

# **SUPERUNIT**

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**Q&A**

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### 1. Who was Le Corbusier and what led him to create the concept of such housing?

Le Corbusier, the main representative of functionalism and modernism, is one of the most prominent figures of history of architecture, whose ideas have found application on an international scale (implementation in Europe, Asia, America). A French architect of Swiss origin lived and created in the first half of the 20th century. The architecture of previous decades was focused on aestheticization and work with the decoration of facades (for example historicisms that took over patterns from earlier epochs). The spirit of the time, according to Le Corbusier, suffocated in habits and false styles. His most famous statement „A house is a machine for living in!“ is the answer to the basic question after finding the meaning of the building. He was looking for the primary purpose of the house. A new form should allow the power and progress of technology. But it was not just about the practicality of buildings, architecture exceeds the usefulness of things. Le Corbusier’s pieces of works combine a sense of geometry, order and completely exceptional artistic feeling.

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### 2. How were Le Corbusier’s principles reflected in the Superunit?

The building, which the documentary introduces to the audience, does not achieve as significant artistic values as have its own works by Le Corbusier. The Superunit is not a direct work of the French architect, it is however, a direct product of the modernist theory that Le Corbusier formulated and which was already in its time facing strong criticism since its inception. Modernist houses and cities are to be freed from aesthetics arbitrariness, to be guided by the idea of social justice (decent housing for all), in contrast with an industrial city of the 19th century to offer a healthy environment (light, air, greenery) and take advantage of the possibilities of industrialization. These principles found application especially in the post-war period of lack of flats, where prefabrication and series production seemed to be the logical tools for its solution. The documentary captures the painful moment when the principles of efficiency and rationalization interfere with the intimate sphere of human life, such as creating a home. The film proves that mere physical proximity of the occupants of the house does not prevent their feeling of loneliness.

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### **3. When Superunit was built? Who built it and who does it belong to?**

The construction of Superunit started in 1967 and was finished in 1972. The main architect of the building was Mieczysław Król. The building was put into service gradually, by segments. At present it has a status of a separate housing estate, owned by Katowicka Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa (Katowice Housing Association).

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### **4. Life now and then: How many people live there/have lived there at its more glorious times? What is/was the average age of the residents? How much is/was an apartment/the rent?**

The block comprises 762 flats of 37, or 47, or 53 square meters. Its housing capacity is as many as 3 thousand people, at present it has approx. 1300 inhabitants. The average age of inhabitants has grown significantly during years, since housing standards have changed. The flats are too small to fit families therefore it is only rarely that you find kids playing in the corridors these days – a view that was very common in the old times. Prices of the flats in Superunit vary from 1400 to 2100 euro per square meter. The building is situated in the centre of Katowice, in the neighbourhood of Spodek, another legendary Polish building, therefore many people are still interested to live in Superunit.

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### **5. How did the filmmakers get in touch with the protagonists? Do they really live there? Are they happy with how the building and the community work?**

Teresa Czepiec and her crew had been living in Superunit during preparation for the film. She and her assistant would wander about the building and the neighbourhood and look for interesting people willing to play part in the movie. E.g. Józef, whom we seen in the garage starting his old car, spends plenty of time in the garages and that's where Teresa Czepiec met him. Zofia, the owner of the aquarium frequents the Senior Club and that's where ladies had met.

Yes, the protagonists live in Superunit, still not in the flats that we associate with them. The director wanted to protect their privacy and decided to hide their true addresses. The older inhabitants like the building and they feel attached to it. Some of them have spent more than 30 years in Superunit.

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## Resources

**Le Corbusier and the Urban Environment**

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3e55/b6b3d5d87c93d8f295378ad7a10c68c6d6c5.pdf>

**Ville Radieuse: Le Corbusier's Functionalist Plan for a Utopian "Radiant City"**

<https://99percentinvisible.org/article/ville-radieuse-le-corbusiers-functionalist-plan-utopian-radiant-city/>

**Architecture of the city: The Shapes of Katowice. Architectural Symbols of The City**

<https://wellcome-home.com/architecture-of-katowice/>