The Language of Habitation: An Investigation of Housing Terms and Meaningful Dwelling Space

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Schoenauer (1981) claims that historically, due to a low population, the transformation in housing across civilizations occurred steadily and organically since it was in harmony with the psychosocial and economic forces of the time. While the shortage (and poor quality) of housing is now a global phenomenon, architects may balk at the thought of trying to resolve this by designing smaller, more confined units – of coming up with a ‘less is more’ approach to what may be primarily a policy or land use issue. Dluhosch (2006) believes that the architect cannot cater to small elites and simultaneously be a spokesperson for the so-called masses. Housing may be the prime contributor towards new developments, but we cannot be too quick to forget the human scale of it all. One only has to revisit ‘The Poetics of Space’ by Bachelard (1964) to understand that the house is a container
of human consciousness; in the Razia Hassan School of Architecture, one way we sought to ‘reassociate’ architecture and housing was to consider the language of residential architecture and its relationship to built-space.

The house itself consists of a series of rooms, arranged in hierarchies that signify patterns of use and named accordingly in a language that implies a function; when these rooms are inhabited these ‘names’ may take on a more layered meaning.

If we examine the relationship between language and perception, research suggests that spatial language is grounded through non-linguistic processes, that thought occurs in a symbolic mode, that perception plays a role in giving language meaning and for an architect, the relationship between language and perception is important to study because of all the arts, architecture may be the most experiential.

The idea is to use housing as an agent to improve urban quality and explore whether language can enhance the ability of the architect to perceive (and design) mass residential space that is grounded in local context.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

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A building design professional with over seven years of experience in designing residential, healthcare and hospitality spaces within different areas of Punjab, Pakistan. Academic interests include environmental design, sustainability and energy efficiency.

Currently working as an Assistant Professor at the Razia Hassan School of Architecture, Beaconhouse National University, and as Chairperson of the Unit of City and Housing - a housing research unit within the school, where the focus is to propose sustainable housing design solutions that will assist the Prime Minister’s Academic Network as well as the government’s initiative to provide affordable housing.

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