

RESIDENTIAL SPACE SEEN THROUGH FAMILY DYNAMICS

Daniela Negrisanu^{1*} and Maja Baldea²

¹PhD student, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania,
daniela.negrisanu@rdsign.ro

² PhD, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania,
maja_baldea@yahoo.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Life-cycle, beginning with the transitional womb period and ending with the closing phase, is passing through a wide diversity of physiologic and spatial necessities. Residential space, as an active container of all these diverse metamorphoses, must take over and absorb them all, in order to accommodate familial necessities of every life-stage. Psychology and psychiatric literature identify several important phases, adapted to specific particularities of the family life cycle: preliminary stage (nest detachment and courting), early stage (couple formation and reproduction), median stage (expansion, separations and partial exits) and closing stage. Along this process, the roles inside the family vary and so do the purpose and the utility of different spaces inside the house. Inconstant use of certain spaces inside the house, inconstant family roles and the amplified dynamics of the family, all of these are requiring an elastic way of living and, in consequence, a flexible residence. By internalizing all these information, housing theory can receive another perspective of how residential spaces can be properly conceived and projected, so that they can come closer to the needs of their residents.

Based on an extended and multidisciplinary research on housing, from architecture theory to psychology, sociology and neuroscience, this study is aiming to investigate the particularities of every stage in the family life cycle, filling up the missing knowledge in housing theory. A better understanding of these characteristics can facilitate architects an improved response to housing project design, assuring thus an adequate response for its end-users. The study of the differences between the actual house needs of every stage can be extremely useful for architects during the design process of residential projects.

Keywords: residential space, family dynamics, life-cycle, housing theory.

1 INTRODUCTION

*„Habiter n'est pas familier, c'est l'insolite même. Jamais lui-même.
En transit.”* Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe (Goetz, 2001)

Residential space is an active part of the ontological discourse of all human beings, able to enhance its life quality. Spaces and objects of the house can become privileged witnesses of family life (Giorgi, Padiglione and Pontecorvo, 2007, p.150). The house itself can become a receptacle of human variable along his development phases. Places of the home can initiate reflection and self-identity processes, can stimulate one's own development, can reflect the way a person is shaped in the present, can provide valuable memories about the past person and ideally can inspire and sustain the person that will be in the future (Basso, 1996, p.55). This dynamic between past, present and future is bringing forward the necessity of homeostatic adjustment on the temporal axis, where housing represents an auxiliary construct sustaining individual and family development through time.

Through its physical limits, the housing is silently assessing to its residents a certain way to live. In order to be able to contain the continuous individual and relational dynamics, it is necessary for the house to dispose of the capacity of taking over and absorbing all these transformations. Thereby, the house and the family are engaging in a symbiotic process of becoming, in which the process itself is as important as the circumstances that are inducing it.

2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Residential space is manifesting its versatile character as long as it is able to adapt to all familial and individual changes occurring over the time. The life-cycle, beginning with the transitional womb period and ending with the closing phase, is passing through a wide diversity of physiologic and spatial necessities. Residential space, as an active container of all these diverse metamorphoses, must take over and absorb them all, in order to accommodate familial necessities expressed along every life-stage. Residential satisfaction is linked to the adaptive capacity, being directly influenced by the house's ability of adjusting to all life-cycle changes.

Psychotherapy literature identifies a few crossing steps in family development, upon which the generational dynamics can be better explained (Zilbach, 2003). In „Housing and Family: An Introduction”, C. Mulder and N. Lauster are connecting major events in family dynamics to major residential decisions. Configuration of the house is depending on the family's future expectations and on its anticipated evolution. Decisions to increase or decrease house's surface and decisions related to residential relocation or ownership have been correlated with major events in family life (Mulder and Lauster, pp. 434-436).

Because housing theory is gathering only a few studies interested in this subject, filling this theoretical gap became a necessity. Based on an extended and multidisciplinary research on housing, from architecture theory to psychology and sociology, this study is aiming to investigate the particularities of every stage in the family life cycle, filling up the missing knowledge in housing theory. A better understanding of these characteristics can facilitate for architects an improved response to housing, assuring thus an adequate residential response for its end-users. The study of the differences between the actual house needs of every stage can be extremely useful for architects, during the design process of residential projects.

3 FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

Every phase of family life is accompanied with functional specificities, derived from diverse individual or familial tasks and attributions. All these external changes are engaging internal, spatial changes that are extremely important to be known by all people involved in projecting housing units. Every family's own way of appropriating the space, of transposing familial needs into residential space, of adapting internal and external dynamics, is conferring unicity and is individualizing the act of dwelling.

Psychology and psychiatric literature identifies several important phases, adapted to specific particularities of the family life cycle: preliminary stage (nest detachment and courting), early stage (couple formation and reproduction), median stage (expansion, separations and partial exits) and closing stage (Zilbach, 2003). The preliminary stage, associated with the detachment from the parental nest, is succeeded by the couple formation stage, followed by a family augmentation. In median stage, the family is going through expansions, exits or partial separations, so that in the final stage the family nucleus is recurring to its original dimension or even smaller. Depending on the family's configuration and cultural context, some of these stages can be suppressed, comprised, intercalated or repeated. The dwelling is bounded to conform itself to all these

stages. Along this development process, the roles inside the family vary and so do the purposes and the functions of different spaces inside the house. Inconstant use of certain spaces inside the house as well as inconstant family roles and the amplified dynamics of the family require an elastic way of living and, in consequence, a flexible residence. By internalizing all these information, housing theory can receive another perspective of how residential spaces can be properly conceived and projected, so that they can better meet the needs of their residents.

3.1 Preliminary phase: Nest detachment and courting

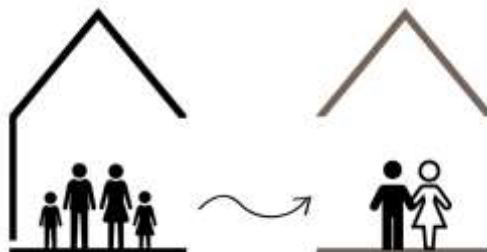


Fig. 1. Scheme of preliminary phase

This phase is belonging to pre-family stage, containing all preparatory steps for future family life. The maturity age is coming along with leaving, sooner or later, the parental house. A lot of variations of this stage's development are depending upon the macrosystemic influences imposed upon family and dwelling. Cultural norms and economical degree of development are two of the most important macrosystemic factors, influencing the way this preliminary stage is occurring. Real-estate market, labour market and educational circumstances are all influencing the age of residential relocation. In south-east European countries, because of financial reasons and because of traditional mentalities, late detachment from parental home is frequently taking place. Financial accessibility for a new residence is often a reason of delaying the age of moving out from parents' home (Aasve et al, cited by Mulder, 2013, p. 358). In some cases, the impossibility of purchasing a new house is leading to multigenerational dwelling, with complex and complicated hierarchies and roles between family members. In western societies, the maturity age is often related with residential autonomy, achieved through renting, house-sharing or house-owning.

In this early phase, detachment from the parental nest can be represented by a physical detachment or a psychological one, corresponding to the individual tendency for autonomy. Leaving the parental home can coincide in some cases with couple formation. In non-traditional and developed cultures, residential relocation is rarely associated with couple forming, being linked more with age and independence rather than with couple's establishment.



a)



b)

Fig.2. a) Young woman's house, Koln, Germany¹; b) Young man's house, Bucuresti, Romania²

The residential experience following the parental home will always be referenced to the previous one. The parental home represents a launching ramp for future residential experience (Jones, 2000, p. 183), highlighting the importance of this original dwelling as well as familial relationships and contacts. The dwelling following the parental nest detachment is being marked by individual expectations and personality,

¹ Photographic project by Gabriele Galimberti and Eduardo Delille. Source: <http://brightside.me/article/a-window-on-a-ladys-bedroom-a-fascinating-photo-project-79405/>

² Photographic project by Bogdan Garbovan. Source: <http://girbovan.ro/10pe1-2008/>

ensuring more functions for building self-esteem and self-identity as compared to other stages. In some cases, a highly social component is being added to basic residential functions.

Eastern and south-eastern European countries are being characterized by a delay in leaving the parental residence, somewhere near by the age of 30. Western societies are manifesting a tendency to begin this stage in the early 20s, as this process is being considered a very important ritual of independency and a point of no return (Cieraad, 2010). Lately, a slight rise can be observed in the average age of leaving the parental home, translated by an increased attention to specific pragmatic reasons. A greater degree of independency offered by parents as well as a greater degree of comfort offered by the parental house are both important reasons of reconsideration when leaving the nest. In non-traditional societies, the delay of leaving has been associated with the situations of parental houses of large dimensions, offering sufficient intimacy for adult children, with a greater comfort (Mulder, 2013). This self-sufficient home has been entitled „feathers nest” (Avery, Goldscheider and Speare, cited by Mulder, 2013). In European countries, young men have the tendency to leave the parental house later than young women, manifesting a longer dependency towards the comfort of the maternal house.

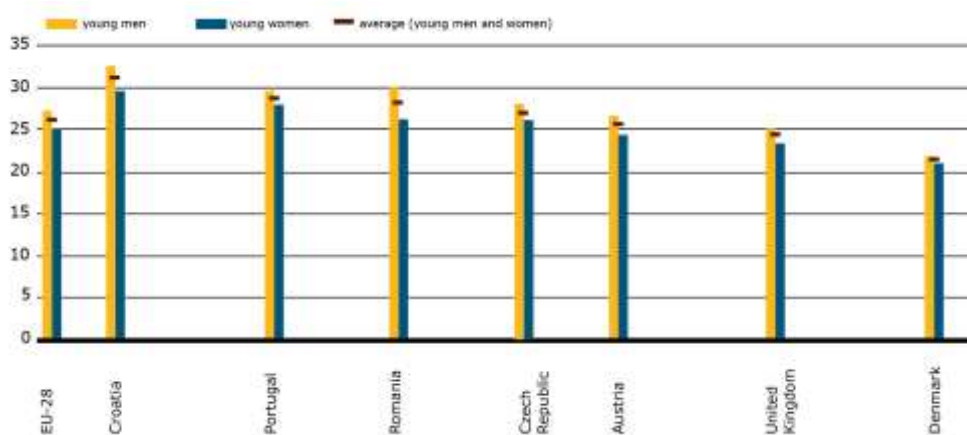


Fig. 2. The average age of leaving the parental home³

By extending the age of first marriage, by enlarging the percentage of unmarried persons, the „bachelor house” can become a dwelling for a larger period of time. In occidental societies, these houses are prevaillingly serving specific needs of this age, often been remarqued by a hedonistic imprint, in order to impress the potential partner. With a highly emotional component, this preliminary phase is requiring intimate spaces for the couple. Feminist literature is noticing in this period a radical change of syntaxes, young women entering into a delusion of a temporary hierarchical advantage, that isn’t necessarily maintaining in the future (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 21).

Recent studies carried on European countries were showing a relatively low residential satisfaction around the age of 25-34 years, compared with the one manifested in the subsequent periods (Eurostat, 2015, p. 40). Possible explanations are related to the transient character of the dwelling and to financial possibilities, usually lower than residential expectations.

3.2 Early stage: Couple formation and reproduction



Fig. 3. Scheme of early phase: couple formation and reproduction

³ Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_family_and_society, accessed in 28.01.2017

The traditional societies are often associating the preliminary stage of nest detachment with the early stage of couple formation and reproduction. Non-traditional societies are having separate timings for these two phases. Couple formation is marking the passage from individual independence and autonomy to couple interdependence, preparing the extended family formation. This is the period of establishing the main family's syntaxes, conferring thus certain specificity to every role and relationship established inside the social group. If in the previous stage the individual spaces have been intensely valued, in this phase social spaces are being more appreciated. The group is prevailing in front of the individual and the house configuration is manifesting this tendency, by prioritizing its social spaces.

Marriage is often associated with the activation of this stage. Especially in traditional cultures and in a considerable part of south-east European countries, the period of couple formation is occurring together with the establishment of a family nucleus, with marriage and eventually with the relocation into a separate residence. In non-traditional cases, couple formation can last a large period without marriage, but the new residence for the couple is a common manifested characteristic. According to Eurostat, in the last decade the age of first marriage in European countries knows significant differences. In 1992, women married at the age of 25 and men at the age of 28, while in 2012 the ages raised at 29 for women and 32 for men⁴.

Residential relocation is a very important stage in family dynamics. Being monetized in almost all societies, the house is a social indicator of family's social success. As a first experience of residential control, this stage is marking not only family syntaxes but also family hierarchy, linking this stage with the importance of financial independence or financial interdependence.

If in traditional couples every member's role is respecting the family hierarchy, the things are not being that simple for non-traditional couples. *„A modern couple's shared homemaking is far more complicated than their grand-parents, who only exchanged the parental home for the marital home... Today's couples, more than ever before, are used to negotiating on every aspect of their relationship. Historically, there was no need for negotiations...”* (Cieraad, 2010, p. 89). In present times, lack of a clear hierarchy and permanent negotiations of domestic roles and attributions are transforming the dwelling process into a hard daily exercise.

The family's reproductive function is increasing the members belonging to the social group, bringing also a few changes in familial life, in family's syntaxes as well as in the way of appropriating and distributing residential spaces. By including a new member in the family, usually a member depending on other's support, a reconfiguration of internal and external patterns of family (professional, social and economic) is implied. The presence of a new member is influencing the entire domestic routine (DeVault, 2003, p.2), affecting even the residential landscape. *„The core family task at this stage is to progress from coupled, dyadic interdependence to the incorporation of dependence within triadic interdependence”* (Zilbach, 2003, p.307).



Fig. 4. Presence of the children inside the house, affecting the entire residential landscape
(photo from personal collection)

⁴ Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_family_and_society , accessed in 28.01.2017.

This early stage is infusing the dwelling with a lot of functional necessities, resulted from a sudden increase in residential expectation and functions. The housing configuration is bounded to adapt its internal organisation so that it can comprise all individual and group necessities. The parental style is also influencing the way residential landscape is being shaped, vertical relations between parents and children requiring more individual spaces, while horizontal relations between them are predominantly requiring social and group spaces.

3.3 Median stage: Expansions, separations and partial exits

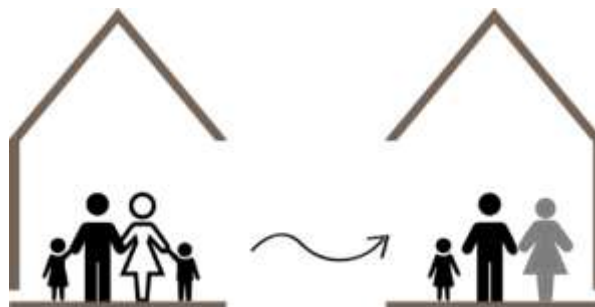


Fig. 5. Scheme of median phase: expansions, separations and partial exits

As an important process of the middle stage of family life cycle, expansion is referring to admission of the dependent member into an extra-familial area, such as kindergarten or school. Regarding the house, this stage is coming together with a process of externalizing some activities (education, socialization) and introducing other new activities (homework, receiving friends).



Fig. 6. Personal space inside the house, typical for median stage of family's development
(photo from personal collection)

This stage is characterised by residential needs expanded to their upper limit, in order to accommodate individual as well as familial group requirements. Personal spaces are being used for individual needs, while collective spaces are serving to build group cohesion.

Supplementary expansions can be induced by divorce and subsequent marriages or cohabitation, adding thereby new members to the existing familial nucleus. These processes are sensitizing the residential landscape, as well as the internal relations. New familial associations are requiring a larger amount of personal and intimate spaces and an extended period of time for assimilating new relational patterns between the members. In this situation, residential space is again bounded to take over, to regulate and compensate the renewed family relationships.

The exit of former dependent members of the family is being associated with the separation phenomenon. The adult members exiting the parental home are actually entering into the preliminary familial stage of nest detachment and courting, beginning the life-cycle on their own. According to Zilbach, in this phase, the main task of the family is to launch, to sustain and to facilitate the formation of a new family unit (Zilbach, 2003, p.308), while maintaining in the same time an adequate performance of the original family nucleus.

3.4 Closing stage: Exits and final processes

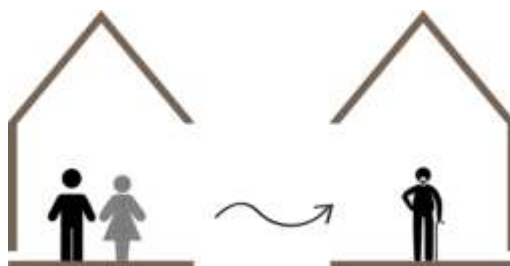


Fig. 6. Scheme of closing stage: exits and final processes

„It's not the house who passes, like a mobile house or a sheep breeder's hut, cause we are living transiently.” (trad.aut)

Lyotard cited by Leach (Leach, 2006, p. 72)

The exit of dependent and independent members from the familial nucleus is marking the final stage of the family life cycle. Shrinkage of the family to its original size or even to smaller dimensions is defining this stage. The house is often remaining the same, being expanded from previous stages. Because most of the elderly prefer to remain in the same dwelling, keeping thus a sense of continuity, they have to manage the residential tasks and the existing spaces. Non-occupied rooms are being prepared for eventual visits of their children or nephews (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, pp. 113, 114), thus conferring to the entire house a sense of proper usage.

When old members of the family are being implied in raising children, a transit process between the two locations can be observed, having direct implications upon their own residence. When there is a significant distance between the two residential locations, the home of the elderly can receive an additional second residence, appropriated as a surrogate-home.

As the mobility of the elderly is attenuating, new valences assigned to the house can be observed. The house, especially the window, is representing a major transitional agent with the world beyond. Living areas are important as well, facilitating through television the connections with the outside world.



Fig. 7. Residential landscape for old people (photo: Bogdan Garbovan⁵)

There is a point in which the residence and its old resident are ceasing to be engaged into an active and reciprocal process. When residential practices no longer can be complied by the residents, a lot of tasks are being externalized or eliminated from the daily routine. This process becomes irreversible in the moment in which the residents can no longer take care of the house or for themselves (Cieraad, 2010, p. 98). This is the moment in which the residence/resident dialectics is dramatically changing. In some cases, the presence of an external person inside the house, helping with residential tasks or assisting the old people in their daily routine represents an intrusion in their intimate universe, inducing a fracture in their residential appropriations or territorialisation. Thus, the residential landscape is beginning to change, as it is complying to another person's control. Family's hierarchies and syntaxes can also be changing dramatically, marking older

⁵ Project by Bogdan Garbovan, source: <http://punctum.ro/expozitii/bogdan-girbovan-101>

people's transitions from being independent to being totally dependent on somebody else's help.

Often associated with the phenomenon of loss, marked by the death of one member of the family's nucleus, the final stage of this phase is being filled with emotional loading. The residential space can contribute to this emotional phase, by delivering the domestic necessities and assuring emotional regulation inside the house.

4 CONCLUSIONS

For all types and possible configurations, the dwelling supports an organic growth of necessities along the family's life cycle, reaching its climax in the median stage, shrinking on the final stage. The major challenge that a dwelling confronts and can properly solve for its residents, at least in most of the cases, is to take over all of these modulations, acting as an elastic and adaptable organism. Architectural practice and daily experience is teaching us that the incapacity of a house to adapt to all these changes can lead either to residential relocation, or to an improver spatial usage and residential dissatisfaction.

Housing theory must be completed by information took over from diverse disciplines, filling up the missing knowledge related to this subject. Getting familiar with all these transformations along the family life-cycle is helping not only professionals to improve their response to housing project-design, but also residents, offering them an adequate residential response.

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