

Spaces of Migration



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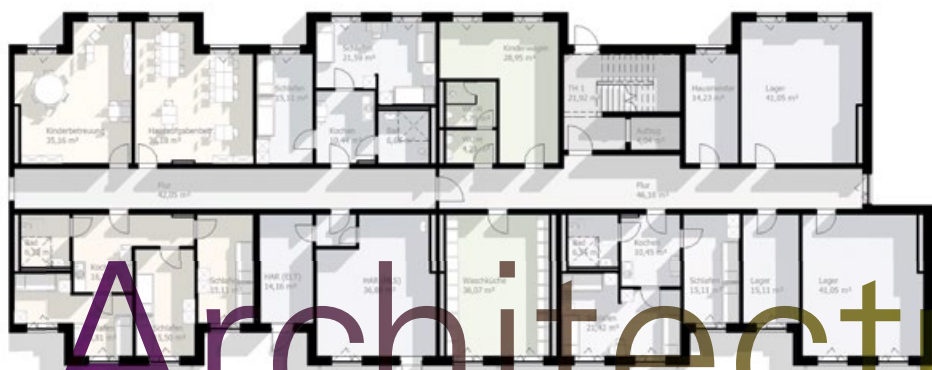


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HOWOGE,
Modular accommodation for refugees,
Hagenower Ring,
Berlin,
2017

Using off-site construction methods, HOWOGE public housing association developed this project as infill in a tower-in-the-park neighbourhood in East Berlin. It can subsequently be converted into regular affordable housing units with minor upgrades such as elevators, balconies and floor-plan reconfigurations.



Architecture for Refugees

BE0363 Hagenower Ring
Grundrisse M1:200
-Marketing-
01.06.2017

The massive influx of migrants to European cities from Syria and beyond, since 2015, has demanded a rethink of how to accommodate refugees. Germany is a case in point: to avoid ghettoisation and aid social cohesion, efforts are being made to integrate newcomers with long-term residents in urban neighbourhoods through specially built, mixed-use schemes. **Kaja Kühl**, a practising urban designer and adjunct professor at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, New York, and **Julie Behrens**, who directs the affordable housing consultancy Project Urbanista, showcase several such projects.

Over the last few decades, the housing market in Western European cities has been marked by a withdrawal of public funding and increasing reliance on partnerships with the private real-estate market to provide housing. One notable exception has been the effort by some countries and cities to provide housing for the most recent influx of refugees. When over a million refugees arrived in Europe over the course of a few months in 2015, the task to shelter and accommodate them fell entirely on the shoulders of local governments. Many architects and planners welcomed the technical challenge of designing affordable, efficient and quickly deployable solutions and the public-purpose-driven nature of this task with a 'roll up our sleeves' attitude embodied by the German Chancellor's statement 'Wir schaffen das' (We can do it).

Recent events in Europe have marked a shift in a global recognition that 'architecture for refugees' is an urban challenge as opposed to one best addressed by geographically isolated camps. Most of the world's refugees are fleeing urban areas, and today roughly 13 million refugees live in cities. In September of 2017, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi acknowledged this trend and announced that the agency will engage more closely with cities to develop solutions in which refugees are integrated more permanently into their new urban homes.¹ The current situation presents

an opportunity for architects to design publicly funded housing projects that think beyond the short-term need for shelter and produce integrated, vibrant residential neighbourhoods that improve the lives of all city dwellers.

The German Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, 'Making: Heimat. Germany Arrival Country', curated by the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM), showcased architectural solutions for emergency shelter that emphasise efficiency, affordability, flexibility and quality of design. Supported by an open online database, it was followed by an exhibition at the Frankfurt museum and now travels to Goethe Institutes around the world.² The breadth of projects envisioned or completed in Germany between 2015 and 2017 showcase ways in which architects are working with public clients to contribute to social equity through thoughtful design of housing and infrastructure.

Projects in the DAM database respond to the immediate housing crisis in a variety of ways, from adaptive reuse of vacant buildings to container villages; from temporary shelters to permanent housing solutions. Some are designed exclusively for newcomers, and others seek to integrate native-born residents into the building's tenant mix. Off-site construction and prefabricated modules are frequently proposed to meet the urgent demand quickly, but also to demonstrate the replicability of the project. One such example, designed, built and inhabited

in less than six months in Freiburg, Germany, uses a modular system made from wood as an alternative to steel containers. Here, three architecture firms – Franz und Geyer Architekten, Jochen Weissenrieder Architekten and stocker.dewes architekten – formed a collaborative for the project and developed the system for three different sites. The buildings were designed to be used as emergency shelter in the short term, but conceived so that the modules can be reconfigured and even relocated for other purposes when urgent need for shelter subsides.

Franz und Geyer Architekten,
Jochen Weissenrieder Architekten
and stocker.dewes architekten,
Emergency shelter,
Freiburg,
Germany,
2016

Housing Not Shelter

Accommodating a sudden large influx of residents is a challenge almost everywhere, but it is particularly difficult in cities experiencing a tight housing market. Berlin's 2014 housing plan called for 100,000 additional units over the following 10 years to meet the city's then-projected demand. By 2017, this estimate was already understood to be insufficient even without counting the arrival of an estimated 65,000 refugees to Berlin under the federal government's resettlement programme. Berlin's population is still smaller than it was before the Second World War.³ As a result, the city's existing infrastructure and relative low density offer opportunities for infill development that repairs the urban fabric while increasing the overall housing stock and improving access to amenities and services.

Three separately commissioned architecture firms collaborated to develop a modular system using wood as an alternative to steel containers. Designed as emergency shelter, the system can be converted into student housing or similar at a later date.



Untreated materials, flexible reuse and the promotion of a regional supply chain promote sustainability. Three projects housing between 100 and 300 asylum seekers have each been completed within less than a year.



As the refugee crisis subsides over time, the intention is to convert these units into permanent housing to be integrated into the HOWOGE-managed housing stock.



HOWOGE,
Modular accommodation for refugees,
Hagenower Ring,
Berlin,
2017

Each communal accommodation built according to the Berlin government plan is equipped with indoor and outdoor social spaces such as playgrounds and seating areas, as well as classrooms and spaces for social service providers on the ground floor.

During the initial response, many newcomers to Berlin were placed in emergency shelters in converted commercial buildings, school gymnasiums or tennis bubbles. To move people from these often-precarious living conditions, the local government developed a prototype for *Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte* (communal accommodations) based on a modular construction system. The prototype is to be constructed on 30 sites across the city and can accommodate between 200 and 450 people depending on location. These projects are designed following federal guidelines for communal shelters, as dormitories with shared bathrooms and kitchens. They include shared spaces such as playgrounds, classrooms and meeting rooms, and social services offices. The local government is developing 10 of these projects directly and has commissioned the six publicly owned housing associations in Berlin to develop the others based on the prototype.

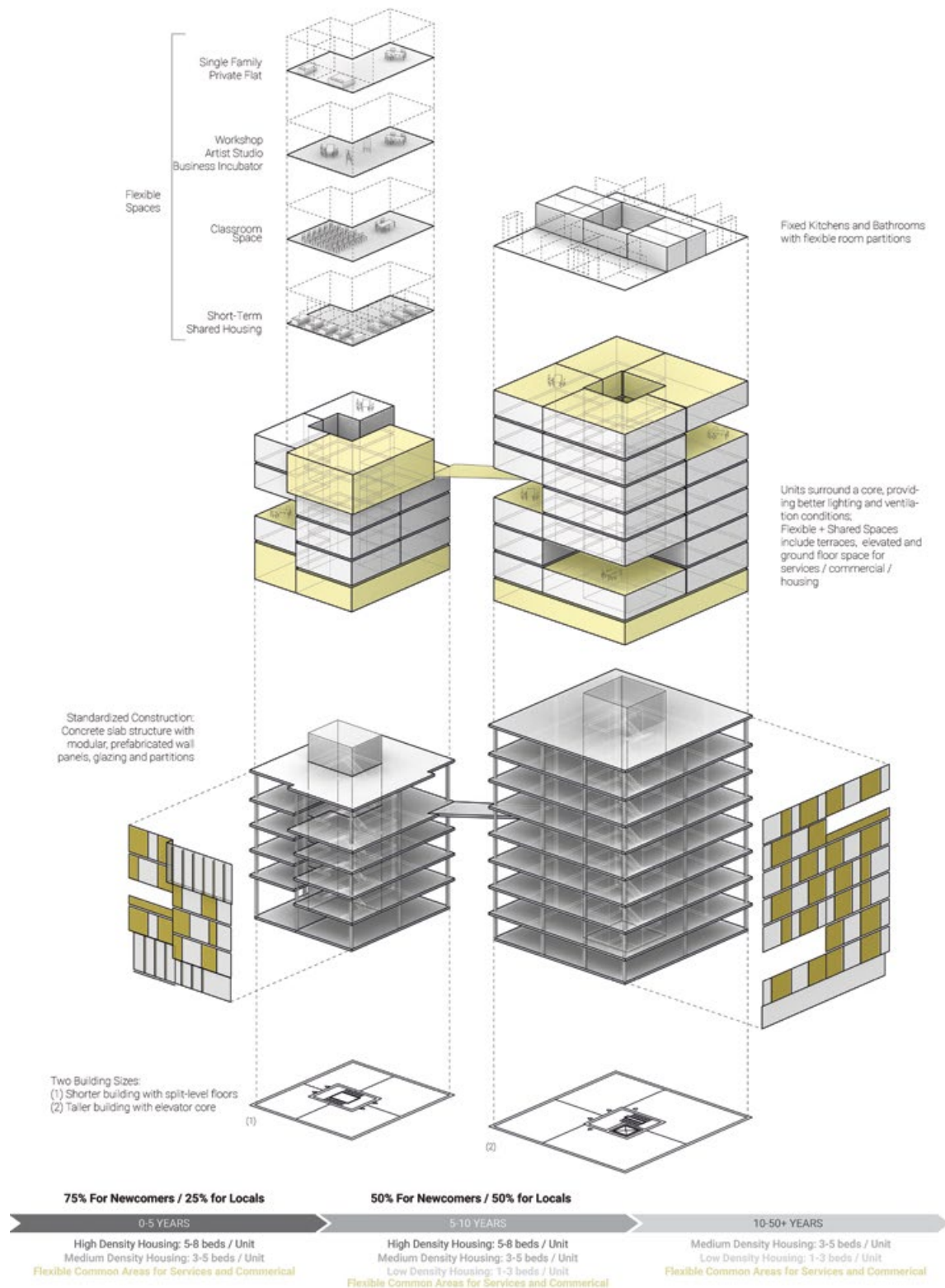
One such housing association, HOWOGE, completed a project under this initiative in 2017 as an infill development in a tower-in-the-park neighbourhood at Hagenower Ring. HOWOGE maintains a portfolio of 59,000 units, mostly located in the district of Lichtenberg in the east of Berlin. Its mission is to provide affordable housing, broadly defined as units priced at or below the average local rent per square metre. In the short term, the new housing units will be leased to the refugee agency for placement of newcomers. As the refugee crisis subsides over time, the intention is to convert these units into permanent housing to be integrated into the HOWOGE-managed housing stock. Together with the other housing associations, HOWOGE lobbied successfully to make key adjustments to the original prototype, rejecting the dormitory-style shelters in favour of units with private kitchens and bathrooms that could easily be converted into permanent affordable housing.

While this intent for permanent housing in the long term is an improvement over the original prototype and has since been adopted by the local government in Berlin for all modular shelters to be built, many advocates argue that the strategy still does not go far enough. For example, all of these buildings include indoor and outdoor accessory spaces for classrooms, play areas and social services. Yet these spaces are intended for the exclusive use of newcomers and may even be fenced off in accordance with design guidelines, severely limiting opportunities for interaction among newcomers and other neighbourhood residents.

In a 2016 workshop entitled 'Immediate Shelter, Sustainable Neighborhood', HOWOGE collaborated with Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and

Michael Nickerson, Lia Sooreanian,
Lama Suleiman and Karol Stern,
Immediate Shelter,
Sustainable Neighborhood: Berlin workshop,
Graduate School of Architecture,
Planning and Preservation (GSAPP),
Columbia University,
New York,
2016

In a workshop held by HOWOGE and the GSAPP at Columbia University, this team proposed housing a mix of newcomers and Berliners in a series of five- to eight-storey buildings on a HOWOGE-owned site in Lichtenberg. Over time, the project can 'de-density' as residents gain income and ability to rent more space per person, or others who can do so move in. Dormitory-style bedrooms can be converted into social spaces within the building, and social service areas on the ground floor can become additional apartments or commercial spaces.



Based on conversations with newcomers and their advocates, students also questioned the difference between shelter and housing.

Katrin Bozeniec, Jessica Cruz, Hussam Jabr, Tobias List and Yuanyi Zhang, Immediate Shelter, Sustainable Neighborhood: Berlin workshop, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP), Columbia University, New York, 2016

Another team proposed active ground-floor uses such as retail, workshops, community facilities and playgrounds to benefit the neighbourhood at large. The proposal also navigates a transition to the industrial area to east and a nearby Vietnamese wholesale market.

Preservation (GSAPP) to explore two sites in Lichtenberg as potential infill development. The students' work sought to design appropriate housing solutions while creating spaces that contribute to the overall vitality of the development and neighbourhood. Based on conversations with newcomers and their advocates, students also questioned the difference between shelter and housing. It was generally accepted that the housing needs of most newcomers are nearly identical to those of every other Berliner. As a result, the students envisioned the transition from short-term shelter into permanent housing as part of a longer-term process that results in newcomers and native-born Berliners living side by side from day one.

This integrated housing concept is also part of the plan in Florian Nagler Architekten's Housing at Dantebad in Munich. Here, 100 affordable units with half reserved for refugees were designed and constructed in only 180 days above the parking lot for a public swimming pool. The parking lot remains fully operational, losing only five of the 110 spots to the new building as it completes the urban block.





Leveraging Housing for Newcomers

In Berlin, many of the proposed infill refugee housing sites are located in the east, where much of the existing urban fabric consists of socialist-era prefabricated developments. The current spatial configuration of these developments as towers-in-the-park within vast expanses of often unmaintained open space offers limited opportunity for casual encounter and few spaces for neighbourhood services and local commercial amenities. As such, owners like HOWOGE are already facing challenges around access to public space and neighbourhood amenities in and around their developments. The current rush to build new infill development provides an opportunity for architects and their clients to leverage this publicly funded effort as long-term contributions to the city. By designing permanent housing for a mix of tenants, incorporating commercial and community facility spaces and improved public space amenities such as playgrounds and sports fields, these projects can improve the overall experience in the neighborhood. Design with this foresight in mind suggests an 'architecture for all' mindset as opposed to 'architecture for refugees', and can play a key role in integration and the political acceptance of newcomers by their neighbours.

Housing thousands of newcomers in cities across Europe is an enormous undertaking supported entirely by public funds. Alongside the goal of creating new housing, designers and planners should leverage these projects to offer solutions for the benefit of all. Engaging strategies that promote equity, integration and long-term economic stability should be the goal of those who commission these projects, and the architects who design them. ▢

Florian Nagler Architekten,
Housing at Dantebad,
Munich,
2016

Under the 'Housing for All' programme, public housing association GEWOFA in Munich commissioned this slender apartment building above the parking lot of a public swimming pool. One hundred units were designed and constructed within less than a year using prefabricated modules. Half of the units are reserved for refugees.

Notes

1. Bruce Katz and Jessica Brandt, 'The Refugee Crisis is a City Crisis', 27 October 2017: www.citylab.com/equity/2017/10/the-refugee-crisis-is-a-city-crisis/544083/.
2. 'Making Heimat. Germany, Arrival Country': www.makingheimat.de/en.
3. Edition Luisenstadt, 'Bevölkerungsentwicklung in Berlin': www.luisse-berlin.de/stadtentwicklung/texte/4_13_bvoelent.htm.

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