



Div of Urban and  
Regional Studies

# **Living together – Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World**

Proceedings from the international collaborative  
housing conference in Stockholm 5–9 May 2010

**DICK URBAN VESTBRO (editor)**



## **Report**

Division of Urban and Regional Studies, Royal Institute of Technology  
in collaboration with Kollektivhus NU  
Stockholm 2010

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Keywords: *Cohousing, housing policy, communal living, eco-villages, demographic change*

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# Foreword

» If I had had an idea that cohousing existed, I would have moved in long ago.«  
These were the words of a woman calling on the cohousing development Färdknäppen in Stockholm to ask if there would be a flat available for her.

Since the 1970s, or even before, new ways of living have seen the light in Europe and gradually spread to other continents. Collective housing, cohousing, mini-communities, bofælleskab, centraal wonen, gemeinschaftliches wohnen – a variety of new words are now in use to describe the many different models and types of housing that exist.

Over the last three decades and more, I have, as a member of the research group Bo i Gemenskap (Live in Community), visited many cohousing projects in Sweden, the rest of Europe and Japan. Almost everyone we met was satisfied, in fact very satisfied, with her/his way of living. But people would also tell me about the general lack of interest and ignorance surrounding the developments, e.g. among neighbours, planners, architects, politicians and developers.

This, however, seemed not to weaken their conviction that collaborative ways of living are bound to belong to the future. They saw many good reasons in the advantages of such living; a sense of community, the potential for economizing with resources, the value of resident cooperation and of learning together.

Why then are we not seeing a dynamic growth in public interest and in the creation of new projects? Why all the obstacles in the way for these good ideas to be implemented? And why are there still so few people who know of the existence of such alternatives to living in a villa or a conventional apartment?

In 2008 during a visit to the USA, I participated in a roundtrip in the San Francisco area, arranged by the Cohousing Association of the United States. I also spent some time in the Swan's Market cohousing in Oakland and visited a number of projects together with Joani Blank and Dorit Fromm (thanks to you two).

The tour inspired me to reflect over the value of an international conference. I contacted the chair of the Swedish cohousing organisation Kollektivhus NU, and he responded with great enthusiasm. He presented the idea to the board of the organisation, which decided to plan for a cohousing conference. A long period of enjoyable and hard work was started, to prepare for the first international conference on collaborative housing, to be held in Stockholm in May 2010.





Kerstin Kärnekull, one of the speakers at the conference and member of the conference working group.

**We had moments of doubt** that the conference would ever become a reality. Economic crises, health problems of key individuals, important UN events drawing a keynote speaker from our program, and volcanoes spreading clouds of ashes over Europe, brought new obstacles to our work. Fortunately, the excellent support we were given by the Division of Urban and Regional Studies of the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), by the research council FORMAS and by a number of sponsors (see publisher's page of this volume) made it possible to move on.

The conference could hardly have been implemented were it not for the support given by volunteers from cohousing developments all over Sweden. Equally important was the support from all those who agreed to act as chairpersons and secretaries in the workshops, and who had to prepare these in advance of the conference. Of the conference participants, close to 40 persons offered their labour in voluntary activities. Without the strength and enthusiasm of these people, we would not have been able to arrange the conference at such a low cost and in such a friendly atmosphere.

The conference working group consisted of Dick Urban Vestbro, Bertil Egerö, Lotta Bystedt, John Fletcher, Feras Hammami, Ingrid Eckerman and myself. Ingrid deserves special thanks for her professional and comprehensive work with logistics and organisation of many practical matters. Of great value was the work of Lotta Bystedt, together with Ann Mari Engel, in preparing the cultural events of the conference. Together with Ingela Blomberg, Anna Demerus and Anita Persson, she

also did a wonderful job in preparing the study visits to cohousing developments that preceded the conference.

Special thanks go to KTH PhD student Feras Hammami for his patient and competent struggle to keep track of all the registrations, payments, cancellations and other practical matters. Thanks also to Elsa Grip, who took responsibility for the coordination of exhibitions; to John Fletcher, who initiated and managed the special website of the conference, and to Ingrid Sillén, who took charge of press contacts and the English version of the exhibition of *Kollektivhus NU*. Madi Gray has corrected the English language, carefully screening the conference report to sort out unclear sentences and terminologies.

**Finally, we are greatly indebted** to all the cohousing members who with great enthusiasm made fantastic efforts to receive curious conference visitors in their cohousing communities in the run-up to the conference.

I am convinced that all who worked with the conference share a deep satisfaction with what we have achieved together: the many meetings between people, all the conversations and exchanges of information, the inspiration shown by conference participants. We share, not the least, a strong feeling that an important step has been taken in the work for much more cohousing of different kinds in the future.

This book reflects the width of what took place during the five days of the Stockholm conference. It will carry the ideas of alternative – and better – types of housing forward and disseminate them around the whole world. These ideas are indeed needed!

STOCKHOLM 1 AUGUST 2010  
KERSTIN KÄRNEKULL

## Cohousing NOW – A brief presentation



The Swedish national association Cohousing NOW – in Swedish *Kollektivhus NU* – is a politically and religiously independent non-government organisation working to promote collaborative housing and other alternative ways of living. The association supports existing cohousing developments as well as groups intending to create new projects. Originally formed in 1981, Kollektivhus NU has recently been revitalised with the prime purpose to inform the public about cohousing as an alternative, and to influence authorities to facilitate the creation and running of such housing projects.

Kollektivhus NU currently has 49 members. Of these 42 are existing cohousing developments, while 7 are organisations working in favour of collaborative housing. There are also 80 individual supporting members.

The just over 40 cohousing units that exist in Sweden are mainly the result of civil society campaigns and positive responses from public housing authorities during the 1980s. They represent a minute fraction of the housing stock. A vast majority of Swedes are unaware of alternatives such as collaborative housing, eco-villages etc. The existing cohousing units are concentrated to the major university cities. Almost half of them are located in Stockholm.

Today the trend is turning in favour of collaborative housing. In the last five years six new units have been built, and more are on their way. Kollektivhus NU has an active collaboration with SABO – the umbrella organisation Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies, and has established contacts with a number of actors in the housing and construction sector.

The association is financed almost entirely through membership fees, smaller donations and sale of books produced by the organisations.

Introduction:

## Cohousing – issues and challenges

It is a sign of the ways things have moved both here in Sweden and internationally, that the first international conference ever came to attract 150 participants from 20 countries, mainly from Europe and the US, but also some from Japan, South Korea, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. To the organisers, this is a confirmation that developments in Scandinavia have a relevance extending far outside the region. Now, the participants could witness the dynamics of cohousing movements in a great variety of countries, and learn from their experiences.

Although the conference was the first of its kind, the issue is in no way a product of recent times. Dick Urban Vestbro's opening presentation was a journey to the deep historical roots, of not only utopian thinking, but also practical experiments in alternative forms of living. Stimulating, while also a sobering reminder that nowhere in either yesterday's or today's world has cohousing met with lasting enthusiasm in wider circles, nowhere has it been officially embraced as one important option to be made available in the housing market.

The challenge is there. Much of the discussion during workshops and plenary meetings focused on this, one way or another.

### **Cohousing varieties – a brief overview**

Denmark is sometimes regarded as the uncontested pioneer in cohousing development. There are, however, good reasons to revise this picture. It appears that the idea of living together in new housing forms spread more or less simultaneously in several European countries. When the so-called *BIG* group of Swedes<sup>1</sup> in the late 1970s set themselves the task to formulate a new blueprint for cohousing, they gradually discovered similar lines of thought not only in Denmark but also in the Netherlands and Germany, which at least in the first two already had resulted in a good number of cohousing projects. Whether such ideas emerged independently in

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1. *BIG* is an acronym for *Bo i Gemenskap*, ('Live in Community'). Two of the authors of the book were speakers at the conference; Kerstin Kärnekull and Inga-Lisa Sangregorio.



Conference plenary hall in Stockholm.



The coffee breaks were used for exchange of information and making friends for the future.

these countries or spread through contacts and inspiration, as well as how they were shaped in relation to local cultures and housing markets, would indeed be worth a systematic study.

In Denmark, the 1970s saw a boom of ‘bofælleskab’ in different parts of the country, a trend that has continued to this day. Such constructive early Danish experiments in cohousing offered a rich source of inspiration for Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant from the USA when they visited Denmark in the 1980s. Through their writings<sup>2</sup> and their work on alternative designs, in the US cohousing began to take root in groups far from the hippie communities that had earlier formed themselves on the margin of society. Like in Denmark, many cohousing projects were and are a response to the interests of relatively resource-rich urban families, many of them close to or already in retirement.

A similar trend was reported to the conference (workshop 9) by Eric Frijters from the Netherlands. His firm had begun to conceptualize cohousing projects in open tracts between the urban areas, suitable for small groups of senior households and designed to give close access to social and health services.

The conference learnt from Albrecht Göschel in his plenary presentation entitled “Collaborative housing in Germany”, that this type is considered the more radical of two main forms of collaborative housing, and a form promoted by a national organization that aims to support projects “which intend to develop mutual help and care”. An activist in the field, Göschel is clear over the purpose of (most) such housing projects; they are not intended to offer close social exchange – “it is even recommended not to embark on such projects with close friends” – but to establish ‘supportive relations’ of mutual help in everyday life and in times of crisis.

Succinctly illustrated in presentations to workshop 9 by South Korea (Jaesoon Choo and Jung Shin Choi) and Japan (Tomoaki Kageyama), social isolation is another driving force behind efforts to develop forms of cohousing, not necessarily

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2. See further Vestbro’s text on *Concepts and terminology* in this volume.

with shared cooking and eating but formed such as to enable moderate contact between households. The social dimension tends to take on additional weight as people retire from work and are left with unreliable kinship ties as the prime social security net. A net growing more and more thin as people increasingly find themselves left with only one or even no child at the end of reproduction.

The Swedish model from the 1970s of urban 'collective housing' for all; small flats linked to common space with collective cooking and eating facilities (see further below), was in the 1990s supplemented by a version better suited to the needs and interests of people "in their second half of life". In concrete terms, this meant a restriction to a defined lower age limit among adults, and no children as members of any household. Living together, "under the same roof", members are expected to offer each other mutual help as required by ageing and illnesses, enabling each one to remain in her/his home throughout the remaining life.

The Danish organization *Ældresagen* (DaneAge) is a strong advocate for collective senior-citizen housing. Working with this organization, Margrethe Kähler offered in her plenary presentation a variety of good arguments, exemplified with existing cohousing projects in urban and rural areas. So far only around one percent of people 50 years or above live in cohousing but, says Kähler, many would like to. Internationally, one percent would seem a good achievement (probably reached also by the Netherlands); still it leaves cohousing as an option hardly known of by most people in Denmark.

### **The public sector, civil society and cohousing**

Plenary speaker Inga-Lisa Sangregorio gave a convincing account of how 20th century cohousing in Sweden grew out of women's need for solutions to the care of children and home when they ventured out to wage employment. This was the case of the 1930s, where 'collective' could mean that food preparation, laundry and child care services were available within the building. It was also the thinking of the *BiG* group of women whose models for cohousing came to influence the construction of a series of cohousing units in the country, most of them by local public housing companies.

The feminist perspective was present not only in Sangregorio's speech, but also in Vestbro's lecture, in workshop 3 and several other contributions to this book. That cohousing is a concern for women was reflected in the fact that 102 of the 155 participants in the conference were women.

Systematic studies of the history of cohousing in different countries show interesting variations that could be traced to political and economic circumstances, external influences etc. It would be of value to expose the trends over time in how cohousing is seen and related to by different actors – civil society, politicians and housing companies. Today, the growing numbers of single parent households, and the even more common one-person households, underline a need for social support and access to social togetherness. The 'ageing' process (relatively fewer young and more



old in the age pyramid) adds dimensions such as care and security, mutual support and easier access to services.

Most of the Swedish cohousing developments of today owe their existence to actions through the public sector. In the early 1980s, Stockholm city council had a group of persons employed specifically for the promotion of collective houses, and those queuing for a flat with the public housing companies could choose a special queue for collective housing projects. These arrangements are no longer there, but urban groups lobbying for cohousing still primarily turn to the public housing companies.

In this respect the Swedish experiences are unusual. However, there is in many countries a growing, while sometimes still latent, official interest in learning more about cohousing. This interest is linked to the inevitable demographic change called “ageing”, and the need to find cost-effective solutions to the care and security needs of older people. Barbro Westerholm’s plenary presentation is a broad account of current official thinking and emerging policies in this area in Sweden. Her presentation was supplemented by a broad introduction to the Swedish welfare model given by Göran Cars, official host of the conference. He offered important insights into the current transition away from decades of welfare oriented policies, emphasizing the lack of political consensus on, in his words, “how to construct – or reform – social and housing policy programs to fit the needs of today.”

The degree to which the public sector assumes responsibility for such needs of older citizens varies a great deal between countries. While governments in East Asia try to keep abreast of housing developments in Europe, the main stumbling block for more concrete responses seems to be a prevailing reliance on kinship networks that

PHOTO: KERSTIN KÄRNEKULL



The first day of the conference was used for study visits to five cohousing projects in the Stockholm area.

nowadays are seriously weakened, plus a hesitance to introduce alternatives seen as alien and unacceptable by patriarchal society. This conservatism is there everywhere, among civil servants, architects and building technicians as much as among local and national level politicians. In Sweden only two parties have cohousing on their agendas (the Left and the Green parties), representing less than 20 % of the parliamentary seats.

That radical responses are needed seems evident; The post-industrial societies are moving seemingly unavoidably towards an increasingly untenable situation of growing imbalance between demands for continued welfare and what the state will be able to offer. Today's economic problems in Greece and Great Britain are an indication of what is to come.

This leaves the civil society with a growing responsibility – to lobby for greater public attention, if possible, and also to search for ways forward in collaboration with private sector interests. Vestbro's historical exposé, and Sangregorio's exposure of the struggles for more rational solutions to the life hassles of working mothers, both underlined the importance of the private building industry in creating the first modern collective houses in Sweden. This was also emphasized strongly by workshop 10 on mobilization strategies. Would there be a way to get such actors onboard today?

### **What about this thing of 'ageing'?**

Demography is about long-term trends. Today's demographic challenges and how they articulate themselves in different countries have been known many years. Knowledge, however, is not always followed by action. Most of the world's countries are experiencing two seemingly irreversible trends, with deep impacts on society and economy. One is the virtually global reduction in family size, or reproduction. In a growing number of countries too few children are born to keep their population from shrinking (as pointed out in the lecture by Egerö and in workshop 12, dealing with health and social environment). In Europe, former socialist and Catholic countries (!) are since decades the most advanced in the move towards societies with very few children.

At the other end of the age scale, old people grow increasingly older, they stay alive longer. Obviously a sign of good health and welfare for the majority, but also – with retirements while many people are still capable to work – an indication that pension and social care systems will come under increasing strain. This is why those who can afford and who see the problems ahead begin to take their own steps to preserve their good living conditions. Göschel notes: "In Germany collaborative housing must be seen as an alternative production of personal services in the face of a service crisis that is presumably already emerging."

Neoliberal politics leads to growing polarization in society. Gated communities for the wealthy is one outcome. Private cohousing projects is likely to become another, increasingly common, answer, open only for select strata with sufficient resources





One of the workshops at the conference.

and social capability. Göran Cars in his plenary presentation, and Guillermo Delgado in his post-conference summary in this volume, both emphasized that Sweden in no way is exempt from the process of social exclusion carried through what might be called neighbourhood segregation – disadvantaged neighbourhoods get poorer and carry growing social and economic burdens, while already wealthy neighbourhoods get increasingly wealthier.

The long-term effects of small families are seen not only in gradually weaker social security networks. There will also be a visible shortage of workers not least in the social care sector, which opens for more liberal policies on immigration from countries outside what we call the West. For the cohousing movement, immigrants and their experiences are a potentially valuable part of civil society. In workshop 1 Els de Jong elaborated on this, and presented examples of ethnic minority collaborative housing. Her studies have shown that ethnic minorities can use collaborative housing to create a stronger sense of community and blend better into existing senior housing options. Her Dutch experiences are confirmed by Guillermo Delgado in his contribution to this book. Bertil Egerö offered anecdotic information from Swedish local public housing efforts to facilitate collective kin-based togetherness in ordinary multistory housing.

Kin-based cohousing is not unusual in societies around the world. It remains to be explored if and how this kind of experiences can be integrated with those of the modern cohousing movement.

## **External influences, internal challenges**

The cohousing movement of today is facing a series of challenges. We are working with what Sangregorio, citing Ernst Bloch, calls concrete utopias. While many earlier attempts have stayed in the ‘abstract utopia’ category, leaving no sustained traces, the conference proved beyond any doubt that cohousing today is an international social movement. The issue is no longer survival, but expansion and extension to groups so far untouched and partnerships with actors that can ensure wider access to cohousing as a way of life.

The challenges are in part external, in part internal to the movement. Externally, the actors we need for our expansion are either government with its interest in care, not participation, or private sector actors with their built-in orientation to hunt for profits and reduced risks. To meet those interests, the movement needs to identify key basic values to guide its work. A proposal in that direction is that we should never deviate from our core principles: *participation and shared responsibility*.

Internally, the movement appears to be swaying between two aims or purposes: the most obvious, to provide cohousing for its current and potential future members; and the more general, to influence welfare politics in the direction of enabling people to improve their social wellbeing by forming dwelling clusters for social and practical interaction. As expressed by Kähler:

The residents in collective housing have chosen not to live in anticipation of something else. Not to believe that everything will be better some day. They say, “Things do not happen – we make them happen”.

In most countries, in fact even in Denmark where 99 percent remain in conventional housing, this sounds like a utopian vision. The cohousing movement, if it decides to work for making cohousing available to all irrespective of age, resources or social capability, would need to get more professional, more inter-active – not least internationally active.

## **Good arguments need to reach the public ear**

The more loosely formed collectives shared by younger people often spring out of their need to cut expenses. This should be an argument in all types of cohousing. The economy of collective living – to cut cost by sharing things, by collective meals, by energy-saving collective devices etc. – is often a reality, in many cases a possibility that could be attended to in cohousing projects. And it is an argument to link to public debates on how to reduce energy consumption, how to live more environment-friendly.

In his plenary paper, Graham Meltzer underlined the advantage of members in “socially cohesive intentional communities” over those in the ordinary housing

market, to understand their capacity to bring about change in their lives – to ‘walk their talk’. Much of recent official response to environment problems has taken the form of pleas to people to change their individual life styles. Cohousing enables people to actually undertake such challenges – another strong argument to bring to the public arena.

### **The importance of professionalism**

A good number of the key actors in the cohousing movement appear to be architects. Local groups lobbying for cohousing projects may lack such required technical competence. Legal and juridical competence, and competence in small group dynamics and conflict solution, would be other areas where assistance could be required.

To serve such needs requires a well functioning national organization, where the required competence could be found at manageable costs. This is a vital aspect of cohousing project planning – all too often, housing companies and builders prove to be difficult partners as they know and trust only conventional housing solutions (issues elaborated on in workshop 10 and 3). Where they have their way, unsatisfactory designs might result which endanger the collectivity of a project.

Professionalism has to be based on good knowledge. Research on cohousing is not a common theme in the academic world. Kerstin Kärnekull reported to the plenary that, to her knowledge, Japan is the only country with a special research committee for the promotion of collective housing (in its Housing Research Foundation Jusoken). Much data on European and other forms of cohousing has been collected by visiting Japanese scientists.

This lack of scientific interest from the academic community should be no surprise to us – academicians are no different from the majority of citizens who see cohousing as an alien and suspect way of living, at the margin of society. There is a need for creative thinking about strategic ways to reach research funds, and the weight of different arguments to influence their boards to take genuine interest in this matter.

### **The importance of international exchange**

One central aspect of international exchange is to learn from others, to see solutions and approaches that are unknown in one’s own habitat. This is of value not only for a local group planning a cohousing project, but equally for its partners in housing companies, local councils, the building industry etc.

However, to create an international organization, an issue discussed also at the Seattle Summit in 2008, most likely is a bit unrealistic. Collaborative housing organizations are based on voluntary engagement, and should not be expected to have the time, funding and energy to maintain an international network. A more realistic proposal would be to create issue-focused international networks or committees. Among relevant issues are Communications/internet, Research colla-

boration, Documentation, Advocacy strategies, and Consulting services to cohousing groups.

### **Conference recommendations – a good blend**

The conference was created as a forum for exchange of experiences and ideas. As such, it was not organized to formulate and adopt conclusions of any kind. Nevertheless, many good conclusions and recommendations are found in different conference documents, not least the reports from different workshops. It might be of value for future meetings to retrieve and systematize such material, however here we have chosen only to highlight a few concrete recommendations from either conference deliberations or meetings at the side.

A common theme was the need to facilitate the sharing, internationally and locally, of both theoretical and practical developments. Translations into English of texts produced in other languages would be a first priority. Such a project would gain much from international coordination and joint efforts to get the necessary funding.

Improved access to systematized experiences from different countries is highly valuable for research and research coordination. Among key themes not least in what they offer for international comparison is process studies; the documentation and analysis of cohousing projects from start to implementation (or failure). Such work should pave the way for what workshop 6 called a draft charter for cohousing. In the words of the workshop report, it could outline factors that are basic to new cohousing, present the range of different options available, summarize lessons of the current movement, and thus be instrumental in developing cohousing in the world.

In line with this proposal, a catalogue of design models from different countries, and their respective relation to social, economic and environmental dimensions of collective life, should be a useful tool also in contacts with politicians and developers.

Given the plethora of terms in use to describe a wide variety of housing projects, it would seem worthwhile to assemble terms in use in different languages, identify their meanings and try to create a categorization of cohousing projects based on some general criteria. As an end product, this might lead to a set of terms in English suitable for respective broad category.

What criteria would be relevant for such a categorization? The choice is important, as it will express what we as an international movement regard as essential in cohousing, affecting the language we would like to use between ourselves and the way we develop our advocacy to civil society and building companies, to the political world and the market actors.

Two criteria need to be given much more attention: the (potential or real) economy of living together, and the environmental gains offered. That radical change in material consumption soon will be required seems beyond doubt, but few workable ways to change the behavior of market actors have yet been devised. To economize is a term with many dimensions. Neither the individual firm competing

on the market, nor the individual household on its own, may be capable of much change; the collective – whether an organization of business operators or a group of households – stands much stronger in this respect. Graham Meltzer’s accounts (in the present volume) from the Scottish community Findhorn demonstrate what is possible, given optimum conditions.

### **Concluding comments**

The first international cohousing conference was made possible by the existence of national movements and organizations working on cohousing as a viable alternative on the market. That it could be carried out with such a wide international representation, and that it was met with such great appreciation, indicate that we as a social movement today have a great potential of international collaboration to support all future efforts. How is this potential to be handled?

There should be no doubt that the vast majority of people engaged in cohousing do so for their own sake, to improve their own lives. In Sweden, the cohousing movement of the 1980s virtually died out when most of its members had found themselves new homes in the collective houses that were built. Only a few have found their way back to activism with a purpose beyond their own collective house.

At the end of the conference, one question remained unanswered: “Who are we?” Some of those present are good entrepreneurs, others are political activists – both aim to get more cohousing projects implemented. Many others attended out of genuine personal interest, but as yet not committed participants in a movement for social change. The real challenge today is to try and get such a movement to take off. This is the ultimate aim of Cohousing NOW, its success in no way secured but greatly supported by the conference.

To move in this direction requires debate on basic issues far beyond the design and organization of cohousing projects. Several challenges were raised in the conference that can only be met by an organization focused on social change. Among these, to link up with single parent households, single person households, poor young people, immigrant communities – households in need of such housing alternatives while as yet not expressing any demand.

We are all working to prove that the utopian vision of housing for togetherness is a *concrete utopia*. To achieve this, national organizations need international support, and international networks need to be based in solid national organizations. The challenge is there, a new stage is set for the cohousing movement. ■

BERTIL EGERÖ

# Concepts and terminology

This chapter aims to sort out differences and similarities between concepts in various countries and languages for housing with shared facilities and other characteristics addressed by the First International Collaborative Housing Conference. It is considered desirable to find concepts that may be used internationally, but the discussion below shows that national differences are likely to remain – even if agreements should be reached about certain concepts. The main concepts discussed here are those expressed by the English terms *collaborative housing*, *collective housing*, *cohousing*, *intentional communities*, *ecovillage*, and their equivalents in some other languages.

## Collaborative housing

When planning for the Stockholm conference it was decided to advertise it as dealing with *collaborative housing*. The assumption was that this concept is wider than *cohousing*, which was considered to give a too limited scope of the conference. In agreement with Dorit Fromm in her book from 1991<sup>1</sup>, collaborative housing was to include various types of housing with shared facilities. We also wanted the conference to include ecovillages and other types of settlements that promote sustainable development, neighbourly cooperation and a sense of community.

Workshop 1 of the conference (chaired by Dorit Fromm) dealt specifically with concepts. In its definition of *collaborative housing* it included design for social contacts. Such a criterion is interesting because attention is given also to the physical setting, not only social factors. The most important design factor is common facilities. In its report, workshop 1 also includes in its definition of this concept design of separate household spaces, including kitchen and bath. With this definition, *collaborative housing* does not include projects where separate apartments do not exist.

The report also includes in its definition the presence of a shared vision/intention. It makes sense to include a common vision about collaboration and work with

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1. Fromm, Dorit (1991): *Collaborative Communities. Cohousing, Central Living and Other New Forms of Housing with Shared Facilities*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

common facilities. In the USA, common visions often include also religion, sexual orientation, vegetarianism etc. In European communities, such issues are usually considered to be each individual's private business. Workshop 1 further mentions as a criterion "*less emphasis on individual consumption of resources*". This factor might be common, but is not present in all collaborative housing projects. The report also noted that *collaborative housing* does not have to include complete resident management, strong participation in the development process, or dining together. This makes sense if the aim is to achieve a wider type of definition.

### Collective housing

'Shared facilities' does not necessarily mean collaboration between residents. Service facilities can be provided by a housing company or a public institution without requiring any action by the inhabitants. Therefore *collaborative housing* is not fully appropriate when searching for a concept that comprises collective organisation of services without resident collaboration. In their book "New Households, New Housing", Franck and Ahrentzen use the term *collective housing* to refer to "*housing that features spaces and facilities for joint use by all residents who also maintain their own individual household.*"<sup>2</sup> This definition may include condominiums and cooperatives, while it excludes communes where individual households are not accommodated in separate dwellings.

In Sweden, the word *kollektivhus* (literally 'collective building') is the most frequently used term for housing with shared facilities. Originally it referred to the collective organisation of housing, but not to neighbourly collaboration or to the idea of community of residents. When the concept was launched in the 1930s, the aim was to reduce women's housework in order for them to be able to retain gainful employment even when they married and had children (see the papers by Vestbro and Sangregorio in this book). The focus on a rational organisation rather than community is seen in the fact that many of the early *kollektivhus* were provided with food lifts (so called dumb waiters). Residents were supposed to



Ground floor of the YK-huset cohousing development in Stockholm, built in the 1930s. Meals were brought to the apartments through food lifts from the central kitchen. The restaurant was open to the general public.

2. Franck, Karen & Sherry Ahrentzen (eds, 1989): *New Households, New Housing*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.



have their meals in the apartment and not in the restaurant that might exist within the building. These early projects were based on services through employed staff and included a reception, a laundry, a local shop and a day care centre for children.

In the 1980s, when this early type of *kollektivhus* was replaced by a new type based on residents working together, the concept *kollektivhus* was maintained, this time focusing on a sense of community and cooperation between residents. Shared spaces and facilities were the common denominators between the old and the new type of collective housing.

The Swedish architect researcher Karin Palm Lindén defines *Swedish kollektivhus* as "multi-family housing with private apartments and communal spaces such as a central kitchen and a dining hall, where residents do not constitute a special category."<sup>3</sup> In the Swedish context at the time of the research (the 1980s), the latter criterion was considered important in order to distinguish *kollektivhus* from more institutional forms of housing for special categories such as students, persons with disabilities, the elderly and other groups of people with special needs. In practice it is difficult to uphold this distinction, however. It is better to identify various types of *collective housing*, such as *collective housing for mixed groups* and *collective housing for special categories*. After intensive studies of Swedish housing the Japanese decided to use *collective housing* to comprise both these types of housing under the same umbrella.

In Scandinavian languages the word *hus* means *building* (and not *house* as many believe, the equivalent of *house* being *bostad* in Swedish and *bolig* in Danish and Norwegian). A *kollektivhus* consists of individual apartments around common spaces. This is in contrast to *boendekollektiv* (communes), which lack individual apartments. Since the latter type of living is associated by the public in general with bohemian lifestyles, temporary sex relations and lack of privacy, efforts are often made to show that in *kollektivhus* privacy is well protected and nuclear family living is the normal pattern. Despite the negative connotations of the term *collective*, the national Swedish association *Kollektivhus NU* finds itself bound to use the word *kollektivhus* since it is the established concept. At the same time, the association is all in favour of a wider use of the term *bogemenskap* (meaning *living community*).

As in the Netherlands (and Denmark before *bofællesskab* appeared around 1970), Swedish *kollektivhus* are often established by housing companies without a specific interest group being formed in advance, or without the participation of residents-to-be in the planning process. It is desirable to agree on a concept that characterises a residential building with shared facilities even if residents have not participated in the design process. Also when an active initiating group is formed it is not unusual (in the

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3. Palm Lindén, Karin (1992): *Kollektivhuset och mellanzonen. Om rumslig struktur och socialt liv* (Collective housing and intermediary space. About spatial structure and social life), Lund University (PhD thesis).



Swedish context) that only a minority of the initiators remain when the time comes to move in. Should we exclude a well functioning collaborative housing development from being called so because residents have not participated in the design process? The author of this paper is positive to resident participation, but does not think that this criterion should be part of the definition.

It is also desirable to find a concept covering a residential building that has certain physical features (common spaces and facilities) regardless of the nature of the planning process. *Kollektivhus* satisfies such a requirement, while *collaborative housing* does not. One reason behind this ambiguity in English is that the term *housing* means both a product and a process. It may also comprise both a single house and a cluster of houses (apartments). When referring to a residential building with shared spaces, one has to use impractical concepts such as *cohousing development*, *cohousing complex* or *cohousing unit* (although *unit* for many means the individual house or apartment). At the conference, many participants used the word *cohousing* when referring to the building itself. Obviously this is not yet a generally accepted term in English. The fact that many used it shows, however, that there is a need for better concepts than *cohousing development*.

In his contribution to this book, Guillermo Delgado considers *collective housing* to be the wider concept. To him this comprises multi-household building complexes without shared facilities (in French called *habitation collectif*, and in Spanish *vivienda colectiva* or *vivienda multifamiliar*, which have nothing to do with cohousing). Because of this use of the term in French and Spanish, *collaborative housing* is less likely to cause confusion, compared to *collective housing*.

## **Cohousing**

The most common concept used in the English-speaking world is *cohousing*. The US cohousing network defines *cohousing* as “a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighborhoods” (<http://www.cohousing.org/>). The concept was coined by Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant in their book from 1984<sup>4</sup>, based to a great extent on the study of Danish *bofællesskab* (literally meaning *living community*). One may note that emphasis is given both to collaboration and to resident participation in the design and management, factors that are not at hand in many types of housing with shared facilities. The US Cohousing network also mentions eating and doing other things together as typical features of *cohousing*. The section of definition on the website states:

The common house is the social center of a community, with a large dining room and kitchen, lounge, recreational facilities, children’s

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4. McCamant, Kathryn and Charles Durrett (1988): *Cohousing – A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*, Berkeley, California: Habitat Press/Ten Speed Press.

spaces, and frequently a guest room, workshop and laundry room. Communities usually serve optional group meals in the common house at least two or three times a week. (<http://www.cohousing.org/>)

The term *cohousing* is also used by the British and Canadian cohousing networks. The latter describes cohousing as “*neighbourhoods that combine the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of shared resources and community living*”.

It is furthermore stated that individual homes are clustered around a common house with shared amenities such as a kitchen and dining room, children’s playroom, workshops, guest rooms, home office support, arts and crafts area, laundry and more (<http://cohousing.ca>)

The concept *cohousing* does not state exactly what **co** stands for. It could be *collaborative*, *cooperative*, *collective* or *communal*. Therefore it is logical to see cohousing as the wider concept. This term is spreading rapidly as the universal term. In April 2010 the author of this paper attended a conference in Barcelona, where in a workshop on cohousing dozens of young people took for granted that this term also may refer to homeless people taking over empty buildings to solve their accommodation problem. If sharing spaces and facilities are key issues, such a use of the concept is logical.

An indication of the prominence of the term *cohousing* is the fact that Italian, Czech and Belgian cohousing networks are using the English term in their names ([www.cohousing.it](http://www.cohousing.it), <http://www.cohousing.cz/>, [www.cohousingplatform.be](http://www.cohousingplatform.be)). The concept cohousing is also used in Austria, simultaneously with satisfactory German concepts (see below).

In his plenary presentation at the conference Graham Meltzer (who has carried out research about US and Australian cohousing) considered *cohousing* to comprise “*participatory process, neighbourhood design, extensive common facilities, resident management, a non-hierarchical structure and no shared economy*”. It may be true that many cohousing associations have non-hierarchical structures, but it nevertheless seems problematic to include this criterion in the definition. Why should we exclude projects with a more conventional power structure (chairman, executive committee, annual meetings)? The consensus principle is regarded by some as the true sign of a non-hierarchical structure, while others consider it as undemocratic, since this principle may be used by a few persons to impose their wills on others. The same uncertainty holds for the criterion *no shared economy*. Why should we exclude communities with shared economy (e.g. the kibbutz) from being called *cohousing*? The fact that Meltzer includes *neighbourhood design* in the definition is also questionable, since neighbours may be involved in design without building a cohousing community.



The Sættedammen cohousing project in Copenhagen was built in 1970–72. Legend: 1. parking; 2. common yard; 3. heating plant; 4. communal building; 5. two-storey houses; 6. one-storey houses; 7. swimming pool; 9. outdoor sitting area. See further <http://dammen.dk/>.

### Other concepts

The equivalent concept in Danish is *bofællesskab*. According to Danish Wikipedia it is a “consciously created mini-society consisting of fully equipped private homes, supplemented by common facilities. Typically a *bofællesskab* is planned, owned and managed by residents” (translation by Vestbro). This definition complies well with definitions of *cohousing* in other countries as shown above. In her contribution to this book Margrethe Kähler uses the term collective housing to denote *bofællesskab*.

In German, the most commonly used concepts are *Wohngemeinschaft* (meaning ‘housing community’) and *Gemeinschaftliche Wohnformen* (meaning ‘community oriented forms of housing’). In one of the German websites it is stated that there is no agreed definition of these concepts, but the following criteria are mentioned as common denominators:

- A conscious formation of social networks
- The combination of housing with citizen’s social commitment.
- Striving for self-determination and self-organisation
- Common principles for economic and social matters (*requiring legal foundations in order to be economically and socially sustainable*)

(source: [www.kompetenznetzwerkwohnen.de/sub/de/wissenspool/4GemeinschaftlicheWohnformen/](http://www.kompetenznetzwerkwohnen.de/sub/de/wissenspool/4GemeinschaftlicheWohnformen/))

*Text shortened and translated by Vestbro with additions by Ben Brix in an email of 22 August 2010)*

These criteria are interesting aspects of housing, but seem to suffer from the same drawbacks as mentioned above, if used to define a concept that should be inclusive of many types of housing with shared facilities. At the website it is pointed out that great

varieties exist between projects and that the form of living may change over time, factors indicating that not all projects fulfil the four criteria.

In the Netherlands the key concept is *centraal wonen*, meaning ‘central living’. In the Flemish part of Belgium the term *samenhuizen* is also used, literally meaning ‘together houses’. According to the website of the *Samehuizen network* ([www.samenhuizen.be/index.php](http://www.samenhuizen.be/index.php)) the concept covers various kinds of housing where several households are involved. It includes community houses, cohousing and other types of communal living. In a contribution to the Stockholm conference, Luk Jonkheere of the Samehuizen network presented a table with concepts used for communal housing in Belgium and other countries (see table).

This overview of terms is a good illustration both of the variety of concepts and of the variety of communal ways of living in reality. Some of the terms in the table do not explain much about the content of the term (e.g. kangaroo housing, baugruppe, co-location) while others are quite expressive (e.g. share houses, friends-wonen). In his presentation, Jonkheere added that the following phenomena are *NOT* communal

<b>Communal housing in Belgium (Flanders)</b>			
woongemeenschap (B, NL), samenhuizen (B-FL), habitat collectif (B-W), collaborative community (UK, US), wohnprojekt (D)			
autonomous units and common facilities		private room(s) within a communal setting	
<b>few common facilities:</b>  garden, garages, laundry, and eventually club house, workshop, ...	<b>extensive common facilities:</b> garden, garages, laundry, but also dining room, kitchen, lounge, kids room, workshop, hobby, workshop, guest	<b>household chores partly shared</b> usually 3 to 8 units meals often shared	<b>household chores all shared</b> usually more than 8 units most of the meals shared
<b>Centraal wonen</b> (B-FL, NL) habitat groupé (B-W), self-developed condominium (US), atrium-siedlung (D), baugruppe (D), ... <b>two units :</b> kangoeroewonen (B, NL), maison kangourou (B, FR) duo-wonen (NL), homeshare (US),	<b>Cohousing</b> cohousing (B, UK, US) centraal wonen (NL), co-voisinage (FR), boffaelleskaeber (DK) , cohabitat (CA), kollektivhus (S), boligbyggelag (N) kibbutz (ISR), ...	<b>Woongroep (B, NL)</b> ‘friends-wonen’ (B), co-location (B-W, F), share house (US), wohngruppe(D)  <b>temporary :</b> <b>Gemeenschapshuis</b> (B-FL) student coop (US)	<b>Leefgemeenschap</b> (B, NL) commune (B, UK, US), communauté (B, F), ...
← less		more →	
degree of communal sharing (spaces, facilities, activities, ...)			

Table of concepts presented by Luk Jonkheere at the Stockholm conference. The concepts are grouped according to the extent of common spaces and sharing of household chores.<sup>5</sup>

5. In an email to the author of the present chapter Peter Bakker of the Dutch network Centraal Wonen points out that *centraal wonen* in the Netherlands always includes extensive common facilities. Therefore *centraal wonen* is found in two difference columns in the table (one for Belgium and one for the Netherlands).

housing: shared public domains, neighbourhood community centres, collective construction of housing, condominiums, student dormitories, senior service flats, sheltered housing, and traditional religious communities like monasteries. These exclusions may be debatable (for instance why condominiums are both included and excluded, or why Norwegian *boligbyggelag* are included when collective construction of houses is excluded), but in principle such negative definitions are necessary when trying to avoid that concepts become too vague.

Despite the fact that the list in the table is quite comprehensive, some concepts are missing. One such term is *habitats autogérées* (self-supported housing)<sup>6</sup> and *vivre autrement* (living differently), both used in France. In an email, Professor Marie-Hélène Bacque of Université Paris Ouest Nanterre explains that *habitation autogérées* comes from the 1980s, referring to groups of people who decided to have a housing project together. Usually they built common spaces such as rooms for teenagers and a living room, but they seldom had dinners together. Bacque furthermore explains that *vivre autrement* is an ideology that sustains the *habitation autogérées* projects, usually reflecting the idea that it is possible to change society by changing everyday life.

### **Intentional community**

In the USA, the term *intentional community* is used to denote ways of living and working that has community as an aim in one way or another. The network *Fellowship for Intentional Community* (FIC) includes ecovillages, cohousing, religious communities, appropriate technology groups, collectively owned consultancy firms and other types of organizations with communal aims. According to its website, FIC is based on four principles: cooperation, non-violence, inclusivity, and unrestricted freedom to leave a group at any time (<http://www.ic.org>). One benefit of the concept *intentional community* is that it distinguishes modern communities from equivalents in traditional society, where people are born into extended families, clans and tribes with strong communal ties without an intention towards alternative living. Nevertheless *intentional community* is considered both too wide and too narrow for the type of housing covered in this book.

### **Ecovillages**

Should *ecovillages* be included in the definition of *collaborative housing* or that of *cohousing*? In his presentation at the conference, Graham Meltzer discussed the differences between ecovillages and cohousing on the basis of his extensive experience and research of both ways of living. Among the differences he mentioned was that ecovillages usually exist on the periphery of mainstream society, whilst cohousing communities are embedded within it. He defined ecovillages as human scaled, full-featured, harmlessly integrated with nature, supportive of healthy human

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6. Bonnin, Philippe (ed, 1983): *Habitats Autogérées*, Paris: Editions Alternatives/Syros.

development and sustainable. This definition complies well with that of the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning: “*an experimental way of living, which includes far-reaching recycling of raw materials and energy, and which promotes health and has little impact on the natural environment*”<sup>7</sup>. Ecovillages may include collaboration between residents and common spaces, but these factors are usually not the main aims. Therefore ecovillages and cohousing communities should be seen as separate phenomena.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis above shows that there exists a large variety of concepts used to refer to alternative ways of living and building with shared facilities. Since the housing and living forms vary it is logical to maintain a variety of concepts. At the same time it is desirable to agree about a limited number of concepts to be used for international communication. The use of inconsistent and vague concepts should be avoided. With this in mind it is concluded here that *cohousing* is the most suitable concept when referring to housing with common spaces and shared facilities. The term *collaborative housing* may be used when referring specifically to housing oriented towards collaboration between residents, while *collective housing* may be used when emphasizing the *collective organization* of services in housing. *Communal housing* may be used when referring particularly to housing for togetherness and sense of community. Finally it is suggested that the term *commune* is used for a communal type of living without individual apartments. It is suggested that the term *cooperative housing* should not be used in this context since it often refers to cooperative ownership of housing without common spaces or shared facilities. ■

DICK URBAN VESTBRO

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7. Boverket (1991): *Ekobyar* (Ecovillages), Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning.

## Welcome Speech

# A Good Home All Your Life



**Barbro Westerholm** is a medical doctor, Professor and a Member of the Swedish Parliament for the Liberal Party. She has been the Director of The National Board of Health and Welfare, chair of the Swedish Association of Pensioners and chair of the government committee on housing for the elderly. Nowadays she is the chair of Liberal Seniors and a member of the Parliament Committee on Health and Welfare.

One's housing needs vary over one's lifespan. When you are a student you might want to live in a small and cheap apartment together with others of your age. When you marry and have children you need more space. Some then want a house of their own, others want to rent or own a flat. When your children have left the nest, you might want to stay in the old home or move to a house or a flat that meets your new needs. And when you are very old you might feel that your old home, your castle, changes into a prison if there is no lift to take you up and down the stairs and when the front door is too heavy for you to open.

Here in my welcome speech I will concentrate on what is happening in Sweden in order to meet the housing needs of older people.

In 2006, the Swedish Government appointed the Elderly Housing Delegation with the task of studying and analyzing the need for and development of housing for older people. It found that the need for housing that is adapted to the situation of older people will be very large in Sweden in the foreseeable future. By 2040, the number of inhabitants over the age of 65 is expected to increase from today's 1.6 million to 2.5 million and the number of inhabitants over the age of 85 years from just over 240 000 (2008) to 430 000 (2040). To deal with this forthcoming demographic development, more housing and special forms of housing must be created for older people.

• 65 +	• 85 +	• 100 +
2008: 1.6 million	2008: 240 000	2006: 1 500
2040: 2.5 million	2040: 430 000	2040: 6 000

The estimated increase in number of old people in Sweden the coming 30 years.



There is no single initiative which will meet the forthcoming needs of older people. They constitute, like the younger generations, individuals with different wishes and needs. The main principle guiding care of older people in Sweden today is that they should be enabled to continue living in their own homes for as long as possible and 93 per cent do so. Even people with extensive health care needs can remain in their own homes.

The Elderly Housing Delegation proposed the following types of housing, which with a few amendments, have been approved by Government:

**Regular housing**, which refers to all housing that is not covered by special legislation. Here the Delegation recommended installation of door openers, lifts, etc. in new and renovated buildings. This would help both older people and families with young children.

**Senior housing**, which is a collective term for all housing in the regular housing stock that is not covered by special legislation and that is intended for people over a certain age. Senior housing is gaining popularity. Many older people feel today that the gap is far too wide between their homes in regular housing and accommodation in residential homes, which nowadays are inhabited by people who are seriously ill (demented people and people with multiple health problems, see below). This has led to the building of what we call senior housing. The initiative can be taken by private builders and municipalities, and also by older people who form cooperatives. Adaptation and accessibility varies. There is often a possibility to have meals together. About 1 600 such flats were built in 2009.

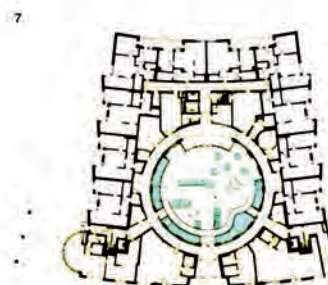
**Sheltered housing** refers to housing that that is meant for people who feel anxious and insecure in their present accommodation. People living in sheltered housing are to have access to communal premises with the option of communal meals, staff as a communal resource and community alarms. The flats should be adapted to disabilities. This is a new form of housing. The flats have to be equipped with certain amenities that provide security, such as community alarms that can be answered and dealt with rapidly, and staff on certain days/times of the week responsible for arranging joint activities of various kinds. It should be possible for the tenants to have meals together and the flats should be adapted to disabilities. In 2009 about 800 flats were built which could be defined as sheltered housing. It is estimated that at least 1 600 flats regarded as sheltered housing flats will be built in 2010–2011 ([www.aktivsenior.se](http://www.aktivsenior.se)).

**Residential care homes** are types of housing for elderly people, who qualify for the right to assistance under the Social Services Act, and replaces the previous concept of special housing. The residents are too ill to remain at home. The residential care





Löjtnantsgården in Stockholm, built in 2008, comprises 54 residential care homes, 54 apartments for seniors and ten student flats. It was built by the Immanuelskyrkan church and designed by ÅWL Architects.



- GEMENSAMMA YTOR
- BOSTADER
- VÄRDBOSTADER
- LOKALER

homes consist of small flats equipped with a kitchenette and a large bathroom allowing the staff to help the resident with showers and visits to the toilet. The residents obtain both social care and health care round the clock and have their meals together in these types of housing. Almost 97 000 such flats are available in Sweden at present. About 70 000 are inhabited by people with dementia. We expect that the need for such flats will increase by at least 50 per cent during the next thirty years.

A government grant, 500 million SEK per year, is available for building sheltered housing and residential care homes. The applications should be sent to the county administrative boards.

### Greater research and development initiatives

There is a need for research and development in the area of housing for the elderly. Elderly people are individuals with varying interests and needs. We know, for instance, very little about the housing needs of older immigrants and ethnic minorities. The interplay between the design of the physical environment and social and medical thinking in health and social care needs to be improved. There is thus a great need for interdisciplinary research on all housing forms for older people. ■

# The Welfare Model Provides a Framework for Swedish Housing Policy



**Göran Cars** is a Professor and Head of the Department of Urban Planning and Environment at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. His research comprises housing policy, governance, planning processes and citizen participation in town planning. He has participated in several EU funded research projects. At present he is running an educational program on sustainable urban development in China.

Sweden is a highly urbanized country. It has an international reputation for having not only a high GDP (Gross Domestic Product) but also an even distribution of welfare in the population. Equality has been an important political objective over a long period of time. In policy debates the expression ‘the Swedish welfare model’ has been coined.

In this introductory section the development of social policy and its links to housing are described. In the next section some basic facts and the development of Swedish housing policy are presented. In the closing section some issues and challenges for Swedish housing policy are discussed.

## **Welfare for all**

The Swedish welfare model has been characterised by a broad definition of social policy, which includes housing policy and labour market policy within its ambit. This model is usually defined as an institutional redistributive model. In contrast to most other capitalistic welfare states, where family rights are the basis for social policy, Sweden has developed a social concept based on the right of the individual. Each individual is given support without making other family members, or members of an extended family, subject to a means test.

Means tested benefits have played a subordinate role and, instead, welfare policies and public services are designed to apply to the entire population. This has resulted in an extensive public sector providing a wide variety of social services, including

health care and social insurance benefits. Redistribution becomes a characteristic feature. The general, all-inclusive character of benefits, are also meant to avoid or minimize the stigmatization of individuals.

The different social programmes have been largely tax financed. To create legitimacy, there has been a striving to involve the entire population in social welfare programmes. Everybody contributes to financing the system and everyone can receive subsidies at different stages in one's life cycle. Central to this welfare model is the aim to reduce social inequalities and promote social equality.

The general principles of housing policy, which were a vital part of the welfare model, were forged by the Swedish Parliament in a series of decisions taken after the Second World War. These policies

were meant to provide all households with healthy and spacious homes at affordable costs. Municipalities were given responsibility for implementing programmes to develop local housing supplies in order to ensure sufficient and modern housing for the population. In order to accomplish this task, municipalities were encouraged to create their own local housing associations, set up as non-profit companies. The objective has been to ensure that the entire population, regardless of income and social affiliation, had adequate housing. This means that the public housing stock includes a great variety of dwellings in terms of size and quality and every fifth Swede lives in a dwelling owned by a public housing association.

As in other West European countries, the economic and social situation changed in the early 1990s. This change was characterised by economic recession, changing values and increasing differences in ways of life among different groups of the population. The traditional aims of welfare, and especially the role of the public sector, were increasingly debated and questioned. Cuts in welfare programmes, not least housing, improved public finances and made tax cuts possible. Improved efficiency in the way traditional public services were delivered could also be observed.

Sweden today is at a crossroads. Various programmes and previous social policies are facing an impasse. Economic constraints do play a role. Yet perhaps even more important is the fact that these measures do not meet current social needs efficiently. It is not possible to identify a consensus on how to reconstruct – or reform – social and housing policy programmes to fit the needs of today.



Stockholm's deputy-mayor Dahlberg sowing standardized multifamily housing blocks developed by experts as part of the Swedish welfare model.

## **Housing in Sweden – basic facts**

In terms of area Sweden is the fourth largest country in Europe. Only ten per cent of the land is cultivated and 50 per cent is forest. The population is 9.1 million and the density only slightly more than 20 inhabitants per square kilometer. The three largest metropolitan areas are Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö.

The low population density and the abundance of timber resources may suggest that large Swedish cities would be sprawled and primarily consist of spacious wooden single-family homes. A number of factors have contributed to the opposite. Thus, Swedish metropolitan areas have a large share of compactly built large multifamily complexes. The important factors in this respect are transportation, strong government control over building activity since World War II, and a national commitment to make social services easily accessible to most inhabitants.

Sweden's existing dwelling stock comprises 4.5 million units. This means that on average slightly more than two persons live in each dwelling. This number has been steadily decreasing over the last decades. Housing production in Sweden peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s. Only 10 percent of the dwelling stock is constructed after 1991.

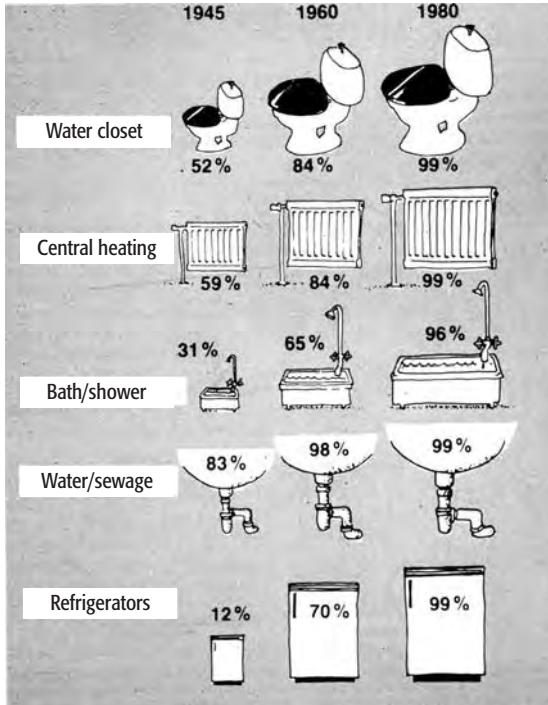
Twelve per cent of the population of Sweden is born in another country. The ethnic minority groups are strongly concentrated to the largest cities. More and more of the immigrants come from outside of Europe, which means there are increasing differences between the 'old' and 'new' Swedes in terms of culture, religion and looks.

'Social housing' (i.e. housing for socially or economically disadvantaged households) is not a form of tenure used in Sweden. Instead municipally owned public housing companies were created in the 1940s and thereafter. The role of these companies has been to provide housing for the entire population, regardless of income or social class. This part of the housing stock comprises flats with large variations in terms of standard, size and attractiveness.

In terms of ownership the housing stock can be schematically divided into four categories; roughly 50 percent of all households live in privately owned single-family homes. In the multifamily segment of the housing stock, 17 percent of households live in tenant-owner associations (Swedish: 'bostadsrätt') (16 %), and the remaining part in the private or public rental stock. Problems of social segregation and exclusion are mainly found within the rental sector, especially in the public housing sector. Further, social problems are concentrated to large-scale suburban or peripheral housing estates constructed in the 1960s and 1970s.

## **Swedish Housing Policy**

After World War II housing became one of the central economic and social issues in Sweden. Housing standards were inadequate. Many people were living in overcrowded dwellings, and the shortage of homes was a serious problem. Parliament responded by making a number of important decisions on housing policy. A fundamental goal of post-war housing policy was to achieve the general improvement



Development of housing standards in Sweden from 1945 to 1980. At the end of the period virtually no household lacked piped drinking water, central heating, bath/shower or a refrigerator.

production since the late 1940s has been financed by state loans. Developers are free to build with market loans but the state subsidy is so large that private financing is unprofitable.

During the 1950s and 1960s the demand for housing grew even stronger with increased urbanization in Sweden, the growing population, and improvements in the standard of living. The demand was for more and larger flats of better quality. An extended housing programme became a priority policy issue.

Although housing production steadily increased, the shortages remained. In the mid-1960s Parliament adopted an ambitious housing construction programme called the Million Homes Programme (one million housing units in ten years), which led to a significant increase in production. Implemented over ten years, the programme raised housing standards and eliminated the housing shortage.

The construction of new dwellings peaked in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the production of more than 100,000 dwellings per year, which roughly corresponded to an annual increase of 14 dwellings per one thousand inhabitants. Nearly 60 per cent

of housing conditions. Measures were not to be restricted to certain groups, such as households with poor social and economic resources, but were to apply to the whole population. The goal was to achieve social integration in all types of housing areas. Thus, public housing was to be given amenities that would attract higher income households. This objective contrasted with policies in most other West European countries and previous housing policy in Sweden.

With this new housing policy in place, Parliament enacted legislation to support a steady increase in housing production and to allocate resources for renewal. The most important measure was the national government's financial contribution to new construction and modernization. Most house

of all flats built in multifamily houses during the Million Homes Programme were constructed by public housing corporations.

When the Million Homes Programme was completed the demand for new housing construction was satisfied to a large extent and new construction began to decline. In 1987 the volume of newly constructed dwellings amounted to slightly more than one-third of the volume in 1970. Parallel to the decline of new construction has been an increase in reconstruction activities. In 1985 investments in reconstruction were, for the first time, larger than investments in new construction. Reconstruction activity has continued to increase, both in absolute numbers as well as in relation to resources allocated to new construction.

Until the 1970s, rehabilitation mostly dealt with houses constructed before World War II. Housing policy was to a large extent aimed at the physical improvement of these houses to bring them up to standard, to maintain and improve their technical facilities, and to expand their floor plans. In the 1980s the focus of renewal activity gradually changed to houses built in the 1960s and 1970s during the Million Homes Programme.

It is impossible to describe renewal activities in a general way, since goals, ambitions, and measures vary so much among municipalities. There are, however, common features in many of the projects. Below the most common upgrading measures are described.

**Outdoor improvement:** These measures were aimed at improving the outdoor environment through physical changes in the green areas, playgrounds, and other common facilities.

**New management policies:** The case studies noted that most of the management changes had two common features. First, improvement was sought in the delivery of daily services. Many housing corporations adopted a new service policy to improve their often very tarnished reputations, especially in public housing corporations. Second, the new management philosophy incorporates a tougher stance towards disruptive households by establishing strict rules for proper tenant behaviour.

**Improvement of public services:** A third approach to enhancing the appeal of various areas has been improving public services. Tenant demands have been met by raising the standards of schools, day care facilities, and other public services in the area.

**Physical improvement of houses and dwellings:** Technical improvements have included the repair of leaking roofs, rotting window frames, and insufficient thermal and noise insulation. In addition, the layouts of dwellings have been altered; in some cases two smaller flats have been merged to form a larger one. Other physical improvements deal with the scale and monotony of design by rebuilding the exterior of houses.



In most of the areas the different renewal activities were more or less integrated. There was, however, an imbalance in the costs of these measures. The outdoor improvement measures, new management policies, and the improvement of public services have been relatively inexpensive. The costs, however, of changing the physical aspects of the housing estates have been high. It is not unusual to have up to 90 per cent of the total renewal investment allocated to physical measures. The number of resources put into the projects varies, of course, in different areas. It is clear, however, that the average investment per square meter in housing rehabilitation has increased over time. In the stock younger than thirty years, the increase has been at a particularly fast pace. The average investment level for projects in this stock is now close to the one for new construction.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis in the 1990s, housing policy took a new turn. Deregulation, marketization and privatization became the new features of housing policy.

The new policies launched coincide to large extent with the global neo-liberal trend of the 1980s and 1990s. The role of national government changed dramatically. Up to the 1990s the housing sector had been substantially supported by government subsidies. This financial support ceased in the 1990s, which led to a significant decrease of new construction. There was also a political swing that led to a shift in tenure. In many municipalities the public housing stock, or part of it, was sold out to the tenants or to private housing companies. During the 1990s and the 2000s, households' cost of living increased dramatically.

The shift in policy also resulted in a housing shortage and increased segregation. The housing shortage was partly the result of higher rentals due to the fact that government subsidies for production were removed, and partly because of a population increase in the larger metropolitan areas. In parallel a rapid growth of segregation could be seen, especially noticeable in larger and growing cities.

## **Current trends and Challenges for Swedish Housing Policy**

### *The rise and fall of the Nordic welfare model*

The welfare models developed in north-western Europe after World War II showed significant differences compared to those adopted by other European countries. The more comprehensive welfare systems introduced in the Nordic countries had had three components in common; a) an educational system designed to meet the skills required to enter the industrial labour market, b) a social insurance system designed to support workers through periods of unemployment, illness and old age, and third, c) a housing system designed to ensure that the population was well housed.

The welfare systems created were closely interrelated with the economic system of production. The welfare system should guarantee the availability of a workforce skilled to meet the demands of the fordist economy, as improved effectiveness in production was the key to increasing incomes and improved welfare and housing

conditions. This linking of the welfare with the economic system was generally considered successful. Economic development was rapid and the advancements in welfare, both in terms of private consumption and public services were significant.

However, in the aftermath of the oil crisis in the 1970s the situation changed. The balance and interaction between the welfare system and the economic system was disturbed. The welfare model, which was successively built up, was questioned and challenged from a variety of perspectives. It became a real question whether or not the welfare system was effective in meeting the most urgent needs. The policies and programmes in place were not sufficiently flexible to cope with the new problems that had emerged. In the past, social problems emerged from issues such as overcrowding and substandard conditions characteristic of poverty. Although these factors still existed, they were now often exacerbated by other conditions, e.g. stigmatization, social tensions and social exclusion. In the Nordic countries, the 1970s and 1980s brought about societal developments that made it necessary to rethink established housing and welfare policies. Issues such as the standards and space of flats were no longer the primary focus; rather problems that called for attention were increased stigmatization of and exclusion in neighbourhoods.

As the economy of the Nordic countries has successively developed from 'mature-fordism' to 'post-fordism' these problems have deteriorated. The long-term unemployment figures have gradually risen to levels that were unthinkable during the heyday of fordism. The growth of the service sector has been associated with an increasing demand for flexible labour, that is, labour which is willing to work in a variety of ways, e.g. casually, part time, on contract basis, on temporary contracts, at home.

It can be concluded that the economic system in Europe has undergone substantial change over the last decades, and in many ways it functions in a significantly different way today. Keeping in mind the close relation between the economic and welfare systems, it is important to look at how the welfare system has responded to the changes in the economic system. Studies indicate that the welfare system has been unable to respond adequately to changes in the economic system. Public financial constraints are an obvious explanation for this. Also noticeable is the inability to redesign social programmes to reflect the changing economic structure (Allen and Cars 2000).

The effectiveness of welfare systems has also been criticized from a neo-conservative perspective in which the welfare state has proven itself to be bureaucratic and unresponsive to welfare needs. It is claimed that rather than solving the problems, the welfare state itself is a part of the problem.

Further, criticism has been raised on the grounds that the welfare system is based on formal arrangements from which the voluntary sector and residents have been excluded. Improved performance and effectiveness presupposes that more informal opportunities are opened. The shortcomings of rehabilitation efforts triggered a



debate on how new effective approaches could be adopted. Thus, in the present debate, the traditional welfare models are challenged from two perspectives. From a perspective of effectiveness, it is questioned whether the systems are capable of delivering services in an optimal manner. From the perspective of democracy, it is argued that present governance arrangements are exclusive to residents and informal actors, e.g. local organizations.

In conclusion three challenges for Swedish policy are defined.

### **Social exclusion**

The largest cities in Sweden are segregated and characterised by neighbourhood differences in terms of social, economic and ethnic conditions. In Sweden large resources have been allocated from municipalities and the state to improve disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to combat social and economic segregation. Some problems have been dealt with, but there is still a widening gap between groups in society and the situation in different neighbourhoods. Swedish cities experience accelerating social segmentation processes, leading to an even wider gap. The measures and policies implemented up to now have not been sufficiently effective. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods are getting poorer and get to carry an accumulative social and economic burden, while other neighbourhoods are getting wealthier. There is a great need for new regeneration strategies and measures to combat social, economic and ethnic segregation. This development strongly draws attention to the need for understanding of the processes of social exclusion.

### **Housing production**

Sweden's population is growing, and much of this growth is located in the largest metropolitan areas. These areas are facing a housing shortage, which has substantial negative effects on society. The housing shortage leads to long queues for obtaining a rental dwelling and prices for condominiums have sky-rocketed. This development has two effects. First, the potential for growth cannot be realized. The labour market of, for example Stockholm, has a demand for labour that cannot be satisfied, as the labourers needed lack the financial means to access the housing market. Second, the shortage increases segregation by making many city districts not accessible to those without high incomes.

### **Household composition and new needs for collective solutions**

As mentioned above, the average size of the households in Sweden has gradually shrunk. Today the average household has only two members. This means that for many residents the dwelling fills a different role than it did previously. In the aftermath of gradual welfare reforms the dwelling came to play an important role for social interaction with family and friends. This role as a social meeting-point has decreased. In parallel we can see that our inherent need for social interaction has



Communal open space in Järla Sjöstad, Nacka, Sweden.

taken new forms and expressions. In our contemporary society we can observe an increasing demand for urban qualities in term of cafes, parks, pedestrianized streets, events and other places for human interaction and meetings. In perspective of this development I cannot understand why housing production seems to be guided by routine-like perspectives rather than by critical reflection and rethinking. Given structural changes in society, shrinking household sizes and our need for social interaction, I am quite convinced that there exist both a market and a demand for collective solutions in the housing stock. The challenge lies in refraining from copying old solutions. Instead we should analyze how contemporary values and preferences of citizens could be accommodated in housing planning and construction. ■

# History of Cohousing – Internationally and in Sweden



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**C**ollaborative housing has a long and fascinating history. In different periods various models for more neighbourly housing with shared services have been launched. These models have been motivated sometimes as social and political visions and sometimes as practical solutions to the needs of day-to-day life. The most important goals have been to share responsibilities fairly between men and women, to promote collaboration between residents, to achieve a sense of community, and to facilitate access to shared amenities. This paper describes the historic development of cohousing internationally and in Sweden.

Collaborative housing means housing with more space and services for communal use than are to be found in conventional housing. Households from several generations and relationships, who prefer to share spaces and facilities such as meals, may live in such housing. This article focuses on what in Swedish is called *kollektivhus*: a type of housing where each household has its own apartment, but has access to communal spaces such a large kitchen and dining room, and spaces for different hobbies.

## **Utopian communities**

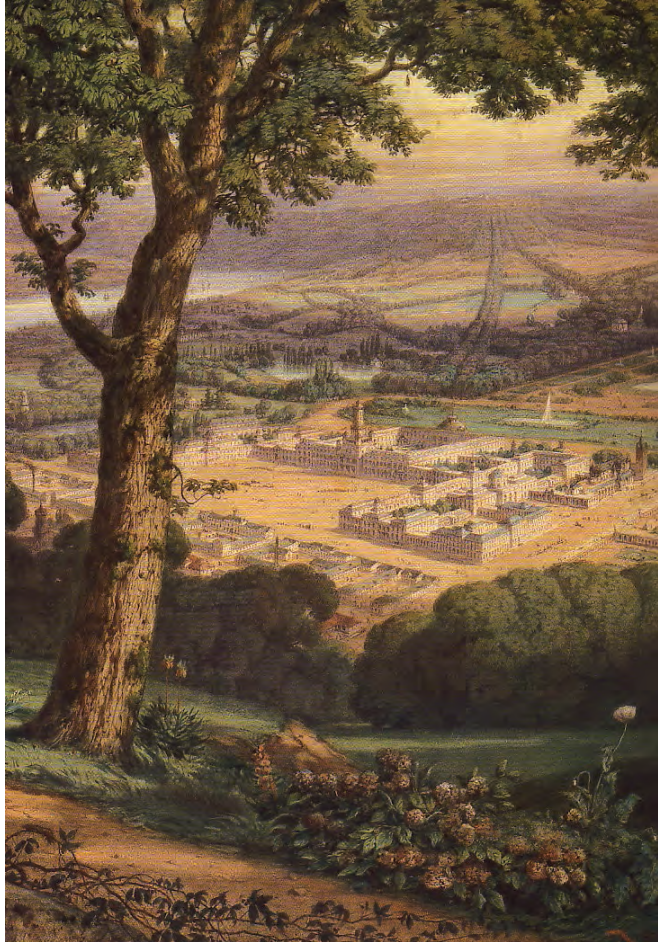
There are visions of ideal human habitats from early European history. In 1506 the Englishman *Thomas More* published the book “Utopia”, meaning *no place*, which gave a name to such visions. In More’s ideal community people were to live in neighbourhood groups with common dining-rooms and various shared leisure

facilities. His description of an ideal community was a way to criticise the existing society.

300 years later, the brutal changes that industrialisation brought in Europe provoked visions of an egalitarian society where working and living were collectively organised. In England in the 1840s, Robert Owen sketched such an ideal society, which he called the Parallelogram. This would combine the best of the agricultural and the industrial society. Each community would be limited to 2 000 inhabitants, who would collectively own the means of production. Men and women would have equal rights. The Parallelogram would have generous dining halls, schools and kindergartens, libraries and sports grounds, while the individual dwellings would be modest. Followers of Robert Owen migrated to North America and built such a community and called it New Harmony, but it disintegrated after a few years.

Perhaps the most famous utopian socialist, the Frenchman *Charles Fourier*, wrote a number of books in the first half of the 19th century on his ideal society, which he called *Falanstere*. It looked like the royal Palace of Versailles, the most famous piece of architecture at that time. Fourier thought that workers should be able to live in such "social palaces", where they would also have workshops and facilities for processing agricultural products. Everything would be owned by the workers. The *Falanstere* would also have a collective kitchen and dining hall, schools, kindergartens, a theatre, a fencing arena, beautiful gardens and other collective facilities.

While utopian communitarian ideas were banned in Europe (with one exception),



Charles Fourier's vision of the Falanstere, where the workers would own the means of production and organise nearly everything collectively. An arcade stretching through the whole building complex would connect the individual residences with the collective spaces.



many such experiments were implemented in 19th century USA. In her book, *Seven American Utopias*, the US feminist Dolores Hayden analyses the most famous sectarian organisations constructing such communitarian settlements. These include the shakers, the owenites, the fourierists and the ‘perfectionists’. She finds that the US utopias were inspired by three different ideals:

- The garden city ideal
- The machine ideal
- The ideal home idea

The vision of a more rational society, with strong roots in the thinking of Owen and Fourier, became prominent in many utopian settlements, for instance among the shakers, who in their architecture can be seen as forerunners of modernism, 100 years ahead of their time. Hayden traces the ideal home idea among feminists who tried to find alternatives to (militaristic, male) industrial society. The three determinants of communitarian settlements are applied in this chapter when tracing the history of collaborative housing. The garden city ideal deviates from the other two in its respect for nature (building according to topography and maintaining greenery, perhaps forerunners to ecovillages).

*Carl Jonas Love Almqvist* was a well-known Swedish author who was inspired by the utopian socialists. In an essay from 1835 he envisioned what he called a ‘Universal Hotel’, where housework would be done collectively to allow women to engage in gainful work. At that time this was considered impossible, but Almqvist explained:

“Is there anything more wasteful, stupid and twisted than each household busying itself with preparing meat and vegetables for its own meals? Now every household has to have its own kitchen. In a large town, these are the equivalent of a foodstuff industry employing thousands of people.”<sup>1</sup>

Almqvist thought that collective housekeeping would not only save time. Women would also be able to marry without demeaning themselves to being mere housekeepers for their husbands. Love between man and woman would no longer wither away after marriage.

In France, it was forbidden for Fourier’s followers to realise his ideas, but one person was able to carry out a project inspired by the *Falanstere* idea. This was the iron stove manufacturer *Jean André Baptiste Godin*. As a leading industrialist and member of the Senate, he was granted permission to build what he called the *Familistere*, where everyone would live as in a huge family.

In Guise in northern France from 1858 onwards he built a factory and large multi-family dwellings, interconnected under a huge glass roof. The big covered courtyards

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by Vestbro.



Godin with a drawing of the Familistere.  
Note the large glass-roofed courtyards  
in the background.

were heated in winter. The workers owned the factory and looked after the collective spaces in the Familistere. The women were supposed to be treated equally with the men, but they were not considered capable of the strenuous and dirty work that the factory required and so many of them were out of work. Therefore individual family kitchens were built and the Familistere gradually lost its collective character. However, the factory continued to operate successfully even after Godin's death and the whole complex is today part of the national building heritage.

### **The central kitchen idea**

Industrialisation in Europe made people think about applying the technical innovations to other sectors of the community, for example the housing sector. The gas stove, the water closet and central heating are illustrations of this. Some people began to think that household kitchens were becoming obsolete in an age of large-scale production.

In the 19th century a middle-class family was expected to have a housemaid and a children's nurse, but for families on the way up, servants were expensive. Thus the idea arose that a group of families could share the task of preparing food by organising a central kitchen from which they could order meals for the family apartments. In the first decades of the 20th century several so-called Central Kitchen Buildings were put up in the European capitals. The first was built in Copenhagen in 1903 and was called "Fick's Collective" because it was built on the initiative of Otto Fick. Similar projects followed in Stockholm, Berlin, Hamburg, Zürich, Prague, London, and Vienna.



Hemgården in Stockholm. The central kitchen  
was located in the basement.

In Stockholm 1905–07, *Hemgården Central Kitchen* was built. There were 60 apartments, none with its own kitchen. Instead there was a central kitchen in the basement, connected to the apartments by food lifts for a tray with food, crockery and cutlery. Via an internal telephone network, those who lived in the apartments could order breakfast, lunch and

supper from the central kitchen. There were no ideas about wives going out to a job or participating in the collective activities. The idea was simply to “collectivise the maid”. The building was run as a Limited Company, but went bankrupt in 1918. Kitchens were later built in the apartments and the former central kitchen became a space for collaborative activities. No more buildings like Hemgården were put up in Sweden, but the idea of housing designed to simplify day-to-day life continued to be discussed until modernism arrived.

### The building on John Ericsonsgatan 6

As the utopian socialists had done before them, the functionalists wanted to change people’s behaviour. They were convinced that a new sort of housing would help to create a new sort of citizen, more rational and more democratic. In a rationally organised society, as many as possible would be engaged in productive work. They would improve their health with sport and other leisure activities. They would participate in study circles and political meetings. They would not need such spacious apartments, because they would principally just sleep in them and keep their possessions there. In such a context, cohousing seemed to be the perfect solution. The book *Acceptera*, published for the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930, prophesied that in the future a large proportion of new housing would be collectively organised. The idea was developed by social scientist Alva Myrdal and architect Sven Markelius. Myrdal wrote in the magazine *Tiden* in 1932:



Some of the ideas which were put forward by Alva Myrdal and Sven Markelius at a meeting of the Professional Women’s Club in 1932: A central kitchen and a dining hall on the ground floor. Small elevators that can send meals up to the apartments. A professionally staffed kindergarten somewhere in the building. Space for games and sun-bathing on the roof.



“Urban housing, where twenty families each in their own apartment cook their own meatballs, where a lot of young children are shut in, each in his or her own little room – doesn’t this cry for overall planning, for a collective solution?”<sup>2</sup>

The idea of collective housing stirred up opposition. A typical reaction was the following from the journal *Barometer*:

“Women with a profession were thrilled by the idea of parking their children at night in glass cages, like wasp larvae in a nest ... Cohousing with its child care units would be an extreme result of the trend towards dissolving the family.”<sup>3</sup>

The leading modernists had important posts in society, but still won no support for collective housing within the organised labour movement, except within its women’s

association. Sven Markelius hoped for support for three large buildings in Alvik in Stockholm, but did not get any public support. Instead, together with his radical friends, as a private initiative, he had to realise Sweden’s first functionalist cohousing block on a small site at John Ericsonsgatan 6 in Stockholm. It was built in 1935 with 54 small apartments, food lifts from the restaurant on the



11. På vejen op i elevatoren studeres restaurantens spisekort. Hvad skal vi have til middag i dag? (John Ericsonsgatan 6).



12. Når husmoderen er kommet ind i sin lejlighed, ringer hun gennem hustelefonen til køkkenet og afgiver sin bestilling.



13. En køkkenpige sætter en bakke med den bestilte mad ind i mædelevatoren og et øjeblik efter . . .



14. tager husmoderen maden fiks og færdig ud af elevatoren. Det snavsede service sendes senere ned igen til opvaskemaskinen.

Photos from the cohousing unit at John Ericsonsgatan in the early 1940s, showing that women did not need to think about the evening meal until they, on the way home from work, see the menu in the elevator. From the restaurant on the ground floor the wife orders dinner, which is then sent up to the apartment in the food lift.

2 Translation by Vestbro.

3 Translated by Vestbro



The dining hall of Marieberg collective housing. The tenants were required to buy 24 meal coupons per month. If they preferred, they could fetch a meal in a basket and eat in their apartments.

ground floor, a small shop, and one of the first kindergartens that followed Alva Myrdal's pedagogic principles. Beside each food lift was a laundry chute. Those who lived in the building could send their washing down to the staff of a laundry in the cellar.

Knowing the neighbours and working with them – the most important goals in today's collaborative housing – were not goals for John Ericsonsgatan 6. Most important was that there was a more rational way of living, simplifying housekeeping in order to free women for a more productive contribution to the business and public sectors. The residents were not expected to meet in the dining hall, nor to work together to run the building. The small apartments did not attract families with children. Instead radical intellectuals moved in. The building was a focal point for radical discussions about social questions. The collective service worked well for three decades, but ceased during the 1960s.

### **Progress and opposition**

More cohousing was built in Sweden from the mid 1930s to the mid 1950s: one project in Gothenburg, another in Örebro, and about eight in Stockholm. The modernists of the 1930s had hoped that the social democratic governments, the co-operative housing organisation HSB, and similar organisations would encourage cohousing, but they were disappointed. Instead it was a private builder who took up the idea. Building-contractor Olle Engkvist was inspired by John Ericsonsgatan 6 and during the following 20 years his firm built six cohousing units in Stockholm.

In 1944, a cohousing unit was developed in Marieberg. The building complex had 198 apartments with a reception, dining hall, kindergarten and other common facilities. The food lift idea was abandoned and only those who lived in the building could eat in the dining hall. To keep the dining hall viable, Olle Engkvist introduced compulsory meal coupons for each adult, 24 meals a month for ten months a year.

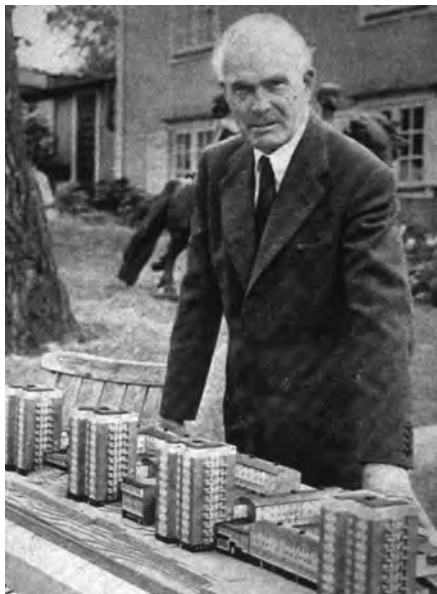
The dining hall was run like a restaurant, with a uniformed staff and a fixed menu drawn up by the dining hall superintendent.

The apartments at Marieberg had two or three rooms and a kitchenette. At the start many families with children moved in, but as the Swedish standard of living became higher, families with several children moved out. Single mothers moved in instead. Collaborative housing was a very good solution for them. Parents collaborated on child-care and there is a lot of evidence that this was a good environment for children.

Although the cohousing idea was progressing, it was also meeting powerful opposition. After the Second World War there was a movement to encourage mothers to stay at home, and in Sweden on the whole the spirit of the 1950s was unfavourable to cohousing. During the 1960s it became more generally accepted that married women should continue to work outside the home even when they had children. A series of important political decisions led to more kindergartens and other services in normal residential areas. Apartments normally had refrigerators, a deep-freeze and other equipment which made housekeeping easier. In a society that was still patriarchal, cohousing was stubbornly opposed by men, many of whom wanted to have a wife who stayed at home and cooked and otherwise kept house for them.

### **Hässelby family hotel – from service to collaboration**

Olle Engkvist's model, with service by employed staff and compulsory meal tickets, dominated the discussion about cohousing up to end of the 1970s. This model



The builder Olle Engkvist with a model of the Hässelby family hotel.

became increasingly obsolete as it became too expensive to arrange meals, cleaning and laundry in this way. The Hässelby story shows how the old model was shown to be inadequate and how a new model grew up in its place, with the residents getting to know one another and working together.

The Hässelby “family hotel” was built in the mid 1950s and was Olle Engkvist's last and biggest cohousing project. There were 328 apartments, a restaurant kitchen, a large dining hall on several levels, a smaller dining room, a room for parties, a club-room with its own cafeteria, a staffed reception, a shop that was open in the evenings, a kindergarten, a laundry, a sauna, a prayer-room and a gymnastic hall shared with the adjacent school. The dining hall was run like a restaurant, with a

manager who worked out the menu. If residents paid a little extra, they could have a specially-laid table with special dishes for guests. In other words, the family hotel was for privileged families.

In the late 1960s a new attitude could be seen, reflecting radical developments in the rest of society. The feminist “Group 8” had its meetings there. The tenants began to question the landlord’s numerous rules. This irritated the landlord. In 1976 the restaurant was closed, against the wishes of the active residents. More or less by chance the activists were allowed to cook in the restaurant kitchen by themselves. They noticed then that they managed very well without employing anybody and that they enjoyed working together. They went on cooking their meals themselves up to today, although only about 50 of the 300 households participate.

### **A new collaborative model**

The Hässelby family hotel was not designed so that those who lived there could do much together. As the name “family hotel” implies, the objective was to support families where the mother was working outside the home. In practice, the tenants came to befriend one another. This collective feeling was strengthened by meetings that questioned the menu or service cut-backs. But the idea that the tenants themselves could work in the kitchen only occurred when they started doing it in 1976 as an emergency solution.

The cohousing idea developed explosively when young people from 1968 and onwards adopted the idea of communal living. Their movement challenged the bourgeois nuclear family, which presupposed a housewife. The media presented the new alternative households as chaotic and immoral. But while society’s officialdom deplored the alternative households’ bohemian way of life, others saw the advantages of sharing household work and letting both men and women share the responsibility for housekeeping and child care.

Among those who saw the advantages of sharing housework were some women who formed the group *Live in Community* (BiG in Swedish). In the late 1970s it presented the idea of a “Working together model” which inspired a number of new cohousing projects. The group rejected the idea that housework was not necessarily something undesirable. Instead it argued that housework was only undesirable when it was a service carried out every day by a woman in a diminishing household. Moreover, cooking less often but for more people would become something to tackle with enthusiasm. Working with other people would in itself be stimulating.

### **Practical experience of the self-work model**

The BiG group’s booklet came out at the right time. Since the early 1960s many married women had begun to work outside the home. They demanded kindergartens and other forms of services. Almost all the women’s organisations in Sweden demanded that some form of cohousing be built, but opposition from a still-

patriarchal society was powerful. Collaborative housing broke through first in the 1980s. Nearly all the old cohousing projects, depending on paid staff for service, had by that time become ordinary apartment buildings. The time was ripe for a new model.

The first building to use the self-work model was *Stacken* in Gothenburg in 1979. This was an area with many social problems and apartments that changed hands often or stood empty. Professor Lars Ågren, the architect who had designed the area in the 1960s, became fascinated by the ideas of the BiG group. He offered the landlord, a municipal housing company, a solution for the unoccupied apartments by transforming one building into cohousing. He advertised in the newspapers and soon had an enthusiastic association which worked together to rehabilitate the building. The sixth floor was chosen for the majority of the collective spaces. The building was to be run by the residents but was still municipally owned. Lars Ågren himself moved in.

*Stacken* attracted people who had been active in the radical student movement and who firmly believed in cohousing. They had emphatic but very different ideas on what this meant. This led to conflicts and many of them moved out again. They disagreed on how children should be brought up, on whether to allow alcohol at parties, on allergies and domestic animals, and on whether decisions should be unanimous or carried by the majority. Later the building was bought by a group of young people who were confronted by the need of once more rehabilitating the building.

The first building in Stockholm to follow the new model was *Prästgårdshagen* in Älvsjö. In this case the idea was taken up by the municipal housing company Familjebostäder, on the initiative of Deputy Mayor Mats Hulth. He had been impressed by the Hässelby family hotel in its original form, but as it changed during the 1970s, he came to believe more in the collaborative model. He and a like-minded group pursued the idea so energetically that no less than 24 cohousing buildings were put up in Stockholm, of which 18 were built according to the collaborative model.

Those who moved into *Prästgårdshagen* saw collaborative housing as a practical solution rather than a grand ideological issue. As in *Stacken*, an association was formed to participate in the planning of the building. Following the BiG model, the apartment area was reduced by about 10% to allow generous collective spaces without increased construction costs, thus keeping rents more affordable.<sup>4</sup> The building was provided with a central kitchen, a dining hall, a laundry, a children's playroom, a meeting-room, a sauna, a photo-lab, a carpentry, a pottery workshop and in the cellar a music room. The municipality ran a kindergarten in the building. Every floor had a collective room that could be used for informal meetings, as a place to share magazines or as a room for young people. The residents were also responsible for

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<sup>4</sup> In Sweden rent levels are pegged to construction costs, due to specific regulations.





The ground floor of Prästgårdshagen. It was designed to stimulate spontaneous use of common spaces. Legend: 2. dining room; 3. kitchen; 4. laundry; 5. ceramics workshop; 6. photo lab; 7. sauna; 8. sitting/rest room; 9. club rooms/office space; 10. day-care centre for children; 11. bicycle parking.

keeping the building clean, for simple maintenance of the collective spaces, and for looking after the garden and cutting the grass.

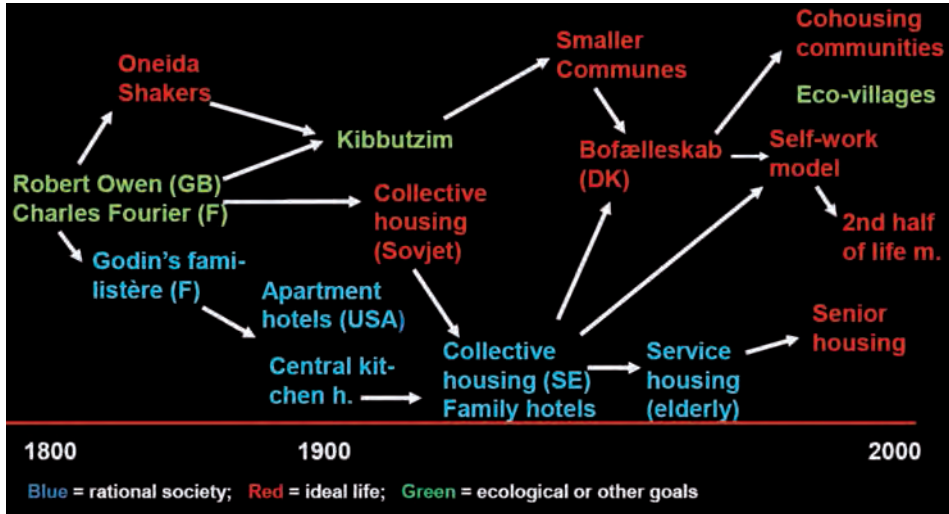
### Expansion and stagnation

About 50 cohousing units were put up in Sweden in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Most of them were of the BiG model, but there were also other models. The City of Stockholm appointed a working committee to organise a competition on different types of cohousing and to ensure that the municipal housing companies did practical experiments with different models. One model was a combination of cohousing and service housing for elderly, the idea being that the younger residents would take advantage of the generous services for the elderly and so create a larger economic base for the restaurant, the club-rooms, the library, the meeting-room, etc. It was hoped that including younger households would encourage social contacts and avoid age-segregation, but the model did not work well in practice. Many of the elderly were too infirm to participate in activities for families with children. The service model called for kitchen staff, but many of the families wanted to cook communally.

*Stolplyckan* in Linköping was a more successful mixture of elderly and younger people. It was built by the municipal housing company Stångåstaden in the late 1970s, drawing on the experience of the Hässelby family hotel. Although here too collective service was the core, no building was exclusively for those who depended on service.







Development of collaborative housing ideas over a period of 200 years.

DIAGRAM CONSTRUCTED BY DICK URBAN VESTBRO AND KERSTIN KÄRNEKULL.

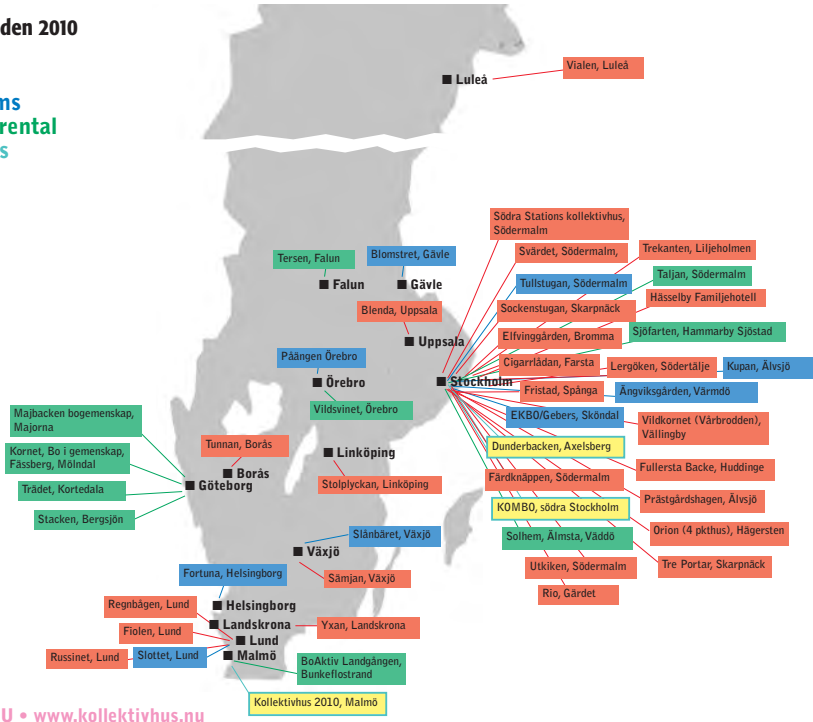
## Conclusions

The historical development of collaborative housing is summarized in the diagram below. An attempt has been made to apply the classification of the three driving forces proposed by Dolores Hayden (see the beginning of this chapter). In many cases elements of all three ideals are estimated to have been present. Thus Owen and Fourier both emphasized the need for rationality, but they also paid much attention to self-sufficiency through communal agricultural production and the need for an alternative to industrial society. Soviet experiments with collective housing in the 1920s (mainly remaining on paper) were very much determined by machine ideals, but they have nevertheless been classified as examples of ideal life models since they also encompassed visions of a completely new life, based on equality between men and women, and between classes. The Scandinavian collective housing experiments of the 1930s and 1940s were inspired by both the Soviet experiments and the apartment hotels in the USA of the 1920s, but are classified as examples of machine age thinking because of the uncritical attitude to industrial society. Service housing refers to a Swedish model of housing for the elderly as well as housing areas with increased services. Neither had goals fostering a sense of community among residents. White arrows show line of influence, deduced from sources describing the background inspiration to the proposed and implemented models.

The model most frequent in Sweden today is the self-work model. It is estimated that Sweden has 45 functioning cohousing units. Of these 27 are more or less running along the original ideas, while about 18 use only part of the original collective spaces. 30 are owned by municipal housing companies, while eight have condominium type

## Cohousing in Sweden 2010

- Rental
- Condominiums
- Cooperative rental
- Planned units



Map of Sweden showing the location of collective housing units and their tenure forms. Almost all buildings are located in university towns. Almost half of them are situated in Stockholm.

ownership and seven are cooperative rental or have other types of tenure. These figures do not include smaller communes sharing a villa or a large apartment. Altogether there are about 2 000 apartments in cohousing in Sweden. This is approximately 0.05 per cent of the total housing stock.

This overview shows that collaborative housing is an exception to the conventional types of housing in Sweden. Yet it is a vital social movement, which has survived for over 40 years. Recently the collaborative housing movement has started to gain momentum. Since 2004 eight new units have been built and more are in the planning stage. The national collaborative housing organisation *Kollektivhus NU* has about 47 organisations as members, including eight local associations of individuals, working for more collaborative housing in general or for concrete buildings for their members. ■

# Cohousing as a Building Block to the Ecovillage

## Case Study of Yarrow Ecovillage, Canada



**Charles Durrett** is an architect living in California. In the 1980s he launched the ‘cohousing’ concept together with his wife Kathryn McCamant after their studies of Danish cohousing (resulting in the book ‘Cohousing’ 1988). Together with his wife he has designed more than 50 cohousing projects, and also served as a consultant to others involved in collaborative housing. In recent years he has taken an interest in housing for the elderly and published the book ‘Senior Cohousing’.

I first experienced cohousing while studying in Denmark. Walking to the train station, I noticed one neighborhood far different from the others. There was more life there, more interaction, more neighborhood cooperation and what appeared to be a real community.

In the mid-1980s, we (Katie, my wife and I) decided to return to Denmark to find out more about cohousing for ourselves. We studied 46 Danish cohousing communities in depth, and visited 150 others. While there, we not only observed cohousing first hand, but we were honored by cohousing residents who spent hours upon hours with us telling us about their personal stories of building a cohousing community and “living” cohousing on a daily basis. Twenty-five years and fifty cohousing communities later, we still reflect on these experiences in the design and creation of communities throughout North America.

Since we designed the first cohousing community in the United States, Muir Commons located in Davis, California, cohousing has not only continued to expand throughout the U.S. and Canada, it has also become a model for other housing types (seniors housing, affordable housing) and a building block for larger communities. My focus here will be on cohousing as a building block for communities and neighborhood design at large. More specifically, I will highlight cohousing as the building block of a neighborhood, in this case the Yarrow Ecovillage – a project we are currently working on in British Columbia.



The life between the buildings at Southside Cohousing, Sacramento, California.



The site of a former Mennonite dairy farm.

Still in the early design stages, the Yarrow Ecovillage is an exceptional combination of cohousing, sustainable living, farmland preservation (as well as farming itself), a live/work community, a learning center, and a mixed-use town center. The combination of three elements – living, working and farming – along with many





The Fraser Valley.

other activities and amenities such as learning, socializing, sharing, teaching, playing and visiting, will come together to provide a model for environmentally, economically and socially sustainable lifestyles.

### **Why Cohousing is Even More Appropriate Than Ever**

True to the cohousing concept in general, the Yarrow Ecovillage, aims to re-establish many of the advantages of traditional villages within the context of twenty-first century life. The 25-acre site is a former dairy farm, left inactive in the 1980s, and in need of new life. Quite conveniently, the site is also on a main road that connects the small town of Yarrow (now incorporated with its neighboring town of Chilliwack) with urban Vancouver (to its west) and the natural beauty of the Fraser Valley.

The “town” of Yarrow has a population of about 3,000 people. It once had a concentration of commercial buildings along its main street to create a rural, but functional, small town surrounded by farms. Like too many rural towns, the commercial viability of Yarrow was eclipsed by big box stores offering cheaper products and scattered throughout the area between farmland, new residential development and previous downtown corridors. As a result, everyone in the area must drive to everything – there is almost nothing to walk to. It is nearly impossible to shop, dine, be entertained, or go to school, the library or the park without getting in a car.



A "neighborhood center" in Berkeley, California. A place for commerce and meeting.

This landscape is representative of many towns across North America where the trend toward suburban development and single-family houses on large lots has fragmented communities and drained once-active downtowns. For financial reasons, the town of Yarrow has been consumed by the larger neighboring city of Chilliwack (population 80,000) since it couldn't afford its own expensive in-town infrastructure (sewer, water, schools, police, fire, administration). Yarrow was incorporated with the city of Chilliwack in 1980. Although now part of the city of Chilliwack, in theory, the residents of Yarrow are about nine miles (14 km) away from Chilliwack. As for Yarrow itself, the disparate but large number of fruit and vegetable markets and small retail stores in and around Yarrow are too spread out to have any long-term commercial viability or to create any sense of place. And their dispersed locations do nothing to contribute to the kind of relationships that stitch a town together.

In this context, Yarrow by definition will not be its own town (since it is legally a part of Chilliwack), but the Yarrow Ecovillage will be a neighborhood center that will function as a small town. The Yarrow Ecovillage Society (YES) has stepped up to the plate to create this new town center. This new model of creating functional neighborhood centers with within walking distance of homes and schools and workplaces, is the future of city planning and regional planning, and in doing so, the Yarrow Ecovillage is establishing a state-of-the-art practice.

### **The Cohousing Site**

The cohousing portion of the site plays a critical role in the ecovillage and in shaping the culture of the ecovillage. It is a place where people learn cooperation and develop skills – as well as how to brainstorm, discuss, and decide; it will be a place where well-intentioned citizens learn to make consequential decisions together to accomplish their environmental and their social aspirations.

Yarrow Ecovillage site plan with cohousing at bottom and mixed-use at top (north) on the site.



### **Creating a Town Center**

The town center is almost as old as human settlement. And members of the Yarrow Ecovillage are not the first to figure out that the combination of positive, usable public space, combined with commercial activity and spaces for creativity and learning will activate the environment. Towns across the U.S., Canada and Europe are doing just this: creating public markets, carving out public open space, reinventing main streets with new businesses and retail, making pedestrian-friendly environments, and providing positive social spaces. Yarrow Ecovillage reintroduces a public realm to the town of Yarrow that is much lacking after several decades of suburban development. Such public space provides not only retail opportunities; it provides opportunities for meaningful human interaction. Over time, these spontaneous or informal interactions may build to more formal friendships: you get to know the person who bakes your bread, grows your carrots, relaxes in the public square on a sunny day, and he or she gets to know you and your children. The variety of relationships and diversity of people, skills and interests will feed off one another, establishing a vibrant culture of learning, doing and being – as a functional interrelated society.

### **Cohousing as a Building Block for the Ecovillage**

The residential, cohousing community will be the first building block of the Yarrow Ecovillage; besides creating a place for the community to live and come together, it is





The relationships established during the design workshops helps build relationships that carry over to the cohousing community after move in.

also a building block at many critical levels. In the process of creating a new community, cohousing residents learn how to fairly, but expediently, make decisions together; they learn to act expeditiously because, unlike so many other cooperative ventures that seem like a good idea, cohousing communities tend to put themselves on a tight time line. Because of real budgets (the maximum that they can pay for a house) and tight timelines (they want their kids into the new school by the fall of 2011), cohousing tends to be set up rather business-like. And a cohousing community has to be fair by nature. People actually learn to get more done by consensus, because everyone has had a say, and everyone is on board. For these reasons, the cohousing will be the basis from which other players at the Yarrow Ecovillage (such as merchants and farmers) model their legal structure to achieve a cooperative corporation. That is, they learn how to invest together, how to get “into the deal”, and “out of the deal”, and most importantly, they learn to get things done by working together.

### **History of the Yarrow Ecovillage**

The 25-acre parcel for the Yarrow Ecovillage was purchased cooperatively by the Yarrow Ecovillage Society (YES) in 2002. Soon after the group held a brainstorming workshop with the residents of Yarrow to share their visions for the site: *What is great*

*about the existing community? What needs improvement? What would they like to see happen on the Yarrow Ecovillage site?* These discussions catalyzed the idea of a mixed-use area with residential, educational, commercial and agricultural uses and several planning and design objectives:

- Complete the gap in the urban fabric of main street Yarrow.
- Develop a way for the public to access the site and the farmland.
- Create public, pedestrian-oriented streets that serve as places for social interaction.
- Encourage “Main Street” activity.
- Enrich the diversity of activity with shops, studios and offices along with residential development; allow a vertical mixing of uses within the buildings.
- Provide a variety of housing types for diverse households.
- Create beneficial microclimates, habitat and food.

Most of the parcel (with the exception of a small commercial area along Yarrow Central Road) was rezoned to an “Ecovillage zone”, a zoning designation created specifically for the site. The Ecovillage Zone includes residential (single-family and multi-family), commercial, cottage industry, recreational and agricultural uses to meet objectives of the group’s vision.

With several key players in place (some of whom are also residing on the site), the group contacted me (Chuck) for advice on their existing site plan and, first and foremost, the cohousing community. I am currently working with the group to achieve their vision in both the cohousing and the overall site plan design.

The group’s original objectives for the Yarrow Ecovillage shaped the schematic site design:

1. **Public Space** – to include open space and small commercial spaces (café/bakery, cottage industries, etc.).
2. **Village Green** – a central area for activities, farmers’ market, lounging and special events.
3. **Pedestrian Ways and Squares** – to provide a safe and socially stimulating experience for residents and visitors.
4. **Neighborhood Gardens** – for recreation and food production.
5. **Common facilities** – for the cohousing community.

### **The Cohousing Site Plan**

The cohousing, the first stage in the development of the ecovillage, is really the kingpin of the larger whole. It will be the cornerstone or the incubator for a thoughtful, fair and efficient collaborative process and investment. It will not only catalyze the larger whole, it will help to synthesize the three separate endeavors to accomplish the overall goals of the ecovillage. The process of designing and building

the cohousing will establish a culture that will shape the greater whole and propel the community forward.

In January 2010, I held a site design workshop with the group to revisit the pre-existing site plan with a focus on the cohousing site. The outcome is a site plan that achieves the objectives of the group to a much greater extent. The site plan adds a diagonal pathway linking the cohousing with the mixed-use site. This north-south pathway creates a spine through the entire site from the cohousing to the mixed-use. It also serves as a sight line, giving the cohousers a view of the existing silo that will be preserved in the redevelopment of the site – along with the heritage barn.

The cohousing site includes 30 private residences with a variety of housing types (duplexes, flats, townhouses), a common house, and ample programmed and unprogrammed open space. A 4,000 square foot common house is sited at the intersection of the pedestrian pathways and alongside of the parking on the east side of the site. This central area will also accommodate a terrace (connected to the common house) and a children's play area (across from, but separate from, the common house terrace). The location of the common house contributes to the overall functioning of the community as a neighborhood gathering place. Visible from private homes and on the path between parking and home, residents will pass by the common house on their way home and are likely to drop in.

Refinement of the site and building designs will help to sculpt the spaces between the buildings where openings become pedestrian streets and courtyards almost like rooms in a house. These areas facilitate interaction and “life on the street.” Front doors are 30 to 40 feet apart for proximity to one another and pathways create a central spine and place for interaction. Play areas for small children are placed in central locations that can be watched easily from the houses or by other people in the vicinity. These so-called soft spaces that happen at the edges of and between buildings – such as gathering nodes, porches, green spaces – create experiential progressions that optimize interaction by seeing people eye-to-eye at ground level, and encouraging engagement. In addition, a large outdoor recreational/playing field and fire pit located on the southern edge of the cohousing site, just beyond the private houses will create a gathering spot that can be used by both residents and farm staff.

The Yarrow site arrangement will foster a sense of community along the pathways and in the various outdoor spaces, balanced with adequate choice for privacy in more secluded areas such as private backyards. In addition, the site orientation is also well suited to passive and active heating and cooling possibilities and overall sun control (in when you want it, out when you don't).

Together the site design and landscape, combined with the architecture, will serve the social and ecological aspirations of the Yarrow cohousers. This will be achieved with a combination of great solar and wind orientation, the addition of porches, trellises, lattices, plant canopies, and, of course, the people. With all of these elements in place, the environment will come to life; the architecture will become the stage set,

and the cohousers, the characters in a vibrant social community.

In moving forward, critical details to the success of this plan will be:

- Making the common house a compelling place
- Having good pathways and light
- Creating outdoor rooms to be comforting, and most importantly inviting to a point that you “feel” that there is no other place that you would rather be.
- Designing the buildings (the forms and the facades) to enliven, but not overwhelm, the “exterior rooms.”
- “Activating” the circulation by:
  - making porches and gathering nodes that work.
  - facing private kitchens towards the common paths.
  - putting mailboxes in the right place to encourage interaction.
  - and working out many other small details that will build the social component of the community.

### **The Mixed-Use Portion of the Site**

The second and most public component of the Yarrow Ecovillage is a 2.5-acre mixed-use area (commercial, rental units, learning, etc.) – effectively the site’s town center. Stripped of its town center by suburban development, both commercial and residential, the Ecovillage’s mixed-use area will fill this void. On the street front of the ecovillage 2,787 m<sup>2</sup> (30,000 sq ft) of commercial space will offer services to the greater neighborhood and places for work and creative opportunities. This new mixed-use area will also include 17 apartments, the refitted historic dairy barn, and a completely

### **The Social Advantages of Cohousing**

While safety and security as well as resource conservation are all critical aspects of a healthy living environment, so is replenishing the social capital that individuals rely on to thrive. And social capital (relationships) and the ability of neighbors to meet and come together is what it takes to achieve the cooperation necessary to readily support each other and to be part of the solution to creating sustainable and livable communities.

Cohousing is for people who value a community of people for friendship and support. And a strong support system offers its own sustainability. Cohousing is a healthy living environment for seniors who might otherwise be secluded in large, private homes alone, or for children who might not otherwise have playmates in their immediate neighborhood, and for mothers and fathers who can share childcare, parenting advice and the companionship of other parents.

How many parents do you know who let their children (four, five and six-year-olds) walk to a friend’s house alone? How many seniors do you know that would feel safe leaving their house after dark? Yet cohousing communities in towns and even inner-city neighborhoods provide the security that enables us to return to a life of sociability and meaningful interaction.

walkable environment with adequate public space for sitting and gathering. Together it promises to be as dynamic and practical as a small town center – and more. The Yarrow Ecovillage will be a high-functioning hub where people can purchase locally-grown organic produce (grown both regionally and on site); a place where one can park once and shop at five or six locations such as the bakery, the bank and an artisan’s shop; where one can meet a friend for coffee; work on site; get to know your neighbors; or take a class or two. It will be a place where adults, elders and even teenagers like to hang out, and where people can grow and sustain a culture. The goal is to not only enhance commercial viability and create a quality living environment, but to create a culturally-viable and culturally-vibrant place.

### **The Yarrow Ecovillage Farm**

The third component of the 25-acre site will be a 20-acre farm. The farm will exist as a distinct entity within the larger Yarrow Ecovillage cooperative, which means that some of the people who live in the cohousing with farm expertise will manage the farm with the help of a hired farmer. Much like the cohousing and the mixed-use portions of the site, the farm will also require successful programming and management to reach its highest potential. A hired farmer will run the farm on a daily basis and will help the group reach their goals for successful local food production: more organic, better yield, more local distribution, better water practices, better land and soil management, better labor management, successful mentoring, more profit, etc. To create synergy with the cohousing and mixed-uses portions, the farm may set-up a community supported agriculture (CSA) program that would enable cohousers to get a fresh basket of vegetables each week. A farmers’ market or farm stand would be included in the mixed-use area. In addition, several residential units in the mixed-use area might be set aside for seasonal farm staff. The farm could also serve as a learning site as part of the on-site learning center.

### **Cohousing Design to Facilitate Community**

The Yarrow Ecovillage, while a model project in its own right, is part of a larger, growing trend in neighborhood design where cohousing has played an important role. A physical environment that encourages a strong neighborhood atmosphere is characteristic of cohousing – and many of the characteristics found in cohousing design are being applied in neighborhood design at large. “Neighborliness” is enhanced by keeping cars out of the living environment and placing parking at the edge of the site. This allows the majority of the development to be pedestrian-oriented and safe for children. Being involved in the design from the outset, residents and users are able to emphasize that they want a living environment where the site and building design increase the possibilities for social contact and to make their lives more convenient and more fun.





Schematic design for the mixed-use portion of the Yarrow Ecovillage site with the cohousing behind (to the south). The site plan includes ample open space and plazas for sitting, eating and socializing combined with commercial, professional and residential spaces throughout.]

### **Cohousing in the Context of Sustainable Neighborhood Design**

In recent years, cohousing has contributed considerably to the discussion and design of residential areas and neighborhood design at large. In the past few years we have designed cohousing communities that have included neighborhood renewal, building renovations, the creation of tighter, more dense neighborhoods, mixed-use areas and affordable housing developments.

We have seen several recent cohousing communities that have evolved to include office and retail space adjacent to cohousing facilities including a coffee shop, a hair salon, and other small neighborhood establishments. In other cases, a cohousing community has anchored the neighborhood and catalyzed additional, mixed-use development. Such projects illustrate how residents – when given the opportunity to re-invent their living environments – can go further to re-invent and re-invigorate environments for society at large.

These examples have influenced regulations such as zoning to allow for mixed-use developments and residential areas with common facilities. In the past, requirements such as zoning or lending practices meant that cohousing communities were often restricted to residential uses only. Fortunately, this has changed. With a trend towards sustainable neighborhood design, transit-oriented development and mixed-use neighborhoods, town and cities have expanded zoning regulations to accommodate a



Frog Song Cohousing in Cotati, California is a mixed-use project with seven 900-1800 sq ft shops. Prior to this, downtown Cotati had not seen any new mixed-use development for 30 years, much less zero setback (Here facades that meet the sidewalk define the street). This development won Best Smart Growth development under 151 units in 2005.

broader range of functions. In the case of the Yarrow Ecovillage, the town was willing to accommodate the variety of uses by creating a new 'Ecovillage' zoning designation.

### **The Yarrow Ecovillage and Good Neighborhood Design**

Many of the elements of good cohousing design will be adopted in the mixed-use design for the Yarrow Ecovillage. The mixed-use area will be a car-free zone; parking will be kept to the periphery to allow for a pedestrian-oriented environment with public open space. Soft spaces around retail and workspaces will create places for informal interaction among visitors, workers, and cohousing residents. Situated in the center of the mixed-use area, the heritage barn will act as a community hub or a beacon. It will be a place for an educational center as well as public events. Combined with a main plaza, the barn and the surrounding outdoor space will function like the common house and its outdoor terrace – enlivening the environment by creating a center of activity. This central open area will be sheltered from the traffic of Yarrow Central Road by retail buildings along the street front with a pedestrian pathway extending into the mixed-use.

From an environmental and an economic perspective, the mixed-use area makes good sense. It consolidates activities providing a variety of retail establishments that enable a person to go to one place for many of their shopping needs, many of which will be local businesses. The Yarrow Ecovillage will bring several existing farmers'





The southern part of the Yarrow Ecovillage parcel will be preserved as an organic farm.

materials.

We have seen many cohousing communities that begin as small, in-fill projects and, over time, result in bringing new life to a neighborhood. The Yarrow Ecovillage could be just this type of community, and might well catalyze other development nearby – helping to stem the tide of sprawl in the Canadian province of British Columbia. As an infill project that re-invigorates a former, under-utilized site with a variety of uses, it also combines an active social and residential area with the natural environment and its original agricultural uses. It might well act as a model to be expanded upon elsewhere and in similar rural settings.

market to a centralized commercial area. For the residents of the mixed-use area, they will have a variety of opportunities on-site and without need for a car for basic necessities as well as educational and social experiences. Finally, the Yarrow Ecovillage Society is committed to sustainable building and both the re-use of existing buildings and new construction on the site will take full advantage of green building techniques and sustainable building

### **Ecovillage Zoning – A New, Sustainable Land-Use Concept**

A few months ago, I and a few of the members of the Yarrow Ecovillage development team met with the city manager of Chilliwack, as well as the head of planning, public works and others – nine city officials in all. To begin the discussions of the site, city staff opened the parcel map that designates the allowable land uses (the zoning map) for all of Chilliwack and the surrounding incorporated areas. Parcels were designated for farming, residential and commercial, or a park, a school, etc. Then we came to the 25-acre site on Yarrow Central Road, the address of the Yarrow Ecovillage. Its zoning was (in capital letters) ECOVILLAGE – the only site in all of Canada that is zoned ecovillage, perhaps the only site in all of North America that is zoned ecovillage.

### **Conclusion**

The Yarrow Ecovillage group has already made the first steps towards a design that will be a true *genius loci*, a place that is memorable for both its architectural and its experiential qualities. This combination also allows for a wonderful balance of economics, ecology, and positive social space. This type of calculated diversity assures flexibility and longevity for the Yarrow Ecovillage.

## Renewing a Sense of Community

The trend towards the creation of good public space and viable commercial centers is happening in many different contexts – from neighborhood-based design in large cities to main streets in small towns. The examples range from public parks to weekly outdoor markets. In the past decade farmers' markets have increased in the U.S. by 70 %<sup>1</sup>; in New York City, for example, the Greenmarket program has brought markets to more than 50 neighborhoods throughout the city – uniting farmers in the region with their urban consumers.

Other forms of public uses have also helped to bring new people to under-utilized downtowns. In North Adams, Massachusetts for example, a contemporary art museum, artist studio spaces, and new businesses to support them, have revived a town that was suffering from a depressed, post-industrial economy. In another example, the town of Tillamook, Oregon is converting a former creamery in an otherwise abandoned downtown to create a year-round market that will draw on the already successful farmers' market and is meant to catalyze other business and activity in the downtown.

In Lake Forest Park, Washington, a former, abandoned shopping mall has been re-utilized to create a town center (in an otherwise suburban context) with a public plaza and organized events including performances, book signings, lectures and on-going recreational opportunities (life-size chess and outdoor tables, for example). In many of these places, the urban form already exists – it is merely re-invented for contemporary uses. In other examples, as in the case of Yarrow Ecovillage, the mixed-use area is a re-envisioning of a site with a different pre-existing function.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture.

The developer of the Ecovillage, the members of the Yarrow Ecovillage Society (YES) Cooperative, bring clarity of vision to the process. Their ability to work together effectively yields the best strategy for accomplishing the type of new town center that redevelopment agencies dream of. The group sees that only a combination of uses will create the type of vitality and daily use that will keep the place active day and night, and throughout the week. They also understand the role that good urban design will play in achieving a culture of social connectivity and environmental awareness that they desire.

Physical design is critically important in facilitating a social atmosphere, and to a large extent the physical design of the community in fact choreographs the behavior of the residents. While the participatory development process establishes the initial sense of community, it is the physical design that sustains it over time. Whether it succeeds or not depends largely on the architect's experience in accomplishing community through design. Without thoughtful consideration, many opportunities will be missed. ■

## **Cohousing and its Environmental Benefits**

Throughout the years it has become apparent that, in addition to the social advantages, cohousing offers numerous environmental benefits. On average, residents of cohousing communities consume less energy (meaning they spend less on utilities), own fewer cars, and drive less than people who do not live in cohousing. This savings is simply a matter of convenience. Walking next door to visit your friend is less expensive in terms of time and fuel than driving across town. Similarly, because individual households can combine resources to share some essential goods, each household saves the environmental cost of owning "one of everything." Sharing a lawnmower among five households is simply less "expensive" than when every household owns one. This is conservation at its most basic level: fewer durable goods means less raw materials are required on the manufacturing side, fewer miles are traveled to deliver those goods, and less energy is required to install and operate them. We save when we share, and sharing is easy, sensible, and normal in a cohousing community.

In addition, the houses in a typical cohousing development sit in a small footprint relative to the larger site. This proximity not only engenders a sense of community but also uses less land. Both are good things. Where individuals once drove, they now walk; where a large yard for a single family house once existed, a garden or a playground for multiple households stands its place and people are happier for it.

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# Collaborative Housing in Germany



**Albrecht Göschel** has a background in architecture and social policy. He is teaching at the Humboldt University in Berlin and at the Internationalen Centrum für Kultur und Management in Salzburg. Since 2007 he is the Chair of the Forum für gemeinschaftliches Leben, a society working for community in housing, especially such that bridge the gap between generations. The Forum initiates new communities and protects the interest of existing housing communities.

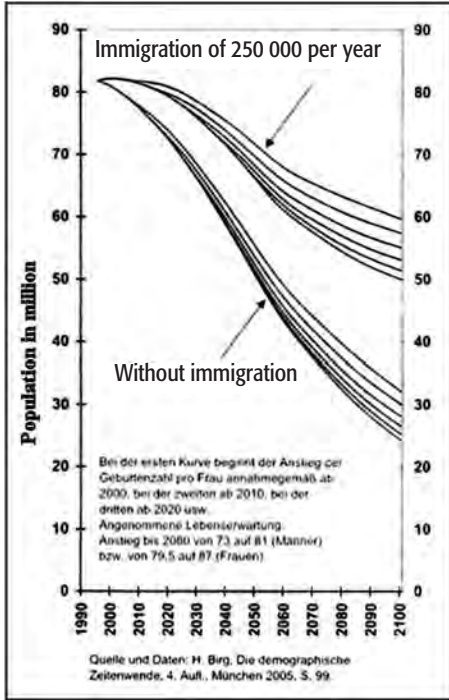
**F**or quite a number of years Germany has been experiencing dramatic economic and social changes and will continue to do so for several years to come. Collaborative housing in Germany is to be understood as one response to this development.

## Demographic Change

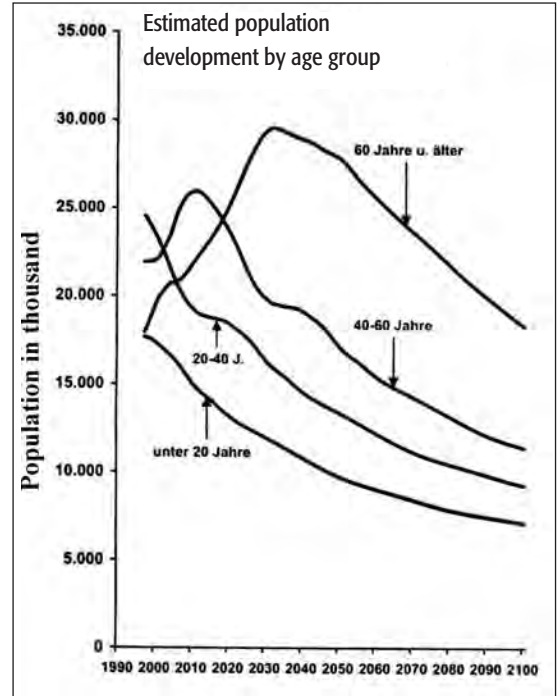
All industrialised societies are undergoing demographic change, but in Germany this trend is extraordinarily strong and poses challenging problems for all systems of health care and social security.

Demographic change is caused by two different trends, namely lower birth rates and increasing life expectancy, resulting in shrinking numbers of young inhabitants and rising numbers of elderly people whose life expectancy is constantly increasing. Firstly, for almost 40 years the birth rate in Germany has been below 1.4 (at c. 1.36 at present), which means that in each generation there is a deficit of 30% of young people to achieve a complete reproduction of the population. Secondly, the increase in life expectancy means that there is an extension of the lifespan of three months from one annual age group to the next. This extension is not a statistical result due to reduced infant mortality. People are actually getting older. There is a linear increased lifespan for all adult ages benefitting mainly the elderly who are gaining additional years of life and, on average, a good, healthy life as they remain physically and mentally fit beyond their seventieth year.

The result is a tremendous increase in the proportion of old people in the German population or better: a dangerous decline in the number of young inhabitants, which



Estimated population development in Germany with and without immigration. In both cases the population will shrink.

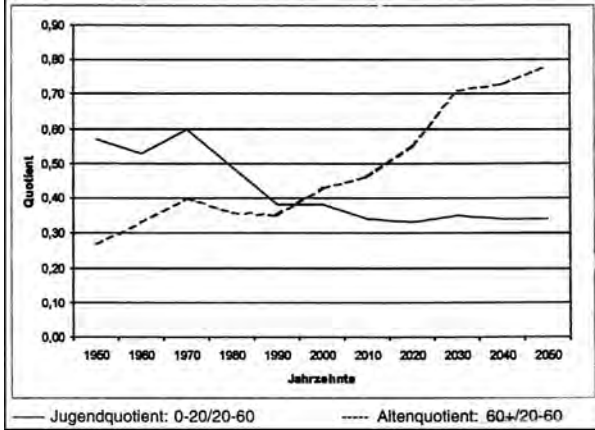


Development of the young and old population groups in Germany as a proportion of the working population.

cannot even be compensated for by steady immigration. Furthermore, immigration, if it does take place, is an extremely expensive affair because a successful integration process cannot be achieved by the immigrating families alone, but needs to be extensively supported by welfare institutions.

The currently emerging population structure is a severe threat to all existing systems of social security and especially to the state pension system, which is designed as a “two-generation-contract”, though it ought to be a “three-generation-contract”. The German social security system as it is definitely supports childlessness. The threats to the state pension system can only be overcome either by an extended working life or by a fundamental reform of the pension system. Both options are facing strong opposition in the German population because they are regarded as ways of introducing intergenerational injustice, a social inequality between generations. Most Germans have already grasped that future generations will not achieve the same level of welfare as those who are presently getting old are enjoying. It has even been said that the current high standard of living in Germany is a result of the decreasing birth rates over the last 40 years and that we will now have to “pay the bill” in the form of reduced productivity, declining incomes, increasing immigration, etc.

As there are no indications of change regarding reproductive behaviour or growing



Development of young and old population groups in Germany as a proportion of the working population.

personal services, offered either by security systems or in the service market. The pressure to look for an alternative organisation of services in a more informal way is building up.

As demographic change reduces the capacity of families to support their aged members, it is becoming imperative to develop new informal personal services in the form of self-help.

### From an Industrial to a Service-Oriented Society

Traditionally, Germany has been a very strong industrial society with all social mentalities related to that tradition. The welfare state holds a very strong position in this context. But since the 1980s Germany has been shifting towards a more service-oriented economy. “Services” here refers to production-related services, not to personal services. In the course of this process the so-called “great systems” or great units were and will be replaced step by step by small units in production as well as in social security systems. In effect, professional life becomes more flexible, less constant. Periods of employment are interrupted by joblessness not only for employees with low education. Even academics are increasingly suffering from job-insecurity, though good or advanced professional education still is the best and almost the only protection against long-lasting unemployment.

The result is an increasing inequality across the population, a decline, if not a dissolution, of the middle classes, even a tendency towards polarisation of the population and a severe reduction of the benefits provided by the welfare state, which traditionally is the main pillar of democratic legitimacy in Germany. Those population groups will increase which are neither able to buy personal services in the service market nor to pay over a lifetime into insurance schemes providing equivalent services. This part of the population does not only consist of traditionally poor

life expectancy, we will arrive at a proportion of almost 40% of the population already being older than 60 years by 2030, and about 15% older than 80 by 2050. It seems absolutely impossible to support such large parts of the population in the traditional way through state pensions. Severe reductions of state pension payments are obviously unavoidable. This will impair the individual capacity of paying for



groups like low-paid industrial workers, but includes a growing proportion of formerly middle-class groups, which have taken a certain standard of welfare for granted. Even they will have to look for alternatives in the form of new and informal personal services.

### **Change of Values**

Since the late 1960s all modern societies have been undergoing a change of values from “values of duty and acceptance” to those of self-determination. In Germany this trend emerged comparatively late and collided with the norms of a very traditional society, which led to heavy conflicts in the late 1960s (“student movement”) and a real backlash, and to a far-reaching destruction of traditional values. The extreme decline of Germany’s birth rate is one phenomenon related to this change of values, which always occurred in very pronounced forms in societies that had gone through a very authoritarian phase in their recent history.

One aspect of the change of values is the rejection of fixed and low standards in personal services as a given fate that has to be accepted. People began to demand participation and self-determination in services and insisted on rather high standards as well as an atmosphere of personal attention and considerate care in these services.

This high quality of personal services is compromised by demographic change as well as by the shift from an industrialised to a service-oriented economy. The areas most heavily affected are health and personal care services. There will be a growing demand for these services, while the capacity to pay for them will be reduced.

The main problem in this context is care for the elderly. Within the coming years a generation will grow into old age, which was brought up with the new values and is used to secure welfare services benefitting a large part of the population, welfare for – almost – all of them. But the second factor of the demographic change causes entirely different health problems than those we are traditionally used to. Traditionally, infectious diseases made up the larger part of all illnesses. Considered from health-care security aspects, these diseases had tremendous advantages: patients either died quickly or recovered quickly.



Example of collaborative housing in Bavaria. Source: <http://www.fgw-ev.de/index.php?id=189>.

These are the diseases modern medicine has largely overcome, thereby steadily extending life expectancy. Most of the population actually gains additional and healthy years in the process of an aging society. Yet at the same time, the probability of contracting a disease common in old age is growing tremendously. And

these old age illnesses are completely different from infectious diseases. Most of them are neither curable nor do they lead to swift death. Cancer, stroke, heart attack, old age dementia are diseases requiring long and intensive personal care.

Taking into account furthermore that the costs of personal services, due to the “uno-actu-principle”<sup>1</sup>, are permanently rising faster than production costs, it becomes obvious that a growing part of the population will soon be facing a severe crisis of personal services, mainly in old age. Neither the service market nor the welfare state systems will be able to solve this problem. In Germany, however, due to its tradition as an industrial welfare state, these messages are rather difficult to communicate to a larger part of the population.

### **Consequences for Collaborative Housing in Germany**

In Germany collaborative housing must be seen as an alternative production of personal services in the face of a service crisis that is presumably already emerging. People are living together in order to render each other those services they may expect from neither their families nor the public welfare institutions, and which, due to declining income and growing service costs, they likewise cannot afford to purchase in the service market.

This rough and short description embodies the basic problem. The services in question have traditionally been provided either by the private family system or by the public system of both welfare state institutions and the service market. The alternative production of personal services in a collaborative housing project belongs to neither category. It cannot be regarded as private in the sense of a family, nor as public in the sense of a service institution. Collaborative housing establishes something in between, something innovative between private and public. Collaborative housing groups can neither rely on the love which forms a family nor on the rational basis of a contract which makes public services reliable and stable. Yet they are looking for the same stability and reliability that either the family or the public institution provides.

Yet collaborative housing groups are not doing so in a social vacuum. They are still surrounded by the family and by institutionalised public personal services. That is to say that collaborative housing establishes a new link between the private and the public realms by binding together these two opposites into which modern life has split during modernisation and industrialisation. Germany – traditionally a very strong industrial society with an identity based on industrialisation and the welfare state – is obviously finding it extremely difficult to adopt this alternative on a large scale. Less than one per cent of the population are living in collaborative housing

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<sup>1</sup> The so called “uno-actu-principle” states that costs of personal services are permanently rising more than costs of production due to the limited possibilities of rationalisation in personal services compared to industrial production.

projects, and the assumption is that this percentage will rise only to not more than five per cent in the course of the coming years, even though the pressure to move this way is extremely strong.

### **Forms of Collaborative Housing**

Currently, we distinguish between two basic forms of collaborative housing following different ideas and purposes with numerous overlapping forms in between. One form is characterised by groups of people who seek to be provided merely with a reasonable flat (cooperative building association, joint building venture). Their main purpose is the self-help involved in getting a flat, a place to live at a reasonable cost. Collaboration between the members is limited to producing the common house and running that facility once it is built. The second form or type is characterised by groups who are seeking to establish supportive relations between their members in a common or shared house. The building and the flats are only means to achieve this purpose of mutual help in everyday life and in certain situations of personal crises, like illness or dependency on personal care. There are different organisations representing these different forms. The “Forum gemeinschaftliches Wohnen” conceives of itself as an organisation leaning towards the second type and aims at supporting projects which intend to develop mutual help and care.

Projects of the second type exhibit quite a number of different ways of arranging common life and designing a building. All of them envision autonomous private flats within a common building. Even if there is little space for the private flats, they are always complete, i.e. they all have their own kitchen, bathroom, bed- and living rooms, just like any “normal flat”. Common rooms are more or less optional. Some projects attach a lot of importance to their shared rooms and facilities while others may establish only a shared garden and do not even have a common room for their meetings. If they have a common kitchen, it is always only the alternative kitchen, built in addition to private kitchens in each flat. This indicates that private life is basically untouched and made possible in the projects. Common life is considered an additional achievement, an additional option, based on agreements, not necessarily on the design of a building.

This form of mutual help is the result of a rational decision based on the insight that this might be a way to improve living conditions and to compensate for reductions in income and social welfare. This means that collaborative housing is not a matter of mutual love or intensive sympathy. There is even a recommendation that one should not move into a collaborative housing project with close friends. Collaborative housing is based on cooperation, not on love. To make this clear is of some importance, especially in Germany with its long and tantalizing tradition of “Gemeinschaft”. On the other hand it is of course necessary for the group members to develop a certain degree of fondness and empathy for each other. In the view of most project groups, mutual help and support do not depend on common rooms and

facilities, while others regard these as extremely important.

This leads to the conclusion that it is by no means a necessity to have a custom-designed building built according to the needs of a specific group or project. We know a growing number of initiatives which are trying to establish collaborative housing in an existing neighbourhood and they do so without undertaking major reconstruction measures or building common facilities. Collaborative housing in this view is not a form of dwelling but of living, it is a special “lifestyle”, not a “housing style”. In this sense collaborative housing is not a part of housing policy like income-related “social housing”, but rather of social policy, of “social service policy”, insofar as it offers alternatives in providing services, not in providing flats or houses.

This is an important statement because it has consequences for public support policies as well as for consultation concepts and in turn for those professionals who are earning their living by advising and counselling others on collaborative housing issues.

Collaborative housing is a form of self-help, intended to improve the living conditions of a group of individuals by establishing private relations of mutual help and support exclusively for the members of this group. According to this definition, we don't see any justification for rendering public support to collaborative housing initiatives. A further counter-argument lies in the fact that public support to collaborative housing initiatives would require the laying down of norms and standards of mutual help. Imposing such norms on everyday life would tend to destroy this life and does not seem to be acceptable. On the other hand, collaborative housing produces a common good by reducing public expenses for health or care institutions and should thus stimulate public interest in this form of living. In this view, the provision of public assistance to collaborative housing initiatives in order to extend this life-style seems more reasonable than granting financial support to single projects, as is the concept in social housing.

Advising individuals or groups on collaborative housing issues is currently quite a



Example of collaborative housing in Hessen.

Source: <http://www.fgw-ev.de/index.php?id=189>

problem in Germany. Growing unemployment in academic professions, mainly in those related to social questions, results in large numbers of academics seeking to make a living in the counselling and advice services, but usually without having appropriate qualifications. Though numerous government initiatives are attempting to improve counselling qualifications, an effective way of doing so has not been found so far. This field is still something like a chaotic playground of rather dubious “professions”.

Much weight is put on financial and legal advice though problems in these fields are clearly not the crucial ones in establishing and running a collaborative housing project of the mutual help type. The main problem is the setting up of the project group, the communication between the members, a certain degree of reliability and commitment from the very beginning, etc. Very often it takes from a couple of years up to six or seven years, for a group to come to terms, to find out what they want and what they are prepared to do. The main reasons for delay are communication problems among the group members rather than financial or legal problems. Sometimes a group finds it very difficult to find an appropriate building site or building but even that very often seems to be a communication problem: Ideas about how and where to live are too different to be combined in one project.

Future tasks therefore are threefold:

- Firstly, communicating the necessity of this life-style to the public;
- Secondly, communicating the same to local authorities and pointing out that they will be gaining if they support collaborative housing in the way described; and
- Thirdly, developing a professional profile for consultants in the field of collaborative housing. ■

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# Social Change and Housing Demands – What Futures?



**Bertil Egerö** is an Associate Professor in Sociology at the University of Lund with special interest in the relation between demographic dynamics and development. He has many years worked as an advisor to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency on related issues, as well as on development impacts of HIV/Aids in African countries. Egerö lives in the collective housing development Slottet in Lund and is an activist in Cohousing NOW.

## Introduction – why we are gathered here

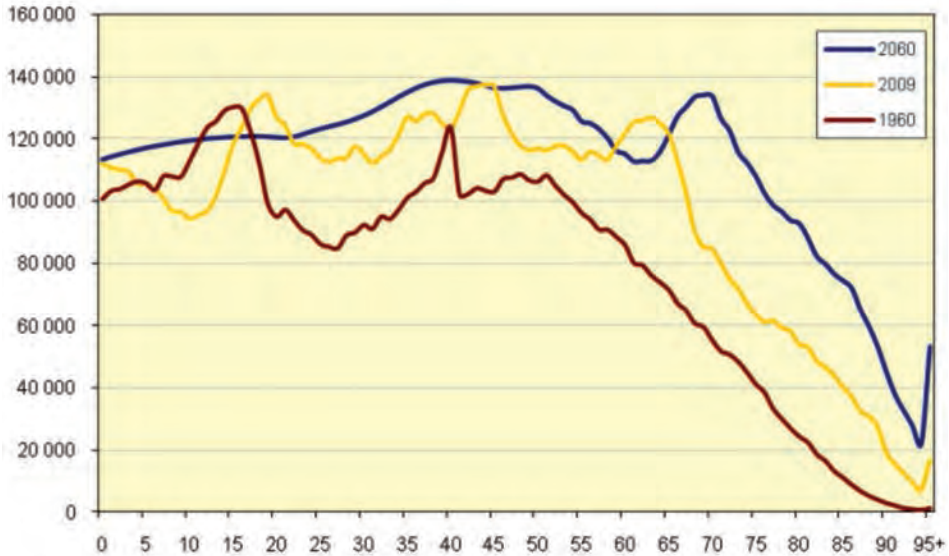
I am happy to have this chance to address this important conference. In our efforts in Sweden to revive public sector interest in cohousing, we badly need to learn from progress and setbacks experienced in other countries. I would like to see the conference as primarily a means to take stock of our achievements as an *embryonic social movement*.

This my characterisation of ourselves and the organisations we represent may not be shared by everyone in this conference. I propose it as a means to open for our consideration the question, “Who are we?” What is it that makes us join a movement that, I believe, by any standards is small, basically irrelevant to the mainstream life styles and housing preferences in the countries we represent?

It is clear that just by assembling here, we want something more than only a good way of living for ourselves. We would all like to have cohousing accepted in wider circles, see more people working for this alternative and get both public sector actors and housing companies interested in participating. To this end, we have to start with some reflections over who we are, not only in our own view but also in the views of others.

Keeping in mind the excellent historical presentations made by other speakers, I need to base my discussion of these issues on a brief return to our recent history. This will be followed by attempts to identify pertinent dimensions of our societies today and tomorrow, and the broader challenges facing us in the future. The trends I





The Swedish population according to age 1960, 2009 and a prognosis for 2060

identify can be supportive of demands for alternative housing forms, but they could equally provide the opposite influence on housing demands.

We are here not only to exchange and learn, but also to formulate joint guidelines for future action. I hope to contribute with a few thoughts in a concluding section.

### Looking back

My framework is that of advanced post-industrial societies. In terms of cohousing, we are all by and large the lucky inheritors of important initiatives taken during the last half a century or so. In the case of Sweden, although the politics of social engineering produced some collective houses already before World War II, it was the 1960s with its radical search for alternatives that held the seed to collective housing as we see it today. The 'green wave' led to rural communes with production as their material base. In the urban areas, collective living flourished, often short-lived and generally regarded as something for the wicked few, those who chose to place themselves at the side of the good society of the majority.

In 2000, a Swedish film by the name *Tillsammans* (available in English by the name *Together*), which focused on life in an urban collective of the 1970s, was shown around the country. In my – subjective – judgement, it displayed a good number of the stereotypes associated with these urban communes. Judging from the reaction of many people to the film, a wide majority of Swedes see these experiments as a funny historical parenthesis of no real interest for good citizens. However, I believe one can argue that the radicals of the 1960s opened for the collective house movement we see still today.



The author in the commune where he lived in the 1980s.



Advertisement for the film *Tillsammans* (Together) describing the bohemian life in a commune of the 1970s.

They are called the ‘baby boom generation’, the many children born towards the end of World War II and a few years thereafter. Members of this generation filled the ranks of the 1960s radical movements, and – not only in Sweden – later in life returned to define progressive agendas for the public sector. Among these were the concept of collective housing which resulted in a series of collective houses built in cooperation between public housing companies and interested households.

As they enter the period of retirement, the Swedish baby boom generation has now begun to take an interest in housing alternatives for seniors and elderly people. Some of them carry our organisation Kollektivhus NU on their shoulders. Others were part of formulating, during the 1990s, the concept of ‘*collective living during the second half of life*’ – similar to the earlier house forms except that there is a lower age limit that excludes minors and younger adults.

This brief review leads me to an important question: How far has the drive for cohousing been adopted by later generations, e.g. the children of the ‘baby boomers’? In Sweden, the picture is not entirely clear, but I see a risk that the bulk of the future production of collective house units will be designed for ‘the second half of life’, or even for retired people. The reasons are as follows.

### How today differs from the heydays of collective housing

The development that east Europe never had a chance to experience, the west European social welfare associated with the ideology and politics of social democracy, is currently undermined by a new type of politics, based on a neo-liberal ideology. With her excellent documentation in *The Shock doctrine*, Naomi Klein has helped us to understand the fundamental redirection of politics spreading over the world since

the 1970s. Privatisation and profits are catchwords of this ideology, emphasis on individualist life styles and trend influenced consumption part of the strategies. *The Information Age trilogy* by Manuel Castells analyses parallel trends, of which the various moves to strengthen control of media are perhaps the most important for our purposes.

What this means is that the children of the baby boom generation find themselves in a very different ideological and political environment from that of their parents. Their view of the role of the state, and of what it means to be ‘radical’ or ‘progressive’, indeed of what is possible, should bear few similarities.

The era of the welfare societies was a period where eradication of poverty was part of the agenda. Today, *poverty* is there and accentuated by the growing polarisation between rich and poor. Another dimension of this process is the growing *social exclusion* linked to unemployment and poverty. The neo-liberal type politics dominating Europe today offers few good measures to deal with this process.

Our societies, and our politics, are affected by another and more fundamental process that by and large covers the whole of Europe. It may be called the ‘*ageing process*’. It consists of two components: Firstly, that people on average live longer than before; secondly that those in reproductive ages have fewer children than before. As a result, the distribution of people over age groups is gradually tipping over in favour of ‘the second half of live’ (see table and diagram).

**Table: Swedish household types 1960 – 2008, from two different sources\*, per cent**  
**Census data Special surveys**

Household type	1960	1975	1990	1991	2008
Single adult	20.2	29.9	39.6	44.1	44.2
Couple without children	n.a.	31.1	30.2	24.7	25.9
Others without children	n.a.	7.7	6.2	1.6	n.a.
<b>Sum [60.7]</b>	<b>68.7</b>	<b>76.0</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>70.1</b>	
Single with child(ren)	n.a.	3.5	3.9	5.1	5.2
Couple with child(ren)	n.a.	28.0	20.5	22.4	19.6
<b>Sum [39.3]</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>24.8</b>	
Unspecified	2.1	5.1			
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Sources: Censuses 1960–1990; Statistics Sweden household surveys etc. NB the latter are not necessarily internally comparable. According to data in 2008, of the two categories “without children” 35 - 40% are households in ages of retirement (65+). n.a. = not available

### The challenges of today

This process offers challenges to societies that even neo-liberal governments have difficulties to ignore. *Firstly*, a growing absolute number of old people need care and security, social support and creation of meaning. In the old days the extended family

### **A new ageing boom**

In all of Western Europe, the proportion of older people is since many years increasing. In Sweden, the expansion of the group 65 years or older was temporarily revised during the 1990s. A new expansion has been started, expected to last until the early 2030s. It reflects the entry in retirement of the big birth cohorts of the 1940s and the latter part of the 1960s.

Older people will over time make up a distinctly greater proportion of the population. Around 2030, those 65 years or older are expected to make up one quarter of the national population, a drastic change compared to today's 17%.

*Source Statistics Sweden 2010*

could be expected to provide much of the needed support. Today, the trend towards zero, one or at the most two children in the family means that the 'extended family' literally is melting away.

*Secondly*, this same trend means that there will be an increasing shortage of people in working ages, not least in the sector of social care for the old people. Accompanied by protests from rightwing movements, labour market needs are bound to press for growing immigration, making "New Swedes" – or Danes or Norwegians – an increasingly important segment of our population. Many have already come from considerably poorer countries, to work with taking care of the elderly in the rich countries.

Care and support are defined areas of responsibility for the public sector. The answers offered are increasingly directed towards creating house forms suited for elderly in need of daily care. The innovative thinking displayed does however not, in my understanding, go beyond the conventional framework we may call 'institution-thinking'. Although facilities are created to enable the dwellers to have some social life inside the house, all care and support is seen to remain in the hands of social sector employees.

I recently shared some thoughts on this with a colleague from the local public housing company *Landskronahem*. He related the fact that most of the daily care needs of old people is provided in informal ways by 'civil society'. Still, he said, the public sector at large seems unable to incorporate this fact in its own planning. A participatory approach of cooperation with and facilitation for de facto care givers is still far away.

Landskrona is a small town in Scania trying to recover from the closing down of the ship building industry in Sweden. Today, it houses considerable numbers of non-European immigrants. Landskronahem has to respond to their needs as well. In response to indications of a culture of care of one's own kin in some of these communities, Landskronahem builds multi-flat houses with a mixture of small and large flats on the same landing – smaller for the old, larger for the family of a son or daughter.



Cultivation in the cohousing development of Prästgårdshagen in Stockholm in 1986.

In societies characterised by ever widening polarisation, social exclusion at one end and gated communities at the other, our aspirations for a growing market of decent collective houses are up to some difficulties. My contacts with Landskronahem stimulated the question whether we should try to open links to immigrant communities in our efforts to spread collective living to wider circles.

### **The current future is far from what it ought to be<sup>1</sup> –**

– which makes it all the more important that we relate to the complexities of the future as we understand it today.

My perception of our movement for collective living is of course coloured by our experiences in Sweden. Here it would seem right to characterise this movement as an expression of the *ideas* of a small segment of a relatively affluent society. The task we have set ourselves is to get a wider acceptance of ‘*ideas-based*’ cohousing in the housing market.

At the same time, we are increasingly reminded that our relative affluence is under threat. *Unsustainability* is a fundamental trait of the societies we have created, best reflected in the prospect of irreversibly rising energy prices – the *peak oil* issue of the beginning of the end of all global oil resources. *When* oil prices will start rising in earnest is debatable, not *that* they will go up sharply. This, probably much more than the more subtle climate change, is what will move our societies in the direction of no-growth or even de-growth. This means a return to low-consumption days, when the use-value of products gave them a longer life span, and when the Swedish word ‘hushålla’ – would ‘economize’ be the best translation? – was met with respect.<sup>2</sup>

This prospect leads me to suggest that we should begin to talk in terms of ‘*needs-based*’ cohousing. We could already now develop an agenda of work and persuasion based on the growing awareness that politics needs to give priority to ‘*economizing*’ in housing and living as much as in other areas of consumption.

<sup>1</sup> Expression borrowed from Beckman (1980).

<sup>2</sup> Cfr LETS; Local Exchange and Trading System, money-free exchange in goods and services, started in Vancouver Island in the 80s and replicated in several countries including Sweden (here called BYTS). Such interaction could suit collective houses.

‘Needs-based’ is a concept that can also be applied to the needs of individual households. A good case is that of single parent households, where both child(ren) and parent would fare much better in the context of a collective house. We should also reflect on whether and how collective living could meet the needs of un- or underemployed; as you all know financial crisis like the one started in 2008 always leave a considerable number of people at the roadside. The *peak oil* prospect of adjusting economies to rising energy prices is – like any adaptation towards lower or even zero growth – bound to produce more unemployment.

I have already discussed the prospects of growing immigration to Europe from other countries, other cultures. The spokesman from Landskronahem had met with immigrants from different countries, with housing experiences of relevance to our agenda. He mentioned cases of collective village organisation in Tito’s Yugoslavia as a case in point. Customary solutions to accommodate the needs of extended family units should be another. To underline this dimension, we might to the “ideas-based” and “needs-based” add a third category: “*customs-based*” collective arrangements.

In preparing my conference paper, I made a brief search for evidence on this aspect in current Swedish migration research, but failed. We might like to add it to that agenda of research that should be part of strengthening our organisation.

## **Our challenges**

For an *embryonic social movement* to grow in size and importance, it needs to see itself and develop its image such that it is seen by others – those who depend on internet information, the mainstream media, actors in the housing market. Its messages need to fit into the frameworks of thought of people, the social realities they have constructed.

Our modern Swedish history knows of major social movements that appeared during the era of major transition from agrarian to industrial society: among them the workers’ movement and the temperance movement. None of the more recent movements such as the environmental and the solidarity movements has had a corresponding impact on our society. Nevertheless, non-parliamentarian organisation for change is today growing to increasing importance, at the cost of vitality of the political parties themselves.

And who are we – a movement for *alternative housing* for the few or a movement lobbying for an *excellent house form for the many*? To my mind there is no doubt that Kollektivhus NU aims for the latter. And this carries the double challenge of becoming accepted as respectable social beings, while not sacrificing the very basis of our project, *participation and shared responsibility*.

The ‘ageing’ process is today a key factor behind public interest in other house forms for older people. It might be tempting to jump on this bandwagon, and spend more of our efforts in the direction of attracting the growing numbers of senior people to some form of shared living. However, the challenges of economic



adjustments to rising energy costs etc. which I have mentioned concern all of us, not just those who are older. Collective living is something some of us experience as young – as children in a collective house, as students in “student corridors” or other cheap forms of cohousing. The spread of our movement is vitally dependent on those who will soon be in decision-making positions in society. If we fail to reach them, the movement will die with ourselves.

As a young social scientist I read with great enthusiasm a book by the name “The diffusion of innovations”. It taught me a lot about how society is functioning and the ways we adopt or reject new things or new thoughts. Since then, a growing stream of research has produced ever new insights into the social processes of innovations and change.

Our ideas about cohousing are certainly in no way new. Still they are in fundamental ways contrary to where post-industrial neo-liberal influences are moving our societies. In that sense we are the marginal people, those deviating. We need to become the respected innovators, the pioneers. ■

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# Why Do We Discuss Cohousing in Sweden in 2010?



**Eva Sandstedt** is a Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Housing and Urban Research at the Uppsala University. Her research focuses on the relationship between household structure, urban planning and social change, including risk and environmental issues such as the sick building syndrome. Earlier she studied single person households and their housing situation. Today she studies housing for the 'second half of life'. (photo: Sara Igglund).

**T**alking about cohousing in a Swedish intellectual setting or in an ordinary conversation is not self-evident or easy today. On the contrary, it may be rather difficult, because many people will not understand what you are talking about. For the most part, they have no idea about cohousing or they may have pre-existing ideas about what it is. These images emanate from memories of the 1970s, with its communes, emancipation, free sex, and liberated living. Or the ideas may come from sensational mass media reports about mismanagement in housing for the elderly.

You often meet a blank face when you excitedly tell others about the good life you share in collaborative housing. You can also get answers like the following: "Oh! I would never in my life want to live in a building like that!!" And if you are talking about cohousing together with people in the second half of life, the answer may very well be: "Never, never. When I get old I don't want old people around me. I don't just want to see old people. I want to see young people, and I want to live near and see children. Not old people!"

That is the negative side of the Swedish attitude towards cohousing. The positive side you encounter in new Swedish policies for the elderly and in the discussion that has just begun on new ways to live in a world with a large proportion of elderly people.

In Sweden, it would be good if we could publicly discuss alternative ways of living in relation to the idea of sustainable development, but my experience here is that this is not a matter of public interest at present. Why is this the case? My explanation is

that the idea of alternative living and collaborative housing is not in line with the current developmental modernization doctrine. With a modernistic approach to environmental problems, it is thought that it is only through technical advancements that we can attain a sustainable society. In this way, we don't have to question our way of life – how we form our households and housing. That seems to continue to be a private issue and a cultural given.

**Cultural living patterns in Sweden today**

In Sweden, it is popular to live in a detached or semi-detached suburban house, especially among families with children, but also among older people. Around 75 per cent of Swedish families prefer this way of living. If we look at the living pattern among people of different ages, we find that this type of housing is most common among married and cohabiting people up to sixty years of age (see the statistical diagram below), with a peak of up to over 80 per cent among cohabiting 60 to 65-year-olds. The downward shift thereafter indicates that some people begin to leave their houses for condominiums and rented apartments, but not as many as one might expect. It has become even more popular in Sweden to own houses at higher ages, in

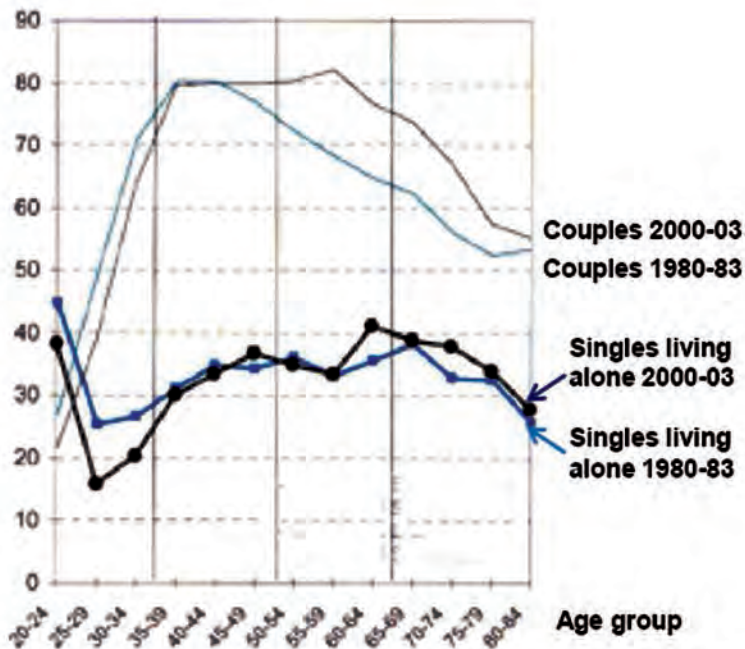


Diagram showing frequency (in per cent) of couples and single person households of different ages living in privately owned houses. Married and unmarried couples live in houses of their own to a much larger extent than single persons. Regional and class differences have been held constant. Source: SCB (2006, p.236) Statistics Sweden, Living Conditions of the elderly: Work, economy, health and social networks 1980–2003.

recent years. Almost half of the very old, over 80 years of age, still live in their own houses. On the other hand, if we look at those living in rented apartments, we find that it is most common among single households among the old. Condominiums are equally represented in both household categories among the old.

In Sweden, it is possible for people in need to receive home care services from social welfare staff if they have great problems managing everyday life chores. Currently, approximately 10 per cent of people 65 years and older receive such care at home a certain number of hours per week. For persons who need permanent care 24 hours a day, it is possible to move from home to so-called frail care housing. Today, we find that 6 per cent of people 65 years or older live in such housing.

The fact is that most Swedish elderly people, 94 per cent of those over 65 years, live in houses on the ordinary housing market and are homeowners. We are then left with an image of older Swedes being prosperous and healthy, rather than poor and ailing.

“There are approximately 1.6 million people aged 65 years and over in Sweden today. Of these, 1.5 million live in ordinary housing, which includes the more than 30.000 people living in various kinds of flats arranged for senior housing. Less than 0.1 million live in special care housing. In the age range 65-79 years, 67 per cent of men and 51 per cent of women live in their own home. At the age of 80, half of the men and just over one third of the women still live in detached or semi-detached houses.” (SOU 2008:113 p. 209-210.)

Thus on the general housing market, there are different kinds of housing for seniors, but these represent only a very small proportion of the whole housing stock and relatively few of the old people. However, the interesting fact here is that senior housing has become relatively popular in Sweden. Over the decade up to 2010, the number of people living in various kinds of senior housing has increased by around 300 per cent. This indicates that, despite the fact that so many older people live in their own houses, there is a growing interest in alternative forms of housing.

So why are we discussing cohousing in the year 2010?

- The first reason is related to the demographic changes
- The second is the growing interest in senior housing
- The third is the idea of a new way of living beyond the nuclear family, and an awakening of a kind of “civic morality” related to our late-modern society.

### **The meaning of the concept of cohousing in late-modern society**

The meaning of the concept of cohousing has changed over time. In the 19th century it was seen by some industrialists and utopian socialists as a way to create better living

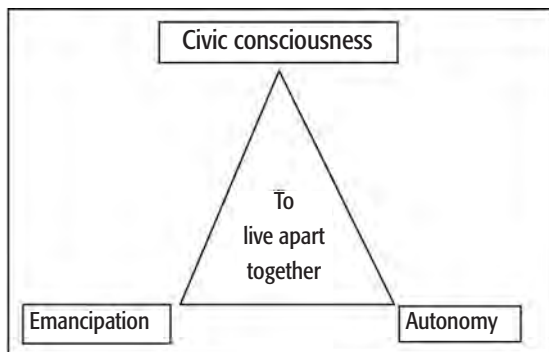
conditions for the workers. In the 1930s, the Swedish politician Alva Myrdal saw it as a way to rationalize housework in order to enable Swedish women to leave their homes and join the labour market. When cohousing became an issue again in the 1960s and 70s, women's emancipation was part of the political feminist agenda, but now the claim was: "*both work and children*". Cohousing could be a way for women to manage *both* work and everyday chores. Again, today in the year 2010, the idea of cohousing is attracting growing interest, but for whom and why?

One way to interpret the idea today is to express its main dimensions in modern language. As formulated by a journalist: To live in collaborative housing is "to live apart together". It can be seen as an expression of a norm of privacy in the social relations within a circle of residents. People live in different apartments and have the same respect for each other's private life as they would in society at large. The "public" or semi-private area is for everyone and is also paid for by all: the common dining room, kitchen, library, computer room, assembly room, and so forth. There one is free to meet others living in the complex without making special arrangements. There is an intricate balance between how to behave in the private and the public areas in collaborative housing. What is different compared with ordinary living is the physical closeness and semi-private relations during the common meals and activities.

Emancipation, autonomy and civic consciousness are the three very important dimensions or characteristics of the cohousing idea today. Seen in relation to Swedish cultural conditions, the first dimension is that of emancipation – but whose emancipation is associated to cohousing today and why? Earlier in modern society it was women's emancipation from patriarchy, and this still holds, but not as unambiguously as before. Today there is a wish to get more men to accept living in cohousing units. In Sweden many women also have a dream of being relieved of the heavy burden of combining work and competition on the labour market with the running of family and home, caring for old parents, commuting, and so on. In such a situation, cohousing can be seen as a more functional and sociable way of life.

The married woman and the dependence of the family household on her has been

the focus of the historical debate on cohousing, but we may find that this way of living is also of great value for others, such as small households with single mothers, or women and men living alone. Today it is also clear that people in the second



Today the abstract idea of cohousing can be visualised in this way.



Are we always two in the second half of life?? No, we're often single and live alone!

half of life, some men and more women, are interested in another way to live, rather than in ordinary houses and apartments. Perhaps it is a manifestation of a silent revolution against elderly people's outsider position in society, with lost societal functions, ageism (social discrimination), and loneliness.

Cohousing is a way to live together with others, but it can also be a way to win individual autonomy, and this is the second dimension. Within collaborative housing, it is possible to manage oneself in another way than in ordinary living. This form of living offers possibilities of avoiding becoming dependent on social care staff, one's own children, or a spouse for one's daily needs, as well as of freeing oneself from such feelings of emptiness as may occur in ordinary apartments and neighbourhoods. Cohousing can be a way to gain wider psychological, social and also economic autonomy.

The third dimension is what I would call civic consciousness, and is related to the kind of solidarity that develops in cohousing units beyond family and kinship. It bears a relation to Tönnies' (1887) famous conceptualization of "Gemeinschaft" (solidarity related to similarities such as kinship), and "Gesellschaft" (solidarity built on formal relations such as in a workplace), but is a broader concept of solidarity. To have civic consciousness is to feel responsibility beyond oneself and one's family and circles of friends, to have a feeling for the whole society and for society as a whole – for the generalized others. This means to have social trust and a positive view of society and to be aware of and to have respect for social rights and duties. This perspective on solidarity extends beyond collaborative housing itself. It is stimulated by the environmental issues that we realize are global and not local, by the shrinking space-time structure, by a focus on NOW; when here and there, now and then have lost their spatial and temporal distance. With influences from Asian thinking, anti-dualistic approaches are becoming more obvious in the West and holistic thinking is beginning to be perceived as visible and desirable.

Cohousing is an interesting form of living that actualizes a lot of new ideas, but at the same time it is a practical everyday life, with many interactions, attitudes, norms,



conflicts and required skills and knowledge. It is an exciting idea that has the potential to challenge the prevailing norms in our consumption society. ■

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# Collective Housing and Well-being



**Margrethe Kähler** is a lawyer and the Director of the Danish Ældre Sagen, an association working for active and meaningful life also for elderly people. With its 460,000 members in 214 local committees Ældre Sagen has become a powerful actor in Danish society. In year 2004 Kähler published the book *Bofællesskab - fra drøm til virkelighed* ('Cohousing from dream to reality'), giving practical advice about legal, economic, social and other issues related to collaborative housing.

## Don't judge people by their age

If we are lucky, we have 30 – perhaps even more than 30 – years to live after leaving the labour market. No more alarm clocks, competition and power struggles. Now we have freedom to practice our human musicality and get a grip on what is really important, has amenity value, or is simply practical and safe – or beautiful.

## Attractive

Age has become less important for people's identity. Aging is no longer a clock ticking mechanically towards decay and sickness. After crossing the magic threshold of 60 years, most people will discover that they can do more or less the same as before – even though they may have slightly less spare capacity. But what does that matter if you still have a love of life, reject the idea of becoming grey and invisible, and embrace the idea of becoming attractive?

## New image of the elderly

New elderly people – senior citizens – want to conquer the stereotype image of old people. They want to “*remain middle-aged to the very end*”. They do not want to accept the loss of status inherent in our youth culture. The new elderly want to decide for themselves. They are the generation who started the women's lib movement, experimented with their lifestyles, travelled and got an education. They are not going to give all that up, just because they turn 50. They want to live in an age-integrated society with life, energy and creative hassle.

## **New strategies**

The new elderly do not want to live behind closed doors in quiet despair at all the enthusiasm and energy they possess, but which they will often have to resign to keep to themselves. They are dreaming of a type of residence where they have their private rooms and gradual transition to the community. They seek a community where they can be together – and remain themselves.

### **A picture of the new elderly – in brief:**

- Polarisation 80/20 in economy and health
- Quantum leap in mindset
- Granny wants to get married – many divorces and new marriages
- Only one duvet in bed – many single households
- Part-time single: living apart together
- Spiteful optimism as a motto
- No to taboos about being old
- Couch potato – only now and then
- Housing for all ages: living with all generations and with universal design
- Multiplicity – take a look at Malmö, Västra Hamnen

### **Collective housing – from dream to reality**

Collective housing and senior-citizen housing with common rooms are a brilliant inventions as far as creating a good life in old age is concerned. They provide security and proximity to other people. You can escape the curse of loneliness and at the same time maintain your self-respect and your integrity.

You can meet people like yourself and get stimulation, acknowledgement and structure to your day, essential ingredients for a good life. In collective housing you will also avoid a lot of boring hassle, so that you can keep up your spirits and your energy.

Although collective housing is not actually a branch of paradise, it's a damned good idea, to quote the Danish anthropologist, Max Pedersen.

The physical structure of collective housing with centrally placed common areas encourages spontaneous meetings. They do not call for advance energy or excess energy. They only provide surprise energy, pleasant energy, irritation energy – in short: life.

The essence of collective housing is something to be together in and something to be together about. Collective housing can be established in all types of residences, in both new and existing residential properties.

### **Collective housing or “olle-kolle”**

*Collective housing* is a number of independent residences, each with its own kitchen and bathroom, one or more common rooms, possibly also shared external areas.

An “*olle-kolle*” is normally collective housing for the elderly and in spite of the name it is not a commune.

In a *commune*, the residents share a kitchen and possibly also a bathroom.

### **How many people live in collective housing in Denmark?**

- About 350 collective housing communities for senior citizens have 5-6 000 residents
- The smallest examples of collective housing have 5 units, and the largest 156.
- Most have between 15 and 30 residences around a common house.
- About 140 collective housing communities exist, where children, young people and elderly people are living together.

### **Few people do it, but more people want to live in cohousing communities**

Only one per cent of Danish people of 50+ live in collective housing, but many would like to. Sense of community is the key word: good neighbours, being able to support and help each other and arrange activities together are the attractive aspects. In our latest residence survey from 2007, between 15 and 20 per cent said they would like to move into collective housing or senior-citizen houses – a large collective housing unit in towns. Slightly more women than men want to move into collective housing. The majority prefer mixed-age collective housing.

### **Brand new survey**

In 1999, the non-profit housing association Lejerbo built Asbo in the municipality of Odsherred together with the future residents – a collective housing unit for senior citizens. The 23 residents are between 60 and 90 years old. The residents are all happy with their lives in Asbo, and their well-being is obvious from their perception of their own health, which is, in fact, better than their own assessment in 1999. Today, just over half of the residents are active in associations. Two to four times each week, half of them attend evening classes or participate in sports or exercise. They feel safe and say for example, “Here you will never lie for three days with your curtains drawn without somebody coming to see if you are OK”.

Living in Asbo is a good cure for loneliness and the need for help with the small things:

- Before moving in, 85% said that they often felt lonely. In 2009 the figure was only 10%.
- Before moving in, 70% often needed help for small repair jobs, shopping, etc. In 2009, none.

## Together – and yourself

The residents in collective housing have chosen not to live in anticipation of something else. They do not need to believe that everything will be better some day. They say, “Things do not happen – we make them happen”.

### Your memo

Before moving into collective housing, it is a good idea to clarify your own motives and the expectations you have of a collective housing unit.

- ✓ Do not choose collective housing in order to avoid loneliness.
- ✓ You need to have energy to work for the community.
- ✓ Everybody will still have their own residence and their own problems.
- ✓ You will rarely get help, just because you need it. You will have to reach out and ask for it.
- ✓ If you give very high priority to your personal freedom, it is a bad idea to live too close to other people.

### Ask yourself:

- ✓ Do I want to share my spare time with other people?
- ✓ Am I willing to make an effort for the community, and am I able to draw the line?
- ✓ Do I want to help neighbours who have problems?
- ✓ Can I manage to be open, when I am feeling sad?

## Stamina and courage

Moving into collective housing is a task and a challenge. Statutes and house rules are necessary, but they do not improve our cooperative skills, and they cannot prevent all conflicts. Living in collective housing requires mental stamina and requires you to be extrovert. You will get practice in a sense of community, which is also practice in expressing your opinion or drawing the line towards the other residents without being cold. You need a bit of warm-hearted rawness. Otherwise, you may find that your limits – physical as well as mental – will be crossed. This was often the case in the old 1968 communes, with shared finances, sex and refrigerators.

Some collective housing units for senior citizens today have almost gone to the opposite extreme with lots of discretion and caution in the relations between the residents. Perhaps there is a need for a new balance between the private and the common aspects of senior collective housing units?

### **Happy activities**

There should be some everyday rituals, which will unite the residents – both couples and singles – something to look forward to each week. For example: on Thursdays, we meet in the common room to sing or do gymnastics. Every third Sunday we have dinner together. Residents bring a dish each or join together in cooking teams to enjoy the simple and sensuous joys of cooking. We buy cooking utensils like those in restaurant kitchens, so that it is easy to cook for many people.

### **Bricks are not enough**

A practical community – without ideological headlines like the old 1968 communes – creates life so that getting old will be more fun. There should be something to unite about and some security aspects, which will make you feel good.

### **Single women's club**

Without one, a split may occur when the pioneering atmosphere fades out after the first six months. Couples will mingle with other couples, and single people will be left in each other's company, unless they have lots of stamina and are able also to participate when a group of people meet in the common areas – outside or indoors.

### **The wear and tear of old age**

People in collective housing do not want to be a worry to their children when the problems of old age become more serious. The couples feel confident because the surviving spouse will have a good place to live.

### **Gardens of childhood**

Security is contrary to the spirit of the times, which requires change and dynamics, ability to handle change, and flexibility, both at work and at home. Insecurity is part of life in today's society. The residents in collective housing create security by doing away with unnecessary worries. It is like the safe gardens of our childhood where we accumulated energy behind the fence so that we could later venture into the world.

### **Diversity in age and lifestyles**

- In age-integrated cohousing, focus is on children and their parents.
- In senior cohousing, the social energy can decline.
- There can be too much discretion and politeness.

A very good compromise is the ecological housing collective, Munksøgård, in Denmark near Roskilde, where there are clusters for each generation and a common house to dine in (see below).



Here is another good model for a mixed-age collective housing unit:

- 1/3 elderly people from 60 years and up who would like to live with younger generations.
- 1/3 young, elderly people between 45 and 60 years, whose children have left home or will soon do so.
- 1/3 young families with children. Perhaps the grandparents are living far away, and the young people would like contact with people who are a bit older than their usual friends.

The idea with both models is, that it is healthy to live in a community where not everybody is a mirror of yourself. It is also a good way of “keeping the residents young” so that the social energy will not leave the collective housing unit when the residents become older.

### **Beauty in old age**

Today, most collective housing units are similar: low, terraced houses, small front gardens, with a centrally situated common house. This type of housing is close to the heart of Danes.

It is an obvious solution for architects, local authorities, housing companies and private investors to use the new building concepts and types of housing to the benefit of the collective housing associations. Such collective housing covers more than just the basic needs.

One can develop housing that has a clean and light physical expression or takes inspiration from the imagination and sense of quality of the hippie culture, as it is for example expressed in Amsterdam in new and old buildings and in buildings to fill the gaps between the old houses in the city. It can be developed in the abundantly decorated merchants’ houses along the canals and in the luxurious and imaginative modern buildings with stylish details following a strict concept.

Think also of Gaudi’s houses in Barcelona and Hundertwasser’s houses in Vienna and “The house-serpent” in Copenhagen. The sweeping shapes, the saturated colours, the unrestrained ideas are a source of pure joy. Only a few details – inspired by these buildings – may bring new life to our new collective housing.

PHOTO: REALEA, JACOB BEKKER-HANSEN.



“House-serpent”, Bispebjerg Bakke, Copenhagen.

### **Individual and common**

Most collective housing complexes for senior citizens

consist of forward-looking units with their own kitchen and bathroom, and share common rooms and surrounding areas. Typically, the residents will give up part of their own housing area to the common areas in order to reduce construction costs.

### **Option or necessity**

In collective housing, eating together is an option, as the individual residences have their own kitchen. In a commune, joint cooking and eating is a necessity, because the individual residences do not have their own kitchens.

### **More men and couples**

At the beginning, women were the ones who moved into collective housing for senior citizens. They were tired of having only themselves and their TV sets to say good night to. In new collective housing for senior citizens, single men account for about 10%, single women for about 30%, and couples for about 60% of the residents.

### **Still younger**

In recent years, the average age has fallen from 68 years when the residents moved in to 62 years. An increasing percentage is still on the labour market.

### **Location**

Most collective housing for senior citizens is situated in small and medium-sized provincial towns in the area between town and country. Most of them are situated in Jutland, then on Funen and Zealand, with one third of the collective housing units between them. So far there are few of them in the large cities – especially Copenhagen where there are fewer building sites for sale and at much higher prices than outside the capital.

### **Low, terraced houses**

Most new collective housing units are terraced or cluster houses built around a common area where the common house is centrally positioned. Some have small front gardens as a transition between the private and the common areas. Many have their own back door and a terrace behind the house where they can be alone, which is absolutely necessary.

### **Life between the houses**

In many new cohousing communities, the area between the houses is open with grass and low hedges. But between the buildings you can benefit from sitting or lying sheltered from the wind, in the shade of trees, under parasols, hidden behind a bush, on a bench with your back to the wall. You are protected, but have a good view over the area.

## Realists

Some of the new collective housing developments for senior citizens recognise that the future will bring old age and have established clinics for health staff – for example a district nurse, physiotherapist and a doctor – close to the common rooms.

## Professional user management

The difference has become smaller between *self-established* collective housing, where a group of committed and dedicated people plan and manage the construction work in cooperation with an architect from the first ideas to the completed buildings, and *prearranged* collective housing, where a professional team of advisers or a non-profit housing association take the initiative of building user-managed collective housing. About two thirds of all new collective housing is prearranged.

An advantage of professionalization is that the establishment stage is shorter. Whereas previously, the residents had to wait 4-5 years before they could move in, the building stage can now be completed in 1-3 years. It takes longest when the future residents are involved in all stages of the construction work.

## Munksøgård – organic collective housing

In the 1960s, detached houses spread like carpets throughout Denmark, but now the wish to live close together and in multi-storey houses has returned in the cities, leading to new possibilities for collective housing in the cities. There are as yet few collective residences in multi-storey buildings, but this is a strong wish among the elderly in cities – both in existing properties and in new buildings. Luckily it is possible in many cases. There are a number of new collective residences in multi-storey buildings in and around Copenhagen.

## From low, terraced houses to multi-storey residences

Collective housing in a large, multi-storey building can afford to have more common facilities, as many people will share the bill. For example, there may be a café, workshop, exercise bike, rowing machine, punch bag, bowling alley, etc. More and more housing associations, building companies and private pension funds build new multi-storey collective housing or establish such units in existing properties.

In 1995 a group of people in Copenhagen decided to create an organic collective housing development in the country. The motive was a longing for the village, the sense of community, and nature. In May 2000, the topping-out ceremony was held after lots of meetings, negotiations among themselves, with technical advisors, contractors, politicians and public officials.

The collective housing development consists of 20 owner-occupied flats, 20 cooperative flats and 60 rented flats. All the buildings are made of wood and painted black with red roofs. They now form the framework for the lives of 250 residents at Trekroner Station near Roskilde – children, young people, middle-aged people and



Munksøgård in winter snow.

elderly people.

In the senior group you have to be 50 years or older and have no children living at home. The flats are rented. They are occupied by four couples and 16 single people, seven men and 17 women. Most of them are in their late 60s.

### Three groups of developers

One group of developers consisted of the future residents who wanted to live in owner-occupied residences, the second group included those who wanted to live in cooperative residences, and the third group included those who wanted to live in ordinary rented accommodation.

The three groups of developers have established a joint heating plant and sewage system that has a mini biological cleaning plant with sand filters and a septic tank with a composting plant, and the development has its own telephone exchange.

### Toxic substances banned

Use of any toxic substances is banned – hair dye, chlorine, pressurized creosoted wood, pesticides, paint containing pesticides, etc. Everybody has separation toilets from which urine is collected, cleaned and stored for nine months, after which it is spread as fertilizer in the fields. Rain water is collected and reused. When there is heavy rain, the excess water runs into a small buffer lake.

### Organic or pesticide milk

The collective housing units have signed a leasehold agreement with the local authorities in Roskilde to enable them to cultivate the land according to organic principles. A resident says, “Danish farming used to be organic. Only now have we started distinguishing between organic and ordinary farming. I distinguish between organic milk and pesticide milk – that makes you think, doesn’t it!”

### The Munksøgård Governing Body

Each group sends two delegates to the Governing Body – the Munksøgård Governing Body – which is in charge of the common facilities: heating plant, sewage system, joint telephone system, common house, etc.

### **New residents**

New residents will have at least one interview with the residents in the section they want to live in, and they often participate in a working weekend before both parties make a decision.

For the owner-occupied residences, the final decision lies with the seller and the buyer. But also here there will be talks between a new buyer and the other residents and participation in a working weekend, during which the parties can get to know each other.

### **Car-sharing association**

There is a car-sharing association with 100 members and 8 cars. The cars are parked at a special area at the entrance to the housing area. They do not have to be collected some distance from the residential area, as is often the case when people share cars.

### **Common house**

Each group of residents has its own common house. The owner-group has built its own house, spending one million DKK and lots of working weekends. It is built of bales of straw and plastered and lime washed in a soft, blue colour. The roof is covered in common mussel shells from Limfjordskompagniet placed in a plastic substance. Below the floor tiles, mussel shells are used as insulation. Inside, light, massive debarked wooden beams from the forests at Svanholm Gods are decorative supports between floor and roof. The walls are coated with unglazed bricks.

The common house has a well-equipped industrial kitchen where fruits and vegetables from the large garden are prepared. There is a technical room for shared IT, a telephone system, electricity and heating plant. The communal laundry with one tumble-dryer for the entire housing complex is also found in the common house, just like the guest rooms. The residents eat together each Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

### **Olines Gård**

In 2004, the Munksøgård residents bought the farm which is surrounded by the groups of housing units. It is an independent cooperative association in which most residents have bought a share. The Munksøgård association has subsidised the purchase financially. The farm is now called Olines Gård after a prominent woman who once lived on the farm.

The address of the collective housing unit of Munksøgaard is:  
Munksøgård, Himmelev, 4000 Roskilde. [www.munksoegaard.dk](http://www.munksoegaard.dk)

### **A senior-citizen house**

At DaneAge, we have a vision of a senior-citizen house in Copenhagen for people of 50+ with lots of resources who would like to live in future-oriented accommodation



Tietgenkollegiet, evening.

with accessible residences and a sense of community and joint activities in a senior house with 150–200 flats. There should be room for both single people and couples.

We want it to be a house you can be proud of, which may form the pattern for other housing estates throughout the country. It should be a house with a

sense of community, which gives social identity and has colours, imagination and is of a good quality.

A house, which is a sanctuary and a symbol of a period of life, should be filled with beauty, happiness and playing, a house with lots of quality of life for mature people. Such a house may turn a negative image of old people into something positive: People should not be judged by their age.

It would be a beautiful, friendly and functional building, expressing happiness and making the residents feel good. It should be a house with temper, joy and expression, but not an expensive house, which is too stately. Yet it should be a building made of new materials with varying sizes of flats and flexible, open rooms.

The walls should be moveable and wiring would be in a panel in the ceiling, so that the rooms can be changed according to requirements. The walls should be able to carry rails in the ceiling for a lift, if that becomes necessary.

It should be an intelligent house utilising the new possibilities offered by today's information technology, for example, with the possibility of remote-controlling doors and windows, and with emergency alarms. There should be a reception area at the centre of the house where you can get help with more or less anything – from practical tasks to a chat at the reception desk.

It should be a house built of finished quality components with prefabricated bathrooms, etc., and created in a partnership between the future residents, the developer, engineers and an artist.

## Why?

There are more single people in Copenhagen than in the rest of the country, within all age groups. There are, for example, more divorced people and more people who have never been married. DaneAge is often contacted by senior citizens wanting to move into future-oriented housing with a possibility of community and activities.



## **This is our vision:**

### **Residences for all times**

Each flat is durable with multi-functional design and layout, bridging the gap between disability and normal health.

### **Types of residences**

The building is to contain both owner-occupied cooperative flats and rented flats. This will make room for people who have little more than their old age pension and for people who can afford to pay a large deposit.

### **Living close together in multi-storey buildings**

The wish to live in multi-storey buildings has returned and attracts mainly senior citizens to the large city who like life around them and the idea that many people can share the bills and make the building a nice place to live, for example with a pool, spa, sun-bed, billiards, table tennis, carpentry workshop, workshop for needlework, library and internet café.

### **Cover**

It should be a lovely, peaceful, sheltered area in the city, with covering either around or in the middle of the building. For example, something like Norman Foster's glass canopy at the British Museum in London, which forms a city room and offers protection against wind, rain and snow, just like hedges and bushes.

### **Building site**

A building site of about 1 000 square metres should be made available by the local authorities in Copenhagen or the Ørestadsselskabet either on a long-term leasehold or sold to a fund at an affordable price, for example Fonden for Billige Boliger or Real Dania Fonden. ■

### **Literature**

Kähler, Margrethe: *Bofællesskab – fra drøm til virkelighed*, ÆldreSagen.

Kähler, Margrethe: *Alle tiders boliger – forbered din bolig til et langt liv*, ÆldreSagen.

These books are available from DaneAge by e-mail: [medlemssevice@aeldresagen.dk](mailto:medlemssevice@aeldresagen.dk) or by phone: +45 33 96 86 89

DaneAge has also established a nationwide list of collective housing and senior citizen residences with common rooms. You will find the list at the DaneAge website:

[www.aelresagen.dk](http://www.aelresagen.dk)

Click on [Rådgivning](#), then on [Bolig](#), on [Bofællesskaber](#), and finally on [Søg](#) to the right.

# Cohousing and Ecovillages: A personal Take on Their Similarities and Differences



**Graham Meltzer** is an architect, researcher and photographer living in the famous ecovillage Findhorn in Scotland. He is of Australian origin and worked earlier as a Lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology. His PhD thesis, 'Cohousing: Toward Social and Environmental Sustainability' (Meltzer, 2000), was based on a study of cohousing in five countries. His book, 'Sustainable Community: learning from the cohousing model' (Meltzer, 2005), focuses on the relationship between community and sustainability.

Intentional communities are groups of people living together with some shared purpose or intention and usually a vision of a better life for themselves and their children than they perceive is available conventionally. Types include: communes, cohousing, kibbutzim, and ecovillages. This paper offers personal impressions of intentional community life and culture informed by a lifetime of immersive participant observation. An abiding passion for communal living led me first to an Israeli kibbutz for two years in my 20s, then an Australian hippie commune for eight years in my 30s. Subsequently, I spent fifteen years researching and writing<sup>1</sup> about cohousing and most recently have lived for four years in the ecovillage at Findhorn. In this paper, I will focus only on cohousing and ecovillages as these types have been my most recent preoccupation.

The defining characteristics of *ecovillages* are said to be that they are human-scaled, full-featured, harmlessly integrated with nature, supportive of healthy human development and sustainable.<sup>1</sup> The equivalent attributes of cohousing are said to be: participatory process, neighbourhood design, extensive common facilities, resident management, a non-hierarchical structure and no shared economy.<sup>2</sup> The two lists are notably different; the former with an emphasis on ecological and sustainable human

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<sup>1</sup> Gilman and Gilman, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> McCamant and Durrett, 1994.

settlement, the later on housing design and group process. These same differences are encapsulated within the names themselves, ecovillage and cohousing. Well-known ecovillages include Findhorn (Scotland), Crystal Waters (Australia), Svanholm (Denmark), Seiben Linden (Germany), Damanhur (Italy), The Farm, Earthhaven and Twin Oaks (USA). Well-known cohousing communities include: Saettedammen and Trudslund (Denmark), Hilversum (The Netherlands), Stacken (Sweden), Windsong (Canada), Doyle St., N-Street and Swan's Market (USA).<sup>3</sup>

### **Similarities and differences between ecovillages and cohousing**

Can cohousing and ecovillages be usefully compared and contrasted? I believe so, but not without inviting controversy. So at risk of over generalising, causing offence or provoking attack, I would tentatively offer the following comparison:

- Ecovillages are predominantly rural, whilst cohousing is mostly urban.
- Ecovillages are generally larger and more heterogeneous (or aspire to be) whilst cohousing communities are smaller and more homogeneous.
- Ecovillages are generally more innovative and aspirational, cohousing communities more pragmatic and realistic.
- Ecovillages mostly exist on the periphery of mainstream society whilst cohousing communities are embedded within it.<sup>4</sup>
- Ecovillages focus on the environmental, cohousing on the social.
- Ecovillages are more explicitly 'green', cohousing more implicitly so.

A clear and incontrovertible difference between cohousing and ecovillages is that of scale. Cohousing communities typically comprise 20 to 40 households or 50 to 100 people.<sup>5</sup> Ecovillages generally start small but aspire to a size of between 150 and 500 individuals. As a consequence, the two models exhibit different levels of complexity and diversity. Cohousing communities are relatively homogeneous, comprising members with similar lifestyles and aspirations, which finds expression in a cohesive urban or suburban architectural typology.<sup>6</sup> Ecovillages are typically of lower density and polycentric, comprising distinct neighbourhoods of differing architectural character and with a population of diverse demographics and varying lifestyles.

Almost always, cohousing is fully purpose designed and built by architects and

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<sup>3</sup> These particular examples are best known not only for intrinsic reasons but because they have been most often featured in influential books and studies.

<sup>4</sup> This appears to be changing; ecovillages are becoming more accepted by authorities and the mainstream.

<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, larger cohousing projects but these tend to be subdivided into smaller neighbourhoods of more human scale.

<sup>6</sup> Again, this is a generalisation and relative. In fact, I have extensively written elsewhere of the diversity of and within cohousing communities.

developers for and with a known resident group.<sup>7</sup> The housing is consequently consistent in form and quality (see figure NN). Ecovillages develop more organically over longer periods of time. Many ecovillages are ongoing ‘works in progress’ that may never be deemed fully finished or complete. The form and quality of the housing may vary widely as conditions and circumstance (e.g. resource availability and the personnel involved) change over time. This, in turn, can lead to a schism (real or perceived) between ‘haves’ and ‘haves not’ that is less likely to occur in cohousing. Ecovillages can, however, offer opportunities for realising a genuinely low-cost, self-built housing that cohousing generally can not,<sup>8</sup> although many cohousing communities have achieved at least a component of relatively affordable housing via privately and publicly funded subsidies.

Cohousing, by the definition above, and in practice, is without a common economy. Inter-household income-sharing is very rare. Members generally own their own homes (or are paying them off) and generate their own private household incomes pursuing conventional vocations. They certainly share resources however, often extensively, with members taking an equitable financial stake in common facilities that may comprise up to 20 % of the total built space (although typically, it’s 12–15%). With most cohousing being located in cities, members’ disposable income flows freely into the pervasive mainstream economy. The economic structure of ecovillages is more variable. Some ecovillages are fully egalitarian<sup>9</sup> (e.g. Twin Oaks and Svanholm) whilst many more incorporate at least a subgroup with a common economy (e.g. Findhorn<sup>10</sup> and Seiben Linden). Others are as financially private as cohousing. The scale of many ecovillages enables significant income generation and expenditure within the bounds of the community. Findhorn, for example, has birthed many businesses that are sustained by residents and visitors to the community.<sup>11</sup> Findhorn, in fact, prints its own alternative currency, the Eko (equivalent to a pound Stirling and available in denominations of 20, 10, 5 and 1) which can only be spent within the community... and at the local pub!

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7 The exceptions are either refurbishments of existing buildings and neighbourhoods or what is known as retrofit cohousing where cohousing communities gel and develop within existing neighbourhoods.

8 One exception being Cascade Cohousing in Tasmania, Australia, where residents mostly built their own homes.

9 Income sharing – an egalitarian community (or subgroup) redistributes income equitably and/or according to need.

10 The Findhorn Foundation, established in 1972, has a staff of about 130 all of whom receive the same minimum wage for a 35 hr work week irrespective of their role.

11 For example: a shop, café, pottery, bed and breakfasts, a print shop, art centre and several consultancies.

## Cultural expression

The moments in which I have been most inspired by intentional communities have been those spent watching or participating in creative or cultural expression. For me, this is community at its best. At Findhorn, singing and dancing in a variety of forms are endemic to the culture; opportunities to participate occur several times a week. Festivities, rituals and celebrations mark the seasons (see figure). Evenings of performance and skits, ‘sharings’ we call them, occur regularly in our much loved Universal Hall,<sup>12</sup> which also offers a weekly cinema and a venue for touring professional groups – everything from the Scottish Symphony to contemporary dance troupes and stand ups. We now have a new Art Centre with gallery and studio space that offers a continuous programme of workshops and exhibitions. For better and worse, I never need leave home to access the arts. The abundance of cultural offerings at Findhorn is very much a result of its scale as a community of 500, which carries a critical mass of talent, enthusiasm, goodwill and resources.

I have been equally moved by the creative expression I have witnessed in cohousing. Perhaps because of its smaller scale, a certain intimacy, warmth and non-judgemental atmosphere usually prevail. At Windsong, for example, a cohousing community of 34 households in British Columbia, Canada, artistic expression, whether by professionals, keen amateurs or novices, is readily shared with the whole community. Musicians offer tutorial classes and wordsmiths promote creative writing. A stage in a corner of the common house dining room is a venue for dramatic and musical performances by young and old. “We enjoy being on stage for



Solstice celebration in the Universal Hall at Findhorn.

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<sup>12</sup> The Hall was built over a ten year period in the 70s and 80s, almost entirely with volunteer labour – an act of manifestation, inspiration, vision and purpose.



Community meeting at Findhorn.

each other,” said one member, “it produces treasured ‘Windsong moments’”.<sup>13</sup> When I was there in 2001, common meals were held six times per week, more often than usual in cohousing, not least because Norma, an accomplished pianist in her seventies, played in the background and led singing around the piano after a meal. Cohousing communities, like ecovillages, consciously build their relationships and identity through shared experience, festive celebration and creative expression.

### **Decision-making**

The difference in scale between cohousing and ecovillages profoundly affects decision-making and governance. At least, that is my experience. At Findhorn, we currently do not do well in this domain. At an organisational level, we are a much compartmentalised, even fractured, community. Ongoing and unresolved divisions and animosities between organisations and special interest groups reduce our effectiveness and limit our potential. This occurs despite our spiritual orientation and professed adherence to a desiderata-like document called the ‘Common Ground’.<sup>14</sup> The largest of these subgroups is the Findhorn Foundation, within which, methods of decision-making and governance are well-honed and run relatively smoothly with significant goodwill. And yet, because of its size, complexity and formal structure as a charitable Trust, decisions are often made in isolation or pass back and forth (often by email) between Trustees, Management, a Council of Coworkers, departments and individuals such that decision-making can be fraught and outcomes not well understood.

My experience of cohousing is quite different. In a community where it’s possible

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<sup>13</sup> Meltzer, 2005: 31.

<sup>14</sup> The *Common Ground* stipulates that, amongst other things, we strive for transparent, open and honest communication and seek to resolve differences directly with the people involved.



to get *everyone* to an important meeting, whose size is such that members are well known to each other and where face-to-face communication is the norm, then decision-making and governance occur more gracefully. Members grow to appreciate the potential of collaborative effort and their personal efficacy within a mini-democracy. Facilitation, consensual decision-making, and conflict resolution processes become normative.

### **Reduced material consumption**

My doctoral research into cohousing found that, whereas projects are generally initiated by a core group of committed visionaries with common environmental concerns, the majority of residents join for quite pragmatic reasons. Where they *are* motivated by idealism, it's more likely to be focused on building community through improving social relationships than saving the planet. And yet, in the act of moving from conventional homes into cohousing, individuals and families become significantly more environmentally aware and responsible. The data revealed that environmental literacy increased appreciably over time with members' recycling, as well as their energy and water conservation practices improving markedly (see figure 4). Importantly, I found a significant statistical correlation between the quality of members' social relationships and their capacity to apply pro-environmental attitudes in practice.

At risk of sounding deterministic, I would argue that in a socially cohesive intentional community (of any type) members gain a profound appreciation of their capacity to bring about change in their lives and better align their lifestyle with their values i.e. to 'walk their talk'. Empowerment (for that is what it is) within the context of community can induce a realignment of personal priorities. Material consumption diminishes in importance as social relations and environmental quality becomes more highly valued. Empowerment dissolves ambivalence and overcomes indifference toward the needs of others, leading to the application of concern and caring in practical ways. Personal change is not just behavioural or attitudinal but occurs at the level of deepest held beliefs and values.

Due to their relatively small scale and mostly urban locations, cohousing communities cannot incorporate larger scaled sustainable technologies such as windmills or biomass-fuelled district heating. This is where ecovillages can excel. Their physical and economic scale, rural (if not remote) location and more explicit set of pro-environmental ambitions make possible these technologies as well as the production of significant quantities of their own organic food. At Findhorn we do all of this and more. We treat our own sewerage on site. Our 750 kW wind farm of four turbines generates 40% more power than we consume, which is fed into the national grid. Currently, we are installing a 250 kW wood chip boiler to supply heat and hot water to twelve community buildings (including the above mentioned hall) and our hot tub!



Findhorn produces its own, organic, food.

Our extensive vegetable garden not only supplies delicious organic produce to our table but also distributes to the local region. I belong to a carpool of 25 individuals who share five co-owned vehicles. These achievements are a source of pride and fundamental to our identity as an ecovillage.<sup>15</sup> They



demonstrate the effectiveness of scale and the potential of large communities to reduce their ecological and carbon footprints to truly low levels.

### **Combining the best of cohousing and ecovillages**

So as we strive to develop models of human habitation of genuinely low environmental impact, perhaps we should consider a blend of the best attributes of both ecovillages and cohousing. Examples of such projects already exist; a well-known one being Ecovillage at Ithica (EVI) in upstate New York where residents of two (soon to be three) cohousing clusters share a large rural property with a CSA.<sup>16</sup> *Munksøgaard*, a Danish project, heralds “the advent of the mainstream ecovillage,” according to

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15. An independent study by the Stockholm Environment Institute found that the Findhorn Community’s ecological footprint was the lowest so-far measured in the Western world and, per person, about half the UK average.

16. CSA = Community Supported Agriculture.

Hildur Jackson, one of the founders of the ecovillage movement.<sup>17</sup> It's located within a bike ride of *Roskilde*, a city of 45,000 and connected by train to *Copenhagen*, 35 km away. Like EVI, *Munksøgaard* has the economy of scale (100 households) and ecological aspirations of an ecovillage *as well* as the architectural features and social agenda of cohousing. The housing is divided into five courtyard-like clusters of twenty dwellings, each with its own common house. In an inspired move, each cluster was purpose designed for a select resident demographic. One is for youth and another for elderly folk, this housing being rented from a non-profit housing association. The remaining family housing is in three clusters, one privately owned, one a private coop, and the other rented. The settlement has all the practical, cultural, technological and economic advantages of large, diverse 'village' but within each cohousing neighbourhood residents enjoy closer, more supportive relationships with like-minded folk.

Another example of a "mainstream ecovillage" is the *Ecovillage at Currumbin* (EVC) situated in southeast Queensland, Australia. This unique project contravenes several of the above generalisations about ecovillages. It is, essentially, a commercially driven housing subdivision being promoted by its 'green' developers as an example of 'best practice' sustainable development, and indeed, has won many awards for being just that.<sup>18</sup> It is not an organically evolving, grass roots initiative of low-cost, self-built housing; rather, EVC is a thoroughly well-considered and comprehensively designed subdivision of genuinely ecological (detached) houses, strictly controlled in their design and construction by comprehensive guidelines. Prospective residents buy lots of between 600m<sup>2</sup> and 8000m<sup>2</sup> configured in cohousing-like clusters set within shared permaculture landscaping. The site is rural (just) but very close to Gold Coast city, beautiful beaches, and all amenities.

On-site sewerage and grey-water treatment are the only centralised utilities. Each house, however, is required to have passive solar design features, photovoltaic and solar thermal roof panels, rainwater harvesting and be constructed of appropriate materials. The project would not warrant a mention in a paper about intentional communities but for the fact that the developers have invested considerable thought and capital into shared facilities<sup>19</sup> and have worked hard to catalyse and foster a sense of community amongst prospective residents, including a nascent cohousing group, well before they purchased lots. EVC is certainly not an affordable housing option.<sup>20</sup> And it remains to be seen whether residents will develop the close supportive relationships of most intentional communities. But it is a model of note – of a

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17. Quoted in Meltzer, 2005:158

18. Including the 2008 FIABCI Prix d'Excellence for environmentally responsive property development.

19. A community hall, kitchen/dining facilities, swimming pool, shops, recycling centre etc.

20. Else I might be living there now. I was involved with this project as a consultant and prospective member for a year before moving to Findhorn.

developer-initiated ecovillage, not too dissimilar in principle to the many successful developer-driven cohousing projects in the US and elsewhere.

### **Concluding thoughts**

I would like to conclude on a personal note. And that is to convey thoughts and feelings about my life in Findhorn. In short, I am deeply contented there. The reasons are many and varied: I enjoy meaningful relationships with a diverse community of well-intended people; I work for an egalitarian non-profit whose main purpose is to make a better world; I live simply but comfortably, close to nature, in a tranquil zero-carbon house; I have easy access to the rich cultural smorgasbord described above. All of this I can do within a walk. And all these aspects are integrated; so the people I work with are those with whom I eat and those with whom I recreate. It's a beautiful life, which feasibly could be lived in either cohousing or ecovillages, although their full-featuredness makes the latter more likely. And to be honest, I enjoy living remote from the 'real' world in a self-contained bubble.

For different reasons, I see both cohousing and ecovillages as important if we are to evolve a sustainable and civilised future for ourselves and our children. Only a tiny proportion of privileged people are ever likely to live such an *alternative* lifestyle as mine, in ecovillages that will surely remain important as laboratories of human and technical innovation. Cohousing however, fully embedded as it is in the mainstream, is much more likely to attract and be appropriate for vast numbers of mainstream folk – which is why I continue to advocate for it so passionately. ■

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# Collaborative Housing from a Woman's Perspective



**Inga-Lisa Sangregorio** is an author, an active participant in the Swedish public debate and a driving force in the successful feminist network Group 8. She is a member of the group Living in Community, which in 1982 published a book that contributed to the development of 50 new cohousing units in Sweden in the 1980s. More recently she wrote the booklet Collaborative Housing in Sweden, presenting the principles of Swedish collaborative housing and giving examples of how ideas have turned out in practice.

**D**uring the last few months I have had reason to reflect on and write about the women's movement of the early 1970s. I was a member of the most important women's liberation group in Sweden, Grupp 8. Many of the things we fought for are now a reality: free abortion, cheap day care, a tax system that does not punish working wives. An income of one's own is a necessary condition for any woman's liberation, and many of us knew from bitter experience that good and accessible day care is an absolute prerequisite to guarantee that no woman has to face the impossible choice between having children and having a job.

But an income of one's own and day care is not enough. We wanted both bread and roses! One of our goals was shorter working hours. It seemed – and still seems – logical that if everybody contributes to the labour market, we should all be able to work fewer hours. Unfortunately logic is one thing, politics another. We underestimated the strength of the opposition to such an idea. Even the labour movement seems to fear what would happen if people had more free time. The dominant opinion in today's Sweden is that an increase in the total number of hours spent working is a good thing. Paul Lafargue and Bertrand Russel and even John Maynard Keynes would turn around in their graves if they followed the Swedish public debate.



### Women demand collective housing

Another important point on the agenda of the women's movement was the demand for more *kollektivhus*, understood as housing with shared facilities and services like day care, restaurant etc. Like other women before us, we realized that only by moving at least some of the housework out of the private home would it be possible to make it visible and treat it as work, and thus as something that could be organized differently. We quoted a famous article by the social democratic politician Alva Myrdal, written forty years earlier. In this article she painted a picture of the irrationality of the isolated home, where twenty women make their own meatballs in twenty small kitchens above and next to one another, while the often single children of the thirties played their lonely games. *Does it not call for a more rational organization, an organization along collective lines?* she asked rhetorically (Myrdal 1932, cited in Vestbro 1968, p. 29).

But just as we failed in the question of shorter working days, we did not succeed in making cohousing – the short and handy word coined by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett (1988) – a normal and accessible choice. It is true that there are several successful cohousing projects today, and it is also true that the collaborative model introduced by a women's group of which I am a member, has lowered the threshold for new projects considerably. But it would be a lie to say that cohousing is a serious alternative to the isolated private home. If you want to live in cohousing, you have to create it yourself from scratch.



A man's dream: "Home" by F C Whitney (1913)



A woman's nightmare: "Spring in the suburb of Hallonbergen" by Anna Sjö Dahl (1972).



## Housemaids instead of collaboration

During the last five or ten years there has been a lot of discussion about what is called the “life puzzle”, i.e. the the struggle to put together a working whole out of the bits and pieces of everyday life. The Swedish women’s movement of the 1970s, as well as the Nordic women’s group for “the new everyday life” ten years later (Forskargruppen för det nya vardagslivet 1987, 1991), envisaged communal solutions, on a neighbourhood basis (Sangregorio 1994). The “solution” offered in today’s Sweden is quite different. The present government has introduced strong tax incentives to encourage people to have their homes cleaned and other services performed by somebody else, most often by an immigrant woman. As Barbara Ehrenreich writes on a similar development in the US: “*The microdefeat of feminism in the household opened a new door for women, only this time it was the servants’ door.*” That housework no longer is a subject of interest to feminist sociologists she attributes to the fact that “*fewer sociologists actually do it*” (Ehrenreich 2003, p. 90).

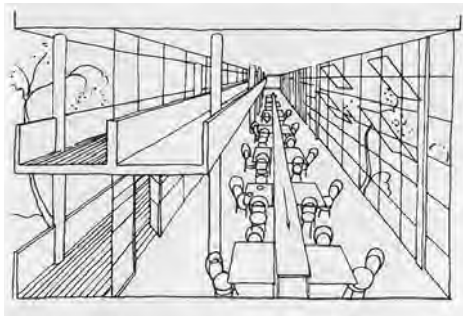
What used to be the politics of gender is becoming the politics of race and class.

## Paid staff or self-work?

Thinking back, I realize that I do not mean the same thing with *kollektivhus* today as in the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. When I first became interested in cohousing I had two small children, worked full-time and lived in a suburb commuting two hours a day. Even though my husband and I shared the housework, it was evident that two adults are too few to play other than a zero sum game.

At that period there were a couple of projects with shared facilities and paid staff to provide meals and other services. The best known was the Hässelby family hotel, with 328 flats. To me the most important feature of those projects was that they had day care in the building, which seemed paradise on earth. I envied the happy few who lived in those mythical buildings. One or two of them were members of Group 8 and

contributed to our interest in cohousing (Vestbro 1982, p. 138). However, there were so few cohousing buildings that they loomed like mirages over the desert, and they had virtually no impact on what was being built.



Proposed organisation of meal services in the communal development project Strojkom, Soviet Union, 1929. Note the conveyor belt bringing the food to the tables. Design by Barsc & Vladimirov. (Source: Caldenby and Walldén 1979)

In the mid-1970s came the final blow. Olle Engkvist, the developer who had built several of the *kollektivhus* in Stockholm, including Hässelby, where he also lived, died, and the people taking over had no interest in cohousing and decided to close the restaurants. To them



In the crib by Marie-Louise de Geer (1976).

the restaurant was simply a complication they did not want to be bothered with, but to the residents it was the heart of the house. In the restaurant people met without having to plan it, in an unpretentious daily contact that was the basis of everything else that made those buildings so special.

The residents decided to fight not only for their own building but also for the very idea of cohousing, organizing a PR-campaign and a series of public meetings. Since they thought it essential not to give up the restaurant they themselves took over the cooking, after a short period of buying the meals from a catering firm. Taking over the restaurant was seen as a temporary solution, but much to their surprise they found that it had many advantages. It proved much less difficult to cook for many people than they had imagined, and they found it was fun to work together. The meals became cheaper, and residents themselves could decide what to serve and how long they wanted to keep the dining room open at night. The potential clash of interest between the staff and the residents disappeared.

I remember visiting Hässelby during that period, with my women friends. The meal was very good, and afterwards we went into the kitchen. One of the cooks that evening, a distinguished middle-aged man, was cleaning a big frying pan. *“Before we took over ourselves one never really thought of the people working in the kitchen”*, he said.

We were duly impressed by the Hässelby people's handling of the dangerous-looking equipment of the professional kitchen. It strengthened us in the conviction that had slowly been growing in our group that one could have cohousing without the complication of paid staff.

Hässelby remains a milestone in the history of Swedish cohousing. It was for a long time the best example of the older type of cohousing, based on service from paid staff. It developed, in the beginning against the will of the residents, into a new type of cohousing, based on cooperation rather than service. The residents of Hässelby greatly contributed to promoting the idea of cohousing, proving that in some fields non-professionals can do at least as good a job as specialists, inspiring others to try it out.

### Can housing promote equality?

Among those "others" was the group of women I mentioned earlier. Most of us had a background in the women's movement. We had first met at a meeting organized by women architects, but our attention soon moved from the career options of architects to the far more interesting question of how we ourselves wanted to live. And to the larger question: was it possible to design and build buildings that would promote

equality and make everyday life less burdensome? Although we were of different ages and living in different kinds of households, with and without men and children, our answer to the first question was surprisingly similar. The ideal dwelling, as we saw it, was one that would offer both privacy and community. We were not prepared to move into the kind of communes that were fairly common in the 1970s, where groups of people moved into big villas, sharing kitchens, bathrooms and living rooms,



Drawing by Helga Henschen. The statements are the following: "Together we are preparing a big load of meatballs"; "Girls, what a contribution to equality!"; "There is nothing wrong with daddy's meatballs either".

with only bedrooms remaining private. We wanted to be able to shut the door of our own private flat. But we also wanted to open that door, in order to solve some of the practical problems of daily life in collaboration with others, and create a social network with our neighbours. We were prepared to give up some private space and equipment in return for space and equipment shared with others.

We named our group *Bo i gemenskap* (Live in community), abbreviated BiG, and set out to create a housing model that would be both desirable and feasible. Like many women and some men before us, we found the answer in some form of cohousing.

From the beginning we were inclined towards something like the original Hässelby, i. e. with professional staff. But gradually there was a change of consciousness in our group. We witnessed the development of Hässelby, and we visited Danish cohousing (bofællesskaber, normally consisting of a group of small houses with a bigger common house). What impressed us most in the Danish experience were the unbureaucratic solutions and the fact that everything was organized and run by the residents themselves. We felt less and less attracted by the idea of paid staff providing service to the residents. The “BiG model”, as it has become known in Sweden, emerged and was presented in a book (Berg et al. 1982).

### **Getting more for less**

The BiG model is based on the extremely simple idea of getting more for less by sharing and collaboration. Residents have their own private flats but they also share some common space and equipment and collaborate on daily tasks.

In the years before and after our first book was published we met with groups of people interested in cohousing in different parts of Sweden. We wrote articles, gave speeches and appeared on television. We also interviewed people in positions of responsibility, trying to “sell” the idea to public housing companies. Actually most of the BiG houses existing today are rentals, owned by public housing companies.

When the book appeared, the first example of the BiG model already existed, a converted multistorey building called *Stacken* (“The ant hill”) in Gothenburg. The very existence of *Stacken* broke the ice. It proved that collaborative housing was a feasible idea and that bureaucratic difficulties could be overcome. People interested in the idea could visit the house and talk to the people who lived there. *Stacken* put into practice the ideas of the BiG group, but it must be said that it was the personal and professional interest of the late Lars Ågren, professor at the Chalmers School of Architecture, that made it possible.

Since then a number of buildings have been built or converted according to the BiG model in different parts of Sweden. In a second book (Lundahl & Sangregorio 1992), members of the group presented and compared fifteen cohousing projects. We decided to choose projects that differed considerably in size, ownership and organization, in order to prove the flexibility of the BiG model.

### **Models for families with or without children?**

Why, then, did the seemingly impossible become possible? Why were housing companies willing to try out what they had formerly refused? The main reason is that this was a more realistic model than the old type of cohousing. The two models have important characteristics in common: sharing space and equipment, organizing some of the daily tasks on a collective basis. But whereas the older projects required a staff of specialists, which led to bigger and bigger buildings in order to get a sufficient number of people to pay their salaries, the new type of cohousing is based on collaboration among the residents, which favours fairly small buildings and considerably increases the options. Thirty or forty flats can be fitted into an infill project, or into a renovated older building. The owner takes no great risk and does not have to take responsibility for services outside the normal duties of a housing company. He provides only the housing, not the cooking. Residents of the new cohousing projects have proved to be strong but competent tenants, taking good care of their buildings.

When we in the BiG group discussed our model we always imagined that the residents would be a mix of different ages. When our work started, several of us still had young children. My own interest in cohousing was from the beginning strongly linked to the idea that children need close contact with more grown-ups than their own parents. I still regret that my children did not have the chance to grow up in collaborative housing.

However, it turned out that our idyllic picture of the joyful mix of generations did not always correspond with reality. Not everybody who had seen their own children grow up and leave home was enthusiastic about the idea of moving into a building full of three-year-olds and their parents. The idea of cohousing for “the second half of life” was born and put into practice. The first building of this type, Färdknäppen in central Stockholm, was ready in 1993 and has been followed by several similar initiatives. With a lower age limit of forty this type of cohousing has a mix of people who are still professionally active and pensioners. To tell the truth, it seems that there is more demand for and interest in this type of cohousing than in our original BiG model with mixed ages.

### **Why is cohousing more popular among women?**

I started this article with the women’s movement of the 1970s and our conviction that cohousing would be an important contribution to women’s liberation. There is no doubt that cohousing encourages equality between men and women. Once you move housework out of the nuclear family it becomes impossible to pretend that it does not exist. It becomes visible and has to be recognized as the work it actually is. In the old type of cohousing, with paid staff, gender conflicts were “solved”, or rather hidden, by having the housework done by somebody else, mostly by other women. As one resident of the first cohousing project in Sweden expressed it in 1936: “*It is so*



*convenient for my wife. She just has to phone down for the meal when she comes home from work*" (Caldenby & Walldén 1979, p. 216).

In collaborative housing men and women do their shares as individual adults. Perhaps the fact that collaborative housing promotes equality explains why the idea seems to be more popular among women than among men. Residents of the first collaborative housing project in Sweden, Stacken, reported that visiting women immediately saw the advantages, whereas visiting men were more diffident or downright reluctant (Caldenby & Walldén 1984).

It is true that several men have played an important role in promoting and implementing cohousing in Sweden. Without Olle Engkvist, Hässelby and his other "family hotels" would not have existed. Without the contribution of Lars Ågren to the creation of Stacken the BiG model might still be only a model. And without Dick Urban Vestbro we would not have gathered for this conference, not to speak of his books on cohousing (e.g. Vestbro 1968, 1982, Woodward, Vestbro & Grossman 1989).

But it is also true that there is a majority of women in virtually all the cohousing projects and that fewer men than women seem to immediately grasp the advantages. This, however, seems rather to reflect prejudice or perhaps ignorance in men not living in this type of housing than disappointment among the ones who do. Perhaps the reluctant men fear that they could lose some privileges by choosing cohousing, whereas men who actually live in the projects know better.

### **Female dreams of a better life**

Looking back it is easy to see that cohousing fits into a long tradition of women's dreams and practice. Evelyne Sullerot, *grande dame* of French feminist research, once asked career-oriented women students what kind of housing they would prefer. Much to her surprise many of them mentioned the kibbutz. This was in the 1960s, and the kibbutz was probably the only form of "cohousing" they had heard of. But Sullerot, who in her book *Demain les femmes* ("Tomorrow the women") compares women's position in different types of societies, maintains that communal solutions are more favourable to women as a group than more individualistic ones (Sullerot 1965). She does not deny that some women may benefit more from individual solutions, but her comparative studies show that women as a group have more to gain from collective solutions.

American architect and writer Dolores Hayden has studied utopian experiments, first in her *Seven American Utopias* (Hayden 1976). The predominantly "male" utopias described there are often completely new societies, embracing all aspects of life and created in new places. They were often designed to include facilities for communal child care and communal housework. Although most of the work in those facilities was carried out by the women, the very fact that it was considered *work* and was organized on a communal and more efficient basis had a liberating effect on women's lives.



While doing research for her book on American utopias Hayden found traces of another tradition, by then almost forgotten. In her *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Hayden 1981) she presents ideas and experiments promoted by “the material feminists”. These women, who do not constitute a group but are as different as their proposals, have one thing in common. Hayden summarizes: “*For six decades the material feminists expounded one powerful idea: that women must create feminist homes with socialized housework and child care before they could become truly equal members of society.*” (Hayden 1981, p. 3)

Few women could or would leave everything to create a completely new society elsewhere. They would rather try to improve things where they lived, changing daily life in a more modest and therefore more realistic way, taking small steps towards a better society.

Collaborative housing as practised in different countries belongs in this latter tradition. It is not and will not be the grand solution to all our problems, but it is an important step in the right direction. In our book on cohousing, the BiG group used Ernst Bloch’s distinction between abstract and concrete utopias. Collaborative housing definitely belongs in the latter category. Its most important role, as I see it, is that it shows the unrealized potential that is latent in the present. What is practised on a small scale could be extended on a neighbourhood basis, contributing to the “new everyday life” described in the work of a group of Nordic women (Forskningsgruppen för det nya vardagslivet 1987, 1991).

The future of housing, and of living, is neither to be found in sophisticated technological solutions, nor in an army of servants liberating their masters and mistresses from all contact with their own material reproduction. The future of housing, and of living, is to be found in taking more, not less, responsibility for how we live, what we eat, how we affect the environment, but – and this is important – doing this not alone but in collaboration with others.

## **Postscript**

In my keynote speech at the conference I did not present the paper I had written. Instead I based my presentation on a series of overhead slides, several of them representing paintings or drawings by (mostly) women artists giving an often rather dismal picture of the home as a prison. I also showed some pictures illustrating different ideas of what cohousing might mean.

I did this for several reasons. One is that I am not the kind of speaker who can do justice to a written text. To me the written and the spoken word are two different categories. It also seemed a waste of time to repeat what anyone interested in the argument could read in my paper, which had been distributed beforehand. Why would anyone take the trouble to travel to a conference, shut themselves up in a lecture room and sit in often uncomfortable seats only to hear somebody say what they could have read at home?

But the most important reason was that I felt that artists could convey something that I as a down-to-earth non-fiction writer could not. Why does the longing for other ways of living arise? What is it in our present lives that gives birth to dreams of something different and better? (Also, admittedly, I had some quite funny pictures that I could not resist showing.)

However, the fifteen pictures I showed would have been quite unintelligible without my comments. I chose them because I felt they illustrated a point I wanted to make, but I do not think that people not present during my presentation would get much out of them even if they were all presented here. ■

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# Thirty-three Years From the Start: Time for New Initiatives!



**Kerstin Kärnekull** is an architect, who has worked with various housing issues most of her life. She has been a director of development work within SABO, the Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies; and a founding member of the important group *Bo i Gemenskap* ('Live in Community'). Since 17 years back she lives in the cohousing development *Färdknäppen*, the first model of the 'second half of life'.

Like Inga-Lisa Sangregorio, I have been involved in the research group "Live in community" (abbreviated BIG) since it began in 1977. Inga-Lisa has already described how our idea on collaborative housing for 20–50 households, based on collective work, emerged. Our report of 1982 had the subheading "the small cohousing project – a model for practical application" (Berg et al. 1982). Today, more than thirty years later, it is time to summarize the experience of that practical application.

## **The small collective house in the real world**

For 17 years, I have lived in *Färdknäppen*, a collective house for the second half of life, in the inner-city district of *Södermalm*, in Stockholm. Experiences from *Färdknäppen* gave rise to many ideas regarding what we in the BIG-group did not anticipate when we gathered ideas for a somewhat different way of living.

As Inga-Lisa already mentioned, we did not understand the need for special housing communities for seniors, even though we stressed that BIG needed the elderly. We also did not realize that life after the children left home consists of three stages: an active working life period, a cheerful retired life as a "young elderly", and a maturation phase in the last years as an "old elderly".

Also, we did not foresee that people would no longer smoke in common areas, when computers and the Internet began sneaking into people's homes. Now, there is no longer any need for smoking-rooms, at least not in *Färdknäppen*. The smoking-room has, rather typically, been turned into a computer workroom for common use.



Färdknäppen cohousing development, Stockholm.

We wrote very little about the outdoor environment and the garden belonging to the house. We also did not write anything on ecological building, even if we brought forward the need for conserving energy and other resources. We saw ourselves primarily as an urban alternative to the 70's longing for the countryside, and we were convinced that residing in the city was more "climate smart" than to being car-dependent.

Our report mentioned gym facilities in passing, but we did not realize that these facilities are as important to us adults, as play-rooms are for children. On the whole, leisure was a concept unfamiliar to us, which might have been explained by all ten of us being working women, many with children, with or without husbands.

We wrote about how a housing community can develop, about the process before moving in, and a lot about work tasks and cooperation after having moved in. But we did not, for obvious reasons, highlight the important question of how one housing community can be maintained and be further developed over the years.

Since the formation of our group, we have visited all collective houses built in Sweden over the past 30 years, with the intention of following up the BIG-model. We have been able to establish that the model works. It has proved to be durable, robust and adaptable to people's different needs and desires. It works in the inner city as well as in suburbs, in rented apartments or condominiums, and suits newly built houses as well as rebuilt houses. And the idea of shared work with common meals is a key to the success (Lundahl & Sangregorio 1992).

## The “new everyday life” in the real world

Moving into a housing community along with fifty other people, whom you have not chosen or even hardly met before the planning process started, is remarkable. To “engage with” fifty strangers, and eventually develop the same familiarity that one would with old school friends or people you have known for a long time, is a rare gift.

Daily conversations and small talk – along with all the inspiration, knowledge and many ideas that your neighbors generously share; as well as access to facilities and equipment (which almost always works), not to mention all the good advice – all this is indeed wealth.

When I come home to Färdknäppen or move around the house, I feel a great sense of security and homeliness. We share most things, while some things remain entirely private. Being able to close my own door, to have a life of one’s own, and to be able to disconnect is also a prerequisite for being able to be collective.

The new daily life is not tied to the building itself, even if it makes up the foundation. All the time we turn outward; to talk about our housing, to engage others and to encourage more housing communities. The cohousing association Färdknäppen is open to non-residents who want to move in or just wish for regular contact. We also have many people come and participate in our cooking, who do not live in the house. It’s a fun challenge to cook together for many!

Just like being in a family, there are many joys, as well as conflicts, sorrows and difficulties within the group. As residents, we are not trained to share space or equipment together. Who has the right to make and implement decisions or modify and use our collective resources? How does a moderately regulated social life for fifty people look?

In Sweden we do not usually use consensus as a decision model. We work with the organization-model that has evolved through the decades, perhaps centuries. We usually take majority decisions. This does not mean that we bulldoze each other, but rather that we discuss an issue until it makes total sense to come to a decision without consensus. For example, we can vote on an issue and make a decision that everyone accepts, even if only 22 are for while 20 are against.

What is fascinating is that this always means *finding our own, novel solutions* to everyday life in the common areas. Anyone who has moved into a collective house knows that the first year is intense and stormy. No matter how well prepared the group is, there are always obstacles that no one anticipated or realized. We, the inhabitants of the collective house, actually create our own social roles again and again. Mindful that the whole is more important than the parts; that what is best for the house must come before one’s own opinion. Painful at times, hurtful sometimes, but most often it is useful and wholesome.

Like Inga-Lisa Sangregorio, I participated in the work on the ideas of “The New Everyday Life”, although my part was rather small (Forskningsgruppen för det nya vardagslivet/The research group for the new everyday life, 1984). Almost daily in

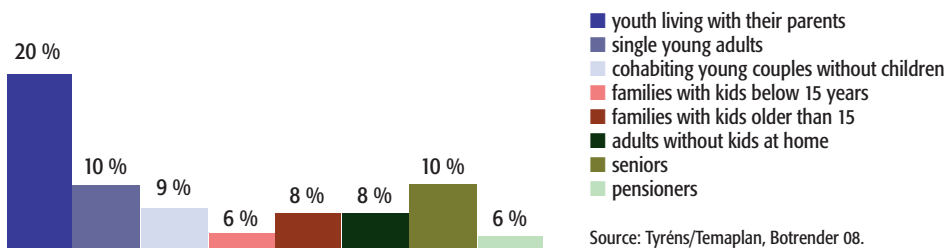
Färdknäppen, I experience “the new everyday life”, as it unfolds at our intermediate level, between the private home and society, i.e., in our common rooms. Färdknäppen is one of many examples of the new everyday life as, not just a utopian dream, but something that makes life more fun and easier to live.

### The new planning process

These days, the usual practice in Sweden is that large developers build housing for the market. The market is defined through market research and the construction companies’ own perceptions. But what do marketers ask about the need for togetherness? Or about desires for a little less private space in return for more common rooms? Which housing developers sell their new apartments by emphasizing the well-designed common areas? Not many, not in Sweden anyway.

Over the years, studies have demonstrated that there is an interest in collective and organic living. For example, according to a 2009 Swedish study, 10% of people surveyed were interested in cohousing<sup>1</sup> (Tyréns Temaplan 2009). Young people showed the most interest. This could translate into a need for many new attractive residences, since less than 0.5 % of the population live in cohousing and housing communities in Sweden.

Our Swedish experiences have shown that the best results can be obtained when the ones who are going to move in to the cohousing get to participate and contribute their own ideas about what is needed – affecting the details and questioning any proposed solutions (Lundahl & Sangregorio 1992). As it is today, it often takes five to ten years from start to occupancy. It also requires enormous power and knowledge of the housing groups to manage the process in dialogue with the developer, architects, financiers, municipality and contractors (Koyabe 1994).



### Interest for living collectively in different age groups in Sweden (in per cent of total).

<sup>1</sup> The question was: “I can very well imagine myself living in a collective, where many households live and dwell together in common residence”. The group studied was 18–70 years, interested in living in apartment housing.





Annual meeting of Kollektivhus NU 2009.

Developers, architects and contractors must be competent and responsive in cooperation with groups of interested, prospective residents. New tools are needed to facilitate cooperation, and make the resident group make decisions at the right stage and to plan so that various decisions can be taken as late as possible without the risk of rising costs.

All of this is unusual for most consultants and builders. Thus, it is necessary to develop the planning process and to make it more professional.

The BIG group highlighted the need to develop project models that do not require the same amount of effort from their users, as the entirely group-run projects do. The initiative could, as is often the case in Denmark, be taken by a housing company, while the residents could be included later in the process (Kähler 2004). But that in turn requires research and experience feedback from those in the houses already built. It is not possible to develop methods and processes without having the underlying knowledge.

The municipal housing company Familjebostäder in Stockholm, which has built six collective houses, has partially worked in such a way. One condition they themselves have given is that they want to cooperate with an organized group of prospective residents. That is why the cohousing association Framtiden (The Future) was formed. It is an association for those people who are interested in cohousing in the Stockholm area. Similar associations exist in Gothenburg and Malmo, and in more locations in the country.

Knowledge and the ability to cooperate with interest groups are becoming

increasingly important, not only in dialogue with those interested in cohousing, but also with all the groups of seniors who are looking for an accommodation consistent with their own dreams. Here we have important experiences that can be transferred between different countries. U.S., Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands seem to be at the forefront. The cohousing movement should strive to be the engine of a broad exchange of experiences, as well as to pursue the important development of new project models for all types of housing in dialogue with the future residents!

### **The new planning process**

The cohousing idea is contradictory to the established notion of how everyone should live and work. It puts new demands on the project planning and construction process, as well as on the central government and municipalities. *“It is plain impossible for a, never so active and knowledgeable interest-group, to implement a project of this nature without proper support from society”*, writes Birgit Assarson regarding her experiences in the planning process for four different collective houses (Assarson 2005) .

She also says that this housing model has proved viable, but that a situation where all the time new groups are alone in describing and defending cohousing is untenable. She calls for a series of efforts by central and local governments:

- A comprehensive survey of the demand for cohousing.
- Identification of the problems and stumbling-blocks that impede and complicate cohousing, including those relating to regulations and laws.
- Evaluation of the new tenure form cooperative tenancy, which is used by several collective houses in Sweden.
- Municipal planning and leasing of the land that supports construction of collective houses.
- A queue for those interested in cohousing and the information about them distributed to the municipal housing office.
- Financial support for the planning process so that architects and other consultants have the time for cooperation with the future residents.
- Funding to also cover furniture, decoration and equipment of the common areas.

There is much that local authorities could do. Good examples are the initiatives made by the city of Stockholm some thirty years ago. In 1980, the municipal executive board appointed a committee to investigate and make proposals on how to realize different forms of cohousing. One result was that three municipal housing companies were commissioned to test various forms of cohousing, and that ten collective houses were built in the period 1983–93.

Another example comes from Roskilde Municipality in Denmark. Roskilde Municipality invites interested groups wishing to live in housing communities to discuss suitable land sites. They also have an excellent downloadable tutorial on how groups

	<b>The cohousing association</b>	<b>Advisors</b>	<b>The municipality</b>
Phase 1	Same interest Discuss expectations on community and form common goals Formalise the association	Advisors are taken on board	Preliminary contacts with representatives of the municipality
Phase 2	Start cooperate with advisors Payment of fee as a guarantee of participation	Start of design process	Discussion of possible sites for the cohousing project Possible advice about the demands related to site
Phase 3	Coordinate the demands and wishes of members Formal acceptance of project Accept basic tender for construction	Designs are finalised Working out and acceptance of design with a financial plan	Negotiations with the cohousing association and its advisers
Phase 4	Sign financial agreement	Sorting out of legal and technical details Surveillance of construction work	Approval of plans Building permission
Phase 5	Residents move in	Continued advice concerning incoming residents	

Five phases of planning a cohousing development in Roskilde.

can work together with the municipality, as well as consultants and builders to create their communal housing (Roskilde 2005).

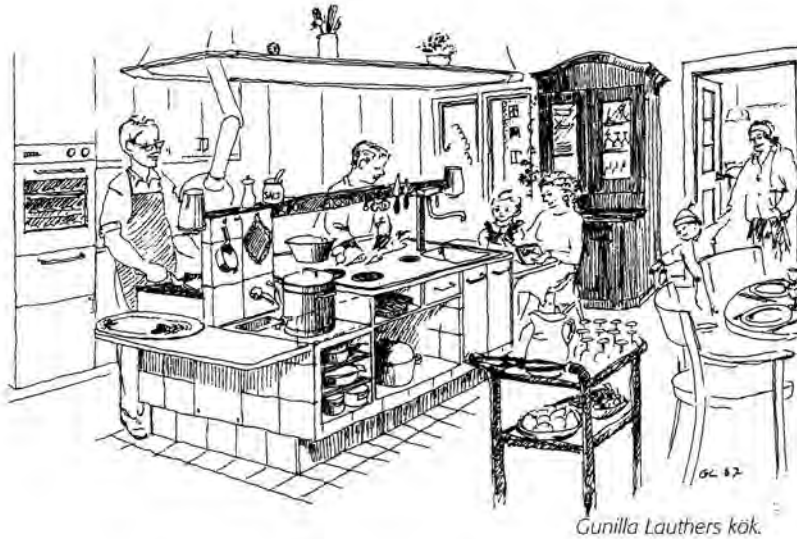
A third example is the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate. In 2003, on the initiative of Malu Dreyer, federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Family and Women, the Red Cross in Mainz started a housing counseling service for housing communities for the elderly throughout the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Here the consultants gathered interested parties and support groups who wanted to create their own housing, for seniors

or for all generations. Several cities regularly organize »Stammtische« allowing interested people a chance to meet and start new projects. They also work hard at informing political leaders about the importance of housing communities and the importance of supporting user-initiatives (Herger 2010).

### **‘Research as support and source of knowledge**

In Sweden there has been a lot of research on cohousing, from about 1970 to 1993 with significant results; both for the increased interest in collective houses during this period, and also because so many houses were built. Unfortunately, most of the material is inaccessible because it is in Swedish and it is not digitally available, as well as it can only be found in a few libraries scattered across the country. Much of what has been done would be of great value today, whereas other things would need to be updated and adapted to current conditions.

Cohousing NOW organized a research seminar in 2007. This seminar resulted in a report and a summary of what has been investigated and what was lacking in the



The kitchen in Färdknäppen, designed by Gunilla Lauthers, who carried out research on kitchen design for cohousing.

research conducted to that date. This report leads to two ideas for research projects: one on *housing communities as an aspect of “social capital”*, and one on *collective houses as a profitable business for property owners*, due to less maintenance costs, a high degree of self-management and fewer problems with non payments of rent. Cohousing NOW has recently also initiated contacts to bring about research on housing communities *as a means of promoting health and wellbeing, and on the issue of sustainable lifestyles*.

In my own work, writing about the design for senior housing, I have discovered that there is very little information on *how common facilities can be designed*, in addition to what has been written about collective houses. Here the Swedish research council Formas, should help to ensure that valuable reports like that on kitchen design for cohousing (Lauthers, Ljungberg & Palm Lindén 1988) are complemented by experiences from the community kitchens that have been built and adapted to the technical progress. *Advice and tools for group projects are also lacking*.

Cohousing NOW has, together with SABO – the Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies – compiled a manual for cohousing development (Grip & Sillén 2007). It is a valuable source of knowledge and should be continuously updated and supplemented by new experiences.

Formas, the Research Council among other areas responsible for the built environment, has financed the publication *“Collaborative Housing in Sweden”* (Sangregorio 2000). This publication is available as conference documentation. It is particularly gratifying that Formas supports today’s conference on collaborative housing.

Japan is, to my knowledge, the only country to have a special *research committee for*

*the promotion of collective housing* via the Housing Research Foundation Jusoken (Jusoken 2009). The Committee has been to Sweden and other countries for study visits on several occasions. It has also published several reports on its experiences. One result of the Committee is that there is a Japanese cohousing association. Also, three new collective housing projects emerged in Japan during the 2000s.

Thirty-three years ago, research in Sweden contributed actively to the development of new alternative forms of housing. It is now the time for new initiatives. The great interest in collaborative housing throughout the world emphasizes the need for knowledge and experience feedback. I hope this conference will be the beginning of a broad collaboration on cohousing issues between all of us involved and our organizations, as well as with researchers in many fields and in many countries.

Housing associations, planners, researchers, academics and politicians have to realize that we are a movement of the future! ■

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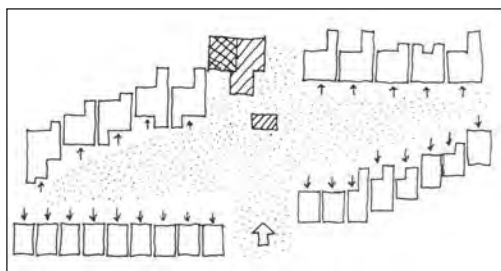


# Collaborative Housing from Around the World

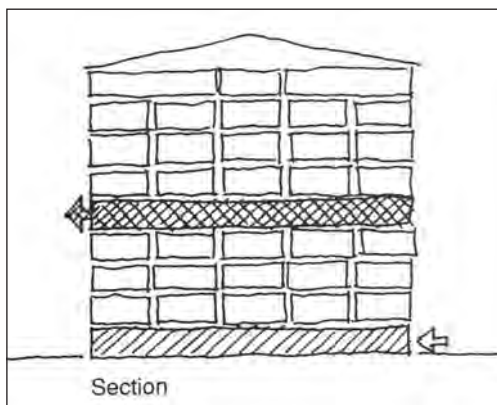
## Workshop 1

Chair: **Dorit Fromm**; Secretary: **Annika Almquist**

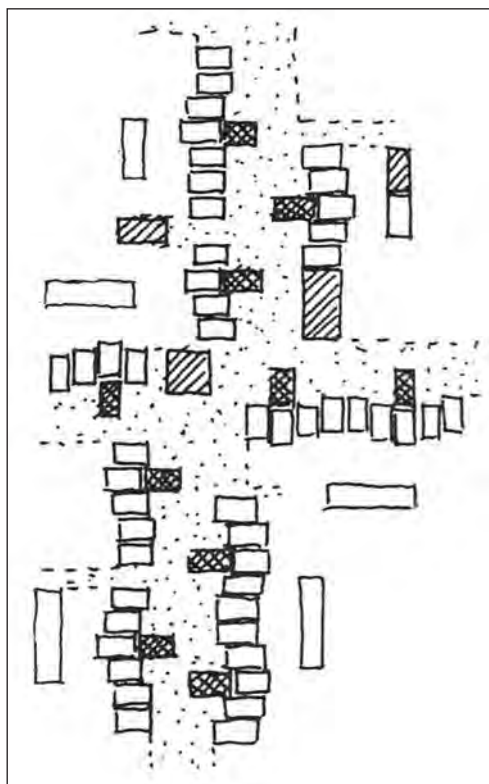
The workshop had 21 participants from 13 different countries. Seven lived in cohousing, three were members of cohousing organizations and 11 had an academic interest in collaborative communities. The workshop began with a presentation by the chair on models of collaborative housing, from the Danish examples to newer models, and some of their ramifications.<sup>1</sup>



**Danish Low-rise Model:** Examples include Sættedammen and Munksøgård in Denmark.



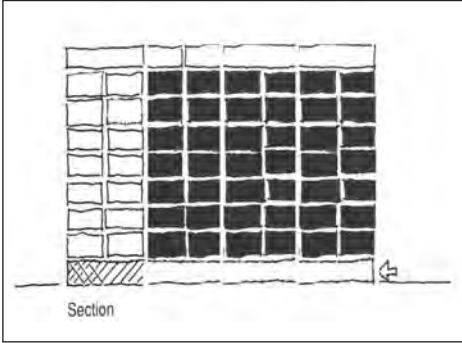
**All Under One Roof:** Examples include Stacken, Sweden and Seiseki, Japan (both retrofitted bldgs), and Savvaerket, Denmark (low-rise)



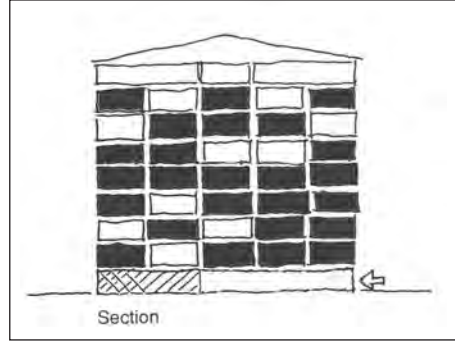
**Cluster Model:** Examples include Hilversumse Meent, Holland and Tinggården in Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> The illustrations are from *Collaborative Communities*, the Speckled model originates from Nico van den Dool and described in more detail by Els de Jong.





**Part or slice (of a larger development):**  
Examples include Erna and Midgaarden in Denmark



**Speckled:** Examples include Santosa in Holland and Majbacken in Sweden (now turning into an “under one roof” model)

Some differences between cohousing/collaborative houses from around the world were discussed, for instance:

- *Types of residents:* intergenerational, seniors, and special groups, for example ethnic groups, people with disabilities.
- *Activities:* eating together weekly; shared tasks, childcare, etc.
- *Forms:* clustered vs. scattered (easier to join or leave, but also easier to dissolve).<sup>2</sup>
- *Tenure:* rented – owned/condominiums – cooperative, various combinations.
- *Service facilities:* a service component, organizing part of the community and activities – or not.
- *Intention:* focused on internal life vs. reaching out to neighborhood.

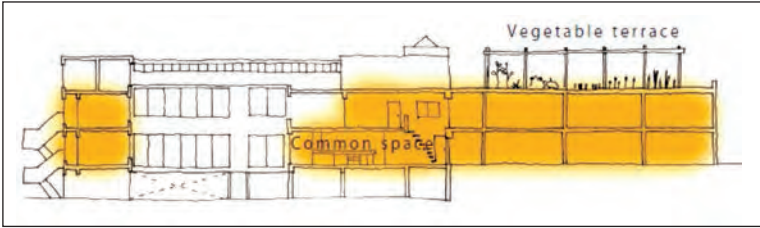
Sayu Yamaguchi and Misako Horikiri from Japan Women’s University presented the three built Japanese cohousing examples: Kankan Mori (2003), Sugamoflat (2007) and Seiseki (2009). Research of Swedish ‘kollektivhus’ by Ikuko Koyabe from Japan’s Women’s University helped to pave the way for these models.

Lene Schmidt – an architect, sociologist, researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) – presented Norwegian examples. Norway also has a history of the central kitchen houses in the 1920s and 30s. Examples of cohousing such as Friisgate (1987) and Baerum (1988) were



Friisgate Cohousing, Oslo, built by Ungdommens Selvbyggerlag 1987.

<sup>2</sup> The speckled model allows residents the choice of joining or leaving the cohousing group while still remaining in the same apartment, so while it is easier to become a cohousing member, it becomes easier also to stop participating.



Section and 1st and 2nd floor plans of Seiseki, a renovated apartment building, located in Tokyo, Japan



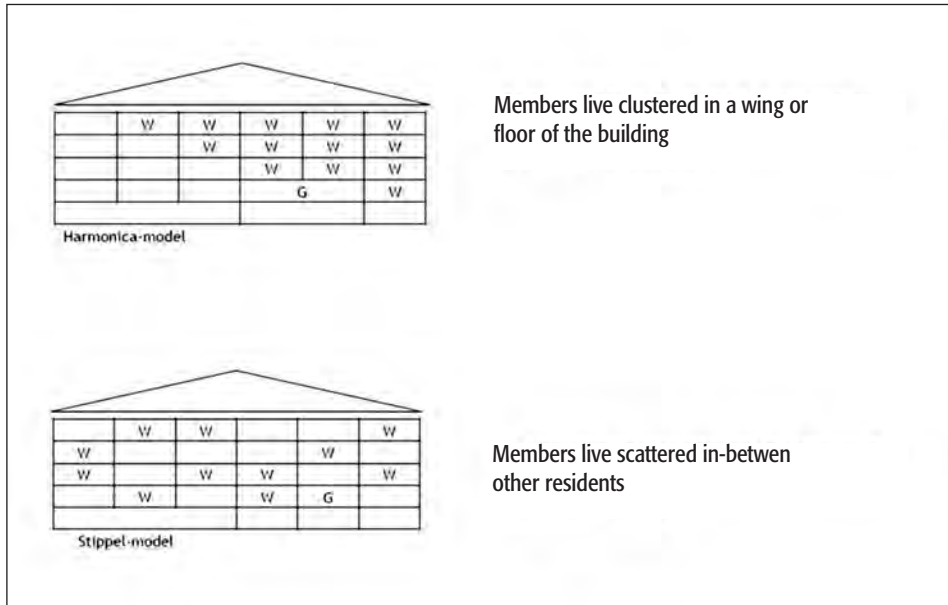
shown; research conducted by Schmidt determined that a substantial percentage of Norwegian senior citizens wanted to live in housing that included some shared arrangements. In Norway, a private developer has recently built seven developments, approximately 1000 flats that have common facilities and daytime staff. These developments are similar to the Norwegian service houses built in the 1920s/30s, and similar to the Swedish Hässelby family hotel model.

Els de Jong, a Dutch social researcher specializing in housing studies, presented examples of ethnic minority collaborative housing, along with several examples by the moderator. Ethnic minorities can use collaborative housing to create a stronger sense of community and blend better into existing senior housing options.

The discussion covered the physical, organizational and intentions of collaborative housing, particularly similarities and differences.

## Definitions

Many different words are used to describe each country's type of collaborative housing – *centraal wonen*, *kollektivhus*, *bofællesskab*, *gemeinschaftliches Wohnen*, etc. – and of course there are many variations in their development, financing, day to



Figures by Els de Jong illustrating various ways of organising individual apartments (W) and common spaces (G) in a cohousing project.

day management and resident participation level – making it difficult to pin down one overall definition and term.

Definitions for collaborative communities and cohousing were presented for discussion. Some differences of opinions on the defining characteristics of cohousing/collaborative housing:

- Shared meals – or shared coffee hour
- Strong participation in the development – or nonprofit developer assisted
- Oversee common activities – or be assisted in creating them
- Hire and fire service providers – or be provided

The term *cohousing*, to some in the workshop, implies dining together on a weekly basis. A community where residents do activities collaboratively but do not eat together weekly, therefore, was mentioned as not being cohousing. Others felt differently.

A definition for collaborative housing presented:

**Physical setting**

- Common facilities.
- Separate private households (including kitchen & bath).
- Design that emphasizes social contact.

## Organization

- Informal exchange of services among neighbors.
- Regular residential gatherings.
- Separate household economies.
- Non-hierarchical structure and decision making.

## Intention

- Shared community vision/intention.
- To live inclusively (as opposed to isolated from the everyday world), neighborly and securely.
- Lesser emphasis on individual consumption of resources.

The term *collaborative housing* could be used more inclusively. (The definition above does not specify: complete resident management, strong participation in the development process, and dining together, although these would add to a sense of community.) More discussion is needed.

Intentional communities is the general umbrella term for a variety of different types of residential communities in which people come together with common purpose. Cohousing, central women, etc describe specific types of community developments.

Obstacles to creating collaborative housing in various countries were brought up and included attitudes among politicians, planners, and builders; the privatization ideology; lack of awareness of the model; limiting legislation; funding difficulties; locating sites; and missing links between people's wishes and the market.

Some strategies of development would be to organize activists + politicians + planners; lobbying (at the national and the local level); education to create awareness of various models; cross-country research; networks of various country's organizations; and further international conferences. ■

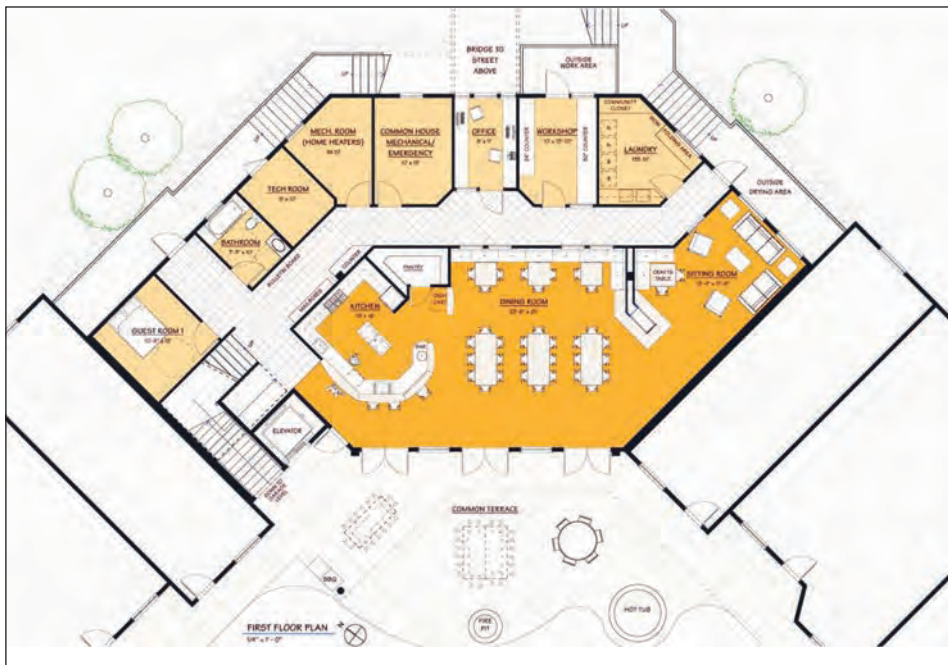
# Cohousing design Workshop 5

Chair: **Raines Cohen**; Secretary: **Johanna Kerovuori**

There were 13 participants in this workshop, four men and nine women. They came from nine different countries. Two participants had experience of living in cohousing, while four belonged to cohousing promotion groups and eight had an academic or a professional interest in cohousing (some cases overlap).

## Introductory presentation

As an introduction to the discussion, Raines Cohen showed a presentation of American style sub-urban low rise collective housing. It appeared that most of the participants were more interested in urban collectives. The design questions are the same but designing multi-storey buildings gives more challenges.



Design of common spaces by Charles Durrett & Kathryn McCamant. Note how well the various common spaces are connected to each other. The contact between indoor and outdoor has been given special attention, as well as an overview including an indoor visual contact with a playground for children (source: Charles Durrett's presentation at the conference).

## Aspects that affect design

The design can strengthen or weaken social life in the house. A clear understanding of differences in design between ordinary housing and cohousing is essential for the development of social relations in daily life.

## Site, surroundings, history

The history and spirit of the place should be taken into consideration so that the community more easily can take root in the neighborhood. Local history can be a great source of inspiration. Sometimes existing old buildings can be integrated with the community and used as common spaces.

Is the plot in urban, suburban or rural surroundings? At least in urban surroundings the community should endeavor to give services also for people who are not members of the community. Rural communities could have a big potential to support countryside development to disadvantaged areas by offering small scale commercial and cultural services. An open policy is also valuable to counter local people's prejudices against collective housing.

## Values:

Groups aspiring to cohousing, and of course those living together, need to define their priorities and also be ready and capable to pay for them.

## Accessibility

Common space areas should be accessible for everyone. Wherever possible and applicable, collective houses should have apartments designed for people with disabilities and also suitable for elderly people. The design should ideally make it possible for all kinds of people to live together.

Obviously, there is no need to equip every apartment with disability adapted toilets. This kind of big toilet can be located in the public space between apartments, e.g. close to the elevator, enabling those living on this floor to use it as needed. This arrangement is useful in situations of temporary disability. Where a household member is permanently disabled, changes are usually required within respective apartment.



Cohousing project Swan market, California. Old buildings create beautiful surroundings for living and open neighborhood.



## Flexibility

Designs should as far as possible permit adjustments to changes in household size and composition. Some solutions were discussed, among them:

- Lofts, where the inhabitants can build and change the interior themselves
- Community owned rooms for rent somewhere outside the apartments
- Different sizes of apartments so that people can swift houses
- Rental and ownership based apartments

## Ecological and social sustainability

Among environment related issues discussed were: What are the principles of ecological sustainability and priorities? What is the time that the costs are counted? To what extent can people be expected to accept to use new environment-friendly technology? What is the position of a group for which a design is to be elaborated - does the group believe in high-tech passive or low energy houses or low technological building materials? Studies are often needed of how much ecological concerns will affect lifestyles. Issues such as active and passive solar energy, microclimatic conditions etc. need to be taken into consideration.

For good result in social terms, people have to participate: Good designs can only come from participation processes where all people affected have a possibility to contribute their opinions. Cohousing groups are different, as are the people included to such processes. During the participatory process dreams and opinions become one spatial program and eventually homes are created for everyone.

**Knowledge:** Designers need to share information about existing cases of cohousing, and have the courage to learn from them before trying their own solutions.

**Economics:** Basic to any design process is how much people can afford to pay. When they present their different ideas and wishes, they need to be asked how much more they are willing to pay for additional choices, and the group as a whole has to set its priorities.

## Privacy is connected to culture

A basic requirement for good design is to find out how 'privacy' is seen in the local culture: In Netherlands many people don't use curtains and it is possible to see through the apartment. In Italy gardens are very private. People like to have high fences around them. Most Finnish people are believed to prefer not to see even the light from the neighbor's window. Living in cohousing makes private spaces more private. It is very important that people have a place where they can be alone, with their family or with friends. There must be a possibility to choose. If community has public activities, the people visiting community should not enter the spaces meant only for the use of community members accidentally. A good design can guide people to the right places without reading sign posts or info boards.



Residents' participation in the design of their future cohousing settlement, as described by the architect Charles Durrett.

### **The soft edges**

The spatial design should be such that it is immediately clear whether a certain place is private, semiprivate, communal or public space. This holds also for any entrance to the house. 'Soft edges' are socially better to separate the private areas. If soft indicators used to mark the space (height, materials, plants, levels, terraces) are perceived as insufficiently clear about levels of privacy, residents might find it necessary to make use of harder items such as fences, private-signs, curtains or venetian blinds. Where conditions permit the creation of a zone separating communal and private space, the selection of space markers should be facilitated. A soft edge is an obstacle as well as a connecting zone and a means to express yourself by the marking you choose.

### **Connections to common spaces**

It should be easy to enter common space. Public spaces should be situated along natural routes: on the way to bus stop or parking place, connected to the staircase. To visit public spaces should be a natural thing for residents. That other residents are there facilitates such a move. The more such space opens for organized and regular events like dinners, sport groups, parties or sauna events, the more it brings people together and strengthens the sense of community.

Visual connection is important: If a resident can see what is happening without entering the space, s/he can choose to enter or pass by. Information boards should

have a strategic place in attracting residents to enter public space. Good solutions could normally be found for bringing people together also in existing conventional buildings

### **The diversity of common spaces: Community size and ways to share spaces**

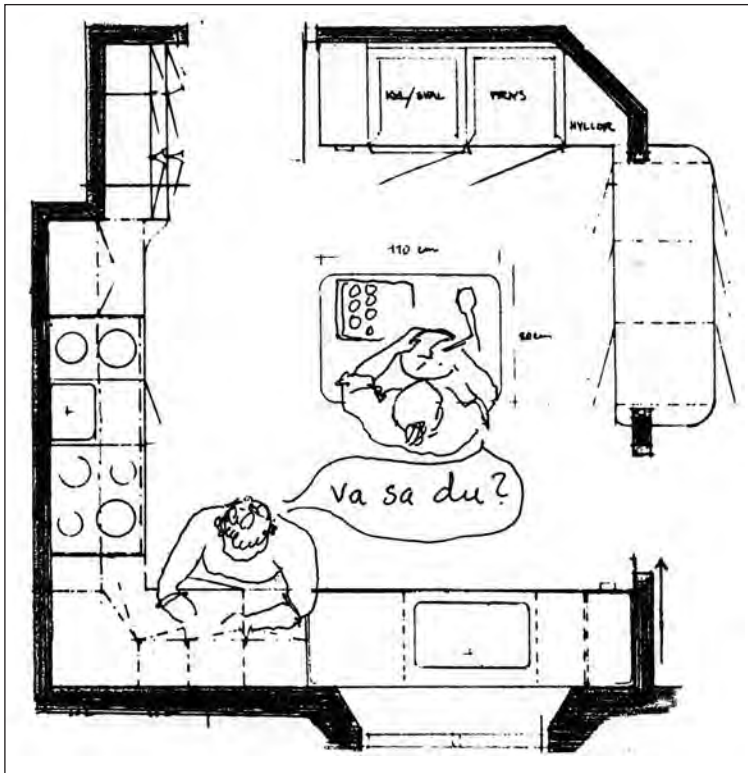
Architectural students from Tampere Technical University had attended a housing design course about collective housing where they learnt about three different ways to locate common spaces in apartment houses:

- Common space area on every floor connected to staircases
- First floor consisting of common space only
- Common space integrated with apartments.

Depending on the size of a cohousing entity, it might be worth considering to design for mini-entities within the larger entity, for instance:

- five apartments share a washing machine
- thirty apartments share a dining room

On the other hand, public space could sometimes be developed for sharing with neighboring houses: examples are commercial and recreational space,



Kitchen in the cohousing Slottet, Lund, Sweden, based on the concept developed by interior designer Gunilla Lauthers. The house was 60 years old when it was redeveloped into a cohousing in 1984. The size of the kitchen was determined by existing main walls, and the design adopted to those restrictions has proved to be functional for the about 30 members of the cohousing.

## **A brief look at Swedish design experiences**

In Swedish collective houses, a common kitchen adapted to cooking for all is generally part of the design. The text below is quoted from the book *Gemenskap och samarbete* (Togetherness and cooperation), produced by Cohousing NOW.

In Sweden, various design approaches for a collective kitchen have been thoroughly studied and tested already before a cohousing is built. Kitchen sizes vary between 15 and 55 m<sup>2</sup> depending on the number of apartments. Usually many people work together in preparing meals, and designs often have a workplace island in the middle with different functions to facilitate dialogue during the work. It pays off to develop and test flow schemes for the handling of hot food, heavy pans and other utensils in the shortest and most functional ways. A cosy and homelike atmosphere created through the use of good materials is important for social exchange during many working hours.

In many Swedish collective houses, the cost of public space is spread among residents through reducing the private flat areas by ten per cent compared to normal space standards. This allows communal kitchens, dining/living rooms, workshops, playroom, guest rooms etc. within normal rents. Common guestrooms allow households to have guests staying overnight despite there being no space in their own apartment.

In Swedish cohousing the common kitchen, dining room and living room are often located together and close to the main entrance. This facilitates spontaneous encounters and keeps people informed about what is going on in the house. Where possible, a fireplace and a sunny veranda are good additions for gatherings.

A variation in sizes of the flats will help the households to stay and move within the house during different phases of life.

For older teenagers, students and home office workers it has proved valuable to have a number of rooms connected to a common pantry and a common bathroom. ■

# Demands for collaborative housing in the future Workshop 9

Chair: **Bertil Egerö**: Secretary: **Els de Jong**

The workshop had 18 persons from nine countries, 13 women and five men. Five lived in cohousing developments, while four belonged to cohousing promotion groups and eight had an academic interest in the topic.

Four persons of the workshop participants had been contacted in advance and invited to prepare brief presentations under specific sub-themes. Guidelines for the discussion were circulated in advance, suggesting that our work should proceed along the following lines (text shortened):

To start, a fairly broad discussion of the actors and forces behind different kinds of collaborative housing today, followed by comments on what it is that drives these actors to go for such ways of living, and how these drivers may change in the future.

Further, a discussion of potential future demands for what may be called needs-based changes in response to impacts of “population ageing”, of ‘peak oil’ impacts on living costs, or responses to environmental changes. This should open for views on how the “collective housing movement” engages in exchanges with the wider society.

Finally, a common search for “what to do” responses to what has been learnt, and the formulation of a provisional agenda of action.

The workshop members came from many different countries; Finland, Greece, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden and the USA.

Jaesoon Choo and Jung Shin Choi opened with a presentation of their work on cohousing in South-Korea.<sup>1</sup> It is a highly urbanized and economically advanced

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<sup>1</sup> *W09\_Choi.Pdf*, distributed on paper during the workshop and Stockholm Conference  
Workshop9 Jung Shin Choi.pptx

# Korean Situation of Cohousing

- Cohousing project is not developed in Korea yet.
- Many people are seeking for new alternative living arrangement among baby-boomers.
- Industrialization in 1970s brought us rapid change of life style and family structure.
- We are facing to the aged society in 2014, very soon.
- Alternative housing schemes are gathering public interests: ecovillage, cohousing, senior cohousing, elderly housing among academics, business sectors and politics.
- But there are many things to resolve to adapt foreign cohousing model into Korea still: cultural difference, people's perception, economy, legal issues.

Presentation Jaesoon Choo & Jung Shin Choi.

country, so far without any cohousing projects yet. A survey showed growing interest among people approaching or in retirement ages. Loneliness and housekeeping problems were motivating factors, while many respondents also could contemplate sharing exercise room, a common kitchen and meeting room. Studies done by students among young families showed that even among young families there is a clear interest to share household work.

Jaesoon and Jung reported that neither public nor private actors as yet took an interest in the matter. The Korean Public Housing Corporation has begun to build senior housing, but not yet cohousing projects. The private sector hesitates, uncertain about the economic prospects of such investment.

Following a discussion of these findings, Angela Plessa from Greece initiated a discussion on the value of 'universal' as against 'second half of life' housing. A provisional conclusion was that a group of mixed ages potentially is more sustainable. In a related statement, Ingrid Båve posed the problem of segregation between rich and poor. There are in Stockholm four big suburbs where immigrants are a majority, while non-immigrant Swedish households hesitate to live or move there. She suggested that cohousing projects could be a way to facilitate integration in these neighborhoods.

The discussion moved on to considering possible future developments. With



- 1 out of 6 persons do not/seldom see people socially other than his family, colleagues, or friends  
... in Japan people have closer ties within family and/or company
- 42,5 % of households living alone (in Tokyo)
- 1 out of 3 is working at non-regular basis  
... which means there are many people who get connected nowhere
- 32,000 people annually die with no tie

Presentation of Tomoaki Kageyama

growing polarization, there will be more poor and unemployed people in Europe. At the same time, the populations of many countries are now shrinking, and Albrecht Göschel had in a plenary presentation suggested that this will lead to a surplus of housing in the future. We did not agree: The migration to cities leaves such surplus in areas where few want to live. Joanna Kerovuori suggested that cohousing with added shops and other amenities could contribute to bringing more life to these areas. She informed us that there are already websites where plots are listed that are free and usable.

Tomoaki Kageyama gave a presentation<sup>2</sup> about the situation in Japan. For many Japanese, Family and Company are the only two places for social contact. One person out of every six lives very isolated, and one of three persons lacks a regular workplace.

As director of a collective housing corporation in Japan, he works to promote interdependent communities of people, where they feel secure and can “*recover a power to make a change in society, as housing means more because it is a day-to-day thing and can be the basis of life*”. Tomoaki however had met no response from his government on his issue.

The next presentation<sup>3</sup> was made by the architect Eric Frijters (Fabrications) from the Netherlands. He introduced the term “clanning”. Faith Popcorn, who invented

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<sup>2</sup> Future\_needs\_japan\_20100508.ppt

<sup>3</sup> FABRIC-100508-presentation-Clanning-Stockholm-a

“cocooning” as a trend, speaks about clans: groups of people who like to share. Eric told that clanning is a more liberal idea of collaborative living, more simply about sharing something together. Eric lives in the centre of Amsterdam. He has experienced that young families in his generation like to share. Although they don’t live in collective house units, there is a new interest in sharing things and share space in the public domain. Said Eric: “You don’t have to connect this interest in sharing to the Hippie Era, and load it with its history. This makes people react like ‘*This is absolutely not for me!!*’”

Eric showed some models with common space in between single family houses. He presented a plan for co-housing commissioned by six senior couples who had bought a lot together and will build six houses plus various services. The care services are intended for themselves, but may also be available for other residents in the neighborhood.

We agreed that the ‘Swedish model’ was only one of many, and that a catalogue of models could be assembled to guide planning of collaborative housing in different countries.

Elisabeth Rudhe presented the organization *Framtiden* (The Future), based in Stockholm and working for the establishment of new cohousing projects in the city of Stockholm<sup>4</sup>. *Framtiden* was founded in 2002 in response to demands from a group of people who did not manage to get a flat in the first project for the second half of life in Stockholm, Färdknäppen. The number of members in *Framtiden* has varied between 80 and 130. After a difficult start, the group has found a willing public housing company, Familjebostäder. The collaboration resulted in a second project of the same kind in Stockholm, called Sjöfarten. For Familjebostäder it was important to know that they had many interested future tenants already queing through their membership in *Framtiden*. This made their cohousing projects less unsafe than they otherwise had been. The next project is expected to be ready in September 2010.

Currently, Familjebostäder plans to develop a new cohousing project for all ages. There is also a new organization called Kombo, directed to the demands of younger people. Elisabeth expects that new forms of cohousing will be created in the future. In the projects developed until now, collective suppers are at the heart of the cohousing, but this could well change in the future.

The *Framtiden* group has found that they need to work hard to get wider recognition. To continue their work, they would need professional support instead of relying for on volunteers for all the work.

The last part of the workshop was spent discussing action recommendations for the future.

*First*, the phenomenon of a shrinking population and the prospect of a surplus of houses could be a point of departure for developing a variety of cohousing models.

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<sup>4</sup> Worksh 9 El Rudhe

*Second*, the term cohousing does not always suit people, perhaps especially younger people. It would be useful to invent a new terminology devoid of links to either radical political orientations or movements such as the hippie movement.

*Third*, we need to improve our internal sharing of knowledge, and find better ways to spread information to the public about the good aspects of cohousing. A catalogue of models is useful, but it tells little more than the physical design, the buildings. Other ways to communicate what it means to live there need to be exploited. Video film is one of them. Johanna told the workshop that she had received a grant for making a video movie on Danish cohousing. Perhaps ways could be found to cover Sweden and Finland as well?

*Fourth*, safety is a growing concern of many people who live alone. Safety is likely to become an important motive for the provision of cohousing in the future.

*Fifth*, sharing and cohousing are excellent ways to reduce the use of resources, like energy, water, goods etc. The environmental dimension of cohousing is another argument in negotiations with authorities.

*Sixth*, while there are lots of good reasons to promote collective housing, it can only succeed if people are not forced – by housing authorities or housing shortage – to move into cohousing units, but are genuinely interested in the concept and positive about trying this way of life. ■

### **The following Recommendations for action were presented to the conference:**

- Assemble a variety of models of collaborative housing: not just the "Swedish Package".
- Improve and strengthen the professionalism in our work on collaborative housing
- Share knowledge and experiences (including texts and videos). Translate into English.
- Rejuvenate and make the organisation younger
- Review terminology to improve communication with younger generations

# Strategies for Mobilisation and Recruitment

## Workshop 10

Chairman: **Albrecht Göschel**; Secretary: **Dick Urban Vestbro**

The workshop had 14 participants from seven countries, six men and eight women. Six belonged to organisations that promote cohousing, while three lived in cohousing themselves and three were academics or professionals with an interest in the topic. Two belonged to organisations with other interests and two were seeking cohousing solutions for themselves.

### **Experiences of *Forum für gemeinschaftliches Leben***

Albrecht Göschel introduced the group's discussions by presenting the work of his organization, *Forum für gemeinschaftliches Leben* (Forum for communal living). He focused especially on the issue of recruitment of people for cohousing. He emphasized the importance of informal contacts and networks. There are websites of groups, private persons and voluntary organisations, which look for members and offer help and advice to new groups. Some of them give lectures, publish newsletters and advertise new projects for new members. Voluntary organisations often have contacts with professionals working with cohousing. However, it is sometimes risky to consult professionals, since Germany has many unemployed who offer their services without having the appropriate competence.

Professional organisations mediate contacts between current projects, skilled individuals, banks, and other institutions when groups want to start projects. There are architects, financial advisers and others who give advice to groups and individuals in the field of cohousing.

An important instrument when recruiting interested people to cohousing is to work with local authorities. In Germany there are 6 000 independent municipalities. The Forum is trying to establish contact with them and involve them in its lobby work. It is sometimes frustrating, for instance when municipalities allocate responsibilities to employees who know nothing about cohousing. Many prefer to deal with issues like poverty and they consider cohousing to be a concern for the middle class. Yet some local governments run advisory offices where people can get information about cohousing. Some run model projects, produce publications, organise conferences and work with professional organisations that give advice or training. Such conferences may target local officials, welfare organisations or building associations.

There is a development from informal networking to more formal cooperation with established institutions, for instance, banks. One problem is that the Forum is on

its way to becoming part of a housing market where the building itself becomes more of a commodity. The idea that groups of people should run their own housing projects is being eroded through this development towards more formal procedures. The Forum is far from being a social movement. The process from the first idea to moving in takes a very long time, up to seven years. In the meantime, many participants leave and are replaced. The Forum recommends new groups to request new members to pay €500 to €5 000 (which is not refundable when leaving the group). This is a way to build reliability into the project.

During the discussion Albrecht was asked about the role of professionals. What about other groups such as youth, students, associations of residents, etc? He replied that the Forum works with such organizations, but mainly with professionals. Another question concerned the investment individuals make in a project and how it affects their attitude to the cohousing project. Göschel replied that cohousing projects are not like buying a commodity. It should be a commitment. Participants have to get involved “to make it happen”. If participants pay €5 000, the group can afford to pay specialists such as architects in order to make the project a reality.

### **Recruitment of interested participants in Helsinki**

Kaisa Nirkkonen explained that the association Hem i stan (Home in the city, which is working for a cohousing project in Helsinki) started to recruit people for their cohousing project informally. It was decided that one must be a member of the association to be eligible for a cohousing apartment. Length of membership would determine who could first select an apartment. When consulting the architect, everybody had to pay a fee to be able to be part of the project. The amount was based on the size of the desired apartment. Kaisa herself had paid €2 000. Ten of the 50 members decided to leave the project. After having paid it is possible to leave the project only by selling one’s share to someone else who wants to join.

Kaisa further explained that the project was helped when the chair of the association appeared in a talk show in TV. She explained the idea of the house so well that her mailbox was flooded by people who wanted to join the project. The main message was that cohousing makes everyday life easier. A plan is required for how to market a cohousing project. The use of mass media is very important. Your message must be clear and thought out well in advance, she said.

Markku Hakalaa added that many people are very prejudiced against cohousing. They shut their ears. To reach them it is necessary to get the message through in two minutes.

### **How can one reach people in countries where cohousing is very rare?**

A question was put to the Spanish couple about how they became interested in cohousing. Arantxa Gurmendi and Antton Elosegı explained that people in Spain usually have many family and other social contacts. Nevertheless there is a concern

that children may not take care of their parents when they grow old. Not all families have many children nowadays. Until 1970 families used to have many children, but since the 1970s that pattern changed dramatically and nowadays families have no more than one or two children, so the demographic situation is very similar to the one in Northern Europe.

One day Arantxa and Antton happened to discuss such issues with some friends and decided to find out more about existing alternatives. They started to search the Internet, using words such as ‘cohabitation’ (French word). This led them to ‘cohousing’ and the International Collaborative Housing Conference. Arantxa and Antton want to live together with others when they grow older, but it may be difficult to implement a project in their small town. Most of their friends have houses of their own. It may be possible to transform one of these buildings into cohousing or to start an affordable cohousing project using money they can raise by selling their own houses. “But first we have to convince our friends of the idea,” they said. Guillermo Delgado suggested that they contact tenant organizations, students, local authorities and grassroots movements.

### **How is mobilisation done in Sweden?**

Dick Urban Vestbro told the workshop how the association Kollektivhus NU (Cohousing NOW) works to raise interest and help cohousing developments that have problems with recruitment. Kollektivhus NU started in 1981 when the new model of cohousing (based on the residents’ own work) started to gain momentum. After a long period of little activity, the association has been revived and is now working actively to inform the public about the benefits of cohousing.

Kollektivhus NU has updated its website, which contains a lot of information not only about all the cohousing projects existing in Sweden, but also about the history of cohousing, reports from seminars, lists of current literature and links to cohousing networks in other countries. The association has 700 subscribers to an electronic newsletter, which is disseminated half a dozen times a year, and an edited publication published four times a year. Journalists often use the website. After a decade of silence, the mass media is starting to write more about cohousing.

Every year Kollektivhus NU organises an “open house”, i.e. special information days when the general public have a chance to see how existing cohousing projects work in practice. Each year 15 to 20 of Sweden’s 35 cohousing units participate in the open house event, attracting anything between 5 and 225 visitors. Kerstin Kärnekull added that some cohousing units have special programs to invite politicians and other influential people to visit their community.

Despite these efforts Kerstin and Dick concluded that many Swedes are uninformed about cohousing and have prejudices about the lack of private life in cohousing. To counteract this, Kollektivhus NU is disseminating a brochure on the theme “Is one allowed to have one’s own toothbrush?” Kerstin added that it is often



difficult to convince housing companies about the virtues of cohousing. She referred to a proposal by Nils Ebril of the public housing company Göteborgs stads bostads AB to turn directly to the managing directors of housing companies with the good arguments that already exist (and refer to the goals of the housing companies themselves, which often stipulate that all categories of housing demands should be met).

### **Use of films about cohousing**

Several participants proposed the use of documentary and other films about cohousing. Reference was made to films already accessible on Youtube. Kerstin proposed that the next international cohousing conference should be a film festival. Her own cohousing complex Färdknäppen had been the subject of one film in Japanese and one in English. Elmar Brugger promised to send a link to a study about “Lebensraum” in Gänserndorf, the first real Austrian cohousing project. The link will be available after the official presentation of the study on June 22nd. Arantxa suggested that some films be made with Spanish subtitles. It was suggested that the film “Solo Senior” be shown on TV. It is a film about senior people in different situations who are living in cohousing.

### **Which categories are interested in cohousing?**

Stéphanie Vermeersch raised the issue of differences in culture in countries such as France compared to Sweden, for instance when it comes to meals. To prepare a meal in France is an important individual task, a way to prepare a treat for relatives or friends. The objection to this statement was that even if habits are often stable, behaviour is always changing in one way or another, and the cohousing movement



Outdoor meal in Austrian cohousing project Gänserndorf.

can push for change in a certain direction. Women are probably the ones who prepare the nice French meals. Will they accept spending so much time preparing meals, to the detriment of their careers? The cohousing movement should question cultural features that actually contribute to lack of equality.

Dick explained that the feminist movement in the 1960s (to which he belonged) actually changed public opinion in Sweden concerning men's and women's responsibilities regarding work in the home. One example is the introduction of special 'paternity leave' for fathers. Stéphanie noted that attitudes on this issue have also changed in France, but not among the working class. Stéphanie also said that 'habitat collectif' in France is considered political, a heritage from the people involved in the May 1968 movement, who wanted to change not only their housing situation, but the whole of society. A concept used in French is 'vivre autrement', to live differently. She said that mainly architects, teachers, social workers, media people and artists are interested in cohousing. She explained that this focus of the middle class is a question of culture, not necessarily an issue of class. How to reach out with the message of cohousing is thus not only a question of communication.

Dick explained that cohousing in Sweden – especially in smaller communes in the 1970s – was also quite political. It was mainly left wing students and youth who engaged in collective living at that time, and they saw it as a protest against bourgeois society. This situation has changed, however. Today there are fewer smaller collectives and they no longer have much of an ideological base. Cohousing is seen as a practical solution and most residents do not feel the urge to propagandize their way of living.

Dick referred to a study he carried out with social scientists in the 1980s, showing that cohousing residents in Sweden at that time were well educated people born in 1940s, working in the public sector, with independent types of work. However, they do not therefore represent the middle-class, because a common feature of the collectivists was that they wanted to turn away from consumer society, which is what the middle class in general is not doing. The so-called 'post-materialists' dominating the cohousing units in Sweden pay more attention to cultural and social values. They are usually engaged in the environmental, feminist, and other alternative movements. In Dick's research report from 1989 (in Swedish) it is argued that the residents in Swedish cohousing communities are more often politically active and have rich social networks, which in turn means that they have less need for the type of community provided by cohousing. Instead single parents (often low-income women) and people living alone are the ones who would benefit most from the low level of community that is offered by cohousing communities. It seems that a change is underway and that more representatives of these groups live in Swedish cohousing developments today.

Kerstin referred to Swedish studies showing that of those who prefer to live in apartment blocks, 10 per cent would like to live in cohousing (which can be compared to the actual figure, which is as low as 0.5 per thousand. In Denmark between 1.5 and



Members of Stacken in Gothenburg, the first Swedish cohousing of the new self-work model, established in 1979. To a great extent residents came from the radical left movement.

2 per cent live in cohousing (bofaelleskab). Among older people as many as 15-20 per cent say that they want to live in senior cohousing or similar housing forms, according to a study by Aeldre Sagen in 2007.

Elmar Brugger informed us about the high motivation of cohousing residents in Austria. They often have professional degrees (between 40 and 50%) and many are willing to move from Vienna and accept a remote location without too many public facilities, even though it means that they have to commute to their workplaces.

The study shows that they choose to live in cohousing *in spite of* its location. In general this is a question of ideology, but because of the much cheaper land prices, and especially in the case of young families, it is also a question of being able to afford cohousing. Elmar found it perfectly acceptable to build cohousing for exactly these categories of people. “We must build for those who are ahead of others and already motivated in order to set trends and make society progress,” he said.

Kaisa said that we may have to accept that people with special ideologies live in cohousing today, while we continue to argue that the idea should spread to new groups, as Bertil Egerö argued in his talk.

Annika Johansson (living in the cohousing complex Sockenstugan, Stockholm) referred to the environmental movement in the 1960s, which was very small, but which later increased tremendously thanks to conscious formation of public opinion. She said that many residents in Sockenstugan had changed their environmental behaviour since they moved into the building and took part in discussions on such issues.

Albrecht referred to the fact that Germany has 45 million cars on the roads – which is not sustainable at all – but nevertheless no change for the better takes place. Dick said that it is very difficult to foresee when behaviour can be radically changed. He pointed to the example of homosexuality, where attitudes have changed dramatically in only a decade or so. We in the cohousing movement must assume that attitudes may change. Perhaps we can use the same argument as in case of homosexuality. Research has shown that cities with a high ‘gay index’ (San Francisco, Copenhagen, Stockholm) also have a high index for creativity and entrepreneurship. How could

cohousing acquire the same glamour factor as gay lifestyles?

Guillermo Delgado argued that the cohousing movement should learn from other social movements such as immigrant organisations and the environmental movement. We should liaise with them and show that cohousing is something for them. Perhaps we should redefine our concepts in order to strengthen interest in alternative living among new groups? We should discuss how cohousing can contribute to solving their specific problems. Instead of accepting that we are a middle class phenomenon, we should make attempts to advertise ourselves as a new grassroots movement. We can turn to students, youth and immigrants, who are already looking for better housing alternatives. Cohousing associations could decide to be open to new groups of people with limited incomes. He referred to the case of Tre Portar in Skarpnäck, Stockholm, where the residents had such an open attitude during the presentation during the study visit earlier in the week.

Dick said that the history of communal living is not restricted to the middle class. He referred to the example of Heimhof in Vienna, which was specifically planned for workers (but later taken over by more affluent citizens), to Japanese working class tenement houses from the 1930s and to some cohousing units in Sweden today, which are inhabited by low-income people.

Elmar referred to the importance of motivation and to an example in Austria where in order to fill vacant units, the cohousing association also accepted people who were not really motivated to participate in cohousing. This led to heavy conflicts that took a long time to resolve.

Elisabeth Holm said that it was difficult to avoid a middle class character in cohousing complexes where there was cooperative ownership ('bostadsrätt' in Swedish), because then most people require a bank loan and that one's income is so high that it is beneficial to deduct the interest rate from one's taxes. Referring to the case of Hem i stan in Helsinki, Kaisa explained that a condition for being allowed to build on their site was that there was a mixture of ownership/tenure relations. Some of those living in the area have no idea that they live in an area with a lot of common facilities. Kerstin pointed out that housing management can promote community among residents by providing incentives to do things together. The problem is that housing companies do not understand the benefits of such incentives. ■

# Initiatives From Below – the Role of Civil Society Workshop 13

Chair: **Marie-Hélène Bacque**; Secretary: **Sarah Berger**.

Workshop 13 had fourteen participants from eight countries. There was no one from Sweden. Two participants lived in cohousing projects. The others were academics or policy makers interested in the process of developing cohousing operations which originate from civic society initiatives. As to the absence of cohousing occupants, the group wondered if cohousing residents may be less interested in the role of civil society.

## **A wide variety of contexts**

The first thing to note is the great diversity of backgrounds, both institutional and cultural, because of the different countries represented. Some have a strong tradition of public action. France, for instance, where the first movements toward housing operations put together by the inhabitants were already taking place in the 1980s. They then weakened. But for several years, new initiatives have been developing – often with an ecological dimension – and national and regional networks have been created. In Italy, as another example, there exists an old cooperative movement, but it is highly institutionalized. In the last few years we have also seen the advent of several new cohousing experiments. And in Great Britain, where a national network has been created, several experiments are under way.

## **A predominance of the middle classes**

The second thing to note is that most of these cohousing operations, whose instigation comes from below, are started by individuals who belong to the middle classes. We especially notice the prominence of certain professionals: social housing employees, urban planners, social workers – no doubt for the purpose of combining certain professional, organizational and activist skills. One of the questions to be asked is therefore: what conditions are needed for the movement to expand to other parts of society and especially to the working classes?

## **Different forms of partnership**

Cohousing experiments develop different social and partnership dynamics depending whether the initiative comes from 1) independent groups of future residents, 2) community organizations and professional networks or 3) local or national institutions such as housing associations, municipalities and sometimes the State.

The workshop group identified three possible types of cohousing partnerships:

- private sector partnerships;
- public sector partnerships; i.e. national government and local government partnerships;
- third sector partnerships (NGOs/non-profit organisations) .

What are the conditions to attract these three partnerships? And what are the effects of the different partnership on the various projects?

There is a variety of reasons why the public sector may be interested:

- As solutions for an ageing population. In most of the developed world this issue becomes a highly charged one and current housing solutions are often not suitable. Besides that, the older generation represent a powerful lobby.
- Access to housing is an equally important issue even if it hardly excites the public authorities. Cohousing could represent an interesting solution to enable young adults to live in shared housing.
- In certain cases, cohousing could be a way to introduce social diversity into impoverished neighbourhoods: it is in keeping with in the logic of urban renewal and can be a first step in a process of gentrification.

Depending on what is at stake the public authority's manner of investment can vary greatly.

The private sector is of course interested in these operations within the logic of the marketplace. In certain cases, it can offer new real estate products which target a given segment of the population. The question then becomes: how do we measure the scale of demand? From this point of view each country's experiences are very different. In the United States, for example, what we notice is the presence of private individuals investing in the cohousing market. In other countries, by contrast, cohousing is a way for future residents to try to avoid real estate speculators and thus to save money.

The third, or intermediate, sector, which is located somewhere between the free market and public involvement, deals with situations which can be very different, depending on the country.

What can the state do to sustain cohousing? What can be asked for? Several types of public aid could be put to into place:

- Subsidies, assistance loans for putting the operations together. This can be done by way of property tax rebates at advantageous rates as is done in France.
- The possibility of integrating elements of cohousing into public works as is done in Sweden.
- Assistance to help put together and finance networks, as we see in the cooperative networks in Canada.
- Or should cohousing groups themselves support networks via subscriptions and



fees? The question being raised here is about the independence of the movement and the commitment of its members.

### **What kinds of cohousing organisations are necessary?**

In all of the cases, the importance of networks and the exchange of experiences seem to be very useful, allowing for the avoidance of a certain number of errors and for the anticipation of a series of difficulties. However, must these networks be:

- International?
- Europe-wide?
- National?

In each case, the issue of defining cohousing is raised, which is an issue that has not been resolved. Must there be a definition which is universal and precise in order for groups to organize and lobby? This, however, carries the risk of being too rigid and of being closed off in relation to the experiences of other collaborative groups.

The workshop group also wondered: Why is there a gulf between UK/USA cohousing and cohousing in Scandinavia and in Europe? Several reasons were suggested. The English language cohousing field is based mainly on US literature, US experiences and US websites. The principal works advocating this model are American, mainly the books of Charles Durrett & Kathryn McCamant, who developed 50 of the 120 cohousing communities in USA, based on the Danish model. It was recognized that there is not much direct access to the expertise and experience of those in the Scandinavian and European cohousing field. Is this merely because of the language barrier – of materials not being translated – or is there cultural phenomenon at work; i.e. Danish and Swedish humility? ■

# More Cohousing through Cooperation between User Groups, Housing Companies and Municipalities

## Workshop 16

Chair: **Kerstin Söderbaum Fletcher**, cohousing development Tersen, Falun, Sweden; Secretary: **Nils Assarson**, cohousing development BoAktiv Landgången, Malmö, Sweden. Both had been active in starting their cohousing projects. The workshop was held in Swedish.

Workshop 16 had 16 participants, 15 were Swedish and one Danish. Eleven were women and five men. Eight of the participants lived in cohousing themselves, while six belonged to cohousing promotion groups. Three represented housing companies, two were active politicians and one had an academic interest in the topic.

### Introduction

#### Perspectives and premises

Some reasonable premises for this workshop were:

- People desire housing with high quality of life. Families with children worry about how to manage their complicated life puzzle. Older people worry about becoming alone and isolated.
- Housing companies are generally interested in a good profitability, which means that they want a low turnover of tenants, little damage to the buildings, and low operating costs.
- Municipalities have tight budgets with social welfare, care for the sick and disabled, and schools as rapidly growing cost items.

#### Goal of workshop

Our starting point for the workshop was that we needed to understand the way housing companies and municipalities think and function in order to be able to talk to their representatives in their language. The focus of the workshop was on the Swedish situation and conditions.

The goal of the workshop was to find a basis for cooperation with municipalities and housing companies, preferably as guidelines for the 'driving souls' who want to start new cohousing projects.

### Cooperation with the *municipalities*

#### Relevant background concerning the municipalities

What important ways are there to start a good dialogue with the municipality about the need for cohousing? The municipalities have important housing policy

documents, which formulate the goals and priorities, which it is important to explore, refer to and connect to.

When it comes to a particular housing project, it is important to understand the relations between the municipality and the housing companies. The trend is for municipalities to shift control over the building of residences to 'the market', that is the big building and housing companies, which may discriminate against less wealthy people and people with particular visions of housing. Many municipalities in Sweden have, however, kept an important political influence over residential building through the public housing companies, which are partly controlled by political directives from the municipality. This is why most cohousing projects in Sweden have been implemented by public housing companies.

Another important organisation, which often is controlled by the municipality, is the municipal housing allocation agency (*bostadsförmedlingen*), in those municipalities where such exist. A special queue of people interested in cohousing could considerably facilitate recruitment to cohousing projects.

Municipalities in Sweden (and in most other western countries) face a growing problem. During the coming 20 years the number of individuals over 80 years will increase dramatically, while the number of individuals between 19 and 65 years will remain almost constant. Every working person will have to take care of and finance pensions for more and more people. At the same time the municipalities have to take into consideration that the salaries of municipal staff will increase considerably, with no possibility of achieving a corresponding increase in productivity. Every idea that could contribute to finding a solution to this problem will be most interesting for the municipalities. Cohousing, and especially cohousing for seniors or for 'the second half of life', could definitely be such an idea.

PHOTO: DICK URBAN VESTBRO



The library of the Kornet cohousing complex in Mölndal, Sweden with visitors from Kollektivhus NU

The first question asked of the workshop members was: What experiences do you have of cooperation with municipalities on cohousing? What is important to know about your municipality when you want to start cooperation around a cohousing project? The conclusions of these discussions are summarized in the following:

### **Advice on cooperation with the municipality**

- Find and read documents on the housing policy of the municipality. Use relevant passages in talking with municipal politicians.
- Try to lobby to have the municipality include support for cohousing in its housing policy.
- Initiate and cultivate contacts with key people among the municipal leaders. Find especially those positive to cohousing ideas, preferably among the women leaders, as they are generally more positive.
- Find research material (through Kollektivhus NU and the international cohousing network) showing the benefits of cohousing for the quality of life, health, and reduced costs for social welfare. Then present it to municipal leaders in a competent way.
- Try to influence the municipal housing allocation agency to become an effective meeting place for cohousing projects and the public.

### **Cooperation with housing and building companies**

#### **Relevant background concerning the housing and building companies**

All housing and building companies, irrespective of ownership, are expected to make a certain profit. Therefore they need to keep construction costs down. Kornet in Mölndal, Sweden, is a cohousing project, which has been followed by the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning. The close cooperation between the project group, the public housing company (Mölnadalsbostäder) and the building company (PEAB) during the whole planning and building period resulted in considerable savings.

The next factor is to what extent tenants fill the building (to avoid vacancies). This is less of a concern in big cities with a housing queue, but more of a problem in rural areas. Low turnover of tenants is also an important argument for cohousing (because cohousing buildings tend to have fewer vacancies).

Other important factors that affect the economy of the housing companies are vandalism, repairs, and cleaning costs. These costs can be considerably lower in cohousing, especially when there are management agreements between the cohousing association and the housing company.

The second question asked of the workshop members was: What experience do you have of cooperation with housing and construction companies on cohousing? What is important to know about these companies when you want to cooperate with them on a cohousing project?

As the workshop members also included three representatives of public housing companies (Familjebostäder Stockholm, Bostadsbolaget Gothenburg, and the Swedish Federation of Public Housing Companies, SABO), we had a very fruitful discussion, which is summarized below.

### **Advice on cooperation with housing and construction companies**

- Try first to get in touch with the public housing companies – better possibilities of reaching an understanding because they have political directives – preferably those who have earlier experience of cohousing.
- Make an appointment first with the chairperson of the political board.
- Present substantiated arguments about the benefits of cohousing, linked to the housing policy of the municipality and the municipality's directives to the company.
- Present substantiated arguments for the economic benefits of cohousing (more stable group of tenants, better care of the building by the tenants etc.) Use Kornet-project as an example.
- If the partner is a private housing company, find out whatever pressure the municipality can apply to the company and use it.

### **The users as partners in cooperation in cohousing**

#### **Relevant background concerning the users**

So far there is only a small minority of the population that is actively interested in cohousing. As there are few, if any, cohousing initiatives from politicians and housing companies, we are dependent on initiatives 'from below', from the potential users. An important experience from such initiatives is that success requires a strong and organized group that formulates common goals.

What makes people motivated to choose cohousing as a way of living? An important factor is that Sweden has one of the highest numbers of single person households in the world (around 50 %, in the cities more than 60 %). This has to do with a high divorce rate and an ageing population. Living alone can of course be self-elected and give a high quality of life but can also mean isolation and insecurity. Families with children can through cohousing have a better chance to manage the life puzzle and find a way to unburden the nuclear family. Older people lose much of their social network when the children move out and when they retire. For them cohousing can mean a revitalized social life.

Many scientific studies show that a good social network is an important factor in promoting health and quality of life, which is also one of the main advantages of cohousing.

As we now have good reasons to believe in the advantages of cohousing, why are there still so few? How can we find the best way to make our experiences known to the public? This would be an important question for newly formed cohousing projects,

and also for existing housing complexes that have difficulties in finding tenants for all their flats.

The third question asked of the workshop members was: What experiences do you have of starting and implement a cohousing project? How do you create a project group that is big and strong enough? The discussions of the workshop are summarized below:

### **Advice on how to build a project group that is big and strong enough**

- The initiators need to put their vision into words, contact people they think might be interested, and start visionary discussions.
- When the vision is concrete enough, the initiator group should reach out to the public by means of posters, advertisements, and use the Internet, etc. to announce a meeting.
- Organize! (form an association around the project).
- Be open to crazy and unconventional solutions (“The fools change the world, the others just administer it”).
- Gradually contact key persons in the municipality and housing companies (see above).
- Raise funds.
- Find out what competence the group needs, find and, if necessary, buy the competence missing.
- Give the planning and group-forming process optimal time, at least two years, but not too long – the ‘driving souls’ might burn out and people might leave.
- Be creative, have fun! ■



# Suitable Forms of Ownership/Tenure and Economic Aspects of Cohousing

## Workshop 8

Chair: **Stig Dederig** (living in Hässelby family hotel for many years); Secretary: **Ylva Sandström** (living in a cooperative project with an ecological orientation, working at the National Swedish Federation of Public Housing Companies, SABO).

This workshop had 16 participants; all except one were Swedish. Nine were men and seven women. Nine lived in cohousing themselves, while three belong to cohousing promotion groups and three represented housing companies. The introduction of participants showed that there was a strong interest in learning from each other's experiences. The workshop was held in Swedish and Madi Gray has translated the report.

The chair and secretary had prepared the workshop by sending out some questions for discussion to the prospective participants:

- How do the various forms of ownership/tenure function for collective living today?
- How does collective living affect the economy of the residents, the properties and society?
- At the beginning of the workshop the following questions were added:
- What characteristics of the forms of ownership/tenure are of particular importance for establishing, developing and maintaining collective living?
- Which problems do we meet and which opportunities can we see in the different forms of ownership/tenure?
- Can we share experiences and give examples of how they function and how problems can be/have been tackled?

### **Influence**

Basic to collaborative living is that residents together have the opportunity of shaping their way of living. The residents must be able to control the design and utilization of the common areas, as well as the activities carried out there. They should also be able to choose to take over certain maintenance tasks in order to keep costs down.

Public housing companies own most cohousing in Sweden, with rental agreements (*hyresrätt* in Swedish). If the company is up to the mark, resident influence can function. Several examples were given of how activists had to start by educating the housing companies about collaborative housing. Then the companies' interest usually increased. The first project usually functions as a prototype from which all can draw

lessons. However, the staff of housing companies often has little time to work with others.

The example of BiG Kornet, owned by the public housing company Mölndalsbostäder, shows how important it is to have the top leadership, in this case the executive director, on one's side. The cohousing group exerted considerable influence and were able to affect the design, with the result that construction costs fell. Expert support for the production of Kornet came from the Subsidy Unit (Byggekostnadsforum) of the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket). The example of Majbacken in Gothenburg shows that if a group of people are determined to get the kind of housing they want, the process will go their way in the end, even if it takes time.

When the cohousing association took over the existing building at Majbacken and converted it to collective living, participants from Majbacken said they doubted that cooperative rental tenure (*kooperativ hyresrätt* in Swedish) would give them more influence. Their joint tenure contract and self-administration agreements work satisfactorily.

### Can one influence who will move in?

How a collaborative housing project develops depends to a great extent on the degree of interest and commitment of the residents. New people who move in may not be interested in this way of living. It is thus important to be able to influence who will move into the cohousing project. This is not only relevant at the start, but also subsequently, when people move and/or exchange units.

Those who lived in cohousing with *ordinary rental contracts* (*hyresrätt* in Swedish) gave several examples of difficulties that arose in influencing who moved in. In some cases this was because empty apartments had to be allocated by the municipal housing agency. This body has little idea of the internal and daily life in cohousing, yet has great influence on the inner life. In some cases these experiences were 25 years old, which means that the structure is very difficult to change. One can avoid these problems with *cooperative rental tenure*, if the cohousing association has taken over the administration of the queue.



Housing community Kornet in Mölndal, Sweden, built in 2005 by Mölndalsbostäder. It has cooperative rental tenure.

### **Can one influence how residents participate?**

One problem may also be that the situation of people who move in may change after some time and they may no longer be able to participate in common activities, or may simply not wish to continue doing so. How can this be dealt with? What are the possibilities and limitations in the different forms of ownership/tenure?

One suggestion was that large housing companies ought to be able to offer another apartment to those who no longer wished to live in cohousing. In Stockholm three centrally situated cohousing rental projects, which are not working very well, are being reorganised and the tenants are becoming owner-occupiers (bostadsrätt in Swedish). Will that increase participation?

Tullstugan is in a large apartment block in Norra Hammarbyhamnen in Stockholm. In 2001 it was converted into owner-occupation, which prevented the cohousing association to demand participation in common activities by those moving in. Nevertheless the Tullstugan cohousing complex has managed to survive by accepting new members from the surrounding neighbourhood.

### **Cooperative rental tenure**

Ylva Sandström pointed out that with cooperative rental tenure one gets a 'cleaner' organisation and clearer division of responsibilities between the housing company and the cohousing association. This form of ownership/tenure is well-suited to those who want considerable influence over their residences. The number of examples is growing, not only among SABO's member companies, but also among other actors. It works best in connection with new projects. It is not obligatory to pay a deposit in cooperative tenure, but it is common when a property owner needs partial financing of new construction. Rents would become too high with ordinary rental tenure. It is based on members being able to sell a former dwelling. (Familjebostäder in Stockholm has low deposits in its most recent project, Dunderbacken. The company does not need to 'borrow' much money from the residents, as they have adequate economic resources).

Cooperative tenure is a form of ownership/tenure that could be seen as an integration of rental tenure with the owner-occupier model. This form of ownership/tenure is a particular type of economic association. The law on cooperative tenure came into effect in April 2002. Two different models exist. In the cooperative tenant-owner model, the members own the actual property/properties. The best-known example is Stockholms Kooperativa Bostadsförening (SKB) a housing co-operative owned by its members, formed in 1916 with about 7 000 apartments rented to members. In the cooperative rental model, the owners construct a building and rent it to a cooperative rental association. The property owners and the rental association sign a contract regarding administration and maintenance. In both models the individual's responsibilities for the apartment and towards the association are specified in the regulations. The more usual model is

cooperative rental. The development of cooperative rental associations is slowly increasing.

**Forms of ownership/tenure with collaborative housing**

	Rental tenure	Cooperative tenure, rental model	Cooperative tenant-owner model	Owner-occupier right	Ownership
<b>Occurrence of collaborative housing forms</b>	More than half, public housing companies predominate	Relatively common, ± ¼, expanding	Unusual, only one in a cohousing building	Occur, 5-6 today	No
<b>Influence?</b>	Depends on the contract	Considerable	Considerable	Considerable	Considerable over one's own dwelling
<b>Influence over who moves in?</b>	Yes, if landlord and housing allocation agency agree	Yes	Yes	Only if a unit is given to the association	No
<b>Influence if exchanging apartments?</b>	Limited, right to exchange is more important	Limited, right to exchange is more important	Limited, right to exchange is more important	No, hardly ever	No
<b>Influence over participation?</b>	Hardly ever, occupancy rights take over	Hardly ever, occupancy rights take over	Hardly ever, occupancy rights take over	Hardly ever, occupancy rights take over	No
<b>Tax problems?</b>	Yes, can arise in cases of self-administration	Yes, but they can be avoided	No	No	No

The table above depicts features of the different forms of ownership/tenure that are of particular significance for initiating, developing and maintaining collaborative housing. The following aspects are important:

**Influence**

Basic to collaborative housing is that the residents have the opportunity of shaping their way of living together. The residents must be able to determine the design and utilization of the common areas, and also decide on other activities. With the aim of reducing costs, they should be able to take over certain administrative and maintenance functions that are often carried out by a housing company or administrative company.

**Influence over those who move in**

How a collaborative housing project develops depends to a great extent on the interest and commitment of the residents. New people who move in may not be

interested in this way of living. An opportunity to choose who will move into cohousing is thus important. This is true at the beginning and also subsequently when residents move or exchange their apartments. Here there may be a conflict between the individual's and the group's interests.

### **Influence over participation**

One problem may be that the situation of people who move in may change after some time so that they can no longer participate in the common activities or if they simply no longer wish to take part in them. How should this be handled and what are the possibilities and limitations in the various forms of ownership/tenure?

### **Taxation problems**

If the residents take over certain tasks and are remunerated for that, taxation problems may arise. It differs in the different forms of ownership/tenure. There are various ways to tackle this.

### **Economy**

Cohousing can differ considerably and the economic conditions may differ. The workshop did not have enough time to go through and compare the questions sent out, but did discuss some.

#### **The residents' economy**

"I pay 30 kronor and get a really good meal, instead of having to cook for myself" is a revealing comment.

#### **The economy of the property owners and the residents**

BoAktiv Landgången in Malmö is a cooperative tenants' association that rents out the units, the property owners are Norska Hyreshem. The example of Landgången shows



Cohousing project Landgången, Malmö, Sweden, built in 2007.

that the economy of the residents can be tight, if the members must borrow to cover the deposit to get tenure. Cooperative rental tenure offers insecure mortgage rights, which in turn leads to higher interest rates on loans.

Bostadsbolaget in Gothenburg has developed a concept called 'Next Stop Living'. It will be applied in a former

collaborative project in the suburb of Majorna. The concept aims at improving common interests among the residents, but not to start a new cohousing project. There is a moderate increase in rents. What will the changes mean for current occupants? FoU i Väst, a research and development project run by the municipalities in and around Gothenburg, will keep track of the changes.

### **Society's economy**

Examples were given of how cohousing projects had a calming effect on the rather rowdy neighbourhoods surrounding them, which is perhaps an unexpected aspect.

Food and other goods are delivered in greater quantities to cohousing using the same trucks. This makes transport and packaging more rational, so there are environmental gains.

Research on the elderly shows that they remain longer in serviced apartments than in their own homes. The final move to frail care is postponed or may not even be needed.

A closing comment pointed out that common sense indicates that peoples' health and quality of life are improved by a good social context. Support is required for research to prove this. More collaborative living projects are also required to show that this is correct.

### **Tax problems**

If the residents take over certain tasks and are paid for this, tax problems may arise. It looks a little different in each of the forms of ownership/tenure. There are various ways of tackling these issues. The discussion showed that the situation may become quite complicated. A reduction of taxes for self-administration in an ordinary rental property is paid to an individual. In the case of Majbacken the reduction in taxes is transferred to the cohousing association. ■



# Self-administration in Cohousing Projects

## Workshop 6

Chair: **Peter Bakker**; Secretary: **Madi Gray**

Workshop had 11 participants from nine countries. Five members lived in cohousing or were affiliated to a cohousing unit, while three belonged to organisations working for cohousing, and four had an academic interest in the topic. One of the academics has done extensive research about the role of social movements within the field of housing.

Different types of ownership or rental of cohousing are related to the property ownership system in each country, for example, in the USA rental is not a common option, while in France, the Netherlands and Sweden rental is common, not only in cohousing but in the housing market in general.

Today there are many varieties of tenant cohousing projects. If the different options could be categorized, this would facilitate the understanding of how different projects are working.

### **Should cohousing associations be able to select who can move in?**

In Sweden a basic expectation of many cohousing associations is that they should be able to decide whom to accept as new member of the group. However, these procedures do not always work well. Housing companies sometimes regard such influences as a violation of the principle of fair access to housing and cohousing associations may be slack in the screening and selection process. In Stockholm new regulations limit the choices since January 2010, as public housing companies now have a single municipal waiting list, which stipulates that queuing time must be respected.

In the Netherlands, all cohousing communities have the right to choose their own members, by agreement with the housing corporations. When an apartment is empty, a cohousing association has from two weeks to three months to find new members before becoming liable for the rent. After three months, the housing corporation has the right to choose a new member.

The process of approving new candidates can lead to conflicts between cohousing members. We need to know more about how such processes work in different units; who takes part in the group making decisions? How are differences between members resolved when making choices? It is quite important to learn how to ask questions to find out who is interested in taking part in the social life of the community, who wants to invest the time, and is capable of doing so.

The workshop also dwelt on the issue whether it is right to choose between



In the Frog Song community California the consensus principle is practiced.



PHOTO: DURRETT & MCKAMMANT

Resident participation in cohousing design in the US

interested applicants – does not everybody have the right to live in cohousing? In the US it is not always possible to select members from among the applicants, because of the existing laws that aim to prevent discrimination.

Seen from the other side, applicants need access to information to enable them to take a well-founded decision on whether or not they really should move in with a particular group. Such information could take the form of a checklist to clarify the responsibilities of each cohousing member, and the benefits of cohousing. It is easier to make a realistic choice if one has a concrete idea of how a particular cohousing project works, like cooking, meetings, gardening or participation in social events.

Questions that applicants need to find answers to are, for instance: How time-consuming is it to live in a particular cohousing development? What are the social demands? How often do we eat together? Can I say no? Do I need

to be there all the time? What do I share? What is private?

Formal meetings in a cohousing unit are important, but sometimes one can resolve issues and get new ideas through informal socialising events such as meals, parties etc. Ideas put forward by individuals make cohousing life richer, for example car-sharing, tenants' projects to improve living like sharing discarded children's clothes or buying organic products in bulk to sell cheaply to cohousing members.

How does one get new members who are committed to living in cohousing? In Sweden it is common that new members sign a contract, while in several cohousing communities in the Netherlands one signs a declaration of intent regarding one's responsibilities to the community.

One workshop participant expressed some doubts about such methods: one can

get people to sign a rental contract, but can one make people do things they don't want to do in a social setting, through making them sign contracts?

### **Consensus or majority decisions?**

The workshop agreed on the need to find solutions that each of the group members can live with. We discussed problems that may arise, which led to the formulation of a number of questions:



Tunnan in Borås, Sweden. Here the cohousing association has a far-reaching measure of self-administration within public rental tenure. The tenants take care of gardening, part of maintenance and administration of common spaces. In this way the rent level is kept down.

How does a cohousing group deal with a passive participant who is sometimes not happy with an outcome, but does not put forward his/her own views in the discussion? There is a need to identify and assist people to find a voice – not let some people take too much power. The last opinion expressed before a decision is taken often sways the consensus decision, which can be good or bad. It can either provide an acceptable solution or the critics may give up.

In communities consensus often leads to taking better decisions and perhaps consensus is an ideal to aim for. Of course a meeting can decide by consensus not to take a consensus decision on a certain point. Then majority decision is one way to be able to move on. However, the lack of consensus might hide underlying problems in the group that it would be better to solve before going further. It may be wrong for a group to force a decision on a member, as it is a break in trust at that moment.



The Kankan Mori collective development.

In Japan, when cooperative ownership of a cohousing development was introduced,

some inhabitants remained as tenants. This opened for differences at meetings between owners and tenants. However, tenants could feel that they could not talk at same level as owner members, and gave up talking at meetings. Thus, discussions and agreements did not proceed the way they should. Japanese people are generally poor at discussing with each other, and outside facilitators could be a way to help a community to face difficulties.

### **A charter for cohousing**

The workshop agreed that in decision-making in cohousing, it is important to keep in mind that it is not “me” and “them”, it is “us”. The process must not get rigid or become more important than the members. The person who decides to live in a community, also thereby decides to challenge him/herself.

Sometimes a group has to remind itself that everyone has a say. One must respect each other and not judge each other, particularly when it comes to managing the place where one lives. Scale matters: When 45 people have difficulties in finding a solution, they might need to mandate a smaller working group to try to resolve an issue on behalf of the whole group.

**Proposal:** That, as a follow-up to this conference, a *draft charter for cohousing* is produced that could function as guidelines. It could outline factors that are basic to new cohousing, present the range of different options available, summarize lessons of the current movement, and thus be instrumental in developing cohousing in the world. ■

# From ‘Wishful Thinking’ to Moving in – The Steering and Planning Process

## Workshop 4

Chair: **Charles Durrett**, McCamant & Durrett Architects. Nevada City. Secretary: **John F Fletcher**, Tersen cohousing development in Falun, Sweden, Treasurer of KollektivhusNU.

The workshop had 20 participants from ten countries, 13 women and seven men. Six lived in cohousing, while three had an academic or professional interest in the topic. As many as 12 participants were currently in a start-up process for 12 different cohousing projects in five different countries. The start-up process appeared to be almost entirely ‘local’, an expression of each country’s traditions and expectations. The cohousing format varied. It was concluded that there is no single ‘best’ start-up process.

Charles Durrett’s and Kathryn McCamant’s two books, ‘Cohousing’ and ‘Senior Cohousing’, describe the approaches to cohousing in both Denmark and the US. It was thought that they can be applied in other environments as well. Full information about these books is available in the literature list appended to this Book of Proceedings.

### **Do we need a shift in perspective?**

The participants replied ‘Yes’ to this question. It was concluded that we need to learn much more from each other about how things can be done. Currently, the core perspective appears to be: “*Can cohousing add to my quality of life?*” The world-wide demographic developments – and the current difficulties in many nations to finance the welfare systems built over the last 50 years – indicate that we also need to find alternative ways for coming generations to ‘fare well’, to ensure an acceptable “quality of society”.

### **So, what can be done?**

It was agreed that we need to support both the quality of life and the quality of social perspectives. Here follow some conclusions:

#### **Forming a cohousing culture**

All participants agreed that the process of forming an individual ‘cohousing culture’ for each new project is critical. It is not primarily a matter of having the ‘right culture’,



but of the residents having gone through the formation process together. Much of this work needs to be in place before moving in. It is much harder to build a desirable culture once everyone has settled in and started to develop her/his own patterns!

The process needs to be studied to develop a clearer picture of cultures in successful cohousing. Appropriate tools to support the process need to be developed for use in future start-ups.

### Cohousing format

There are two distinct ownership patterns: US and Danish cohousing starters favor ownership, whereas most of the rest of Europe favors renting, often from a public housing company. The Swedish tradition says ‘enrol a public housing company in building a new house’, while Danes and Americans prefer to find, buy and develop their own sites.

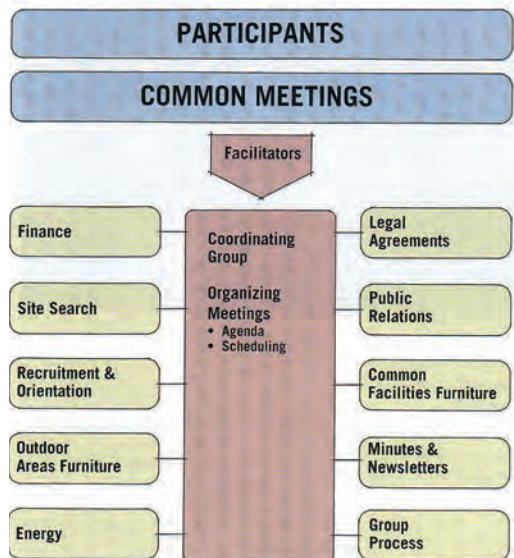
With some exaggeration, it might be said that Swedes try to “convince somebody else to act”; while Danes/Americans try to convince others to “get out of the way”. The Danish/American model demands a much stronger up-front financial commitment from the participants.

*The various patterns need to be described, understood, and made available to all interested parties.*

### Selection of tenants

Many perceived a need to select future tenants in order to ensure that those who do move in are serious, not just looking for a roof over their heads (a key aspect where there is a housing shortage). Again we noted different patterns. Selection can be seen as discriminatory in the US. Selection is difficult where there is a housing shortage (the larger Swedish cities) and the authorities decide to whom a vacant apartment will be offered.

*Various methods have been developed to help in this process. They need to be documented and made available to others.*



Example of administration of cohousing in USA. Source: Charles Durrett's book Senior Cohousing, page 114".



A difficulty (specific to Sweden) is that many participants in the start-up process back off when the time comes to sign a tenant contract, creating difficulties for both the cohousing association and the landlord.

*Can the recruitment process be made more formal, requiring commitment, by introducing some kind of up-front financial input?*

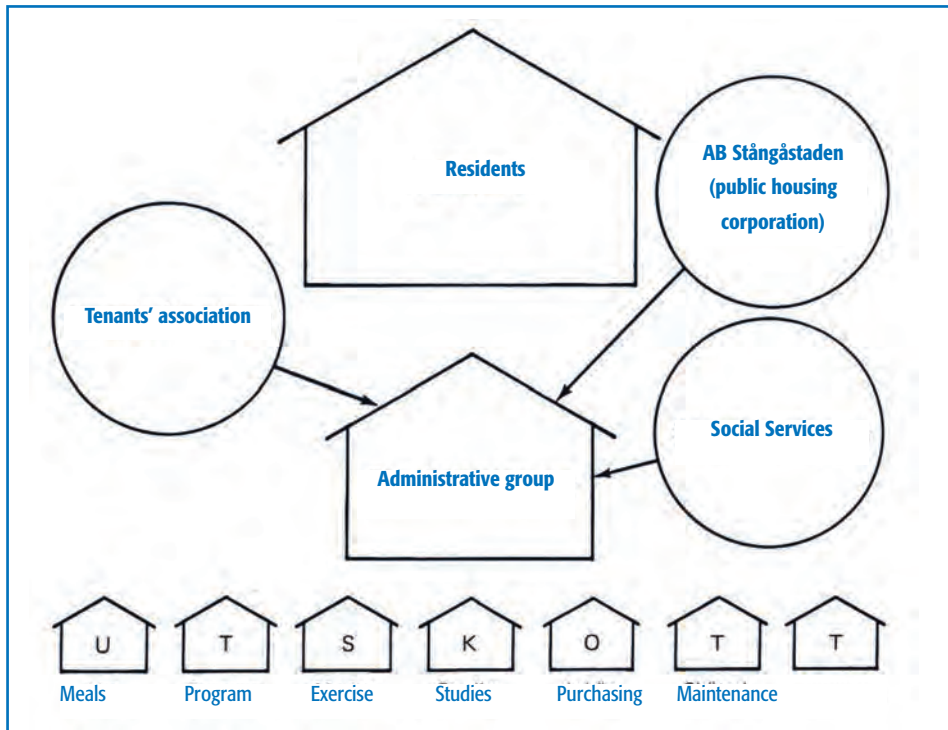
### Time frame

It was concluded that the varying approaches lead to very different time frames. The most common ‘gestation period’ (time from the in-principle go-ahead to getting construction started) in the US is less than 6 months, compared to maybe five years in many European countries. This difference probably reflects the difference in financing and ‘ownership’ of the projects.

*We need to learn more about the reasons for, and the consequences of these differences.*

### Use of professionals

The Danish/American approach of ownership and up front financial commitment



Proposed organization for the implementation of the Stolplyckan cohousing project in Linköping, Sweden, built in 1979–80.

opens up for the use of professional facilitators, individuals who can help start-up groups organize their efforts. The tenant approach works with a much weaker financial base, and thus depends more on the effort and ability of the start-up group itself. This probably explains some of the differences in time frames.

*Again, we need to learn more about the reasons for and the consequences of these differences.*

#### **Our own answers**

*We need to find out what differences there might be in the start-up rates in different nations with different traditions. We also need to know whether these differences lead to different 'success rates' in the future development of the various cohousing projects.*

#### **What are the next steps?**

A lot depends on how soon we can establish a joint website where information can be displayed and discussed. Having such a site available, the next step should be to build further on the issues raised in this report. ■

# Shared Meals – the Hub of Living Together

## Workshop 2

Chair: **Helen Jarvis**. Secretary: **Birgitta Fransson**

The workshop consisted of 12 participants from seven countries. Seven participants lived in cohousing, while four belonged to cohousing promotion groups and three had an academic interest in the topic (see further table below).

### **Introduction: definition and significance**

Shared meals that neighbours prepare and sit down to eat together in a common house are the ‘glue’ that binds community together; they are perhaps the defining characteristic of cohousing and what differentiates cohousing from other innovative ‘green’ housing and sustainable community forms. Graham Meltzer (2005) argues that sharing a common meal is fundamental to the way that living in community is understood and practised in cohousing.

The full significance of the shared meal is potentially far greater than the instrumental benefits of convenience (a team of four cooking a meal for 60+ rather than 30 individuals cooking meals for small family households) and conviviality. The idea and practice of the shared meal builds on the philosophy of service to others in the wider community and it fosters trust and consensus – in opposition to arguably dominant and damaging, individualistic Western fast food dining practices.

Cohousing communities usually prepare between two and five meals per week in their common house. The meals are prepared by a team of 2-4 persons for however many eaters sign up for the meal in advance. Eating common meals is always voluntary. In a few communities cooking is also voluntary, but in most cases it is not. However, there is a good deal of variation in the way the cooking (and clean-up) responsibilities are structured (typically each adult is involved in meal preparation and/or clean-up once every 4 or 5 weeks). An added benefit of having a communal kitchen and dining room is that it allows a variety of spontaneous breakfasts, pot-lucks and barbeques to occur.

### **What we did:**

The workshop explored different cultural practices and ways of organising collective housekeeping. We also examined issues, tensions, challenges and solutions. We felt a strong instinct to be positive (loyal to the ethos of sharing) but at the same time we identified the need to manage expectations and also to recognise that as with social



Cohousing community of Winslow, Washington State, USA. It is of an impromptu gathering of residents around a shared pot of soup! Photo: Helen Jarvis.



Meal in Kankan Mori cohousing unit, Tokyo.

PHOTO: KERSTIN KÄRNEKULL



Food served in cohousing development of Sjöfarten, Stockholm. The kitchen is in the background.

interactions generally, conflicts will continue to arise

An interesting feature of this workshop was the variety of experience within the group, which consisted of a mix of nationalities and ages. With ten female and two male participants, the make-up of the group appeared to reflect a gender bias which can be generally observed in popular concern for the role and organizational detail of the shared meal in community life (see further workshop 3). While a number of activities were planned to structure the workshop we soon found that themes for discussion emerged naturally from the diverse makeup of the group and their experience of different community cultures and settings.

The shared meal as a social activity was important to all participants – to avoid having to eat alone. This aspect seems to be valid both for the very young and for the elderly, both categories newly separated from their families albeit for different reasons. The shared meal offers the benefits of an extended family and cooking does not have to feature for this sense of conviviality to emerge. One example would be community mailing lists

facilitating swift decisions on meal-sharing: *“I feel like having a pizza, anyone care to join me?”* (Mark Westcombe. UK).

Among young participants the common meal also tended to be a solution to the students’ problem of getting healthy food at an affordable price, especially when living away from the family home for the first time. In this context, students typically lack kitchen facilities, knowledge and cooking skills. *“Young people/students away from home for their first time don’t know how to cook, are always hungry and always poor. This can result in a poor diet”* (Ayane Kato, Japan). There was also evidence of both economies of scale and a common sense approach to the question of food costs and affordability. In one Japanese example the participants of the shared meals were asked to put their contribution in a saving box on the table where there was a notice stating that “rice is 50 yen”. One of the Austrian participants took part in “Volksküche”, serving vegan meals on the street to those who are in need, payment for the food being voluntary or according to each person’s ability to pay.

Among senior participants living in cohousing reserved for older people, it can be difficult to fill up a sustainable rota of cooking teams in situations where some of the residents do not have sufficient health or mobility to take an active part in cooking or cleaning for large numbers. This calls for new solutions, such as inviting people from outside of the cohousing complex to take part in cooking teams and meal-sharing – as day-visiting or prospective members.

The group universally recognised the importance of the shared meal for cohousing. One participant made this point with reference to a recent survey (Brugger) which suggested that communities which regularly shared meals were the most enduring. The importance of maintaining a full cooking team rota led to some ‘brain-storming’ on measures that could be adopted in senior cohousing where this was not always possible. One suggestion was that work-team commitments could be entered into on a 3-monthly basis to allow people to adjust their contributions gradually - because they could easily foresee their physical and scheduling limitations on this kind of time range.

Another lively and constructive theme of discussion touched upon the power and influence that cohousing communities potentially have as collective (large scale) consumers of both fresh produce and dry goods. While some cohousing members mentioned that dry goods were purchased from local wholesale suppliers, we all agreed that awareness could be raised of the ‘moral obligation’ of cohousing communities to shop ethically and to negotiate trading relations with suppliers on the basis of local/ organic/ fair-trade/ humane priorities. One suggestion was that a number of cohousing communities within a city-region could work together to use the ‘power of collection action’ to influence ethical and economical trading relations with local farms and wholesalers.

### What we learned:

There was consensus that the shared meal is pivotal to community; it is about more than a meal; it plays a key social (and political and ethical) function. The success of the shared meal (frequency and level of participation) distinguishes a thriving and sustainable community from a moribund or less engaged one. We identified tensions between compulsory and voluntary participation and between efficiency and the capacity to be spontaneous. A mix or balance is recommended.

Some of the intersecting issues and attempts at problem solving raised over the course of this workshop are expressed via the matrix as below.

### Participants living in cohousing projects

Name, origin	Experience	Issue/Solution
Birgitta Aulin, Sweden	Cohousing complex Blomstret, Gävle, Sweden; 46 households, mixed ages, serving 5 meals a week except during holidays.	Works well, no specific problems
Annika Johansson, Sweden	Cohousing complex Sockenstugan, Stockholm. Ages over 40 only. Serving 5 meals a week	Cooking teams suffer from inhabitants being unable to participate in the cooking as they grow old or frail. Inviting non-resident people to join the cooking team.
Marja Dahlström, Finland	Cohousing complex Loppukiri, 71 households, ages over 55 only. 6 cooking groups serve 5 dinners a week.	Initially separate cooking and cleaning groups made cleaners jealous. Combined cooking and cleaning groups taking turns on rotation.
Rossana Gutman, Austria	Cohousing unit with shared meals/ shared living room but no common kitchen. Takes part in Volksküche cooking and serving vegan meals to homeless.	No specific problems.
Hilde Krogh, Norway	Cohousing complex in Oslo. Started with lots of interaction, based on voluntary work, but this activity has dwindled.	Only 1/3 of households active in cooking team. How could this be improved?
Birgitta Fransson, Sweden	Cohousing complex Trekanten, Stockholm. 78 households, 1 meal a week, voluntary work.	Only a minority participate in meals. How to increase interest in meal sharing?



## Participants not living in cohousing

Mie Karino, Japan	Part of a non-profit organisation supporting cohousing in Japan.	Cooking common meals is time-consuming due to the custom of many separate dishes per meal. This is a problem for people working long hours. Problem enhanced by complex dietary/allergy needs.
Ayane Kato, Japan	Student of anthropology, practicing cohousing by sharing house with her brother and gathering fellow students for shared meals.	Sharing meals can be beneficial to health and more affordable as well as fulfilling an important social function.
Elmar Brugger, Austria	Doing his own research on cohousing.	Found that shared meals distinguish cohousing (with active and long-term sustainable community life) from other forms of housing which benefit from common space but not meals.
Caterina Presti, Italy	Student of anthropology involved in a group with the ambition to establish cohousing with emphasis on shared meals.	How many meals should be served per week? Opinions vary from 1 to 4 meals a week. Preparing and sharing a meal together is more than nourishment, it's also creating a social community.
Mark Westcombe, Great Britain	Currently in the planning process of setting up cohousing in Lancaster.	What makes meals work socially? How to deal with dietary issues (veganism, food allergies etc). How to keep costs down? How to involve children? > Try to satisfy the majority. Manage expectations. Keep control of costs. Encourage children to participate in cooking/ youth cooking teams.
Helen Jarvis, Great Britain	Academic, Urban Social Geographer	Is cohousing unique in terms of collaborative meal sharing? Can we learn from other spontaneous collaboration (e.g. Big Lunch street eating initiative)? Does collective housekeeping deliver gender equality?

### Outstanding issues:

- Consensus that further research was needed so that cohousing advocates could demonstrate the multiple benefits (social and environmental) of the shared meal and also disseminate best practice for organising sustainable and democratic organisational practices and innovations.

- Balancing the needs of cohousing communities and wider social/ethical roles (e.g. reducing food-miles and supporting fair trade) is a challenge which needs to be embraced and collective action by several cohousing projects working together may be the solution.
- Inter-generation diversity was a strength and limitation – parental concern for children’s eating habits and maintaining ‘family time’ versus rowdy social occasions or sedate dining for seniors – these are issues that need to be discussed and resolved at the community level. ■

### **Further Reading:**

Blank, J. (2001): Common meals in cohousing communities: an experienced cohouser reports from common house kitchens and dining rooms across North America. *Cohousing Journal*, Winter 2001, <http://www.joaniblack.com/cohousing/CommonMeals/index.html>

Meltzer, G. (2005): *Sustainable community: learning from the cohousing model*, Victoria BC: Trafford.

Sullivan-Catlin, H. (2007): “Home-based vs communal meals: ‘family time’ and the division of household labor in cohousing”. Paper presented at *American Sociological Association Annual Meeting*, NYC, August, 2007.

### **Useful Links:**

<http://www.cohousingpartners.com/faq.html>

<http://gocoho.org/blog/?p=13>

<http://www.cohousing.org/node/3239>

<http://members.optusnet.com.au/~cohousing/cohomelb/meltzer/content.htm>

# Children and Youth in Cohousing

## Workshop 14

Chair: **Mark Westcombe**, Lancaster Cohousing, UK; Secretary: **Helen Rydberg**, Södra Station cohousing, Stockholm.

The workshop had nine participants from five countries, six women and three men. Two participants lived in cohousing, while four belonged to groups working for cohousing and four had an academic interest in the topic.

A number of themes were identified prior to the workshop, and extended in discussion, to attempt to identify a list of topics for the sharing of best practice amongst cohousing residents, or potentially for research.

The themes and some associated best practices are as below, but we questioned whether the root cause of all issues of children and youth in community was because we see children and youth as *different* from adults ... To reconcile adult needs with children's needs may mean helping children to articulate their needs and giving them tools to deal with their own issues.

### Themes

#### Relationships

In cohousing children have relationship to many adults.

Boys in particular gain access to relationships with adult men that they might otherwise not have. Children also gain access to adults of different ages and can learn not only from their parents, but from across different generations.

#### Facilities

We noted that there are different types of facilities for children and young people, both indoor and outdoor.

Many cohouses have excellent children's rooms, which may or may not include baby facilities such as nappy changing rooms or benches. Many communities also often have teenage spaces, though these are often in the basement and with limited natural light. They are often less attractive spaces than adult spaces and communities often lament why the rooms get so underused, when they are not necessarily the most attractive spaces to occupy. Some cohouses have well designed outdoor playgrounds.

#### Gender and Childcare

Cohousing may alleviate some issues regarding gender and childcare, particularly the



Boys may relate to many adult men in cohousing. Lancaster Cohousing development.



Children enjoy participating in meal preparations.

sharing of formal tasks. But it's not necessarily a panacea and can bring new problems as well.

### Decision Making

Children should be included in both the decision-making process and in the administration of cohousing facilities.

### Teenagers

Teenagers are easily forgotten. They need spaces where they can be together, spaces that are respected by adults as the venues of the teenagers themselves. These spaces though can be ideal for sexual experimentation, which may be viewed differently by different parents. It can introduce the idea of sexual education within the community.

### Other themes

- Consensual dialogue between children and adults: developing genuine responsibility vs community coercing agreement and participation through group pressure
- Participation in meals – accommodating both children and adults needs and preferences
- Children's interaction with a community neighbourhood
- Benefits to children's development later as adults
- Children's participation in work
- Security / Safety (people coming & going, inc youths)
- Accommodating parenting styles amongst residents
- Childcare within the community
- What do children bring to cohousing? And
- What do they gain from better relationships within a community



Lancaster Cohousing Design Workshop.



Laughton Lodge, Lewes, UK

PHOTO: SARAH BERGER

- What are the downsides: of children in community; to the parents; and to the children?

### Best practice tips

#### Rooms

- Design by *function* not *age*, e.g. music room, pool room, table tennis room and have joint activities and classes, e.g. hip-hop;
- Avoids 'labelling' rooms as teenage spaces and thereby stigmatising the room and teenagers;
- Allows adults to play too; and facilitates interaction between youth and adult men;
- Ensures teenagers aren't given the worse room in the basement that nobody else wanted; and
- Ensures *all* rooms accommodate young people.

#### Design

- Design using principles of Hierarchy of Space where there is a gradation between public, semi-public and private rooms in order to tackle what is acceptable norms of behaviours in spaces, e.g. keeping noisy toddlers' cycling away from the newspaper reading area in the common house by design rather than rules.
- Avoid blind corners to facilitate looking after children and maintain direct line of sight between adult spaces and children spaces.

#### Dialogue

- Consensus – *Leadership* – Authority & Power
- Providing leadership to children and young people may be an appropriate balance between defining and enforcing rules (such as spaces to be quiet in) and expecting

them (i.e. through group pressure) to engage in the burden of informed, consensual decision making.

### **Expectations**

- At home we might expect children and youth to collaborate in chores, eg putting a game away. This may extend to tidying a room.
- In society children have expectations placed upon them such as attending school or abiding by the law.
- Children may not have chosen to live in cohousing like their parents and perhaps their parents might therefore not expect them to engage in the additional work of community obligations, but is community different from the other realms they find themselves in with obligations? Perhaps they should help?
- Establish good expectations and practices regarding behaviour, eg who can be brought into the common house;
- Have children's meetings only for children and give them a budget, both for annual expenses and for new capital investment;
- Establish practices for dealing with bad behaviour and lack of respect from visiting youths; and for dealing with uninvited or unwelcome youths.

### **Parenting**

- Issues are, and should be contained, between the adults and parents, not between the children and adults
- Have special parent's meetings to define parental boundaries and discuss different styles of parenting and boundaries, e.g. disruptive behaviour, running in cohouses, cleaning up toys, etc.

### **Inclusion**

- We need to respect children and establish and provide for their needs rather than accommodate them within adults' boundaries and needs. Noting that it can be difficult to learn to be consensual with children when we don't know how to do it and we don't like what they're doing. We need to become aware, reflective and transparent around issues of power, much like with gender equality.
- But how do we get children to meetings if the adults are bored of being there?

### **The good, the bad & the ugly of children and youth in cohousing**

- Children are social animals and community members by nature, more so than adults;
- Young people gain an extending family that serves them their lifetime;
- Children learn that they can create things, that they are empowered and can act as



democratic citizens; they learn skills, but also acquire at a deeper level a different way of being in the world;

- Children see men cooking, adults having fun with neighbours, parents sharing – a wealth of good role models and good behaviour;
- If there is a large community, children can become inward looking and have their needs satisfied wholly within the community. They only learn to socialise with a particular subculture and can struggle outside of this subculture, e.g. school or workplace, particularly with competitive rather than cooperative cultures;
- Life can be so easy that children don't learn to overcome normal obstacles, such as boredom;
- Children can form tight relationships with adults that then move away and often the onus is on the child, not the adult, to maintain the relationship;
- Parents have access to adults who can fill their gaps, e.g. learning skills. ■

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK WESTCOMBE, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED.

# Cohousing for Seniors Workshop 7

Chair: **Margrethe Kähler**, Denmark; Secretary: **Thorild Ljunggren**, Sweden.

The workshop had 23 participants from ten countries, 17 women and six men. Six lived in cohousing, while five belonged to cohousing promotion groups and 13 had an academic interest in the topic.

## Introduction

This report is written against the background of an ageing population in many countries and the fact that the authorities may not be capable of coping with the bulk of pensioners who will emerge looking for good quality lodgings when they grow older – or become elderly.

One possible solution is for pensioners to take up the challenge and join together in order to provide dwellings for themselves.

In some countries, e.g. the United States, this can be done for people who are well-off, in conjunction with inspired architects, who construct collaborative housing without much contact with the authorities.

In other countries, groups of interested people – with or without help from architects – have to struggle hard with municipalities to persuade them to allocate professional, technical and economic support to collective housing and also with the building companies to make them interested in the construction of collaborative housing.

The amount of collaborative housing in each country is still a very small percentage of all housing. This means, that it can take time to make the concept better known. This is also a reason for lifting up the issue and debating it.

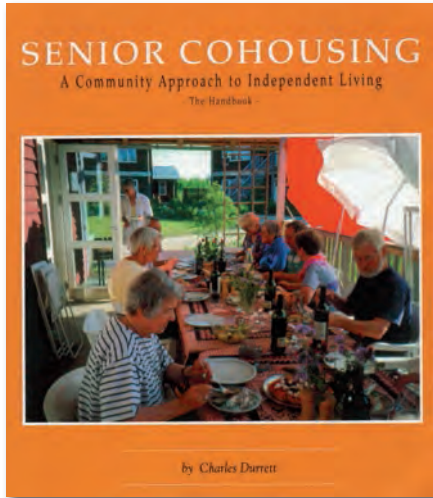
## Opening questions

The first question we discussed in our workshop was: *Why should there be cohousing for seniors?* Could the reasons for the growing interest concern:

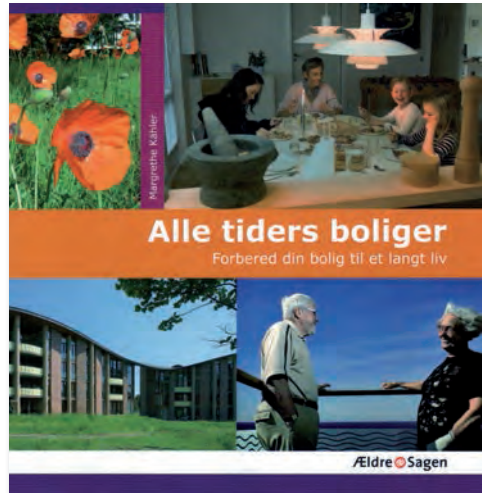
- Demography – we are so many – Can society afford to be responsible for our care?
- Biology – Do we need to help each other when we get older?
- Sociology – e.g. retirement – How do we want to cope with this new phase in life?
- Psychology – Do we like to have high quality relations to others?

Our conclusion was that all these reasons matter and interact. Thus we view the increasing interest from a holistic perspective.

The next opening question was: *Who are the new elderly?* It is as if the word “old” is somewhat out of fashion – owing to the rise of welfare and rising age in the developed



One of Charles Durrett's books: *Senior Cohousing. A Community Approach to Independent Living*, Berkeley: Habitat Press.



One of Margrethe Kähler's books published by Ældre-Sagen on cohousing for seniors: *All tiders boliger. Forbered din bolig till et langt liv*, ÆldreSagen 2008.

world at least (though the developing countries are surely catching up fast).

The new elderly are people who want to decide for themselves, being individuals. They want to stay in control, and you could also talk of a shift in mentality – a different mindset. A person in her/his 60s may well jump with a parachute – she is not an elderly person in the traditional context. She wants to stay young as long as she can. A travel agency for senior trips changed its name to “Grand Tour” and people undergo surgery to look younger. As Oscar Wilde said: “The tragedy of old age is that we are young”.

The reverse side of this issue is that people are not willing to discuss how they want to live 15 years from when they are 50 or 55.

When it comes to the issue of moving into cohousing, it is common to hear, “It is the women who think they have the most to benefit from cohousing”. Men often think that they have the most to lose through cohousing, as many household chores that could be “disguised” come into the open in a cohousing unit. These attitudes occur before they have moved into cohousing!

Once they have moved into cohousing, most men change their minds and stay. This is relevant mainly to cohousing in Northern Europe and the United States, where the residents work together.

### **Issues involved:**

#### **Differences between northern and southern Europe**

When it comes to how Senior Cohousing is looked upon in different countries, there is a difference between northern and southern Europe – linked to the different

welfare systems. The northern system is more universal, while the southern one is more restricted and only for people with severe needs.

In the southern part more emphasis is laid upon caretaking and in the northern part upon having relations with one another and sharing interests, events and meals together. The Nordic cohousing projects draw a line: We don't want to be homehelpers for each other.

### **Cohousing for the second half of life**

Many cohousing projects in Sweden are reluctant to call themselves 'senior cohousing'. They imagine that this name will send the wrong signals to the segment of the population, which they want to attract: people aged 40 and up. In Sweden there is a special name for this kind of organized senior cohousing: Cohousing for "the second half of life".

### **Age-integrated cohousing**

In Denmark – especially close to small or middle-sized provincial towns – there is a lot of senior cohousing. In some places they lie close to units for other ages. One cohousing project for all ages is Munksøgård, near to Roskilde. Here there are three clusters of buildings, each cluster with residents of a certain age. The residents in one cluster are seniors, the residents in another cluster young families with children, a third one is for young people without children. They all join together in their common house to make dinner and socialise. This kind of cohousing is called age-integrated cohousing. In such a context the word "senior" does not give wrong signals.

Age-integrated cohousing is also common in Germany. They are called cohousing

PHOTO: KERSTIN KÄRNEKULL



Conference study visit to the cohousing development of Sjöfarten, Stockholm.



Old and young need to meet (Source: [www.statz-maneck.de/](http://www.statz-maneck.de/)).



Backyard of senior cohousing, Tietgenkollegiet, Denmark.

for “Alt und jung” and there is a strong inclination to make it possible to live together with people of all ages. In such a context, the word ‘senior’ does not send out the wrong signals.

### Pros and cons of senior cohousing compared to age-integrated cohousing

There are other aspects of cohousing:

- In age-integrated cohousing focus is on children and their parents.
- In senior cohousing the social energy can decline.
- There can be too much discretion and politeness in senior cohousing.

Munksøgård in Denmark with clusters for each generation and a common house to dine in is a good compromise.

We concluded that it is healthy to live in a community, where everybody is not a mirror of oneself. Everywhere there is a wish to prevent loneliness and dementia.

### The need for buffer-zones

At the same time one needs privacy in cohousing and architects must design semi-private zones, where one can sit and talk and look without being 100 per cent sociable all the time (these “buffer zones” are more necessary in northern Europe and the US – while in southern Europe people are used to socializing as soon as they step outdoors). You should learn never to cross the border of privacy if you are not invited or needed, and you must learn to say yes and no without being cold.

### What can be done?

We concluded that a political agenda for the authorities could be:

- To make people interested in their way of live when they are getting old.
- To design both the new and the existing buildings together with the coming elderly instead of for them

Taken together, this agenda will also demand a different mindset from the authorities.

This leads us to a New Housing Concept: to build 'All times buildings' or 'Universal Design, or Design for all ages', where the buildings suit all generations. If they are good for the elderly, it means that they are also good for families with children and single households.

For instance, they could be in the form of flexible houses where all electrical fittings lie in the ceiling so that walls can easily be moved, in order to provide for diversity in age and lifestyles. Critics say that this will be too expensive, but it may also challenge architects and building companies to come up with new and inspiring solutions.

### **What are the next steps?**

Maybe study groups could be formed and stimulated by society – especially municipalities – in order to study the concept of ageing in the modern sense, what to do about it and what the desired outcome would be. If people were stimulated to get together to a greater extent to form more and more clusters of senior cohousing of different kinds, might this have the result of easing the burden on society of caring for this segment of the population?

Builders often say that cohousing is more expensive, because of the common areas in cohousing. These areas could be used for flats instead and provide an income through renting. They forget that people living in a cohousing and sharing common resources reduce certain costs, e.g. water for cooking the common meals.

Another thing to be aware of is that municipal building companies are selling cohousing to the residents in countries where there are such municipal building companies, such as Sweden. This might be a threat to the whole idea of cohousing, as it limits the possibilities of people without substantial economic means to access a flat in cohousing.

If you look at countries with an ageing population and – at the same time – a decreasing population as a whole, you have another aspect to cope with, as in Germany, for example.

Here, in principle, there is no need to build new housing. There is instead a large old housing stock that could be reconstructed to fit cohousing needs. This is another challenge for architects, as at the same time it could reduce pressure on the authorities, as the economic resources of society could be directed to an area where they are needed instead of using the money to build a new housing bubble with buildings that not are requested by anybody.

Maybe there is an interest in an international project on how to proceed when dealing with cohousing for seniors, seen against this background and other factors not mentioned here. Maybe such a project could get its own website? There was consensus on the question of a website in the workshop. Maybe one could use the conference website [www.cohousing.2010.se](http://www.cohousing.2010.se) and the blog attached to it as a means for



this purpose? (Another easy way is to open a discussion group on Facebook concerning Senior Cohousing – in fact a group already exists with this name!)

PS. The kind of “Senior Cohousing” we dealt with in this Workshop was cohousing where you yourself could decide whether you would like to move in when a flat became free. The kind of “Senior Housing” where the welfare authorities decide who should be given the opportunity to move into a flat that became free, lies outside the scope of the proceedings of this workshop. (There was some confusion at the beginning of the discussions, before this distinction became evident.) Another topic outside the scope of these discussions is the kind of ‘Senior Housing’ where the welfare authorities decide who should be advised to move to a flat – we might call them ‘advised projects’ – and where the facilities in the buildings may partly resemble those in the ‘voluntary’ cohousing, e.g. where the inhabitants will have the possibility to cook and eat together. ■

# Conflicts and Antidotes Workshop 15

Chair: **Eva Norrby**; Secretary: **Gwen Bouchier**

A total of 22 people participated in the workshop, 15 women and seven men. Half were Swedish, three were from Belgium, two from Finland, two from Japan and individual participants came from Germany, Norway, Italy and Ethiopia. There was a good mix of experienced 'cohosers' and people only beginning to realize the cohousing dream. Three participants were doing research on cohousing for a masters or PhD thesis.

## **Introduction**

In preparation for the workshop, a questionnaire was sent to the participants. The objective was to obtain a better view of the common interests of the participants and of the topics that could be addressed at the workshop. We also wanted to receive some input on the subject of the workshop, 'Conflicts & antidotes'. In the answers to this questionnaire, examples of conflicts were given by the participants, as well as possible antidotes to them.

The goal of the workshop was to deepen the discussion on typical conflict areas in cohousing (based on the answers to the questionnaire) and to talk about possible antidotes and what makes them work. The conclusions below were drawn from a fruitful 2,5 hour discussion, with interesting inputs from all the participants.

## **Conflicts**

### **Conflicts will always arise**

Inevitably, when different people are put together, they will not all share the same opinions and values. These different opinions may clash in discussions about issues that are important to them, about their 'home'.

A few typical conflict areas could be identified: democracy and decision-making, financial issues, differences in commitment, differences in knowledge and different values about healthy food, cleanliness, education, style – and also about what is allowed and not allowed in private and common spaces.

A lack of communication, or miscommunication, was often mentioned as a source of conflicts. Especially the latest communication methods, such as e-mail and the internet (an in-house communication system), have proven to lead to misinterpretations and thus to (escalation of) conflicts.

### **Better to confront conflicts than to avoid them**

One typical problem that was found in the different cultures represented among the workshop participants was the difficulty to lay issues on the table. In many situations, people are afraid to speak out, as they do not want to be impolite or 'hurt' the other with whom they do not agree on an important issue. It happens quite often that people ask somebody else to confront the other in their place.

Every effort should be made to overcome this reticence to confront conflicts. Talking about the issue is the first step to resolution. Facing a conflict and trying to solve it together can be a learning experience for all and can lead to better agreements and organization.

### **Conflict is not always negative. It can also be constructive.**

#### **Not all conflicts can be resolved**

Certain conflicts have external causes that cannot be controlled by the group. These conflicts cannot be resolved as long as the external causes are not eliminated or overcome. Other conflicts are ideological, about right and wrong, and can never be 'resolved' as long as people's ideologies remain unchanged.

### **Conflicts are not between individuals but between values, viewpoints, ideas**

It is possible to disagree with someone without actually disliking them. One can agree on some points, but disagree on others. On the other hand, conflicts can also arise because people just do not like each other, because they do not 'connect' or do not want to make an effort to do so.

### **We even have conflicts within ourselves**

People are also dealing with conflicts within themselves, struggling with difficult choices, questions that do not always have obvious answers.

### **Types of conflicts**

The first step to resolve a conflict is to lay it on the table. The second step is to identify the type of conflict (in order to find a proper antidote). Through the workshop discussion, three types were identified:

*Disagreement:* People can live with disagreements and can 'agree to disagree'.

*Ideological issues – Matters of principle:* People have different values, conflicting ideas about right and wrong, which can keep on clashing in the different aspects of cohousing life.

*Conflicts that destroy the soul of cohousing:* These can touch the foundations of the cohousing idea and may make it fall apart.

## Antidotes

### Prevention: clarify everyone's expectations before moving in

Before moving into a collaborative housing project, it is crucial that you clarify, for yourself and for your future neighbours, what you expect from living in such a project. In return, the 'group' should make it clear what is expected of the future residents.

General information on cohousing can be obtained from literature. A good book can be the basis for study groups and discussions on the many aspects of cohousing. To make this antidote work, proper follow-up is required. After moving in, an evaluation can be done to confirm if reality did or did not meet expectations.

### Respect each other's feelings and opinions

When joining a group, you must be able to play down your ego, to think 'we' instead of 'I'. During discussions, it is important to have and to show respect for each other's feelings and opinions.

### Talk and listen – non-violent communication

In collaborative housing, there are (or should be) many opportunities for open debate, to solve conflicts by discussion instead of by the exercise of power. However, discussions about delicate matters, on which opinions differ greatly, often tend to become 'violent'. The idea of non-violent communication (developed by Carl Rogers and his disciple Marshall Rosenberg) was mentioned by several workshop participants. One of the principles of non-violent communication is that people talk from a personal perspective ('I') rather than pointing the finger accusingly at others ('You'). This should lead to more empathy and to a non-violent discussion.

### Group dynamics: forming, storming, norming, performing

Freshly started cohousing projects face other issues than 'old' projects. Newly formed groups need to become aware of differences, go through conflicts, work out routines, and form traditions.

PHOTO: DICK URBAN VESTBRO



Meeting during the establishment of a consensus culture in the cohousing complex Prästgårdshagen, Älvsjö, Stockholm.

The ideas developed by Bruce Tuckman in the 1960s summarize this really well. A group must go through different phases (forming, storming, norming) that are all necessary in order for the team to grow, to face up to challenges, to tackle problems, to find solutions. With this in mind, one must conclude that time is also an important antidote. The group

must go through different phases and each person in that group will also evolve and learn to understand, appreciate, or at least tolerate, the others' opinions and viewpoints.

### **Time is the best antidote**

#### **External help by a neutral consultant**

The appointment of people from the group to work as mediators or facilitators was often mentioned as a good antidote. These people can mediate between the different 'parties' and come to a solution with everyone's agreement and cooperation. Another possibility is to turn to an external, neutral consultant for help in resolving conflicts. Professionals of group dynamics and facilitation techniques can teach the group how to deal with and prevent conflicts. ■

### **List of literature**

Farber, Barry A. (1998): *The psychotherapy of Carl Rogers: cases and commentary*, Guilford Press.

Rogers, Carl. (1970): *On Encounter Groups*. New York: Harrow Books, Harper and Row.

Rosenberg, Marshall (2005): *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What You Say Next Will Change Your World*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

Tuckman, Bruce (1965): "Developmental sequence in small groups". *Psychological Bulletin* **63** (6): 384–99.  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3954/is\\_200104/ai\\_n8943663](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3954/is_200104/ai_n8943663).

# Saving by Sharing – How to Promote Sustainable Lifestyles Workshop 11

Chair: **Graham Meltzer**; Secretary: **Michel Desgagnes**

The workshop had 23 participants from ten countries, 14 women and nine men. Eleven lived in cohousing while three were members of cohousing promotion groups and seven had an academic or professional interest in the topic.

## **Introduction**

The chairperson, Graham Meltzer, had sent out some notes in advance as a basis for discussion. Among other things he stipulated that in cohousing it is easy to share resources like cars, tools, meals, space, recycling, composting, etc, while emphasizing that one can also share time, ideas, energy, traditions, knowledge, information, experiences, and responsibilities and most important: you can share your heart. Your desires, dreams, feelings, concerns and friendship may also be shared with others. It is important to get in our mind that sharing is winning ... not losing.

To begin, we had presentations from Graham Meltzer, Michel Desgagnes and Ben Brix. Questions put for discussion included the following:

- How does sharing in all its manifestations contribute to sustainable lifestyles?
- How does sharing reduce stress through developing more economically sustainable lifestyles, i.e. does cohousing help break the cycle of working and consuming?

Questions were also raised how much one could save by eating common meals, being part of a car pooling group or satisfying oneself with a smaller house. The workshop format varied through the afternoon with discussion and sharing in pairs, small groups and the whole group at different times.

## **Sharing issues**

### **Gender roles in cohousing?**

What we observe is that there may be a perception problem in cohousing, at least in Europe, suggesting that women gain more freedom by living in cohousing, but men seem to lose it. We propose addressing it with workshops to speak about this problem and to use the power of the group to find solutions.



**Well-known sharing strategies in cohousing include the following:**

- Sharing land – efficient land use, through the clustering of dwellings ... which frees up land for other purposes.
- Shared car parking. Car usage and vehicle presence are suppressed.
- Sharing common facilities enables residents to live in smaller dwellings than ‘normal’.
- Sharing household and other consumer goods (also see below).
- Sharing work – residents growing their own organic food together.
- Sharing responsibilities – managing waste (recycling) effectively.

**Examples of deeper levels of sharing and trust**

Create an ethical foundation for your community i.e. discuss at length and over time, what values you have in common and how might those values underpin a better life for community members and also contribute to a better, more sustainable world. It is only from a basis of agreed shared values that practical measures can be implemented and sustained.

Category	Item	Lender Unit #	Category	Item	Lender Unit #
Gardening	Hand trowel	A5,A6,B1,B4	Outings	Backpack	A6,A7,B1,C7,D3
	Lawn mower	A6		Bicycle tools	A7,B1,C7,D3
	Leaf rake	A2,A5,A6,B1,B3		Car bike rack	A5,A6,B1,C5,C7
	Pick	A2,B3,C4		Bikes	A2,A5,B1,C5,C7
	Pitch fork	B1,B3		Canoe	A2
	Tree loper	B1		Ice axe	A2,D3
	Weed eater	B2,D2		Life preservers	B1,C5,D3
	Weed scythe	C4		Maps	A6,B1,B4,C7,D4
	Wheelbarrow	A2,A4,A6,B1,C4		Snowshoes	D3
				Tents	A7,B1,B4,D2,D3
Building & maintenance	Back belt	A6,B1,B3	Cooking	Coffee pot	A6,D5
	Bucket	CH,B1,B3		Cookbooks	A4,A5,B1,C4,D4
	Carpentry	C4,C7		Corn popper	C4,D5
	Dolly	A4,B1,D3		Crock pot	A5,B4,C5
	Drill	A6,B1,B4,C6,D5	Other	Blow up bed	C4,D5
	Staple gun	A6,B1,C7		Single futon	D5
	Toilet plunger	A5,B1		Folding tables	B1,D3,C6,C7
	Toilet snake	B1			
Cleaning	Mini vacuum	A7,C4	<i>To add your valuables to the list, call Ken.</i>		
	Rug cleaner	B1			

Lending list of household items available for use by others, from Commons on the Alameda, a cohousing community in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

**In cohousing, shared aspirations can be social, not material-consumerist.**

- Creating a lending list of what is available to share in your community. See the example below of (part only) of a list in one cohousing community which shows



A car from the car pool attached to the Stolplyckan cohousing complex in Linköping, Sweden.

all those items in members possession which they are prepared to lend with other members.

- Create a LETS (Local Exchange Trading System) in your community. These are a means of exchanging skills, support, energy without the involvement of money. So for example, a massage might be exchanged for babysitting time. Sophisticated LETS systems exist where points are allocated for time and/or skills and a register is kept of exchanges which enable members to 'spend' their accumulated credit however they wish.
- Tithing is a strategy first mentioned in Genesis which, these days, constitutes a small but regular voluntary payment (usually deducted from one's income) toward some worthy cause. In some intentional communities the payment is made by those who can afford it, into an Emergency Fund which is then made available to others in the community in times of need, if for example they need expensive medical treatment or lose their job or whatever. It's one way of sharing or redistributing the wealth within a community.
- Donate (Haiti, Africa) as a way of sharing beyond the community. This gets back to the ethical basis for sharing mentioned above. Is it acceptable to only share within a closed group such as a cohousing community? In one sense, this is no less 'private' than keeping one's money or resources to oneself or within one's immediate family.

***Don't forget ... you can't take it with you when you die***

***Build trust. Start with the small things.***

***Borrow something, return it in the same condition and say thank you!***

***Be the change you want to see in the world! ■***

# Can Cohousing Promote Gender Equality?

## Workshop 3

Chair: **Inga Alander**; Secretary: **Dick Urban Vestbro**

There were ten participants from five countries in the workshop, eight women and two men. Three lived in cohousing themselves, while two belonged to cohousing promotion groups and four had an academic interest in the topic. At least three had been active in feminist movements.

The participants listed the following questions for discussion:

- Why are men less interested in cohousing?
- How can one encourage men to become more interested?
- Does cohousing promote 'emancipated men', individuals who develop their sensitive sides, have higher social competence, and become better fathers?
- Is there anything wrong with cohousing for women only?
- Is it possible to achieve equality in the labour market without having equal responsibilities at home?
- How can one change male dominance in the building sector?

### **Why are men less interested in cohousing?**

Reference was made to research showing that cohousing units have more female than male residents, and that men are more reluctant to move to cohousing. Why is this the case? It was argued that women of all ages more easily see the advantages of sharing household tasks, while men may feel threatened by having their share of housework increase. Perhaps it is a greater change for men when they compare the way of living in cohousing to "normal" life in a private home. Reference was made to a theory postulating that men in general are more 'possessive' than women in their partner relationships. Therefore they are more negative to their woman socialising with others in the neighbourhood. They easily become jealous.

Are there special types of men ('civilised males') who move into cohousing? The workshop did not deny this, but it was also argued that men who move to cohousing could learn to develop their personalities. They may learn new skills, for instance, solving conflicts through discussions, learning to cook, having more intimate relationships with children, etc. Perhaps there is a difference between the generations, so that younger men are more prepared to live in cohousing.

Is it true that many strong women move into cohousing, and that this makes men feel threatened? If men do not expect to be on top and control their social



More women than men are attracted to cohousing. This example is from the cohousing unit of Landgången, Malmö, Sweden.

environment, then they do not have to feel threatened. If they accept that they are normal human beings, they would feel comfortable living with strong women around them. It was pointed out that not only well educated, politically active (“strong”) women move to cohousing. Nowadays many single mothers are also living in Swedish cohousing developments, and they are not always well educated with high incomes.

### **Cohousing for women, what is the problem?**

Some workshop members asked why it is considered wrong to have cohousing units dominated by women. They argued that it is better to have a majority of women than to persuade men to participate when these men do not want to live in cohousing. In Sweden there are no cohousing developments with only women<sup>1</sup>, but such projects exist in Germany, and there are special networks for recruitment of women to such cohousing developments<sup>2</sup>. It was pointed out that older women – or others who have tired of men – prefer to live collectively without men. As a counterargument, reference was made to research showing that mixed workplaces were more attractive

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1. Just before the Stockholm conference a group called 'Hållkollbo' was formed in Sweden to work for a new cohousing project for women with a strong orientation towards sustainability.

2. See website <http://www.frauenwohnen-eg.de/>

than single-sex workplaces and that single-sex workplaces tended to reinforce unequal relations in society at large. This situation is probably true also in cohousing, it was argued.

It is a fact that most cohousing complexes in Sweden with an unbalanced sex ratio have a policy of giving special preference to men when recruiting new members, and that this is a conscious decision by the women. Men who live in these houses may be the best advocates when it comes to spreading the idea of collaborative living to other men (but this does not mean that all cohousing developments must have the same policy on gender).

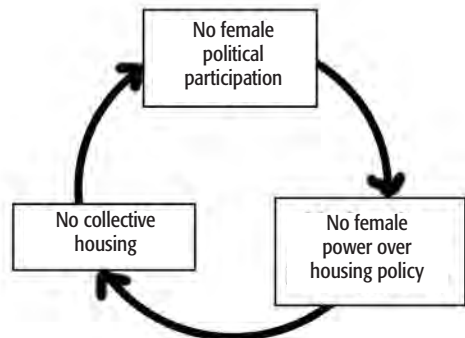
### **Is equality at home necessary for equality in the labour market?**

It was asked whether we could have equal positions in the labour market without equal responsibilities in the home. The group answered no. It was considered important for men to take their share of housework, but in cohousing the amount of housework is reduced and therefore it is easier to share the burdens. There is usually an ideology in favour of equal responsibility, which prevents men from running away from their responsibilities (as least from communal duties like cooking in the common kitchen, cleaning staircases, and the like).

The workshop agreed that in general housework is still quite burdensome for households with children – despite improvements with respect to day-care centres for children, access to ready-made dishes, refrigeration, private washing machines, etc, and despite the increased frequency of people being able to eat in restaurants. The burden of housework is a limiting factor when it comes to the possibility of following a career, since many jobs require not only that people work full time, but also that they work overtime when required, which is virtually impossible for parents who take their home responsibilities seriously. Therefore there cannot be equal status in the labour market as long as domestic work is not substantially reduced or shared equally between men and women.



Alva Myrdal, a Swedish pioneer of cohousing. She saw cohousing as an instrument to allow women to combine professional work with having a family.



The vicious circle obstructing cohousing in patriarchal society (source: Woodward et al 1989).



## Promote the emancipation of the men!

The workshop agreed that cohousing may empower women to have more control over their lives, to enable them change things, but what about men? In the normal Swedish cohousing development, a man cannot send his wife to do the cooking. There is a certain cultural model in which men are expected to take equal responsibilities. It is possible that they feel comfortable with such egalitarian sharing when they get acquainted with it. Has the ideal of the emancipated man been realized in cohousing? It was thought that no study exists to show whether this is the case, thus the proposal was made to initiate a research project about the role of cohousing for the emancipation of men.

The workshop considered cohousing to be an excellent instrument to promote gender equality by showing children that men and women can do the same tasks in their home environment. It is a well-known fact that children learn more from what their parents *do* than from what they *say* one should do. Men who cook, wash dishes, clean rooms, wash clothes, and do other chores that are considered 'female' probably have a strong influence upon the emergence of a more humane man in the future. In cohousing children also experience more adults, they make friends easily, and they learn from solving conflicts with others.

One participant raised the issue of the role of sex/gender in general and in particular in relation to cohousing. She argued that many women in cohousing think that sex/gender does not play such an important role any longer, because the gender contract or general culture is such that both women and men share domestic tasks equally. This in turn may mean that the culture is relatively asexual, at least in terms of heterosexual roles. The dominant male culture may, however, continue in cohousing, for example in the relationships between boys and girls. One of the collectives visited before the conference, paid special attention to the way the hobby rooms were used, as only boys tended to use them (fighting with cushions or playing pool, just like in youth centres). It was mentioned that in one of the cohousing projects a group of members had to support a married couple in which the husband was apparently violent towards his wife. So patriarchy continues in collectives, even if hidden, it was noted.



PHOTO: DICK URBAN VESTERLO

Men cooking in Tullstugan, Stockholm.



## Can one change male domination in the construction sector?

It was noted that the construction sector is more dominated by men than most other sectors in society. It is also a sector characterized by resistance to change. Could this be a reason behind the low number of cohousing projects? The group believed this to be the case. It was also argued that as long as the demand for cohousing is small, it will be seen as an exception from normal planning. To produce cohousing means taking a risk, since the procedures are necessarily different from those in the usual type of building. If there was better information about cohousing, the demand might be stronger, and then probably the interest of developers would increase. There is a lack of information both to the young and to the third generation, many of whom would benefit greatly from living in cohousing. ■

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# Social Environment and Health Workshop 12

Chair: **Mette Kjörstad**; Secretary: **John Fletcher**

The workshop had 20 participants from 11 countries, 15 women and 5 men. Nine participants lived in cohousing developments, while four belonged to cohousing promotion groups and eight had an academic interest in the topic.

Mette Kjörstad opened the workshop by giving the EU's definition of a Good Social Environment:

*A person's social environment includes their working and living conditions, income level, educational background and the communities they are part of. All these have a powerful effect on health.*

She also referred to Aaron Antonovsky's "Sense of coherence", which identifies factors that support health and wellbeing:

- *Comprehensibility*: a sense that you can understand events in your life and reasonably predict what will happen in the future.
- *Manageability*: you have the skills or ability, the support, the help, or the resources necessary to take care of things, and that things are manageable and within your control.
- *Meaningfulness*: life is interesting and worthwhile, and that there is good reason or purpose to care about what happens.

In advance of the conference the workshop participants received a letter with the questions for discussion. Most of the work was then done in smaller groups, dealing with one question at a time. Each group used post-it notes to report on the key issues discussed.

## **Social environment and health**

The workshop started with the following questions:

- Do you know of any studies/research linking social environment to health? If so, can you give examples?
- Do you see any links between cohousing and health? If so, which?
- Does the public health/social sector in your country actively promote cohousing explicitly as a link between health and social environment? If so, how?

The discussion was opened with some remarks prepared by Gunnel Torstensson, who is working with issues of care for the elderly at The National Board of Health and

Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) and living in cohousing development Trekanten, Stockholm. She noted that there are at least five studies done in the US, Finland and Sweden relevant to the subject. There is also an EU report on Health and Ageing. There do not seem to be any studies on the cost effectiveness of preventive work.

Marja Dahlström, living in the senior cohousing development Loppukiri in Finland, had submitted a list of relevant literature before the conference (see below). The following literature was mentioned during the workshop:

- *The Spirit Level* (Swedish: Jämlikhetsanden), R. Wilkinson/K Pickett, 2009.
- *Proactive Coping*, Aspinwall & Taylor (1997).
- Several books and reports by Professor Emeritus Kristina Orth-Gomér on social environment and vascular/heart disease.
- Several books and reports by (among others) professors Bengt Winblad and Laura Fratiglioni on social environment and dementia.

### **Which groups benefit most from cohousing?**

The next set of questions was:

- What do you see as future key concerns for public health?
- Could cohousing have a positive impact on public health for specific groups, or in general?
- In the case of “specific groups”, which groups would benefit from cohousing, and why?

The discussion was opened with some remarks by Luk Jonckheere. The participants raised the following areas of concern for public health:

- Unemployment and financial insecurity as strong negative factors.
- Increase in dementia.
- Many inequalities in society.

It was considered possible to gain health benefits through simple improvements in the social environment. It was pointed out that cohousing is cheaper for the community – and for the landlord.

### **How can one meet the challenge of the increasing elderly population?**

The rapidly growing share of elderly people in the global population was considered to have a wide-ranging impact on welfare and economy. Questions:

- What measures are taken in various countries to meet this challenge?
- Is cohousing commonly seen as an option for the elderly in your country? If so, how is it promoted, and by whom?

The discussion was opened with some remarks by John F Fletcher. The participants raised the following areas of concern:

- How can we make it easier for individuals and small groups to get started?

- We need research to support arguments (social benefits).
- We need to clarify the legal status of cohousing.

### **What actions can one take?**

The question was raised: Based on your reflections on the above, what do you see as key actions, research, or other priorities arising from this conference? The participants raised the following areas of concern:

- We need to find a way to communicate about cohousing;
- A joint website would help!
- We need to look at incentives for communities to help develop cohousing;
- We need to spread information about the benefits that come from cohousing;
- Forestalling the deterioration of health needs to be established as a priority for public health;
- John Fletcher will work with others to assemble information about the health preservation aspects as well as the potential cost benefits to tenants and landlords;
- Cohousing is cooperation = ecology + sustainability = health;
- Children – a new world.



## **Social Environment and Health**

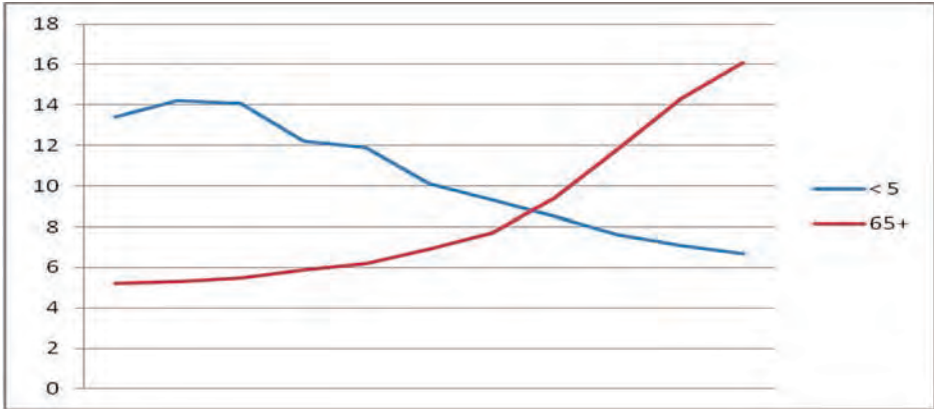
### **presentation by John F Fletcher**

We speak about “Social Environment and Health” – but what do we mean by A Good Social Environment? I suggest the following definition:

*I live in a Good Social Environment* when I:

- remain in charge of my own life;
- am needed by others;
- learn from others.

It seems to me that we are discussing two parallel issues! The first is our *individual quality of life*, what cohousing can offer each one of us as an individual. The second is the growing need for *structural change* in our various societies and welfare systems, a need driven by global demographic changes. If we stay with the first issue, we need to focus on the quality of life offered by cohousing, and on how to make that available to more people. If we want to incorporate the second issue, cohousing becomes a tool which might be used as a means among others to minimize the negative consequences of the coming global demographic changes.



Share (%) of Global Population (Source: “Why Population Matters – a Global Perspective”; published by the US Department of Health and Human Services).

Many more children survive their first years – and having survived, they live a lot longer, giving the following age structure development:

A smaller share of the population will be available to maintain the current welfare systems – or to develop such systems where needed. We will almost certainly have trouble finding– and paying – the needed manpower. There is a further complication, however!

### ***Welfare costs***

- Remuneration in ‘welfare’ areas (health care, education, and other human-oriented professions) needs to match development in manufacturing industries, or there will be staff shortages.
- It is much harder to increase productivity when you work with people.
- The total cost for ‘welfare’ will demand an ever-greater part of the total available resources.

We may have to redefine ‘welfare’, to move away from the current “*treating the needy*” concept to a future “*forestalling the need for treatment*”. To do this, we need to move away from the attitude “*somebody will take care of me!*” to “*how can I take care of myself?*”

We know that nutrition matters, that physical exercise matters, that the social environment matters, just as we know that smoking and drugs matter.

### ***So, why don’t we use that knowledge more than we do?***

I believe that there are two major causes. There aren’t strong enough here-and-now incentives to change – and we lack a sense of urgency.

It is my belief that cohousing can offer both a superior social environment and an incentive to make a move here-and-now. There is a fair bit of research available to support this. ■

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# Collaborative Housing at a Crossroad: Critical Reflections from the International Collaborative Housing Conference



**Guillermo Delgado** is an architect and belongs to Cohabitation Strategies, a cooperative for socio-spatial development based in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and is a member of the Right to the City movement.

## **Utopia and reality**

Like Greek democracy in classical times, Thomas More's social vision in "Utopia" had, as a constituent part of its structure, the existence of slavery. In the case of "Utopia" slaves were excluded from most of daily life, only performing the activities that were considered unworthy of the utopian citizen (e.g. the slaughter of animals). However, a general shortcoming of utopian projects is that they are not aimed at proposing specific transformations to the system that would shift current conditions towards a position elsewhere; instead they propose fait accompli visions (i.e. finished products) that would per se represent a better way to live. Collaborative housing (from here on referred to as "cohousing"), however, is a concrete reality with the potential of becoming instrumental in changing the current situation of housing and the city.

## **Cohousing as a tool to address challenges in contemporary cities**

Can cohousing deal with issues of social exclusion? Can cohousing become a feasible alternative to address housing shortages and furthermore decrease segregation? Can cohousing increase the role of housing as a social meeting-point? The first issue to start with in answering these questions is clear: one must start to address cohousing as housing. More specifically, it should be seen as a housing alternative with all the rights and obligations that the right to housing establishes for all citizens in contemporary democracies. It is for this reason that cohousing has to establish its

own guidelines, to announce its consolidation by means of a charter, and organize its members under a constitution that can be observed by its members and embraced by the authorities that deal with the issues of housing. Cohousing is a different way of housing, but is nevertheless housing. Cohousing is neither simply a lifestyle nor a typology, nor is it a social club with restricted membership with sectarian proceedings. Cohousing represents an alternative to the current types of production of housing and ways to live, in addition, it offers a way of resistance.

The city is being taken over by a privileged elite. This is reflected (and sustained) by neo-liberal urban practices that foster uneven forms of development in cities. In other words:

Where urban forms are dictated by speculators and developers, by passing democratic controls over planning and resources, the predictable social outcomes are extreme spatial segregation by income or ethnicity, as well as unsafe environments for children, the elderly and those with special needs; inner-city development is conceived as gentrification through eviction [or privatization], destroying [...] urban culture in the process.<sup>1</sup>

Stockholm is today moving closer to this *modus operandi*: a city centre gradually becoming inaccessible to middle-income households, rampant privatization promoted by the ruling neo-conservative government, polarization of society by widening the gap between the wealthy and the lower income sectors.<sup>2</sup> These generate paradoxical situations to the detriment of the disadvantaged. An artist living in cohousing “Södra station” waited 16 years for the chance to live in an apartment she could afford in central Stockholm. Just when she was finally assigned an apartment and moved in, the studio in the city centre where she had worked all these years, suffered from a rise in rent, forcing her (and many other artists, as she explained<sup>3</sup>) to look for cheaper studio space in more peripheral areas, forcing her to commute every day just as she had previously. Such are the perils of the rising land values and speculation that are symptomatic of this tendency in Swedish cities, which are shifting towards the same conditions that continental European and other international cities face today.

However, it has to be clear that the discussion is not a matter of “the rich and the poor”, since under this system of exclusion the disadvantaged sector of society

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1. Mike Davis “Who will build the ark?”, *New Left Review* No. 61, January-February 2010.

2. These trends are explained in Göran Cars’ chapter on Swedish housing policy.

3. “Let the city centre be for designers, architects, and expensive furniture stores! We artists will all unite and leave this place, we will stay outside the city.” The interviewee, who prefers to remain anonymous, was interviewed on Thursday, May 6th, 2010, in the cohousing development “Södra station”.

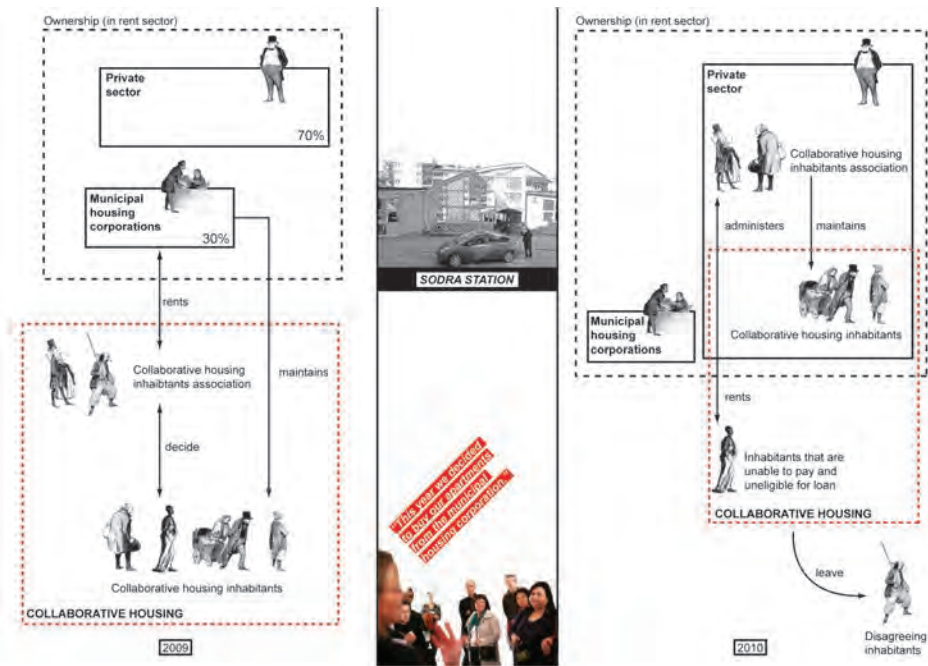


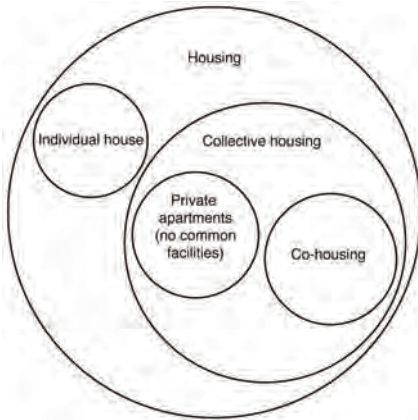
Diagram showing the ownership relations before and after the conversion from public rental into owner-occupation ('bostadsrätt') in the cohousing complex Södra Station in Stockholm.

becomes the elderly population, artists, students, the younger population (who have reached higher unemployment rates since 1929<sup>4</sup>), temporary workers, basically a population that in today's cities is not a minority anymore. This is the current situation that any serious housing alternative has to address.

### Deciding on the way to decide, what is in common, and a basic definition

Access to cohousing involves access to housing, and therefore there are laws that protect it as a right. This becomes crucial when it comes to the "selection process" or how one gets the opportunity of joining cohousing. During the cohousing conference many discussions revolved around the issue of how to "refine" the "selection process". However, this debate leaned more towards finding ways in which cohousing members could determine the compatibility of newcomers with existing routines, rather than on how to reach more heterogeneous groups and expand the cohousing population to more generalized categories (compared to a "particular" sector, e.g. elderly population). This raises the question of whether residents of collaborative housing

4. Several sources: a) William Underhill and Tracy McNicoll: "The Lost Youth of Europe: Europe's new young generation of losers", *Newsweek magazine* web edition. March, 2007; b) Ashley Seager, "The Lost Generation: surge in joblessness hits young", *The Guardian*. August 13th, 2009; c) Peter Coy: "The Lost Generation", *Business Week*. October 8th, 2009.



Visualisation of the place of collaborative housing within a simplified categorization of housing schemes.

projects are a group carrying out certain common functions, or a “community”<sup>5</sup>.

Rather than debating possible answers, it is perhaps more pertinent to simply reformulate the question. It is clear that the first category (i.e. a group of residents performing certain common functions) is general and open, while the second one (i.e. community) is more particular. The second implies that in order for residents to carry out certain functions together they have to share some other common things (age, political beliefs, income). We could argue that the “cohousing movement” is in its early stages, therefore, would it not

be more pertinent to allow the possibility of living in cohousing to remain open and flexible in order to test its capacities and find its meaning, while leaving “communities” as a sub-category (i.e. optional, not general)? A preliminary open definition of cohousing therefore emerges: housing with the possibility of sharing.

On our visit to the “Tre portar” cohousing complex we learned that until 2009 in Stockholm each municipal housing company had an internal apartment exchange queue, and today there is a single public queue that includes all three housing companies, which makes it more difficult for each cohousing association to select residents. Some visitors to Tre portar asked: “How do you select the candidates?” and our guide told us that the best thing they could do was to explain to the newcomer about the responsibilities of living there, so applicants could make the decision themselves. This is an affirmation of a more open definition of cohousing, and hence of welcoming different members to bring new definitions and life to it.

### Definitions of collective and private life

I will put in opposition two standpoints observed during the conference: the first lies in the statement “the key of success of cohousing is the selection [and composition] of its members”<sup>6</sup>. This stresses the fact that the “selection process” is crucial, but what is really being discussed during this “selection process”? If cohousing is dealt with as

5. In many discussions during the conference there was an instant equivalence between cohousing and “communities”. This is a subject for further debate since these terms are not interchangeable and there are significant fundamental differences between them. See Dorit Fromm: “Collaborative Communities” Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1991.

6. This opinion was shared by a participant in Workshop 6, “Self-administration in cohousing projects”. The statement was based on experiences in the Netherlands.



Analysis of the collective housing complex Tre Portar in Skarpnäck, Stockholm.

housing, then the rights of access to housing are very precise on the reasons why someone is to be granted or denied the opportunity to live in certain housing. How can we make sure that during this “selection process” some of the aspects taken into account to deny access to a particular applicant are not illegal? (Discrimination based on nationality, income, disabilities to name a few examples.) How can we make sure that collective housing projects are open to different citizens without the prejudices that would prevent some from having access? Is granting everyone the chance to explore cohousing an alternative?

The second standpoint underlies the phrase “We keep the discussions short and the dinners long”<sup>7</sup> in a collaborative housing unit. What needs to be discussed in order to make the common amenities and chores work? In the Swedish case, the kitchen seems to “be the heart of cohousing”<sup>8</sup>, or put it in more objective terms, the concrete activity where the residents of cohousing gather in collaborative production. On average, residents are required to contribute a minimum of five hours a month to the

7. This quote is taken from one of our guides in the cohousing development “Tre Portar” in Skarpnäck, Stockholm.

8. This quote is from one of our guides in the cohousing unit “Fullersta Backe”.

collective, usually in activities related to the kitchen (buying ingredients, cooking, washing dishes, or combinations of these). If this is what has been identified (again, in the case of Sweden) to be the collaborative function to be undertaken, then the issues to be discussed in meetings of the residents are precisely whether this collective cooking is done successfully.

If a collective manages to define clearly what is to be shared between the residents, then the rest does not have to coincide in any way. That is to say, concretely using the example of the quote, if the dinner has been produced successfully, not much more needs to be discussed. In this way, it is possible to avoid discussions that are misleading, such as political affiliations, religion, or personal life. This can be discussed informally during the dinners, which one can try to keep long! When the “collaborative” aspect in a cohousing development is clearly defined (i.e. what specific function/s will be performed collectively, when, and how), there is room left for the freedom and privacy that cohousing also has to provide.

### **On property**

Currently cohousing is developing in times that are characterized by extreme individualization. In this context, sharing becomes not only an element reflected in the collective kitchen or common living room, but in the solidarity between citizens putting their trust in a strong state that will look after its population. It was from a resident of a collaborative housing project that we heard the extraordinary statement: “I don’t need to own (property)”<sup>9</sup>, which is completely incomprehensible from the capitalist point of view. This is rather remarkable, considering that today many tenants in Stockholm have the possibility to buy the unit in which they live for about 60 per cent of the market price from the municipal housing corporations and then to sell it in the private sector, which may mean making a profit of about SEK 1 million instantly. These are the moments of decision between resistance to and co-optation into the current trend of privatization, speculation, and exclusion. Notions of property should therefore be discussed in order to assist the residents of cohousing in these crucial moments of making fundamental decisions.

The majority of Swedish cohousing projects presented at the conference were owned by municipal housing corporations<sup>10</sup>, which were originally supported by public institutions for the benefit of the population. Current tenants of public housing corporations nevertheless have the right to make such a decision. An overwhelming majority of 66 per cent of the residents<sup>11</sup> of “Södra station” decided at

9. This we heard from a disappointed resident of “Södra station”, mourning the privatization of the cohousing complex.

10. On May 6th, 2010, some of the participants had the chance to take a bus tour organized by the conference. It took us to five different cohousing projects: Fullersta backe, Tre portar, Sjöfarten, Färdknäppen, Södra station. Only the last project was privatized, a process being finalized at the time.

11. This is the minimum required by law.



the beginning of 2010 to buy their units from the municipal housing corporation. The implications of this decision are fundamental: firstly, some will not be able either to pay or to be eligible for a loan from the bank for their apartments. Therefore uneven conditions arise instantly leading to possible displacement. It will change social relations, because some will have to rent their apartments from those who bought them. It also changes responsibilities, because where the municipal housing company was responsible for maintenance of the common areas and technical equipment, now the inhabitants will have to find out how to substitute for these functions by (most likely) sub-contracting.

Finally, it weakens the position of the *municipal* housing corporations relative to *private* housing corporations by reducing the percentage of housing units under their control. The value of sharing has to reach this higher level of consciousness, where the sharing of the kitchen and common spaces becomes a simulacrum favouring a more general awareness of collaborative living: by renting their apartments an equilibrium between public and private interests is maintained in the city. By doing so, residents reinforce the public sector by empowering their government not only by means of votes, but by entrusting them with the good management of their homes. These allow the value of sharing to transcend, and not remain in promotional booklets and flyers showing how wonderful it is to live in cohousing because “we share”.

### **Spaces of consensus, the politics of cohousing**

One of the urgent issues in the politics of cohousing is the determination of governance. How are things decided? Does one prefer consensus, majority decisions or representative democracy? The answer varies depending on the country in which the cohousing development is located and with whom the issue being discussed. Yet can the organization behind this conference be capable of synthesizing the international and varied experiences of cohousing into a document that would help provide guidelines on operational issues for current and future buildings? Can it provide useful assistance for emerging cohousing projects, or will it only add them in their list of achievements?

Majority decision making proved to be efficient in many cases. Many Swedish cohousing projects operate under a system that resembles a kind of “representative democracy”. In the latter case a board is elected for, say, a two-year term. It takes decisions on the issues that arise between the regular/bi-monthly meetings of the residents. At these meetings majority decisions are taken. The board also serves as the spokesman of the cohousing association, as the representative of the residents recognised by the municipal housing company that owns the building. This facilitates communication between the cohousing association and the municipal housing corporation, since the board members represent a larger number of people, and it becomes less of a burden for the other residents so they do not need to be contacted frequently about minor decisions. Perhaps this works in Sweden; nevertheless it

seems to be a good starting point for other models, since it has helped to nurture several other cohousing developments.

Decision by consensus (i.e. a decision when everyone consents) seemed a way that has proven stagnant in the experiences shared by some attendants to the conference<sup>12</sup>. Paradoxically, it was mutually agreed that consensus remains an “ideal”. But isn’t then consensus (as it is characteristic of “ideal” situations) an aim rather than the mean? When consensus is the way of deciding, it can impose a situation in which no decision is made until all who are there to decide are forced to emit the same verdict. This is an undesirable case in which consensus becomes an imposition.

Typologically, cohousing has abundant common spaces that offer the possibility of interaction in settings that are not those of the “bi-monthly meeting” (i.e. the moment in which the decision is made). Therefore, creating points of exchange to re-discuss and re-think decisions can change the discourse between inhabitants. These are therefore *consensus-making spaces*, promoting conversation and dialogue between inhabitants to advance mutual understanding for the moments in which a decision has to be made, as well as afterwards. This is a virtue that enables cohousing to be a feasible alternative: not be presented as a final well-functioning product (as is frequently the case in the promotional material and outreach communication of collaborative housing projects), but more as a process-based habitat equipped with several communal spaces for the inhabitants to formally and informally take decisions and/or maintain their discourse.

### **Marketing or solidarity?**

The potential of cohousing to be a feasible alternative on the current housing market relies on municipal ownership and the possibility it offers of sharing. These two theses – despite being presented as *de facto* conclusions of what ought to be the outcome of thorough research – provide intrinsic and unique features that can define the character of cohousing from the very early stages. This is to gain political leverage in appealing not only to populations who are already looking for different models of living, but also to those who are excluded from the current housing offered by the market. There is already a majority that could join and strengthen the cohousing alternative.

Prime-time television, magazines, and advertising are marketing strategies that rather than helping the movement, make cohousing banal as an alternative, since they tend to depict it as a *spectacle* rather than entering into a dialogue and showing solidarity with existing social movements and marginalized populations. It is precisely those marketing techniques that are the means used by the dominant structures to manipulate the population by imposing standards, lifestyles, and ideas of happiness. The media has imposed the current lifestyles that advertise sleekly

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12. Mainly some participants in Workshop 6, “Self-administration in cohousing projects”.

designed new developments with an impressive rendition of “sustainable” apartments on a waterfront with sunny blue skies, which the majority of the population cannot afford, and which generate displacement and pressurize the residents of collaborative housing projects to succumb and move their buildings into the private sector.

This way is not only the most expensive, but also the easiest and obvious one. It is surely harder to think of the possibility of testing the idea of cohousing by opening it up as an option for temporary workers, immigrants, or new family configurations (single parents, same-sex couples living with a child and his/her parent, extended families). Is cohousing going to *sell* another lifestyle for glossy magazines or can it demonstrate its value by showing it can be an instrument in addressing current necessities in our contemporary cities?

What underlies our current society is before us in the form of the city. What does an astonishing 60 per cent rate of single occupancy in households in Stockholm say about the current state of society? Leaving the environmental impact aside, it urgently calls for of sharing. Stockholm Vision 2030 triumphantly advertises new housing developments, shopping malls, and infrastructure together with science parks and conference centres “towards a world-class Stockholm”<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, municipal investment in renewal of peripheral large-scale developments from the 1960s and 70s has been reduced, further impoverishing areas that were already downgraded compared to the ever more exclusive city centres. Protests are taking place in the city.<sup>14</sup> Solidarity is cheaper and far more valuable than viewing-time in prime-time television.

### **Cohousing as a form of activism**

Is it possible to imagine that cohousing may become one of the few ways to find a flat in central Stockholm, Gothenburg or other cities that have become unaffordable for many? Can cohousing be the way to access the right to inhabit the city centre in times of increasing gentrification? Can cohousing – rather than being a ghetto of a “group of socially interested people”<sup>15</sup>, radical intellectuals, or bourgeois elders afraid of impoverishment – finally become heterogeneous? We have put this question earlier in

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13. See the City of Stockholm official webpage: <http://www.stockholm.se/OmStockholm/framtids-stockholm/Vision-2030/>

14. A protest march on Saturday 8th of May in central Stockholm, with nearly 500 participants, [...] gathered under the title “Carnival of Utopia”, to campaign for [...] housing and public transport. “Unauthorized protest march caused traffic problems” in Stockholm News: <http://www.stockholmnews.com/more.aspx?NID=5289>. This was a march organized by several movements, among them Syndikalistiska ungdomsförbundet (Swedish Anarcho-syndicalist Youth Federation), Ingen människa är illegal (No people are illegal), and Kulturkampanjen.

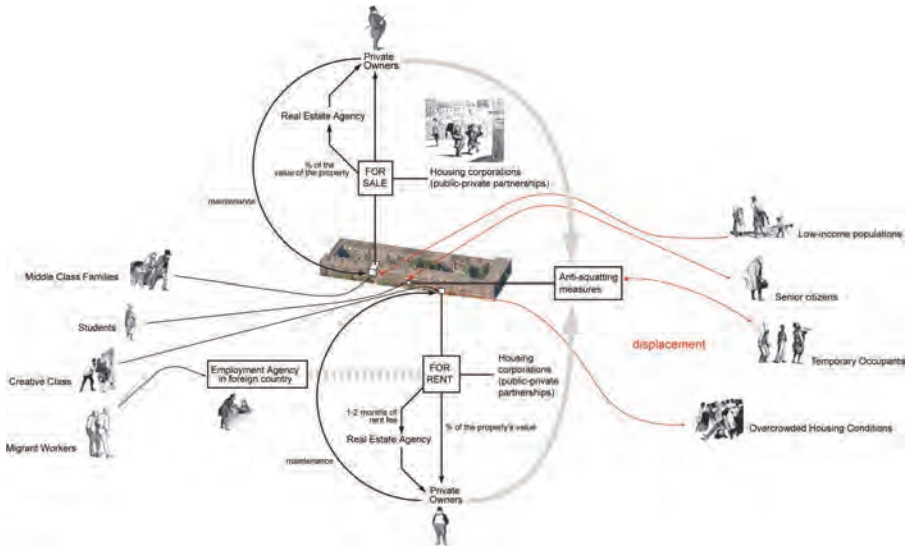
15. During an interview with professor Claes Caldenby we asked whether Alva Myrdal’s and Sven Markelius’ cohousing project on John Ericsonsgatan 6 in 1935 was the product of a social movement, to which he replied that it rather was the product of a “group of socially interested people”.



During, and independently of, the International Collaborative Housing Conference, the “Utopi Karneval” marched through the streets of Stockholm putting forward demands on issues of housing, public transport, segregation, and exclusion. [Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxYQvSNT3cc>]

different terms: can cohousing become a way to avoid displacement? Can it reduce segregation or challenge speculation? We can summarize all these questions by placing ourselves at the following crossroads: *Is it possible for cohousing to take a position?*

In the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, similar neo-liberal dynamics are taking place. In the name of “renovation” and “improvement”, new developments are being promoted by means of public-private partnerships. The specific case of the neighbourhood of “Tarwewijk” in the south of the city is a clear example of the kind of “upgrading” that in fact displaces the existing population (temporary workers, immigrants, and the elderly) to more peripheral areas. The apartments that are renovated remain empty because they are aimed at a middle class that is non-existent



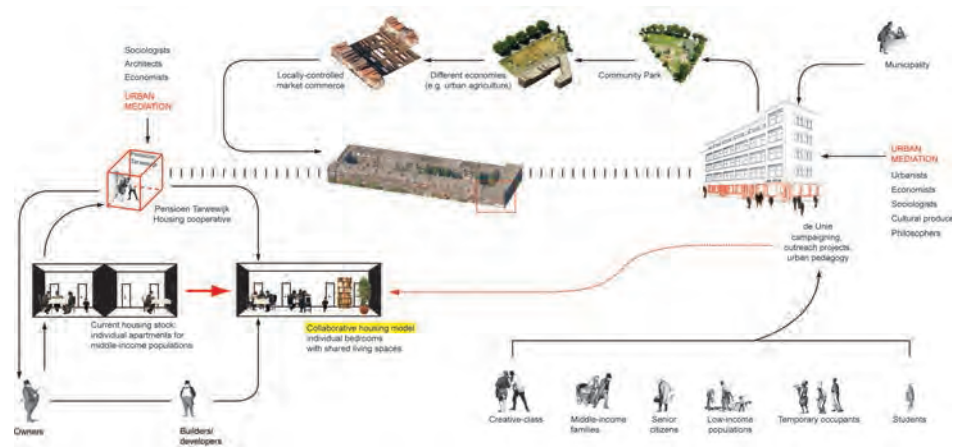
Current exploitative housing conditions in Tarwewijk” (Rotterdam, the Netherlands). The figure visualizes processes of access to housing and how they generate displacement of the populations who currently live in the neighbourhood.

in the area. Therefore the profit-driven logic of those behind such projects tackle this with marketing campaigns to “bring” the desired populations into the neighbourhood. Is it possible to develop a project truly aimed at the existing populations? If so, we could offer the hypothesis that collaborative housing models would increase the density of encounters among the residents in order to empower them and facilitate their ability to organize, communicate, and support each other, and indeed to take part in the daily life of the city.

This is not an isolated case, but a symptom of the generalized destructive urban policies that further segregate the population of the city. In the centre of Rotterdam, similar renovation projects are taking place in projects that have only existed for a few years. An elderly woman living in one of the apartments set aside for demolition in the city centre (Lijnbaan), has become active in challenging the processes that are going to displace the residents of her building. She explains: *“When I saw all these [social] movements in the 1960s, I didn’t understand what they were asking for. I thought it would be better for them to go to work. Today I am being forced out of my apartment. Now I realize that it took me until I was 80 years old to understand and become an activist”*.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusions

This experience is offered as a reference to encourage all the participants at the First International Collaborative Housing Conference and those who will join in the

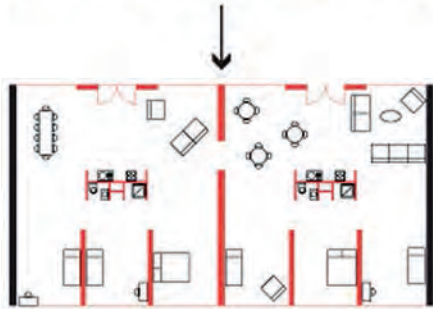


Socio-spatial intervention in the Tarwewijk (Rotterdam, the Netherlands). This urban strategy contemplates alternative processes to the current housing situation that can trigger the role of collaborative housing as a device to increase the density of encounters of an active population, who are enabled to take part in the making of the city.

16. This anecdote was shared with us by Agnes Verweij (Rotterdam in Action) in an interview conducted in March 2010 [unpublished].



For structural reasons only two apartments can be joined in the most common existing typology of “affordable housing” in the Netherlands, therefore allowing not more than four bedrooms to share communal spaces per apartment.



future, to see that the quest for alternatives in housing is a cry and a demand shared by many others. Collaborative housing projects can now leave utopian thought aside, for these ideals only made us conscious of our lack of freedom in respect to the current modus operandi of property and housing markets that we inherited from capitalist urban policies, which we generally regard as “natural” (i.e. “the way it is”). The task today is not passively to agree, but rather to “escape” from this reality to the comforts that current collaborative housing projects provide for their residents.

The challenge for all of us who saw the many cases of collaborative housing during the conference (from Sweden, other European countries, the United States) is to realize that “cohousing” need not only be a way to “escape” and “retreat”, but it can also be a way to confront the current problems of our cities.

The aim is, therefore, not to create more cohousing units for the sake of having more. The hypothesis offered in this paper is that by establishing alliances between the many sectors of society that demand alternative housing models to those currently being offered in cities, it will be possible to find a way for collaborative housing projects to be reproduced in many different forms. This will focus hope on the collaborative housing projects that stand firm against today’s uneven development in cities, fighting exclusion, and opening themselves to the many urban populations that desire different ways to live, thus interlocking them in a habitat that provides opportunities for all to realize their full potential. ■



## International Collaborative Housing Conference, Stockholm 5–9 May 2010

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# Literature in English about Cohousing

Compiled by **Dick Urban Vestbro**

The list below has been compiled on the basis of research carried out by the author, updated in 2010 in collaboration with Dorit Fromm, with later additions from the extensive lists of literature in five languages, made by Luk Jonkheere from the Belgian cohousing network Samehuizen. In order to avoid a too long list, priority has been given to research oriented literature rather than article in newspapers, to titles that are more recent, to those that are possible to trace through normal library channels or the Internet, and to titles that focus on cohousing rather than communities and cooperatives in general. To some extent literature on ecovillages has been included. In cases when an author has written many books and papers, a selection has been made. Lists of literature in other languages than English may be found on websites of national cohousing associations. The list below does not include all references provided in individual chapters of the Book of Proceedings.

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# Cohousing websites

## **International**

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), <http://gen.ecovillage.org/>

Gaia Trust (located in Denmark), <http://www.gaia.org/gaia/>

Eurotopia (Communities and Ecovillages in Europe),  
<http://www.eurotopia.de/verzeichnis.html>

## **Australia**

Intentional communities Australia, <http://www.communities.org.au/>

## **Belgium**

Samenhuizen, <http://www.samenhuizen.be/index.php>

Cohousing Platform, [www.cohousingplatform.be](http://www.cohousingplatform.be)

Habitat et Participation, <http://www.habitat-participation.be/>

## **Canada**

Canadian Cohousing Network, <http://cohousing.ca/>

## **Czech Republic**

Czech Cohousing network, [www.cohousing.cz](http://www.cohousing.cz)

## **Denmark**

Cohousing allocation service, <http://www.bofællesskab.dk/>

DaneAge (Ældre Sagen), <http://www.aeldresagen.dk/>

## **Germany**

Forum für Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen, <http://www.fgwa.de/>

FrauenWohnen (association of planning and building for women),  
<http://www.frauenwohnen-eg.de/>

## **Great Britain**

The UK Cohousing Network, <http://www.cohousing.org.uk/>

## **Italy**

Italian Cohousing Network, [www.cohousing.it](http://www.cohousing.it)

## **The Netherlands**

Gemeenschappelijk Bouwen en Wonen, <http://www.gemeenschappelijkwonen.nl/>

Centraal Wonen, [www.lvcw.nl](http://www.lvcw.nl)

## **New Zealand**

Eco-Village, and Cohousing Assoc of New Zealand, <http://www.converge.org.nz/evcnz/>

## **Sweden**

Kollektivhus NU (Cohousing NOW), [http://www.kollektivhus.nu/english/index\\_eng.html](http://www.kollektivhus.nu/english/index_eng.html)

Njord, the association of ecovillages in Sweden, <http://njord.spruz.com/>

## **USA**

Cohousing network of the USA, <http://www.cohousing.org/>

Fellowship for Intentional Communities, <http://www.ic.org/>

The Federation of Egalitarian Communities, <http://www.thefec.org/>

## Living together – Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World



The last 20 years have seen a growing interest in housing with shared spaces and resident collaboration around meals and other common facilities in Europe, USA, Australia, Japan and other countries. The search for a sense of community remains an important driving force behind demands for this type of housing. During the last ten years new aspects have been added, such as housing for the “second half of life” and planning for more sustainable lifestyles. Against this background, the Swedish association Kollektivhus NU and the Division of Urban and Regional Studies of The Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) arranged an international conference on collaborative housing, taking place in Stockholm 5-9 May 2010. The conference – which was the first of its kind – provided a forum for researchers, housing companies, politicians and activists to discuss experiences of different models of cohousing, collaborative living and ecovillages experiments.

The conference attracted 150 participants from 20 countries. It included study visits to cohousing developments in the Stockholm area, eleven keynote speakers, cultural activities and 16 well prepared workshops on various themes from the role common meals and design aspects, via gender issues, ageing and the role of housing companies and civil society, to assessments of demands for cohousing in the future.

This book consists of papers by the plenary speakers, by three specially written additional chapters and of elaborate reports from the 16 workshops of the conference. The book is the most comprehensive one about housing with shared spaces and facilities for resident collaboration published so far. It may be used by researchers, housing companies, politicians, activists and various non-government organisations interested in how we may solve problems related to an ageing society and other transformations in household structures, to urban anonymity, the potential of neighbourly cooperation and issues of sustainable lifestyles.

### **The book may be ordered either from:**

The Division of Urban and Regional Studies, School of Architecture and the Built Environment, the Royal Institute of Technology, Drottning Kristinas väg 30, SE-10044 Stockholm, Sweden.

or from [kollektivhus.nu@gmail.com](mailto:kollektivhus.nu@gmail.com).

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