Clues for Architectural Education: Flexibility in Traditional and Modern Turkish House

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Abstract: Traditional Turkish house which characterized with its original shape of the room, plan layout, construction and roof forms has two main spaces as “sofa” (common space) and the “room” differentiate it from the houses in different geographies. The flexibility of the room in traditional Turkish house is characterized with its fixed-in-furniture, which supplies all necessities of a person in a house. This paper will discuss the similarities and differences in use of space between traditional Turkish houses and today’s flats in apartments. The comprehensions will be made through the field works on traditional houses and with the projects of architecture students in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. The concept of the students’ projects is redesigning their own houses. Since the students come from different regions of Turkey, their houses have both similar and different spatial characteristics. Whether the cultural identity of the user plays a role in use of living space will be discussed. The aim of this study is to put the relation between the past and today’s use of interior spaces of Turkish houses.

Key words: Traditional Turkish house, architectural education, interior space, flexibility.

1. Introduction

Dwelling is not the result of the building, it builds that which buildings produces into presence. It is produced, made to appear, not determined by building [1].

“Can he find clues from traditional lifestyle in contemporary interiors depending on habitations?”; “Are there any similarities between the interiors of the traditional and contemporary Turkish houses?”; “Do architecture students inspire from traditional Turkish houses in terms of use of space and spatial perception while designing contemporary houses?”. This paper aims to discuss these questions on exemplified house projects of architecture students in first year of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University.

Perception and awareness as most important issues in architectural education, help to activate his role in everyday life spaces. As Lefebvre conceives, although the division which keeps the various types a space

away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space is obviously risen, “in actuality each of these two kinds of space involves the other” [2]. The “house”, as an effective instrument for an architecture student who experiences his/her built environment from a different point of view during his/her education, accepted as a dominant instrument for everyday-life, carries much more meanings for a student owning different kind of identities. Thus, studying a house/dwelling unit in architectural education is not incidentally, because that its potentials are accepted as a necessary instrument for practicing and experiencing the concept of a space for an architectural student. In this context, looking the historical development of a house in its cultural environment is a must for an academician who researches on teaching methods in terms of space. As Heidegger conceives “Dwelling and building are related as end and means.”

From an overview of “Traditional Turkish House” in history, he first met the term in texts of 1920’s in the process of building the Turkish identity with the establishment of the republic. “National Architecture

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Seminar” in 1940’s with Sedad Hakki Eldem, and thesis on this subject in following years has established the term “Turkish house”. During 1960’s, the term had been widely used and accepted without any conflicts [3]. Sedad Hakki Eldem [4], a prior Turkish architect, has described the houses in Anatolia from 15th to 16th century, which have spatial characteristics form a unique identity. Later, Dogan Kuban [4] has described the Turkish house depending on the existence and placement of common space “sofa” which is typical for these houses. The traditional lifestyle of Turks grounded on the times when they were nomadic in central Asia. The perception of space is free from “place” as they were nomadic. The “house” is where they constructed the tents, the textile on the ground is a thin separation from earth just like the tent above a light separation from the sky. In all literature on Turkish house, it is accepted that the last (top) floor is the main floor of the building, which has a typical plan. Dogan Kuban [4] has described the main elements of the scheme as the room, the “eyvan” and the “hayat”.

The paper focuses on the themes of traditional Turkish house, elementary acknowledges are still seen or disappear in contemporary housing unit in the same geography by time. The methodology of the paper is evaluating the examples of the course—building and design theory in architectural education in MSFAU.

2. Methodology and Materials

2.1 Methodology

In order to make a comprehension about the change in use of space, the activities was grouped in the house, rather than comparing the rooms, as the hierarchy of spaces does not show differences according to functions in traditional Turkish house. In “Turkish house”, storing, eating, bathing, sleeping, sitting and working activities can take place in any of the rooms, since each room is designed to correspond to every activity. There is no mobile furniture in traditional Turkish house as the fixed in furniture meets all the

activities and needs in the room. The interior space, the surfaces are designed together with fixed in furniture during the construction of the house.

The exemplified house projects are selected from first year architecture students in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Building design and methodology is an obligatory course in MSFAU which student starts with drawing his/her own house and goes on by revaluating and reorganizing the spaces of the house. Both the existing and the last phase of the house projects are put and examined in order to discuss the use of space in traditional and contemporary Turkish houses.

2.2 Interior of Traditional Turkish House

Some academicians claimed that the interior of traditional Turkish house has the signs of nomadic culture, as the Turks do all the activities on the floor, sleeping, eating, sitting and working. The interior of room has the same “sense of space” with the interior of the tents. The room is the space that isolated at the most from the exterior world with a thin separation from the sky and ground. The house has a very clear and repetitive form and elements that produce this form [5].

The spatial characteristics of these houses are their plan types, construction methods and spatial organization. The plan typology of these houses is based on the existence and placement of the “sofa”, a common space, which is typical for traditional Turkish house. The rooms are separated with closets at the construction of the house. The room has two main spaces, the main part is “seki” (threshold)—a levelled sitting space, which is emphasized with a high wooden ceiling.

At the entrance of the room, a wooden closet covers the whole wall, designed together with the door. There is no drawer in closet but the height of the shelves is designed considering the size of the objects that will be put on them [6]. The mattresses are rolled up and put in the closet, while the hats are put on the open

shelves. The shoes are taken off before stepping the main space of the room, which is levelled from the floor. Sometimes, shoes are taken off and put in a special space called “pabucluk” before ascending the stairs or “seki”.

2.3 Materials: Studying the “House” in Architectural Education

The exemplified projects are from the 1st semester course, showing the steps of designing a living space, starting from designing a family house by considering the environmental values and proposing a system for social housing. The student reevaluates the quality of living space in his/her existing dwelling, conceives the awareness of the cultural differences and questions the built environment and social structure that he lives in.

“Building Design and Methodology” is a compulsory course at the first semester for architecture students. The exemplified projects show the steps of designing a family house, starting from the house the student lives in. The student starts to work on furnishing the kitchen and bathroom in the scale of 1/20. After a while, she/he searches new variations of furnishing his/her own house. Six different students’ projects will be analysed with in this paper in order to put the similarities and

differences among traditional Turkish houses. Starting from drawing the house he lives in, the student develops the house project, considering the new lifestyle and ongoing traditions.

2.3.1 Example 1: Burcu Kara’s Project: A Duplex Unit

Zeynep Burcu Kara lives in a duplex apartment, which has a private entrance from the street. The flat has a compact planning with an efficient circulation. The main/dominant architectural element of the house is the stairs (Fig. 1a). In traditional Turkish house, the stairs takes place in sofa space, enriches the spatial quality while providing the unity of the general planning. In this case, despite the unity of the general furnishing, the stairs needed to be reorganized within the totality of the space. The circulation is revaluated in the planning as the most important issue in this house character.

At the ground floor, the stairs is considered as an element of the unity of the spatial organization. Two variations are developed for the first floor: the first one proposes to enlarge the room spaces while the other one offers a common room which is similar with the “sofa” concept in traditional Turkish house (Fig. 1b).

2.3.2 Example 2: Aslıhan Dokmeci’s Project

The “corridor” space is one of the common elements in contemporary apartment flats which does

Fig. 1 (a) The existing plan, starting point and (b) the final proposal, planning a “sofa” space.

not exist in traditional Turkish houses. Aslihan Dokmeci's house is another exemplified student's project—a rectangular shaped flat with corridors. She considered the corridors as “lost” spaces, developed ideas for them. At the end, instead of being just circulation elements in the flat, all the corridors are revaluated and considered as a part of the spatial unity. Similarly, the walls in the flat are rethought again and used as not only separation units that create corridors but as storage elements for rooms (Figs. 2a and 2b).

2.3.3 Example 3: Cagla Coban's Project

In the case of Cagla Coban's flat, the main point was to add a bathroom for masters' bedroom (Fig. 3a). In most Turkish traditional house, the part of the main

room called “gusulhane” which is a kind of space that widened from a cupboard and used for bath. As the usual “bathroom” is hamam for Turkish traditional cities, the general tendency in this geography is not designing a “bathroom” for all residents. On the contrary, for a contemporary apartment, a separate bathroom is an important element for all the residents. Beside this, some special bathrooms can be designed in the rooms as well. But the size of these baths is very different from “gusulhane”. With the conversion of the minimal effect of “gusulhane”, parent's room's bathroom is a comfortable one.

In Cagla's flat, she studied on a concept of organizing a “nish” for the bathroom in parents' room

Fig. 2 (a) The existing plan and (b) the final proposal.

Fig. 3 (a) The existing plan and (b) the final proposal.

So, the hierarchy between the general bathroom and parent's bathroom can be easily observed by comparing their area (Fig. 3b).

2.3.4 Example 4: Irfan Halilgac's Project

Irfan Halilgac lives in an apartment with a difficult access from the public space (Fig. 4a). Despite the unity of the planning, the house has a complex circulation. Beside this, with a conversion of the general house planning, the bedrooms and the living room have switched in the plan. From the entrance, one first meets a bedroom and for accessing the living space, more bedrooms should be passed. There are two bathrooms for such a small flat which creates a corridor space again. Two concepts—totality/unity of the space and existence of a common space “sofa”, were starting points to reorganize the house. Creating a unique living space without separating the circulation area was the challenge for this project (Fig. 4b).

2.3.5 Example 5: Rustem Olijev's Project

Rustem Olijev studied on a flat with two living rooms. One of them is related with kitchen directly, while the other is correlated with rooms and holes indirectly. This living room is larger and has a dining space in it, which refers the “main room” in traditional

Turkish house. The separation of living spaces for men and women comes from the sexist approaches and has Islamic cultural codes. In contemporary flats, this differentiation appears as a “larger and better decorated” space/“living room” for the guests while the family members spend most of their time in the smaller and modest “family room”. The separation of these two living spaces was the main problem for the students' project. The smaller living room converted into a balcony within the redesigning process (Figs. 5a and 5b).

3. Results and Discussion

Some clues from the interior of traditional Turkish house that give inspiration in house planning in architectural education in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University can be grouped in terms of use of space.

Living and Dining spaces: Although the traditional Turkish houses have enough rooms for different activities, none of them is reserved only for “dining” activity. The families eat together, sitting on the floor, on carpets and have a tablecloth on their knees. So, there is no furniture, the table is the big circle shaped tray, while, “sini” and the carpet is the “chair”. The dining can take in any of the rooms, as the house

Fig. 4 (a) The existing plan and (b) the final proposal, studying the accessibility.

Fig. 5 (a) The existing plan and (b) the final proposal; the main room.

shelters more than one single family, but also the families of the sons, brides and grandchildren together.

“Dining” activity takes place whether in the kitchen or in the living room is exemplified in students’ projects. None of the students proposed a room only for “dining” activity in his/her new house project. This attitude cannot be explained only with traditional lifestyle, but also with the necessity of using minimum space in apartment flat. In some projects, the students propose space for “dining” in the kitchen, while some put the dining activity in the living room. The borders of dining and living space are not sharp/strict in the exemplified projects. Although a breakfast corner takes place in the kitchen in some of the students’ projects, there is always a table for dining in the living room. The dining activity for the family can be in the kitchen but the guests for dinner should be always entertained in the living room. Having guests for dinner in the kitchen, in a service space, is still not an adopted attitude in students’ projects.

The exemplified students’ projects are not detached houses but apartment flats, which are designed usually for middle-class families. The dimensions of dining space are close to the dimensions of living space and both spaces share the same place at the exemplified flats.

Sofa, common space: The concept of “sofa” does

not take place in modern apartment flats. None of the students lives in a flat with sofa. On the other hand, some of them find it necessary to design a special space for gathering the family together. While some of them proposed a “family room” for this necessity. The student living in a duplex flat has the opportunity to design a “sofa” as the duplex house has enough space.

“Corridor” circulation space: The “corridor”—a narrow space for circulation only, does not exist in traditional Turkish house plans. A similar attitude in house planning at the first year of architectural education in MSFAU is not to form “corridor” spaces in apartment flats.

Bathing spaces: In the existing house projects, there is a bathroom for bathing and also there is a toilet for the guests. In new projects, the toilet space is transformed as a secondary bathroom or removed totally. Even though, the flat is designed for a nuclear family where two bathrooms are proposed that consider the privacy of bathing for each family member. This attitude reminds the “gusulhane”—washing unit solution in Turkish house. From an overview of the exemplified students’ projects, a private bathroom for masters’ bedroom is a necessity if the flat has enough space. The “alaturca” toilet does not take place in any of the proposed flats. The new bathroom has closet and a bath tube and washbasin at the same space.

4. Conclusions

The flexibility, as an important concept in contemporary housing, conceives the “user” a dominant figure in architectural production. This topic is emphasized in architectural education in MSFAU by using some references within Turkish housing planning. To develop perception and awareness in architectural education, it is obviously a must to choose the housing projects as a major role in practises of everyday life.

The habitations change by time and in a global world, consumption attitudes determine the lifestyles of world citizens. Two breaking points can be easily observed in Turkish housing culture. One of them is the term of 1960's which develops according to the commercial law that accepted on 1934. It enables the widespread of cooperative systems in production of housing [7]. The second one realized by 1980's which Tekeli summarizes it as the reallocation of cash in space, the reallocation of demography in space and the network conditions [8]. Still, many people are in need/search for the feeling of belonging at the houses they live in.

The spatial qualities of traditional Turkish house

discussed in this paper maybe an inspiration for new housing projects. He can find clues of traditional houses in today's apartment flats in terms of use and perception of space. The architecture students are encouraged to design new projects, considering the ongoing habitations and revaluating the traditional housing for a contemporary architecture.

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