

Attributes of Domestic Spaces for Contemporary Habitation — A Secondary Publication

Silvina Barraud Caffaratti*

Catholic University of Córdoba, Córdoba, Argentina

**Corresponding author:* Silvina Barraud Caffaratti, 0821545@ucc.edu.ar

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Abstract: The domestic space can be defined as the sphere that articulates the needs for subjective containment and contextual stimuli. In this sense, questions arise about the indispensable attributes that spaces must possess for this articulation to take place adequately. Architecture, as the discipline in charge of satisfying the specific spatial needs of those who inhabit these spaces and, in a broader sense, as a concrete contribution to society, must address this relationship in all its complexity and generate concrete responses that incorporate the appropriate spatial attributes during the design processes. The design processes that shape living spaces confront this dialectic, and the manner in which they do so brings identity and character to them. It is believed that the higher the level of variables that are contemplated and weighted, the greater the adequacy of spaces to the changing dynamics of the people who inhabit them. This article focuses on a thorough analysis of these spatial attributes, in parallel to the definition of each one as a particular condition for design, based on their conceptualization, breakdown, and articulation. Conceptually, the following attributes are addressed: flexibility, adaptability, variability, versatility, multiplicity, plurality, integrality, gradualness, incrementality, progressiveness, independence, connectivity, intimacy, and privacy. Each of these attributes is valued as a contribution to creating adequate habitability in contextual terms, with consideration to possible integrations and combinations.

Keywords: Attributes; Domestic space; Design processes

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1. Introduction

The contemporary domestic space can be characterized as a dynamic sphere of subjective development, in which multiple tensions associated with the dynamics of inhabiting are present and evident, while permeations with respect to the exteriority are required. For the conceptual approach, it is resorted to Doberti's theory of inhabiting, given its temporal and geographical proximity, which states that "inhabiting is structurally variable" ^[1]. This approach is considered relevant since variability is understood as a significant notion of inhabiting. Architecture, as a discipline committed to the reflective study, conception, projection, and materialization of habitat, must take these aspects into account in order to generate spaces consistent with habits and lifestyles, also capturing the "temporary" conditions of those who inhabit, so that they are integrated

into the generative process of space. Doberti further characterizes inhabiting from its conditions of immediacy, familiarity, and constancy ^[1]. Immediacy is related to the accelerated pace of contemporary life, determined by constant changes and simultaneous actions; familiarity is articulated to the containment implied by the notion of “inhabiting,” to attachment and belonging; and constancy is linked to persistence and recursiveness as a practice. From this perspective, inhabiting is more than a “macro practice,” it is a system of signification that links human activities with the configurations of spatiality; this is how the meaning and transcendence of inhabiting participates. In this context, habitability is understood as a condition that contributes to the meaning of architecture, which is achieved through appropriate relationships. In this way, “habitability is composed,” as Paredes and Carlos ^[2] puts it, considering that composition implies that something “enters into new combinations or correlations.” Within the framework of these relationships, it could be argued that inhabiting is a practice that combines the relationships between inhabitants as protagonists, habitats as means of action, and habits as practices. It is considered that the attributes of the domestic spaces that are generated should be based on this triad so that the design processes are adequate for life to take place.

2. Methods

In order to carry out the research stage described in this article, the methodology used was the literature search and tracing. A simple type of search was first carried out and followed by an advanced type of search. This approach was considered essential in scientific research. In order to achieve greater precision in the approach of the aforementioned search, a time frame was established that coincided with contemporaneity. This is related to the thematic contextualization since the conceptual exploration of the attributes of the projected spaces according to the current ways of living requires adequate material for this time frame. In this direction, the production of the available academic community is investigated, which includes books, specialized journals, and material published in specialized pages of Architectural Theory, the field of knowledge to which we seek to contribute. Subsequently, the analytical reading of the selected primary sources was carried out, and the visions and approaches presented to generate the discussion instance included diverse and even antagonistic positions on the concepts that emerge as attributes of the domestic space. Once the general conceptualizations had been generated, an approach to the articulation of notions was established, and the information obtained was processed and recorded in cards that were organized into categories according to the concepts (and their relationships among them), as a glossary. As a result, a set of attributes valued as conceptual foundations for the development of the design processes of contemporary domestic spaces, in accordance with current ways of living, was formed.

3. Results

A list of attributes valued as conceptual foundations for the development of design processes of contemporary domestic spaces is elaborated, with an enunciation coherent with the current ways of living. These attributes have antecedents and roots in the history of domestic architecture, which acquired new meanings in the current context. The arguments inherent to each attribute are presented below. It is relevant to mention that each concept is developed from a conceptualization supported by diverse perspectives intertwined with criteria of argumentative and not necessarily chronological relationship, concluding with a notion that manifests itself as its own definition.

3.1. Flexibility

According to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), “flexible” refers to something that is

not subject to strict rules, dogmas, or constraints, and is susceptible to changes or variations according to circumstances or needs. Regarding spatiality, according to Hernández, “Flexibility is the category by which the housing project includes a series of mechanisms that ensure certain interior spatial variability, due to the daily functional demands of its inhabitants”^[3]. However, although the concept is enunciated as an initial cliché and is a generic and inescapable reference to contemporary domestic space, it is not exclusive to other moments. In contemporaneity, as Medina states, “The search for flexibility would seem to be a shared premise”^[4], although its conception does not imply a generic agreement nor does it guarantee its effective incorporation in every phase of the process, and sometimes even in no phase at all, nor, finally, in the spatial resultants. Due to its implication, Carli associates flexibility with “polyvalence”^[5] and antagonistic considerations, since, according to his approach, polyvalence is inherent to “the casual, the fortuitous, the unforeseen” and flexibility implies “univalence” as a consequence of spatial integration that validates unique functions. Oppositely, Alemán deduces that “the topic of flexibility appears, amidst serious misunderstandings linked to the frivolous application of the term” and raises the “fictitious character of the flexibility/fragmentarity binomial”^[6]. In this regard, Monteys and Fuertes relate flexibility to the notion of “Valid Ambiguity” and explain it as follows: “The greater the specialization of the pieces of the house has been and the more undefined pieces have disappeared, the greater has been the loss of flexibility”^[7].

Lastly, addressing spatial flexibility implies articulating incident variables in the design process of space, especially diverse alternatives, multiple contingencies, and heterogeneous events that can be accommodated, while aiming at habitability in the best circumstances. Therefore, when referring to flexibility, it becomes evident, first of all, the need to reflect on the diversity that characterizes those who inhabit contemporaneity, translated into the heterogeneity of demands. Each person, in turn, goes through stages and processes of transformations and changes in the temporal evolution of their existence, so that spaces are required that make these processes viable and make it possible to accompany them, as well as to enable the realization of different events, with temporal distance or proximity to each other. This is independent of the specific personal and social condition of its inhabitants at the time the project is implemented. Alemán^[6] states that “Flexibility should be understood in conceptual and not literal terms: not as a result of the breaking down of partitions but as a capacity to enable permanently changing ways of life” and proposes “versatility” as an axis of reflection. Controversially, Pallasmaa questions extreme flexibility and defines it as a “game without rules.” The author confronts the idea of “inflexible flexibility,” which he argues as follows: “Complete flexibility is not architecture. It is a means to efficiency, not the expression of a psychic structure”^[8]. His position presents flexibility as an inverse condition to that which is systematic and dynamically accommodates multiple variations. His conception puts in tension two aspects proper to the domestic space: expression as representation, and efficiency in terms of adaptability. Regarding expression as representation, the domestic space demands that the project favors the viability of the temporal expression of inhabiting in different instances and that it is capable of signifying the environment of domesticity of each person; or, in other words, the space must be able to make present the way of inhabiting of each subject in the time in which it takes place. This articulation between expression and adaptability characterizes the implication of flexibility in terms of domestic spaces. From what has been expressed, contemporary spatial flexibility is understood as the essential condition for the projection of contemporary architectural spaces, being an articulator of the attributes of adaptability, variability, and versatility in the face of the diverse and heterogeneous emerging conditions. It includes the multiplicity and plurality of possibilities, alluding to uncertainty, as well as the freedom of subjective action and openness to what may happen. It favors independence and connectivity and involves evolutionary logics and integrality. Flexibility is then approached as the “framework” condition of the domestic space, with an ambiguous and indeterminate character and self-

expression. This implies that, as a general condition, it includes, encompasses, contains, and understands others.

3.2. Adaptability, variability, and versatility

Adaptability is defined by the RAE as the quality of accommodating or adjusting something and making it perform differently from its original purpose. Based on this, spatial adaptability is understood as a receptive condition that allows spaces to adapt to new changes, in unforeseen ways, and to dispense with pre-established uses. Variability is defined as the capacity for dynamic adaptation, and versatility as the capacity for functional conciliation and transformation that makes viable practices and uses different from those assumed. In this direction, Monteys and Fuertes ^[7] address the idea of “subverting” as “critical action” and define it as “using a thing in another way than it was intended.” Regarding adaptability, Gausa ^[9] differentiates the concept of adaptation, presenting adaptability as “...the capacity to resist the typical changes of an environment,” and adaptation as “...synonymous with independence, and capacity to resist new changes”; and adds that while “...adaptation is related to certainty, adaptability to uncertainty.” According to Fernández-Lorenzo, “An adaptable house is capable of accommodating, with small interior variations, a great variety of groups and models of coexistence” ^[10]. Adaptable spaces are those that can accommodate emergent changes, not essentially considered at the outset. Adaptability makes it possible for spaces to accommodate unanticipated practices and are linked to fluctuation. In turn, the articulation between versatility of the domestic space, adaptability to the diversity of practices and variability of uses must be contemplated during the design process. Adaptability, variability, and versatility are associated with the uses and practices that in time make a given space possible, if it is designed in those terms; and it is considered that the role of its designers is to define the material conditions to favor it during the design process.

Variability is then considered to be associated with the capacity for adaptation that a space may have, depending on the changing needs of its inhabitants. Adaptability is related to receptivity to new changes, and versatility to adaptation to unforeseen changes.

3.3. Multiplicity and plurality

According to its RAE definition, multiplicity is associated with quantitative abundance or with a multiple set, while plurality refers to the variety of aspects and characteristics coexisting in that set. Both aspects are inherent to contemporary life, in which there are multiple changes associated with domestic habitation, such as the incorporation of viable work activities that can be carried out from home, changes in the composition of the living group due to aggregation or disaggregation, the need to incorporate inhabitants with a certain degree of independence, among others. All these aspects require spatial responses that reflect these dualities: home-work, integration-separation, independence-articulation, among others that may arise.

The introversion of the interior space does not lie in its greater degree of enclosure, but in the change in the relations of experience. Furthermore, it is added that, in this process, spatiality is neither unitary nor continuous and an interstitial version is produced, composed of differentiated rooms that maintain their identity within the whole. This represents a renewal of the notion of interiority associated with spatial enclosure and also with the interstitial relationship between the different rooms of the ensemble. It detaches it from spatial integration and links it to integrality.

Based on the above, it is considered that multiplicity and plurality are related to the idea of an integral system that enables alternation and variety of practices, through logics that define relative distances between them. Distance does not imply remoteness, but separation by means of systematic organization, and as a derivative, it favors independence.

3.4. Integrality

Integrality, according to the RAE, refers to the understanding of the elements or aspects of something, as well as to each of the parts of a whole, and also to what enters into its composition without being essential to it, so that it can subsist, even if it is incomplete. In this sense, spatial integrality is approached as a relational aspect of a system of coexistence of fragments whose end is habitability. Baudrillard refers to the house as “the integration of personal relationships that compose an organic system”^[11] and it could be added that this organism is directly associated with the occurrence of its spatio-temporal context. In contemporaneity, the concept of integrality refers to the condition of the domestic space inherent to the essence of the proposal, which preserves it as a system beyond the changes that may occur with the passing of time (made possible by variability and plurality), implying that the proposal is expressed as an integral entity even though it undergoes incorporations, additions, aggregations, or fragmentations as a result of changes in the ways of inhabiting. This condition is related to the material expression of the habitable space.

3.5. Gradualness

The RAE establishes that gradualness is a quality that indicates that something advances from degree to degree, and in terms of spatiality, it refers to the succession between successive and differentiated spaces. The current coexistence groups, dynamic and changing, demand spatialities that reflect these conditions and that, at the same time, have transition instances that provide gradients as inter-spatial relational variables. Thus, gradients participate as substitutes for hierarchization, a condition of domestic space reversed in the contemporary context. According to Baudrillard^[11]: “The prototypical bourgeois interior is of patriarchal order” and adds that in this context space presents “infunctionality, immovability, imposing presence, and hierarchical etiquette.” To this rigid and binary perspective of spatiality, appropriate for certain moments and indissoluble in societies of the past, are opposed criteria of inhabiting based on dynamic networks of relationships that are structured with non-hierarchical logics that enable undefined practices and uses. Hubeli proposes that, if a project strategy had to be defined, it would be to achieve that margin of freedom that allows changes of use and hierarchy^[12] and Montaner *et al.* contribute that “The first rule of flexibility is the existence of areas with the minimum possible graduation”^[13]. It is understood from the above that contemporaneity demands spaces that relate to each other through orders that do not imply subordination, and that the operative linking instances must be resolved in terms of graduations and sequentiality. Binary or dual relations between spaces are replaced by interrelation and trans-scalarity. In this gradual sequentiality, the relationship between urban public and domestic private space becomes present, as well as between inside (interiority, which corresponds to the idea of shelter) and outside (exteriority). In this traction, the gallery emerges as a “bivalent” space that is both interior and exterior^[5] and transitions bring gradients of interrelation in all its meanings.

3.6. Incrementality and progressivity

Incrementality, according to the RAE, is understood as the increase in the value of a variable; its translation to architectural spatiality implies the capacity for growth of a space, which is articulated with progressivity as a temporal and gradual condition of that growth. Thus, it is considered that space can be increased progressively. Fernández Gago and Mesejo refer to the idea of “cultivating dwellings” by means of “configurable enclosures”^[14], which they approach as reserve spaces not already built and waiting to be needed.

Regarding the temporality associated with the material realization of housing, it is common in the contemporary context to project to build in stages, mainly associated with economic reasons, and that in turn, the habitability is made possible from the moment in which the first stage is completed or admits to be

inhabited. For these reasons, it is essential that growth is produced from a project that evidences it and develops its potential. Progressivity involves issues that require habitability parallel to the process of materialization of the next stage or the following stages (if progressivity is planned in more than two stages), so it is essential to undertake construction processes consistent with these design demands. Independent construction systems favor growth and partial substitution. On the other hand, it contributes to the incrementality of flat roofs, which make vertical growth and the use of concrete limits feasible, while favoring accessible terraces (temporary or permanent) that can become covered spaces.

As for the types of growth, we can refer to internal growth (existing spaces are subdivided horizontally or vertically) and external growth (habitable spaces are added or incorporated). In the first case, it is materially associated with mobile or fixed subdivision, by means of elements such as curtains or movable panels. Fixed rigid systems allow the modification of the dimensions of the spaces and generate a greater number of habitable areas. In the case of external growth, habitable spaces are added.

Based on the above, incrementality (as the possibility of having a greater number of spaces, even if it is from the subdivision in the case of internal growth) and progressivity (as gradual growth associated with temporality) are considered as values that make it possible to live adequately according to the changes generated and the temporal dynamics.

3.7. Independence

Independence, according to the RAE, implies autonomy and does not admit interference or subordination. In the contemporary demand of inhabiting, it is linked to multiple possibilities, among them the one exposed by Ballent and Liernur: "...spatially and materially autonomous enclosures, which allow housing a flexible network of parental relationships" ^[15]. On the other hand, independence is associated with the proximity that each space has in relation to income, as well as with the accessibility and relative proximity to functional service spaces (sanitary, hygienic, and food) that, due to their material condition, present a higher degree of immovability. In addition, it directly involves the possibility of adequate ventilation and natural lighting to develop multiple activities and direct access to outdoor spaces (patios and gardens). Moreover, if possible, it concerns the possibility of having a greater number of accesses.

In terms of the ways of living, the dynamism that characterizes contemporary life, associated with the changes inherent to the different moments of people's lives, implies the need for projects that replicate these circumstances and favor them. With respect to changing cohabitation groups, composed of members with diversified demands, as occurs with blended families or groups composed of people who do not have family ties (living together for work, study, economic reasons, or age groupings), it is feasible to project based on the notions of articulation and independence. Independence makes possible the articulation of autonomies, and each space can function as an autonomous cell. Two essential variables for this are: accessibility to the cell from the outside and proximity to sanitary services. Each room has the minimum to develop individual living independently, and the common spaces are designed for social interaction. As an extreme, the independence of its location emerges, and thus there are spaces with the possibility of movement: rotation, removable, and transportable, assembled by materialities associated with industry and prefabrication.

3.8. Connectivity

Connectivity refers to the ability to connect or make connections. In the case of spaces, it can be approached in different extensions. Contemporaneity deploys it in direct association with the possibility of access to communication and information networks, externalizing virtuality through technologies and installations for

different devices. In this way, the domestic space behaves as an operative base that connects each inhabitant with the world, and this dimension is also associated with the articulation between domestic and working life. From the particular context of 2020, this condition has acquired a new relevance, because, for those who have the necessary means, various aspects of life have turned toward it: the work dimension (home office or telework), the school academic dimension, the social dimension and activities related to entertainment, including medical care through telemedicine. This implies, as a counterpart, a lot of social exclusion. In the case of Argentina, the geographical characteristics and its heterogeneous population density mean that the greatest development of networks and services is mainly concentrated in large cities.

On the other hand, the etymology of the concept of connectivity includes as an argument in the following notion: “Union that is established between two or more things or persons so that there is a relationship or communication” (RAE). In terms of inhabiting, it implies appropriate relationships that can be evident between interior spaces or between exterior and interior. In this regard, Paredes and Carlos ^[2] dwells on “...coverings, interfaces, surfaces” as instances of interrelation. With regard to connections, they are associated with the contextual consideration of location in terms of orientations, geographical situation, topography, and climate. From this, adequate openness or protection is defined (which can be mobile to allow diverse practices that may or may not require natural light), as well as the possibility of concertedly inhabiting interior and exterior spaces (expansion of outdoor activities). Likewise, the idea of connectivity is linked to the accessibility that makes possible the absence of physical barriers, such as steps.

3.9. Intimacy and privacy

Privacy, according to the RAE, implies the right to protection against any intrusion, while intimacy refers to reserve. In relation to this difference, Bryson characterizes privacy as “The story of becoming comfortable little by little” ^[16], an expression that is directly associated with the idea of intimacy that privacy represents. The etymology of intimacy refers precisely to what is further inside and also to the condition “between” spaces, as Pereira da Silva (2015) expresses: “What legitimizes the intimate is not only the confinement or narrowness of relationships, but the depth or essentiality with which one experiences (...) the space.” The author also expresses that intimacy “...is something better defined in terms of time than space, because it appears as moments and its clearest boundaries are inevitably temporal.” This expression articulates with the changes that the representation of what is private and intimate has undergone in history. Currently, both concepts are redefined by the irruption of technology in the domestic sphere. Despite this, and as Pereira da Silva also states: “Private space and intimate space are not necessarily constituted as corresponding spheres. The intimate space clearly overflows the limits of the individual,” although they are directly associated.

According to Bachelard (1992): “For a phenomenological study of the values of intimacy of interior space, the house is undoubtedly privileged, (...) in its unity and complexity.” In this context, Gloria Mèlich (2001) deploys the notions: *interus* as “what is between,” or what is inside, *interior*: “what is further inside” and *intimus*, which implies “what is at the bottom,” thus presenting the intimate as the superlative form of the interior. He also expresses that “Intimacy appears to designate the innermost space, the fullest, the most closed: the domestic. One lives in the intimacy of the home, that space that has established practically impassable frontiers with respect to the environment. The above conceptions imply spatial transitions and gradients. Based on the above, it is considered that the private space is linked to the notion of intentional “retreat” and that it is constituted, from the subjective will, in a sphere of comfort, as well as protection and individual identity.

4. Conclusion

It is concluded that the consideration of the attributes: flexibility, adaptability, variability, versatility, multiplicity, plurality, integrality, gradualness, incrementality, progressiveness, independence, connectivity, intimacy, and privacy, favors the generation of spaces that allow for adequate living according to one's own requirements, and also makes it possible to fully deploy the subjective potentialities of each inhabitant. It is worth mentioning that this consideration does not imply its unavoidable inclusion in all cases, but the critical reflection in each particular situation associated with the requirements and possibilities in its conjugation. Likewise, it is concluded that gradualness, incrementality, progressiveness, independence, and connectivity delimit inter-spatial relations in which hierarchies are diluted and equivalences are favored.

As for spatial flexibility, it emerges as an integral condition that involves and encompasses the others, qualified from its more specific characteristics; and which are present in changing and inconstant ways in the spatial definition. As an attribute of the design processes of contemporary domestic spaces, it is considered as unavoidable when circumscribing adaptability, variability, and versatility according to temporal dynamics; multiplicity and plurality are also considered as congenital of the type of organization that defines levels of connection.

On the other hand, by articulating spatial flexibility, adaptability, and variability with specific conditions associated with spatial demands of temporality, organizational structure, movement, interconnection, privacy, or hierarchy, conciliation with contemporary domestic habitation is favored.

Furthermore, it is understood that the integration between flexibility, adaptability, and spatial variability makes relations, actions, and transformations viable, without imposing them; and that their articulation benefits the overcoming of closed programs as restrictive destinations of uses and activities. Thus, it is understood that having a list of spatial attributes enables reflection in generative instances that are framed in the development of design processes, so that, based on their analysis, spatial needs and conditions are balanced.

Disclosure statement

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