

Foreword

RECODING HOMES: THE FLEXIBILITY OF SPACE AT THE TIME OF THE NEW NOMADS

The annual Global Trends Report of UNHCR (2018), reports that at the end of 2017 there were 68.5 million people forced to flee. Of these, 16.2 million people left their homes in 2016 for the first time and 44,500 people are on the run every day, which means one person every two seconds. In the total of 68.5 million, are also included 25.4 million refugees who have left their country due to wars and persecution, 2.9 million more than those in 2016, the largest increase recorded by the UNHCR in a single year. Considering all the nations in the world, one in 110 people is forced to flee. The Global Trends Report offers two other important facts: the first is that most refugees live in urban areas (58%) and not in rural areas; the second is that people forced to flee around the world are young people, 53% of cases are minors, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Even before the phenomenon of refugees took on its present dimension, many signs had been given that the first forms of mass migration would spread to the planet. The UN International Migration Report (2017), estimated that 258 million people have left their countries of birth and are now living in other countries with a 49% increase compared to 2000. Although they are of a different nature, the two phenomena are indicative of the same indisputable tendency: a new social actor coming on the contemporary scene defined by some as traveller of the contemporaneity, by others neonomad.

For Arianna Dagnino (1996), Italian scholar and writer on the changes in collective behavior and author of the book “The new nomads”, these are the great crossers of geographical and mental borders, physical and virtual, possible inhabitants of cities that could be born and that could die in a single day. To address the problem, it is considered necessary to adopt an approach that defines transcultural, as a “critical perspective, which considers cultures as dynamic processes affected by mergers

and confluences” that “can therefore also represent an alternative model of identity building, which develops at the intersection with other cultures and propels towards a dimension that goes beyond any specific culture. Instead of concentrating on polarities and differences, transculturality favors intersections, elements of commonality and shared initiatives”.

Primarily for politics but also for design, the great challenge of these years and probably of this century, is therefore to give credible and practicable answers to the question of living generated by the non-momentary phenomenon of displacement of millions of human beings from one geographical area to another, although for very different reasons, it seems clear that the solutions proposed by the design culture developed during the twentieth century are no longer available.

In a study on the question of living, the contemporary condition is described by John Berger and Jean Mohr (2016) in this way: “The house is a microcosmos that acts as a model to interpret its daily experience and to structure it and project it outside. However, in a world in motion, made up of global workers, emigration and exodus, it is appropriate to reflect on the new meanings house can assume. The hypothesis is that rather than physical space, it appears more and more in the form of routine sets and exportable practices elsewhere, that is, opinions, dress styles, etc. House as habitus is about practices incorporated, in the words of the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1969), as performance. The narratives about house become the ideal context for research in order to find the way in which individuals build moving homes of various types, ‘cognitive houses’ in transit”. In this perspective, the interior environments of the city can be a laboratory for experimenting the new ways of living freed from their borders, repeatedly staged in public and private spaces that mix to each other and get deconstructed. This is why the question of the flexibility of living environments, and their adaptability to the continuous changes in user demands, continues to be a crucial challenge for the design culture. The illusion, typical of the eighties of the last century, of being able to obtain a continuous and radical transformation of the distribution system of the housing unit through the adoption of moving systems and devices (pivoting walls, sliding walls, etc.), is now a question of experimenting new forms of flexibility. Some today speak of evolutionary housing (Sartoretti, 2016), as research on “forms of open and indeterminate spatiality, which lend themselves to versatile appropriations by the inhabitants and changes in time”. It is something that is based on the idea of being able to incorporate already at the time of the project the possibilities of its evolution.

We can also speak above all, as it is done in this text, of innovative approaches, entrusted to the use of flexible expert systems able to generate spatial variations through “multi parametric layout generation” with parameters determined by the user’s needs. In this case the spatial variations embrace different internal modules that respond to different sets of functions regarding the activities that are needed in

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living environments. This allows operating distributive layouts making use of light devices and furniture especially in existing contexts, which are difficult to modify without heavy interventions on the architecture. This book discusses in detail all the phases of a research study focusing on wellbeing requirements in contemporary living environments in Istanbul. The study also includes the prototyping process of basic modules and the design of an interface that contains the alternatives proposed with their material and cost estimates.

The study therefore is able to make a significant contribution to the crucial question of flexibility of living, outcome of the demanding research work “A User-Centered Model Research Towards a Flexible Interior Spatial Design for Mass Housing Units: Urban Renewal Housing”, carried out by scholars from different disciplinary skills, all of whom share the same interest in the potential of interior design.

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