



POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

Honors thesis

Master of Science in Architecture Construction City

Abstract

Smallness. 1+11 Contemporary Urban Dwelling Stories

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Constantly rushing, lacking solid reference points and certainties of what will be tomorrow, society's lifestyle and the typical family structure went through significant changes in the last twenty years, and spatial needs of dwelling changed with them. These changes brought with them more and more urban-settled people, more one-person households, more rapid technological innovations, more dynamic and fluid relationships with each others. How is it possible to keep living in the same houses of fifty or more years ago?

This is one of the questions from which, the City of New York, ended up in promoting, in 2012, the adAPT NYC Competition, a pilot tentative for searching and testing the downsizing path for creating a new type of housing for meeting the new needs of New Yorkers. The competition, won by nArchitects with the project formerly known as MyMicro NY, was the first case in the city allowed to waive regulations concerning unit' size limits. The operation unleashed several controversial opinions, and surely this single operation is not enough to solve the housing crisis in the American metropolis, but it opened the discussion around the need of retooling the current city's housing offer. The project, in its process, had an interesting dialogue between architecture in its form of spatial modification, laws, and the socio-economic context in which is located, and produced effects on these dimensions too, making the three fields intertwined and indissociable when retracing the project's process.

However, New York City is not the only one to actuate this strategy: micro-units phenomenon has hit many big cities worldwide as a way of dealing with density and reaching affordability by downsizing the house dimensions; declined in different ways, faced with various conditions and tested at multiple scales, the phenomenon has proved to be a global one, and although the number of examples is still relatively limited, the trend of micro-apartment has already reached early success. If this represents the start of a new way of living or a passing fad has still to be determined.

Starting from the big discussion generated by adAPT NYC, this research is going to build a method for investigating other cases, distributed around the world, with a selection of criteria belonging to specific fields (process, uses, management, block space, building space, and unit space). The results of the investigations will put in evidence certain questions that have to be considered while dealing with micro-units. These questions, in the end, will be collected in a toolkit which starts from the evidences detected in the research for suggesting a call to action for all the actors involved in the city-making, including not only architects, designers, and planners, but also developers, promoters, real estate agencies, municipalities, and even until potential users.

MyMicro NY process

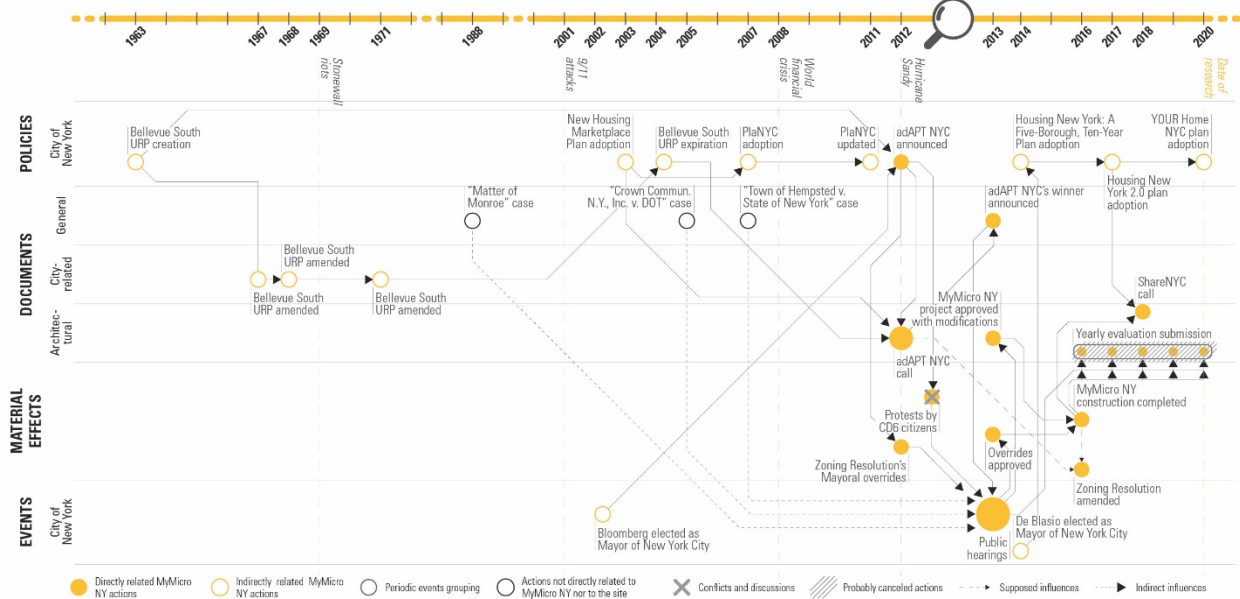
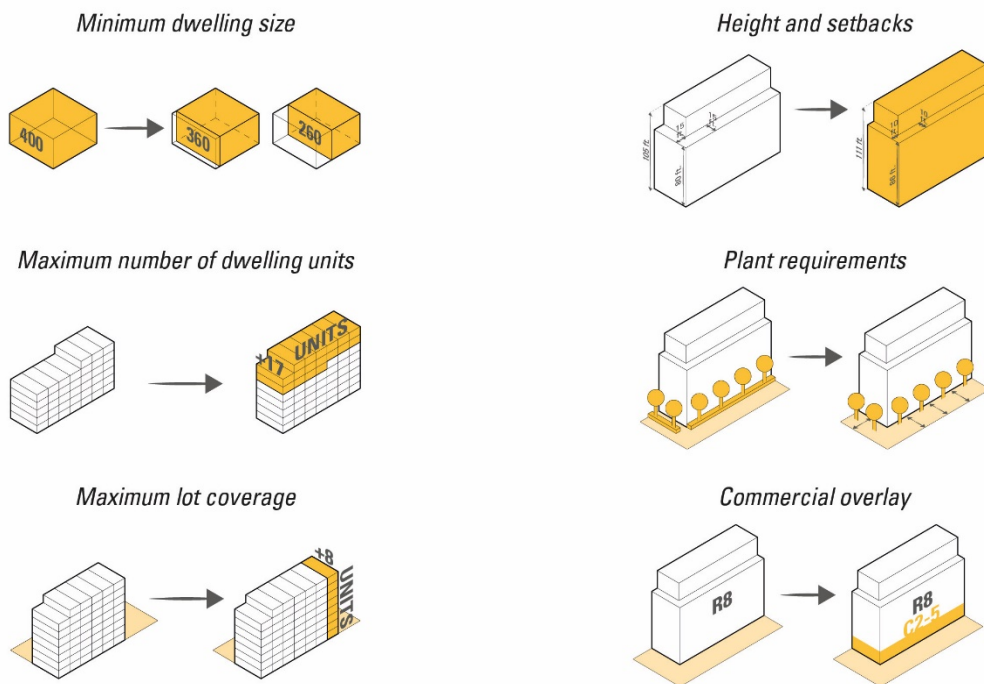


Diagram of events related to the MyMicro NY project – Personal drawing by the author



Regulations' overrides allowed to MyMicro NY project – Personal drawing by the author



Rules changes related to micro-unit dwelling adopted by different municipalities – Personal drawing by the author