



THEME COMMONS

SUB-THEME:

URBANISM AND HOUSING

TITLE OF WORKSHOP

WS13: Saving by Sharing — the potential o cohousing to contribute to sustainable lifestyles.

(Merged with WS12: Living

close and in solidarity. Community of families, gift economy and relationships rebuilding)



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Saving by Sharing — Collective Housing for Sustainable Lifestyles in the Swedish Context

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ABSTRACT

In Swedish cohousing one of the goals is to increase access to attractive indoor space by abstaining from some private space in favour of common rooms. Therefore cohousing constitutes an example of saving by sharing. Facilities shared are common meals, playrooms for children, hobby rooms, guest rooms, saunas and exercise rooms. Space may be saved both by reducing the normal apartment and by accepting fewer private rooms than in non-collective living. The paper shows how cohouses may be designed to promote both a sense of community and saving through the sharing of resources. Common spaces should be connected to apartments through indoor communication, located where residents pass frequently and provided with glazed walls in order to stimulate spontaneous use. Spatial organisation may influence the level of social control, which in turn may constitute a determining factor for pro-environment behaviour. In the paper examples are given of communal activities in various types of cohouses in Sweden. The question is raised how to promote cohousing in a society dominated by neo-liberal doctrines, and how to save by sharing more generally in the urban landscape. The main methods used to write this paper are analysis of literature and practical experience of the author. The author has carried out research on collective housing since 1964. Since 1996 he lives in a cohousing in Stockholm and since 2006 he has been the chairman of the national Swedish organization Cohousing NOW, which keeps regular contact with 50 cohouses and 10 starter groups for cohousing.



“Social housing as common good”, by Pierantonio Val, IUAV

ABSTRACT

Along his evolution, the man has gradually abandoned the nomadic condition in order to take a shelter where to live: a house, a common good around which the life of the individual, of the tribe and of the community started to constitute itself. Housing is a fundamental topic in the history of towns and urban territories. Also ATER's real estate can be considered a common good: institutions and communities attend to ensure everyone the possibility to get the primary good.

ATER's action belongs to another important common source, the ground. The urban territory of Mestre and Venice was an area of intense building activity, notably in the post-war period. Nowadays, public residential buildings must meet demands promptly by respecting the environment and the individual and ensuring low rent and sales prices whilst helping to renovate quality buildings integrated into the surroundings. The process brought about by the research unit Construction- Preservation of IUAV University in co-operation with ATER of Venice, also referring to institutional provisions, begins with the identification of the demand for transformation and of the social-economic premises to be implemented.

The example of Venice is a way to understand how social housing has ever worked in the urban history of the city itself keeping the common soil to give life both to the man and both to the lagoon ecosystem. The principles of sustainable energy upgrade become the driving force for the quality transformation which takes places at different levels, codified into five strategic points of intervention.

First of all, a strong densification of the existing buildings, the open spaces and the urban environments in which they are interserted that generates a choice of types and intervention without occupying free grounds. Then, the abandonment of distributional patterns based on “experiencing space”, not only on living in it, leading to the conception of the flexible homes, promotes the awareness of unexpressed needs and makes social housing once again an intelligent tool for the quality of living through the steady change of the territory and its inhabitants.

The transformation of the buildings led also to improve the performance and the qualities of the façades and of the roofs. In this way the whole system generate a more enjoyable and usable use of the built common good. An osmotic diaphragm that can satisfy the needs of living and allows the free soils to be a common heritage for the future generations.



Experiences of supportive co-housing communities in “Mondo di Comunità e Famiglia” Association. LUIGI GIARIO MCF

ABSTRACT

The association I belong to is called “Mondo di Comunità e Famiglia” that means “World of community and family” and we wish to respond to existential disease by searching a really alternative lifestyle, not antagonist nor exclusive.

We believe that another way of living is possible, even in towns.

We believe in little communities of mutual supporting families and individuals, in the new forms of social aggregation. We accept that we are not self-sufficient, which is a sort of laic version of the Gospel poverty, the poor being the one who accepts to depend on God and on the neighbour. We share the same fate, it is not possible to save ourselves on our own. Don Lorenzo Milani used to say: saving ourselves on our own is egoism, saving ourselves together is Politics.

We search for a new lifestyle because we know that living in a communitarian environment which values diversity brings serenity. A fulfilled person is a resource for the entire society. We can say to each other “I can be a resource but I need you to make it happen”. On these bases, the first experiences of housing communities and territorial communities were born. Territory can be a district of a big town as well as a group of small neighbouring villages: each a place where community members can develop important and frequent relationships. People and individuals may choose to live in the same building and have their own flat, or to move in order to be nearer to other families.

The term of cohousing community is now used to describe any housing solution open to some form of social features. It can remind us of the used-to-be neighbouring communities, very important in the past, such as described in “Il quartiere” by Vasco Pratolini. 80 to 60 years ago neighbouring communities or extended families were not a choice but a simple fact. Today, entering a community is a conscious choice, consistent with our inner needs.

Some sociologists say we propose to go back to a way of life impossible to practice nowadays but we rather think that we go “back to future”.



TACKLED ISSUES

- Co-housing can be defined as a way of living. Where you share spaces and services with a small community;
- Co-housing is a way to include people from the neighbourhood and create relationships;
- In which level everyday community should be moderate (without too many or too little regulation);
- It's a good environment for children;
- It promote gender equality: men take responsibility in children care and house works;
- It's a change of lifestyle (choices of reduction of energy consumption become enjoyable;
- Middle class with anti-middle class attitude;
- In the past co-housing was very ideological, but now it is more connected to practical (without taking a specific profile);
- "Living in solidarity" the association: world of communities and families built with the aim of creating relationships, a necessity in time of crisis, it is not a cohousing but a way of living where trust/sobriety are the main principles — the use of money is related with people possibilities and responsibilities;
- Salaries on the community account,

GIVEN ANSWERS:

- Legal framework? Co-housing association ask t o sign an agreement where people are bided to basic rules of sharing. The agreement don't have an institutional recognition but co-housing association is pushing to improve Swedish legal framework.
- How to change an existing building into a co-housing? In Sweden there are not empty buildings and the case is related to Swedish culture. In other countries, for example in Germany government given funds to renovate empty buildings and they could be transformed into cohousing buildings.
- What's about rules? There is the risk of having too much or too little regulations It's important to fix basic rules, concerning food/cleaning/order and things are discussed in the house meetings.



- Tenure/ownership? In Sweden pure ownership does not exist, so there are other forms of tenure like public rental, cooperative rental, cooperative ownership.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- How is work integrated in Cohousing initiatives?
- Which kind of propriety rights could attain to co-housing? Which are the experiences already putted in place?
- Is the rental a public rental or a cooperative rental?
- Sharing for other goods & commodities
- Which are the main obstacles/barriers to the spread of the demand?
- Gender equality equal conditions in shared areas, but what happen in apartments? How to look after that?
- Which is the difference between eco-villages and co-housing?