

Exploring the impact of dwellers' psychological, social and cultural needs on generating the house's experiential qualities

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The home is more than just a shelter. Its physical structure should mimic the everyday patterns of living; represent the identity of its dwellers to the tiniest details; host the memory of the past and afford comfort for imagining and dreaming about the future; provide common spaces for socializing and private ones for retreat and contemplation about the self and the world; ... in a word, its physical structure should afford possibilities for fulfilling the multiple needs of its dwellers. The more the experiential qualities of the house fit the psychological, social and cultural needs of its dwellers, the higher is the level of satisfaction with the house and hence the greater is the possibility for its occupants to feel at home (Gifford 2014). The fact that house should be congruent with the dwellers' needs is an enormous responsibility and challenge for architects because they should know very well the nature of the people they are designing for, how to decode the complex and diverse needs of different persons in relation to the house and how to adapt the qualities of the house in accordance to their needs.

Unfortunately, considering the issues that arise continuously in my architectural practice and the concerns expressed by many global interdisciplinary initiatives among architects and researchers from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, neuroscience, etc., many architects, especially the novices, are very superficially equipped with insights on how individuals perceive, experience and interrelate with the built environment. Therefore, in practice, the cases when architects fail to predict users' behavior, preferences and satisfaction with the designs they appraise and suggest are not rare. (Holl, Pallasmaa, Gomez 2008, Mallgrave 2010) Moreover, the system of values toward the spatial qualities of the building between architects among themselves as well as with laypeople very often displays substantial differences (Gifford 2014). Nevertheless, these contradictions initiated many studies to understand how people perceive and experience the built environment and what affects their building preferences, choices and satisfactions.

House - related studies were initiated by real estate interests with the intention to understand the factors that affect preferences and choices for house attributes in order to predict future developments that would be more acceptable to people, but also from shared interests of few architects and psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. that intended to understand, for example, how different types and traits of personality affect the perception and experience of the house attributes, ...; how various socio-cultural contexts affect different ways of inhabiting house,...; or how different features of buildings as style, shape, functional entities, height of ceiling, presence of windows, the color and many other things influence experiences, preferences and choices of house attributes.(Coolen 2005, Augustin, Coleman and Frankel 2015) However, considering that people experience buildings with a body equipped with

multiple sensory/motor capabilities moving through its spatial configuration to pursue their goals, makes the impression that these studies and findings provide partial knowledge of the house's experiential qualities. Either they narrow the study of the experience of the house for one particular physical attribute, neglecting the impact of the broader context and the whole, provide only frameworks that might explain how different factors affect the experience of the house but not supporting empirical evidence, or provide empirical evidence that measures the experience and preference of some house's attributes through questionnaires and general pictures that detach the individual from a real setting and can hardly grasp the experiential qualities of the house as felt through inhabiting it. Besides, apart from being partial, this generated knowledge is also scattered in many different sources. As such, it requires too much effort to be found and the architect can hardly use it to understand and inform the individual he/she is designing for.

Therefore, this research intends to develop a methodology that might help to understand how multiple factors as a whole, in individuals with certain characteristics, embedded in a particular socio-cultural context, that live in houses with a particular spatial configuration, cooperate and compete to yield house experiences, preferences and choices. In this way, the findings are expected to complement the existing body of knowledge with new insights that grasp the experience of the house in multifaceted manner as felt by different dwellers through inhabiting it. To develop the methodology, the inhabitants of some existing houses in Tetovo will serve as instrumental case studies with the idea that they will provide valuable information on how different personal, social and cultural factors, as well as the impact of the architect, have affected the choice for particular house qualities. From existing houses, it would also be easier to extract post-occupancy evaluation perspectives and hence better understand how people experience the house through inhabiting it, to elucidate people's own conceptions of home. Later, during the design process, the same methodology could inform the architects on how to understand the needs of different individuals.

In order to explore the impact of personal, social and cultural factors on the generation of the experiential qualities of the house, the first part of the research will review the literature in the fields of architecture, philosophy, sociology and psychology that has investigated and described what the home is, how people experience it and what influences the preferences and selection of its qualities. The second part will analyze the socio-cultural context of Tetovo, to extract the main historical, social, cultural, economic and political turns related to architectural production, and the third part will elaborate the methods that will be used to become acquainted with the dwellers and through them with the personal and socio-cultural factors behind their choices for particular house qualities. Whereas the last one will present the findings.

Methods

To conduct the research will be adopted the qualitative case study approach. The case unit is the process of the generation of the experiential qualities of the house whereas its purpose is exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. To explore the case unit will be necessary multiple instrumental cases. They will not be seen as typical of other cases, but will only facilitate the understanding of the main unit. The instrumental cases of this research will be the dwellers of a few houses in Tetovo built after North Macedonia's independence from Yugoslavia. They will be selected in stages. Analysis of the data will begin after the first time of data gathering and depending on the insights- concepts and questions that will arise, new individuals will be recruited purposively, to complement the concepts with more in-depth insights or address

additional issues until it will be found that no new issues are emerging. The data gathering will depend primarily on open-ended in-depth interviews. However, adapted questionnaires developed by psychologists and sociologists to measure personality types and traits as well as socio-cultural influences on preferences will be distributed at the end of each interview in order to see whether there is any interdependence between certain personal, social and cultural factors and house preferences, choices and satisfactions. Moreover, field notes, archival documents and building regulation policies will be considered in order to enrich the principal data with insights about the broader socio-cultural, political and economic context of architectural production in Tetovo. The method called qualitative content analysis will be used to analyze and classify the content of the qualitative data gathered from the interviewees. The categories and themes that will be developed from the interviews are expected to provide descriptions of how the personal, social and cultural factors are manifested in the spatial configuration of the house and how the latter affects the experience of the house as a whole.

Keywords_ experiential qualities of the house, psychological, social and cultural factors

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List of publications

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