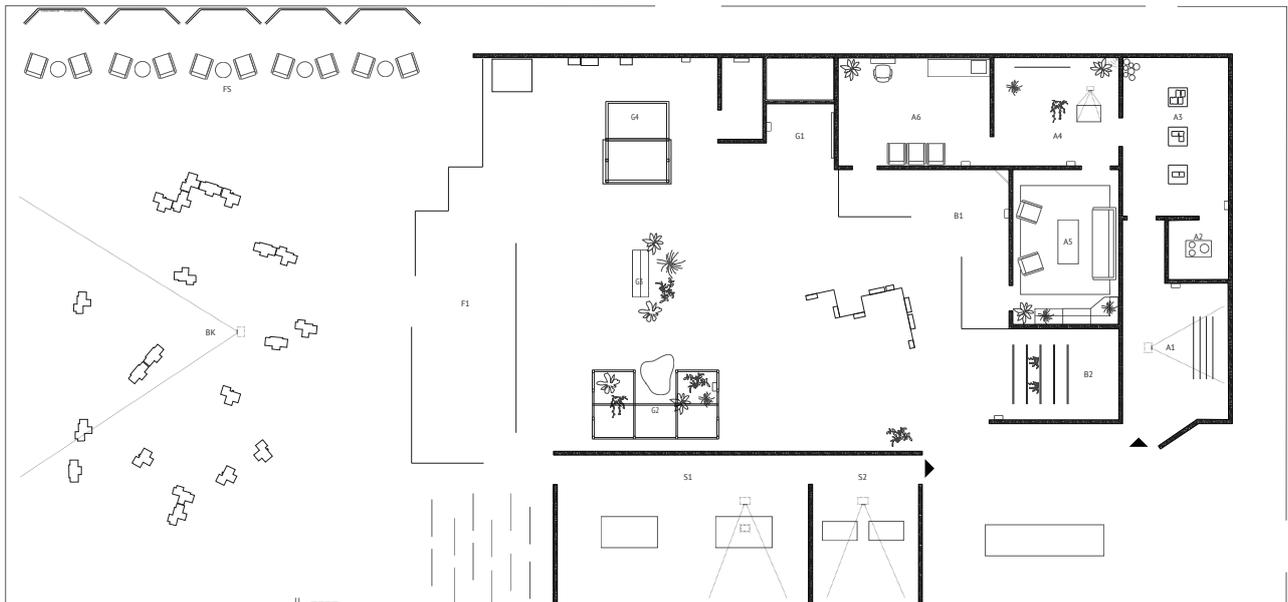
Organised from the individual apartment to the urban plan, the progression through the exhibition is the way in which an inhabitant experiences the neighbourhood everyday. Inside to outside - exactly the opposite of how an architect typically approaches the design of such a neighbourhood - from outside to inside. As a living laboratory, the exhibition provides an interactive opportunity to review how we can learn from the creative processes that continue to shape Trakiya.

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context

In October 2016 ONE ARCHITECTURE WEEK, an international festival for architecture and the urban environment addressed the role of citizen participation in the contemporary city. The festival took place in the neighborhood of Trakiya, a 62,000 strong Modernist mass-housing area on the periphery of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. An empty supermarket served as the festival's base and the location of its main exhibition, "Living Spaces." The exhibition was designed to introduce and engage inhabitants, architects, and local decision makers to the neighborhood and its transformations, revealing them as productive endeavors with potential for the future.

Over its 10 day installment, "Living Spaces" saw over 1.000 local and foreign visitors of all ages and received extensive coverage by local, national and even international media. Its accessible forms of engagement succeeded in introducing a new understanding of such neighborhoods to the audience, whereas existing opinions are generally unfavourable. The exhibition's storytelling approach encourages and convinces people to see the transformations as proof of vitality.



[Exhibition Photos](#)

[Exhibition Video](#)

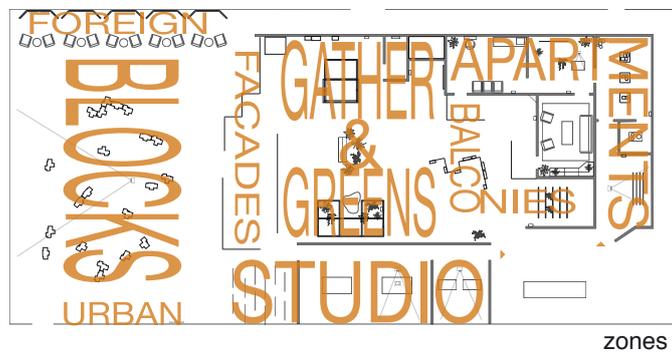
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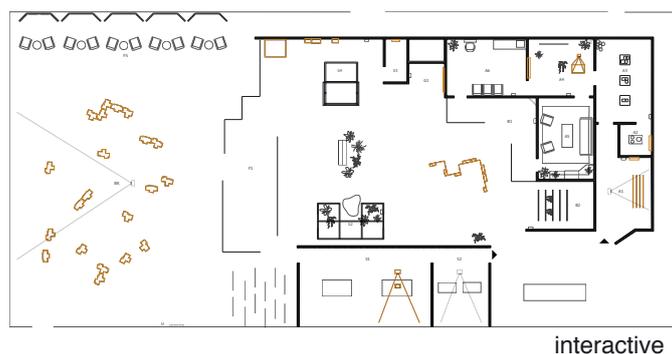
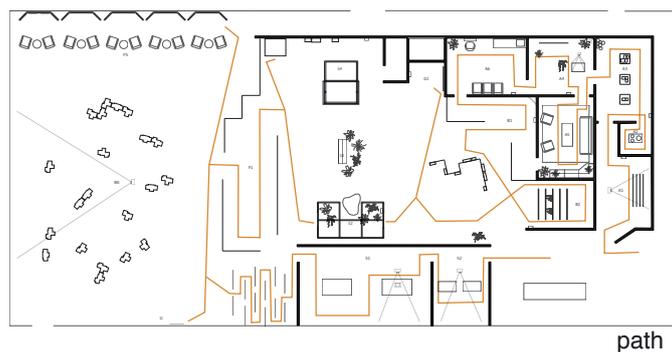
The content of the exhibition is based on a year long anthropological and architectural research executed by the curator Megan Lueneburg, as well as a 8 month mapping and research executed by ONE and research coordinator Nina Toleva. The interdisciplinary approach is used in the presentation of the information in the exhibition, applying the methodologies of both architecture and anthropology to resonate with visitors. Through storytelling, interactive installations, models, videos, photography and drawings the neighborhood is analyzed from both the designers' and the inhabitants' point of view.

The exhibition is divided into zones that represent the scales of the neighborhood beginning with the apartment and ending in the studio.

APARTMENTS // BALCONIES // GATHER & GREENS // FACADES // BLOCKS // FOREIGN // URBAN // STUDIO



The scale of representation throughout the spaces ranges from 1:1 to 1:250,000, allowing visitors to experience the neighborhood as both inhabitants and as architects. This emphasizes and empathizes the understandings of each, while also highlighting the way in which individual acts have impacted the overall environment.

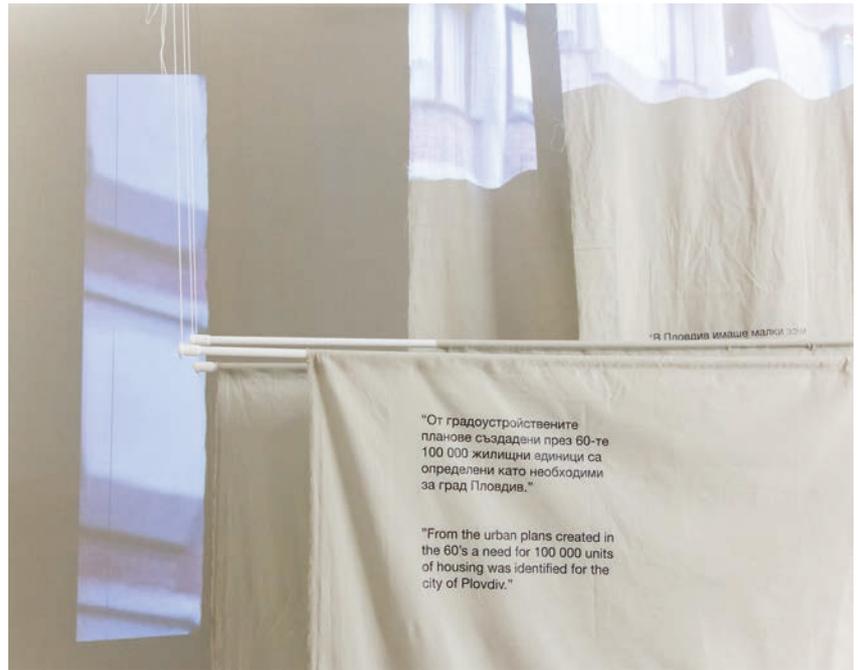


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content

A1 STANDARDIZATION

Panel construction was introduced throughout many European countries to pacify the postwar housing crisis. The buildings were cheap and quick to erect due to their repetitive elements and fixed proportions. Often built en masse, the characteristics that made them so effective also earned them reputation for monotony. The architects of Trakiya were aware of this and strived to innovate wherever possible. Today, over 30% of the Bulgarian population continues to live in panel buildings. This astonishing proportion is similar in other Eastern European countries. As we examine the intricacies of Trakiya, we ask you to consider the scale and relevance of this topic and the number of lives it affects.



- European modernist mass-housing map with photo examples
- Bulgarian modernist mass-housing map with photo examples
- Bulgarian panel block statistics : amount and inhabitants
- Interactive hanging panels with quotes from Trakiya planners
- Projection of archive footage of the construction of Trakiya
- Vintage panel manufacturer advertisements from Bulgaria
- Photo album of panel construction and abandoned panels.

A2 CONDENSING

Most inhabitants came to Trakiya from the surrounding villages and the country industrialized and urbanized. The new panelki marked a stark contrast to their previous homes. The proportions and spatial layouts redefined the role of traditional rooms, primarily the kitchen. Traditionally the main space of the home, open and at its center, was found in a small enclosed corner in the panelka. The new kitchen space was aptly named a "boks". The separation of living space and kitchen, along with its new proportions redefined daily activities and their relationships.



- Timeline of rural vs. urban population in Bulgaria
- Traditional Bulgarian home floorplans
- Elevation and plan outlines of kitchen
- Traditional wood burning stove
- "Vertical village" photo collage
- Interactive window shade of village and panelka views

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A3 FILLING

The nature of the panel is that all walls are load bearing. The inhabitants moved into a series of concrete boxes; ones that could never be resized, opened up or changed due to their structural characteristics. Overtime the inhabitants have continually redefined the spaces, not only through its coverings, but also mixing and switching the spaces' function.



- 12 apartment plans of Trakiya
- 3 concrete apartment models 1:20
- Collection of wallpapers and floor vinyl
- Typical socialist modern lighting fixture
- Photo album of interior stylings throughout Trakiya.

A4 NEIGHBOURLY

Architects designed apartment combinations by rotating various apartment around the staircase, attempting to orient each apartment in a different direction to accomplish a sense of individuality. The stairwell is the main shared space of all the apartments and the space of negotiation between residents, regularly collecting old appliances, materials for remodels, decorations spilling beyond their interior and the echoes of gossip.



- Outline of stair plan on floor 1:1
- Fabric print of view of stair space
- Vintage "Perla" washing machine
- Projection of the apartment combinations making up Trakiya
- Peepholes looking at neighbors apartment interiors
- Section through block module and its stairwell
- Axonometric of block floor with furniture arrangements
- Photo album of stairwell personalizations throughout Trakiya
- Audio recorded from stairwell
- Plants : hanging and wall

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A5 EVERYDAY

The panelka established a distinct lifestyle. Decor magazines were filled with tips and articles about ways to make the spaces homely and how to DIY inside and outside the apartment. Over the 40 years since the first inhabitants moved into the panelki, Trakiya has housed multiple generations. The markings and memories of their lives cover the walls.



- Nostalgic apartment setting : couch, chairs, table, shelf, rug
- *Collective Archive Trakiya* : childhood photos from Trakiya
- *Nash Dom (Our Home)* : DIY panelka decor articles
- *Panelki Land* : Photography of Nikolay Nikolov
- *Everyday Trakiya* : A visual journal of Trakiya

A6 ADAPTATION

Many of the intended service functions of Trakiya were never completely realised. After 1989 the inhabitants of Trakiya began to transform apartments into small businesses. Hair salons, seamstresses, cobblers and greengrocers have filled the gaps and now make up the bulk of the neighborhood's economy. The map of businesses in Trakiya shows their concentration in residential buildings.



- Salon Setting 1:1 - mirror, sink, chair, tools, sign
- Collection of Trakiya business cards
- Map of categorized businesses in Trakiya
- Photo album of businesses found throughout Trakiya

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B1 SOCIAL VIEWS

In attempts to make the panelki of Trakiya more interesting, the architects configured its modules and oriented the balconies in various directions. A sense of individuality through view, they thought. The result was balconies that look in at one another. Originally, the inhabitants were convinced this had been done on purpose for neighbours to monitor each other. What became clear as time went on is that the spaces are an active social arena, where inhabitants regularly use the balconies as a form of interaction with their neighbors.



- 5 block plan of resulting sunlight
- 5 block plan of resulting views
- Video of balcony conversations
- Steel balcony sculpture for viewing 1:20
- Photo album of balcony formations from design to today.

B2 SOCIAL VIEWS

The balcony has always been a space of expression. A space between inside and out, public and private, protruding from the rest of the panelka, they received attention by both the architects and the inhabitants. By design, the balconies were an opportunity for the architects to get creative, using different railing motifs to liven up the panelki. The inhabitants quickly appropriated these, glazing them in, closing them up, or filling them with greens. The stories of the balconies are embedded in all their layers.



- Hanging layers : curtains, window, plants, glazing, security bars
- 9 graphics of railing motifs
- Print of original elevation with selected balconies of today
- Photo album of balcony composition from design to today

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G1 CHECKPOINT

When the first families arrived in Trakiya, they met their new neighbours at the entrance. Today, the entry is where those same neighbours continue to gather, plant gardens together, and keep up to date on each other's families, many now on their second or third generation. The ownership percentages in Trakiya are high and apartment turnover is low. The population that first moved to the neighborhood was diverse and it continues to be.



- Elevation outline of entry 1:1
- Concrete entry pavers
- Mailboxes containing demographic data
- Photo album of the entries of Trakiya

G2 BIOTRAKIYA

People moved into Trakiya as construction dragged on. Most blocks were surrounded by mud and dirt, waiting for the landscaping to catch up with the pace of apartment building. Craving a connection to the land, many inhabitants claimed empty plots and slowly wove them together into a complex web of small gardens, affectionately dubbed "ranches". Technically illegal, the ranches play a vital role locally and offer further diversification of the urban fabric.



- Wood framed, plastic covered greenhouse 1:1
- 2 Aerial photos of "ranch" plots in Trakiya
- Map of categorized gardens throughout Trakiya
- Jars of preserves from Trakiya ranches
- Photo album of ranches
- Pile of dirt
- Plants

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G3 TRASH CHUTE TAKEOVER

The spaces next to the entrances were designed as trash chutes. Each of the floors above had a place for the disposal of trash into a hatch door, dropping it down to the entry for removal. Whether for reasons of hygiene or the idea of everyone's garbage from above collecting at the entrance, the trash chutes were never used. Today, the spaces have been appropriated as hair salons, shoe cobblers, seamstresses, bike repair shops, and the occasional surprise, such as a bait shop.



- Elevation outline of trashcan 1:1
- Trash hatch revealing photo of bait shop

G4 MEETINGS

Humble benches proved too simple for the handy inhabitants of Trakiya. Communal tables and roofs were constructed, mainly out of previously discarded materials. These marvelous creations, referred to as *besedki*, can be found adjacent to entrances or tucked away in greenery. Over the course of a single day they host a myriad different inhabitant groups. Coffee time in the mornings, afternoon playtime for mums with young children, evening rakiya drinking, birthdays, namedays and countless other holidays are celebrated together at the *besedki*, a bedrock for the communities that breathe life into our panelki.



- Besedka under construction 1:1
- Fabric print of trees
- Tree cabinets : technical drawings and besedka supplies
- Map of benches and besedkas found throughout Trakiya
- Photo album of gathering spaces throughout Trakiya
- Coffee machine
- Bench
- Plants / trees

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F FACADES

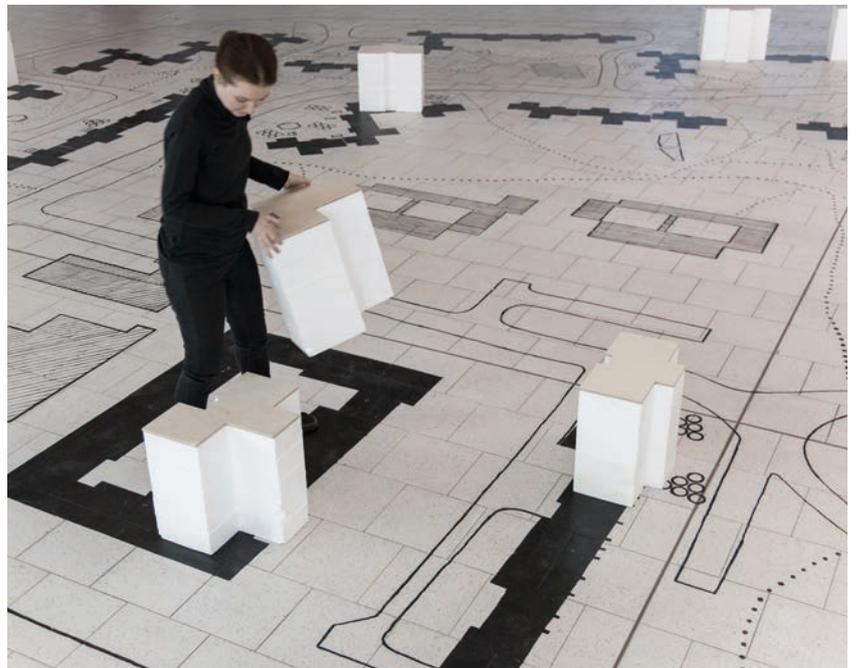
The building facades in neighbourhoods like Trakiya often receive the most attention from visitors and are subjected to a lot of stereotypes. The architects designed Trakiya in bright colours that weathered quickly. As times changed, people began to individually update the exterior of their apartments. Patchwork patterns throughout Trakiya are often seen in a negative light, a disgrace to the architecture, but there is much more to be seen in their diversity.



- Hanging fabric prints of Trakiya facade collage

F BLOCKS

One of the most distinctive traits of Trakiya is the twisting of the panelki. The design allows the modules to be conjoined on 2 different axis, creating blocks that zig zag across the land. This unique innovation gained it the special recognition of Trakiiska panelka. These forms along with their organic placement distributed among other building typologies created ideal pockets of space for the interventions of the inhabitants.



- Block guide : modular break down of every block in Trakiya
- Painted floor map of A9 : its distribution and interventions
- 20 module stools
- Toy cars

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FS LOOKING OUT

The post war housing complexes throughout the world created similar residential spaces for a multitude of cultures. Modernist architecture made many assumptions about the way people should live, and they forced it with the home spaces. Each neighborhood within its own cultural and historical context has transformed over the years. By understanding the way that people actually live in these spaces, we can begin to better understand the realities of habitable spaces. The works presented here go beyond the stereotypes and assumptions of these neighborhoods to discover the vitality of these spaces.



- 5 windows presenting Germany, Bulgaria, Denmark, Georgia, & Austria
- 4 screens for video installation of Lyulin, Bulgaria and Gropiustadt
- Chairs and tables for each window.

U URBAN

Trakiya was designed holistically, from balcony railing details to the overall urban plan. Many of its urban pieces were never realised, including the entire complex of civic buildings along the main road and a lake at its center. In 1998 the architects of Trakiya returned, revisiting and reassessing what had been built and what was left out. They did an in-depth research, mapping the neighbourhood, and they made suggestions.

Unfortunately, few of these suggestions materialized. Development plans come out for Trakiya often, yet most of them do not address the the suggestions by the original architects or the nature of the infill of the inhabitants. In order to understand the future development of the neighbourhood, it is important for us to look at both processes.



- GIF of urban makeup over the years 1979, 2004, 2016

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S1 STUDIO

Trakiya began as a national architecture competition. Architects were in collectives at the time, and although three entries were submitted, none were chosen. The Plovdiv collective took attributes of each entry and developed a design process focusing on differentiating Trakiya from the typical monotony and massive scale of similar neighborhoods. The urban plan, its winding roads, building typology distribution, and open space distribution to give the neighborhood a social and human scale. Much of the plan was never realised as building more apartments faster was priority. Through the years the lots meant for cultural and open functions have been sold to private companies for luxury apartments. The indepth research conducted by ONE ARCHITECTURE WEEK exposes all the spatial relationships of the formal and informal constructions of today.



- Prints of sketches from the design process of Trakiya
- Model of Trakiya showing the worst case scenario 1:250,000
- Table and drafting lamp
- Tablet and projection of interactive modern mapping of Trakiya
- Explanation of research

S2 DO YOU KNOW THE ARCHITECT?

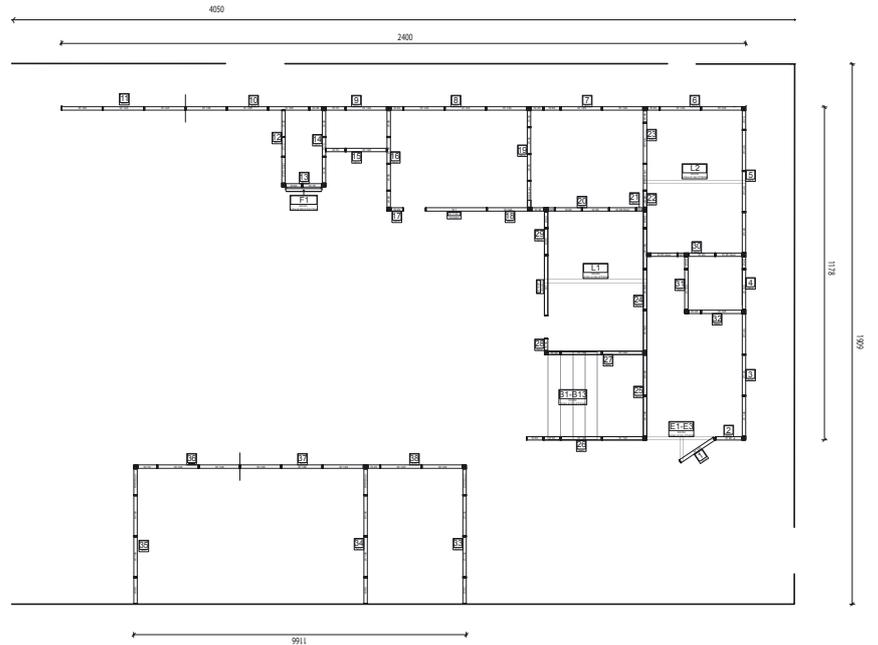
This film brings together the architects of a 40 year old panelka neighbourhood that has housed over 80,000 people since its creation. Holistically designed, composed of avant-garde social theories and aesthetic aspirations, the construction was never fully executed. Over time the inhabitants significantly altered the architecture. After all this time and all these adaptation we gathered the architects around a table with their original sketches to discuss the designs that shaped the everyday living of so many people. What were their intentions? What did they experiment with? What worked in their eyes, what didn't?



- Projection of film
- Seating

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construction

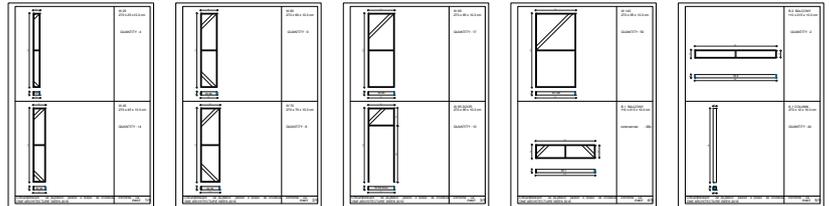


AREA

Original installation : 770 m2
The exhibition can be rearranged or scaled to fit various spaces.

WALLS

Modular wood framing covered in fabric.



OBJECTS

Full inventory of objects and their dimensions : [Inventory](#)

HANGING

The prints are 2mm pvc and are hung by threads attached to the top of the walls

DRAWINGS

Construction drawings and files for outlines : [Drawings](#)



