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# HOW EASY WE LOST COMMUNITY WITH THE LOSS OF COMMON AREA

Architecture is dynamically changing with economic, social, and cultural shifts<sup>1</sup>. Changes and the need for development in the field of housing are a direct indicator of changes in the wider social context. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, a large number of the population, for various reasons, were forced to change their place of residence and move to the cities.<sup>2</sup> In the past 100 years architecture is seen as a tool to minimize the economy and housing shortage crisis after both World wars and soon after become part of new futuristic concepts in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Architecture is a strong element in connecting people or separating them. Living concepts, especially in the second half of the 20th century, tended to adequately respond to the change of family over time through new ideas in the housing.<sup>4</sup>

The family ceases to be a strong institution with "public" functions, as before, it retains only "private" ones. An individual in a family acquires the

<sup>1</sup> M. Zivkovic, *Social experiments of the city and housing*, Book 47, Belgrade: Architectural Faculty, 1980 (in Serbian);

<sup>2</sup> O. Heckmann, F. Schneider, E. Zapel, *Floor Plan Manual Housing*, Basel: Birkhauser Verlag GmbH, 2018;

<sup>3</sup> T. Schneider & J. Till, *Flexible Housing*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 2007;

<sup>4</sup> B. Milenkovic, *Notes for one topic* in D. Marusic (eds.) *In Housing 2*, Belgrade: IAUS, 1979 (in Serbian);

right to his or her autonomous privacy, where, in the final sequence of that evolution, families are single-member households<sup>5</sup>. From the extended family with more generations under one roof to basic family (parents + children) and individuals<sup>6</sup>- the primary community directly depends on the neighbors, especially in the form of housing that had an expansion during the 20th century with housing shortage, the multi-family housing. Residents are more and more in the 20<sup>th</sup> century joining building communities and directly depend on one another. Activities they perform together, whereby group activities, are positioned in common areas of the building.

However, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, there is a significant degradation of common areas. The whole act of collectivity is reduced to necessity and the apartment becomes again a capsule for the user. In Serbia, at the end of the 20th century, common areas of the building are neglected and repurposed and users have lost part of their housing and the quality of the community. There is a need for common ground, a base space, where people in one building can build their community and relationships. It turns out that today's community in building gathers only when they have a common problem. An important question is how to stimulate the user to use and care about something other than his dwelling?

## Housing complexity

Compared to other architectural concepts, housing is much more complex not only for design, but also for anticipating the development of that space after it is brought to life. Housing seeks utilitarianism in its highest sense, intensification of useful area, spatial value and adaptability to different forms of use. These are all measures to increase usability that relate to

<sup>5</sup> F. Arijes, Z. Dibi, *History of Private life: Form WWI to today*, Belgrade: Clio, 2004 (in Serbian);

<sup>6</sup> O. Heckmann, F. Schneider, E. Zapel, *Floor Plan Manual Housing*, Basel: Birkhauser Verlag GmbH, 2018;

intervention in both spatial and temporal terms in housing.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes it seems that it can take away the creative moment of architects, who design a complex solution (especially in technical term), and not pure ambience. Yet the complexity of a system such as housing requires much more virtuosity of the architect in planning future life and potential conflicts. Architecture should not overshadow visitors and users as in some other types of space, it should be the basis for creating and living a good life. How can we be good people if we do not live in good architecture?

An individual house is complex in the organization of the functioning of one family living there (changes of that family over the years and change of the number of members), while multi-family housing is an additionally complex system. The number of families is multiplying, while each family develops and grows in its own way. Multi-family housing residents' needs are far more layered and overlapped. Basic layers we see in multi-family housing is a division of private to public space. Analyzing the building structure it can be divided into three levels in terms of access and privacy: private, semi-public and public space. In this regard, it is accompanied by a spatial division: the space of the dwelling, the common areas and the space outside the building (which again can be semi-public to some extent). As Perceps states building almost always belong to someone and the streets and outer space usually does not.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, these three levels are characterized not only by different approaches but also by different users and their quantity.

This paper does not address the complexity of the dwelling and its design, as well as the prediction of its use, which in some respects can be identified with a small individual house. Paper, focuses, in multi-family housing, on the connection of the dwelling with the building as something which is challenging to analyze. The common area is much more complex, and even insufficiently understood system and in what way it achieves connection through the building. The aim of this paper and the basic problem that

<sup>7</sup> M. Lojanica, 'Dwelling is used and is changing', In: D. Marusic (eds.) In *Housing 1*, Belgrade. IAUS, 1975;

<sup>8</sup> G. Perceps, *Species of Spaces*, London: Penguin Selected writings, 1974;

threatens multi-family areas, or has already happened, is their loss of common areas and reduction to only private spaces (except horizontal and vertical communications) within the building. It is important how and in what way common spaces enable functions that are not only communication and whether they provide opportunities for different use.<sup>9</sup>

## Community and common area

The complexity and importance of community in housing has been emphasized in different periods. When you look at the development of housing during the 20th century there is a need for collectivity, for example in USSR with their communes, and before that again the basic provision of living space for families and workers in particular. Sabsovich points out the value of common areas with Sobsovich who points the fundamental question facing the collective housing of the era of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: defining the center of gravity of the dwelling combine, is it represented by common spaces or by complex of individual rooms? There is no doubt the center of housing of any socialist dwelling at that time should be the collective, social spaces.<sup>10</sup> Therefore saving cost in construction should never be on common areas, but on keeping dwelling modest as possible. Role model project was the Narkomfin building, where it was clearly approached to the problem of common functions and their relocation from the space of the dwelling.<sup>11</sup> Architects decided to decentralize common functions into a separate object. The building then pretended to be a model in the further production of residential buildings with the same layout and separate common functions.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> O. Heckmann, F. Schneider, E. Zapel, *Floor Plan Manual Housing*, Basel: Birkhauser Verlag GmbH, 2018;

<sup>10</sup> L.M.. Sabsovich, 'Goroda budushchego i organizatsiia sotsialisticheskogo byta' In K. Teige In *The Minimum Dwelling*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002;

<sup>11</sup> B. Brankov, 'Common areas in development of multi-family housing', *Arhitektura i Urbanizam*, Vol. 49, pp. 32-39, 2019 (in Serbian);

<sup>12</sup> K. Teige In *The Minimum Dwelling*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002;

In the 1960s there is a new chance with the participation of users and the possibility for the community to influence the living space, as well as the design process. Community life is also a collective perception of quality and understanding of their needs in space.

When it comes to multi-family housing, residents have the opportunity to use the benefits of collective life. This is best achieved if there is a space that in some way unites the interests and needs of users from multiple dwellings. It can be a laundry rooms or to some more social area of buildings. Teige states that the "heart" of any housing complex that strives for collectivity in housing is its common space.<sup>13</sup> In that sense designed or not it can be expected that collectivity in multi-family housing is spontaneously or not initiated by the residents.

The problem for today's construction, in Serbia especially is that investors are not a State enterprises anymore, and the individual investors don't look at common spaces as something that can be sold as part of the price of the dwelling. On the one hand, it is not just a question of space, but the appropriation of space by users by some temporary activity that they carry out together. Their user activities can be from basic to complex: communication passage, bicycle space, visiting the basement, mowing the grass in the common yard, throwing garbage outside, feeding the neighboring cats, talking in the hallway. Some are often absent or missing: laundry (turned into apartments), cooking common meals, kindergarten for children in the building, bicycle shed (partially exists), functional basement, parking, terrace (demolished by the annex constructions usually) and much more. The possibilities of the space can less and less follow the needs and wishes of the users, which would stimulate the development of collective activities. Creating an atmosphere in the collective with certain activities, mutual cooperation and help from neighbors is something that builds a stronger community.

<sup>13</sup> K. Teige In *The Minimum Dwelling*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002;

## Common areas

The common spaces in a building are often not as diverse as might be desired in the design or as much as they could be. They are often utilitarian functions or recurrences of necessary corridor spaces (Fig. 1). On the other hand, the user is not interested in the hallway, he will not maintain or decorate it, but the space that is something more can make him notice it and use it, and where they can spend a part of their time in that space.

One example of this good use of space with achieving less corridor type space is seen in Block 29 in New Belgrade. The architects introduces common areas instead of an ordinary hallway on typical floor levels. The communication space between staircase and elevator shaft is not an ordinary corridor but more a common areas for two neighbor flats to use.<sup>14</sup> That space can be for personal things (bicycles, plants etc.). Example of people's needs to extend their space beyond the dwelling can be with plants outside the apartment, usually around the stairs. As some parts of the hallway are not overloaded with strict communication and as it is near the dwelling it can become a small oasis for users.

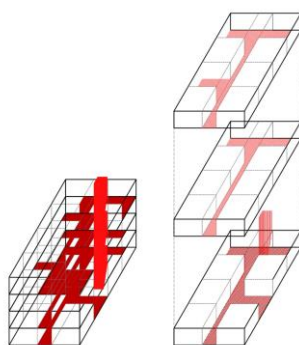


Figure 1 – Scheme of common areas in one building – string and spaces all connected and both stationary and fluid spaces (Source: Borjan Brankov)

<sup>14</sup> D. Marusic, Architectural competitions from 1965 to 1975 – Block 29, *Arhitektura Urbanizam*, Vol. 74-77, 1975;

## **Shift from we share common areas to just “I am my apartment”**

In the 1990s in Serbia due to a time of crisis, poverty, embargo and powerlessness there is an increase in illegal construction and extensions as results of the need for people to expand or "create" new housing for themselves. At some point, some residents seen this way as the only way to survive, you don't ask for a permit for the construction work, you just build. When someone does something like that once, then it is a “bad role model” for others later. In times of poverty, the collective was no longer important, but only individual. When everyone is well, all the money is everyone's, when it's hard, everyone looks only for their property. Individualism and separation within communities is strengthen and reflected in moments of personal crisis and lack of living space - the difference between people in possession and lack of one.

What absence of common area/ground changed in life? Space in the building is conditioned by the change in the life of the user and the reduction of the common space. But that reduction is becoming the cause of a change in the lives of users who grow up in a new individual space. Property for the user was, for a long time, identified with individual property, while common property was never seen as someone's property. That was reflected in their lack of maintenance and failure to see the benefits of these spaces for each user. Of course, not everyone will use that space to the same extent, and then not everyone wants to invest in it if only some use it more. Example of an elevator - requires service that requires finances, which users on the ground floors sometimes do not want to pay, because they don't see the benefit to themselves. How to stimulate equal investment? How to motivate residents to invest in everything although they do not use some activities. The motivation can create an active and resilient community that strives for greater collectivity.

Therefore, there are several things that are important: what is mine, what is someone else's, and what is common, and to figure out what is motivation for investing “If I invest then I use, if I use then I invest, if I am close I use that space, if I am not I don't use it”. Creating new activities, compensating for the need for socializing in the building and activities that move outside the dwelling, all this improves the living space.

## **Cases of transition – Disappearance of common area**

The paper show two examples of how we lost something common and someone got something private.

### **One man – one flat - the Postman adventure**

An example of a common area that has disappeared and become private is the case of common area for the residents' monthly assembly. The story goes as follows: the postman in the building notices the space for the tenants' assembly, which is probably used less often and poorly furnished, breaks in and brings in a sofa. After that, he moves in with his daughter and after the other building residents protest, he says that they have nowhere (or at least his daughter) to stay. This ends quietly and they continue to furnish the dwelling and in the end they manage to sell it as a property, as they in some period succeeded to get a signature of other residents that they willingly give them that common area. Now the owner who bought the apartment rents out the apartment to students mostly (Fig. 2, Fig. 3).<sup>15</sup>

Space of the “dwelling” is quite linear and off course non-natural height for an apartment. But human force to turn something into a dwelling is strange and at the end community allows it which gave the result that the postman got his new apartment and the community meetings today are held outside

<sup>15</sup> story written by the instruction of current residents of this space/dwelling, who wanted to stay anonymous;



the building as there is no common place inside (this is no lonely case in Serbia).



Figure 2 – Dwelling originated from the common area of the building, shown: living room (left), kitchen and dining part (right), location: Nis, Serbia (Source: Borjan Brankov)

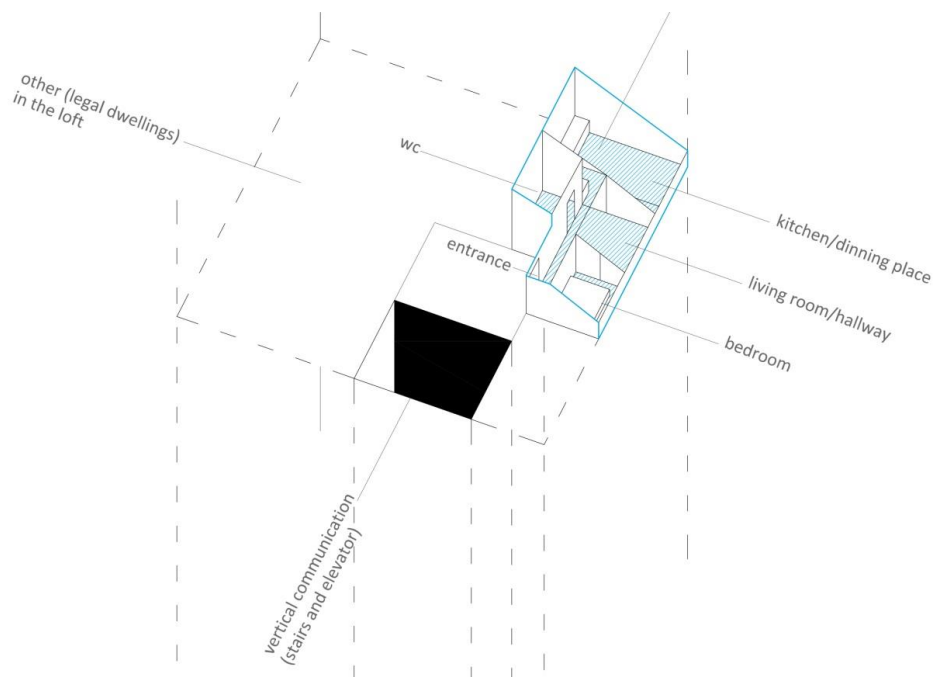


Figure 3 – Dwelling originated from the common area of the building, location: Nis, Serbia (Source: Borjan Brankov)

### **One roof – one building construction - Terrace disappearance**

The building in Pancevo, Serbia, was planned to be upgraded at one point. on the existing 4 floors (Fig. 4), of which the last is a withdrawn floor with a roof terrace and a drying room. Due to the upgrade, the terrace (accessible to all tenants) was abolished, as well as the drying room (Fig. 5). Common functions have been abolished completely. The result is this: more tenants in the building and the abolition of functions for existing tenants. The basement has parts belongs to every old apartment, while new apartments do not get part of the basement because of lack of new space. This means that not only the existing tenants are denied of their common spaces, but also the future ones, which leads to an uneven distribution of space. By demolishing a part of the common area in the building, joint activities are denied, and with unconditional and often smaller apartments, the new tenants are put in a worse position than the current ones, and it can be seen that the common spaces mean more because their apartments are smaller. For example, the garden (only common area) of the building lately is more used by residents from higher (new) floors than those on lower floors.



Figure 4 – Current state of the building with added floors, location: Pancevo, Serbia (Source: Borjan Brankov)

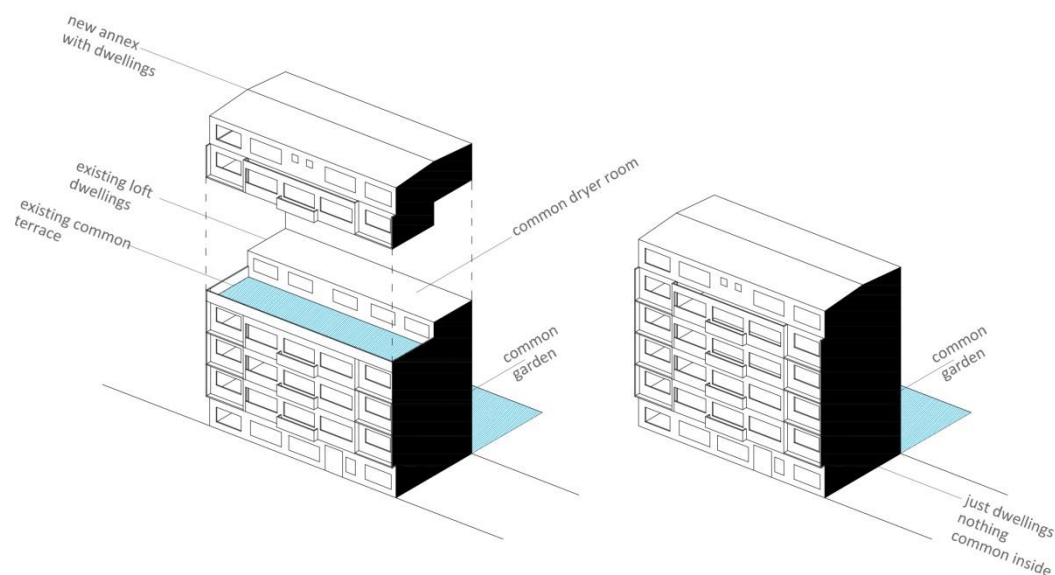


Figure 5 – Adding annex to the existing building and thus removing the common terrace, location: Pancevo, Serbia (Source: Borjan Brankov)

## Can common adapt to change and individual force

Each space of a building has a greater or lesser use at some point and is therefore the target of assessing whether it really serves its purpose. However, common areas are of great importance not only in compensating for the space of the apartment, but also for the social activities of the tenants. When you look at the situation during the crisis of 2020, where many people have been in their buildings and homes for a long time, the quality of these spaces became relevant. In Serbia at that time, everyone who had a house with a yard was happier than the people who lived in the apartments, not because the apartments were unconditional, but because they were deprived of the functions that every residential building should have. However in Serbia, there are settlements that resist the changes of individuals and investors, such as Cerak Vinogradi in Belgrade, because

the author-architect is a particularly hardworking and dedicated person in preserving the space of the building and because the tenants' community recognized the importance of the common spaces where they live and where their children can play and grow up.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> B. Brankov, Common areas in multi-family housing in Serbia: case study of Cerak Vinogradi, Belgrade, FACING POST-SOCIALIST URBAN HERITAGE – Proceedings of the 3rd international doctoral-postdoctoral conference, Faculty of Architecture, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), pp. 42–45, 2019;