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THE HOUSING QUESTION OF TOMORROW**

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CONTENTS

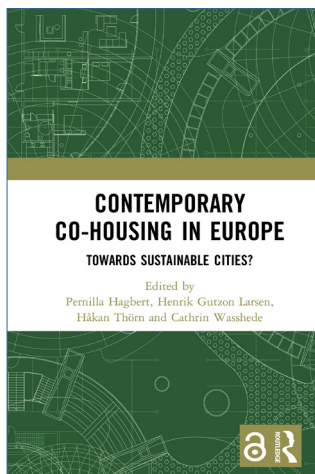
THE HOUSING QUESTION OF TOMORROW EDITORS' NOTES	5
DANIEL MOVILLA VEGA, OLA NYLANDER AND MAGNUS RÖNN	
AN ARCHITECTS' RESPONSE TO NATURAL DISASTERS: SHARED LIVING AND BOTTOM-UP COMMUNITY BUILDING IN JAPAN	13
CATHELIJNE NUIJSINK	
SHARING IS CARING? KOLLEKTIVHUS, RESIDENTIAL HOTELS AND CO-LIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF HOUSING INEQUALITY IN SWEDEN.....	35
KARIN GRUNDSTRÖM	
SHARING COMMUNITIES: AN ALTERNATIVE POST-PANDEMIC RESIDENTIAL LOGIC	63
IVETTE ARROYO, LAURA LIUKE AND ERIK JOHANSSON	
AVOIDING MACRO MISTAKES: ANALYSIS OF MICRO-HOMES IN FINLAND TODAY	92
SOFIE PELSMAKERS, SINI SAARIMAA AND MARI VAATTOVAARA	
FORUM	
PHD REVIEW: WHERE PLANNING AND DESIGN MEET: TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN TISSUE UNDER DENSIFICATION POLICY – THE CASE OF OSLO	128
REVIEWERS: KARL KROPF AND ROLF JOHANSSON	
PHD REVIEW: URBAN COMPACT LIVING: MAKING HOME IN THE CITY	132
REVIEWERS: HELLE NØRGAARD, STEN GROMARK AND TINA GUDRUN JENSEN	
BOOK REVIEW: CONTEMPORARY CO-HOUSING IN EUROPE. TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CITIES?	138
REVIEWER: ESPERANZA CAMPAÑA	

Front cover:

Housing proposal designed by Krook & Tjäder (architectural office) and Erik Larsson bygg (developer) in a design developer competition 2020 organized by Mark municipality in Sweden.

BOOK REVIEW:
**PERNILLA HAGBERT, HENRIK
GUTZON LARSEN, HÅKAN THÖRN
AND CATHRIN WASSHEDE**
***CONTEMPORARY CO-HOUSING IN
EUROPE.***
TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CITIES?
ROUTLEDGE, 2020

REVIEWER: ESPERANZA CAMPAÑA



Based on the research project “Co-housing and sustainable urban development: cases from Denmark, Germany, Spain and Sweden”, financed by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, the text addresses the ever-relevant topic of co-housing from the critical perspective of urban sustainable development. It arises as a response to the co-housing wave of the 2000s, seeking to provide an analysis of different examples of co-housing examined in relation to contemporary city and housing. With a dialectic structure, the first part explores the specificities of four different geographical contexts, whereas the second addresses a constellation of topic-based analyses with different focuses.

In the first two chapters, the publication focuses extensively on the wider frameworks of Denmark and Sweden, providing a thorough evaluation of the co-housing perspectives of these countries. In the next two chapters, the text studies two particular examples in the cities of Hamburg and Barcelona. When concentrating on Denmark, the text explains the history of its success with co-housing, a movement that emerged there in the 70s, and traditionally has set the world-wide standards for this form of residential communities. The research reveals that Danish

co-housing settings are mainly quasi-rural, not because the communities that promote them are anti-urban but because they need to maintain low land costs. Additionally, the investigation exposes a finding as relevant as it is paradoxical, that is that Danish co-housing estates are promoted and inhabited by relatively privileged residents, since owner-occupied tenure prevails over the more socially sustainable forms of tenure, such as cooperatives or non-profit rental associations. Not without reason, the text draws attention to the path of commodification that Danish co-housing has undertaken as it matures. When focusing on Sweden, the text highlights the importance of the co-housing initiatives of the 80s, an alternative movement that aimed to build community bonds at a moment in which the idea of individual autonomy was setting the tone in social behaviour. The text highlights how the Social Democratic policy of “good housing for everyone”, formulated in the 40s to fight private speculation, secured minimum standards while preventing alternative models of housing provision, which makes the co-housing experiences quite marginal in Sweden.

The case of Hamburg is accurately explored from the context of the vibrant interaction between bottom-up housing initiatives and local governments. The historical roots of social movements for affordable housing provision are exhaustively charted in this chapter, allowing the author to infer that in Germany the ever-increasing interest in co-housing is a “sedimentation”, the result of a constant pressure on a society struggling with housing shortage. Supported with a number of interviews, this section also succeeds in mapping the clues provided by the legal system for new forms of tenure and experimental uses of the land. Similarly, the case of Barcelona is examined within its historical background and context, with particular focus on its long tradition of home ownership. In Spain, state-property housing is the anomaly, so any form of alternative housing provision can be understood as experimental. To illustrate this, this section uses a ground-breaking example of housing cooperatives (La Borda) and other cases in the geographical area of Catalonia. The text emphasizes the role of activism as a trigger of urban and political awareness and highlights the importance of these social movements in the transformation of the traditional mindsets for housing provision in Spain.

In Part II, the topic-based analyses concentrate mainly on the interaction between the co-housing projects and their nearby urban context, on the domestic and living practices of the communities and how they react with the socio-spatial framework, and on the notion of co-housing as a facilitator of ecological transitions. In the first section, the interaction with political institutions at national, regional and municipal level is explored in six projects in Gothenburg and Hamburg, with a particular interest in forms of tenure. The text succeeds in framing the system of strategies that each co-housing group put in place to sustain their initia-

tives within the ecological, sociological and economical fields, acknowledging the differences between definitions and practices that vary according to the geographical context. The second section, highlights the similarities between Hamburg and Barcelona when examining the role of urban activism as a catalyst for co-housing projects. Of particular relevance is the approach of the text to the politics of co-housing – the balance between bottom-up management and top-down governance – and its final suggestion on how squatting movements can help in keeping open the ideological discourses on which co-housing initiatives are based.

New forms of everyday life associated with co-housing are examined in the following chapter, using the support of theoretical perspectives on family, eating, public/private space, care and children. By using interviews as a main source, this section effectively charts the notion of extended family that co-housing residents experience in their everyday life, thanks to shared activities such as cooking, cleaning and also the opportunities to socialize that eating together provides. The text also succeeds in revealing the structure of overlapping social networks that the different generations of dwellers produce beyond the nuclear family, especially when it comes to children. Particularly remarkable is the notion of the “extended sense of home” that arises from the investigation and how this could be applicable to the wider context of housing design. The following section revisits classical concepts of spatial theory to present co-housing architecture as an answer to our ever-changing social demands. It is argued that spatiality and sociality are engaged in a “dialectic negotiation” that has specific consequences for the communities that inhabit co-housing buildings and for their immediate surroundings. Especially stimulating is the proposal that this section introduces, which observes co-housing not only as a more sustainable form of urban inhabitation but also as an opportunity to provide a space – physical and symbolic – for political and urban activism. Finally, the last thematic analysis addresses the role of the co-housing model in the reduction of the ecological impact of contemporary ways of living. The text focuses on the fact that the alternative way of organising everyday life in co-housing communities ensures a way to reduce the resources and the ecological footprint compared to other forms of housing, mainly due to its dense form of dwelling and the sharing philosophy that underlies its organizational system. The debate that the text pursues to open acknowledges that, even if co-housing intrinsically implies an eco-sustainable model, it cannot ensure the individual responsibility of the residents in terms of their ecological impact. What the author concludes, and which can be understood as a point of departure for the future of co-housing, is that the model needs to overcome the label of a housing solution for a ‘greener middle-class lifestyle’ to become a radical socio-ecological dwelling alternative.

As a general conclusion, it can be stated that the main contribution of the text is the vast importance that it attaches to the contextual dimensions of co-housing. Not only in the base of the investigation from which it derives but also in the editorial strategy of the publication, it becomes clear that the contextual conditions of every single co-housing community produce unique results not only in terms of building form but also in terms of management, governance and ecological commitment. Regarding its role as mediator for sustainable urban development, co-housing is consistently advocated throughout the text as a phenomenon that, regardless of its small scale and low impact in the present, may provide significant insights to help citizens, designers and lawmakers imagine a city for people and not for profit for the future.