

Statutory interventions

Health conditions in multi-storey housing improved in line with developments in technology.

Those multi-storey dwellings that were still without flushing toilets at the start of the 1930s were to be equipped with them after 1935; as a minimum they were to be made available to each floor even if they were shared between several rented properties. Among the multi-storey housing stock of that period, it was only the smaller homes that were still without their own toilet.

The arrangement of toilets shared by floor typically occurred in that (small) section of the multi-storey housing stock that contained so called "corridor apartments", which no longer exist. In other cases, toilets were shared between two apartments and placed in an annexe to the back staircase with access from the middle of the winder flight.

Shared toilets were still in existence at the end of the 1900s – in Copenhagen alone there were around 5,000. In the remaining section – typically in two-room apartments – toilets were arranged in small rooms built where obsolete kitchen chimneys had been demolished following the introduction of cooking gas, and part of the kitchen was also included.

These rooms were very small, without hand basins and normally with a simple linoleum floor; the walls were usually built of breeze block and in many cases as partitions against the neighbouring toilet; and a column of ventilation pipes rose upwards in the quantity demanded by the arrangement of the toilet room. Toilet conditions such as these can still be found.

Material relating to these types of toilet installations and the design of the rooms housing them is (or should be) available in the archives of local building authorities.

In the mid-1970s all existing apartment buildings with more than two floors were included under the act relating to the fire protection of residential buildings, and in the first instance, the requirements addressed immediate compliance in buildings erected before 1900.

The required measures were aimed at preventing the spread of fire and ensuring the evacuation of the residents in the event of a fire. More detailed provisions appeared in the Ministry of Housing's proclamation of 27 February 1976.

Later, the Building Committee's proclamation of 6 May 1983 required that all buildings erected after 1900 also be directly included.

Neither of the building interventions were especially extensive, and appear in addition to the declarations that owners had to submit and which are included in archives of the building authorities.

Problems with apartments and residential areas that were outdated or quite simply unhealthy were solved to some extent through demolition works that were carried out up to the 1970s.

Throughout this decade, attitudes changed towards existing older buildings, and during the last few decades of the 1900s a large number of the oldest multi-storey residences were renovated and modernised according to the applicable redevelopment and urban renewal legislation.

The work was carried out in such a way as to bring them up to a standard that was comparable to modern new buildings.

Bathrooms and new kitchens were designed, and central heating, hot water and mechanical ventilation were all installed. In addition, energy-saving measures were added, including the thermal insulation of roofs, freestanding gables and the thinner window breast masonry on facades due to the placement of radiators. Thermal insulation of exterior walls was otherwise avoided partly on the grounds of the building's external appearance, and partly due to its corresponding interior, the latter case being further supported by the problems that would arise from connections to the internal walls and storey partitions.

Windows were fitted with two layers of glass by either replacing them or installing double casements.

Space requirements in connection with the design of bathrooms and new/larger kitchens resulted in the merging of many two-room apartments. The need for additional space was also solved in many cases by adding an extension. In both cases this generally resulted in an intervention in the existing structure.

Lastly, much simpler extensions into courtyards were also built and clad with glass as a thermal insulation measure.

On the whole, this change led to people being much more open-minded about the modernising of the existing housing stock rather than it being regarded as mainly restorative.

Interventions carried out under the redevelopment and urban renewal legislation are (exhaustively) recorded in the archives of the building authorities.