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Housing regeneration in Europe: tools for manipulating the post-war collective dwelling

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Abstract

The rethinking of modern mass housing built throughout Europe after WWII has become a crucial topic in the contemporary European debate. Often, the housing stock have prematurely deteriorated. Moreover, typological uniformity and resistance to variation limit the capacity of buildings to adapt. Over the last decades, we have seen numerous projects focused on redesigning such spaces to accommodate current needs and lifestyles, in terms of spatial and functional endowment, as well as environmental requirements. The extreme architectural schematicism and repetitiveness offers today a great potential: it provides designers with a fairly generic basis capable of embodying new design inputs, with the aim of rethinking spatial qualities – through subtractions, partial replacements and new additions. By combining more radical or measured changes in each case, a creative process can be developed giving a new character to the buildings and existing urban landscape.

The experiments under way generally seek to achieve a greater mixité (social, functional, typological etc.) with more variable uses, a higher degree of complexity, an appropriate relationship between different scales and an effective articulation of spaces. While presenting a number of case studies, this research provides interpretations for morphological and typological variations, highlighting recurrent architectural ‘corrections’ of the original projects. Manipulations are here observed with the ‘gaze of the architect’ – focused on spatial or aesthetic aspects – interested in extracting replicable solutions. The investigation is developed inquiring about the possibility of collecting useful learning from the multiple carried out experiences: are there recurrent features? Is it possible to build some generalizations in order to outline a new part of our disciplinary knowledge?

After providing a point of view to interpret a large number of carried experiences, the research presents an “open abacus”: a series of recurring physical mutations for the construction of a ‘toolbox’, strongly oriented to future possible transformation projects.

Keywords: collective-housing, contemporary-living, regeneration, toolbox