HOUSING
AS HOME AND INVESTMENT FOR THE PRECARIAT

ABSTRACT

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Diploma Fall 2019
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Housing investments has since the post-war period in Norway been at the heart of our private economy and a social success story. 80 percent of Norwegians own their own houses, giving them economic security. However, in urban areas, and particularly in Oslo, high prices now make it extremely difficult for many people to make their first housing investment. People with low or unpredictable income cannot raise the necessary mortgage and are relegated to an expensive rental market.

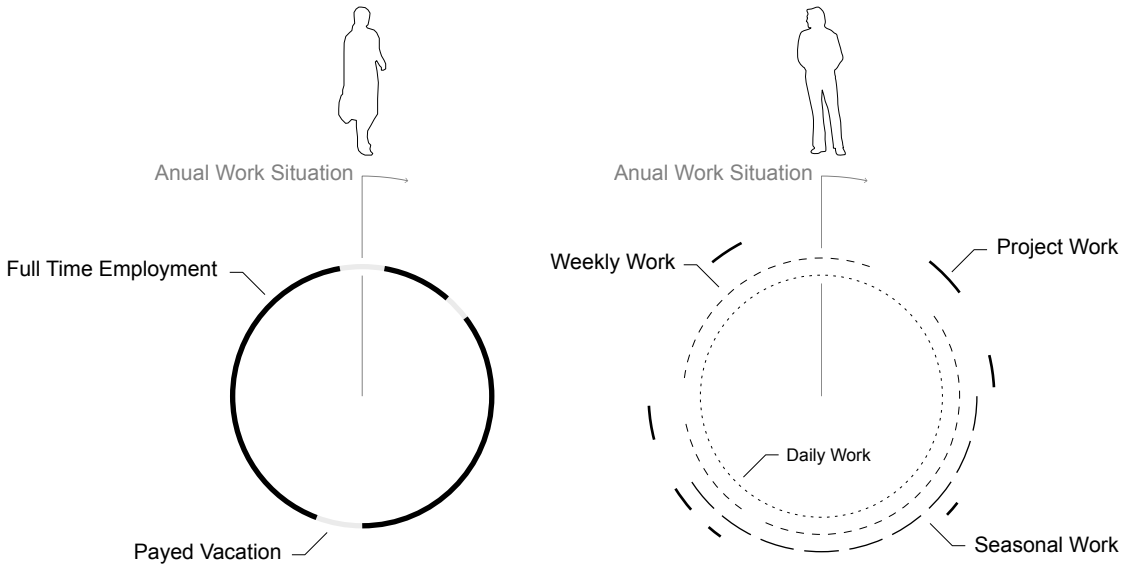
At the same time, the number of people with an unpredictable income is rising. Self-employment and temporary contracts are on the rise and have created a new social class, the precariat. While not necessarily being poor, the unpredictability or precariousness of their situation make them victims of the traditional housing concept. Housing as home and investment for the precariat is a project that through architecture reacts to a specific need for a specific group in a specific place at a specific time. It offers a predictable investment to those living unpredictable lives.

WHO THE PRECARIAT

The precariat is a new social class that is growing throughout the western world. The group is characterized by having unpredictable careers; being self-employed or working on short term contracts. Thus, their economy will vary greatly from one month to another.

It is an exhausting situation, where the time between jobs is used to search and apply for new assignments. Moreover, a constant change of workplace or living quarters make it difficult to expand one's social circles or having close personal relations.

The unstable income does not only affect the daily economy. Without a stable income, banks are reluctant to provide a mortgage. This excludes the group from the housing market. This is not only a problem for the individuals. It has an impact on the city.



To reach a fair salary, the precariat often needs many jobs, the result is a heavy schedule with a number different employers, while time between work gets used to find and apply for new jobs.

TODAY THE HOUSING MARKET IN OSLO

In the post-war period, housing was a need that had to be fulfilled. The housing structure was based on a regulated, self-ownership market. The residents would therefore be offered a housing mortgaged subsidized by the state in order for them to own their own apartment.

As the political winds changed in the 1970s, government housing policies got drastically changed. The market was liberated and opened for private investments. Housing prices in urban areas have now raised dramatically. As a result, and despite state subsidies, more and more people are today left out of the housing market in the urban areas.

PLACE GRORUD CENTRE

Grorud became one of the most important areas for Oslo's expansion in the post war period, and has since been carrying the social and economic consequences of the rapid growth. Grorud centre was supposed to function as the local community centre providing space for retail and being a social meetings place, with Grorud mall, which is protected today, as the centrepiece.

In the 1970s, the road R4 was upgraded to highway standard. With this, the local centre ended up as an intersection with heavy traffic, a shopping mall, a few apartments and a petrol station.

The area is now part of Oslo municipality's plans for transformation, focusing on creating a more compact centre around the metro- and bus station. The plans are closely connected to the future downscaling of the R4 from highway to a city street. This will reduce the traffic and the noise levels in the area. As a result, more properties along the road will be available for housing. This project will contribute to the positive development of the area by offering housing for young people that takes part in its transformation.

The chosen site is well suited for the project. It allows a large housing construction and is well connected to the rest of the city by metro and buses. The site requires a mixed-use building, with a fairly high degree of utilization.

The site covers roughly 9 400 sqm. Few tall neighbouring buildings in the area ensures good light conditions throughout the year. Today's petrol station has intoxicated parts of the ground, and will have to be treated before building new constructions.

The topography of the site is dominated by a flat area at 190,0 m a.s.l. This is the original level from before the highway was built and the same level as Grorud mall. The bridge in the south west corner of the site tangents the site at 192,5 m a.s.l. The site also has an inclination down towards the R4 at 188,5 m a.s.l that lets the traffic under the bridge.

A large building complex on the site must deal well with the topography. The three main levels became important for how the complex meet the surroundings.

WHAT **HOUSING**

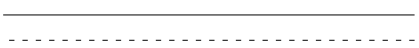
The building complex reflects the scale and type of Grorud mall. Four long volumes facing east-west contains the housing program. The direction of the buildings provides good lighting conditions across all the units. One long volume facing R4 contains the office program. This building works as a noise buffer protecting the housing units from traffic noise.

AFFORDABLE

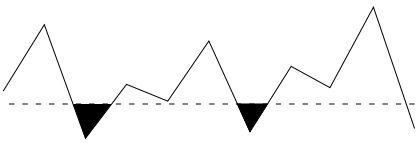
Three factors help reducing the costs. First, the location of the project is within an area in Oslo with relatively low sqm. prices. Secondly, the construction consists of repeated prefabricated elements which lower the production costs. Expensive elements such as elevators and car parking are limited. Thirdly, the size of the apartments has been minimized, giving room for a higher number of apartments and thus lower costs per resident.

ADAPTIVE

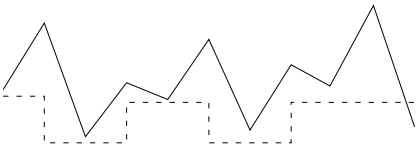
To cater for the residents' changing economic situation, the apartment units have been made adjustable. A person with an unpredictable income should have the opportunity to adapt the living space and thereby the living costs according to what he or she can afford at any given time. This added flexibility is worked through the program and communication. The technical solutions are designed to accommodate the program with a similar flexibility.



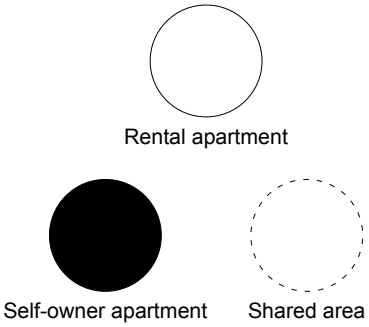
Stable income vs. normal housing expenses



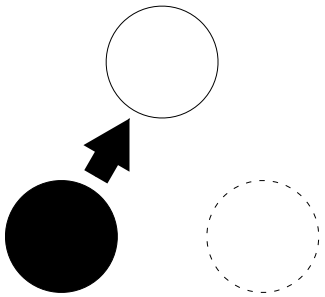
Unstable income vs. normal housing expenses



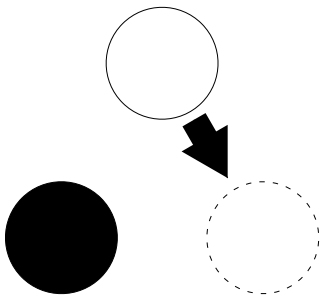
Unstable income vs. adaptive housing expenses



The self-owner units are accompanied by the same number of units for rent and a shared area. The combination of these three elements is what creates the flexibility of the project. The self-owner apartments are the basis for the investments.



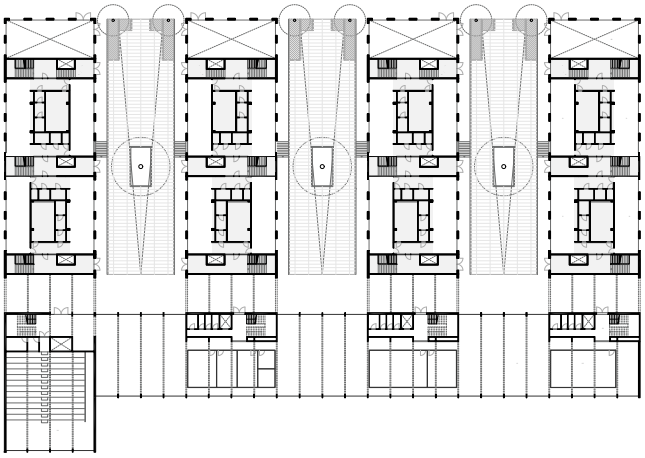
The owner has the possibility to extend the apartment's floor area by renting the neighbouring unit(s).



When this unit is not used by one of the home-owners, it will be rented out externally. The flexibility of the program is further enhanced with a shared area on the first floor, for all residents.

SOCIAL

The three entrances to each of the housing units are connected to the shared kitchen and hangout area on the first floor. The placement of the shared area allows informal and spontaneous meetings between the residents, increasing their social interferences.



The bicycle garage and storage rooms run through the basement plan of the building connecting the north side of the complex to the south side. This allows all the residents to reach the car garage or the bicycles and to exit the complex in all directions based by foot or by wheel.

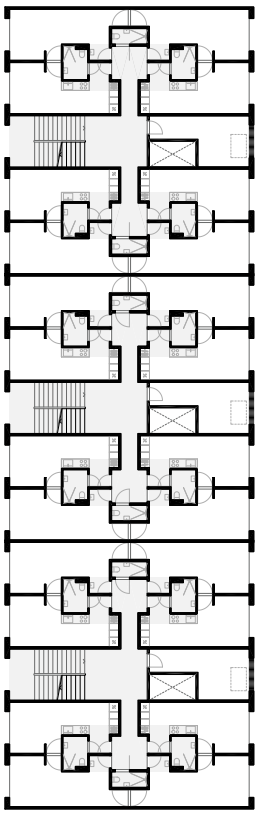
The staircase leads the resident up to their unit. One staircase serves 24 apartments. The apartment is accessed through an entrance area. From there the apartment is divided into two zones. First the secondary zone, then the main zone. The main zone is dimensioned for the main furniture of the room; a bed, a table or a sofa, together with storage.

The bathroom and kitchen units create a room division and a core element around which the movement takes place. The central placement of the door between the units gives a visual contact between the rooms. When connecting two units, the extra entrance becomes a storage room.

HOW CONSTRUCTION

The main construction is prefabricated CLT-elements. The choice of material is based on a fast and economic assembly process, as well as a low carbon footprint. CLT is a suited material for small apartment units, since the spans are limited to a few meters. Regarding fire safety, the limited number of floors allows the construction to be exposed.

The walls between the units consist of two CLT-elements with insulation in between. This is to satisfy the sound level requirements between the apartments. By dividing the walls, the sound will not transmit through the walls. Floors are constructed in CLT 150 mm elements. Because of the low weight of the CLT elements, sand or gravel is placed on top to stop low frequent sounds to transmit to the apartment below.



KEY NUMBERS

Sqm. Site	9 400
Sqm. Building Footprint	6 930
Utilization Built area	73%
Sqm. GFA	19 190
Utilization GFA	204%
Sqm. Total Housing	8 510
Sqm. Total Shared space	2 740
Sqm. Total Storage	1 200
Sqm. Total Office space	4 000
Sqm. Total Retail	400
Sqm. Total Parking	2 340
Number of Apartments	288