

Forms of Residential Living. A Comparative Study of Collective and Individual Housing Preferences

There is only little research on how much living space an individual requires in order to feel comfortable, and how the consumption of space can be reduced by new and innovative forms of shared residential living. The “residential living forms” project addresses these issues by looking into different arrangements of communal dwellings in order to determine whether the standard layout of rooms is still up to date and how the demands for space can be reduced by re-defining these standards. To this end, nine residential accommodations situated in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Heidelberg were examined. Of these, all but one were student dormitories—for comparison purposes one retirement home was included in the sample.

As a first step, based on the ground plots for each residence, the ratio of privately used spaces against the communal spaces was portrayed graphically (space and rooms analysis). Then through observations and interviews the actual use residents made of the spaces was determined, documenting in great detail the domestic activities of individual users during the course of the day (appropriation analysis). This analysis was performed by graphic means as well as by an elaborated content analysis of the recorded interviews. A coding scheme for the classification of everyday activities and the types of communities had been devised for describing the different settings. Finally, it was attempted to draw general conclusions from the nine case studies in order to develop first guidelines for the construction of communal dwellings.

Relevant for communal dwellings are two determining factors: the physical functions defined through the architectural design of the building and the characteristics of the community that comes to occupy the building. The aim of the study was to determine the relative effects of these two types of influence by analysing the structure of the buildings and by conducting interviews with users in order to draw conclusions for constructing buildings for communal residences.

One of the results of the study is that these effects are “conditional”, i. e. they hold true only under specific conditions. In view of the very different forms of communal dwellings no direct but only an indirect effect of the architectural ramifications on communal living conditions is identifiable. The spacial structures and functions do indeed have conducive or inhibiting effects, as the analyses show, but not in a deterministic sense, but by providing a framework of possibilities in which communal dwelling can develop depending on other influencing variables.

Next to the spacial structure there are two components determining the form of communal dwellings, first the personal mix and number of residents and second the dwelling practices, i. e. the structural conditions which result from the specific character of the groups (social structure). As a third factor shaping the communal structure the management concept and how the community is governed play an important role (organisational structure). The success of communal dwelling therefore depends not only on appropriate spacial requirements and architectural design features but also on suitable social and organizational conditions. The recommendations of the guidelines that result from the project then are an attempt to make allowance for these effects and mutual interdependences.

Primary investigators:

Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Bernd Wegener

Survey Research & Evaluation GeSK mbH und Humboldt-Universität Berlin

Ziegelstr. 29

D-10117 Berlin

Email: wegener@hu-berlin.de

Dipl. Arch. ETH Hans Drexler M. Arch.

DGJ Architektur GmbH

Walter-Kolb-Straße 22

D-60594 Frankfurt am Main

Email: drexler@djg.eu