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A Comparison of Flexible Solutions for Residential Interiors | Neotopie in Milan – Re-Coding Homes in Istanbul

[Luciano Crespi, Nilufer Saglar Onay]

Comparing Milan's case with Istanbul's from a viewpoint of styles of living in public houses might open up unthinkable perspectives for the culture and practice of Interior Design. Two iconic cities: Milan a symbol of innovation in the field of land use policies implemented by the current administration, thanks to the driving role performed by Expo 2015; Istanbul a symbol of the *potpourri* of cultures on the frontier between East and West, a role it still performs today, by *inter alia* implementing a policy of generous investments in the field of art and design.

What strikes us is noticing how the solutions that are seemingly the ones most capable of tackling the problem of the demand for good living from the most disadvantaged sectors of the population disclose a variety of common points, despite the fact that the social and cultural contexts of the two cities evince clear differences. Although, in Milan, the true emergency consists in a demand for public houses, and not just for them, from people living on their own, whereas in Istanbul it consists in a demand from family nuclei made up of several persons, the research work conducted on the two cities has highlighted the central issue of building adaptability and flexibility. Viewed, however, from a radically different perspective than the one adopted by past researches, orientated towards facing the issue primarily by resorting to sophisticated technological devices capable of modifying the spatial organization of the residential building. Likewise different from some recent reflections elaborated on the issue of flexibility, that take as their point of departure the realization of architectural structures readied to accept flexibility (Granato, 2006). The true challenge of contemporaneity, which, as evinced by the cases of Milan and Istanbul, seems to concern not only the Western world, is to be able to transform the existing real estate heritage, particularly the public one, in such a manner as to empower it to offer residential solutions suitable to the current way of living, by resorting to the use of "furnishing" devices. That of typification, recourse to a standard, and prescriptive manuals, has been the characteristic obsession of the last century, and underwent a crisis the moment people became aware first of the existence and then of the value of "diversities": Richard Sennet calls the contemporary man a "flexible man" (Sennet, 2000), precisely by virtue of the supervened changes in the way of organizing work and the impacts such changes have made on the structure of behaviour and the composition of family nuclei. Inaki Abalos (2009), in his nice book *La buena vida: visita guiada a las casas de la modernidad*, describes seven possible ways of living, starting from the identification of a few archetypes, while knowing that they are "caricatures and that it is difficult to accept that life, which rages outside with its brutality and its incoherence, might be tamed in such a simple manner" (Abalos, 2009, p. 222). While that is a remark on the architecture of the house and on the manner in which some architectural paradigms correspond to neatly defined philosophies, aimed at showing how "every house, even the most banal one, may come to potentially encompass a whole world" (Abalos, 2009, p. 221), the book contains an acknowledgment of the importance vesting in "the different material cultures, with their symbolical meanings

and the way in which objects and decoration colonize spaces, from a viewpoint of the ideas of intimacy and comfort they express" (Abalos, 2009, pp. 221–221). That is seemingly even truer when we turn our attention to the private house, whose inhabitant is going to occupy it for a more or less long time, and the character of which will have to be such as to be able to tune into different human profiles, different stories, different cultures. We might no doubt think that some forms of behaviour tend to spread by virtue of the globalization of the world that facilitates a kind of standardization in the ways people live on the planet. We might think that the spread of a behaviour linked to mobility concerns most of the planet. We might, for instance, speak of a generalized change in the rituals specifically pertaining to the manner of using a house, and yet their symbolical meaning still preserves a connection with the various cultures. Carla Pasquinelli has dealt with this theme in her book *La vertigine dell'ordine* (Pasquinelli, 2004), which envisions the act of furnishing one's house as tantamount to a "cosmogonic act" destined to found an order capable of regulating the life of whoever is going to reside in it. An act which, however, simultaneously detects the process of "slow desacralization of space" and its "polysemic multiplication", which the idea of home is trying to resist through the adoption, by its inhabitants, of various types of stratagems. Accordingly, just as the contemporary artistic field is deemed by artists to be more a warehouse packed with materials to manipulate than an opportunity to "embark on a heroic quest for the novel and the sublime" (Bourriaud, 2004, p. 40), the field of designing projects involving living environments destined to receive these "nomads of contemporaneity" ought to be able to abandon the terminologies, the rules and the spatial categories associated with rituals that are no longer extant. Accordingly, when we speak of flexibility of public houses, more than on mobile walls or other devices introduced a thousand times with poor results in the various experiments in the past, it is on the way in which art presently constructs worlds, similarly to a Dj or a web surfer, that we should focus our look, also by contemplating the possibility that the user himself is granted the chance to contribute to that act of furnishing, one that is capable of creating a sense of belonging. We might speak of a design of the "unfinished", the completion of which might take place even by having recourse to the world of "small things", the philosophy of which has been so aptly illustrated to us by the Italian philosopher Francesca Rigotti (2013).

Pallasma (2005) defines life enhancing architecture as an articulator of human experience. If human is at the center of architecture, from urban scale to interior scale the entire environment that supports his activity need to be analyzed in relation to each other with a concentric focus on human experience. Otherwise we cannot fully understand the ever-changing interaction between human, time and space. We can easily say that great part of the existing building repertoire in our cities is dominated by standard architecture, which fail to create the variety and flexibility that correspond to contemporary living scenarios. At this point it becomes extremely necessary to explore the potentials of existing buildings in order to create spaces that enrich human experience and support new ways of living. In this sense the contribution of interior architecture can be very significant because of its strong relationship to life. Furthermore interior design also supports the ever-changing dynamics of life because of its relatively high temporality when compared to architecture. Therefore especially when rethinking homes, the role of interior architecture as the follower of life becomes even more significant. As stated by Rappaport (1995), "a dwelling is the

primary anchor from where people explore the world" and it can be regarded as the center of people's everyday lives. Design basically deals with creating meaningful artifacts and Hallnäs and Redström (2006) discusses that "meaning arises out of, or is derived from, social interaction with ones fellows". User satisfaction depends on creating spatial solutions that enrich human experience in relation to others. Especially while re-evaluating living environments, user satisfaction is difficult to achieve only by flexible solutions that donate space with all essential functional requirements. Furthermore it becomes necessary to discuss spatial flexibility that can extend lives out of the predefined boxes and let people create their own ways of interaction with space and with each other.

How can interior architecture solve the problems that architecture leave unsolved? How can standard architecture be interpreted to support different ways of living? How can interiors become articulators of human experience and activities in a flexible way? Moreover how can flexibility be capable of offering choice and personalization for the living environments? "Da Spazio Nasce Spazio"; the case of Milan and "Re-coding Homes"; the case of Istanbul are two different methodologies searching for the answers. Both cases are very challenging because of the great nonconcurrency between the variety of user profiles and uniformity in existing living environments and both search for flexibility that denotes not only adaptation, but also freedom.

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