



Architecture & Dwelling

TU DELFT | FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE | CHAIR OF ARCHITECTURE & DWELLING | GLOBAL HOUSING STUDIO

REFLECTION

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MASTER THESIS, 2020

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DELFT, 2020

Introduction

Ethiopia has one of the fastest-growing economies in the whole world. Nowadays, it is experiencing rapid urbanization, substantial economic growth, population boom, and high numbers of internal migration from rural lands to the cities. Due to the reasons for intense migration and fast population growth, the major cities, and especially the capital Addis Ababa, cannot vastly and efficiently manage the inflow of people and they are left without any adequate housing or support from the government. Throughout history, Addis Ababa was the destination for most rural-to-urban migrants, often manifested because of the great famines, that devastated many rural areas and left people without other choices than moving. This process brought many traditional ways of rural living to the city.

Over the history of the capital city, Addis Ababa has become the home for a variety of social, ethnic, and economic groups. The informal way of living has spread through the whole city, enhancing the different social groups to coexist together side by side, turning Addis Ababa to an intensively heterogeneous city, where urban mixity is a key factor of inclusiveness. Increasing economic capabilities, investments from the other countries and shift from rural to industrial economic sectors creates more possibilities for the urban dwellers, however, establishes a bigger gap between the low-income and high-income groups. As the country is shifting between the different economic sectors, low-income families and rural migrants are experiencing great struggles. The lack of education and income, forces families to debt, leading to the struggle of finding adequate accommodation and put their children through school, creating a vicious circle of poverty.

Today, Addis Ababa has become home for around 4,5 million people and the majority is living in the informal settlements. The urban poor are facing problems due to the lack of sufficient housing, no access to services, low-paid jobs, unhealthy working conditions, and relocation processes. These numbers keep rising as more and more people are coming to urban life every day. Actions by the government have been implemented, offering standardized architectural solution housing. However, the Integrated Housing Development Programme is not accessible to all people, especially the urban poor, simply because they cannot afford the down payment. The new housing developments propose an international style of globalized architecture, that has little to do with the traditional dwelling patterns of Ethiopia and therefore, the program fails to meet the needs of the residents.

To stop this vicious circle, the housing issue must be solved and the secure and safe living environment for the city dwellers, rural newcomers, and urban poor, offered. I believe that proposing the solution for housing, which would sustain the mixity of social and economic groups, decreases the gap between rich and poor, and encourages not only the benefits for a stronger society but also the further growth of the economy of Ethiopia.

Method & Approach

The Chair of Architecture & Dwelling implies the best equilibrium between architectural theory and design to prevent vague architectural decisions. The space of the housing is introduced as the most important aspect of human life: this is where the day of human starts and ends, this is the place where most life-changing decisions happen. As the Global Housing studio is approaching obstacles of unknown contexts, often in the Global South countries, the deeper social analysis must be implicated.

Primally, the method of research used is architectural ethnography. Architectural ethnography is the study of the nature of human actions, which takes into consideration the built environment as an everyday practice. In my opinion, it is an

extremely useful research approach, as the resulting design is more holistic in solving societal challenges. Therefore, the architect focuses more on the habitation patterns, ties between community members, and informal usage of spaces, rather than only focusing on what is architecturally appropriate in the particular space. This way, the architect tries to research and learn about the processes of habitation using methods, derived from anthropology.

In the first phase of the studio, the students researched the fundamental knowledge of Ethiopia and Addis Ababa, concerning four topics: Soft Data, Hard Data, Spatial Mapping, and Housing. Within this collaborative research, together with the other three students, I worked on mapping urban growth patterns of the city of Addis Ababa, from its foundation to these days. We highlighted the important urban transformations of different eras for the city. Later on, I analysed the case studies of housing for different social groups, did a literature analysis on housing typologies, dwelling patterns of the urban poor, and reasons for migration. During weekly meetings with group and tutors, the analysis of different chapters of the book "Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the city" by Richard Sennett additionally broaden our knowledge of the history of urban developments and general research ideas, through the decades.

As a part of the architectural ethnographical research, we did a comparative study of two neighbourhoods in the Netherlands and Ethiopia. This comparison showed that the area of Kleiwegkwartier and the neighbourhood of Gerji are the examples, how completely different cultures could have similar and opposite living patterns. As a foreign researcher, it is important to be subjective and not to compare the differences in a concrete manner. The traditional dwelling patterns of the African country and the European ones are different fundamentally. However, even if the differences are visually noticeable, the understanding of secure living space is the same. Different cultures preserve community-like living and security becomes a major factor in sustaining comfortable living. The importance of the community and ownership of the property, as well as security, is the main conclusions visible after research. Even if, culturally the neighbourhoods are different, the residents have similar ambitions of living and developing their dwelling towards the more comfortable future.

The individual research started when the students from the Global Housing studio went to Addis Ababa and visited the chosen project site in Kolfe district. To further develop my micro-ethnographical research, I obtained interviews with residents of the site (with the help of local architecture students), introduced the participatory game of the dream house design. The series of drawings were conducted during the visit, which helped to understand the spatial qualities and living patterns better. Interviewing different social groups, helped to realise their aspirations and needs, that could be translated into a project that would cherish social mixing, as it is a pattern already visible in the site. The individual research methods were similar to the group's ones, however, it helped me to elaborate on certain topics, as migration and movement, better personally. I believe, that my project could be viewed as a case study, where the mixity of the urban poor and middle-, higher-income groups could be viewed as a strength and possibility, that would help to solve the key issues rural migrants face.

Using the method of architectural ethnography for the research led the project to be richer, helped to understand a small part of different cultures visually, and formed the logic behind many decisions for the project, however, I struggled to translate these findings in a more holistic architectural design. Adapting the findings and translating them into the architecture was difficult, because it was the first time, I tried creating a project using such an approach. In my opinion, I did not reach the wished result. I think, I lacked knowledge of adapting research results for the project to become successful in its surroundings and neighbourhood. I wish to have taken a longer time to analyse the current situation, spend more time on the site and interview more people to get even more knowledge of how my project should look like, researched more typologies of housing that would work better than the ones I defined. Nonetheless, for my future projects, I will use the same approach, because it is rewarding to create something, that was inspired and derived from the local residents, their needs, and ambitions. Just translating the findings better.

Relationship Between Research & Design

At the beginning phase of research, the issues correlated with the internal migrations within the country, and the struggles it brings to the capital city was in my interest. The case studies, literature research and the visit to the Kolfe site helped me to raise my design hypothesis, that would create a prototype, that would not only help to create an identity of the site itself but also would improve the lifestyle of the current residents by forming the resilient communities using mixity as a tool. The aim of creating a project that would change someone's life was a strong reason to keep on researching and achieving better results weekly.

The collective and individual research set a strong base for the further design process considering the context of Addis Ababa. By the feedback of my tutors, I was all the time encouraged to work in a bigger picture, zoom in and out to the project frequently, and never forget the initial goal of the project, which should create resilient clusters for different social groups. They constantly helped me to improve my project and challenged me to research better solutions in many cases.

The most important part of the research was the analysis of the aspirations and needs of different user groups that were observed through the interviews with locals in the site of Kolfe and Gerji. These needs set the goals for the project, that could be viewed even in the architectural case studies I analysed. For example, the hierarchy of spaces and the separation between the public and private, as well as the entrepreneurship possibilities of income generation from the home or shared housing for the migrants. The co-existence patterns are visible in my design approach, however, being less holistic as I expected, as the density of the project needs to address the issues of the megapolis of Addis Ababa.

Ethical Dilemmas

The approach of architectural ethnography requires spending a lot of time in the neighbourhood. However, using the approach of visual ethnography brought challenges in how the research could be conducted and interpreted. Living amongst the people, to understand their daily struggles and living patterns would be the key method of ethnographical research. However, our time was limited, as we had only a couple of days for the research, where we could be accompanied by the local students, due to the barrier of language. This was one of the hardest parts of the research, as not many people would clearly understand what we would be asking or not many would speak in English and students from EiABC would help plenty by translating and elaborating more. Unfortunately, sometimes people did not show trust as we were foreigners and then would refuse to answer questions. On the other hand, we spend a lot of time taking pictures, that I could say no one minded.

Due to the fact, that research was mainly conducted in a short period, we heavily interpreted the habitation patterns, maybe romanticized particular ways of living, and did not pay enough attention to the others. The interpretations concluded that people prefer to live in communal environments, share facilities, and interact closely with one another. Even though we knew this might become an issue, it seemed that sometimes we categorised income groups in black and white, implementing personal emotions to the research. Successfully, we could interview different social groups and did not view one from another as better or worse. To summarise, the ethical dilemmas were mainly raised because of the invasive way of obtaining the information and the interpretation of it.

Master of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Science

The topic of accommodating the urban poor and rural migrants is very relevant in architecture during the times of mass urbanization. Nowadays, sufficient housing became a commodity rather than a basic right for many people in developing countries. This calls for the solutions, that would often include the mixity of social, ethnic, economic groups, to create a resilient and sustainable community. As cities all over the world are experiencing mass urbanization by the poorest, the solutions that could be achieved in the city of Addis Ababa, such as the ones I proposed, could be applied and adapted towards the future needs of other vastly growing cities in the Global South.

To enhance, my architectural design project focuses on creating an urban model of a co-existing neighbourhood scheme between two very different social groups: urban dwellers and rural newcomers, as well as different income groups: low-income and middle-higher income groups, in the mid-rise and high-rise housing units. The architecture becomes a tool for creating a healthier, safer environment for the localities. On a bigger scale, it offers solutions for the problems Addis Ababa faces, on a smaller scale, it creates a project that sustains the traditional dwelling patterns in a modernized architectural project.

Therefore, the aim of the Global Housing studio becomes unique within the other studios in the Master track of Architecture. Focusing on everyday life practises in a real environment for the urban poor, trying to understand their lifestyle: it requires openness, dedication, and hard work, but it is focused to make people lives better. It becomes a real project and not only an academic one. Comparing my project with other students in the Global Housing studio, it is fascinating how many different approached every one of us took and how many different projects we proposed. My design is different from the others as I defined different typologies for different socio-economic groups, to prevent forced mixity. Using the existing typologies in the city of Addis Ababa and adapting them towards a more sustainable neighbourhood with better planning solutions is good, as the knowledge of building technology by locals are there. However, it might also look to general or even insensitive, but I believe that the four typologies I chose reflect well on the needs and ambitions of different social groups, and being combined in one neighbourhood is the strength of the design.

I believe that suggesting solutions for the problems growing cities face requires the wide knowledge, that connects the different disciplines of multiple sectors, that all are embodied in the Master of Science in Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Science. At the same time, it requires determination to face these challenges, and compared with other studios, I believe the progress we did for our master thesis and the good intentional thoughts we had behind it is extremely valuable for becoming a future architect.

The Social, Professional & Scientific Framework

On the 25th of September in 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” (The New York Times, 2015) The document laid out the vision for improving the lives of people all over the world, established as 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These goals are the blueprints to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all developing countries, thriving humanity to its strengths and fighting the variety of the global challenges of community’s face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

The 11th goal particularly focused on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Focusing on the development of cities, taking an active interest in the governance and management of the city, reduces inequality.

Nowadays, over 1 billion people live in slums and this number keeps on rising. Cities occupy just 3% of the Earth's land, but if planned poorly, they consume a lot of energy and produce 70% of the carbon emissions. Many underdeveloped cities are also vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change, due to the overcrowding of people and poor building constructions.

Vast migration and its consequences are increasing in the whole world annually. More and more people are willing to relocate for the opportunities of a better life. The topic of how rural migrants become a part of huge cities as a group of the urban poor is extremely important, so that architects, socialists, politicians could prevent patterns that are happening now from repeating in the future. Even in the Western world, similar factors drive people to migrate from city to city, or from country to country: better-paid job opportunities, stable work, better living conditions or opportunities for better education. My thesis focuses on these migrants and provides a theory on how they could not only be accommodated in the constantly growing cities but become a part of it. I think that the framework of research and aspects I focused on, could be implemented in more countries globally, but with the important modifications for the climate and social lifestyle.

My overall urban goal is to create a future-proof, resilient neighbourhood for a community that would live in a megapolis of Addis Ababa. It should adapt to changing residents, encourage entrepreneurship possibilities, provide a safe environment to raise children, and set a strong fundament for a dignified life in the future for many people. The strong community is achieved through the social mix, good tenure solutions, and architectural qualities, that could be repeated in the developments of more neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia.

My project meets the targets, that United Nations drafted to by the 11th sustainable development goal: make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable: "By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities, Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning." (United Nations, 2015)

Suggesting the solutions that would change lives for millions is the main purpose of my profession. Opening the discussion of the quality of life and providing results, creates opportunities for inclusive architectural solutions. In this regard, my project opens a conversation of the more inclusive, future-focused housing policies and architectural designs, that would acknowledge the need for changes.