



DA Dipartimento
Architettura
Ferrara

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING,
PLANNING, AND RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE
TERRITORY

TOWARDS EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVES

OCTOBER 16th-17th, 2025

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2nd International Conference on Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory

Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Theme and Rationale

This conference returned for the second time within the Albanian and Mediterranean academic context, aiming to build a tradition of collaboration centered on scientific research and academia. Following the success of the first edition held on October 13th-14th, 2023, where proceedings were published in the Book of Proceedings, Albanica journal, and various international academic platforms, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania relaunched this important event. The 2025 edition focused on housing, urban planning, and resilient territorial development, offering a platform for researchers, policymakers, and experts from the region and beyond.

Albania and the Western Balkans have faced major transformations in urbanization, spatial planning, and environmental management. Demographic changes, economic pressures, and environmental challenges created a need for new strategies in architecture, planning, and governance. This conference brought together diverse voices to explore these themes and promote resilient and sustainable development.

Key topics included architecture and the city, with emphasis on urban form, housing typologies, and the role of cultural heritage in modern urban design; urban mobility, addressing traffic challenges, public transport, and the use of technologies like GIS and AI in planning; and new housing models, focusing on affordability, energy efficiency, and innovative materials.

Discussions also covered demography and economy, exploring territorial governance, smart cities, social enterprises, and digital technologies such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse in urban management. Finally, the urban and natural environment was addressed through topics like pollution, adaptive planning, and nature-based solutions for climate resilience.

Through this conference, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania aimed to foster a broad interdisciplinary debate on these pressing issues, combining academic and practical perspectives to offer concrete recommendations for future urban and territorial development policies and projects.

Organizers' Announcement

The International Scientific Conference on Housing, Urban Planning, and Resilient Territorial Development: Toward Euro-Mediterranean Approaches was held on October 16th-17th, 2025, in Tirana, Albania. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the Academy of Sciences of Albania and supported by national and international partners, including the University of Ferrara and Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development, the event brought together researchers, academics, policymakers, and professionals to address key challenges in urban development, with a focus on resilience and sustainability in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The first day of the conference took place at the Academy of Sciences, while the second day was hosted at POLIS University.

The conference explored five main themes:

- I. Architecture and the City, which investigated the typological and morphological dimensions of urban form, the evolution of collective and individual housing types, the relationship between architectural design and urban identity, and the role of historical and cultural heritage in shaping contemporary cities;
- II. Urban Mobility and Resilient Cities, which addressed traffic congestion, infrastructure challenges, and public transportation, while also promoting the redesign of public spaces – such as streets, squares, and pedestrian zones – to improve accessibility and mobility; it also explored the integration of digital technologies like GIS, AI, and simulation tools to enhance planning, automation, and infrastructure management;
- III. New Housing Models, which examined innovative approaches to affordable and social housing in response to demographic shifts and technological change, along with energy efficiency strategies, passive energy systems, and the application of new sustainable materials and construction technologies;
- IV. Demography and Economy, which focused on macro-regional and national dynamics impacting territorial development, including urban governance, disaster risk reduction, and the rise of smart and inclusive cities; it also explored how emerging technologies – such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse – along with social enterprises and circular economy practices, could foster more equitable and adaptive urban systems; and
- V. Urban and Natural Environment, which analyzed environmental degradation in urban settings, including air, water, and soil pollution, and promoted nature-based solutions, ecosystem-based planning, and adaptive strategies to enhance environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

The conference was conducted in English and Albanian (with self-translated texts where applicable) and was free of charge, with all registration fees fully covered by POLIS University in support of open academic exchange. Key deadlines included abstract submission by June 15th, acceptance notification by June 30th, first draft of papers by September 15th, and final submissions by October 31st.

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III. New Housing Models and Innovative Architectural-Urban Forms to Adapt to Demographic, Technological and Development Trends/Challenges

Housing affordability / Housing and land markets / Social housing / Housing policies and challenges.

Passive energy strategies / Energy efficiency in buildings / Heating and cooling loads / Indoor and natural ventilation / Natural lighting / Building materials and technologies.

Circular economy in the construction sector.

Reimagining Urban Living: Beyond Building Housing – Building a Community

Affordable, Sustainable, and Innovative Housing Solutions for better
Quality Living

DOI: 10.37199/c41000922

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Abstract

In response to rising housing needs, changing demographics, and climatic challenges, we acknowledge the need to challenge the standard Housing typology. Housing, usually synonym to dull and standard design, one that is unimaginative, made to basic living standards and often associated with building types such as the mundane, contextually isolated tower blocks. As architectural scholars and practitioners, we strive to develop innovative architectural and urban models that combine affordability, community, and sustainability. The intention here is to create engaging architecture that responds to the diverse needs of a wide demographic and be effortlessly part of urban context, embracing topography and climatic conditions, proving both a sustainable and humane environment for dwelling, while at the same time acknowledging the market demands and system as well as align with the developer's perspective. Overall housing is part of a multi-layered system that needs to be approached simultaneously and work together with multiple stakeholders and bodies, on which housing is made of and made for. This paper, through housing and planning projects, seeks to demonstrate how challenging the housing typology and embracing a wider design vision, has the ability to create quality housing resilient, inclusive neighbourhoods by linking architecture with social, economic, and environmental ambitions.

Keywords

Housing, sustainable, mixed-use development, inclusive urbanism, residential

1. Introduction

"Housing manifests an incredible complexity of issues, touching on social, economic, political, aesthetic, and urban questions".¹

In both professional architecture practice and academic discourse, housing has traditionally been regarded as a complex challenge – a puzzle difficult to solve. This comes as no surprise, since it is an area in architecture and planning that is affected by rapid and continuous socio-economic shifts, expected to accommodate a wide variety of requirements, guidelines and aspirations from different sides, while quality and innovation are often overlooked. Historically, the housing typology has attracted great attention from the architecture profession, aspiring to create forms of housing that goes beyond mere shelter, providing instead exciting architecture that enhances quality of life, builds safer and more humane neighborhoods, and ultimately elevates urban living conditions.

'Architects and Urban designers have less control over the framework of their projects than some other participants in the development business, but they have the synergetic mission to combine numerous and partly contradicting forces to create a culturally meaningful outcome. Seen from this angle, typology unfolds as a sub-discipline that, despite its serious cultural interdependencies, defines maybe more than others, including structures and materials what one could call the autonomy of architecture: a system that is unique to the profession. If we lose it, we might lose a lot of what architecture can bring to society: an intrinsic connection to the past that is not ideological, an appreciation of long term processes, a rigor of analysis that combines hard and soft sciences, and-most importantly – an intentional focus on the relationship between public, private and the communal realms'.²

Although many parameters influence the quality of a housing project, we see that typology is the factor that has the greatest impact on its success or failure. It directly and deeply affects residents' quality of life and the urban fabric, in addition to the economic feasibility of the project from the developer's viewpoint. A good typology enables optimal use of land, promotes human interaction, improves a building's climatic performance to enhance sustainability, and often reduces operating and maintenance costs over time. It can generate local identity, encourage a sense of community, and offer innovative solutions for a wide and diverse demographic. From a developer's perspective, a strong typology produces a unique piece of real estate with added value that increases its commercial value and sometimes earns planning or public preference.

Investing in a housing type that is socially relevant, contextual and environmentally-friendly, generates high value on all scales: economic, social, and cultural, showcasing better urban living conditions.

There are several examples, in Israel and internationally, in the last decades that prove that typology is key to the success of urban housing development. Diverse approaches to housing design

¹ Alan Pert (2024), *Architecture Versus Housing: If the System Is Broken, Design a new System*, introduction in *Architecture for Housing: Understanding the Value of Design through 14 Case Studies.*, by by Djordje Stojanović, Birkhauser, pp. 6-11.

² Firley, E., & Deupi, V. (2021). *The urban housing handbook* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell. pp. VIII-XI(Introduction to the New Edition)

are emerging, addressing these very same challenges, ultimately aiming to offer quality and resilient ways to urban dwelling.

This paper seeks to investigate, highlight and discuss relevant case studies, focusing on current examples in Israel that focus on the following areas, identified as integral into housing design, both as a typology as well as part of a wider urban context. The following areas are identified as key within the selected case studies:

- Human and nature-oriented Housing Typologies that move away from the generic and often soulless 'Tower-Block'.
- Reducing social fragmentation by designing buildings and neighborhoods that address challenges such as social inequality, safety and limited open spaces, disconnected areas and the absence of shared communal areas.
- Environmentally friendly design that promotes sustainability and well-being.
- Building strategic collaborations with governmental authorities and with local groups from an early stage to gain better understanding of local needs and clearly communicate the vision of both sides (community, municipalities/private investor/architecture vision).

Considering design as a catalyst for change on both the urban and the building scale, this paper investigates the current needs and challenges as well as present the architects/urban planner with a toolkit and ideas on how to navigate in a rapidly changing world in order to best address housing, socio- economic issues that are reflected in the urban and living environment, climatic shift and resilience, among others. Issues that the architecture profession is called to respond to, providing design solutions to address current challenges and anticipated future shifts.

The objectives of this paper are categorised in two (2) different scales:

At urban scale, planning strategies focus on improving connectivity, environmental resilience and sustainable mobility. Embracing the changing needs for living, working, and social infrastructure, we outline an approach that promotes well-connected, mixed-use, walkable environments that strengthen social cohesion and local economic activity.

Objectives:

- Enhance accessibility to open spaces and green areas that upgrade living quality for residents as well as raising the value of the neighborhood.
- Design inclusive neighborhoods that cater for diverse communities and their needs.
- Promote connectivity, accessibility, safety and shared mobility.
- Highlight the benefits of transforming neglected neighborhoods into vibrant mixed- use urban environments.
- Working closely with governmental and private bodies on financial, social, and planning regeneration mechanisms.
- Encourage climate-adaptive and resilient urban strategies that can respond to the future challenges and absorb unknown shocks and stresses.
- Integrate data-driven planning tools
- Utilise existing assets and bring to life neglected areas and buildings

At building scale, successful housing strategies combine flexible layouts, shared spaces, human-oriented landscape, passive climate design, and fast, efficient construction to provide high-quality, affordable housing tailored to the diverse needs of a wide-range population. Public and semi-public areas at street and elevated levels are designed to encourage interaction and community use, while features like natural ventilation, green infrastructure, and reduced car dependency contribute to better environmental performance and to strengthening the community ties.

Objectives:

- Create quality human-oriented housing, both high-rise and mid-rise.
- Develop flexible and adaptable layouts to accommodate changing family structures and lifestyles.
- Design Housing buildings that fortify community ties and promote togetherness, including features such as shared amenities and open communal spaces, among others.
- Create quality living and mixed-use environments that enhance well-being.
- Inject innovation and design excellence into the housing typology to improve its standards.
- Promote environmentally friendly design and resource-efficient strategies that enhances sustainability
- Incorporate passive design principles for natural light, ventilation, and thermal comfort in accordance to the local climatic conditions.
- Promote construction efficiency through smart construction and innovative building materials, that embrace sustainable practices.
- Use landscape and green infrastructure to enhance harmony between architecture and nature, improving biodiversity and micro-climate, while improving the living standards of the residents and local community.

2. Overview of relevant studies

For a long time, urban housing has been a key area of attention and great effort for architects, focusing not only on the design aspect, but in conjunction with external elements such as addressing rapid growth, affordability constraints, and social fragmentation. Traditional typologies, such as the “tower-on-a-base” model that is dominant on a global scale usually prioritise economic and technical feasibility over community building and social engagement, resulting in structural repetition, low standard building methods and aesthetic dullness, in addition to neglected or completely absent public and open spaces. These factors result in generating nondescript housing and generic urban dwelling environments that are uninspiring, detached for their surroundings and fail to meet community’s needs.

There are alternative housing models that manage to resolve existing challenges, reflect the current needs and expectations of residents and provide solutions that are efficient, exciting and effective. Spanning from courtyards, expanding balconies and low-rise terraces to accessible mixed-use neighborhoods welcoming open spaces and green areas, to shared mobility and enhanced connectivity, this paper demonstrates that there is room to build quality housing and neighborhoods and that affordability, community and well-being do not need to be compromised.

This paper contains contemporary case studies from across Israel, of different socio-economic backgrounds, typologies and scapes to investigate such options, demonstrating how design interventions, mixed-use strategies, and activated public spaces can foster socially inclusive, resilient, and high-quality urban dwelling.

2.1. Around the world

Nightingale Housing in Australia is not just a building, but a movement. Groups of residents and architects came together to build collectively and with a transparent approach: no marketing, no excessive profit, no tricks. Here, the central idea is quality of life. The design includes lobbies with seating areas, gardens, community kitchens. Meeting your neighbor is not only allowed, but encouraged.



Figure 1. *An exterior view of Nightingale.*

Source: <https://www.nightingalehousing.org/project/nightingale-1>.

In Montreal, Habitat 67 by Moshe Safdie, now an iconic piece of housing architecture, was initially an experiment investigating how towers could become ‘homes’. Each unit is a cube with a balcony, roof, and privacy, yet the composition of these elements creates community. Representing a “super-housing” initiative, we witness the repetitive pattern turning into a form of art that itself creates an iconic landmark, now boasting international recognition.



Figure 2. *An exterior view of Habitat '67 by Moshe Safdie.*

Source: Courtesy of Richard McGuire.

In the Barbican Estate in the City of London (by architects P.Chamberlin, G.Powell and C.Bon), we witness an iconic residential and cultural complex that has been profoundly successful for decades, becoming synonymous with community, culture and quality urban living. The complex includes various housing typologies, such as three towers, thirteen blocks, two terraces of small two-story houses and a series of maisonettes.³ Among the buildings, there are gardens, lakes and ponds, generous communal and open spaces, retail spaces, recreational and cultural facilities including a conference hall, theatre and cinemas, that create a unique atmosphere of togetherness and community. The Barbican has a profoundly strong residential identity that has been so successful over the decades that have even been featured in a single publication under the title 'Barbican Residents', highlighting this remarkable essence of belonging, where the building's identity becomes part of both individual and collective identity.



Figure 3. *The Barbican Estate - Central ponds view with residential complex at the back and communal and cultural amenities seen at the sides creating a holistic and human-oriented environment.*

Source: Stephendickson (2024).

Beyond the residential use, the Estate has been continuously successful to attract a great number of visitors, due to its vibrant cultural, artistic and public life, becoming a destination in its own right for Londoners and foreigners.

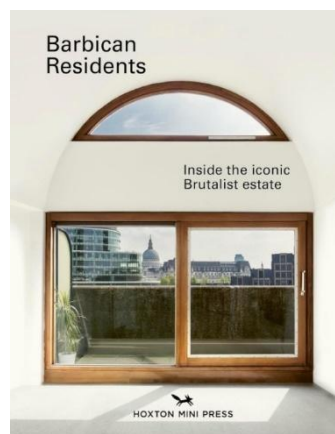


Figure 4. *Barbican residents publication by Hoxton Mini Press.*

Source: <https://www.hoxtonminipress.com/products/barbican-residents>.

At the 8HOUSE, Copenhagen, a project by BIG that has successfully integrated different types of housing and mixed-uses manages to create a strong and successful community. The 61,000 sqm mixed-use building incorporates three different types of residential housing and 10,000 sqm of retail and offices

comprises Denmark's largest private development ever undertaken. Sitting on the outer edge of the city as the southernmost outpost of Ørestad. Instead of using the traditional block typology, the 8 House stacks all ingredients of a lively urban neighborhood into horizontal layers of typologies connected by a continuous promenade and cycling path up to the 10th floor. This approach establishes a three-dimensional urban neighborhood where suburban life merges with the energy of a city, where business and housing co-exist.³



Figure 5. *8HOUSE external view.*

Source: Jens Lindhe.

Another example is the Phoenix Heights by Brady Mallalieu Architects in London's Isle of Dogs in the Canary Wharf area. This is an integrated large mixed-tenure residential development, that includes 199 homes varying in height, ranging from 3-23 storeys. Situated in a high-density urban area, it was designed as a family friendly and community-oriented development that provides family-sized units located at the base with gardens and play areas, while smaller units are located higher up with balconies and communal amenities.



Figure 6. *The Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing.*

Source: William Wright Photography.

³ Kelly Minner, "8 House/BIG," *ArchDaily*, October 20, 2010, <https://www.archdaily.com/83307/8-house-big>

Across the pond, the Capitol Hill Urban Co-housing project in Seattle, USA, by Schemata.Workshop presents a 5-storey mixed-use infill building in Seattle's dense Capitol Hill neighborhood, designed as a co-housing community for nine households. True to the spirit of co-inhabitation and creating a strong community, the project features a shared community kitchen and dining room, a rooftop urban farm, and commercial space at ground level, depicting intentional community design within a dense urban setting. Although smaller in scale compared to the other mega-developments discussed in this paper, it is a strong example of housing that emphasizes high-density solutions with a community-focused scheme.



Figure 7. *The rooftop garden at Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing.*

Source: William Wright Photography.

2.2. Baugruppen Berlin – a unique approach with residents at the centre of the design process

In the 2000s, Berlin saw the formation of so-called Baugruppen (construction groups) – associations of small-scale investors who pooled their modest capital to commission an architect and construct a multistorey building in which they would own and occupy a flat. They were mostly middle-class families united by a belief in community values and neighbourly contact as well as the qualities of urban living.⁴

The “Baugruppen”, translated into English as the building-group model, is an approach to housing that is architect-led, collectively funded, and community-oriented. It involves the creation of resident-driven, multi-family buildings, found typically in the form of condominiums or cooperatives that are located within dense urban environments, most widely implemented in Berlin, among other locations in Germany. The Baugruppen housing present a very strong shared design approach, with shared amenities, higher densities than typical single-family building schemes and with an emphasis on affordability, collaboration, sustainability and community-oriented urban living solutions. The beauty of these Baugruppen Co-housing projects, lies in the concept that the future owners are involved in the process from the very beginning with the ability

⁴ Florian Urban, “Berlin’s Construction Groups and the Politics of Bottom-Up Architecture,” *Urban History* 45, no. 4 (November 2018): 683–711, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926817000694>.

to also influence the concept and the design, presenting how people can act as developers of their own homes.

In almost every German city, Baugruppen have become a self-evident and accepted part of housing sector output in the last decades. In Berlin in particular, Baugruppen have been responsible for a minor revolution in the development and construction market. The by now more than 150 Baugruppen projects in Berlin appear to be not only a means to ward off the building crisis, but also contribute in architectural and social terms to the diversity and attractiveness of the city. Using the situation in Berlin as an example, insight is given into the spatial aspects that have contributed to the success of the Baugruppen phenomenon... The Baugenossenschaft - the essence of building as a group is that the occupants take the initiative for a building plan themselves and make almost all their own decisions about the layout of the houses, the façade, possible extra space and so on. This self-purpose and power of self-determination is not something that was developed in the last decade, but enjoys a long tradition in Germany.⁵

These Baugruppen projects are much more than just physical buildings, they are a leading example on how people organize, live, and interact, and an interesting case study of how to provide not only affordable, quality housing solutions but also how to create societies within the urban setting. In Berlin alone, approximately 80 of these cooperatives own around 184,628 apartments⁶, accounting for more than 10 percent of the city's total housing stock.⁷

It is interesting to look into more detail in some of these Baugruppen examples in order to understand more about their operating system and design principles: The R50 project in Berlin-Kreuzberg, by Heide & von Beckerath, ifau und Jesko Fezer is a joint building venture project that was initiated by the architects in collaboration with the future residents, as they formed the building group and co-funded the development. The Baugruppe model allowed residents to participate substantially in the planning, design, construction and financing, consequently removing the typical developer profit margin and enabling more affordable housing. The project showcases a new model for this typology that provides high-quality housing that is socially dynamic, architecturally sophisticated and equitably priced than most conventional developer-led projects.

The detached building is surrounded by various housing concepts characteristic of Berlin's post-war period. It has six full storeys, a basement and an attic. It comprises three blocks with 19 individual apartments, one studio and various shared spaces. Underneath is a double-height, flexible community space which connects the building's main access with the public street space. It is made available for neighbourhood groups and other public uses. The reinforced concrete structure was designed to minimum requirements. Combined with the reduced and partly exposed infrastructure, the modular timber facade with fixed and flexible, outward opening glazed door

⁵ Annet Ritsema and Vincent Kompier, "Baugruppen as Catalysts for New Urban Housing Quality," DASH | Delft Architectural Studies on Housing 5, no. 08 (2013): P.31, <https://journals.open.tudelft.nl/dash/article/view/4865>.

⁶ Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *Who Owns the City? The Role—and History—of the Cooperatives in Berlin* (Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2021), 33

⁷ Manuel Lutz, "Lived Solidarity: Housing Co-operatives," Assemble Papers, November 20, 2019, 2.

elements was specifically developed for this building. This combined with the all-around balconies on each level allows a direct dialogue between the building's architecture and its use.⁸

Moreover, R50 features a spacious urban garden that integrates harmoniously with its surrounding neighborhood setting. Additional amenities are located at the basement level that include a laundry, workshop space, and a roof terrace creating a communal and ergonomic living environment. On the building's external envelope, wrap-around balconies complement the bright interior spaces while linking the apartments on each floor, enhancing connectivity and communal spaces.



Figure 8. R50 External view.

Source: Andrew Alberts.



Figure 9. D2 External view.

Source: Thomas Straub.

An additional project in the same philosophy, the Baugruppe Donaustraße 2 (D2) in Berlin's Neukölln district, was developed by 15 families by the architecture studio IFUB* to provide flexible housing units, communal amenities, and strong integration into Berlin's urban context. The D2 site, previously a workshop and garage rental, was acquired by a group of young families who faced the challenge of designing a complex, long, narrow plot with limited street-front buildable area and a large courtyard, while maximizing its use due to high land prices and Berlin's tight housing market. The result is a housing complex that incorporates a wide range of apartments, ranging from compact 1.5-room apartments to 6-room maisonettes, catering to the diverse needs of the new residents. Creating quality open spaces is key to the building's character, with the ground-floor apartments having their own small gardens instead of balconies.

The materiality of the complex creates a distinctive and playful identity for the building that includes timber, titanium-zinc metal sheets and locally sourced glazed bricks with vibrant graphics and colors. The complex has a courtyard, shared garden areas, and flexible communal spaces, as well as roof terraces, with all these elements designed to enhance the communal feel, that include shared activities and social interaction, encouraging residents to enjoy a collective outdoor living

⁸ ifau; Heide & von Beckerath; Jesko Fezer et al., "R50 – Cohousing," EU Mies Awards, <https://eumiesawards.com/heritageobject/r50--cohousing/>

lifestyle. On the ground floor of the front building two commercial units activate the street-front, embedding the project within the neighborhood.⁹

2.3. Retrospective of Israeli housing efforts

The history of housing in Israel includes numerous moments of searching for a quality model. Among several examples, we highlight the workers' housing of the 1930s, which offered a shared inner courtyard; the Gilo neighborhood in Jerusalem from the late 1960s, which adapted to the topography and created a series of buildings; Zvi Hecker's tower in Ramat Gan, which explored alternative morphologies to the classic tower typology; and the Ben-Gurion dormitories, which attempted to articulate a shared experience through the "courtyard typology." Although the examples were isolated and did not create a movement that was widely adopted in Israel, along with many others they share a central idea: a pursuit of collective clarity and an effort to create unique and customized housing, demonstrating that Israel too can be a hotbed for innovative, creative typological thinking.

2.4. The reign of the Tower-Base in Israel

The "Tower on a Base" typology has become dominant in nearly every residential and urban renewal project in Israel, whether in demolition-and-reconstruction schemes, TAMA 38, or new real estate initiatives. It usually consists of some kind of base: an entrance lobby surrounded by lifeless landscaping and parking, or alternatively, an "urban base" that includes commercial floors, parking, and a public lobby. Above it rises a monolithic residential tower of 10-40 stories.

Most of these Tower-Base typologies derive their character from the interior planning of the apartments and the landscape, which aims to connect private and public spaces between buildings, open spaces and the neighborhood. However, in reality they fail to create space for community life and good urbanism, often leaving the landscape between house and neighborhood as an undefined open area – with ornamental greenery, an unimaginative minimalist "square" area or, at worst, bare parking lots.

The "tower-on-a-base" typology is not inherently problematic. In certain cases, it can provide a suitable solution for conditions of high urban density or specific economic requirements. Nevertheless, its indiscriminate use, without criteria that take into account context, climate, social or cultural data, leads to "spatial arrogance", a boring and repetitive building model that imposes its presence on the environment and alienates communities and urban life.

⁹ Institut für unerwartete, unkonventionelle, unverbesserliche, umfassende, unglaubliche, ... Baukunst (IFUB)*, "Baugruppe D2: Newbuild of a residential and commercial ensemble for a housing cooperative," <https://www.ifub.de/baugrupped2>.

2.5. Rethink density and housing

It is time to question the very assumption that towers are the only typology capable of achieving density. Examples from around the world, for instance in one of the densest cities, such as Paris that is among the 70 densest cities in the world, with more than 20,000 residents per square kilometer¹⁰, present an alternative scenario, where high density can be accomplished through a variety of typologies, and not solely with the development of big towers. As a result, urban dwelling maintains a high-quality standard, showcasing an exciting and rich urban appeal that is rooted in spatial diversity, design clarity and human- oriented approach.

We must also confront the fundamental question of life in towers: is living far from the ground, the trees, nature, and the sounds of the street truly suitable for everyone, everywhere? Is not this distance from the ground also a distance from belonging, encounter, and connection? Perhaps by holding onto the “tower-on-a-base” typology we are limited to environments dominated by concrete and asphalt – rigid, inflexible, and with limited livability. The lack of community infrastructure, combined with dependence on costly maintenance, makes community living difficult and often creates environments that do not meet the potential or needs of residents.



Figure 10. *Savonnerie Heymans: a former soap factory in Brussels, Belgium turned into a sustainable housing project.*

Source: www.mdw-architecture.com.

3. Results

3.1. Overview

Drawing on examples from Israel’s experiments with housing since the country’s founding and discussing current examples and case studies from the practice of HQ Architects (HQA) across different contextual frameworks, but with a key focus on housing, both as typology and as part of the broader urban environment, this paper aims to highlight the shared principles and frameworks,

¹⁰ “Population Density, Île-de-France (Paris Region), by Department, France,” *Statista*, accessed 14 September 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1047176/population-density-ile-de-france-paris-region-by-department-france/>

which demonstrate proven results and experiences, as well as a to present the thorough planning and participatory processes required to create these projects.

The following case studies illustrate housing examples at both building and urban scales, highlighting shared values such as:

1. Human scale
2. Flexibility
3. Urban Integration
4. Community
5. Diversity
6. Connectivity and accessibility

3.2. Contemporary examples from Israel

To better understand the context of the current Israeli housing scene, before presenting the HQA case studies, it is important to briefly showcase some current examples from Israel that show the effort underway and the momentum that exists in the country. Whether as a deliberate design choice or out of economic necessity, there are housing examples that seek to create a human dimension even within the familiar typology. For example, in Gaby Schwartz's urban renewal plan in Ramat Hasharon, a neighborhood was designed above a massive colonnade floor resembling a stage. This space became an open public realm that connects the towers while lifting them off the ground, not to distance them from it, but rather to return it to the citizens. The ground-floor safe rooms (Mamad) have multiple functions, serving as classrooms, bicycle storage, and music rooms, shaping a supportive community fabric.

In *Ganei Shapira Affordable Housing scheme (2014)*, designed by Orit Muhlbauser Eyal Architects for the Tel Aviv Municipality, the buildings integrate into the existing urban fabric, responding to the city's pathways around them. Encompassing 69 apartments available to rent under the Affordable Housing scheme, there was special emphasis given to the open communal spaces and to the neighborhood's green spaces. The spaces between the structures become small, intimate, and tangible communal areas, fostering a sense of community and social integration. The design offers a modern perspective of the "Shikun" residential housing projects that were built during the years of the massive immigration to Israel (1950-1960) to provide dwellings for refugees and immigrants. However, unlike the old housing complexes of minimum standards requirements, the Shapira housing project benefits from high building standards, presenting a great case study of community-oriented quality modern housing.¹¹

¹¹ Erez Ella, *Gilyon – Journal of Urban Design and Culture* (כתב עת לתכנון עירוני ותרבות – גיליון), article: to resist the rule of the tower, published September 2025. pp.81-88



Figure 11. *Ganei Shapira Housing by Orit Muhlbauser Eyal Architects.*
Source: Shai Epstein.

3.3. Case studies

3.3.1. Fein 1 Central – sustainability meets community

'It was a den of drugs and prostitution. Now it's the cutest building in Tel Aviv: The house on 1 Fein Street was for many years considered a symbol of neglect in South Tel Aviv. After being demolished and rebuilt, it became home to colorful residents and a bustling community life'.¹²



Figure 12. *Fein 1 Central Apartment Complex by HQ Architects.*
Source: Dor Kedmi

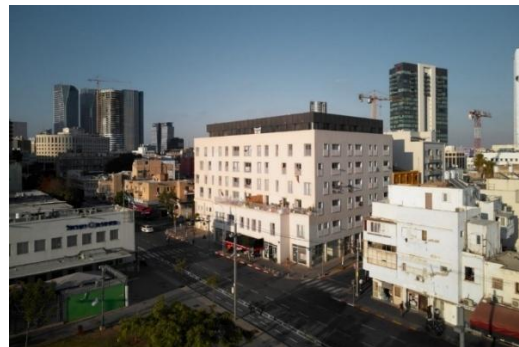


Figure 13. *Fein 1 Central by HQA. External facade view featuring a symmetrical and clean lines on the outside of the building.*
Source: Dor Kedmi.

In Tel Aviv, the Fein 1 Central, a new apartment complex that contributes to the area's regeneration by providing adequate living space for Tel Aviv's degraded yet fastest changing area. The building is situated within the municipality's master plan for southern Tel Aviv, and responds to the neighborhood's social, cultural, and economic growth and transformation. Part of this growth will be the addition of the new premises of the renowned Bat Sheva Dance Company right across the street, and the new light rail station next to apartment building. The building was designed with young families and professionals in mind, aiming to provide them with adequate and affordable

¹² Hilo Glazer, "It was a den of drugs and prostitution. Now it is the cutest building in Tel Aviv," *Haaretz Weekend*, July 3, 2025, online article. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/2025-07-03/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/00000197-cc86-da1d-a5ff-ec86c1380000>

spaces to support them, while promoting the creation of a strong and vibrant community through shared spaces suitable for gatherings, and incorporating sustainable design strategies such as cross-ventilation, shading, and pedestrian-friendly planning. Following the brief's requirements to provide small apartments with cross ventilation, the design moved away from the characteristic Tel Aviv building typology by inverting the typical box building inside – out, and resolving both issues at once.

The building's facade is minimal and symmetrical in an off-white color- typical of local Tel Aviv architecture. Playful color contrast between inside and outside is used to emphasize public and private spaces; a strong red color is used in the courtyard offering a more private and airy shelter from the hot and busy street. The organic shaped balconies offer a fluid form which also contrasts the strictly symmetrical exterior facade, creating a clear distinction between street and shelter.

Fein 1 Central contains medium to small apartments, incorporating 53 apartments comprising 49 two-bedroom apartments, 3 three-bedroom apartments and a 1 four-bedroom apartment. The scale of the apartments allows young families and young professionals – a major affordable housing local demographic, to remain in the neighborhood. In addition to the residential use, the building includes 9 retail units while incorporating 350 m² of existing fragments from the old structure.

The 6,400 m² six-storey building offers high quality apartments arranged around a three-dimensional courtyard, where entrances pass through shared balconies. These balconies do not merely overlook but actively participate in what happens. The courtyard is not a symbolic garden but a readily available space for events, encounters, and the in-between moments of life.

The courtyard also contributes to a more sustainable living, as it promotes low energy consumption by offering shading in the summer and penetration of direct sunlight in the winter.

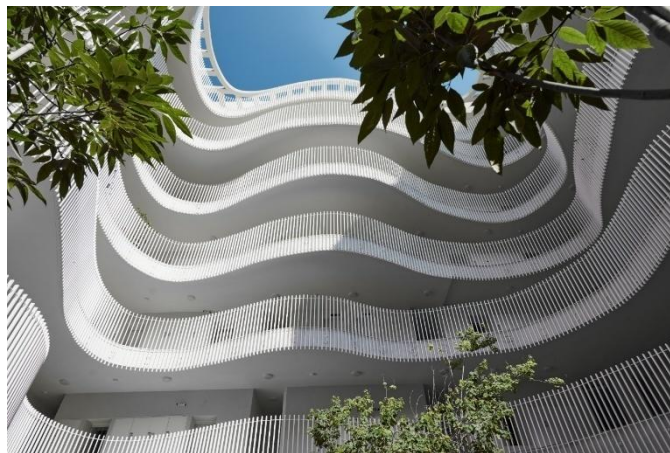


Figure 14. *Fein 1 Central by HQA. Balconies view taken from the ground-floor looking up.*

Source: Dor Kedmi.

The apartment complex also features a private 5-level underground parking in an area that is very dense and lacks vehicle parking space. Also, it was important to create minimal car exposure, and for the neighborhood to remain pedestrian friendly.

The result of key design decisions are evident in the life of the building and its residents that has now become a vibrant community in itself.

In an interview with Haaretz, a resident of the building reflected on the sense of community, stating: "I had my eye on the building for four months before I managed to snag an apartment," he says. "The design blew my mind. Israelis are addicted to balconies, but here they went for something different: an exterior space that faces inward, creating a sort of communal courtyard. I figured there would be more interactions with neighbors, unlike a standard residential building where the stairwell is just a corridor to the elevator. And I hoped those interactions would be positive. But it turned out to be much more – a real community formed here".¹³

The project's impact on the surrounding area and regeneration of this Tel Aviv southern suburb is evident, as is the impact it has on its residents and the internal community that has emerged from this new structure. By providing much needed high-quality housing and activating derelict and dangerous urban spaces, it enhances urban fabric breathing new life to it. Combining both innovative architectural and sustainable design strategies together with building a strong community within, the building's impact is evident inside - out, creating a model for high quality affordable housing that its impact resonates beyond its footprint.

3.3.2. Kfar Yona residential complex - a new vision for urban living

The Kfar Yona Housing Complex is a project that seeks to address the limitations and challenges of typical suburban housing by introducing spatial diversity, promoting social interaction and community life, while presenting environmentally friendly design solutions aimed at creating a resilient and flexible living environment.

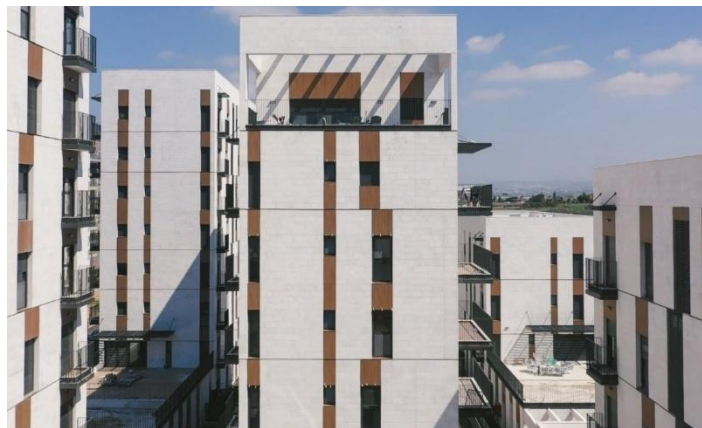


Figure 15. *kfar Yona Residential Complex by HQ Architects.*

Source: Lior Avitan.

The 15,500 m² housing project in East Kfar Yona re imagines a monotonous suburban grid, replacing uniformity with openness, variation, and a renewed sense of community. The site, once dominated by identical H-shaped buildings, offered an opportunity to rethink the spatial logic of everyday residential development. The new design, together with meticulous design of the materials and

¹³ Hilo Glazer, "It was a den of drugs and prostitution. Now it is the cutest building in Tel Aviv," *Haaretz Weekend*, July 3, 2025, online article. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/2025-07-03/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/00000197-cc86-da1d-a5ff-ec86c1380000>

the facades of the buildings, created a project that provides quality and unique housing within a neighborhood of “standard” construction. In the compound, a mini-neighborhood was created in one lot, while it provides fertile ground for the development of a new and cohesive community.

The square masses of the conventional H structures are dismantled into six long and narrow structures. The buildings were shifted in plan in order to create further distance between the apartments and to open the view to the landscape. At the same time, by creating buildings of gradual heights, a flow of light and air was made possible and a connection was made to the surrounding urban fabric. The project consists of 6 buildings and 81 apartments. In each of the buildings, only two apartments were planned on each floor, so that all the apartments receive three full facades. Each floor has a 3-bedroom apartment and a 4-bedroom apartment. All the parking spaces in the project were located in an underground parking lot that connects all the buildings. The vehicle-free ground floor creates a safe, defined public space connecting the buildings into an organic compound.

The final outcome is not just a housing project, but rather a dwelling system that provides spatial balance with a distinctive character that is well connected and accessible allowing residents to live within a community that fosters community cohesion, comfort, and well-being and creates a new neighborhood with enhanced social, cultural and economic value.



Figure 16. *Kfar Yona Residential Complex by HQ Architects. Typical level plan.*

Source: HQ Architects.

The Kfar Yona Residential Complex won first prize under the Residential category at the Festival of Israeli Architecture 2019.

3.3.3. Or Sderot – a live-work neighbourhood promoting sustainability and community

The Or Sderot development addresses the lack of high-quality, mixed-use housing in Israel’s fringe cities, where standard suburban models usually prioritize cars over community, therefore limiting social, recreational, and working spaces for this purpose. This new live-work complex situated in southern Israel, integrates diverse apartment types, communal amenities, and office units to encourage the creation of a connected, intergenerational community. With an emphasis on walkability, shared mobility, and accessible human-scale design as alternatives to the generic,

compact and car-oriented urban environments, Or Sderot presents a different model for an independent, sustainable, flexible, and socially engaging living environment. This gives this new neighborhood a distinctive identity and the ability to prioritise the community's quality well-being and live- work balance.



Figure 17. Or Sderot Residential Development by HQ Architects.

Source: HQA.

Located in southern Israel, the project introduces 200 residential units across eight buildings, two of which are designated for rental. The plan integrates 23,000 sqm of housing with 2,000 sqm of communal ground-floor amenities – including daycare, laundry services, cafés, and shared gathering spaces. A key feature of the development is its integration of workspaces: 1,000 sqm. of office units are sold alongside apartments, enabling residents to live and work within the same environment. A wide range of apartment sizes, from 60 to 140 sqm, supports a diverse and inter-generational community.

Reducing dependence on private vehicles, the project offers fewer parking spots than typical developments and includes a shared mobility service, electric bike charging, and generous outdoor areas. These strategies prioritize walkability and safety, while creating shared spaces for play, interaction, and neighborhood life. Or Sderot reflects a broader ambition: to create new forms of urban living rooted in proximity, flexibility, and community – offering an alternative to the growing density of Israel's central urban core.

As a whole, Or Sderot presents a contemporary alternative model to typical housing typology and framework: a project that translates principles such as community, diversity, human scale and accessibility into a new-town in the periphery, creating a new urban hub beyond the already crowded central Israel, showing that better and quality housing is not a privilege of the renewal of Tel Aviv and other central cities, but can also emerge in the southern cities and communities of Israel.

3.3.4. Lea Goldberg residential and mixed-use scheme (urban scale)

The primary challenge of the Lea Goldberg Masterplan is to mitigate Lod's long-term urban neglect, with a focus on struggling with housing shortages, poor and outdated infrastructure, and spatial fragmentation, while initiating a sustainable model for urban regeneration focusing on enhancing connectivity, public space, and financial feasibility, while providing adequate housing, commercial spaces and functional public areas that will suit the needs of a diverse demographic.



Figure 18. Lea Goldberg Masterplan by HQ Architects, provides generous and well-connected open areas, in parallel to retail and commercial spaces, providing a welcoming urban environment for both locals and visitors. On top of the retail and commercial spaces, the housing blocks – with some also providing social infrastructure (kindergartens), rise on top.

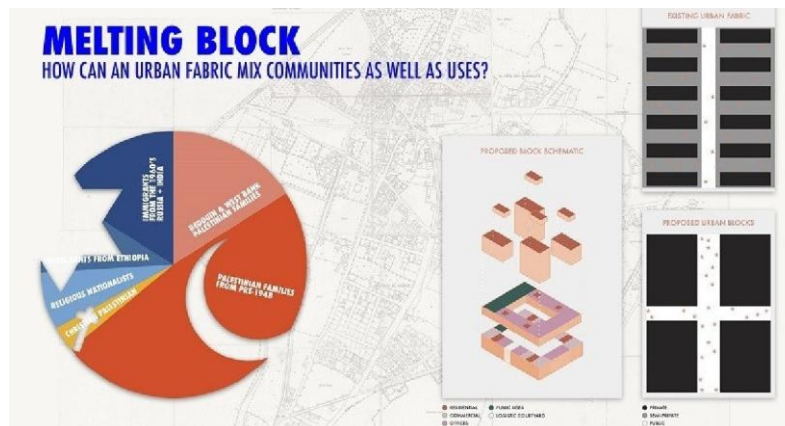


Figure 19. Lea Goldberg Masterplan by HQ Architects. A diverse community in Lod, a historic city, that currently is neglected and fragmented. A new typology emerges that activates dead space and rearranges housing buildings to enhance connectivity, open up public spaces and create apartment buildings for a wide demographic.

The scheme focuses on enhancing connectivity, infrastructure and providing quality public spaces together with providing additional housing and commercial areas to enable families to live and work in the area. It opens marginalized spaces and vibrant walkable areas, setting the foundations for Lod's future growth and transformation into a destination, while boosting its real estate value. This is key as the Israel Regeneration Urban Renewal Authority, in order to proceed with the

masterplan, relies on a sustainable financial model mechanism. To enable this mechanism, HQA worked together with Lod Municipality to create social and public interventions to raise the land value before the masterplan's implementation.

The scheme includes 4 plots with 104,598m² residential use (782 apartments), 7,130 m² commercial spaces, 8,000 m² office spaces, 2,250 m² public areas (mainly day care facilities) and 4,7000 m² parking spaces. Mixed use spaces are located on the 2 first floors with residential towers on top. This arrangement presents an urban volume with a continuous facade and an uninterrupted high street, providing a sense of urban coherence in the area.

A strong impact across all scales

The scheme deals with various aspects of transforming a neglected neighbourhood by working closely with governmental bodies on financial, social, and planning regeneration mechanisms. By utilizing neglected infrastructure, it creates open spaces of various scales, from public parks to smaller public walkways and simple courtyards that upgrade the value of the neighbourhood. By introducing a different block arrangement from the existing that eliminates dead communal space, we enable public spaces and streets to be functional again. In a way, the scheme restores the "traditional" Lod city planning, by providing either fully public or fully private spaces. That way, public spaces are easier to maintain, as they are managed in a more straightforward and efficient way. By activating disused communal spaces and creating accessible public areas, the neighbourhood becomes a hub of social life, and together with the commercial high-street it turns into a destination.

Civic engagement and & social participation

By closely collaborating with governmental bodies on financial and planning mechanisms, as well as engaging with local communities and groups from an early stage in a project is key to understanding their needs and shaping better and more effective outcomes. Project-related data demonstrate that collaboration and open dialogue with local municipalities, authorities and residents are essential for the implementation of large and complex projects.



Figure 20. *Lea Goldberg Masterplan by HQ Architects. Site plan with different building blocks and open and green areas. On the right, a render showing a ground floor with retail and commercial spaces and housing on top in an effort to create an exciting high-street essence and promote social interaction.*

Contextuality drives sustainability and community

By re-purposing the neglected existing rail infrastructure, transforming it into functional and inviting public space, and activating disused public spaces turning them into green and open public spaces, the scheme promotes both environmental and social sustainability, enhancing the neighbourhood's longevity and prosperity. The masterplan turns underused and neglected areas into vibrant, accessible and safe public spaces, integrating commercial high streets and social infrastructure, responding to the needs of the local community but also providing the basis to become an attractive destination for visitors to enjoy recreational and retail activities.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1. Reconsider what housing stands for – look beyond walls and blocks; rethink housing as a cultural act

Housing needs to be understood as a multi-faceted scheme, one that encompasses values, social contracts, and provisions, and that surpasses the technical delivery of square meters and basic sheltering needs. We should move away from the typical tower block as a typology that often presents limited design imagination, and instead focus on creating more porous building types that promote interaction, community, connecting with nature and sustainable well-being, while providing an integrated environment that supports a higher standard of living. By rethinking housing typologies, we can reclaim housing in order to redefine social life and community building. Ultimately, housing can become what determines its core qualities; a cultural, social, and urban act that fosters togetherness and community, while providing quality living within the urban environment.

By enhancing the design and development process, we have the opportunity to change the mindset that frames the housing system as a source of uniformity, exclusion, and alienation. By approaching it with a more holistic approach that promotes community, diversity, and well-being, we can implement changes that are required across several layers simultaneously.

a. Regulations that promote quality, not only minimising risk

Many planning guidelines are written out of fear of exceptions. However, despite this concern, frameworks that promote boldness must be allowed. Many cities already apply this approach where deviation from the rules is allowed, provided that there is a clear conceptual logic outlined. Suggested strategies can include:

- Adopting flexible regulatory frameworks that allow exceptions to projects that demonstrate strong conceptual logic and clear urban benefits. These bespoke proposal exceptions to standard planning rules can promote design excellence, sustainability, strong social benefit and long-term resilience.
- Enabling design review boards to promote creative risk-taking and diversity while maintaining public safety and urban consistency.

b. Urban policy arranged around diversity and innovation, not standardization

Work towards urban policies that promote a balanced mix of building typologies, such as high-rise and low-rise developments and between private and communal spaces, aiming to respond to the needs of diverse populations. Public, open and green spaces need to be designed at a human scale, with walkable streets, social infrastructure and community spaces, play areas; all designed in harmony with the natural environment and adjacent urban setting. Creating safe and well-connected landscape spaces that feature pedestrian networks, connected green corridors, and welcoming recreational areas can improve life quality while integrating urban development with the natural environment. Focusing on scale, proportion, and connectivity, can make even the most dense urban environments, feel welcoming and accessible, as well as being environmentally friendly.

To regulate and strengthen these objectives, urban policies should include incentives such as but not limited to the following:

- Land use diversity and flexibility: Promoting mixed-use strategies, adaptive reuse, and diverse density within neighborhoods can lead to the creation of an exciting and dynamic, multi-functional urban fabric.
- Density incentives: Encouraging developers to work closely with architects and planners and explore innovative typologies and building arrangements that respond to both community needs and spatial constraints and challenges.
- Mixed-use guidelines: Integrating residential, commercial, cultural, and social uses to create vibrant, resilient neighborhoods that combine living, working, and recreational functions.
- Design review models: Ensuring that diversity in form and typology does not compromise quality, safety, or environmental impact.
- Public-private partnerships: Following examples around the world where partnerships of this nature have created successful investments and developments that promote architectural diversity, quality housing solutions that are affordable and inclusive.

c. Rewarding architectural creativity

The current system rewards minimum creativity. A tiered compensation model with fair pay at all planning stages would allow architects to invest time and resources to explore, develop, and lead new and creative housing ideas.

Auxiliary strategies could include innovation grants, competition awards, and recognition programs that could further stimulate research and experimentation in housing design.

d. Economic incentives to promote quality

Currently, there is no planning incentive for developers to invest beyond the bare minimum. Planning quality indicators should be integrated into municipal and public tenders, as well as into tax incentive frameworks, thereby enabling developers to participate in the strive for design quality.

e. Developers as partners in sustainable, community-oriented housing

Developers and private sector stakeholders should encourage responsible and quality-driven investments, which at the same time can be also a social asset. They can be patrons of design innovation, supporting progressive solutions in construction, such as modular building, innovative materials, and carbon-neutral strategies that promote both environmental and economic sustainability.

f. Bring back the architectural ambition of the housing typology

The 20th century saw a remarkable redefinition of housing ambition that was driven by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and social reform. Early Modernist architects addressed social inequities through rational, functional, and standardized housing typologies, emphasizing light, air, and communal amenities. Throughout the past century, the housing typology has been consistently under architectural investigation, remaining to this day a creative challenge. Innovation in the Housing typology can provide ideas and solutions to socio-economic and urban challenges alike. Both architects and developers can create innovative models that seek to provide spaces and redefine areas that enhance accessibility, showcase cultural sensitivity, as well as create opportunities to strengthen communities through spatial organization. The issue with housing is not flat; is multi-layered and deeply rooted to the Zeitgeist. Our time of essence is that of rapid change, innovation, and immigration; the era of information and unprecedented change. Therefore, now is the time for architects to bring back the ambition and accept the creative task to create new housing architecture that corresponds with the current needs, challenges and innovations, seeking the opportunity to create quality housing architecture.

Suggested areas to focus on can include:

- Rethinking housing as an active part of the city. Promote mixed-use environments that provide an integrated live - work environment. Reclaim the street level by activating ground levels and by introducing semi-public uses, with the aim to connect residents with their surroundings, leading to vibrant and well-connected mixed-use spaces.
- Extend the creative network by collaborating with other experts – social, data, environmental- to better understand community behavior and environmental performance. Data collection and process can be particularly insightful in the process.
- The promotion of sustainable living. By embedding nature in design through green roofs, vertical gardens, and courtyards we can improve well-being and create comfortable urban micro-climates. Our cities are changing into more dense urban environments; therefore we need to ensure that they remain human centered and connected to nature.

g. Public education and participatory dialogue

The public should engage with the language of architecture, understanding the benefits and value of certain architectural elements, such as shared courtyards, open lobbies, and hybrid buildings, as well as their overall impact on urban well-being.

Epilogue

Reimagining housing as a cultural act calls for more than new policies or typologies, it suggests a change of thinking, a different mindset and a combined, multi-layered approach. It requires cross-

disciplinary thinking and a collaborative spirit that brings together architects, planners, developers, policymakers, and local communities who together, can redefine what housing means in the era of information and rapid urban change.

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