A Versatile Approach to Social Housing
The Addis 5000 Project

Access to adequate shelter and basic sanitary installations is a fundamental human right enshrined in international laws. A variety of programs are running worldwide to meet the demand, many under the umbrella of social housing initiatives, which are addressed to low-income inhabitants of urbanized areas. The living units within this social housing pool are usually owned and managed by the state, non-profit organizations or a combination of both, and provided at subsidized costs in order to provide affordable housing.
Fig. 01  Final Review of Addis 5000, Fall Semester 2014
Next to poverty reduction, social housing is considered as one of the key remedies to the housing backlog worldwide. In today’s increasingly global and interconnected world, over half of the world’s population (54 per cent) lives in urban areas (United Nations 2014). As the Worldwatch Institute concludes, however, “most of the world’s cities […] impose a huge burden on the environment and fail to provide decent living conditions for hundreds of millions of people. Some 1 billion urbanites lack adequate shelter, living without easy access to clean water, toilets, or electricity” (Worldwatch Institute 2013). A trend that will continue according to recent estimates by UN Habitat: By 2030, about 3 billion people, or about 40 per cent of the world’s population, will need proper housing and access to basic infrastructure and services such as water and sanitation systems. This translates into the need to complete 96,150 housing units per day with serviced and documented land from now until 2030 (UN-Habitat 2014).

The history of social housing dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, when the Industrial Revolution changed European cities dramatically. Within a relatively short time span, millions of workers moved with their families from the countryside to urbanized areas, looking for employment. Thousands were forced to live in informal or even illegal squatter settlements. The overpopulated dwellings, without running water or access to sanitary infrastructure, unmanaged and run down, were often cause for illnesses, disabilities, premature deaths and a significantly raise in crime rates.

As a response, several models of social help were developed, even though access was restricted. In Germany for example, social programs mostly addressed workers in higher positions, with capital to invest, while the poor remained trapped in low-cost, sub-standard housing. The spatial segregation of social groups was clearly structured by the economic realities, reflected in income and occupation that controlled access to different types of housing.

The next ‘real’ social housing boom took place in most European regions after the Second World War. Out of 10.6 million homes in Western Germany, 2.3 million (equivalent to 21 per cent) were completely destroyed and further 2.3 million severely damaged. Within the available apartments, an additional 10 million refugees and repatriates required shelter. By 1955, the density inside German apartments had almost doubled from 3.6 to 6 people per unit. Soon after, with the help of reinstated Weimar Republic regulations (housing distribution by the authorities, fixed maximum rent, considerably high protection against eviction), the Federal Republic of Germany started distribution of existing living units and the creation of new ones, leading to a massive social housing program. Next to the provision of shelter, planners saw in these programs additionally the chance to “boost the economy and fight unemployment” (MSB Spartakus 1981). Within 40 years, Western Germany supplied 19 million living units, out of which 7.5 million were social houses for new residents, an investment of 37 billion German Mark. Importantly however, it needs to be noted that one of the key elements of the program was the activation of private developers and their support through subsidies for this building program. Clearly, the German state alone would have not been able to achieve such high numbers (‘Wohnungspolitik | bpb’ 2015).
Addis 5000, an alternative pathway

The rapid population growth and mass migration towards the urbanized areas caused a major housing shortage in a big number of African cities. Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia is no exception in this. In the early 2000s a series of studies in the housing sector, conducted in accordance with the Addis Ababa’s master plan revision, assigned almost 60 per cent of the living units within the city center for major upgrading or total replacement. According to the calculations in 2000 the housing backlog in the capital reached 233 thousand units and foreseen additional 223 thousand by the end of 2010 (ORAAMP 2002). The country soon realized its need for a social housing program in big scale. As a result, collaboration between the Ethiopian Government and the development agency ‘German Technical Cooperation’ (GTZ) initiated a large-scale housing scheme for the capital under the name of ‘Addis Ababa Grand Housing Program’. The goal of this doing was to “improve housing affordability via introducing appropriate housing standards that consider local resource capacities and requirements” as stated in the ‘Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programs’ statement (FDRE and MoFED 2002).

In the mean time, an updated research verified the numbers and indicated an even bigger existing housing backlog - reaching 300 thousand units or additional 60 thousand new flats per year (GTZ and MWUD 2005). After a few years of intensive development and implementation, the Ethiopian Government realized the need for additional interventions to seal this ever-growing gap.
In 2014 the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC) in collaboration with the Assistant Professorship of Architecture and Construction Dirk E. Hebel was asked by the Addis Ababa City Administration to design 5'000 social housing units in the center of Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa. The study was executed as a design studio at EiABC as well as at ETH Zürich. The target groups for the new housing-typologies were no- and low-income families, which need to be displaced for a certain amount of time due to the on-going redevelopment strategies. These new residential proposals were therefore planned to be constructed within the inner-city context on pre-defined sites, selected by the city administration. It was the declared aim, to provide new three to four stories housing typologies not more than 500 meters away from people’s original home, in order to maintain their social, economical and also educational network.

Fig. 05  The analysis of building proportions, appropriateness of construction techniques as well as local building materials were important factors in the cost calculations

Fig. 06  The setbacks in a façade allow for semi-private activities in front of the house
The typologies were conceived by the city administration to be structures for temporary use. They had to take the existing social and cultural conditions into consideration and, where possible, utilize local building materials. Additionally, they had to remain within a given budget set by the city administration. Next to important urban questions addressing high densities and the construction of socially functional neighborhoods, the students concentrated on establishing a specific type of architectural and spatial configuration, that tried to reflect the unique cultural, social, economic, and also climatic conditions in Addis Ababa and its diverse population. Here, ideas of spatial configurations addressing the need for new urban manufacturing processes and trade models were discussed. But also ideas of empowering the tenants to subdivide their own apartments on their own desire were taken into consideration, just to highlight some of the features being addressed.

Sustainable affordable housing, in this regard, may be considered as extension of the ‘adequate shelter for all’ strategy defined within the UN-Habitat Agenda: Adequate shelter requires more than a roof over one’s head. It also addresses adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; security of tenure; structural stability and reliability; adequate lighting, heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure, such as water supply, sanitation and waste-management facilities; suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities: all of which should be available at an affordable cost (UN Habitat, Housing and slum upgrading).

The variety of student projects presented at the end of the semester to representatives of the Addis Ababa City administration proofed this holistic approach on housing successfully as an alternative in the search for ideas to close the gap.
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Marta H. Wisniewska

Fig. 13 Excerpts from the Master Thesis of Aknaw Yohannes, EiABC 2014

1. Washing cloths and privacy reason which allows them to fence the corridor. Most of the time cooking outside and stare outside.

2. People's response to the design. Converting kitchen to bedroom, balcony to bathroom, expansion of living room. Bedroom expansion and sleeping in addition of traditional kitchen.

3. Duplication for two units (8 families and 4 workshop space at the ground floor). Dunlication for six units (24 families and 6 workshop space at the ground floor).

4. Optimize for toilet space and entrance space. Sleeping space and 4 workshop space at the ground floor.

5. Design level: Appropriateness, interaction and high intelligibility. High Intelligent activities extend a small active space for the site.

6. Robust circulation and active way of micro front. Availability of micro front and active space.

7. Extravagant use of space at the entrance. Limited users seen in the entrance.

8. Stair is at the center while the washing tab/sink is at the entrance. Door space.

9. EGA sheet roof covering and textile ceiling for insulation.

10. Door, light curtain at the gate and traditional cooking at the corridor with additional partitions for different units.

11. Door, light curtain at the gate and traditional cooking at the corridor with additional partitions for different units.
References


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