Chapter 13
Re-Coding Homes as a Flexible Design Approach for Living Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the results of the “Recoding Homes Project,” which has been conducted as a TUBITAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) research project with the title “A User-Centered Model Research Towards a Flexible Interior Spatial Design for Mass Housing Units: Urban Renewal Housing.” The project aims to improve the interior spaces of mass housing projects in accordance with user needs and to provide solutions that will increase the flexibility of interior spaces. The design model outlined in this chapter has the potential to change the traditional ways of housing supply as it gives the possibility to produce complete living environments with all their necessary components. It investigates how an interior design model can transform existing spaces into more flexible and more functional housing units. This way of housing supply can eliminate the non-compatibility between the architectural features and interior components often chosen randomly without evaluating actual conditions and needs.

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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 migrate to big cities in order to have better jobs and education opportunities. But getting involved within the big city life necessitated creating their own solutions for housing. Gecekondu (self built houses without any permission from authorities) settlements started to spread in the peripheries of big cities. Over time, these settlements were regarded as unhealthy and dangerous living environments because of the great threat of earthquake. Subsequent to the 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 social housing. During the last two decades, many families living in gecekondu areas and other unplanned quarters of big cities started to move to new social houses in scope of urban transformation projects. But these new living units 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 apartments which have better living conditions regarding infrastructure and services, they have many difficulties in performing their daily activities within the spaces. The apartment units are too small, impractical and very difficult to interfere because of the fixed tunnel construction method that is used. Especially crowded families try to create their own primitive solutions in order to use the rooms for different activities and functions during different times of the day. They also have difficulties in performing social rituals that necessitate the participation of neighbours and relatives.

The design model which is proposed in scope of Re-coding Homes project has the potential to change the traditional ways of housing interior supply as it gives the possibility to produce complete living environments with all their necessary components. It investigates how an interior design model can transform existing spaces into more flexible and more functional housing units. When traditional residential architecture is examined, it is a fact that flexibility is not an unfamiliar issue for the Turkish living environment. In traditional houses, flexibility was a natural outcome of the need to use rooms for different activities and functions during different times of the day. They also have difficulties in performing social rituals that necessitate the participation of neighbours and relatives.

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.
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