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Design for gender equality - the history of cohousing ideas and realities

Dick Urban Vestbro and Liisa Horelli

Abstract

Today's development of alternative types of housing with communal spaces and shared facilities, called cohousing, has been influenced by utopian visions, practical proposals and implemented projects far back in the past. This article traces the driving forces behind the various models of communitarian settlements, cooperative housekeeping, central kitchen buildings, collective housing and collaborative residential experiments while focusing specifically on the design and gender aspects of these models. An emphasis is given to feminist arguments for cohousing, as well as a discussion of the patriarchal resistance against various forms of housing and living based on equality and neighbourly cooperation. The article includes an analysis of the relief of house work burdens and of the possibility for men to be courageously domesticated through this type of housing. The main research methods comprise analyses of literature and the researchers' own practical experiences of cohousing. The authors claim that cohousing in Scandinavian and some other countries has contributed to a more equal distribution of responsibilities for house work. However, the number of people living in cohousing is still too small to influence the gender segregation of labour markets. It is furthermore concluded that design factors, such as the quality of shared spaces, easy access to common rooms and indoor communication, are important for the smooth functioning of cohousing.

Introduction

Several concepts have been used to denote the same or similar phenomena in the research on housing with common spaces and shared facilities. Some authors give emphasis to the collaboration of residents, while others focus on the promotion of community or on the rational organization of residences in an urban housing block. User participation in the planning, design and implementation of projects has often been the driving force, but including participation in the definition means that housing focusing on communal eating etc. falls outside the definition. In addition, definitions that include self-management are excluded in this article, since cohousing projects exist that are managed by a private or a public housing company.

In line with the arguments elaborated by Vestbro (2010), *cohousing* is here defined as housing with common spaces and shared facilities. The concept is used widely in the English-speaking world, but also in Austria, Belgium, Italy and the Czech Republic. The term *collaborative housing* is recommended to be used when referring specifically to housing that is oriented towards collaboration among residents, while *communal housing* ought to be used, when referring to housing designed to create community. *Collective housing* is proposed to be used

when the emphasis is on the *collective organization* of services. The term *commune* is used for a communal type of living without individual apartments. We suggest that the term *cooperative housing* should be avoided in this context, since it often refers to the cooperative ownership of housing without common spaces or shared facilities (Vestbro, 2010). Also *ecovillages* fall outside the definition of cohousing, unless common spaces and shared facilities are provided.

The focus of the discussions on cohousing lies often on the ways of living, as well as on the built environment. In order to understand the relationship between these two factors – which is the desire in this article – we need to use concepts that are clearly defined. In English *housing* may refer to the building itself, but the term may just as well be used to denote the social content or the process leading to physical structures. On the other hand, *communal living* or *collaborative lifestyles* can be used to denote the social content. When the role of the physical structures is in focus, one may use the concept *cohousing project* (including both imagined and implemented projects), or *collaborative residential building*. We consider these terms awkward. Therefore, we venture to use the term *cohousing*, when referring to a residential building with several apartments combined with communal facilities. This is in line with the use of the term *Haus* in German or *hus* in the Scandinavian languages.

We are interested in both the social content and the physical design of cohousing. Valuable research has been carried out in this field by Hayden (1977; 1981; 1992/2005), Caldenby & Walldén (1979), McCamant & Durrett (1988), Fromm (1991), Palm Lindén (1992a), Caldenby (1992), Meltzer (2006) and Williams (2005). Hayden's research is discussed in two sections in this article, while Palm Lindén's analysis of spatial organization of Swedish cohousing is presented in the section on the development of the Swedish self-work model. McCamant & Durrett are practitioners whose main contributions consist of bringing the Danish experience to an international audience and of working out a collaborative design model. Meltzer has made a valuable contribution by sorting out the environmental benefits of cohousing design, mainly in the US context (Meltzer, 2006), and by analyzing the differences between ecovillages and cohousing (Meltzer, 2010).

In their research on collective housing in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and that of Sweden in the 1930s, Caldenby & Walldén show that designs in both countries were based on modernist ideas about a far-reaching division of labour between residents and service staff, and the desire to reduce house-work as much as possible. These forms of collective housing had no ideas about resident collaboration. In his PhD thesis (in Swedish with a summary in Russian) Caldenby (1992) discusses the typology of cohousing, based on a) the analyses of utopian projects of the 19th century, b) on Soviet projects (both proposed and implemented) of the 1920s, and c) on some early Swedish projects. He found that the examples were detached institution-like buildings, often following a symmetrical pattern. None of them were part of a dense urban structure. He also found that the internal spatial structure of the analyzed examples followed classicist, often tree-like, architectural principles and ideas which had been borrowed from monasteries or prisons. These modernist collective housing projects deviated considerably from the later cohousing models.

Jo Williams has made a valuable overview of the literature on design factors that encourage social interaction in housing. These are: high densities, good visibility, clustering, the inclusion

of defensible space and car parking on the periphery of communities (Williams, 2005:196). These observations are valid both for the building and the neighbourhood levels. The author concludes that the communal facilities need to be centrally located, that pathways should be shared by many residents, and that private spaces should be reduced, if increased social interaction is sought after (Williams, 2005:199).

The publications mentioned above do not analyze the designs of cohousing from a gender perspective. The aim of our article is to identify and discuss the differences between cohousing models, driving forces and designs from a gender perspective. We pose the question to what extent the various cohousing models have been determined by ideas related to gender. To explore this question we examine not only what model inventors say about this aspect, but also to what extent articulated goals have been implemented in practice. Research on cohousing in the Nordic countries shows that the issue of equal responsibilities between men and women in housework has been a determining factor (Vestbro, 1982). Another question that we pose is to what extent a more equal distribution of responsibilities at home can contribute to equality in the labour markets and political life.

Currently, gender studies tend to ignore the fields of planning, design and even housing, as the focus of research and policy are on the political rights, violence against women and the segregated labour markets. Descriptions about the three waves of equality between the sexes usually start with the 'Equal treatment perspective', in the late 1900s. Its strategy has been and still is the promotion of human rights, which has brought forth formal equality to women. The strategy of the second wave of equality, in the 1960s, is the empowerment of women (and men) including the politics of difference. The 'gender perspective' is the last wave, which started in the early 1980s and still goes on. Its strategy is mainstreaming gender equality to all possible fields, policies, projects and processes (Horelli & Wallin, forthcoming).

Already 60 years ago, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) claimed that "one is not born, but becomes a woman". This influential statement was followed by the recognition that gender deviates from the biological sex and is a social construction. Currently, gender is usually considered a dynamic and relational concept that refers to individual, inter-relational and institutional phenomena. "Doing gender in context" is something that has to be recognized or deconstructed in all gender-aware activities. For example, in housing, the dwelling has an indirect role in the reproduction of gender depending on the amount of time women and men devote to the domestic chores, in the kitchen or in the garage. It is the temporal and spatial patterns of certain activities that reproduce the images of gender identity which, in turn, have an impact on the identity of the person. The process is affected by the cultural, often patriarchal patterns that set the limits of choice to individual residents or households (Horelli, 1995). In individual houses, the conservative patterns of the culture tend to dominate. This means that the traditional distribution of house work continues in which women carry out far more domestic work than men (HETUS, 2001). The consequence is that the kitchen is mostly interpreted as the female place, whereas the garage or outside spaces are male places (Horelli, 1993). This is not the case with cohousing, in which the patriarchal patterns can be broken and the domestic chores shared between women and men (Horelli & Vepsä, 1994). The residents of cohouses also tend to use a variety of alternative temporalities that interact with spaces and places which in turn affect their gender identities (Jarvis, 2011).

The research methods used for writing this article mainly consist of a literature review. For the historical account, we rely on Vestbro's book in Swedish about the history of cohousing (Vestbro, 1982). Other important sources are the books by Hayden (1977; 1981), Uhlig (1981) and Caldenby and Walldén (1979). An additional research method consists of the practical experience of the authors. Vestbro has lived in a cohousing in Stockholm since 1996. Since 2006, he has been the chairman of the national Swedish organization Cohousing NOW, which keeps regular contact with 50 cohousing and 12 starter groups for cohousing. Horelli has participated in the planning of a cohousing experiment in the early 1970s outside Helsinki and lived there for 12 years. She has also been an active member of the research group The New Everyday Life in the 1980s.

We will describe the history of cohousing in chronological order by first presenting the utopian ideas about the ideal habitat, followed by the material feminists in the USA, the central kitchen and the early collective housing, the New Everyday Life, and finally the development of the Swedish self-work model. We will end by answering our research questions and discussing the lessons learnt.

Utopian ideas about the ideal habitat

Today's ideas about cohousing have been influenced by historical examples. One of the early influential thinkers was Thomas More, a statesman and humanist scholar under King Henry VIII. In his famous book *Utopia* ("a place nowhere", 1516) More described a society in perfect order, with equal education for men and women, and without private property. The island of Utopia had 54 towns, each with about 6000 households, divided into groups of 30, and served by a couple of slaves (foreigners or criminals). Every citizen was supposed to work part of his/her life in farming. Women were to do the same work as men, but weaving would mainly be done by women, while carpentry, metal-smithing and masonry would be done by men (More, 1516/2005). The meals are consumed in big dining halls. The communal meals are described as follows:

At the hours of dinner and supper the whole Syphogranty (household group) is called together by sound of trumpet, they meet and eat together, except only such as are in the hospitals or lie sick at home. Yet, after the halls are served, no man is hindered to carry provisions home from the market-place, for they know that none does that but for some good reason; for though any that will may eat at home, yet none does it willingly, since it is both ridiculous and foolish for any to give themselves the trouble to make ready an ill dinner at home when there is a much more plentiful one made ready for him so near hand (More, 1516/2005).

Services in the halls were to be performed by slaves, while cooking and the ordering of tables were to be carried out by women taking turns. Three hundred years later similar ideas were advocated by the utopian socialists. One of them, Charles Fourier, advocated communal ownership, order and productivity instead of the chaos and parasitism he considered to be the result of private appropriation of the means of production in Europe at the time. He proposed that women should have good education, not only in the traditional female chores, but also in work outside their homes. Housework was to be rationalized through machines and communal kitchens. Everybody would live in the “Phalanstères” of the ideal city. The city was to contain 1620-1800 inhabitants, engaged in both agriculture and small-scale industrial production. The Phalanstère looked like the Palace of Versailles. But contrary to Versailles, the Phalanstère was to have a communal dining hall, schools, kindergartens, libraries, lecture halls, a theatre, and other collective facilities for everybody (Benevolo, 1971; Beddall, 1976; Vestbro, 1982).

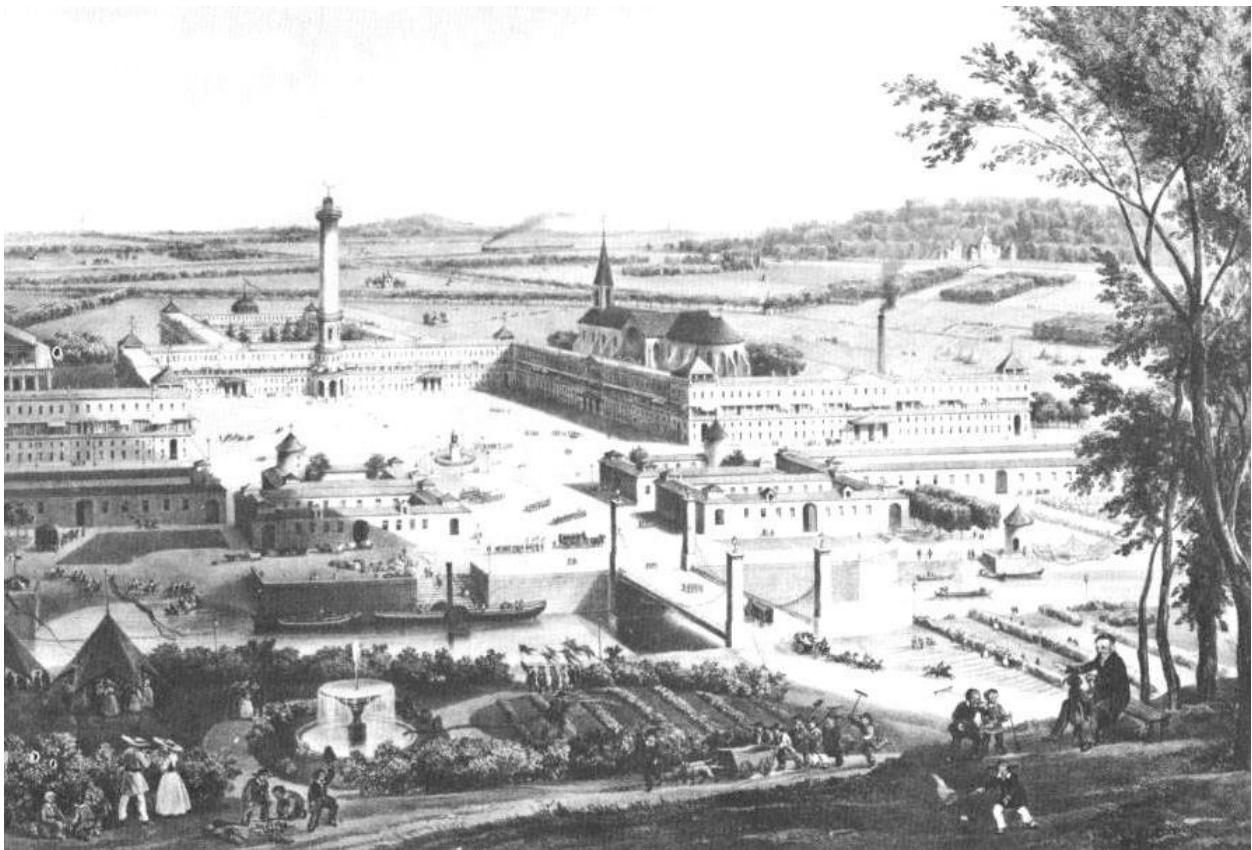


Figure 1. *Fourier's Phalanstère as interpreted by Charles Daubigny. The arcade stretching through the whole building complex connects individual dwellings with communal spaces. Fourier himself is sitting in the shade to the right* (Source: <http://www.institutfrancais.nl>).

The ideas of the utopian socialists were banned, with one exception (see further below). The disciples of Fourier and other European utopians had to migrate to the USA to implement their ideas. In her book *Seven American Utopias* architect researcher Dolores Hayden (1977) analyzed the US communitarian settlements from 1790 to 1930 (280 altogether, with a closer examination of seven of them). According to Hayden, the design solutions of these communities were based

on the wish to establish self-sufficient settlements that incorporate both industry and agriculture. The driving forces behind the different designs could be categorized into three main motives:

- *The garden ideal*, characterized by the placement in an idealized landscape with an emphasis on horticulture and agricultural productivity.
- *The machine ideal*, characterized by industrial productivity and political inventiveness.
- *The model home idea*, characterized by the focus on good design and new lifestyles.

The vision of a more rational society became prominent in many utopian settlements. For instance, the shakers can be seen as forerunners of modernism, as they adopted a puritan type of architecture 100 years ahead of time. Hayden shows that the principles of equality between men and women were important driving forces behind most of the analyzed communities. The bourgeois housewife-system was rejected in favour of women's full participation in production. Nevertheless the author concludes:

"In most nineteenth century communes 'women's work' remained sex stereotyped, but men and women benefited when cooking, cleaning, and child care were collectivized" (Hayden, 1977:25).

The only European example of a realized project, inspired by the utopian socialists, was the Familistère of Guise. It was built by Jean Baptiste André Godin, an industrialist and member of the French senate. He was allowed to construct a building complex, where everyone would live in a huge family. The complex included both a factory and large multi-family dwellings, which were inter-connected under huge glass roofs. The workers owned the factory and looked after the collective spaces in the Familistère. Women were supposed to be treated equally with men. However, as they were not considered capable to carry out the strenuous work that the factory required, many of them were out of work. Therefore, individual family kitchens were built and the Familistère gradually lost its collective character (Bernardot, 1892; Benevolo, 1971; Beddall 1976; summarized in Vestbro, 1982). Today the building complex is part of the national building heritage.



Figure 2. Godin with the Familistère in the background. It comprised residential buildings with glazed roofs and small apartments connected to communal facilities, such as dining rooms, a day-care centre for children, a theatre, a school, a library, a laundry, amusement rooms, a fencing hall and a big park (Source: <http://imgc.allpostersimages.com>).

Material feminist ideas in the USA

Hayden (1981) reinvigorated the debate, when she revealed in her path-breaking book, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, the lost and forgotten feminist tradition that had dominated USA during six decades. The movement began in 1868, when the first demands for housewives to be paid were expressed. It ended in 1931, when the Hoover Commission Report on Home Building and Home Ownership led to the building of 50 million single-family houses mostly in the suburbs (Hayden, 1981).

Hayden calls these women ‘material feminists’, as they demanded “*a complete transformation of the spatial design and material culture of American homes, neighbourhoods and cities*” (Hayden, 1981:3). The feminists attacked both the physical separation of household space from public space and the economic separation of the domestic economy from the political economy.

Thus, the proponents of the movement argued that the built environment had to reflect more egalitarian systems of production and consumption. They also claimed that the entire physical environment of cities must be redesigned to reflect equality for women in contrast to the utopians, who had mostly built their communities out of town (Hayden, 1981:8).

The strategy of the feminists was, above all, to invent new forms of organizations in the neighbourhoods that could make the hidden domestic work visible. The new interventions included housewives' cooperatives, new building types (kitchen-less houses; apartment hotels), day care centres, public kitchens, community dining clubs and food service delivery. They also created visions for feminist cities in which the split between the domestic and public life of industrial capitalism had been overcome.

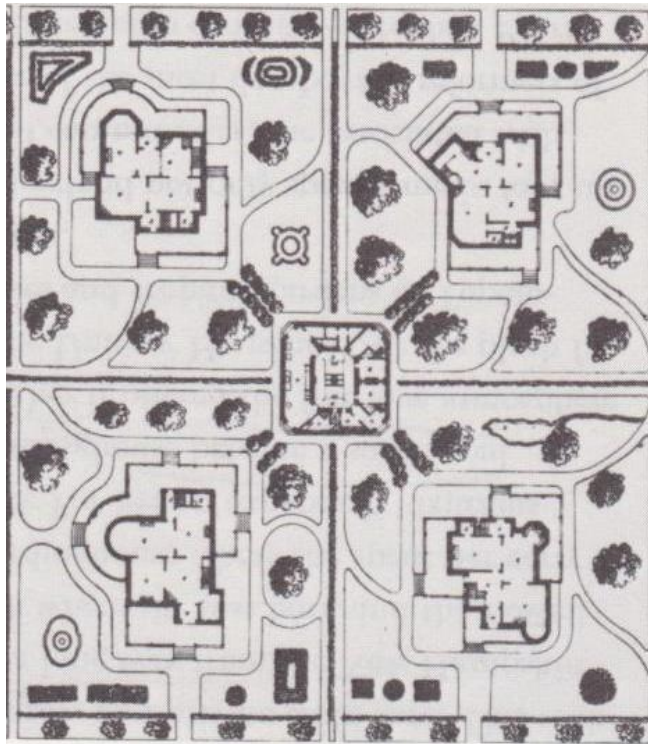


Figure 3. *A plan by Howland, Deery and Owen, in 1885, for a block of individual freestanding cottages with cooperative housekeeping shared by four families* (Source: Hayden, 1981:111).

The material feminists wanted to create homes with socialized housework and child care in order to become equal members of society. It meant for many proponents that “the home should be extended to the world” (Hayden, 1981). The claims of the feminists challenged economically, architecturally and socially the traditional conceptions of the women’s sphere. They began to apply new forms of organizing, especially around the producers’ and consumers’ cooperatives. They also continuously negotiated with other activists and political players. The material feminists demanded women’s control over reproduction. This was influenced by the communitarian socialists (Owen, Fourier and Godin), who had given equal weight to household and industrial labour. The key figures among the material feminists, such as Melucina Fay Peirce, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Livermore, considered that the socialization of domestic work should be at the centre of their movement. They claimed that women should have

control of the reproduction of society. This meant that domestic work, even if paid, was never to be shared with men. However, the material feminists were not able to solve the issue of class or women exploiting other women, as they considered gender and not class as the unifying category of the social movement. In addition, the feminists were unprepared to face the development of monopoly capitalism that included advocacy for single-family homes in the suburbs and the consumption of mass-produced commodities (Hayden, 1981).

The material feminists had an impact on the building of central kitchens and collective housing in Europe. In addition, even if their legacy was long forgotten in the later history of cohousing, the publication of the *Grand Domestic Revolution* in 1981 and the participation of Dolores Hayden in the conference on Housing and Building on Women's Conditions in Denmark, at the beginning of the 1980s, had great impact on the New Everyday Life-approach and its expansion within cohousing in several countries.

Central kitchens and early collective housing

At the end of the 19th century a public debate took place in some European countries about the need of the growing middle class to find solutions to the problem of hiring domestic servants at an affordable price. One idea that came up was to "collectivize the maid", by producing urban residential complexes where many households could share meal production.

Probably the first building of this type was the "*central building*", initiated by schoolmaster Otto Fick. It was built in Copenhagen, in 1903. Later, similar buildings were constructed in Stockholm, London, Berlin, Zürich and Vienna. They were called "*Einküchenhaus*" (one-kitchen buildings) in German-speaking Europe, in contrast to the "*multi-kitchen housing*" that dominated house production (Pirhofer, 1978; Uhlig, 1981).

The second one-kitchen housing project was *Hemgården Centralkök* built in 1905-1907 in Stockholm. In a booklet of the housing association reference was made to the prototypes in Copenhagen and USA. The motive for building this house was that the domestic servants kept demanding higher wages and shorter working hours. The purpose was not to facilitate women to work outside the home, but to save costs by employing fewer servants (Hagström & Ekman, 1971/1905).

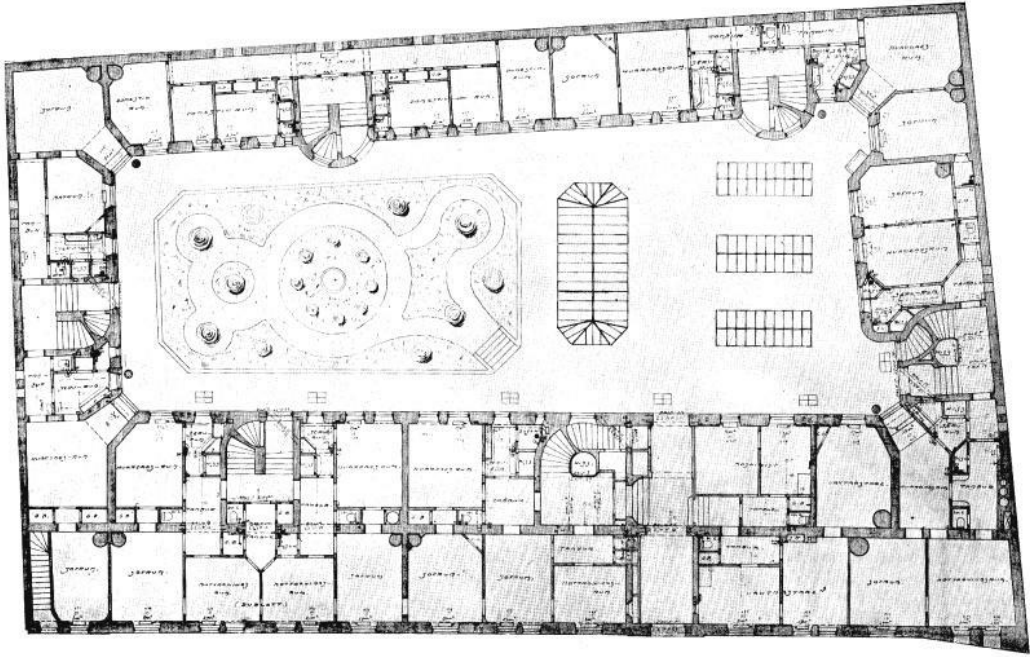


Figure 4. *The floor plan of Hemgården in Stockholm. All 60 apartments lack private kitchens and maid's rooms. The central kitchen is found below the glass roofs in the yard. Meals were sent to the apartments by food lifts (Source: Hagström & Ekman, 1971/1905).*

In Hemgården normal bourgeois apartments were deprived of the kitchen, the maid's room and some storage space. Instead, a central kitchen and a bakery were placed in the basement. Three meals a day could be ordered. These were sent to the flats through food lifts on each side of the staircases. After the meal, china and cutlery was sent back to the basement for cleaning. The servant staff also had the task of doing the laundry, room cleaning, shoe polish, sending messages etc. (Vestbro, 1982).

After 1922, no more experiments with central kitchen houses were carried out in Europe. However, the debate about new house forms continued, and the public debate became soon dominated by the modernists.

In Sweden - as in other European countries – modernist architects regarded housing with collective services as a logical expression of modernization. The word *kollektivhus* (collective house) was introduced. The idea was mainly developed by architect Sven Markelius and social reformer Alva Myrdal. For them collective housing was a tool to enable women to combine housework and paid employment. In an article of 1932 Myrdal wrote:

"When you consider an urban apartment block, where meatballs are prepared in 20 small kitchens beside and on top of each other, and where many small nursery rooms each accommodate a little languishing human sapling - doesn't this cry for a systematic organization, an organization in the name of collectivism?" (Myrdal, 1932; translated by Vestbro)

Myrdal thought that the possibility for women to work outside the home was a major instrument to achieve female emancipation. This was in contrast to another feminist ideal that was advocated by the author Elin Wägner, who emphasized the reproductive role of women and demanded a society that would be permeated by the spirit of motherhood (Vestbro, 1997). Myrdal also considered it important to provide a socially desirable environment for children in a situation when families became smaller and more isolated. The intention was not to dissolve the family, as was said in the conservative press, but to facilitate everyday life for a modern family with equal roles for men and women

The first modernist collective house in Sweden was built in 1935 at John Ericssonsgatan in Stockholm. It was designed by Sven Markelius, who lived there himself for many years. The kindergarten, established according to Alva Myrdal's concepts, was the first one in Sweden where modern educational methods were applied.



11. På vejen op i elevatoren studeres restaurantens spisekort. Hvad skal vi have til middag i dag? (John Ericssonsgatan 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 madelevatoren og et øjeblik efter . . .



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

Figure 5. Pictures showing the main idea of the collective house John Ericssonsgatan 6 in Stockholm. Not until entering the home after work the wife needs to think of dinner. She orders food from the restaurant at the ground floor and a few minutes later the meal arrives through the food lift to the apartment. After eating the dishes are sent down for cleaning (Source: Waagensen & Rubin, 1949).

The ideal of rational living is revealed not only by the food lifts and the internal telephone system, but also in the layout of the flats, which were designed according to the idea of minimum requirements. Despite the small apartment sizes the John Ericssonsgatan unit did not attract

working class households. It was radical intellectuals who occupied the building. However, the small flats constituted a low standard for them, and many residents moved away to bigger houses, especially those with several children (Waagensen & Rubin, 1949; Caldenby & Walldén, 1979).

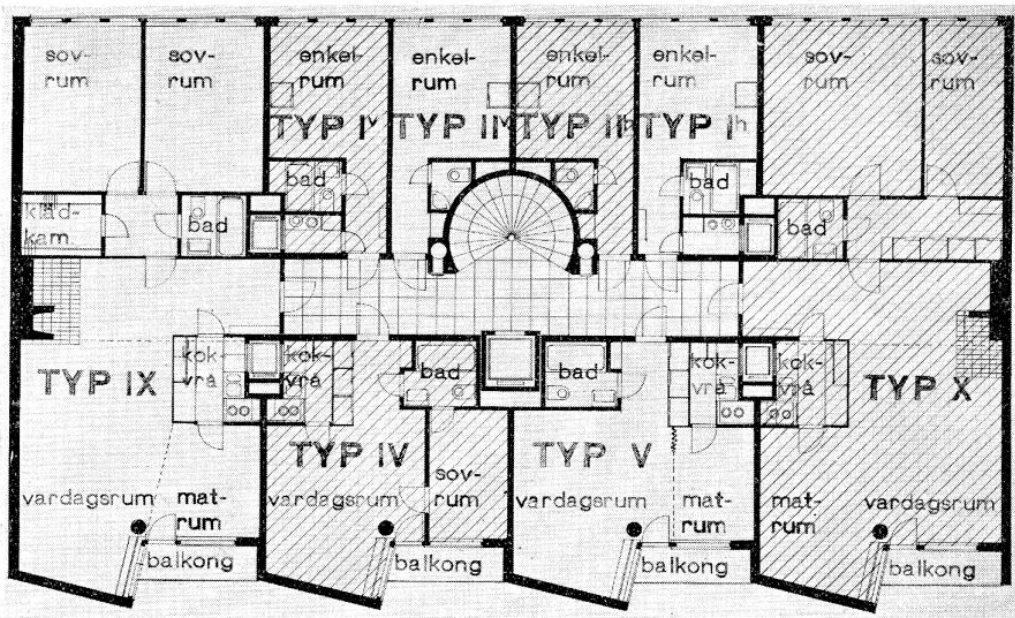


Figure 6. A typical floor plan of John Ericssonsgatan 6. Note the small apartment sizes and the food lifts next to the minimal pantries (Source: Markelius, 1934).

The first collective housing units of Sweden were based not on cooperation, but on the division of labour. The tenants were to be served by employed staff, even for laundry and room cleaning. The tenants themselves were not supposed to do any house work. This probably contributed to the labelling of collective housing as a *"special solution for privileged people"*. Thus, it was considered impossible for the labour party in power to provide subsidies to collective housing (Vestbro, 1982).

The radical modernists saw collective housing as an instrument to promote equality between men and women. The idea was not that men should have equal responsibilities with women for children and house work (as was the case later), but there was a desire to do away with the bourgeois housewife system so that women could work outside their homes.

The John Ericssonsgatan project was followed by other cohousing that were based on services through employed staff. A government investigation committee was appointed in 1948 to study the problem of collective facilities in housing areas. In its first report the committee proposed that cohousing should be promoted. However, under the impact of the cold war, with its subsequent campaign for the house-wife ideal, the committee turned against cohousing in its final report. One of the major arguments was that collective childcare – which was seen as an integral part of cohousing – would be detrimental to the moral development of the child. Reference was made to the British physician Dr Bowlby who had found that children in orphanages suffered from *"mother deprivation"*, which in turn was said to pro-mote juvenile

delinquency. The government committee referred to these findings without taking into consideration that children in collective housing were not deprived of their parents except during normal working hours (Vestbro, 1982).

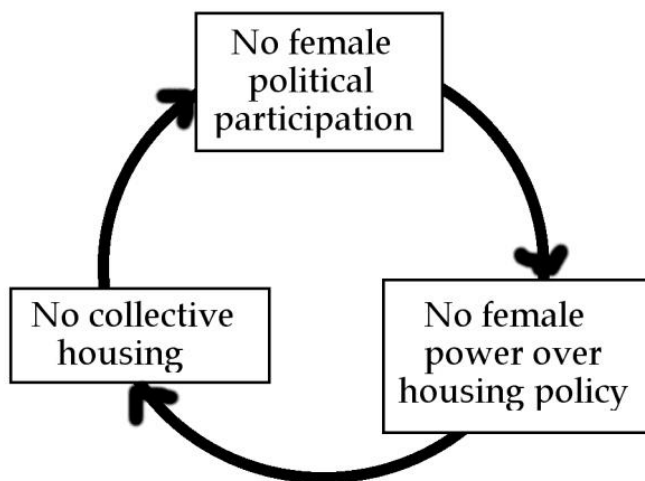


Figure 7. *The vicious circle of women's lack of residential service. Women need services on the home front to enable them to carry out their job and family responsibilities. Without services they have no time to participate in politics. If women do not participate, housing is planned by men, without recognition of the needs of women* (Source: Vestbro, 1982).

The negative official attitude to collective housing meant that such housing had to be developed without public support. Five of the 16 collective houses built in Sweden from 1935 to 1972 were produced by the private housing company Olle Engkvist. It introduced a model based on compulsory purchase of meal tickets and ample services for families with well educated women, who wanted to keep their jobs when children were in the pre-school age.

The last one of Engkvist's collective houses was Hässelby Family Hotel, built in the middle of the 1950s. It consisted of 328 apartments, all connected to facilities such as a restaurant, a cafeteria, a big party room, a day-care centre for children, a gymnastic hall, a small shop, a reception, a hair-dresser, a laundry and a meditation room (Vestbro, 1982; Blomberg et al, 1986).

In the beginning, the Hässelby unit attracted rather wealthy inhabitants, but in the 1970s new groups of people moved in, including young families with roots in the feminist and alternative living movement. They started to protest against increases in rent and meal prices. These actions and the common use of spaces contributed to a sense of solidarity between the tenants. After the death of Engkvist in 1969, the leadership of the company started to dismantle the services in the family hotel. The active residents objected, but after several years of struggle they lost the battle about the meal service, and the restaurant closed down. As they still did not want to give up, the activists started to cook themselves in the restaurant kitchen. To their surprise they found this work attractive. Subsequently, the purchase of food, division into cooking teams and the selling of meal tickets were organized on a long-term basis among those who participated in the new activity (Vestbro, 1982; Blomberg et al, 1986).

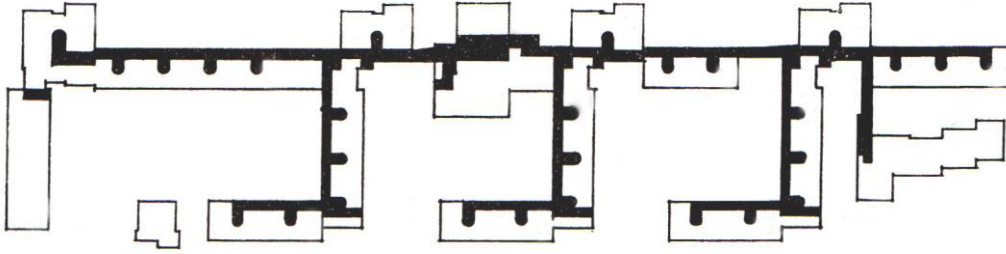


Figure 8. *The ground floor of the Hässelby complex. The 750 m long corridor (in black) connects the 328 apartments to a plethora of communal spaces. Indoor communication is essential for the use of communal facilities in the Stockholm climate.*

The BIG group and The New Everyday Life

Arguments for the self-work model had been presented by a group of women, called BIG, *Bo i Gemenskap* ('Live in community'), already before the Hässelby family hotel was transformed into a new model. The BIG group rejected the idea of separating productive and reproductive work. Nor did it agree with the modernists that housework should be minimized. Instead, it maintained that housework was part of the women's culture and it should be regarded as a valuable contribution to society. It was argued that the disadvantage with traditional housework was that it is carried out in isolation by a small household. BIG claimed that cooking and child rearing together with others is enjoyable, and it also saves time. Between 15 and 50 households was considered to be an appropriate size for the new type of cohousing. If each household would forego ten per cent of the normal apartment space, the collective would get a substantial amount of communal facilities without increasing costs. The new model was called "*the small collective housing unit based on togetherness through common work*" or the "*self-work model*" (Berg et al, 1982).

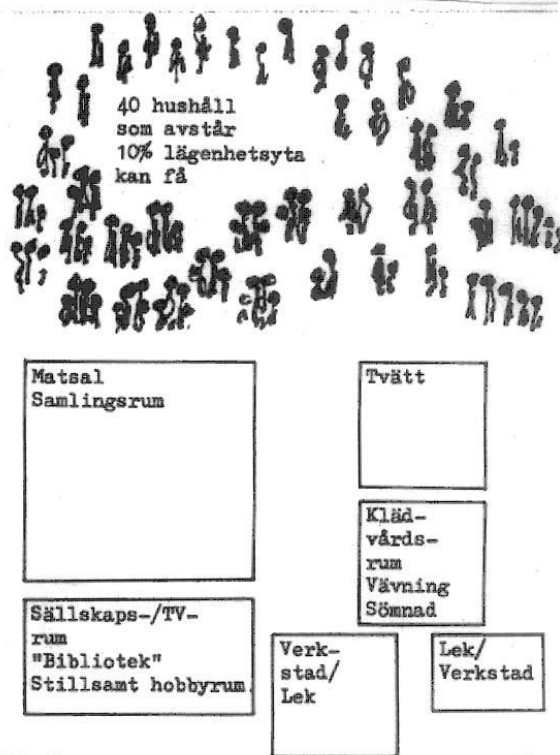


Figure 9. The sketch shows, how 40 households can get access to a central kitchen, a common dining room cum assembly hall, a laundry, a TV room, a workshop, a children's play room, a library and other common spaces by abstaining from only ten per cent of normal space standards in private apartments (Source: Berg et al, 1982).

The BIG group could have chosen to implement its ideas with the limited goal to satisfy its own needs. However, it wanted the new model to be an asset to other social groups. Therefore, it proposed that municipal housing companies should take the lead. At the end of the 1970s the time was ripe for the new model for several reasons. It was actually the previously hostile municipal housing companies (now under new leadership) which implemented most of the new experiments (Woodward, Vestbro & Grossman, 1989).

Members of the BIG group became key actors in the Nordic women's network on 'Housing and building on women's conditions', which gathered to its first conference in 1979. Irrespective of the provision of care services, the Nordic welfare states had not been able to relieve women's double burden when managing both work and home, nor to resolve the structural fragmentation of society resulting in frustrating daily experiences. The conference came up with the idea of a better everyday life in which a supportive infrastructure would play a central role. This evolved into a decade long transdisciplinary project, The New Everyday Life (Forskargruppen, 1987). It did not only provide a critique of the difficult conditions to balance work and private life, but also a vision of a just society, as well as a model of action. The central motives for action were the needs of children and women, as well as the social reproduction of people and nature. The yearning for personal and collective whole-ness and integration was inspired, in addition to the

early utopians and American material feminists, also by the critical texts of André Gortz (1980) and Henri Lefebvre (1971).

The vision of The New Everyday Life group was a concrete utopia of a post-industrial, mosaic-like society consisting of varying self-governing units that are responsible for the use of local resources. Important elements are work (paid and unpaid), care and housing, the separation of which was to be replaced by their integration in the living environment.

The theoretical framework comprised two central concepts: *everyday life as a process* and the *intermediary level* as a new important structure to be developed. According to Heller (1984) and Beck-Joergensen (1988), the root of everyday life lies in the reproductive actions that form the psychosocial forces with which people transform societal and cultural conditions into phenomenal experiences, enhanced or constrained by the built environment. Structural change can take place in the inter-subjective arenas – free living spaces – that are characterized by deliberations and digressions from the generally accepted ways of orientation.

The intermediary level, as a mediating structure between individual households, and the public and private sectors, was developed as a concept that referred to the structural and functional basis for the reorganization and integration of housing, work, and care in the neighbourhoods (Forskargruppen, 1987). As a new structure in the neighbourhoods the intermediary level was also to comprise environ-mentally friendly housing, services, employment, and other activities, which may support the residents irrespective of age and gender (Horelli & Vepsä, 1994).

The action model comprised the creation of the functional basis of the intermediary level by bringing to the neighbourhood some of the daily tasks normally located in different sectors and places. The care of domestic chores and children could be transferred from private homes to communal spaces, as in the examples of cohousing. Environmental planning and management, as well as care of older people, would be delivered in the neighbourhood and not in centralized institutions of the public sector. Even the private sector could occasionally find it interesting to create production to serve the local community. These transactions were to result in new activities, called the local housework, local care, local production, and local planning and management (The Research group for the New Everyday life, 1991).

As a geographical phenomenon, the intermediary level was to be a locally limited territorial whole, varying in size from a group of dwellings or a block to a neighbourhood, village or part of a town. As a physical phenomenon, it was to comprise shared arenas and spaces of communication. In fact, its architecture would support different modes of housing and the identity of the local culture. It could be regarded as a mixture of New Urbanism and the Just City (Fainstein, 2010).

The applications of The New Everyday Life-approach can be structured according to the level of aspired communality and the degree of informal/formal economy. This has resulted in a range of examples, such as a well-functioning housing area with shared spaces, like the neighbourhood of Tinggaarden outside Copenhagen; cohousing communities or collective houses similar to the ones that the BIG group has proposed; communes of different sizes; service house communities with both cohousing and an exchange of unpaid and paid services; and lastly communities in

which members work in the same residence in which they live, such as Svaneholm in Denmark, kibbutzim in Israel and the eco-village Findhorn in Scotland. The local care in the intermediary level has made it possible to conceptualize services in terms of social and material support networks, which later became the 'infrastructure of everyday life' (Gilroy & Booth, 1999).

Local planning at the time of the first Conference on Building and Housing on Women's Conditions followed the radical tradition of Owen, Fourier, the Material feminists, Patrick Geddes, John Freeman, John Turner and Margrit Kennedy, by creating alternatives to the rationalistic industrial and market-oriented urban development that is still dominant today. The gender perspective implied an effort to integrate both the social and ecological domains in planning. Thus planning was proposed to be a locally anchored dialogue between the residents, officials and various specialists in a way that today is called the 'quadruple helix-mode' (Lindberg et al, 2011). It affected not only the process of planning but also the content of the plans and outcomes, which became more congruent with the needs of users than before. This meant an application of both bottom-up and top-down strategies (Horelli & Vepsä, 1994).

Thirty years later, The New Everyday Life-approach, which sought to embed the self-work model of cohousing in the neighbourhood context, still seems to be valid. It is currently being applied in a number of gender-aware neighbourhood improvement projects in Germany, Spain, Austria, Italy and Finland (Roberts et al. forthcoming; Horelli & Wallin, forthcoming).

Development of the Swedish self-work model

After the early 1960s many married women in Sweden began to work outside home. They wanted kindergartens and other forms of services. Almost all the women's organizations in Sweden demanded that cohousing be built, but the opposition from the still-patriarchal society was powerful. Cohousing broke through only in the 1980s. Nearly all the old cohouses that depended on paid staff for service, had by that time become ordinary apartment buildings.

During the 1970s the idea of communal living developed explosively when young people from 1968 and onwards started to live in smaller communes in Berlin, Boston, Copenhagen, Stockholm and other university cities of industrialized countries. This alternative living movement challenged the nuclear family ideal. The media presented the new alternative households as bohemian and immoral. However, while the official society deplored the alternative households' 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 (Vestbro, 1982; Palm Lindén, 1982).

The growth of smaller communes coincided with increased demands for cohouses of the self-work model. The BIG group report of 1982 was often used as a manual by both action groups and housing companies. The first building in Stockholm of the new model was *Prästgårdshagen* in the suburb of Älvsjö. In this case the idea was taken up by the municipal housing company Familjebostäder. An association of willing residents was formed and acted as a partner to the housing company during the planning and design process. In agreement with the association, apartments were reduced by ten per cent of the normal space standards, according to the recommendations of the BIG group. Thus kitchens were not provided with space for a dining table, something the residents later regretted (Woodward, Vestbro & Grossman, 1989;

summarized in English in Woodward, 1991). Prästgårdshagen is a good example of designing for spontaneous use of communal spaces. When entering one of the two entrances all residents pass the common rooms. Several of the common rooms are provided with glass walls, a fact that facilitates overview.

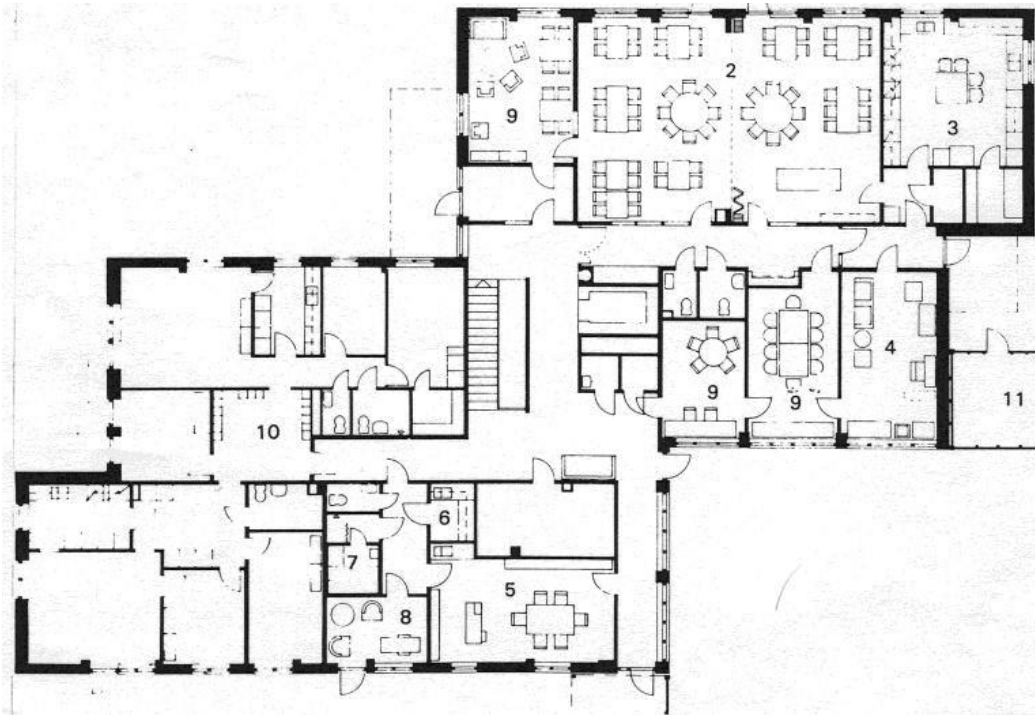


Figure 10. Ground floor of Prästgårdshagen, built in 1983 by the municipal housing company Familjebostäder. Legend: 2. Dining room, 3. Kitchen, 4. Laundry, 5. Ceramics workshop, 6. Photo lab, 7. Sauna, 8. Relax room, 9. Common spaces such as children's play room, workshop, office (later TV room), 10. Daycare centre (run by the municipality), 11. Storage (Source: Woodward, Vestbro, Grossman, 1989).

Prästgårdshagen was initiated by the Stockholm Vice-Mayor Mats Hulth, who had been impressed by the Hässelby family hotel and started to believe in the idea of cohousing. Supported by several political parties and women's organizations he launched, a program for the development of various models of cohousing, including one that combined housing for older people with cohousing for families with children.

During a period of ten years, 24 cohouses were put up in Stockholm. Eighteen of them were of the self-work model. In all Sweden about 60 cohouses were built in the 1980s. Thirty-seven were built by municipal housing companies, 18 by cooperative organizations and 9 by private companies (Woodward, Vestbro & Grossman, 1989). A dozen cohouses have been 'decollectivized' later on. After a period of stagnation in the 1990s a new wave of cohouses has been implemented, the majority being of the type "second half of life" (+ 40 without children at home). A list of Swedish cohouses can be found at www.kollektivhus.nu.

The residents are requested to carry out some compulsory tasks in the units of the self-work model. This is usually specified as part of the contract. The most frequent compulsory task is

cooking. In most units each adult has to cook together with other people one afternoon every second or every third week. Most other days residents may sit down at a set table. Another common activity is the cleaning of staircases and common rooms. For this activity the residents' association gets a refund from the housing company.

The Swedish experience indicates that independent action groups usually work with municipal housing companies. One may ask whether a group of wealthy professionals acting as developers to solve their own housing problem should be called *bottom-up* while a municipal housing company finding a solution to the housing problem of single mothers and other underprivileged categories should be labelled *top-down* (as stated in Williams, 2005). Contacts with cohousing action groups in Sweden over a period of 35 years show that it is difficult for laypeople to act as developers. Therefore, the residents usually decide to involve an established housing company. It is also observed that the long planning process and other factors lead to the situation that only a fraction of the action group members actually moving in when the building is ready. New residents are usually recruited after completion. This means that collaborative design is hard to achieve.

Which are the design principles used in the Swedish cohousing models? First of all most cohouses are multi-family apartment blocks in urban contexts, which distinguishes the Swedish experience from that in Denmark and the USA. Some are found in a suburb, which most often means that they are accommodated in tower blocks or walk-ups of four to five story buildings with staircases.

The PhD thesis from 1992 of architect researcher Karin Palm Lindén constitutes one of the most comprehensive studies of cohousing design principles. The purpose of her study was to clarify how the various spatial systems in cohousing provide for community versus privacy (Palm Lindén, 1992a, summarized in English in Palm Lindén, 1992b).


















	LOCATION OF COMMON ROOMS		
	All common rooms at bottom floor	Common kitchen and diningroom at bottom floor	Common kitchen and diningroom at upper floors
HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS			
One staircase system - without corridors and galleries (A)	 Orion x 7 Tunnan Puljörsta gård	 Katthuvudet Träden Bergsviken Täljan	 Stacked
- with corridors or galleries (B)	 Jakobeberg C Mårsta dal Söderströ	 Prästgårds- backen Blonda Lina Hage	
Several staircase systems - connected on bottom floor (C)	 Måltbandet Flygrafiken	 Fortuna	
- connected on several floors (D)	 Blomstret Svårdet Kupan	 Yttan	 Slottet Angringsgården
Central hall/yard (E)			
LOW-RISE BUILDINGS			
Corridor systems (F)	 Common rooms placed together Regnbågen	 Common rooms split	
Central hall/yard (G)	 Björkåsa	 Jernstøberiet	

Figure 11. An overview of cohousing, classified according to the building type, communication system and location of common spaces (Source: Palm Lindén, 1992b).

The author classified 24 Swedish and one Danish cohousing according to a) residential building type, b) type of communication (stairs, corridors or loggias) and c) location of communal spaces in the building. Figure 11 shows that the selected cases are distributed across 12 out of 20 possible theoretical options. The wide distribution means that there is no typical model of cohousing design. One may note that a cluster of row houses with outdoor communication to shared spaces – the most common model in Denmark and the USA – is missing

Palm Lindén's most important analytical tool was Space Syntax, a method used to measure the depth and integration of each room in the whole spatial system. The method may also be used to trace the "ringiness" of a spatial system, i.e. alternative ways of moving around in the building (through stairs, corridors and lifts). Spatial rings do not only connect spaces but also provide possibilities for individual choices to find one's way and to avoid social control. The opposite of ringiness are spatial systems with many cul-de-sacs (which limit possibilities to move around in the building). Ten of the buildings were selected for indepth analysis through observations and interviews.

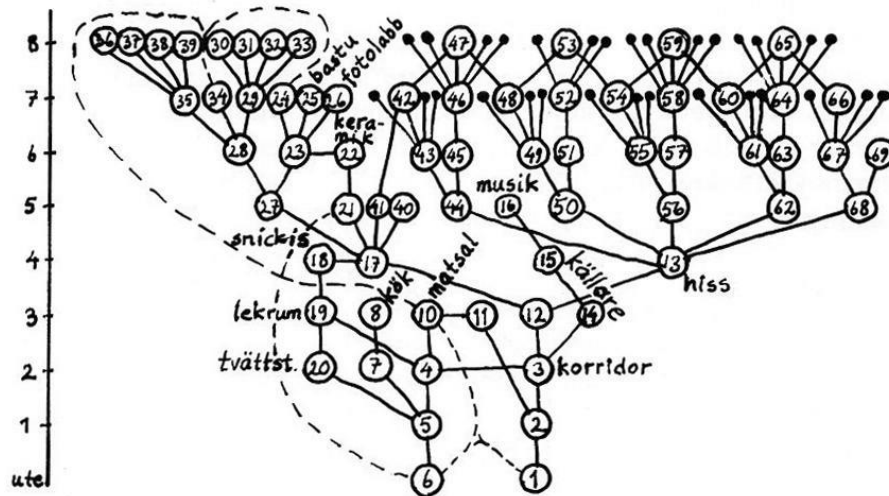


Figure 12. Space Syntax diagram of Prästgårdshagen. This cohousing has a somewhat shallower space structure than other cohousing. The "ringiness" is moderate (deviating from the more tree-like structure of tower block examples). (Source: Woodward, Vestbro & Grossman, 1989).

Palm Lindén's study shows that the location of common spaces has an important role for the spontaneous use of these spaces. In addition, the nature of "transitional zones" (entrances, elevator and stairs) are crucial for social interaction and also important for the cohousing to function as a whole. An interesting observation is that the residents may be attracted to these spaces in tower blocks with common rooms on the ground floor, when they pass the entrance, but not when they have reached their private apartments (Palm Lindén, 1992a).

Conclusions

The history of cohousing started over two thousand years ago, when Pythagoras founded Homakoeion, a vegetarian commune, based on intellectualism, mysticism and the equality of the sexes (Meltzer, 2006). Our historical account of the past two hundred years, summarized in Table 1, shows that the driving forces behind the selected communal living models have varied strongly. The aims of gender equality have been significant in all models, except for the central kitchen projects. The reduction of housework has been important in all models, while the equal share of responsibilities for work at home has appeared only in the New Everyday Life and the Swedish self-work model. All models have rich communal spaces, but only the material feminists and the models appearing after 1970 have sought to promote community and cooperation among the neighbours.

Aspects Models	Driving forces	Models of cohousing & gender	Housing solutions & design	Domestic work, impact on the labour market	Lessons for the future; obstacles & stepping stones
Utopists, 19 th century USA & Europe	Visions of a harmonious and just society, workers to own the means of production.	Women to work in production but the division of tasks according to gender.	Production and reproduction spatially integrated out of cities; influence on modernist ideas.	Collective organisation of meals, partly for women's participation in production.	Inflexible solutions, but had positive influence on later cohousing ideas.
Material feminists, late 19 th & early 20 th century	Econ. Independence of women through socialized domestic work (coop. housekeeping)	Production coops in the neighbourhood liberating women, (but work not done by men).	Neighbourhoods with kitchen-less houses, public kitchens & laundry, dinner clubs, etc.	No demand for equal distribution of domestic work with men. Gender & class conflicts not solved.	Interesting solutions in neighbourhoods. Conflicts with patriarchal society and corporate society.
Central kitchen houses, 1904-1922	To solve the servant problem of the middle classes; "collectivization of the maid".	No ideas of equality, an aid to housewives, rationalisation of food production.	Bourgeois apartments without private kitchens, with food lifts + a central kitchen.	Reduction of domestic work; house wives not expected to work in production.	Possible to centralise food production, otherwise few lessons for the future.
Cohouses with employed staff, 1935-1976	The machine age transferred to housing. Well-educated women wanted to combine family with a career.	Socialisation of maids allowing women to participate in labour force. Low valuation of house work.	Apartments with small kitchens, central kitchen and other services.	Enhanced female participation in the labour market. Domestic work not done by men.	Paid services became too expensive. Strong resistance from the patriarchal society.
New Everyday life & the Swedish self-work model.	Integration of work & private life through shared domestic work by men and women in housing.	The model made domestic work visible and thus sharable with men. Neighbourhoods with local production, care, culture.	Combination of bungalows and apartments with the community house and other shared spaces.	Equal distribution of domestic work a prerequisite for work/life balance.	The most successful model today, has expanded the concrete utopia into the neighbourhood.
Today and the future	A need to overcome isolation, a demand for sustainable lifestyles.	Reduction of house work and care of children & elderly still issues that affect inequality in labour market.	Models needed at the neighbourhood level, also ones that are accessible to all classes.	Equal distribution of domestic work, but the educational & labour markets remain segregated by gender.	Cohousing ideas expand, but the conservative construction sector is slow to respond. Hope in the new movement.

Table 1: *Aspects of communal living models from the Renaissance utopians until today.*

The private apartments have no or reduced kitchens in many cases, but the later models often have full-size private kitchens, since they are used for many meals besides the common dinners.

Cohousing constitutes a tiny fraction of the total housing stock even in those countries where cohousing is fairly frequent. In Sweden, the share of apartments in cohousing is estimated to only 0.05 per cent of the total housing stock (Vestbro, 2008). In Denmark, which is considered to

be the leading cohousing country, the share is thought to be almost 1 per cent. The figure for the Netherlands is likely to be similar. According to Williams (2008), the share of people living in cohousing in USA is estimated to amount to 0.001 per cent of the total population.

What about the categories of people who live in cohousing? A study of the Swedish situation around 1987 (when many young families had moved into the new self-work units) showed that there was a dominance of well-educated people, born in the 1940s with jobs in the public sector. They came from categories that were politically active and had intensive social contacts. They moved to cohousing, not to represent middle class values, but to make experiments that were interesting also to single parents and other groups that are considered isolated in society (Woodward, Vestbro & Grossman, 1989). The cohousing inhabitants are still judged today to belong to the new groups of “post-materialists”, who turn their backs to the consumer society and favour values, such as time with children, good social contacts, cultural and recreational activities.

According to Vestbro’s contacts with most of the Swedish cohouses the share of women range from 55 to 70 per cent of the residents. The strong dominance of women may be explained by the fact that women are the ones who benefit most from reduced housework and shared responsibilities for children. It is evident that women have a more positive attitude to communal living and sharing of facilities. For men, living in cohousing seems to be conceived as a threat. It is often stated that many men desire to control their partner (Vestbro, 2010:202).

Strangely enough very few studies exist about the extent to which cohousing has reduced work at home and promoted equal sharing of responsibilities of household chores. One of the few existing studies compared four different experimental housing with common spaces (two of which were cohousing projects) to four conventional neighbourhoods used as control cases (Michelson, 1993).

The research showed that household work substantially decreased in the two cohouses due to the frequent communal dinners. The study also showed that the two cohouses had the greatest amounts of neighbourly contacts, and that children in cohouses spend more time with neighbours and friends than in the other housing projects. The author notes that children are in safe and supportive locations in the cohouses. In Prästgårdshagen (with a higher share of single parents) fathers spend much more time with children than in the other areas, while mothers spend less time with children, probably due to the fact that common spaces are easily surveyed and that children are considered a responsibility of all adults (Michelson, 1993).

Other literature and our examples of cohousing corroborate the claim that cohousing does increase equality between women and men by making the domestic chores visible, which can then be shared by both sexes. This does not mean that women and men appropriate the spaces in the same way. It is evident that cohousing has relieved women some of the extra housework so that they can participate in other activities either in the house or outside it. Above all, cohousing has expanded the traditional male role, as it now entails a larger number of activities around daily reproduction (Vestbro, 2010:202f).

The design of the cohousing often supports indirectly the sharing of domestic work, as the private dwellings are, perhaps not kitchen-less as in the times of the material feminists, but reduced in terms of spaces for cooking. Also the vast amount of shared spaces for eating, hobbies etc. in the cohousing provides arenas for a deliberative democracy that nourishes a special type of “public sphere” (Habermas, 1996; Frazer, 1996). The latter reproduces a culture that does not easily accept gender inequalities.

All models in Table 1, except the central kitchen buildings, have sought to promote a more equal status for men and women in the labour market. We consider that the claim that the women’s movement made in the 1970s about the importance of equality at home for entering the labour market, still holds true. The statistics show clearly that in those countries in which the sharing of domestic work is high or fairly high, such as the Nordic countries, also the employment rate of women is high, close to 70%. This differs from the countries in which men do very little domestic work, such as Italy and Spain, and where the employment of women is quite low, around 50% (Eurostat, 2009; HETUS, 2001). Thus, the ‘gender contract’ that provides limits for what people are allowed or expected to do in terms of women and men, is different in these countries.

The possibility for women to enter the labour market is also dependent on the system for care of children and older people. In contrast to Southern European countries, the Nordic ones provide an extensive system of care, which enables women to enter working life without having to think about childcare. This has, however, been combined with a segregation of labour markets into female and male areas. The public sector still employs mostly women in low paid jobs, which in turn is reflected in the pay gap between women and men. The occupational division in Southern European countries is more even among women and men, and consequently the salary gap is smaller (Eurostat, 2009).

It is obvious that cohousing has brought support to people living in isolation or who wish to lead a more sustainable life. It has also been able to shake the traditional patriarchal division of domestic work. However, cohousing could open up even more to society by liaising with the neighbourhood at large, like some of the collective houses have done in Stockholm, or by leading to a new housing policy (see Delgado, 2010). The examples of The New Everyday Life seek to transform the neighbourhood environment into a supportive infrastructure of daily life at the centre of which cohousing could be one of the intermediary levels. It would be interesting to see an implementation of the speculations of Dolores Hayden (1991/2005), about the design of the non-sexist City.

The summary in Table 1 indicates that the main obstacle to the implementation of cohousing has been patriarchal society, including both the public and private sectors. Housing with communal facilities has often been conceived as a threat to the nuclear family. The main reason for the small share of cohousing in the total housing stock today is the lack of information about alternative ways of living and the prejudices about cohousing, especially among men. The expansion of this supportive form of dwelling needs a new strong movement that is willing to act for models on the neighbourhood level that are accessible to all classes. Research on cohousing could reflect on the change theories that might be applied to enhance this trend in the future.

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