

**1 FIRST MODERNITY AND THE FORDIST MODEL**

One of the main arguments expressed by Le Corbusier in *Towards a new architecture* in 1923 was the absence of an architecture that could be identified with the modern society of his time. This broken relation between architecture and society was illustrated by comparing the products manufactured by the society available for the use of the consumers and housing, which is the production in the sector of the architecture specially created for the citizens' use. The perfection and beauty of many industrial products of that time: automobiles, airplanes and many machines were compared with the bizarre and unhealthy housing architecture of his time. The precision and inalterability of the new materials employed by the industry was contrasted with the heterogeneity and variability of the natural materials used in the housing construction. The industrial standardization of elements and details was confronted with the chaotic variety of artisan solutions in the housing production. And the economical efficiency of the serialization in the industry was measured with the waste of labour time and resources of the artisan construction. As conclusion, the analogy between modernity and machine was synthesised in the famous icon of the modernity: "machine à habiter." With this phrase Le Corbusier linked the term "house" to "machine", but also "housing construction" to "mass production". He described this relation with these words: "the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful... Industry on the grand scale must occupy itself with building and establish the elements of the house on a mass-production basis. We must create the mass-production spirit." <sup>1</sup>



The "mass-production spirit" defended by Le Corbusier was in fact the architectural translation of the fordist model that was characteristic of Western industry of the XX century typified by a cycle of mass standardized production linked to mass consumption. The Fordism was coined at the beginning of the XX century to describe the new revolutionary industrial practices developed by the American automobile manufacturer Henry Ford. The fordist production system was based on the introduction of the assembly line in 1908 where the different parts of the car were quickly and efficiently assembled by a moving conveyor belt. The system demanded a distinctive division of labour separating the different work tasks between different groups of workers, that means specialization, and also the production of the different parts and components under a strict high quality control, that means standardization. The most famous product manufactured by this system was the Ford Model T. The reduction of the production costs and the increasing of the speed in the assembly line produced a reduction of the selling price, leading to increased sales and to the development of a mass market of affordable products for the public. As result of it, the mass production was born based on identical products with the same components, same accessories, same finishing and even same colour: black. The ironic statement of Henry Ford : "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black", resumes the unflexible relation market-production where everybody gets the same, for the same affordable price.



**2 SECOND MODERNITY AND THE POST-FORDIST MODEL**

According to many sociologists we are entering in a new phase of the modernity; Anthony Giddens names it "radicalized modernity", Ulrich Beck "second modernity" and Zygmunt Bauman "Liquid Modernity". This second phase of modernity is linked to the emergence of the computer, biotechnology, world-wide communication and transport networks. Bauman uses the term "liquid" as metaphor for the present stage of the modern era in contrast with the term "solid" that characterized the first modernity: "Liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape..., neither fix space nor bind time..., are constantly ready (and prone) to change...and the extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with idea of lightness".<sup>2</sup>

One of the changes between the first modernity and the second modernity or liquid modernity is the evolution of a fordist society into a post-fordist society, what Bauman describes as the change from "producer-style" to "consumer-style." Post-Fordism is based, instead on the production of a standardized product, on the manufacturing of different product lines for different target groups, responding to the diversification of the consumers' demands. This radical change in the production systems was based on the introduction of computer technologies and robotization of the machinery that created a flexible production system able to give a quick respond to the demands of the market. Changes in the process of production are quickly done without extra cost, the production of small volumes that immediately are delivered reduces the need of space for stock and for the first time it is possible the tailoring of production to the requirements of the individual customers.

The fordist production system that was based on the repetition of "identicals" to reach the economical feasibility was related with a strong social feeling of collectivity, the feeling of building a new modern society. On the contrary the post-fordist production system that is based on the production of a great variety of products following the consumers' demands is linked to the process of individualization of the second modernity.

### **3 INDIVIDUALIZATION AND THE CRISIS OF THE "HOUSING IDENTITY"**

One of the new terms that identifies this second phase of the modernity is "individualization". The term was used by Georg Simmel to define the strong increase of individual independence and Ulrich Beck describes with these words the consequences of the individualization: "What is heralded, ultimately, by this development is the end of fixed, predefined images of man. The human being becomes (in radicalization of Sartre's meaning) a choice among possibilities, homo optionis. Life, death, gender, corporeality, identity, religion, marriage, parenthood, social ties – all are becoming decidable down to the small print; once fragmented into options, everything must be decided."<sup>3</sup>

We should distinguish between individualization and individualism. While individualism is a personal attitude or behaviour, individualization is a social phenomenon. While individualism could be considered as an ideology supported by a few, individualization is a "social fact" suffered or enjoyed by everybody. Beck emphasizes that individualization is a "social condition" which is not chosen by a free decision of individuals and that is becoming "the social structure of the second modern society itself."

Once again, in the XXI century, the housing industry and market cannot follow the changes of our society. Anchored in the same fordist model developed by the modern movement almost one century ago the housing production has not been capable to evolve into a post-fordist model related with the current society. When we compare the variety and sophistication of products developed by the industry of the second modernity with the lack of diversity in the housing market, we realized that basically the "housing type" developed by the modern movement has not changed so much in almost one century. If we compare the flexibility of the current methods of production of the industry with the housing industry, the conclusion is that we are anchored in an inflexible normalization and standardization of the construction based on a rigid fordist production method more appropriated of the first half of the past century. And finally if we compare the high degree of personalization of every product or service developed in our current society with the minimum level of personalization of the housing we can conclude that the relation between society products and housing is definitively broken.

At global scale there is again, as Le Corbusier claimed in 1923, an absence of a housing system that could be identified with the modern society of our times and the result is a crisis of the "housing identity". In parallel, at the scale of the individual, there is a lack of flexible housing products available to reassert the self-identity of the consumer. That is what Bauman defines like "self-identify through possessions". The house is one of the most important elements in the complex task of defining our own identity. In the process of individualization of the second modern society, housing is a complex and important parameter to reassert our biography, because on one hand it is an object of consume with a value in the market and on the other hand it has a big influence in our way of living.

Ulrich Beck resumes this crisis with this question: "What architecture, what spatial planning, what educational planning does a society need under the pressure of individualization?"<sup>3</sup>

To answer to this question we have analyzed three different aspects of the individualization process (detraditionalization, heterogenization and emancipation) and experimented different strategies in several architectural projects to define the bases of a new housing identity related to the individualization process of the second modernity.

#### **4 DETRADITIONALIZATION AND THE TYPOLOGICAL HYBRIDIZATION**

The detraditionalization phenomenon is one of the effects of individualization in the modern society that consists of the progressive loosening of ties of individuals with "traditional" institutions like the family, the church, political parties or trade unions. That means that in the past the way of life was given by the traditions but nowadays, more and more, it is defined by the individuals. Analogically, during the first modernity period the housing type was standardized but nowadays there is a necessity of diversification of housing typologies for new different ways of living.

Conscious of this problematic we have developed a family of hybrid typologies in several projects that could be used to amplify the range of housing solutions for a contemporary society. The mix of classic dwelling typologies, some of them traditionally individual and some collective, combined in collective urban morphologies generates a wide field of experimentation with some interesting results.

One of the results is that some typically individual typologies like the "patio-house" can be integrated in collective blocks becoming a new hybrid type such as the "patio-penthouse" or that types like the "multilevel house" traditionally connected horizontally in row housing configurations could be combined also vertically with other typologies in more dense configurations. These hybrid typologies are located on the border between the individual and the collective, which could be considered as new typological solutions to deal with the new relationship between individuality and collectivity in our current society.

#### **5 EMANCIPATION AND THE PERSONALIZATION OF THE HOUSE**

Emancipation is, in social terms, the increasing of "freedom of choice" of the individual. It is, on one hand, the result of the progressive detraditionalization of the society that loses the influences on individual attitudes. On the other hand it is the effect of the diversification of possibilities to choose generated by the post-fordist system. This increasing of freedom of choice in our life is in charge to transform our "given biography" in the "elective biography", the "reflexive biography", the "do-it-yourself biography", expressed in Beck's words.

If we understand the house as an important element of our biography in relation with our way of living, a wide freedom of choice should be provided in order to configure an "elective living habitat" linked to our "elective biography". Obviously the current housing system does not offer a range of freedom of choice consequent with the level of emancipation of our individualized society.

When we study this phenomenon we find several strategies suitable to be used at different levels to increase the level of personalization of the house:

Choosing types. A wider range of housing typologies to choose is needed like the hybrid typologies or even more personalized typologies.

Choosing options. When a housing typology for living is chosen, to offer a wide range of options is needed to personalize the house. These options can vary from simple elements like the equipment of the kitchen and the bathrooms, to elements that define the spatial quality of the house such as partition walls, voids and double high rooms and even in some cases elements linked to the exterior image of the house like balconies, terraces, colours and materials.

Do-it-yourself. A different concept in the way of personalizing the house is the shift from "choosing types" and "choosing options" to "do-it-yourself". It does not mean that the user has total freedom to build his own house but that within a certain frame conditions the house is thought and designed by the user. The user becomes the architect of his own house as he is becoming the architect of his own life.

The result of applying these strategies is to get a highly personalized house that could work as a useful instrument to define the "elective biography" of every individual. The mechanisms to define the housing identity

are linked to the mechanisms to define our own identity. Our identity is becoming something configured by ourselves by the election of choices as Bauman explained: "Individualization consists of transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' and charging the actors with the responsibility of performing the task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance...As this happens, human beings are no more 'born into' their identities."<sup>4</sup>

Housing identity and personal identity are definitely determined by the possibilities of choosing and these possibilities are becoming an obligation more than an option as Anthony Giddins underlines with this enlightening sentence: "we have no choice but to choose."<sup>5</sup>

## 6 HETEROGENIZATION AND THE RELATION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALIZATION AND SOCIETY

One of the effects of the individualization is the heterogenization of the society. If the individuals lose their ties with the traditions and, as a consequence of it, they experiment an increasing freedom of choice, then they will probably make different choices.

The heterogenization phenomenon of the society and its translation into the frame of the collective housing bring to light many interesting questions such as: How to express the housing diversification in the collective context of the city? What is the relation between housing individuality and the collectivity of the city? What is the new image of a collectivity based on the individualization? In resume, what is the relation between individualization and society?

The image of collectivity generated by the first modernity was based on the concept of repetition of identicals. This image was related with the standardization of the mass production system but also with a particular way of understanding the term "collective" that Le Corbusier described with this words: "The worker makes one tiny detail, always the same one, during months of work, perhaps during years of work, perhaps the rest of his life... the spirit of the worker's booth no longer exists, but certainly there does exist a more collective spirit."<sup>1</sup> Therefore the expression of collectivity created by the first modernity is generated by what Gilles Deleuze called "close repetition"<sup>6</sup> based on a combination of repeated elements: A A A A ..., whereas the new image of the collectivity of the second modernity should be generated by an evolution of the concept "open repetition" that could generate more sophisticated typological combinations.

The relation between the level of repetition of elements and the difference between them is in charge to create the housing heterogenization, which is at the same time the result of the equilibrium between the production cost to generate diversity and the necessity of typological variety demanded by the housing market.

The housing heterogenization has been study in several projects defined by two main parameters: the level of housing heterogenization (LHH) and the intensity of the housing heterogenization (IHH).

The relation between the housing heterogenization of the project and its image is defined by the transparency of the heterogenization that could varie between opaque, analogical or transparent heterogenization.

The new image of collectivity is irreversible linked to the notion of individualization. Traditional collective urban morphologies are composed by typical individual housing types and individual housing types are combined to generate a collective identity.

In conclusion a new and strong housing identity capable to characterize the second modernity of the XXI century needs to address the paradoxical relation between collectivity and individualization quoted by Beck with this words: "In developed modernity human mutuality and community rest no longer on solidly established traditions, but, rather, on a paradoxical collectivity of reciprocal individualization."<sup>3</sup>

1 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (1923). English edition, *Towards a new architecture* (1923)

2 Zigmunt Bauman, *Liquid modernity*, Cambridge (2000)

3 Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, London (2002)

4 Zigmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, Cambridge (2001)

5 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge (1991)

6 Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (1968). English edition: *Difference and repetition* (1994)

7 Norbert Elias, *Die Gesellschaft der Individuen*, Frankfurt am Main (1987). English edition: *The Society of Individuals*, Oxford (1991)