

CURRENT ISSUES RELATED TO THE MULTIFAMILY HOUSING

Tudor Grădinaru

"G.M.Cantacuzino" School of Architecture, "Gh.Asachi" Technical University, Iași, Romania

Summary

One of the most thorny and interesting issues among the fundamental questions raised by the Modern Movement, is the one for all residence, the residence for industrial type consumers. Under the present circumstances, this residence type should be redefined in order to meet the needs and aspirations of the contemporary world. These considerations led to the establishment of the theoretical and architectural grounds of the modern residence, types of which had been represented after the 2nd World War by few models spread and applied under the regulations approved by the State and the housing industry.

Comparing the models presented within almost 50 years of collective residence design, we notice not only the progress of demand, the technical or economic contrasts but also the significant changes in the living standards and social conduct. The radical day/night delimitation was progressively substituted by other space organizing principles. Even the term "collective residence" changed, after the revaluation of some basic aspects.

These changes in the present collective residence morphology that have occurred in the European countries, together with the adjustments made in our country make us believe in the need for a rapid reconsideration of the collective residence issue.

The aim of this paper, in this context, is to outline new or old problems faced by the collective residence issue.

A critical analysis of the collective residence from this point of view based on the results of several inquiries and contest, on the European experience and latest experiments, shall provide us guidelines and approach methods that shall be used after their adjustment to our specific environment. We shall also mark the main steps to be followed in the design of a quality collective residence.



Tudor Grădinaru

1. INTRODUCTION

The residence issue and particularly the collective residence is still, at the end of this century, an open end issue. Even if the quantity aspect is well represented, the quality still requires improvements. The same and unchanged model of apartment is designed, being reproduced and adjusted to the present social and economic norms, as if the psychological needs, the aspirations of their inhabitants remained unchanged.

The rare attempts of innovating, the partial or integral flexibilities, the rationalized functions or spaces, the mechanization, modernization of equipment, led in the end to critical deadlocks, as long as these innovations had not been preceded by any consideration of the residence type, morphology, of the adjustment to the variety of lifestyles of a changing society.

Over the last 30 years, the habitation in most of the European cities suffered from significant changes. In spite of the variety of the development process, the economic and technological modernization of Europe has affected the way of designing and building collective residences.

After the '50s, the dwellings in various countries rapidly became quite similar. The emergency represented by the reconstruction of neighborhoods, that were partially or totally destroyed during the 2nd World War, the new start-up of industries or the demographic explosion of the '60s, highlighted the relatively stable cultural and local models. Thus it was substituted a universal sanitary and normative model, that was self-functioning, separate from the urban environment.

The '70s, when Europe faced a cultural crisis, are characterized by the flowering of individualism and the unlimited extension of individual residences around the cities (leading to a rapid and anarchical territory occupation) as well as by the construction of a large number of apartment complexes within real "bedroom neighborhoods " (many of which of a questionable quality), designed for workers, to solve the big crisis of dwellings.

Over the last decades, the European dwelling market has decreased and continued to produce many inadequate models.



Current issues related to the multifamily housing

2. SECOND CHAPTER

2.1 Adjusting the collective residence to new lifestyles

Starting from a research study results, an inquiry on the inhabitants perception of their own dwellings (collective) built between 1970 and 1990 in France, Jean Michel Leger (in his book “Derniers domicils connus”) raises the question of how architects take into consideration the variety of contemporary lifestyles. His conclusions are not final, but they reveal, in many of the analyzed examples, a deficit of space organization solutions that allow new functions, or adjustments to domestic life.

The author does not militate against “architecture”, or to pre-determining the space depending on the living style, but he points out a minimum number of rules on how to use it, rules that apply to all dwellings that shall receive different innovation levels, depending on the cultural habits of its future inhabitants.

Such sociologic analysis gives birth to a new direction when the living ways are overthrown by the progress of lifestyle, of technology and family structures. The first “European” contests organized on this topic, showed that the proposed dwellings did not correspond entirely to the needs of its users.

The European architects, especially the French ones, were rather interested in the dwelling outdoors than in the interior organization that was most of the times pre-established by imposed investment programs and rules.

The most important commercial criterion of an apartment seems to be its location (downtown or in the suburbs), and not its partition. The result: the construction of a large number of ordinary dwellings.

More interested in their profitability or in the fact that the medium size apartments (of 2 or 3 rooms) are the most wanted, the most usual organization of the living cells meets the day/night cleavage structure, model inherited from the '50s.

At the same time, the increase of costs leads to the reduction of surface areas (up to the lowest acceptable level), in order to meet the investment capacity. Nevertheless, if the avoidance of an exceeded real estate fund is intended from the beginning, the persons in charge (local authorities, private investor) shall be interested in monitoring the lifestyle progress of its clients.



Tudor Grădinaru

The family itself faces deep changes. Limited at the beginning to parents-children family, it became more and more a single-parent family, one of its consequences being the distribution of role and activities. Secondly, due to the lack of access of young families to a new dwelling, because of their social disadvantages, we notice and extended family core: parents – children - grandparents.

The concept of a lifelong dwelling seems to disappear (especially in former socialist countries) being replaced by the residential mobility, generated by the course of life events: jobs, changes of professions, marriage or divorce.

Finally, the dwelling represents the sum of too fast changes in the progress of techniques and technologies. The communication instruments already affect the way of using the habitation.

Modern life, and its rapid rhythms, the increased role of services, the variety of equipments and the higher level of focus on individuals, require locations adjusted to these changes.

Challenged to provide modern standards of living and to satisfy a limited number of needs, the proposed ordinary dwelling excludes many of other activities. The strict distribution of determined areas is an obstacle for the variety of the way of using it and for their variation in time.

This analysis allows the highlight of preferential systems, but it is still obvious that the needs of an individual are strictly related to his/her biological and social structure, a result of the slow progress of customs and tradition.

Living concepts may be grounded on less variable and fundamental factors.

Prior to thinking about functions specific to current activities, we should first focus on the issues related to interpersonal relationships. The relative importance of each of these functions, to the inhabitants, may vary and it depends, in particular, on the system of values specific to each family.

Still, it is important that the spatial relations of the dwelling are not neglected. The object able to meet the requirements of a research study on motivation (addressing persons looking for a dwelling or who already possess one) is the dwelling that allows the control of relations with the physical and human environment, the development of personal style and the satisfaction of functional needs, of physical comfort and savings.



Current issues related to the multifamily housing

Based on the same model, apartments in collective buildings are usually wrong adjusted to the life cycle of families living inside. These families grow in number and their habits change, while the size or the internal partition of apartments remains the same. A young married couple has a totally different style of living inside an apartment than a similar couple with babies.

The manner of living of a family with teenagers cannot be the same with the one of a retired couple.

Statistics from developed countries show that a couple without children lives between 10 and 30 years in the same apartment, a family with children lives under 10 years or less and a family with teenagers less than 10 years.

Inside, the apartments are divided in two areas: the day area and the night area. The first one is formed by the living room, the dining room and kitchen, while the second one consists of the parent's bedroom, children bedrooms and bathrooms.

The day area is the most important one. This is, by definition, a family area but the inquiries on ways of using it show that, in this area, the access of children, and small ones in particular, who are noisy when playing and mess up things is almost restricted.

Children usually stay in their rooms for various activities so these rooms may also become day areas. The daily living room area is significant as the TV room without being necessarily equipped for other types of activities.

The concept of the children bedroom as a resting area is not at all true. This does not apply to parent's bedroom which is indeed a resting room. A too tight co-habitation between parents and teenagers is a source of conflicts, because they frequently express their need to stay away from parents. Parents are too much involved in the teenagers' lives, being thus seen as "controllers".

Many sociologists concluded that teenagers want to develop their own lifestyle, without involving their parents. The distance between parents and teenagers inside the same apartment is opposite to their close relationships during childhood.

The elaboration of a collective dwelling that allows self-independence of individuals within a couple or family group has challenged a large number



Tudor Grădinaru

of architects (who participated in European -1989), who provided amazing solutions.

Lacconi, for example, proposed that certain “support spatial units (15m² parts) or “independent areas” (25m²) should be added to the current dwelling in order to extend it or to provide a personal area to the child who became an adult.

A group of French architects (Marcel, Gilbert and Boufoud) propose a day time area for children that allows the compliance to the sociability of all family members as well a separation between the playing area and the one for sleeping.

Bastie, Bruguiere and Fontaine propose a collective residence adjusted to the role and position of various family members and of areas that allow their progress.

The solution provided by Tania Concko and Pierre Gautier consists of the plan organization in longitudinal and crossing strips of all the main parts of the residence, the use of an extension that may be added to it using a mobile sliding system. This approach with mobile walls provides a great occupational independence inside the dwelling (from one to six pieces).

2.2 Flexibility of collective residences through outcomes, experiments and international contests. Ways and criteria for approaching flexibility

The permanent change in the family structure make us think about a “collective house”, the flexibility of the living area that allows changes and adjustments to increasing quantitative and qualitative needs of people.

There are two types of flexibility that can be solved during the design phase: one addresses the provision of the initial flexibility, while the other one addresses the possible changes generated in time by certain requirements. The initial flexibility and the dynamic one may be analyzed both related to an apartment and building or residence complex.

In a building complex, the flexibility refers to the possibility of achieving a varied volume compound that ensures the “human framework” damaged by the industrialization process.

The assurance of flexibility may reduce the difference between the wear and tear of apartment buildings by establishing the effects of both design and execution.



Current issues related to the multifamily housing

The flexibility of apartments directly depends on the size of the net area of the apartment, and on a structure released from vertical elements and beams.

The intent of providing flexibility to collective dwellings built is justified and it benefits from all efforts made.

The controversy on flexibility occurs every time one tries to define it and mainly when the limits of its positive effects are established.

Most of the European contests held over the last 30 years, on this topic, highlight the need for different and variable residences with flexible walls inside.

One of the winners of the 1987 European contest on the topic of dwellings noticed that “we should consider from the beginning the limits of the adjusting principle and the rational significance of the adjustment process, in order to give the opportunity of highlighting the hidden possibilities”.

The flexibility may be rational if the probability of a positive result is significant. Thus, the first phase should analyze fixed areas and not the open ones, so that flexibility becomes “a broadband of the oscillation of evolution”, as Lucius, Burckardt and Marcel Herbst noticed.

Various living needs do not necessarily require special and expensive closed areas, but mainly the possibility of the future inhabitants to make changes in time, by easy dismantle/mounting of partition walls.

When the dwelling flexibility depends on the evolution of a family, various solutions may be proposed. One of them is to suggest elements that can be added to one adjacent apartment within a dwelling complex without affecting the others. Herve Krokaert, the architect who proposed these elements, named them dilation areas of 12.5 m² each.

Many architects consider that flexibility consists in regrouping services in order to create more space.

The “service stage” that links the “wet” spots of the dwelling, presented by the team formed by the Belgium architects De Vos and Valembois, who participated in European 1989, shows the unused closings and creates a free area independent from the structure.

The German architect Georg Procakis gives more importance to the regrouping of services that allows free areas, by proposing duplex apartments built between a closed cell containing the technical equipment



Tudor Grădinaru

and the two floor living, with windows on sides, throughout the apartment length.

In the same context, the Austrian architect Zechner uses a central service strip, for a convenient structure of the flexible plan in a building with four apartments per floor.

The solution of mobile closings is presented as a remedy, although very few designers consider the problems raised by sound proofing, as an obvious comfort feature.

Due to the variety of living needs, the architect shall always consider the future variation in number of family members.

Another possible remedy is to create an adjustable living area that presently represents a temporary movement of light closings. The flexibility generated by movement is only an apparent freedom between four walls. This type of flexibility proved its ineffectiveness right from the Weissenhof moment.

Taking into consideration that the tradition of moving the furniture is totally inappropriate inside a small dwelling, the architect should be the one who pleads for short time flexibility, in order to make the dwelling more dynamic. The extra costs involved by the flexible partition proposed do not fit their use, if all these partitions are not adjusted within several years.

A mobile dwelling should meet the short time needs, which involves the design of easy partition systems that allow the direct and easy intervention of the inhabitant, when reorganizing the space.

In order to properly achieve this type of dwelling, with best results, the following design aspects of flexible collective dwellings should be considered:

- To regularly apply, whenever possible, the opportunities provided by the flexible plan, highlighted by the previous experience in the design and execution of experimental buildings.
- To give a special consideration to solutions that allow the inhabitants to easily make changes, without the help of a specialist.
- To consider the modern modular furniture, designed for flexibility.
- To join the designers, in order to create rational dwelling buildings, with big apartments, while observing the economic conditions imposed.



Current issues related to the multifamily housing

- To extend the flexibility not only of plans, but also of the building and structure, in order to achieve more possible variations of the dwelling shape.

2.3 The Romanian Collective Residence

Although Romania was remarked by Western analysts due to its increased “tailoring” development of habitation, we should notice that the big crisis of dwellings after the ‘50, caused by the imposed Communist industrialization in the cities that resulted in the rural population migration to urban areas, was more significant than in other countries.

The State authorities were thus forced to start a wide dwelling development program, resulting in a massive construction of dwellings for workers, often of poor quality and with minimal requirements, able to ensure the “quartering” of a large number of people, in a small or medium size space (and the achievement of the target in due time). This was not applicable in Western Europe, where the private real estate investor, who was often the contractor, could not develop the usage value of its product, a particular merchandise, before the sale moment of the property. This led to a variety of the initial models, in order to satisfy the demand.

In our country, the collective dwelling applied the Western outcomes and experience by transferring a spatial organization model that was significantly influenced by the Bahaus ideas and by Corbusier doctrine, but without adjusting it to the current requirements of inhabitants.

The rural origin and the dependence on a traditional living habits in a dwelling with less specialized functions generated a high level of alienation (corresponding to the replacement of an old value system with a totally different one). Thus, the core, as the central element of the house, was replaced by the kitchen of a small apartment, designed only as a food preparation room, under minimal standard requirements. The clean room, or the guest room of the traditional house was assimilated to the living room, that became representative, with its show case full of city symbols or, later, of the middle class condition. Furthermore, the table with chairs in the middle of this room suggests the guest room function of the living room. (The living room was the area where two rural traditional important functions overlapped: the guest room and the one borrowed from the urban middle class – the living room.)

The “ancient and picturesque” fairs became over night industrial cities. Between 1950 and 1980, over 1 200 000 apartments were built by the state



Tudor Grădinaru

authorities, structured in huge dwelling complexes subdivided in neighborhoods designed for 20 – 50 000 people (in big cities), comprising dwelling complexes for 2-15 000 inhabitants each.

If the collective units built before the '60s were of small and medium height, after the development of the industrialized systems, many towers and horizontal structures have been erected throughout the country, with a height progressively ranging between 4-5 floors and 9-12 floor, resulting in a high density of dwellings. The most affected were the cities, mainly the big, old historical and cultural cities, that have been industrialized during the communism, by the location of the collective dwelling complexes, that often disregarded the particular features and characteristics of the city, and the existing buildings, by a limited variation of shape and landscaping.

After the '90s, the change of the political regime and the start of democratic politics targeted on a free market economy, the reassessment of locations and a new approach of the collective dwellings, of the social one, in particular, were required. The social pressure of the last years of Communism and the new social features generated by the change made require special attention and proper sustainable solutions from the state and designers, in order to update this issue to the new context.

One of the effects of this transition to a new economy consists in the strong social contrasts, i.e. in the creation of a wide class of disadvantaged people. Analyzing these effects, the sociologists consider that these lead to a geography of poverty that involves a deep reflection on social policies and both the research and application should approach this issue at geographic level. Although poverty should first be the concern of the central authorities, the local leaders face the management of the problems raised by the economically disadvantaged people, in the context of town planning and social action. Decentralization involves the transition from a *de facto* involvement of local authorities to a total responsibility.

In Romania, the problem of poverty and subsistence is a characteristic of counties, towns and cities. The new elements are rather related to major changes of scale, actors, and outcomes of the local policies than to the update of methods and analysis. In the last 15 years, the aggravation of the social problems reveals the relative incapacity of the partners involved to provide available solutions for the developing poverty. The delay in applying a set of large scale measures to facilitate the access to dwellings of



Current issues related to the multifamily housing

the population in need shows that the local authorities are not interested in the detailed analysis and assessment of this issue.

The role of an analysis or research is to contribute to a better understanding of the variety of issues, of their field of application, and of the necessity to elaborate more subtle and adjusted strategies. (Note: the comparison of the living standards based on a single normative indicator, i.e. the level of financial resources, does not present the social reality in the absence of deep inquiries on the local trading facilities, self-subsistence or black market). In spite of all its shortcomings, mainly due to its limitation to given facts, an inquiry on disadvantaged population, as a detailed scale of social conditions, involves a large number of parameters.

These circumstances require the promotion and highlight of the necessary framework for the construction of dwellings, also meant to avoid the potential dysfunctions that may affect this field, and the elaboration of a set of rules adjusted to the European laws.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The existing economic and social conditions in Romania require that the issue of a short time achievement of proper collective residences (with a special focus on the social ones) should involve rapid and effective actions, both for starting new inquiries and researches meant to establish and quantify the present needs, and to gather the necessary funds and to attract local and foreign investors; an organized action of pressure groups is an opportunity to raise the awareness of authorities, decision-makers, and public opinion on this problem.

Netherlands is the best example in this regard, because the civil society has a special capacity to gather during the transition periods (a democratic tradition that allows individuals to form pressure groups, when the gap between the leaders and the society becomes too deep).

Thus, in 1987, the "5 × 5" group was established (a suggestive name that contains the essence of its actions: 5 initial professionals managed to involve other 5 persons, who also involve 5 more, etc.) by several professionals in order to think about the solutions to raise the quality of dwellings. Since then, the "5 × 5" group has considerably raised in number and became an organization formed by representatives of all the cities



Tudor Grădinaru

involved in ambitious urban strategies, architects and investors who considered the habitation a social objective of priority, as well as an economic but, most of all, a social issue. Within two years of activity, workshops, conferences and debates, the “5 × 5” group launched a manifest named “Pleading for the Quality of Habitation and Rehabilitation”. At the end of 1989, the group dissolved by itself before becoming a bureaucratic structure, considering their mission accomplished.

The planning, design and construction of dwellings has no longer a restricted typology, with templates addressing few profiles of inhabitants.

The following factors influence the various meanings of the habitation term:

- the acknowledge of new lifestyles and their specific needs
- the economic requirements of construction and management
- the significance of the locations within cities, and their consequences.

Presently, the designers of social collective dwellings are focused on the concept of habitation as a micro-society for those who work or for unemployed people, for young and old people, for families or single persons, for mobile or sedentary people. One of the impediments to be avoided is represented by the strong identity of these programs that might constitute a real segregation factor.

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