

was sticky because he wished to be free from all building regulations. He was also legally challenged for ‘desecrating the countryside’ so he saw himself battling for Architecture against great odds.

Le Corbusier’s idea for the Unité had antecedents in the nineteenth century utopian principles used in the design of workers’ accommodations in the Familistère, Le Cruesot and Mulhouse. The Unité is not a megastructure in a conventional sense, but rather a neighbourhood of what was supposed to be a city of like residential/neighbourhood units. It is a vertical neighbourhood unit housed in a single building set in a park-like setting. A number of these neighbourhoods would form a city or, at least, three or four would form an identifiable cluster. The plan for Marseilles shows Le Corbusier’s basic idea (see Figure 6.11d). It was, he believed, the type of environment appropriate for people’s lives in the second half of the twentieth century. The Unités that were built are, however, all individual stand-alone structures.

The Unité’s footprint is 110 metres by 20 metres (360 feet by 65 feet) in size. It is set on *pilotis* (the columns on which a building stands leaving the ground floor open). It was designed to consist of 337 residential units housing 1000 to 1200 people, a small hotel, retail establishments and communal facilities. The shopping is located on a central floor and areas for a nursery school, jogging track (long before such an activity became popular), and other communal facilities are on the roof. The apartments are each two floors high, with a balcony to provide fresh air and sunlight, primary concerns of Le Corbusier. The arrangement of apartments allows for a skip-stop lift system with stops on each third floor. The

ground floor was for the parking of cars in dedicated places, for circulation, and for recreation.

The scheme affords many of the functions of built form shown in Figure 1.6 as Le Corbusier perceived it should. The problem with his design idea is that it is removed from everyday life; the Unité is simply not a large enough unit to sustain much in the way of retail activities. As a result most of the shops have been converted to other uses. Parking is more haphazard than intended. The development is, nevertheless, much loved by those who live in it. It fits their way of life well, but they have chosen to live there. A similar result occurs in the Unité in Berlin which is really simply an apartment building with only a shop and a post office. Elsewhere, however, the Unités stand semi-empty.

A second problem lies in the way bureaucrats and architects think. As Le Corbusier intended public housing agencies and architects around the world from the United Kingdom to Venezuela have regarded the Unité as a prototype to be replicated. They wanted up-to-date designs. The success has been very limited. In the first place the buildings are pale copies of the precedent set by the Unité d’Habitation in Marseilles (Marmot, 1982). In the second, the ways of life of their inhabitants and what the buildings afford are at odds.

### Major references

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- Marmot, Alexi (1982). The legacy of Le Corbusier and high rise housing. *Built Environment* 7 (2): 82–95.