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How Do Students Live in Student Housing? Materialities, Practices, Feelings and Imaginations of Zagreb Students

Based on the research conducted in 2023, the paper addresses the issue of the housing of Zagreb students from an ethnological and cultural-anthropological perspective. The aim is to contribute to the understanding of students' housing through a focused, in-depth and qualitative view of the material aspects of housing (selection, design/equipping/changing of domestic spaces, material objects and furnishings of domestic spaces, etc.), everyday life, behaviour, practices and interactions linked with domestic spaces, and feelings and imaginations linked with the house and home. The research findings show that domestic space with its characteristics causes, limits or accentuates certain behaviours, interactions with roommates, feelings and moods. The examples discussed speak of the limitations and disadvantages of domestic spaces resulting from their often-inadequate size and furnishings, as well as about practices, often small interventions and furnishings, with which tenants try to overcome limitations, create a practical and pleasant space and achieve a pleasant coexistence with their roommates. Building a connection with the domestic space, creating intimacy and a sense of home are recorded in the actions of furnishing the space with their own objects, smells, sounds, and established activities and interactions with people and pets. The idea of future (and ideal) domestic spaces is associated with the idea of temporality (current housing), and the current and future place of residence is perceived as a space of becoming independent and independence. The aim of the paper is to pave the way for future extensive ethnological and cultural-anthropological research on housing.

Keywords: housing, students, youth, intimacy, domestic spaces

INTRODUCTION

Housing, as a cultural and social phenomenon, is closely related to a number of changes and challenges in contemporary societies. Housing shortage, rising real estate prices, which is connected, among other things, with tourism activities, unemployment, indebtedness, working from home, longer life expectancy and aging of the population, mobility of residents and workers, etc. – they all in different ways impact on the housing of different social, age and ethnic groups, and the right to housing and the need for safe and affordable housing are discussed in public and scientific discourse (cf. e.g. Eurofound 2024; EWSI 2024; Iwarsson 2024; Marčetić 2020; Mikulić et al. 2021; Mikuš and Rodik 2021; Rodik et al. 2019; Weiler and Caxaj 2024; Wetzstein 2017). Housing is therefore linked with broader considerations of quality of life, social stratification and social inequalities, as well as with a number of current public policy issues. Consequently, it imposes itself as an extremely relevant topic of scientific research.

Student housing is a separate phenomenon that attracts the attention of researchers, university administrations, and potential investors (Gong and Söderberg 2024: 538). It is defined as an essential part of the educational environment and has been identified as important in achieving academic success, personal development and social connection on the one hand, and on the other hand as one that, if not appropriate, can be a source of stress and contribute to poorer academic achievement (ibid.; Sotomayor et al. 2022). In recent years, the student housing crisis has been openly reported both globally and in the countries of the European Union. It implies a lack of (affordable) student accommodation due to the growing population of (especially international) students, rising rental prices, students' adaptation to smaller room sizes, etc. (Dickinson 2023; University Living 2024).

Student housing is also linked with the broader issue of gaining independence of young people through housing, i.e. the phenomenon of prolonged youth, which implies prolonged “economic, financial, housing and other dependence of young people, i.e. their more difficult transition to adulthood” (Mitrović 2021: 88; cf. Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš 2017: 15),¹ and with young people staying longer in their parents' home or returning to it after a certain period of independent living (Botrić 2022; Eurofound 2024; Hill et al. 2021; Potočnik 2017; Jurašić 2024; Lepan Štefančić 2024).² Going to study in another city is usually the first step in the life of young people outside their parents' home, either temporarily (in the case of returning after their studies) or leaving it permanently (cf. Botrić 2022: 22). On the other hand, for those young people who study in the city where the parental home is located, studying can be one of the factors that prolong housing independence.

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- 1 Mitrović (2021: 88) cites economic and political factors, longer schooling or later professional status in certain professions (doctors, lawyers, engineers) as factors that contribute to a more difficult transition to adulthood. Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš (2017: 15) state the following as characteristics of the phenomenon of prolonged youth: “the increasingly longer duration of institutionalised education, uncertain employment opportunities (especially in secure and well-paid jobs), difficult socio-economic independence, postponement of starting one's own family and insufficient involvement in social (political) decision-making processes”.
 - 2 Dunja Potočnik concludes that the current generation of young people in Croatia can be described as the “boomerang generation”, and these are young people who “either due to discouragement by the difficulties of independent living, or because of the inability to find a job or because of the loss of a job, after the late gaining of independence from their parents' home, they return to that same home and become a part of multigenerational families, often burdened with poor socio-economic perspectives” (Potočnik 2017: 69).

Despite the large number of students in the European Union (around 18.5 million; Eurostat 2023) and Croatia (about 150 000; DZS 2023), there is still a lack of more complex and continuous research on student housing at the level both of Europe and Croatia. There is a particular lack of qualitative research that would include what the actual students have to say (Sotomayor et al. 2022), which could consequently influence the design of better-quality student accommodation (cf. Gong and Söderberg 2024: 551).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of contemporary housing of Zagreb students, i.e. the ways in which, in (limited) conditions inherent in their student status, they create and use domestic space. The fundamental research questions are: How do students live in student housing? What is the relationship between the domestic space and its characteristics and the behaviour, thoughts, feelings and moods of students? How do students achieve a connection with space, as well as intimacy and a sense of home? How do students imagine future and ideal domestic spaces? The paper is based on a small-scale ethnological and cultural-anthropological research conducted in 2023 in Zagreb and its surroundings, in which a qualitative methodology was applied. The research included conducting semi-structured interviews, collecting photographs of the domestic spaces and making sketches of the space (the apartment or the house with the surrounding space). Concerning this goal, the research strived to obtain a focused, in-depth and qualitative view of the material aspects of housing (selection, design/furnishing/changing of domestic spaces, material objects and furnishing of domestic spaces, etc.), everyday life, behaviour, practices and interactions linked with domestic spaces, and feelings and imaginations linked with the house and home. Conversations about *the student room* expanded towards the understanding of the entire domestic space (a house or an apartment) and its immediate environment,³ to social relations, feelings and notions that are realised in domestic spaces.

In the following chapter, we describe the basic theoretical assumptions of the research, i.e. the analytical axes that guided our research, from its design to the analysis of the collected material. This is followed by a brief description of the research methodology. The central part of the paper is divided into several thematic units that follow the analytical axes: characteristics of domestic spaces; functions and furnishing of the domestic space; space, activities and interactions; home and feelings – creating a home; future and ideal housing. The research opened a number of topics in connection with student housing as a specific social group, such as attachment to a family home, renting housing, organised housing in public student dormitories, sharing the domestic space, limited time duration of housing, limited and unstable economic circumstances and opportunities, the need for independence, and more. Although it is focused on student housing, the paper also addresses broader topics of housing and the interrelationship between people and different spaces.

3 Although the interviews included students' reflections on the immediate surroundings of the domestic space, the neighbourhood and the district, this paper does not deal with it in more detail due to its limited scope. However, it is important to keep in mind the connection between the space of the apartment or house and the surroundings in which they are located, i.e. the role of those surroundings in the choice of where to live and in the satisfaction of living (for the Zagreb context, cf. Gulin Zrnić 2009; Svirčić Gotovac and Zlatar 2015; Svirčić Gotovac and Đokić 2023).

RESEARCH ON HOUSING AS A COMBINATION OF MATERIAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASPECTS

Understanding the complex phenomenon of housing requires considering numerous and diverse social, cultural, economic and environmental phenomena from the perspective of different professions. Ethnological and cultural-anthropological research on domestic spaces and housing, in an effort to answer the question of how people live, has changed the focus from looking at and understanding the form of a housing facility and its furnishing, the distribution, origin and development of certain elements and aspects of housing to the study of the way and style of life of members of specific social classes and ethnic groups, as well as the relationship between people and domestic spaces, i.e. immediate living environment (Muraj 1989: 3-61; Cieraad 1999).

The starting point is that people inhabit the domestic space, and at the same time it inhabits people, i.e. it affects the ways of being, thinking and discourse (Briganti and Mezei 2012: 12; Muraj 1989: 5). Such a postulate on the interaction of man and space implies that the domestic space with its characteristics, especially the size, arrangement of rooms and furnishings, influences human behaviour, actions and thinking, but also that people create, maintain, challenge, i.e. transform physical (domestic) space into places of meaning through their activities (actions, practices, experiences) (cf. Cresswell 2004; Low 2006). In other words, domestic space is at the same time a framework and a medium in which and through which we observe the relationship between space, the occupants of space and the (imagined and realized) function of space, as well as the behavioural, symbolic and emotional manifestations that are created in the process. Domestic practices and domestic objects linked with domestic space assume specific meanings that are the focus of anthropology of domestic space (Cieraad 1999: 3) and anthropology of house and home (cf. Barone 2019). Contemporary research on domestic spaces and housing therefore focuses on and connects diverse spatial and material, social and emotional aspects, i.e. examines the categories of physical and metaphorical, local and national, belonging and exclusion, private and public (Bahun and Petrić 2018; Cieraad 1999; Briganti and Mezei 2012), the categories of family, home and community (Munro and Madigan 1999).

An important segment of understanding housing is the consideration of *spatial and material aspects* such as selection, construction, design/equipping/changing of domestic spaces, material objects and furnishing of domestic spaces. Moving in and decorating a room in a public student dormitory Cresswell (2004: 2) takes as an example of creating space. He describes how, when moving in, a student is faced with a room of small dimensions equipped with basic pieces of furniture (a bed, a table, a wardrobe, a drawer). By arranging furniture and bringing in their own things, pieces of furniture, bedding, books, posters, but also smells and sounds, the student creates their own unique space from the initially empty, unknown space, from a room that is similar to other student rooms, i.e. a place that says something about them, with which they are connected and which has a certain meaning for them. This example confirms that the spatial arrangement, furnishing and decoration of the domestic space, as well as the surrounding public space (Cieraad 1999: 2), are a means by which people symbolically expresses themselves, and that objects in the domestic space have not only a utilitarian but also an identity and a symbolic function (Appadurai 1986; Cieraad 1999: 6; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). They can make the home “more comfortable, intimate, individual” (Muraj 1989: 7). Domestic spaces undergo changes, which are recognised in changes in the plan of domestic space, through interventions of various scales, changes in the arrangement of furniture, use and functions of the

premises, but also in the meaning and values that are attributed to them. Research thus shows that when children leave the family home, their rooms acquire new functions and often become storage facilities for parents, spaces for ironing, exercising or working (Bervoets and Heynen 2014). Different forms of use and appropriation of space confirm the ideas about the complex and creative lives of buildings/spaces (cf. Maudlin and Vellinga 2014), the dynamics of use and interior design, the constant interaction between the apartment and the tenant (cf. Muraj 1989: 4-5).

Domestic space includes not only physical but also *social space* that is created through social relationships (Munro and Madigan 1999). It implies a specific way of using space, behaviour and action, atmospheres and feelings that differ from those in public spaces (Pennartz 1999; Muraj 1989; Munro and Madigan 1999). The division into private and public has been recognised in the emotional, moral and economic aspects of housing since the 19th century (Pennartz 1999; Cieraad 1999: 7), and the understanding of these categories and the meanings attached to them change over time and in different contexts (Cieraad 1999: 5). Home and privacy, i.e. the personal, intimate and family spheres of life, are therefore becoming an important segment of housing research. The physical characteristics of domestic spaces impose specific constraints on behaviour and require tenants to make adjustments that are sometimes not easy to achieve (Munro and Madigan 1999; Putnam 1999). Munro and Madigan (1999) connect the concept of privacy with relationships between family members, showing how individual family members in the home can be limited in terms of privacy and negotiate about it, creating their own privacy conditions through a combination of time zoning and space zoning. The use of space and the need for privacy within a domestic space can cause tensions and conflicts between tenants, especially if it is a part of the domestic space intended for shared use, such as the living room. Conflict situations occur in households with young adults seeking greater rights in the family home (Munro and Madigan 1999: 112-113). Parents of young people show different concerns. On the one hand, they are aimed at criticizing the inappropriate use of the family home, and on the other hand, at the awareness of children's independence and their leaving the family home (ibid.).

Domestic spaces also encourage consideration of *the emotional and affective bonds* that people form in spaces, the ambience/atmosphere that characterises certain spaces and events, as well as the diverse meanings, images and presentations that are constructed and associated with spaces (cf. Cieraad 1999; Pennartz 1999). The bonds between people and space are interpreted in related terms and concepts – the sense of place, the connection with the place, the spirit of the place, the creation of the place, etc. – pointing to the different characters of these bonds, the different intensities and modes of expression (cf. Cross 2001). (Repetitive) activities and actions, i.e. regular stay in certain spaces helps to form specific bonds between people and space (Tuan 1974). In doing so, the meanings that are created are linked with practice, with what is (unconsciously) done in such spaces, to everyday situations that are sometimes referred to as rituals (Cieraad 1999: 4). The atmosphere, in terms of pleasantness, is considered an inherent aspect of housing (Pennartz 1999: 95). Pennartz starts from the assumption that certain spatial characteristics of a domestic space as well as certain situations within such a space can contribute to the creation and experience of the atmosphere (ibid.). In doing so, the atmosphere manifests itself as a two-way process – the atmosphere of the room affects the individual, and in turn the individual projects their mood into the room. That is why Pennartz describes the atmosphere as the most extensive characteristic of the space (ibid.) which, like the space itself, needs to be explored with the “totality of space” in mind, i.e. the notion of space as “an amalgam of related

activities, conceptions and material attributes” (ibid.: 96). When researching the atmosphere, he starts from the question of when, where and why the interlocutor feels most comfortable and uncomfortable in the house, and as a result he receives descriptions of the spatial/architectural characteristics of domestic spaces, descriptions of behaviour and interrelations between tenants, descriptions of activities, descriptions of the time of day, descriptions of the situation, etc. At the same time, he points out that the feeling of comfort and the atmosphere do not appear (by themselves) but they must be created, and that the quality of the atmosphere depends on the quality of interpersonal relationships and spatial/architectural characteristics of the domestic space (ibid.: 99, 102). The complexity of the relationship between people and space is also contained in the notions of domestic and living space, its experience, assessment and imagining of the future (cf. Muraj 1989: 8-9). Research thus speaks of the idea of owning one’s own home among adolescents (Cieraad 1995 according to Cieraad 1999: 10) and about the ideals that families strive to achieve in the domestic space, for example, to provide each child with their own room (Munro and Madigan 1999: 112) or to make the home a space in which everyone can relax and be themselves (ibid.: 115).

In the domestic context, the topic of student housing from an ethnological and cultural-anthropological perspective has not been explored in depth. The exception is small-scale student research that touched on various aspects of student housing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they focused on changes in the practices of using residential and other spaces and the challenges in studying that were associated with these changes.⁴ Guided by the described analytical axes, this paper aims to open the topic of student housing in the domestic context and show possible analytical directions.

METHODOLOGY

A small-scale study on the housing of Zagreb students was conducted in 2023 within the lectures at the study of ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb.⁵ Preparation for the research included a critical reading of professional literature in the field of anthropology of space and place and anthropology of

4 An example is the research that was carried out as student research assignments in the courses *Anthropology of Place and Space* (the professor Sanja Lončar, from the academic year 2009/2010) and *Field Research Practices* (the professors Sanja Lončar and Duško Petrović, from the academic year 2019/2020) at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb and which resulted in unpublished seminar papers. In addition, one of the editions of the project *Watch What You Eat Laboratory* was dedicated to student nutrition and indirectly touched on the topic of student housing (Kocković Zaborski 2022). The previously mentioned ethnological and cultural-anthropological research, together with research and artistic projects (Štefanac 2023) and individual graduate theses (e.g. at sociology studies Lučić 2019; Vrtar 2023; Vukorepa 2022), show students, or young people in general, find the topic of housing interesting and we believe that this will be an incentive for further research.

5 The research was conducted as a part of the course *Field Research Practices* at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. The course is dedicated to the development of field research skills. According to the possibilities, the research is thematically linked with the research projects of teachers, current social processes and the interests of students. In the academic year 2022/2023, thanks to the co-operation with the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb and the museum advisor Zvezdana Antoš, PhD, who also gave a guest lecture, the course was dedicated to research on the topic of housing. As professors in the course, we mentored research conducted by students of ethnology and cultural anthropology Andela Bilan, Daria Erjavec, Lucija Kovačević, Leon Vlašić and Ana Zubčić.



Figure 1. A room in the family house that a student shares with his brother (photographed by the interviewee, April 2023)

housing, a guest lecture and an analysis of selected museum, art and research projects. Based on this, students individually and in joint mentored work designed questions for semi-structured interviews, which sought to encompass different practices and reflections on space. The questions were grouped into six units: basic information about the person – the interlocutor and the domestic space, the space and objects, activities in the space, interactions (with roommates, guests and neighbours), feelings (experiences of space, atmosphere, memories) and planning the future and imagining the ideal space. Guided by the principles of ethnographic research, the questions aimed to encourage detailed descriptions of spaces and situations, thinking and feelings. Such a methodology is considered a valuable and useful approach and is especially recommended for collecting data on phenomena that are difficult to investigate empirically (Pennartz 1999: 95, 97).

Interviews were conducted with twelve students (nine female and three male students) who are in their twenties (born between 1996 and 2002). Until the beginning of their studies, they lived with their families in different places (Jastrebarsko, Novska, Subotica, Zadar, the island of Ugljan, Virovitica, Zagreb, Zenica, Županja), and they currently live in Zagreb or its immediate vicinity and study in Zagreb.⁶ All of them, except for one female student who is a mother of a

6 An interview was also conducted with a student from the vicinity of Zagreb who is studying abroad, but this material is not analysed in this text. The focus on the housing of Zagreb students was linked with the practical reasons for easier organisation and implementation of research in Zagreb.



Figure 2. A loggia that is the favourite place in the family apartment of one of the interlocutors (photographed by Ana Zubčić, April 2024)

small child, are currently occasionally or constantly employed in different jobs, some of which are linked with their studies (e.g. work in a software company, PR company, work connected with the music they are studying) and some are not (e.g. work in a café, shop, cinema).⁷

In parallel with conducting the interview (a total of around 25 hours of interviews were recorded), photographs of the interlocutors' domestic spaces were collected (the authors of most of the approximately 230 collected photographs are students who conducted the research, and some of the photographs were provided by the interlocutors), sketches of the space (apartment or house with the surrounding space) were made and research diaries were kept. This was followed by the creation of transcripts of the interviews (Bilan et al. 2023), the analysis of the collected field materials, its understanding and interpretation, and the writing of seminar papers.⁸ The research was the impetus for the design of the workshop "Intimate Spaces of Everyday Life" and further

7 Students study at various faculties in Zagreb (studies of archaeology, librarianship, electrical engineering and computer science, ethnology and cultural anthropology, German studies, communication studies, fashion design, musicology, pedagogy, Portuguese language and literature, mechanical engineering, forestry and wood technology). The topic of work in addition to studying goes beyond the scope and focus of this work and certainly requires special research in order to capture the complex relationship between studying and everyday/occasional/seasonal work.

8 The students wrote the final individual seminar papers – ethnographic reports based on two to three interviews conducted by each of them. This text presents a further analysis, comparison and interpretation of the entire collected field materials, as well as its theoretical framing and contextualisation.

multidisciplinary reflection on the spaces of intimacy.⁹

PLACES OF RESIDENCE AND DOMESTIC SPACES: CHARACTERISTICS

Throughout the lives and studies of the students interviewed, the circumstances and characteristics of their housing have changed, including their place of residence, domestic spaces and their furnishing, the people with whom they live and the schedule and time they spend in the domestic space, to name a few. This is connected with various circumstances linked with the family, finances and other circumstances. Several interviewees showed that financial reasons were key to changing housing: for example, moving out from a family house to a family apartment or moving out from a rented apartment to a public student dormitory.¹⁰ The time spent in the domestic space is conditioned by the schedule of classes at the faculty, which causes longer or shorter absences (the organisation of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on this dynamic), student jobs, hobbies and the way they spend their free time.

Students from Zagreb and its suburbs have spent their entire life with their parents (and siblings) in the same place and in the same domestic space. The exceptions are the family of one interlocutor who, after a period of living abroad, when he was a three-year-old, returned to a family house in the vicinity of Zagreb, while the family of another interlocutor moved out from a family house in one Zagreb district to a family apartment in another Zagreb district. Students who come from cities and towns further away from Zagreb (Novska, Subotica, Zadar and its outskirts, Virovitica) live in rented apartments or in a public student dormitory in Zagreb, and since arriving in Zagreb they have usually changed districts and domestic space several times. For example, one female student lived in apartments in Trešnjevka and Dubrava before the public student dormitory, while the other female student lived in another apartment in Trešnjevka and in Prečko before the current apartment in Trešnjevka. These students sometimes spend weekends and holidays in a family home outside Zagreb and therefore have two domestic spaces. Usually, their family domestic spaces are larger in area than those in Zagreb.

9 The workshop, which was held from October 2023 to March 2024 at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, was attended by students and teachers from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology), the Academy of Fine Arts (Department of Animated Film and New Media), the Faculty of Architecture (Department of Design Studies and the Department of Architectural Design) and the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology (Department of Wood Technology) of the University of Zagreb. The workshop resulted in the exhibition *New Spaces of Intimacy*, which was held at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb from 12th June to 18th August 2024, and where five final works by multidisciplinary groups of students were presented. A separate part of the exhibition, titled *Student Housing: Materialities, Practices, Feelings, Imaginations. Ethnological and Cultural-Anthropological Contribution to the Understanding of Student Housing at Present* was intended to present the results of the research that we are addressing in this paper.

10 Analyses confirm the increase in the prices of buying and renting apartments in Croatia. The data for Zagreb, which was published at the beginning of 2024, shows an average rental price of an apartment of 15 euros per m² (which does not include the overheads), so the average rental price for apartments of 60 m², which are the most sought-after, is 900 euros (Strukić 2024). Before the parliamentary elections held in April 2024, the media reported that “housing policy is included in the programmes of all the leading political parties for the first time” and that “an increase in student accommodation capacities was promised by all the five currently strongest parties, either through the construction of new public student dormitories or the extension of existing ones” (Simić 2024). Responses to rising housing prices are also being discussed at the European Union level, so in March 2024, the *Declaration on affordable, decent and sustainable housing for all* (MPGI 2024) was adopted in Liège.



Figure 3. A student's room in the rented apartment where she lives with her mother (photographed by Anđela Bilan, April 2023)



Figure 4. A room in the public student dormitory "Stjepan Radić" in Zagreb shared by two female students (photo by Lucija Kovačević, May 2023)

There are different domestic spaces and students share them with roommates, partners or family members (parents/parents and siblings/siblings/the wife and a child). At the time of the research, three students lived in a family house, two students in a family-owned apartment, four in rented apartments, and three female students lived in a public student dormitory. The domestic spaces are of different sizes and they are furnished in different ways.

Family houses have between 130 and 180 m² of living space that includes two or more bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a dining room, a bathroom, a toilet, a hallway and a balcony/terrace, and sometimes additional (yard) storage spaces (an attic, a garage, etc.). Two students who live in family houses have their own rooms, and one shares it with his brother. Mihaela has her own room in her family house in the Zagreb district of Blato, where she lives with her parents and cats. She uses it for studying, resting, sleeping and dining. She sees it as a safe place and a place where she can retreat and be alone with herself. Danko, who lives with his parents in a family house in Jastrebarsko, has his own room with a balcony where he spends most of his time when he is at home. Ranko lives with his parents and brother in the family house in Jastrebarsko. He considers the room he shares with his brother to be his favourite part of the house because it is his space, although he would like to be alone in the room and for the space to be more beautiful.

Family apartments in which students live have around 47 and 60 m². Teo lives with his parents and his dog in a family apartment in the Zagreb district of Knežija. Previously, he lived in a family house on Jarun. The apartment has 60 m² and consists of a hallway, the parents' bedroom, a toilet, a bathroom, a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom that is also used as a shared living room and a loggia with a summer kitchen. Teo uses his bedroom for sleeping, studying and resting,

and his favourite place in the apartment is the loggia, where he likes to spend time, especially in the summer. Anastazija lives in an apartment in the Zagreb district of Voltino with her husband and son. Her parents bought the apartment when she enrolled in college. She lived in it alone for three years, and then her husband moved in. The apartment has 47 m² and consists of a hallway, a bathroom, a bedroom and a room where there are a living room, a dining room and a kitchen. From the living room and the bedroom, you can go out to the balcony with the parapet, and from there you can go down two stairs to the terrace with the railing.

Rented apartments are of different dimensions, some have around 30–35 m², and some are slightly larger and have from around 45 to around 65 m². They consist of a kitchen with a dining room (and a pantry), a bathroom (and a toilet), a hallway and one or more bedrooms, depending on the dimensions of the apartment. Sometimes rented apartments are owned by famous people to students. So, for example, Nina lives in a rented apartment in the Zagreb district of Knežija, which is owned by her roommate, who has been spending little time there for the last two years because she mostly stays with her boyfriend. The apartment has around 30 m² and consists of a hallway, a kitchen, a bathroom and a large room that can be divided by a curtain and that serves as a dining room, a living room and a bedroom. Lena lives in a rented apartment in the Zagreb district of Trešnjevka with her boyfriend and her cat. The apartment has around 35 m² and consists of a hallway, a living room with a kitchen and a pantry, a bathroom and a bedroom. Dragica lives in a rented apartment in the Zagreb district of Dugave with her sister, who does not stay in the apartment most of the time, so Dragica is mostly alone. The apartment has around 45 m² and consists of a hallway, a bedroom, a bathroom, a balcony and a room in which there is a living room, a dining table and a kitchen. Tara lives in a rented apartment in Gornja Dubrava with her mother and her cat. The apartment has around 65 m² and consists of a hallway, a living room with a kitchen and a balcony, a bathroom and two bedrooms. Tara spends most of her time in her room, studying, resting, sleeping and eating. She describes it as her favourite place in the apartment and it perfectly reflects her personality.

Three students – Nika, Petra and Mirta – live in the public student dormitory “Stjepan Radić” (popularly known as “Sava”) located in the Zagreb district of Trešnjevka – South. The complex of the public student dormitory includes twelve pavilions with student rooms, administrative buildings and accompanying facilities in which there are accompanying amenities “a fitness centre, a cinema hall, classrooms, a pastoral office, a doctor’s and a dental office, a dance hall, two student food restaurants and a pizzeria, a café - Slastičarna” (SCZG 2024a). This is the largest public student dormitory in Zagreb and provides accommodation, which is realised through applications on public calls for admission of students, for more than 4000 students (ibid.).¹¹ The size and furnishing of the rooms is not the same in all the pavilions. The rooms in which Nika, Petra and Mirta live are 10 m² in size and are intended for two people. Each person uses one part of the room that includes a closet, a bed with drawers, a desk with a table lamp and a chair, shelves and a notice board. The room also has a refrigerator and a trash can, and it also has pillows and blankets. In the hallway there are common areas: a washbasin, showers, a toilet and a kitchen.

The dimensions of the domestic space, the number and arrangement of rooms and furnishing greatly influence the manner and quality of living (cf. Muraj 1989). Students who live in family houses and apartments live in larger spaces with a larger number of rooms and separate functions. Some of them have their own room that is not used by other tenants, some share a room

11 It is an affordable student accommodation, which, depending on the arrangement of the pavilion and rooms, students pay between 40 and 100 euros per month (SCZG 2024b).



Figure 5. Shared washbasins in the public student dormitory “Stjepan Radić” in Zagreb (photographed by the interviewee, May 2023)



Figure 6. A table/desk that, if necessary, can be expanded to meet different functions and can be used by more people (photo by Anđela Bilan, April 2023)

(with their brother and with their husband and child), and in one case the student’s room is also used as a common family living room. Students who live in rented apartments live in spaces of smaller size, in which there is often a smaller number of rooms, which is why sometimes different functions are connected or alternated in one space. Two students do not have their own room, but since their roommates spend little time in the apartment, they are mostly alone. The most cramped female students live in a public student dormitory where the domestic space is reduced to around ten square meters that are shared with the roommate and where certain functions (washbasin, showers, toilets, kitchen) must be satisfied in common areas that are shared with a large number of (known and unknown) people. Students who own their own room described it as their favourite part of the domestic space, as their “favourite place” or “safe place”.

FUNCTIONS AND FURNISHING OF DOMESTIC SPACE: DISADVANTAGES, ADJUSTMENTS AND COPING

The purpose and manner of use of individual rooms or parts of the domestic space vary depending on the users. Small domestic spaces do not provide the possibility of separating individual functions, bringing in more pieces of furniture or furniture of larger dimensions. Some interlocutors emphasised the impossibility of separating the space for learning and work from the space in which one sleeps or from the space in which one cooks and eats. This makes the space multifunctional. Multifunctionality in a small space is extreme in the rooms of the public student dormitory where sleeping, studying, working, and sometimes dining for two people and socialising, take place in only 10 m².



Figure 7. A mat for children's play, a shelf with picture books and toys that entered the previously student apartment upon the birth of a child (photographed by the interviewee, May 2023)

Space somewhere does not provide the functions that are needed in everyday life, i.e. one needs to share space to satisfy some specific functions or to meet everyday needs outside the domestic space. Students who live in public student dormitories spoke about the experiences of sharing common public student dormitory rooms, the kitchen and the bathroom, and about the availability and (im)practicality of services such as doing the laundry in the public student dormitory's laundromat. Mirta describes the living conditions in the public student dormitory with these words:

"And I'm used to it, so [sharing the toilet with other people] really isn't a problem for me anymore. It's terribly annoying that you still have to carry everything with you. Even, never mind, if you go to the toilet, it's toilet paper and soap or, I don't know, a sanitary pad if you need it or if you're going to have a shower, you have to carry everything with you. It's very, very annoying, but I don't have a problem with the fact that I share things with someone. The problem is cleanliness. Because, OK, it is cleaned up on weekdays. The cleaning lady comes in the morning and cleans really OK, but at the weekends, some people are ill-mannered. You can't find a shower in which there are no hairs or some kind of dirt because they don't wash the shower after using it. I don't know, hairs in the washbasin. Awful, it's so disgusting."

Based on her own experience, Nika describes the specificity of living in public student dormitories compared with other domestic spaces with these words:

"Well, I lived in an apartment and in a house, so in larger spaces where I didn't just have a room or only half a room. This space is very specific because it is made in such a way that



Figure 8. Rented apartment of about 30 m² in which a curtain can divide the room that serves as a dining room, a living room and a bedroom (photographed by the interviewee, April 2023)

the most basic things of life fit into a very small square footage and I think that people who live in a public student dormitory must be very open to everything, especially because of these common areas because it is not easy to share toilets and showers with at least thirty other people. We only have two sinks for washing the dishes, so I think that distinguishes [the space of the public student dormitory from other domestic spaces], it is made so that we now have some space of our own, but it is never really ours.”

As several interlocutors pointed out, the advantage of multifunctional and practical furniture is shown in confined spaces, such as folding chairs that are taken out of the wardrobe in the hallway when guests arrive or an expandable table/desk whose size can be expanded as needed (e.g. you expand it when guests arrive or when two people need it for studying).

The lack of space affects the selection and quantity of domestic objects that a person owns and stores in a domestic space. It requires their practicality and good organisation of space. Students who live in smaller apartments and a public student dormitory emphasised the need to reduce the number of domestic objects they own to those that are necessary for their daily use. Anastasia said that they try to have a minimum of things, and Nika that she can’t “just afford to have too many objects that don’t mean anything [to her].”

The students who live in the public student dormitory commented on the excess of things: the blankets and bedding that students borrow when moving in, which they do not use, so they take up space in the already cramped wardrobes and drawers under the bed. These students described in particular how the cramped space determines the way objects are organised and stored in everyday use. Mirta explained as follows: “What fits into someone’s room, must fit on my shelf”, describing five small square wall shelves that she thematically arranged and each represents a specific space in the house: one, for example, represents a kitchen cabinet, and the other contains hygiene items that are normally placed in the bathroom.

Some solve the problem of a lack of storage space by taking items they are not currently using (seasonal clothes, pieces of furniture, etc.) to their parents' houses in other cities and returning them when they need them.

When describing domestic spaces, students expressed some dissatisfaction with some specific characteristics of domestic spaces and the inability to meet certain needs. They pointed out, for example, the small size of the apartment, the lack of a separate space for studying and working, the lack of space for storing things and the appearance of furniture, among others. The furnishing of the domestic space and the possibility of modifications vary, and often depend on the ownership of the property. Students who live in family houses and apartments have the opportunity to intervene more in the furnishing of the domestic space. However, they also cited examples where this was not possible. For example, they talked about the furnishing that their parents set up, such as pieces of furniture that sometimes take up space in their rooms or common areas, or decorations that are not to their taste. Such examples have been recorded in cases where objects in the domestic space are inherited or donated and are often retained in the domestic space by inertia (cf. Muraj 1989: 7). Sharing the domestic space in these cases prevents complete freedom in its arrangement, which can lead to dissatisfaction. Students living in rented apartments described how they found the furniture when they moved in, and in some cases items from the owners of the apartment that were left in the apartment, which led to a lack of space for their belongings. Because of the cramped space that does not allow the introduction of different or additional furniture, and because of the rules that living in public student dormitories entails (cf. SCZG 2020), the possibilities of intervention are the least in public student dormitories.

Some interlocutors showed that a change in life stage can lead to the need for modifications in the domestic space, different organisation of space and the introduction of new necessary things. Anastasia described that she and her husband would now decorate the kitchen completely differently, in the sense that they would use the space differently (she considers some characteristics impractical) and use a different style of decoration. When she was a student, she did not spend as much time in the kitchen as she does now when she is a mother. She summed up the change in these words: "Mainly because [the apartment] was more intended for student housing and then it became a family apartment, and we remodelled it as it suited us on the fly."

Some explained that they were trying to reshape the space and make it more functional with smaller interventions, e.g. in one apartment they replaced the tables in the bedroom and dining room so that there was a practical folding table in the dining room, while in the other apartment the curtain serves to separate the sleeping area from the rest of the apartment and thus to make a division of space and functions.

Some interlocutors associated tolerance of what they do not like in the apartment with the idea of temporality, aware that they will live in the current apartment for a shorter period in their life. The current impossibility of major interventions, which would make the space more functional and design more adapted to the wishes of the interlocutor, is thus related to the idea of temporariness and the fact that they live in rented apartments. At the same time, high rental prices of apartments are recognised as an obstacle to a possible move to another space.

"I certainly see changes that should be made, but that's it. I think about all sorts of things, but I say, I change and I want to make the space my own with some of my things, but I'm aware that I can't change the space now I don't know how much because the apartment is not primarily mine, although we are really allowed to do everything our way, but it's not like I

can throw away that dining table and buy another one or something. I mean, I can, but since it's not mine, I don't want to do those big interventions." (Dragica)

"This is just an apartment where I will live for a short time, i.e. five years, while I am studying, maybe six, and I think I'm just fine for those few years. It is true that I would like some things to be different, but when I move into a new space, then I think that I will definitely be able to manage that space more and that I will be able to realise some of my wishes and ideas more in the space, but for now I'm just OK like this." (Nina)

The described examples show the need for the existence of furniture and objects that take up little space, that are practical and multifunctional. Moreover, the need for storage spaces for things that are not currently in use has been shown. Students state that even in cases where they live in a space where they can organise the way they use the space according to their own needs, they still like to work or study in other spaces, i.e. get out of the domestic space and separate housing from studying or working. The lack of space for socialising was also cited because cramped spaces or spaces where students live with family members or roommates do not allow gatherings, which indicates the relationship between the space and the interactions that take place in it. Similar practices of socialising outside the family home to avoid potential conflicts have been recorded in other studies (Munro and Madigan 1999: 113).

SPACE, ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS: COEXISTENCE, SOCIALISING, ISOLATION

The collected stories show how the domestic space affects activities and behaviour, interactions and coexistence. It encourages and requires agreements and compromises; it encourages or limits the frequency and number of interactions. Sharing housing space leads to the need to respect the people with whom the domestic space is shared, as well as their habits and obligations. This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when students were more aware of the obligations of their roommates during distance learning. Munro and Madigan (1999), refer to such planning, i.e. negotiation over the use of space and time as *time* and *space zoning*. This was confirmed by the collected stories. Nina explained: "You have to pay attention to when someone has lectures, whether they have to say something and so you need to be quiet, so that you don't make banging noises while you're cooking and so on. So, I think that was actually the hardest part." Changes in the number of co-tenants and the time they spend in the domestic space affect its furnishing and use. Anastazija explained the changes that the birth of a child brought to the appearance and use of the domestic space. Dragica described how where she spends most of her time in the apartment is affected by the absence of her roommate: if the roommate is in the apartment, then Dragica prefers to stay in her room, and if she is not there, then she spends most of her time in the living room.

Some students described in detail how living in smaller apartments and in a public student dormitory affects their daily activities, how they do not like to work there due to spatial constraints, or how they prefer to leave the apartment to meet their friends, so their domestic space is not a space for socialising. The space influences the possibilities of organising friendly gatherings and thus participates in the formation of social connections.

"I don't like working remotely. I go there [to work], I hang out with my colleagues. I think it is good to separate working and domestic spaces. I go to work and get out of this space a

bit. It's very small, now imagine that you're in it all day every day. Like in a matchbox. [...] I used to work from here, but it's very annoying for me because it's very annoying to be here all day. And well, it's such a small space that if you work here... usually when you're done with work, you leave the company, you just leave. You know, let's say, you separate those parts of life, but if you're constantly in that room, I can move twenty centimetres away. So, I avoid working here now if I don't really have to. I'm glad I have that opportunity to be able to, but I'm avoiding it, that's it." (Mirta)

"Somehow because I live with my boyfriend, I don't want to invite people while he's here, so that we don't disturb his peace. It's a very small space and I have a couple of girlfriends over and we're all in that small space, while he, for example, has to work. Well, it's inconvenient. So, I more often go somewhere." (Lena)

"I don't really have a habit of inviting someone to my place. It wouldn't be so much of a pain for me, but I also don't want my parents to have to tiptoe around us now, I don't want them to feel limited in their house. If I had my own room now, it would be much easier for me, then I would also invite someone over much more often." (Teo)

"Well, my friends come over the most. And mostly friends who also live in a public student dormitory, because somehow other friends are not used to such a small space, so it is always somehow uncomfortable for them to come, they somehow feel like they are a nuisance, I noticed that." (Petra)

The number and layout of rooms affect the (im)possibility of separating co-tenants into a separate space. The need for isolation is emphasised by some as very important:

"I like to be alone and my Mum too. To give each other space to rest and I think that everyone needs time to be alone. And so even when we are together in the apartment, each of us has her own space where she likes to stay and that's the way it is." (Tara)

However, some cannot achieve this due to spatial constraints:

"If I'm sad and I want to cry, I want to have my own little space, but you don't have that. The best I can do is turn to the wall. And try not to sob too hard." (Mirta)

The previously mentioned examples show the role of space in interactions with roommates and guests. Having one's own room, "one's own space", allows separation from roommates, while students who live in smaller apartments and without their own room, and especially those who live in public student dormitories, find it difficult to ensure privacy. The size of the space does not allow for spatial and sometimes not even temporal zoning in order to ensure privacy (cf. Munro and Madigan 1999). In some cases, as in the case of a student whose bedroom also functions as a shared living room, this inability of zoning leads to the fact that he chooses to leave his domestic space to go to college, to a café or to a friend's house for studying. Also, the size of the space affects friendly gatherings. While some said that the folding table serves them well when hosting friends, others described how they prefer to spend time with friends outside the domestic space because of its cramped conditions and because they do not want to disturb their roommates.



Figure 9. A desk surrounded by plants, photos, memories and lights that create a cozy space (photographed by Ana Zubčić, April 2023)



Figure 10. A windowsill filled with various small objects, which, together with other such objects, trifles and memories distributed around the apartment, make us "feel that the apartment is our own" (photographed by the interviewee, June 2023)

HOME AND FEELINGS – CREATING A HOME

In the descriptions of their perception of home, students most often talked about a special ambience or atmosphere, i.e. about the feelings that appear in such a space such as relaxation, safety, peace, silence, warmth, comfort or pleasantness, freedom, satisfaction, happiness, understanding and (beautiful) memories. In order to clarify the atmosphere or ambience inherent in the home, they described everyday life in which the domestic space brings contrast and an alternative to the hustle and bustle, as well as to student and work obligations, the abundance of sounds they experience and the people they meet during the day. Some of them, although they had the option of working from home, still chose to go to the office because they do not want to mix the place where they work and the place “where they are at home”. Tara explained, “I don’t like to identify that place where I am somehow the most relaxed, the most myself and the calmest with the place where I work at the same time.” Home is the space that provides calm and relaxation:

“It means that there simply is that atmosphere of calm. It’s very important to me because I think in general that I have a lot of obligations every day and I’m on the move a lot, maybe not necessarily now, but normally. And then it’s very important for me to have that peace and to feel like it’s the end of the day, I came to the apartment, I can relax and so on.” (Nina)

“Well, I’m kind of the most relaxed at home. Most days I’m actually at home, like this when I don’t have to go anywhere, it’s pyjamas or something comfortable, which we all love. It is pure in a sense, to be in your peace, your silence. Somehow, I think that if you don’t have peace at home, it’s very difficult in your life. That home is exactly the place where you should feel completely relaxed, completely yourself. There is no yelling, no rush, just comfort zone, an oasis of peace. Because I’m surrounded by people all day and we’re all surrounded by people all day and then sometimes you need that peace. [...] I think I can summarise this by saying that if someone does not have peace in their home, they do not have peace in life in general. Everyone needs that space where they can recharge and where they feel beautiful, comfortable, happy and this is absolutely necessary for the psyche. And I’m very sorry for those who don’t have it because it’s not easy. Certainly not.” (Tara)

The home allows you to behave freely, with actions that create pleasure and bring relaxation, such as listening to music, socialising with close people and pets, etc. These are actions that are usually repeated and become a habit.

“Well, it’s special for those things that make that space yours and it’s your rituals, they don’t even have to be objects. Most often, when I wake up, I play music, either on the radio, Otvoreni or Bravo radio or my *YouTube* playlist and stuff like that. It’s simply functioning here and how I got used to where my things are, the bathroom, the kitchen, the room. Simply that. [...] I’m really connected to this space. All those habits you create in a space. That’s why I am attached to it the most.” (Dragica)

“I’m comfortable with a space where I can behave freely. I can do the things I love. I can spend time with the people I love. Somehow, all of this is a comfort for me. And I think I’ve definitely got it there. In general, I would say that I feel very comfortable here. I feel at home here.” (Lena)

“My safe zone and there is no place I like more than my bed, my shower, my... I mean,

wherever I go, I'm going to feel great, but I love that feeling again when I come back, when it's my bed, my bedding, my shower, my cat in the apartment. Somehow, I associate all this with that feeling. My own place." (Tara)

Creating a home means creating a cozy space, which was repeated by all the interlocutors. Light, sounds, smells, colours and various objects contribute to a pleasant space. A few have mentioned that they like to have plants in the space. They listed objects that are arranged in the space, such as photographs, postcards, decorations, souvenirs from travels, objects that tell a story of their achievements (awards, certificates, etc.) and objects that remind them of some events and people that they find important, among others. They explained that these objects make the space their own. Rather than a utilitarian role, objects have an identity and a symbolic role (cf. Appadurai 1986; Cieraad 1999: 6; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981).

"I really like plants, especially these orchids, they are just like children to me." (Dragica)

"Nice slow mornings in the apartment. The light outside is somehow more beautiful when it's morning and in the apartment the light is the most beautiful in the morning, so that's what I love." (Tara)

"I really like candles and so in the evening, for example, if I'm watching something or not even watching, but let's say I'm listening to music, I light candles. Candles have always given me some warmth in the space, so I really love them." (Dragica)

By independently furnishing and decorating the space, it is appropriated (Cieraad 1999: 6; Maudlin and Vellinga 2014), one's own space is created, a connection with the space is built, the place with which the person is connected (Cresswell 2004: 2). From an empty, unknown and new space, a home is created:

"[When] I started living here, the apartment was actually very unfamiliar to me and somehow I didn't feel like I do now. I was like... I didn't see it as my home. So, it's only been the last two or three years, I've really connected with this space and somehow, I love it very much. So yes, it was definitely different before, when I first arrived, I even used to, I don't know, I felt bad if I was alone here. It means that I really wasn't connected to the space. And now I enjoy being alone and enjoy this space and everything that is really there." (Dragica)

The impossibility of interventions in space was one of the key arguments why some students do not perceive the space in which they currently live as a home. They are aware that they have some constraints in the space in which they live and that it is temporary. Due to the inability to appropriate space and the inability to interact with friends, these students have not been able to build a home from the space in which they live.

"It would be a home if I didn't look at it as a temporary solution and if I had the option of decorating that home. [...] To bring my friends here more, so that I can turn this into a space to connect memories with. [...] I love it, but not too much and I don't see it as some kind of final destination when it comes to living and my personal space, but because of all these reasons that I mentioned before, no matter how temporary it is, I still feel very comfortable and safe in it because it is a place where I live and which I can identify in my head with something that is a space for safety and rest." (Teo)

"At the moment, I don't consider any space to be really home, until I finish college and go somewhere where I will be able to decorate it, as I said, where I will be completely free, so at the moment I wouldn't say that I really have a home." (Nika)

The connection with the space is built by furnishing the space with one's own things, introducing smells and sounds, but also by established activities (habits) and interactions with people (family members, friends, etc.) and pets over a long period of time. These aspects of the building of the connection with the space can be arranged differently in order of importance, and in some cases only a combination of several aspects leads to the fact that the domestic space is considered a home. For example, Nina likes to live in the apartment but does not consider it home because she associates a sense of affection, permanence and people one finds important with home, while she sees the current apartment as temporary accommodation during her studies and currently lives in it mostly alone. She considers her parents' house to be home, where she occasionally goes during the holidays.¹² Lena, on the other hand sees the rented apartment where she lives with her boyfriend as their space, considers it intimate and feels comfortable in it. Comparing this apartment and a family house in another city, she believes that she feels more comfortable in the Zagreb-based apartment because she can "organise her life as it suits her" and that during her occasional stays in the family house "it can sometimes be difficult [...] because somehow [she has to] adapt back to a lifestyle with [parents] that is different from now." In a similar way, Dragica, who mostly lives alone in a rented apartment because her sister stays in it less, feels at home because everything in it is the way she wants it to be. Anastazija, who lives in an apartment that her parents bought at the beginning of her studies, feels the apartment is her home and associates it with creating her own family. The above examples also show that the ownership of housing is not crucial in building the feeling of home.

FUTURE AND IDEAL HOUSING

As young people who are facing decisions about where to live, students shared their thoughts on what their future (more realistic) and ideal (which is not constrained by financial, business, family and other life circumstances) housing would be like. Some expressed doubts about the future desired place of residence, weighing what each location could bring: for a home in Zagreb, they think it would provide them with more employment opportunities, while for a home in some other cities (where they have lived before or which they perceive in a certain manner) they believe that it would bring them a quieter life. Some students described in great detail the desired appearance of the future domestic space: they talked about the colours, the number and layout of rooms, the type of furniture, the amount of light and the location where they would like to live, to name a few. In some descriptions, the appearance of the future house and apartment was associated with the desire to grow their own food and have pets, which is currently impossible for them because they live in a small apartment. The descriptions of the future domestic space were partly connected with the current domestic space: imagined future spaces should avoid the shortcomings of the spaces in which they currently live or emphasise their good sides. Some students, on the other hand, stated that they currently do not know what their future place of residence would look like.

In the future home, they hope to achieve safety and warmth and have the opportunity to make decisions about the arrangement:

12 Her room in that house, during her absence for study, acquired a different function and is used for storing things. A similar study conducted in Belgium showed: children who move out to go to school leave their parents alone in family homes, and former children's rooms take on new functions, e.g. they become spaces for ironing or storing things (Bervoets and Heynen 2014). Further research would certainly be good to include the spatial changes that occur in family houses when children go to study.

"I would like to feel security and warmth, when I come to the space, to feel just like home, now I will rest, which I actually feel in this space. It's kind of my space where I'm safe and that's it. [How do you think you could achieve these emotions?] Using these things of mine that I enrich the space with because some things are also a reflection of me and make that space mine, so that I feel safe, protected and that I like to spend time here, and not that it is just a functional space, I sleep, eat and that's it." (Dragica)

Some of the interlocutors who live with their parents talked about their great desire to move out, which is currently not possible for some of them due to financial reasons. Danko succinctly described the possible departure from his parents' house with these words: "To learn to live a little, independence and so on." Mihaela described the desired moving out as follows:

"I would be willing to leave at once because I think that I am too old, but you know how it is with finances and you can't do it when you want to, so, I don't know, I guess, will it be after graduation? I guess, I'd definitely like to, I think the sooner the better [laughs] because now I'm like, I can see that I long to be alone, I mean independent, because I don't think I can even figure it out yet while I'm sharing the space with other people, especially the parents, not that they are like this or that, but again you have that relationship 'I'm the daughter in this house', I don't think I can be fully myself, if that makes sense."

Some also see relocation as a desired change of themselves, believing that this change will occur because they will be "on their own and in their own (space)". Others see moving out as a possibility, although they were not entirely sure how they would cope in the new situation when they would have to perform all the obligations by themselves. Some, however, expressed a desire to try to live on their own, while simultaneously questioning whether this would imply loneliness.

The current and future place of residence is also perceived as a space where one becomes independent and is associated with independence. Independence has various, sometimes intertwined, meanings: from independently covering the financial costs of housing and independently arranging one's own space, through independence as an opportunity to live one's own routine and "live one's own way", to independence as a way of building a young person and a more complete understanding of oneself.

CONCLUSION

Student housing is a separate phenomenon that is not given enough attention in Croatia. Students represent a specific heterogeneous social group (cf. Puzić et al. 2021) whose housing is characterised by attachment to a family home, renting housing, organised housing in public student dormitories, sharing of domestic space, limited duration of housing, limited and unstable circumstances and opportunities, as well as the need for independence, among others. Student housing is important because of the close connection with the success of studying (Cvitan et al. 2011; Matković et al. 2010; Gong and Söderberg 2024), the quality of life and well-being of the individual.

Ethnological and cultural-anthropological research of student housing in the domestic context has provided an insight into how Zagreb students live through a focused, in-depth and qualitative view of the material aspects of housing (selection, design/furnishing/changing of domestic spaces, material objects and furnishment of domestic spaces, etc.), everyday life, behaviour, practices and interactions linked with domestic spaces, and feelings and imaginations in

connection with the house and home. The qualitative methodology enabled the inclusion of the voices of the students themselves and the introduction of individual domestic spaces, housing and lifestyle.

In the collected field materials, different stances on the domestic space and some common points of view on space and similar spatial practices were also identified. Through individual examples, it was possible to find out and understand how students feel about their own housing, what they recognise as the basic challenges of housing and what they think about housing in the future. The results of the research show that domestic space with its characteristics causes, limits or accentuates some behaviours, interactions with roommates, feelings and moods. Examples speak of the constraints and shortcomings of domestic spaces resulting from their often-inadequate size and furnishing, as well as about practices, often small interventions and furnishings, by which tenants strive to overcome limitations, create a practical and pleasant space and coexist with their roommates.

Building a connection with the domestic space, creating intimacy and a sense of home are recorded in the actions of furnishing the space with one's own things, smells, sounds, and in established activities and interactions with people and pets. The idea of future (and ideal) housing is associated with the idea of temporality (current housing), and the current and future place of residence is perceived as a space for becoming independent and achieving independence. Research on domestic spaces and housing can provide an incentive and assistance in considering intimacy in public spaces, workspaces, etc., as well as in the complex interweaving of various everyday activities and functions of space, which was especially emphasised during remote learning or in the possibility or the need to work from home.

The results of the research have opened up topics that need to be covered in more extensive research in the future and compared with examples from Croatia and other countries. Comparative studies on student housing in different areas of Croatia are proving to be necessary. The heterogeneity of the student population needs to be considered, the economic aspect of housing and studying, the relationship between studying and working, the various factors that affect housing satisfaction (cf. Milić and Zhou 2017) and the impact of (un)affordability of housing on demographic trends (starting a family, migration; cf. Čipin and Akrap 2008; Bežovan and Jakovčević 2023). Moreover, there is a need for longitudinal research that would follow the diverse trajectories of young people, their (later) independence and return to their parents' home after a period of independent living, including after completing their studies (cf. Potočnik 2017: 34), and thus shed light on the complex topic of cohabitation of parents and their adult children (cf. Isengard and Szydlik 2012). At a time when housing is seen as essential for the quality of life and well-being of individuals and communities, qualitative research that includes the voices of the tenants can be of huge importance for understanding how people live and how they would like to live.

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