TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR YOUNG ADULTS IN A TIME OF CRISIS AND UNEMPLOYMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Stein notes that during the 1980s, concern about housing provision for young people leaving home and moving on their own path to housing and employment was a major factor contributing to the design thinking of specialist facilities to accommodate this group of people[1]. The development of accommodation options, although uneven, has been an ongoing challenge for providers of this service[2,3]. The findings indicate the fact that young people's early housing choices were often difficult and significant problems existed in relation to the supply, quality and location of accommodation. Other studies have pointed to the high housing mobility experienced by young people to study or to find a job or to set up home with a partner[4]. Still many young people are not shown to be well equipped to manage independently.

Housing emerged as a critical area for housing providers for this age group, charged with engaging in positive interventions that should make a substantial difference to young people's early housing choices and to their overall sense of well-being. How young people fared in housing was not greatly associated with past events in their lives, but it was more closely linked to life events after leaving home. Taken as a whole, these findings point to the reciprocal relationship between housing choices and different circumstances in young people's lives. The paper examines best practices for positive outcomes that will allow young people to develop the skills to manage well in accommodation that is suitable to their needs at the time and where they are making the transition from the family home to independent living.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology of investigation is based on relevant literature review and also in terms of physical planning, whereby the issue of housing challenges for young adults is examined through three prongs of investigation. The first prong concerns the city and regional scale of any intervention; the second examines the typology of housing units that will accommodate the target population of young adults; and the third one looks into the design of communal / public spaces as venues of increased socialization and normalization of social networks, acceptance and diversity.

Literature review

In the case of communities of young adults, the literature review indicates that in the receiving venues, many of these groups are segregated spatially and concentrated in particular housing tenures.

According to Murdie and Borgegard[5], there is considerable debate about the advantages and disadvantages of segregation. For example, the spatial concentration of an age group may enhance communication among members of the group and encourage the development of age-oriented businesses and institutions. On the other hand, residential segregation, either spatially or in particular housing tenures, may reduce opportunities for structural integration, especially in areas such as language, education and employment.

The academic literature has been careful to emphasize both the contested nature of the term 'integration' and the complexity inherent in the different socio-economic, legal, political and cultural dimensions of the integration process[678]. Important distinctions have been drawn in the age group literature, for example, between structural integration, involving the growing participation of newcomers in society's main institutions (e.g. the housing market, labor market, healthcare system) and acculturation, implying the evolution of new identities and cultures[9]. The literature on the housing of young adults meanwhile has focused particularly on structural integration, with an emphasis on support, protection and service provision for vulnerable newcomers[1011]. Housing integration is discussed in this literature in terms of access to good quality, affordable accommodation, meeting culturally diverse housing needs and the management of the settlement process at the local community level.

Also, many of these young people experience a cluster of problems both while they are home, including placement instability, stigma and educational difficulties at school and after they leave home, including disrupted careers, periods of dependency on benefits, getting into trouble, mental-health problems and loneliness[12131415].

Young people now leave home for a broader range of reasons than the traditional ones of marriage and/or employment:[16]

- Increasing proportions leave home primarily in order to achieve independence.
- Young people who leave home under duress are at risk of homelessness.
- Repeated returns to the parental home are also increasingly common experiences, often in response to adverse circumstances.
- Independent living arrangements – living alone or with peers – are widely adopted by young people.

There is an established link between shared housing and social disadvantage and a growing association between shared housing and graduates and/or young professionals. These trends are largely attributable to the growth of cohabitation as the norm and they will be spatially examined in the ensuing proposal.

GREECE COMPARED

Decent housing, at an affordable price in a safe environment, is a fundamental need and right. Ensuring this need is met, which is likely to alleviate poverty and social exclusion, is still a significant challenge in a number of European countries. The data used in this article are primarily derived from microdata from EU statistics on income and living conditions[17]. The reference population was all private households and their current members residing in the territory of an EU Member State at the time of data collection. Persons living in collective households and in institutions were generally excluded from the target population. The EU-28 aggregate is a population-weighted average of individual national figures. However, the EU and euro area aggregates that are presented for 2014 are estimates, as there was no information available for reference year 2014 for Estonia or Ireland at the time of data extraction (November 2015).

Type of dwelling

In 2014, 4 out of every 10 persons in the EU-28 lived in flats, just over one quarter (25.6%) in semi-detached houses and just over one third (33.7%) in detached houses. The proportion of people living in flats was highest, among the EU Member States, in Spain (66.5%), Latvia (65.1%) and Estonia (63.8%; 2013 data), while the highest proportions of people living in semi-detached houses were reported in the Netherlands (61.2%), the United Kingdom (60.0%) and Ireland (58.3%; 2013 data). The share of people living in detached houses peaked in Croatia (72.6%), Slovenia (65.4%) and Hungary (63.0%); Norway (62.4%) and Serbia (60.5%; 2013 data) also reported high shares of their populations living in detached houses.

People at-risk-of-poverty

The reduction of the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU is one of the key targets of the Europe 2020 strategy. The at risk of poverty or social exclusion figure, for the EU-28 average, calculated as a weighted average of national results, masks considerable variation between EU Member States. In 2013, more than a third of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in five EU Member States: Bulgaria (48.0 %), Romania (40.4 %), Greece (35.7 %), Latvia (35.1 %) and Hungary (33.5 %). At the other end of the scale, the lowest shares of persons being at risk of poverty or social exclusion were recorded in Sweden (16.4 %), Finland (16.0 %), the Netherlands (15.9 %) and the Czech Republic (14.6 %). Overall, the at-risk of poverty rate has slightly decreased at EU-28 level between 2012 and 2013 by 0.3 pp. The risk of poverty or social exclusion rose by 2.1 pp in Portugal and 1.1 pp in Greece and Hungary, decreasing by 2.7 pp in Croatia and 1.7 pp in Lithuania.

Social exclusion

In the case of Greece, the percentage representing the share of young people (18-24) who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (and/or severely materially deprived and/or living in a household with very low work intensity; Source Eurostat, 2011) as a result of their housing choices and compared to the general population risk of poverty rate is as follows:
- People at risk of poverty or social exclusion: 3.403 (in thousands) 31.0%.
- People living in households with very low work intensity: 978 (in thousands) 11.8%.
- People at risk of poverty after social transfers: 2.349 (in thousands) 21.4% (Total) 23.7% (0-17 years) 20.2% (18-64 years).
- People severely materially deprived: 1.667 (in thousands) 15.2% (Total).

Comparing the percentage of the general population at risk of poverty after social transfers (21.4%) and the respective rate of young people aged from 0-17 years old (23.7%), the risk of poverty is higher by approximately 2.3 units (2011 data) and the rate is growing over the last few years. A huge impact for the entire population has to do with the current socioeconomic crisis in Greece, with the needs for housing, food, clothing and transportation not being fulfilled especially for the younger population.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MIGRATION PATTERNS

In Greece, internal and external migration patterns are linked to economic and political structures that precipitate a variety of positive and negative factors that may encourage or force young people to leave their homes and move elsewhere. Newly arrived young people, as a result of recent migration patterns towards Europe, are often being viewed by majority groups as a threat to economic well-being and national identity. This is especially so for countries like Greece, which have experienced the social

dislocation of the current economic restructuring and where a retrenchment, which has reduced the socioeconomic outlook of many residents[18]. At the international level, the most important factors are the increased flows and greater diversity of immigrants and refugees[19].

These factors change over time as a result of shifts in political ideology and economic circumstances. Important factors nationally include the nature of immigration policy, attitudes towards immigrants, economic restructuring and housing policy[20]. Recently arrived groups of young adults display a low level of both behavioral and structural integration. These groups exhibit considerable cultural distance from the local population and the residential segregation associated with them may be further compounded by a desire to retain their identity[21]. In addition, the structural integration of these groups is made more difficult by the current weak economic conditions.

AVOIDING SOCIAL DISTANCE AND MARGINALIZATION

The social distance between many newcomer groups and the local residents has also increased, thus raising the potential for lower levels of integration and greater economic marginalization. In turn, this has increased the likelihood of higher levels of spatial segregation and housing segmentation at the regional scale of metropolitan areas, such as in Athens in general and some of its neighborhoods, like Exarcheia, in particular. To counter this fact, measures need to be taken that include revisiting immigration policies, attitudes towards immigrants, housing policies and economic restructuring for creating jobs. Priorities for creating jobs for young people according to their qualifications include:[22]

- Providing business grants for hiring unemployed university graduates up to 35-years-old with the objective to create new full-time jobs in private companies for unemployed graduates.
- Creating a National Network of Direct Social Intervention for unemployed young people up to 30-years-old with the primary objective to provide comprehensive services for homeless people and people living in or at risk of poverty.
- Instituting charitable work programs in the field of culture for young people up to the age of 30 with the aim to enhance employment through co-funded projects that involve the construction, promotion and preservation of cultural infrastructure.
- Strengthening vocational education and training and apprenticeship systems, with an emphasis on combining training and work experience, while further investing in work placements and internships during and after training.
- Subsidizing programs for enterprises to recruit unemployed graduates up to the age of 35 from university and technological Higher Education Institutes.
- Instituting work experience programs for new labor market entrants aged 16-24 years, in addition to a special three-year program for aiding employers through a subsidy, aimed at recruiting unemployed people with disabilities or young people at social risk.
- Financially supporting new businesses and sponsoring counselling for e.g. writing a business plan, understanding principles of financial sustainability, etc., for those who receive financial aid.
- Organizing activities to support youth entrepreneurship in the sectors of tourism, culture and the environment, according to the particular needs of local economies..

DEVELOPING ACCOMODATION RESOURCES

Although there are differing levels and types of accommodation resources across Europe, all see the need for investing heavily in improving these resources and developing a broad range of supported and independent accommodation options for young people leaving their home[23]. The evidence

suggests that strategies to improve housing outcomes for young people require a number of interrelated elements:
- Investing over time to improve the range of accommodation resources to meet the differing needs and choices of young people.
- Developing formal protocols and partnerships with local housing providers to audit needs, plan developments and provide for joint assessments.
- Providing good quality accommodation, but also putting in place finance and support packages to enable young people to manage their homes and life responsibilities.
It is right then that this paper should examine particular circumstances facing this group of people in a two-pronged approach, one concerned with the socioeconomic profiling of the potential users and the other with the spatial organization of habitation. The coupling of these two prongs may then constitute the basis of schematic proposals for spatial organizations and taxonomies that will allow for the opportunistic appropriation and development of urban sites for the housing of young people.

A South London Case Study

A prefabricated housing project for homeless people, which opened in south London, was designed for charity YMCA as factory-building housing scheme by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners[24]. It provides accommodation for 36 homeless young people in Mitcham, south London. The designers' modular Y:Cube scheme was intended to be easily assembled and transported, so blocks can be moved between temporary sites in the capital. Each of the 26-square-metre units has a combined living room and kitchen and a separate en-suite bedroom, as shown in Figure 1. The brightly colored blocks are stacked on top of each other. Each unit cost was between £30.000 and £35.000 and took about a week to construct in a factory and again as long to assemble on-site. Rent is calculated at 65% of the local market value, taking into account site lease and construction costs – equating to an outgoing of approximately £150 per week for each resident. The principle here is to minimize people's outlay for their rent so that they can afford to save and eventually get on the more conventional housing ladder.

Figure 1: Prefabricated housing project for homeless people in south London by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners.

The dimensions of each unit – ranging from the shallow pitch of the roofs to the width of the rooms within – are determined by the maximum cargo of the wide-load lorry used to transport the units from the factory to the site. The container-like spaces are craned from the lorry and stacked one on top of

the other, culminating in a row of pitched-roof blocks. Wide timber decks provide outdoor space around the perimeter of a grassy courtyard in the center of the Mitcham site. The designers noted that the conventional mass-market residential sector was working in a block-by-block and brick-by-brick pattern, so when it came to quality for low costs there was real opportunity to take advantage of economies of scale by adopting an off-site manufacturing strategy.

The case of Athens and the Exarcheia Neighbourhood

As illustrated in the example above, the potential for success would seem to be enhanced when holistic, community-centered, inter-agency approaches are adopted, supported by adequate resources and a clear political commitment. Experience from the British and European context suggests that housing and integration strategies are more likely to work when they develop partnerships with voluntary organizations with specialist knowledge and skills, with a view to working towards more culturally sensitive mainstream provision for populations of young adults[25][26].

There are many positive initiatives underway in Exarcheia, especially from within the communities of young adults themselves, such as in Figure 2. The focus of the proposal is on the development of training and placement programs acknowledging and accrediting prior knowledge and experience, as well as retraining facilities, all of which will be synthesized with the user characteristics to define the second prong of the investigation dealing with a proposed architectural typology and illustrated in a case study below for the Exarcheia neighborhood in Athens, Greece. The proposal also uses spatial appropriation of nearby existing facilities which may house spillover activities from the reception center and thus increase interaction between the resident population and the adjacent community and accommodate public and private agencies and volunteer organizations that cater to the health, safety and welfare of the community of young adults.
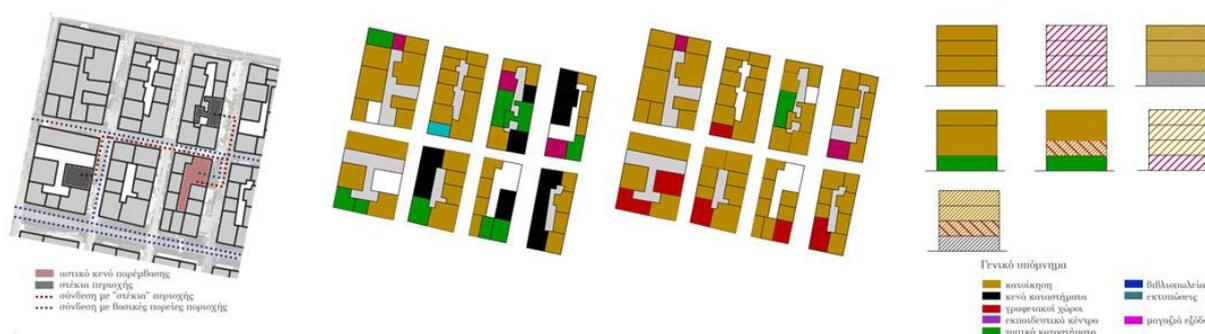

Figure 2: Proposal for opportunistic infill housing for young adults
making use of underutilized urban voids at Exarcheia, Athens.

In general, attempts to include populations of young adults or to resist their exclusion have come from civil society –community organizations, campaign groups, church groups or advocacy organizations. These groups provide an important counterweight to the hostility experienced by young adults and serve as a challenge to the policies of exclusion and as a mediator for the co-evolution of immigrant and local societies in gateway nations like Greece. In Exarcheia, these groups facilitate the symbiotic coexistence of these populations and the local communities by creating a common ground for deliberation and visioning exercises that lead to informed physical planning.

However, because of the wide range of agencies involved in the housing and integration process and the uncertainties that arise from a rapidly changing policy and funding environment and exclusion of such populations from the integration process, there are also many gaps in provision and support. These include gaps in the co-ordination of housing services, inadequate communication between community organizations and mainstream providers, discontinuous funding and disparities between the priorities and expectations of the populations of young adults and those of service providers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite good intentions and localized successes, there are still many obstacles to accessing descent accommodation in a safe environment that is implicit in the discourse of housing integration.[27] The challenge to housing providers and support agencies is multi-faceted. Obstacles arise from conflicting local government agendas and multiple gaps in housing provision, choice and support. Not only is it necessary to meet housing needs, but it is also important to develop practical support structures, such as those leading to employment. Promising developments include plans for more holistic thinking between housing-and-economic-related government departments. However, organizations catering to young adults are often skeptical as to whether enough resources will be devoted to these initiatives to prove effective[28][29]. These positive developments must also be set in a wider legislative context and an understanding of the marginal position of groups of young adults converging on metropolitan areas in search of housing and employment. There is a commonplace view of young adults as "outsiders" and their exclusion from consideration within government integration strategies underlines their marginality. As this group of people starts to compete for mainstream housing, jobs and other resources, they are likely to face many of the challenges experienced by settled local groups and they may very well come face-to-face with deprivation and exclusion.

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