Chapter 15

Searching for Flexible Interior Design Solutions: Mass Housing Units in Istanbul

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ABSTRACT

In Turkey starting from 80s, especially in metropolises like Istanbul the increase of urban density, the decrease of urban inland and the change of social and cultural structure brought with it the need for housing design and production with different priorities. In this context, crowded families had to be replaced from self-built houses to presented mass housing units. Interior spaces of such mass housing that are designed and produced with the intention of standardization, failed to meet the needs of crowded family types. The aim of this work is to discuss the role of interior design in creating design solutions that can increase the flexibility of interiors according to the changing needs of different families with different cultural backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from 1940’s Turkey witnessed important economic and structural reforms, which also changed the socio cultural structure of the population. Many families living in rural areas in Anatolia started to come to big cities in order to have better job and education opportunities. But getting involved in big city life necessitated creating their own solutions. Gecekondu (self built houses without any permission from authorities) settlements started to grow in the peripheries of big cities. In time these settlements were regarded as unhealthy and dangerous because of the great threat of earthquake. Subsequent to the
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great İzmit earthquake of 1999, the urgent need to renew old or high-risk housing brought about urban renewal projects into the agenda.

The state founded the Housing Development Administration (TOKI) to solve the problem of public housing. During the last 2 decades many families living in gecekondu areas and other unplanned quarters of big cities started to move to new public houses. But these new houses were mostly apartment blocks constructed with the priority of reducing construction costs without any other further research about family structures and socio cultural requirements. Although many families are thankful and pleased to have their own houses, which have better living conditions regarding infrastructure and services, they have many difficulties in performing their daily activities. The apartments are small, impractical and very difficult to interfere because of the tunnel construction method. Especially crowded families try to create their own primitive solutions to use rooms for different activities during different times of the day. They also have difficulties in performing social rituals that necessitate the participation of neighbours and relatives. At this point the contribution of interior design is essential in order to create flexible solutions for crowded families with different physical and social requirements. Flexibility is not an unfamiliar issue for the Turkish living environment. In traditional house flexibility was a natural outcome of the need to use rooms for different purposes. But the spatial solutions created were outputs of years of experience and ingenious mastership. Today’s solutions for flexible interiors need to use contemporary approaches by also evaluating the values hidden in traditional houses.

BACKGROUND

In Turkey the discussions about new housing settlements have different perspectives. In housing market new housing units even the most luxurious apartments are evaluated according to their overall areas, number of rooms and other quantitative properties. Housing projects developed for high income groups differ from the others only by the quality of construction and the existence of an artificial identity. According to Ek (2012), architects design only the characteristics of settlements and services by attaching some popular concepts to them for underwriting rather than designing alternative spatial-organizations providing different living qualities for different inhabitants. Mostly even the purchasers are not aware of the lack of qualitative properties that need to be evaluated in housing units. Issues like the cultural and social background of inhabitants; spatial properties that support domestic activities and environmental factors are often being disregarded.

In academic studies and research the architectural rigidity of mass housing units is mostly discussed through case studies in different regions of Turkey. In the housing literature of Turkey, the uniformity in the quality of architectural design is undertaken as a quality problem, because it causes to monotonous built-environment and inhibits the variety in spatial experience of the inhabitants. Moreover, most of these studies agree generally on that this problem mainly affects users’ living standards and decreases their living quality (Tekeli 2008, Sey 1994, Bilgin 2002) Bektas (2007) stated that the new houses and residences built today in Turkey are intended to suit a different style of living. Bektas also called this new period “influenced”, “integrated” or “modified” and a new synthesis, which have not matured at present, will evolve. The new houses and residences are mostly built similar to each other, ignoring all the climatically, geographical and local influences which traditional Turkish house valued a lot.

On the other hand Ek (2012) discusses that monotony and deficiency in the quality of architectural design, is not perceived as a problem by their inhabitants through a case study made in high-income,