

Social Housing in Ethiopia

a barrier and carrier of culture



washing and drying clothes happens mostly outside, it is a communal activity

foil used to wrap Injera (Ethiopian bread) due to shortage washed to reuse



Figure 1: Lideta Condominium. Source: Author

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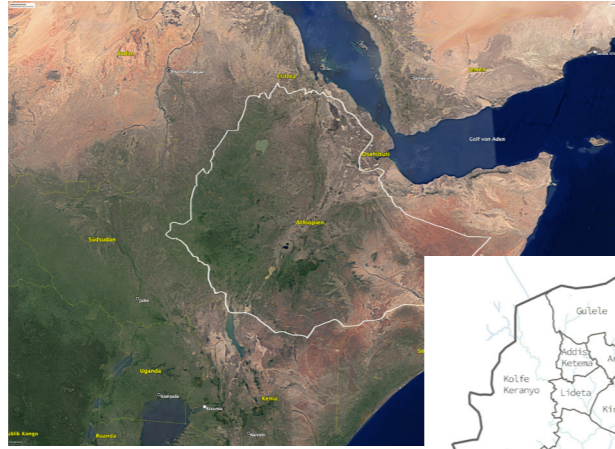


Figure 2: Map of Ethiopia
Source: Google Earth



Figure 3: Map of Addis Ababa
Source: Author

Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing economies in the world¹. A country that depends mainly on agriculture but due to the limitation of this resource, is experiencing a rapid migration from the countryside to the cities. However, not because the cities are pulling the population with employment opportunities but rather because rural poverty is pushing young people to the cities.²

The majority of the population lives in settlements referred to as *sefer*, whose establishment dates back to the foundation of Addis Ababa in 1886. These traditional settlements are made up of state-owned informal housing called kebele³ housing and are characterized by the fact that families and people until today live in close social, economic as well as spatial proximity.⁴ Thus, once established by the emperor to control the city, today the *sefer* function as micro cities within a larger

urban network, “not correspond[ing] to the City Administration plans of density, sanitation, safety or public accessibility.”⁵

In these incrementally grown settlements, living is not separated from working, rather they correlate with each other. However the increase in population and the fast migration from rural to urban areas has made the uncondensed way of building incrementally unsustainable. The settlements are of poor quality and 80% are referred to as slums⁶, which is heavily reducing the livelihood of the dwellers. These impairments have led to a massive increase in the demand for serviced, healthy and affordable housing. In order to enhance the living conditions within the *sefer* and turn Addis Ababa towards a market driven economy, various Master Plans were developed. The latter plan had the goal of expanding the road net-

work and renovating the old *sefer*. For this purpose, a large number of *sefers* were destroyed or divided, creating not only a spatial division, but also a social one.⁷ One of the projects as part of the recent Master Plan is the Grand Housing Programme (GHP), which the government implemented in order to create homes for a fast growing population. The construction processes created jobs, increased housing stock, its intrinsic value and raised the living standard.⁸ However it has reinforced the dependency on imported materials and imported knowledge, as well as failed to address the group it was intended to address in the first place - lower income families and instead benefited the middle class.⁹ But most importantly the static architecture of the apartment blocks of the GHP, the so-called Condominiums, created harsh boundaries between the exterior and interior, which posed a major problem for the Ethiopian dwellers. On the one hand the boundaries prevented the incremental growth of the living space according to the needs of the residents and on the other hand they largely impeded the interaction of the inhabitants with each other as well as their connection with the environment.¹⁰ These restrictions as well as a high economic pressure resulted in dwellers deciding to sublet their apartments to higher income families and move back to the settlements. Therefore the Condominium block became a way of generating income rather than a place to live.

Addis Ababa’s way of urbanization, which is characterized by naturally grown settlements, can be regarded as peripheral urbanization, which is a process that many cities in the glo-

bal south are undergoing. The most distinctive aspect that becomes of interest in this context is the form of agency within the urban environment. “Residents are agents of urbanization, not simply consumers of spaces developed and regulated by others.”¹¹ This becomes quite clear when taking a closer look at the way the *sefer* evolved over the years. The most common housing typology are the ‘small houses and sheds’, which are the most affordable possibilities for a shelter. Both types appear mostly together, as 70 % of the small houses are characterized by an extension. However, the sheds are not the only way of extending the living space, because in other cases the houses themselves are directly adjusted by the residents in order to gain more living space.¹² This way of dealing with the space showcases that housing in the *sefer* is not static but very individually adapted to the needs of the dwellers through a process of auto-construction. This way of letting the house grow incrementally, meaning the gradual step by step construction process, is deeply rooted into the Ethiopian building tradition, where the dwelling is not merely produced as a finished product, rather evolved over time depending on the owner’s needs and income.

The latter is an aspect of crucial importance within peripheral urbanization, which “does not involve spaces already made that can be consumed as finished products before they are even inhabited. Rather, it involves spaces that are never quite done, always being altered, expanded and elaborated upon.”¹³

¹ “Overview,” World Bank, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview#1>.

² Anteneh Tesfaye, “Places of Transit- The entries to Addis Ababa” in *Building Ethiopia*, ed. Cherenet and Sewnet (EiABC, 2012), 139.

³ Elias Yitbarek Alemayeh and Laura Stark *The Transformation of Addis Ababa* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 8.

⁴ Dirk Hebel and Elias Yitbarek, “Addis Ababa - Extracting Character: From Voids” in *Building Ethiopia*, ed. Cherenet and Sewnet (EiABC, 2012), 33.

⁵ Hebel and Yitbarek, “Addis Ababa - Extracting Character From Voids” in *Building Ethiopia*, ed. Cherenet and Sewnet (EiABC, 2012), 33.

⁶ UN-Habitat, “Ethiopia Urban Profile,” (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008), 23

⁷ Hebel and Yitbarek, “Addis Ababa - Extracting Character From Voids” in *Building Ethiopia*, ed. Cherenet and Sewnet (EiABC, 2012), 33.

⁸ Matthew French and Katherine Hegab, *Condominium Housing in Ethiopia: The Integrated Housing Development Programme* (United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2011), 7.

⁹ Dirk Hebel, “Building the Future,” in *Building Ethiopia*, ed. Cherenet and Sewnet (EiABC, 2012), 186.

¹⁰ Elias Yitbarek Alemayehu, Yonas Alemayehu Soressa, Imam Mahmoud Hassen and Laura Stark, “New Perspectives on Urban Transformation in Addis Ababa,” (Addis Ababa: Transformation of a Multifunction African City, 2018).

¹¹ Teresa PR. Caldeira, “Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 1 (2016): pp. 3-20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816658479>, 5.

¹² Felix Heisel, “Housing Typologies,” in *Building Ethiopia*, ed. Cherenet and Sewnet (EiABC, 2012), 267-268

¹³ Caldeira, “Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South,” 5.



Figure 3: Lideta Condominium. Source: Author

Problem Statement

Within the context of Addis Ababa's peripheral urbanization, *housing* should clearly be regarded as a *process*, rather than a *product*. Dwellers should be auto-constructioners who have agency over their living space, by being able to express their needs and culture depending on their resources and demands. However programs like the Grand Housing Project that gave birth to the Condominiums generate the opposite by “transform[ing] the house into another type of commodity: no longer a space to be auto-constructed and improved over time, but rather one, often limited and low quality, to be consumed as a finished product.”¹⁴

This development showcases clearly that even though the Condominium blocks address the tangible need of housing, they fail to address the intangible aspects of the living culture of the dwellers, by not being able to reproduce the “vital multifunctional utility of the domestic and public places in the inner-city kebele housing area.”¹⁵ Architecture within this environment needs to not only take into account socio-economic factors but also cultural factors.¹⁶ Since this development has a strong impact precisely on the most vulnerable group, women and the youth,¹⁷ it is of high importance to make their culture of everyday life tangible, in order to design future architecture that addresses their realities to a higher extent.

¹⁴ Caldeira, “Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South,” 513.

¹⁵ Alemayeh and Stark *The Transformation of Addis Ababa*, 8.

¹⁶ Alemayeh and Stark *The Transformation of Addis Ababa*, 16.

¹⁷ Alemayeh and Stark *The Transformation of Addis Ababa*, 213.

Research Questions

Within this context the research question is raised:

What **spatial needs** do Ethiopian dwellers have that **housing** in Ethiopia must fulfill in order to ensure the expression of their **culture of everyday life**?

How do Ethiopian dwellers relate to space ?

How are their practices influenced by space ?

How is it possible to map/trace/document culture ?

Where is architecture a barrier and where is it a carrier for culture ?

Glossary

Theoretical Framework

housing

Within this context I am using housing as a verb instead of the noun. According to Turner (1972) housing as a noun refers to a finished product, whereas housing as a verb refers to the housing activity which implies the essence of our lives, such as

*“the cultivation and preparation of food, the clothing of ourselves, the care of our bodies, the procreation and nurture of children, and the sheltering of these activities.”*¹⁸

*“[...]if housing is treated as a verbal entity, as a means to human ends, as an activity rather than as a manufactured and packaged product, decision-making power must, of necessity, remain in the hands of the users themselves.”*¹⁹

peripheral urbanization

According to Teresa Caldeira, a professor of Anthropology at the University of California, “peripheral urbanization does not simply refer to a spatial location in the city—its margins—but rather to a way of producing space that can be anywhere. What makes this process peripheral is not its physical location but rather the crucial role of residents in the production of space and how as a mode of urbanization it unfolds slowly, transversally in relation to official logics, and amidst political contestations.”²⁰

culture of every day

I am referring here to the daily routines of the residents, the processes that describe everyday life. On the one hand, this refers to the home and the processes within. Like cleaning, cooking, socialising as well as the activities that go beyond the home, such as going shopping, earning money and so on.

*“[W]e cannot understand how a society, or a particular part of it, works unless we understand what goes on in everyday life for different groups of people.”*²⁰

condominium

“Condominium housing is a name given to the form of housing tenure where each resident household owns their individual unit, but equally shares ownership and responsibility for the communal areas and facilities of the building, such as hallways, heating systems, and elevators. There is no individual ownership over plots of land. All of the land on a condominium site is owned by all homeowners.”²¹

autoconstruction

One aspect which is of high importance within the concept of peripheral urbanization is the special form of agency dwellers have, which Caldeira refers to as autoconstruction.

“Residents are agents of urbanization, not simply consumers of spaces developed and regulated by others. They build their houses and cities step-by-step according to the resources they are able to put together at each moment”

dweller

The noun dwell-er stems from the verb to dwell, which means to live in a place or in a particular way²². It is not necessarily tied to a classical house or building, it just implies that someone lives in a certain place which could be an informal structure as well as a building. The aspect which becomes of interest in this case is the second part of the definition, where to dwell is connected to “a particular way” of living, thereby making the dwell-er not only someone who lives in a place but also someone who is part of the process of living. In the case of the Ethiopians living in the traditional settlement I am using the word dwellers in order to highlight that they are able to actively change their living environment as it is not a fixed structure but very much versatile.

resident

The word resident derives from the verb to reside which means to “live, have your home, or stay in a place”²³. It becomes clear that a resident and a dweller on the first glance do the same, they live in a place, however the way I interpret it is that there is a slight difference. A resident is someone who is living in a certain place, however there is not a further agency over the place of living, it is more about the fact that the aspect of living is tied to a certain place. I am intending to use the word resident to refer to the people living in the condominiums to highlight that there is a restricted form of agency.

¹⁸Turner John F.C. and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build; Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 153.

¹⁹Turner John F.C. and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build; Dweller Control of the Housing Process*, 154.

²⁰David Inglis, *Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 3.

²¹Caldeira, “Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South,” 4.

²²UN-Habitat, “Condominium Housing in Ethiopia,” (United Nations Human Settlements Programme: Nairobi, 2010), 14

²³Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “dweller,” accessed November 14, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dweller>

²⁴Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “resident,” accessed November 14, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/resident>

²⁵Caldeira, “Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South,” 5.



Figure 4: Bieke Depoorter let others comment her pictures, opened a dialogue. Source: <https://biekedepoorter.com>

Methodology

Home making is multi - dimensional and a combination between spatial and social facets. For this reason architectural and ethnographic research methods are brought into dialogue.

Even though the architect sets the spatial boundaries, he/she can not control how the space is actually used. Therefore the lived space entails valuable information about the living culture that needs to be analyzed. It is intended to analyze these elements of every day that people use according to my observations and interviews. This analysis is combined and layered upon the architectural plan analysis in different projections in order to understand the objects and rituals of everyday life in relation to the built structure. This combination is supposed to highlight where architecture allows or prevents cultural activity and expression. In order to actually learn and understand the environment not only through the viewers perspective, but through the

perspective of the dwellers, the work is supplemented by comments and ideas of the dwellers in order to give space to the community and literally enter into a dialogue. Furthermore, the perspective of designers and professionals who are intensively involved with the processes in Addis Ababa is included. By layering these different perspectives onto each other, the intangible as well as tangible elements of the everyday are analyzed and expressed, giving a picture full of connections and contradictions.

These layers are actually going to be layered onto each other by collaging, sketching and drawing, that way the process becomes part of the research and invites viewers to become part of the conversion. The aim is to create a catalogue the object of everyday in order to preserve the culture and serve as a reference for future architectural projects.

Plan Analysis:
analysis of the layout of the housing block and a traditional compound



Figure 5: Gede Kresna documented food preparations in Bali. Source: *Revolusi dari Dapur (Revolution from the Kitchen)*.

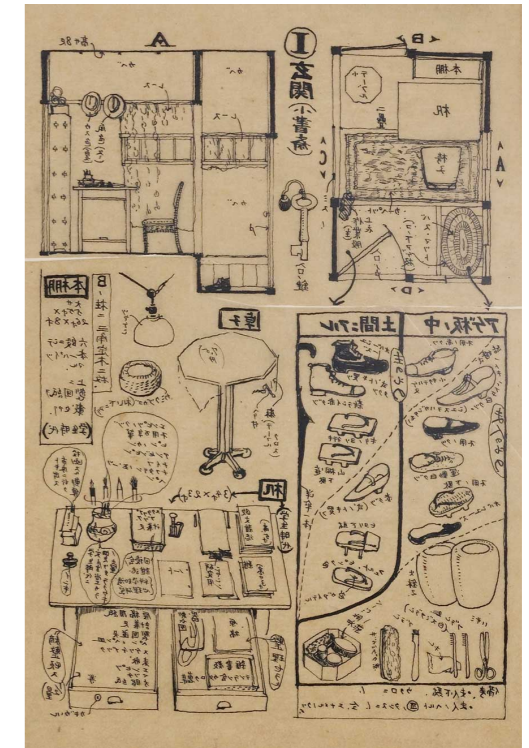


Figure 6: Wajiro Kon archive of Japanese culture. Source: <https://pen-online.com/culture/modernity-kon-wajiros-science-of-everyday-observation/>

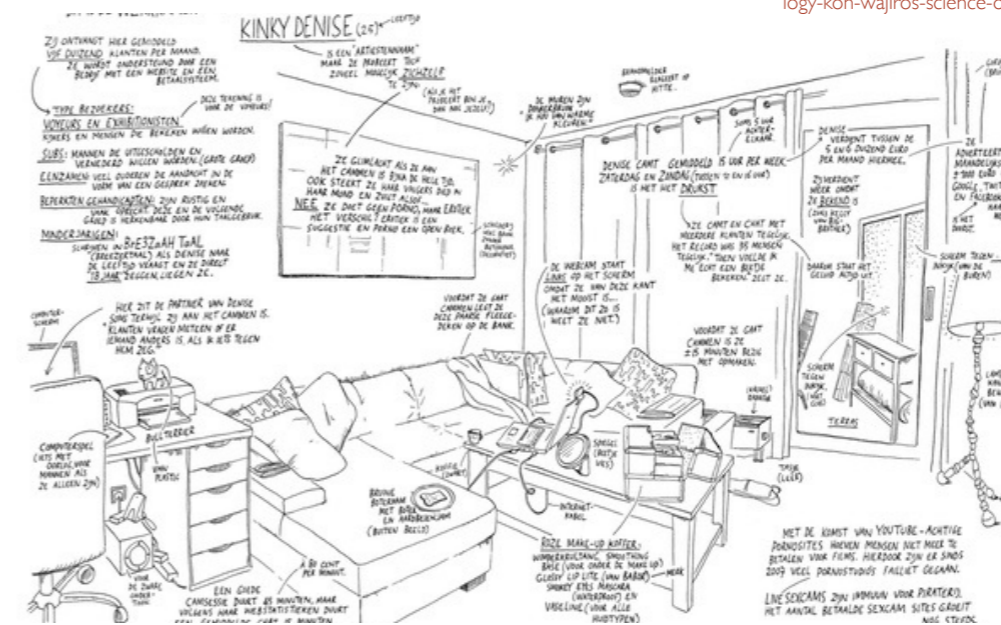
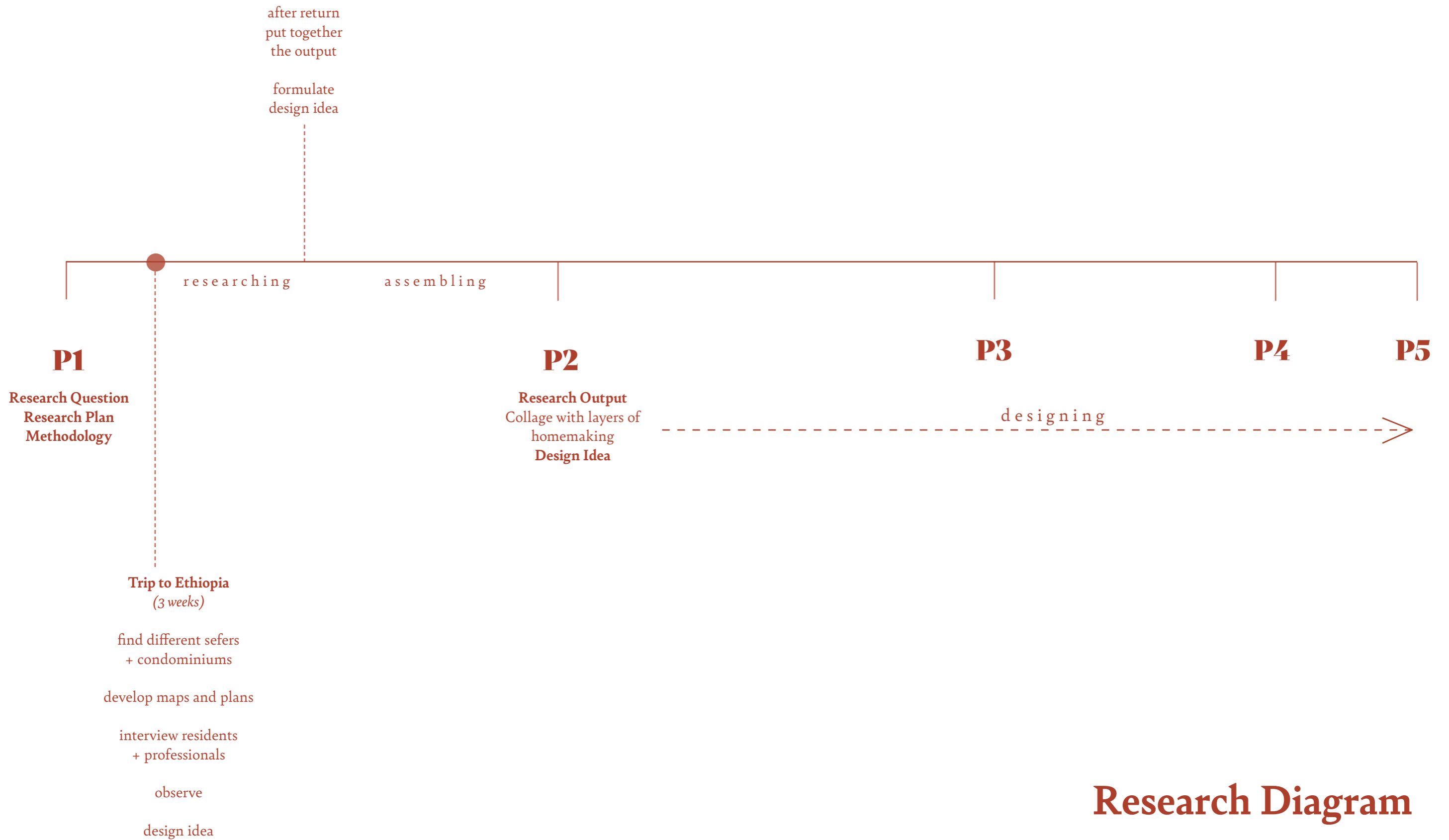


Figure 7: Jan Rothuizen created 'soft atlas' documenting the daily life in Amsterdam. Source: <https://janrothuizen.nl>

Interviews :
documentation of the rhythms of the dwellers and opinions of professionals



The Condominium

a stage of cultural expression

Despite the static appearance of the condominiums, residents nevertheless try on a very small scale to express their urge for autoconstruction, by finding ways to appropriate the place with objects and rituals of their everyday life. On closer observation it becomes visible that loggias are converted into extensions for the kitchen and the corridors are used for hanging laundry and communal coffee ceremonies.

Thus the condominium becomes a stage of cultural expression with the residents as agents and the objects within as their instruments.

Seen from this perspective it becomes clear that these elements of appropriation highlight the discrepancy between the intended use of the architecture and the actual way people use their environment. These non-fixed objects in the very much fixed built environment do not only entail valuable information about the culture of the dwellers but also about their everyday rituals, which correlate with the built and unbuilt environment. In contrast to the approach taken so far in architectural practice, these elements of the every day are not to be ignored but valued, analyzed and dissected in order to learn from them and develop architecture that gives them space.



Figure 8: Layering architecture, objects and observations Source:

Catalogue



1 clothes are hanging everywhere, in the corridors as well as on the property



6 coffee is sold between the blocks

7 gardening is also happening on the property



3 onions and other vegetables are planted on the balustrades

2 dried herbs are placed on the property due to better sunlight



4 during the end of fastin season animals are slaughtered



5 in the dark corridors seatings are found



8 utilities for making and storing ethiopian bread injera is found in the corridors



to be continued ...

Argument of Relevance

Even if housing solution like the condominium increases the standard of living and is accepted and appreciated by a certain portion of the population, large scale projects like this result in the loss of valuable urban history.

Moreover, it seems that the target group is very undefined and the needs of the society are simplified. Because like a majority of other modernist housing, “condominiums [...] are designed for a broad and loosely defined category of low-to middle-income users, without sufficient attention paid to the differences that exist within that group.”²⁶

It is visible that in the Global South a large amount of mass-produced housing solutions are influenced by a Western way of living. This type of architecture restricts people from living out their culture, implying that the Western way of life is a goal to strive for which eventually can lead to a loss of important culture. In order to counteract this development, it is of high importance to study and record the realities and practices of the residents' everyday life in order to develop architecture that directly responds to these needs.

“Planners and decision makers must also understand that the urban poor have a complex web of social networks and that their multi-faceted problems cannot be successfully addressed with a simplistic model. Planners must approach building as a process and abandon the mechanical, reductionist view that aims for an ideal.”²⁷

²⁶Alazar G. Ejigu, “7. Socio-Spatial Tensions and Interactions: An Ethnography of the Condominium Housing of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,” *Sustainable Cities*, 2012, pp. 97-112, <https://doi.org/10.3362/9781780440002.007>, 108.

²⁷Ejigu, “7. Socio-Spatial Tensions and Interactions: An Ethnography of the Condominium Housing of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,” 108.



Figure 9: Lideta Condominium loggias showing how the space is used as storage space. Source: Author

Expected results

Through this research, it is expected that the layering of the different outputs of architectural and ethnographic research results will create a picture that is no longer clear and simple to understand, but reflects the complexity of this topic.

It is also expected that the opinions about life in the condominium blocks and the settlements will be different depending on the interests and needs of the interviewees. Furthermore it is expected that the analysis of the daily practices of the residents will reveal where the condominium architecture needs to be adapted to fully address their needs.

Positionality

“Our class, ethnicity, gender and other forms of background can impact on how we talk about and evaluate others. Moreover, how academics represent other people also hinges on what uses they make of that knowledge in the university setting and how they want other academics to understand and respond to that knowledge—do I want to be seen as an ‘intellectual’ who knows more about ‘ordinary people’ (itself a loaded term) than they do themselves, or do I want to be regarded as a ‘people’s champion’, standing up for the ‘little man’ (and woman)? Both perspectives are ideologically loaded. We have therefore to be very attuned to how our own constructions of ‘everyday life’ and ‘culture’ reflect our own biases, likes and dislikes, and attitudes.”²⁸

²⁸ David Inglis, *Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 11.

german

communicator

student

observer

compassionate

sister

listener

collector

friend

student

curator

woman

participant

connector

architect

researcher

interviewer

ethiopian

fair

social

daughter

empathetic



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