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A shelter is not enough: a pattern for refugees' social life

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1. Introduction

Disasters, wars, earthquakes result in a lot of casualties, while damage to the buildings also lead to a need for shelter. The need for post-disaster shelter is met through emergency assistance, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. Problems such as resource consumption, economic and environmental complications, and inability to meet users' requirements arise at all stages of the post-disaster sheltering process. Emergency assistance is required to respond to the first need for housing, but settlements are less resistant to environmental conditions and long-term use is not feasible. The reconstruction phase often requires a certain period of time for permanent housing construction, so a well-behaved rehabilitation phase is often needed between these two stages. If the rehabilitation phase is not introduced by pre-disaster planning in the direction of a well-organized disaster scenario, it damages both the resources of the country and the disasters that are obliged to live in these shelters¹.

All the human beings deserve dignity in their lives regardless of their cultural tradition, nationality and religion. However, generally it may be difficult to provide this dignity for refugees. There are many studies and theories related to hosting refugees in a country but there is not enough approach for providing them real dignity in action. Providing the shelter for refugees may not be enough to meet their social needs and maintain their traditions according to the country they come from. A new concept of solidarity, related to the dignity of the individual, to be developed between refugees and community might be a useful means both for hosting country and refugees. It is important to emphasize this problem and find a permanent solution in the future.

2. Learning from some case studies

According to the official data by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 3.000.000 Syrian refugees live in Turkey by 2017. The refugees are hosted in camps located in 24 different locations near the border by the Turkish government (fig.1). However, only 8% of the refugees live in camps, while the large amount of the refugee population has been spread in various urban centres. Therefore, even the basic needs as healthcare, food security, protection and education services are provided in the camps, the major refugee population is not able to get these services. Supposing that all of them would met these basic needs, is it enough for having a proper life? A proper social life for refugees, cultural expectations, activeness in local economy and integration with the hosting citizens can be considered the main and presumably the most difficult circumstances in front of us, a primary challenging matter for the future of many countries worldwide. From this point of view, definition and analysis of social needs of the people who had to flee to other places, and developing proposals for them gain extreme importance.

Instinctively, in case of emergency a distinction is made between urgent-important needs and non-urgent ones. After surviving, sheltering is the very first activity to think about in the post-

¹ İlhan, H. B., (2010), *The Investigation of the Sustainability of Housing Practices During the Post-Disaster Rehabilitation Phase*, M.Sc. Thesis, Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, p. 2.

disaster period. Tent cities first and prefabricated settlements then are created by the governmental or non-governmental organizations for victims to meet their urgent needs. While these attempts result well in the short term, in the long run other problems come in sight. Uncertainty in the future lives, being obliged to live in temporary spaces for an undefined period, impossibility of customization of spaces according to the personal life style and isolated environments which are disconnected from the centres affect the victims negatively. In this context, strategic planning and designing a temporary/ephemeral built environment for the disaster areas are the key concepts to prevent possible problems. Designing social spaces in which the victims will be able to be integrated to the society and to feel active in urban life can provide milieu for better temporal lives.

A study on Palestinian refugee camps reveals the needs for social life in the camp environment². According to the results of the questionnaire carried out by İsmail and Ciravoğlu, the main requirements of the refugees in the camps are improving the infrastructure, re-planning the camp, providing all necessary services as educational, health, social and even entertainment services and including the refugees in the managing of the camp³.

Based on this perspective, a project proposal must not just focus on the final product which is a well-designed social space, but also consider the design and construction process of it as a way of collective production. By involving the victims into the process, enhancing the sense of belonging has been experienced in many different post disaster areas. Rehabilitation of social life in parallel to the physical environment became possible thanks to gathering around one main aim in those cases. In Solidarity Houses (İmece Evleri) which were realized in Düzce-Turkey after the 1999 Marmara Earthquakes (fig. 2), a close participant-driven philosophy was adopted⁴. Users were involved in both the decision-making and construction processes; this alternative methodology brought several advantages with it (fig. 3). Firstly, the houses were built on the same site where the society feels at home. The participation of users to the construction provided several significant outcomes, too: placing reliance to the structure by giving opportunity to observe all the phases; reducing the cost of construction by using local labour force; establishing a collective environment and so providing solidarity; designing authentic buildings by using local features and data. This project was achieved with the combination of knowledge of the professionals and the local workers' ability, together with the will of the society (fig. 4). The funds given by the government were managed by a representative commission (Shared Fund Administration)⁵. «Instead of expecting solutions from the government or some other organizations, by taking active role in both defining the problem and proposing the answer is the diversifying point of the Solidarity Houses project»⁶.

When we examine what has been done after Skopje earthquake (1963), the important point about Skopje's newly formed structures is that most of the new buildings do not carry traces of the city traditional texture and original urban tissue. Except for the survivors of the old city and some of the later buildings, it is not possible anymore to grasp the clues of the traditional architecture style in the city. After the reconstruction of Skopje, "cultural appropriateness" has been mentioned as a problem. Concerning the adaptation of housing taken from UK to climate

² İsmail, E., Ciravoğlu, A., (2016), "Resilience and Refugee Spaces: Lessons from Palestinian Refugee Camps", *Architecture in Emergency: Re-Thinking the Refugee Crisis*, İstanbul Kültür University, pp.34-35.

³ İsmail, E., Ciravoğlu, A., (2016), *ibid.*

⁴ Demirel, S. (2005), *Production of Space in the Post Earthquake Region: Three Cases from Düzce*, Master Thesis, METU.

⁵ Demirel, S. (2005), *ibid.*

⁶ Demirel, S. (2005), *ibid.*

conditions, the implementation of a Tokyo-scale project at Skopje's scale, the handling of local factors and ensuring that local needs are met led to several criticisms⁷.

On the contrary, it would be appropriate the purpose of teaching the people hit by disasters how to build their own houses correctly, possibly by using traditional methods and materials and organizing a new life's pattern. Making their own house is a preferred method in many countries for low-cost housing construction. The purpose of this method is to make the dwellings according to certain standards by the user⁸.

Generally the construction process does not include community participation. According to the literature, there is generally top down decision making, in so that local people and refugees participation are not considered. This lack of participation has resulted in inattention, lack of maintenance, and damage after evacuation in units. Community participation in the process of emergency accommodation has been very low because most of the victims were traumatized because their homes were damaged or destroyed. People with different income levels and social status began to live in the same building blocks due to regulations of the building codes, which posed a social problem. Disaster victims who have walked to work before the disaster and have habitable neighbourhoods in horticultural homes have had to carry the responsibility and isolation of a public place with new settlements⁹.

Another case in point is L'Aquila, a medieval Italian city rose in the XIII century, with a huge old town centre, true heart of every activity, which has been hit by a major earthquake in April 2009. Still today any institutional, commercial, cultural, residential function within the old town is forbidden. Immediately after the earthquake many inhabitants, who preferred to stay in the tent camp in front of the old cathedral of the city rather than go elsewhere in more comfortable places (fig. 5), have asked loudly to be able to walk at least through the two main streets of the historical city. The streets were then effectively cleared by the rubble and re-opened for the public walk after securing the façades. Walking in the ancient heart of the city represents the power to keep the identity, which is necessarily related to the place of daily life, whereas these places have an intimate connection with the growth of the community, which reifies the two-ways relationship that could hardly be reconstituted elsewhere. Today the citizens of L'Aquila are seeking their own identity mainly in relation to the history of the city. They are determined to see their city rising to the glory of the ancient beauty, a wish which testifies the intense livability it represented.

3. Historicized precedent cases

It is worth to mention other important precedent cases in point, which can be already included in historicized literature. According to Luis Mumford, «The main function of a city is to transform power into structures, energy into culture, dead elements in living symbols of art, and biological reproduction into social creativity»¹⁰. This is what has been done in two very interesting cases throughout the XX century, the first one in Vienna after the First World War and the second one all around Germany after the Second World War.

⁷ Davis, I., (1976), *Skopje Rebuilt: Reconstruction Following the 1963 Earthquake*, Architectural Design.

⁸ Office of United Nations Disaster Relief Co-Ordinator, Geneva, 1982, *Shelter After Disaster*, New York.

⁹ İlhan, H. B., (2010), *ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁰ Mumford, L., (1961), *The city in history*, New York; It. ed. (1997) *La città' nella storia*, Milan, p.708.

In the years just after the World War I Austria was affected by a serious poverty and resource shortage; the architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897-2000), a great protagonist of the *Neues Bauen*, was called by Vienna government to find a possible solution. In order to create an innovative result, in 1922 she designed a 'core house' prototype (fig. 6) destined to the poor people whose typology was based on the very first standardized kitchen, with evident relation to the importance of people's nourishment; it immediately had a high social value because the settlers were not only the future inhabitants, but also the builders of the temporary housing units. The active participation of the people, together with the implementation of common spaces for socialization, like the shared urban gardens, was fundamental in Lihotzky's innovative architectural process. People's active participation was one of the determinants of success in the project for Vienna: « A new form of organizing the production of architecture had come into being through self-help and cooperation, as an immediate response to the post-war state of emergency. Settling was therefore not simply a working-class response to the conditions of scarcity, but a process (...) creating a common consciousness»¹¹.

After the tragic experience of the Second World War, thanks to his determined work the German architect Otto Bartning (1883-1959), who was also a theologian, was an important protagonist in German religious architecture that characterized the post-war period. Right after the war, Bartning built more than eighty Lutheran prefabricated emergency churches throughout Germany, called *Notkirchen*. The architect tried to combine the scarcity of means destined to reconstruction with the need for a renewed spirituality that, in a devastated Germany not only by the bombing but also by the psychological weight of the nefariousness carried out by the Nazi regime, appeared as strongly necessary. The architect elaborated an extremely innovative solution, combining prefabrication of part of the structure with 'fortune materials': built in stone or brick, the walls of these prefabricated churches were often taken from the rubble of the bombing, while the roofs were assembled using pre-cut wooden beams (fig. 7). Bartning designed four basic types of churches - A, B, C and D – which, according to architect plans, could be erected very quickly in one to three weeks. By thoroughly studying the best typology to be developed based on the preacher's position as the main factor, the architect was able to interpret a rediscovered necessity to live the religious spirit by a welcoming space capable of holding the community, in a Germany almost completely destroyed. Choosing to combine a main base frame with wall materials coming from bombed rubble might seem ventured, but considering the state of extreme need in a 'Year Zero Germany', Bartning knew how to make a virtue out of necessity and not just for the recycling of waste material, but for the evident metaphor that this use represented on a psychological level: to rebuild from the rubble and with the debris the sense of a newly established community, close to a new significant liturgical space of the Word.

With great critical sense, by reason the scholar G. K. Koenig commented on this important post-war constructive experience: «Bartning prefabricated churches for the organization of American aids to German Lutheran churches are a remarkable example (...) of how to reconcile expression with prefabrication, especially in the difficult field of religious building. Of these churches, 48 were planned but then 80 were built; the basement and the filled part were planned to be in masonry, obtained by the recovery of the materials taken from the rubble; this artifice dictated by economic reasons has greatly contributed to their setting, removing to every church what is unpleasantly new that is usually felt in such constructions. The load-bearing structures and

¹¹ Hochhäusl, S., (2017), *From Vienna to Frankfurt: a history of crisis, limited resources, and the modern kitchen*, Rome, Bruno Zevi Foundation, p. 57.

coverings, both prefabricated, are in wooden planks, and Bartning's formal mastery has been able to take off that sense of provisional shortage that is typical of prefabricated wooden constructions. Thus, many of these provisional churches have become definitive, so the believers have developed affection to them, destroying the cliché that would exclude churches from the field of standardized prefabrication, in the name of a concept of church wrongly considered as unique and unrepeatable»¹².

The historical events which recur in different forms invite us to reflect upon our time, upon the pressing need to conceive an effective emergency architectural planning able to safeguard not only refugees' primary needs, but also their dignity as men and women, which only a shared action can grant, as the historicized cases teach us. The current condition of camp alienation (fig. 8) created social tensions and does not favour a policy of integration. A shelter is really not enough for safeguarding the human dignity.

4. The idea of our project

Before outlining the aims and features of our project, it is very important to specify a proper definition of refugees. In the paper *Negotiating Space: traces of social integration*¹³ the authors in figure 1 represent them in this 'equation':

$$\text{REFUGEES} + \text{IMMIGRANTS} = \text{NEW COMERS}$$

In our opinion the new comers might be also asylum seekers and disaster victims, thus their different background must be taken in high consideration in order to define a flexible pattern of social life for these different categories.

Our aim is to try to develop a possible architectural/urban model starting from the concept that the dignity of the human being is the primary thing to be preserved (fig. 9) in order to keep on developing a good society even though, in terms of new comers, it could be a temporary or ephemeral society. Nevertheless, we think that also a transient contribution to the 'social good' can be very suitable for sheltering human's dignity. As case studies and historicized cases show us, one of the most important factors is to involve the new comers in the process of their new setting. That is why it is crucial to develop a model which can work according to 'bottom up' procedure, because only in this way the new comers can be really involved and be active part of the process.

Our project came out by observing the situation in different main Turkish cities, where it is possible to meet any kind of new comers who carry on them an important specificity: their identity. We look at this identity as a relevant possible source for the future of the country where we live, in which the integration of the new comers, either temporary or permanent, can benefit both the parties. The main aim is to create sustainable modular structures to be placed in the temporary urban voids of Turkish cities. Adopting the participative means, refugees will be involved in the construction and management process of the project by considering their individual skills and counting them as active subjects in the organization of their primary social needs. In this way, the project will bring a mutual benefit. While creating a life with dignity for refugee by offering an active participation to the society; for hosting country the work load and

¹² Koenig, G.K. (1965), *Architettura tedesca del secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Cappelli, p. 62.

¹³ Madero, A., Mugisa, F. Bhattacharya, T., Mahaseth, T., *Negotiating Space: traces of social integration*, Architecture in emergency: re-thinking the refugees crisis, Proceedings of the Symposium, Istanbul Kültür University, Faculty of Architecture, November 17-19 2016, p. 14.

expenditure will be minimized due to the self-efficient approach in the construction and in the management. The first important factor in Turkish cities is that there are many temporary urban voids, due to the fact that in this country there is a large activity of pulling down and rebuild entire compounds. For this reason, many private or public plots, standing right at the city centres, are empty and unused for long time. Avoiding the current behaving of setting refugees camps in the periphery of the city, we would like to create social structures within these downtown urban voids, in order to facilitate a real integration between new comers and the city. Indeed the process might involve also the local citizens who can contribute to the creation of an efficient temporary social pattern. We share the idea expressed by the scholar Pippo Ciorra: «The idea, in this case, is not to ‘fill’ the urban voids in order to rise the density, rather to subtract them to the processes of traditional urbanization, in order to give commitments to new landscape urbanists, who will made of them habitable and cultivating landscape, productive and public space at the same time, with the goal in mind of the self-sufficiency»¹⁴.

Our idea is to identify each new comer according to his/her skills and expertise during the very first sheltering step, by a constructive dialogue which can provide information about the job carried out before leaving. This is a crucial step which can help in identifying how to involve the new comers in the efficient creation of a social pattern. By listening to them, it will be also possible to better understand their social need and the structures that must be built: for instance a first aid centre, temporary schools, language education, lawyer consultants, common laundries...but there are most specific functions which have to be considered: for instance according to religion (Muslims, Christians...) in the first case the baby boys must get the circumcision while in the second case the baptism for both sex. But also type of feeding, specific needs of dressing etc. are part of the cultural identity, which has to be taken in maximum consideration.

A special care has to be destined to children, especially those who are fleeing without parents. This is a recurrent and extremely risky situation, as recently reported on journals: «With nearly 6.000 children now unaccounted for, Germany has fallen short of protecting missing refugee children, as the number in the country continues to grow. (...) The U.N. children’s agency UNICEF had also voiced alarm and urged European countries to do more to protect migrant children who are on their own»¹⁵. Some of the new comers by themselves could look after these children belonging to their original community but far from their parents, in order to enhance a self-social responsibility toward the weakest members of the new civic group.

Other strategies for obtaining our goal would be, at first stage, to collecting information from the literature, municipality and other institutions which did surveys. After that, it is fundamental to combine them with the psychological aspects; considering refugees’ ideas and respecting the identity should be the most significant aspect. At second stage, it would be meaningful to let refugees design and work together with architects, artists and maybe students all together. By this way, their cultural materials and living conditions in the country they come from will be interpreted and possibly provided according to their requests.

In the second step, a tangible proposal of temporary architecture will be developed taking into account the issues related to the new physical environment. By our prototypal project, we would try to answer the crucial questions:

- In a multicultural temporary society, what kind of built environment is the solution to provide dignity for all the people?

¹⁴ Ciorra, P., (2011), *Senza Architettura. Le ragioni di una crisi*, Bari, Laterza, p. 52.

¹⁵ No author, *Germany falls short of protecting missing child migrants*, Daily Sabbah, 6 July 2017, pp. 1-11.

- What is the real necessity for the social life of refugees without making discrimination?
- By offering new patterns to meet these necessities, how the urban life will be affected?

In the second step of our project, by proposing sustainable, flexible, modular, and self-efficient structure for public and social services, we aim to draw the attention to the social needs of refugees and to design a model for meeting their expectations. We will take into consideration several specific criteria (Table 1), also keeping in mind the importance of factors like re-naturalization, urban agriculture, self-sufficient feeding, self-sufficient energy supply. According to the guide which supports environmental criteria for architecture of emergency, there are five sustainable criteria¹⁶ we could also take into consideration also in the case of our project:

4.1. Selection of the Land

The selected land in the post-disaster rehabilitation phase must be suitable for shelters, either temporarily or in terms of both climatic and environmental characteristics. Soil structure, infrastructure features, electricity and water supply, etc. should allow settlement's setting with minimum requirements. In addition, the nature of the farm in agricultural terms or the state of being a public or private landmark, are other important factors in the selection of the area. In order to provide convenience in legal and financial terms, to the public sector must be given priority in the selection¹⁷.

4.2. Material

Describing the use of environmentally optimum materials for post-disaster construction projects offers a sustainable awareness in approaching to the selection, purchase and use of materials for the design of shelters that have the least negative impact on the environment and people.

4.3. Energy efficiency and renewable energy

It provides the most sustainable way to meet the energy needs of emergency shelters. It includes the use of renewable energy sources and technologies to improve energy efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions to the atmosphere.

4.4. Water efficiency

It emphasizes environmental sustainability, promotes and implements water and sanitation systems that increase the prosperity of the users.

4.5. Indoor comfort

It aims to contribute to the comfort of the interior for the well-being of its residents. This includes the natural and mechanical systems related to ventilation, daylight, comfort temperature and other influential factors from a sustainable point¹⁸.

Based on the analysis, we have identified three key factors for developing the second step of our project, with the consciousness that achieving a dignified standard of living comes together with taking into consideration the real necessities and the potentials of the needy people. The key factors are:

1. Flexibility:

Asylum seekers, refugees, disaster victims, immigrants will be the users of the proposed ephemeral social structure in changing conditions. Therefore, the flexibility of the design is one of the main features to be considered. The structure should be adaptable to the environment by means of climate, geography and culture.

2. Low-Cost model:

¹⁶ Brusadin Viola, S., (2013), *An Approach for Energy Efficiency and Sustainability in Emergency Architecture: Evaluation of Post-Disaster Shelters in Turkey*, M.Sc. Thesis, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, p. 32.

¹⁷ İlhan, H. B., (2010), *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁸ Brusadin Viola, S., (2013), *ibid.*, p.33.

Due to the limited sources vis-à-vis increasing needs, the most efficient way to offer a social environment to the victims is to create a sustainable and economic model.

3. Participation:

As experienced in different examples, participative process helps the people to adopt their new environment. To provide the sustainability of the project, it is crucial to have the society involved.

This project pushes us to think and reconsider the function of architecture in contemporary times. «In the face of evolving and changing languages, what has always made clear the difference between the status of architecture and that of ‘pure’ arts is their mission. The art is asked to pose questions: highlighting and giving shape to the existence of conditions, potentialities and problems in space, in society, in individual and collective psychology. Architecture, even in parity of forms, must provide answers, solutions capable of modifying the shape of a space and the lives of people who live in it, no matter how limited has become the range of its influence»¹⁹. We wish to offer a possible answer through a renewed good practice of architecture.

Selection of Location	Settlement	Structure
Disaster (earthquake, flood etc.) Risk Situation	Land Use Decisions	Structure-Ground interaction
Natural structure of the land features	Settlement Model	The Form of Structure
Accessibility and infrastructure opportunities	Transportation and infrastructure axes system	Structural Items

Table 1: Approach to architectural design criteria²⁰.

¹⁹ Ciorra, P., Ibid., p. 106.

²⁰ Kimilli, M. Z., (2006), *Sustainable Architectural Design in the Areas Sensitive for Earthquake; Isparta/Mavikent Sample*, M.Sc. Thesis, Süleyman Demirel University, Isparta, p. 35.

Turkey

Syrian Refugee Camps and Provincial Breakdown of Syrian Refugees Registered in South East Turkey

as of 03 July 2017

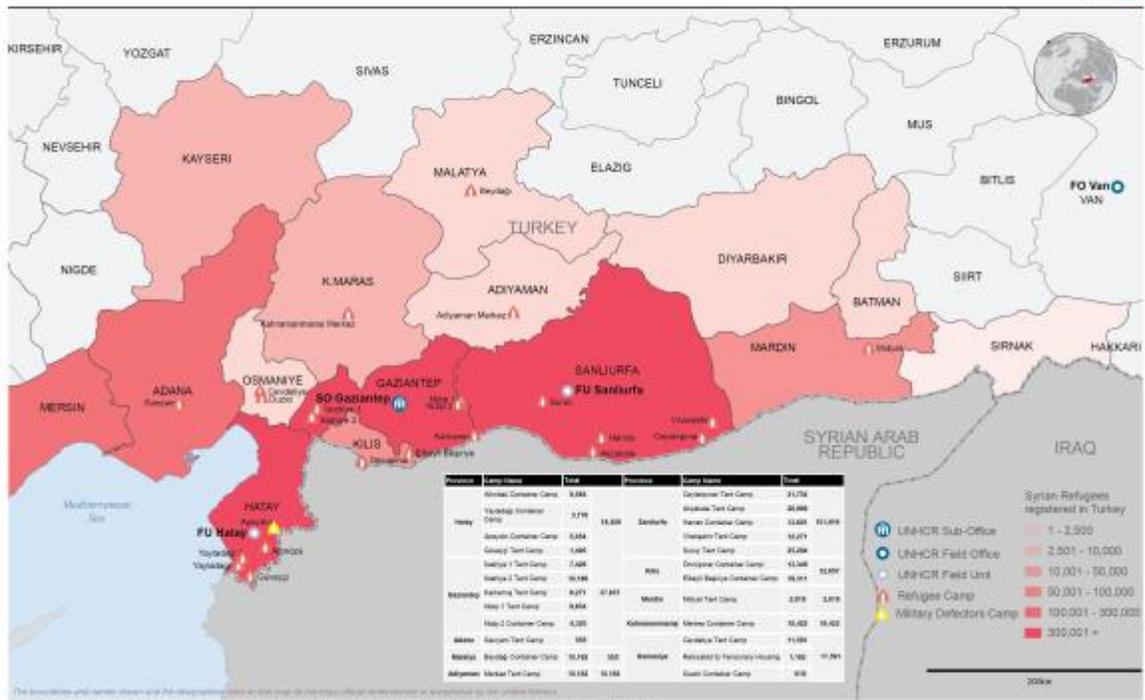


Fig. 1: The map emphasizes the engagement of Turkey in the refugee hosting process.

Source: www.unhcr.org

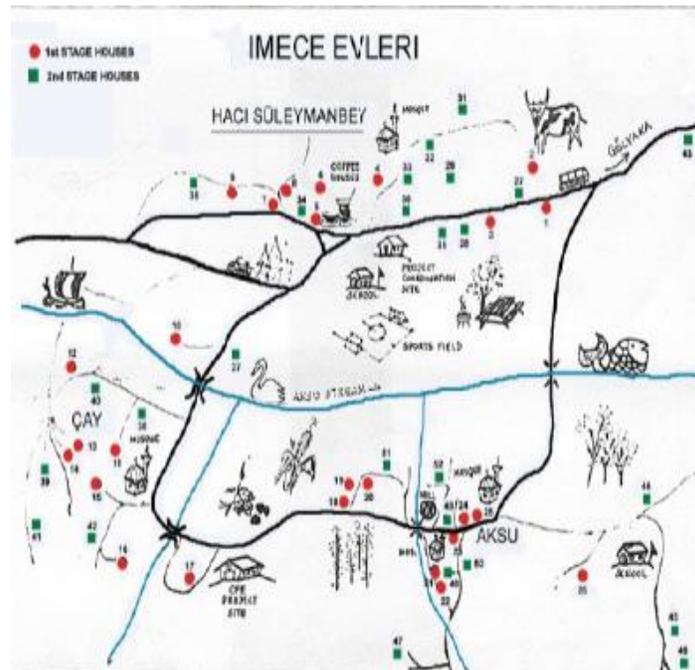


Fig. 2: Scheme of the new buildings built in Düzce.

Source: Demirel S., (2005), p.40



*Fig. 3: Villagers working in the construction process of Solidarity Houses in Düzce.
Source: Demirel, S. (2005), p.43*



*Fig. 4: Solidarity Houses built by the villagers in Düzce after the 1999 Marmara Earthquake.
Source: Demirel S., (2005), p.55*



Fig. 5: Aerial photo of the first tents camp located in front of Santa Maria di Collemaggio cathedral after the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake.

Source: http://www.eneaspr.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/LAquila_2009_Campo-Croce-Rossa-Collemaggio.jpg

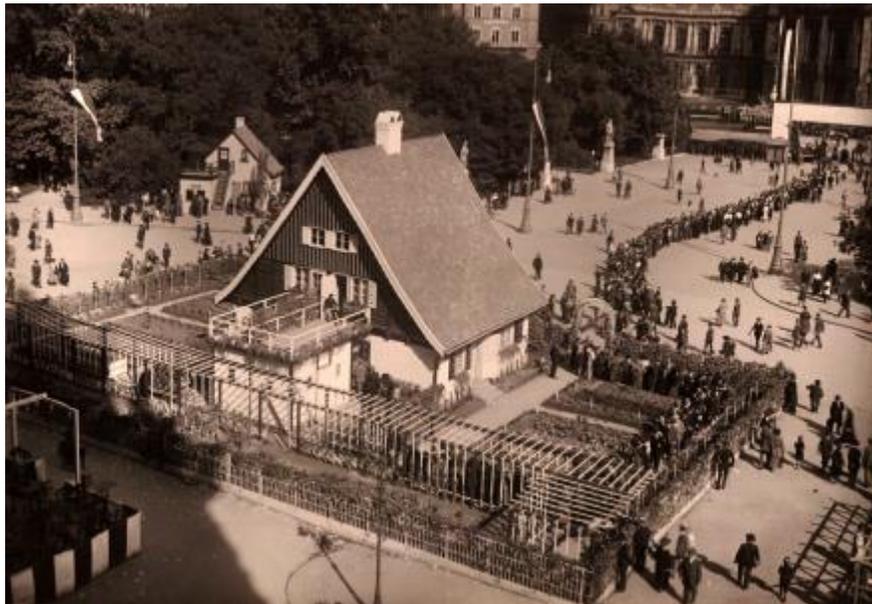


Figure 6: Visitors in front of Vienna's 1923 Allotment Garden Settlement and Housing Exposition, lining up to see Burgenland Type.

Source: Cooperative archives of the Central Association of Austrian Allotment Gardeners (Hochhäusl 2017)

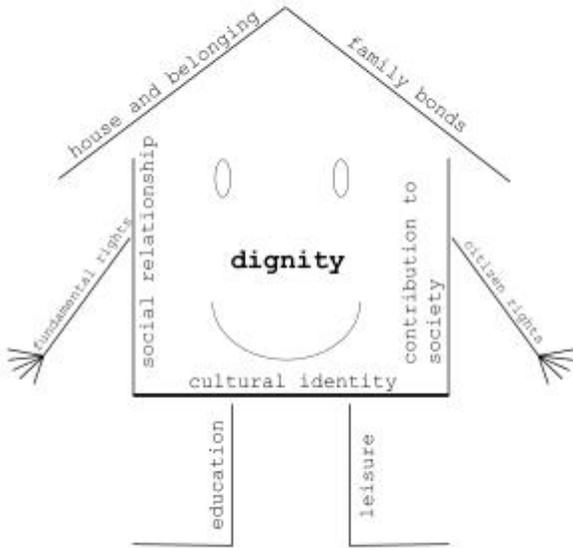


Figure 7: Otto Bartning, wood structure prefabricated church, 1946-50.
Source: ©Otto Bartning Archiv, TU Darmstadt



Fig. 8: Nizip II Container Camp, Tobias Hutzler, Turkish/Syrian border, 2014.
Source: <https://archpaper.com>

Normal State of a Human Being



State of a Human Being After a Disaster

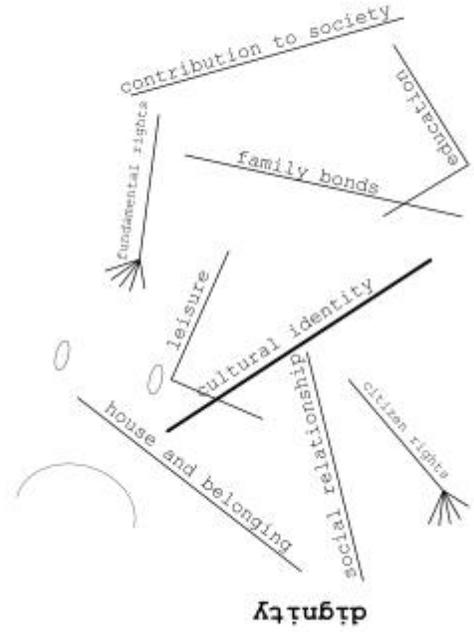


Fig. 9: Scheme of the state of human being in normal condition and in post-disaster condition.
Source: scheme by the authors