

Co-living, a new living alternative with a strong potential

What are the qualities and barriers of shared-living ?



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Urban Shelter Theory

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1 Introduction

Exponential growth of human population in high dense cities have urged for more smaller living and communal living due to the lack of space. Maximising sharing of ressources and living amenities will free up for space to accommodate the increasing population, while reducing the cost of living at the same time. Increasing urbanism, geographical mobility and economy fluidity have also speed up the rate of rural-urban migration, resulting in more people moving to urban centre permanently or travel between places more frequently (Green, 2017). People who are in frequent transition start to develop a growing preference towards subscription-based living that offers ease of accessibility, higher flexibility and improved adaptability to their changing needs. However the quality of living are often compromised for the group of people who are ghettoized, financially constrained or racially marginalized because high dense cities in both developed and developing countries have prioritized economy goal over social benefit. Hence, future housing solution needs to be more malleable to meet the dynamic urban change in order to strike a balance between large scale housing and intimate human interaction in land-scarce urban cities where land and cost of living are increasingly expensive (Jenkins, Smith and Ping Yang, 2007).

The urban population is predicted to increase from 4 billion today to nearly 7 billion by 2050 (SPACE10, 2018). Yet, with space becoming scarcer and the cost of housing rising, billions of people could struggle to find an adequate and affordable place to live so the possibility of shared living in this context as an alternative short-term or long-term accommodation could be a solution.

Around the 1980s, the interest for urban management became more important with the emergence of the Habitat Agenda and alternative approach promoting the role of civil society flourished (Jenkins, Smith and Ping Yang, 2007).

New ways of living began to emerge in many European countries and a wide variety of words appeared. Yet this terms were often used interchangeably (Lang, 2018).

Co-housing is the more commonly used term, and defined by Fromm Dorit in 1991 as a « *Common areas and facilities -with rooms for shared cooking and dining -combined with private self-contained units (including private bathrooms and kitchens). Social and supportive services such as child and elder care may be include. An intergenerational mix of residents govern and maintain the housing with an emphasis on community* ». Co-housing is often considered as the predecessor of Co-living. They have similar characteristics but co-living tends to share more space and provide a wider range of amenities such as private chefs, gyms, game areas, work spaces...Another difference is the length of stay and the flexibility. Indeed, co-living is particularly popular with millennials freelancer, young travelers, digital nomads who need flexibility. Finally compared with co-housing where the residents are in charge of the maintenance and governance, co-living includes a third party service provider who is in charge of collective activities and responsibilities as a company or property manager(PUREHOUSE LAB, 2017). To distinguish this models we could ask : *are they more destinational spaces where flexible and nomadic young professionals are able to stay in for short-term periods, or are they rather more residential in nature and cater to a diversity of modern urbanites who seek medium to long-term stays?* To sum up, we could say that the main difference in this new form of living is the length of stays and the location (PUREHOUSE LAB, 2017).

This research intended to study the potential of co-living as an answer to some of our biggest contemporary challenges. First, by exploring the social and economical aspects and secondly its potential in the context of sustainable neighborhood design. After introducing the various opportunities of this new model, I will discuss the challenges and the barriers. This discussion will open on how to design for sharing and the presence of co-living in Phillipines. Finally we will conclude on the role of the architect as a social innovator. This study aims to explore the future urban housing perspective of co-living, providing an alternative architecture solution in term of flexibility, adaptability and modularity of housing with sharing culture as the backbone approach.

« The problem of housing the vast majority of our urban population is not one of building technology - it is primarily a matter of optimizing densities, of re-adjusting land-use allocation », Correa C, 1999, Housing and Urbanization.

2 Literature Review, Argument, Critique or Discussion

Could shared living spaces and services provide a solution? Could shared living even foster healthier, happier communities? If so, how might we encourage more inter-generational co-living spaces? Should we rethink access to ownership and savings through new financial and sharing technologies?

I) Co-living : an emerging sector with a strong potential for opportunity

Nowadays, cities face the challenge of developing attractive, but compact urban residential areas that pay attention to human interaction and community feeling. Against this backdrop, many Western cities have seen the (re-)emergence of an alternative typology: 'co-housing'. It is characterized by a specific focus on sharing, collectivity and community. Traditional co-housing is a resident-led scheme with high levels of user involvement in planning, construction and management. More recently another typology is attracting attention. One that has many similarities, but is developer-led: co-living.

Characterized by smaller private spaces, co-living primarily targets a group known as **millennials**. Urban millennials are more mobile and have a different attachment to a place than co-housing residents.

This is a group that is attracted by urban living, but has difficulty in finding suitable housing. Also, it is a group that has specific housing preferences that cannot be found in more traditional housing typologies. With millennials being prone to loneliness and a growing demand for single-person households, co-living can offer a promising alternative (*The Housemonk*, Kumar, Hatti, 2019).

A- Sharing is urgent:

Across the world, people are moving to cities in search of jobs and opportunities. Today, the lack for affordable housing is a pressing issue in many cities and house prices are rising almost in every major city. It has become much harder to find an affordable place to live for ordinary people-not to mention students.

The idea behind this new trend of co-living is that residents have their own private living space but also gain access to shared facilities. Private space may be smaller but they would be more efficient and residents would have access to more space and better facilities for less money. A community can also benefit from economies of scale by sharing services and buying groceries and household products in bulk or by being more self-sufficient in terms of energy, food and mobility. More than ever, people choose to live alone and single person households are projected to see faster growth than any other property type in the coming decade and that is a global trend in low-middle and high-income countries alike. Fewer people remain at home with their parents until they get married and couples tend to be older than previous generations when they do get hitched. However alternatives are limited. Indeed, the housing market seems to consist largely of one-unit single-family homes, yet many people end up living with flatmates in homes that aren't designed for it. Co-living spaces could be designed for that (Outsite, 2016).

Having a lack of close relationships is also a serious concern today. Scientists believe that prolonged loneliness has a large impact on both our mental and physical health and could even be a greater health hazard than obesity or smoking. Moreover, almost every study going finds that the quality of our relationships is often the best predictor of whether we are happy or not so shared

living could improve the sense of belonging to a community that is fundamental to improve the health and well-being of many urban dwellers (Green, 2017).

One of the last reasons explaining the co-living re-emergence is the Age Boom. The global population is getting older and our housing needs are changing which is another reason to rethink how we design our cities. This new aging generation needs to stay healthy and keep participating in society and this could be provided by the shared living model. It could be designed for multiple generations, bringing people of all ages together and creating more meaningful and supportive communities that would benefit everyone (Vestbro, 2010).

B- Shared-living is nothing new :

Communal living is not a new concept, but a traditional form of living that has only changed in recent history. Co-living can be traced back to the origins of society as a pragmatic response to a need for safety, security, and social opportunity. (Green, 2017). Indeed, the first wave of this concept was around the seventies, it emerged in Scandinavian countries, and it was mainly a movement against prevailing social norms and built on egalitarian principles of sharing, equality and participation. Diverse co-housing typologies have been created during that period; ‘Centraal Wonen’ in the Netherlands, ‘Kollektivehus’ in Sweden and ‘bofælleskaber’ in Denmark (Tummers, 2017). The second wave is more a reaction to housing market issues and to promote affordability and social cohesion into urban development. We could mention examples such as the French ‘Habitat Participatif’; German ‘Baugruppen’ and Dutch ‘Collectief Particulier Opdrachtgeverschap’ (Vestbro, 2010).

The other shared-living models such as eco-villages, housing cooperative, intentional community, exist where one can also find similar characteristics to co-living spaces. But intentional community and eco-village tend to be rural and land-based models of community living, with a strong focus on sustainable living. (PUREHOUSELAB, 2017). The “co” has been proposed to mean ‘Collaborative’, ‘Communal’ and ‘Collective’, and thus includes a wide variety of practices (Vestbro, 2010).

II) Co-living in the context of sustainable neighborhood design

A- Saving resources by sharing : a new sustainable lifestyle

1- Social advantages :

Housing and planning context can vary from country to country, but the intentions and ideology of inhabitants of co-housing are remarkably similar. Most cases of co-housing emerged from a certain ideal and can be a practical solution for spatial challenges in many European cities. Challenges such as declining social cohesion, an aging population, lack of local identity, resilient local economy, energy transition and participation in urban development. Empirical studies report that co-housing developments produce active and diverse communities that can enhance social interaction and combat loneliness, isolation and disconnection (Vestbro & Horelli, 2012).

The four main benefits (Jarvis, Scanlon, & Fernández Arrigoitia, 2016) :

- 1) New social practices, technical processes and collective learning can reduce energy costs and improve housing performance;
- 2) Because common household appliances and functions are shared, co-living is a more affordable cost of living, in terms of food, utilities, goods and services;
- 3) It increases the social and physical resilience of residents and wider communities through the provision of shared facilities
- 4) Enhanced sense of place, increased self-awareness and sharing community knowledge.

2- What is being shared ?

The opportunity for sharing facilities and spaces in co-housing and co-living is regarded as one of the most important qualities, but there is no regulation on what should be shared or collectively owned. However, even if every project is unique, two themes are generally found on what is being shared. The first is making desired (luxurious) services or spaces that are too expensive for an individual, collective. The second is making spaces that are undesired to have in a personal living space, such as guest rooms and event rooms, collective.

The following table is to summarize the shared facilities and spaces according to the types of shared-living (Hoppenbrouwer, 2019) :

Feature	Co-housing	Co-living
Planning process & Management	Design process Building phase Financial Risk Homeowner's association	Co-creation Community manager Condo-board Co-op
Collective spaces & Facilities	Communal garden Common house Laundry-facilities Living Room Kitchen	Living room / guest room Work / study room Communal garden Laundry service Tool library Gym/fitness Kitchen Swimming pool Rooftop terrace
Services & Activities	Self-organization Maintenance	Concierge Dry-cleaning Cleaners / House keeping Moving service Digital platform Daycare service Activity manager

B- Environmental benefits :

In a co-living building the better use of space, the lower demand for resources in its operations, and the potential to be flexible with people's needs moved the idea to the forefront of the sustainable living concept. Also, co-living spaces can help to reduce carbon emissions and lower the demand for material in its construction by removing useless space. Besides all the above, collective living can increase opportunities for more sustainable urban living through the sense of community by sharing and collaborating. Sharing resources such as gas, water, electricity, and even food; but also collaborating to create more sustainable activities such as urban gardening, composting, and so on (Vestbro, 2010). By 2020, an estimated 40% of workers will be freelance, remote, or project based. Further to this, the young generation are staying single for longer and, raised on the instant gratification of the internet, are more intolerant than past generations to poor service. (Outsite, 2016). Co-living facilities reduce space per capita, energy use, and waste production. Thanks to this sharing of resources, it helps to reduce ecological cost and environmental damage in response to a world turned toward individualism, social stratification, and wasteful consumer habits (Vestbro, 2010).

III) Why don't we build more for sharing ?

The interest in shared living is clear but how come so few residential projects actually take share ability into account ?

A- The challenges of co-living :

Today, both developers and community initiatives struggle with a variety of barriers that make the co-living model unattractive or risky to pursue. (SPACE10, 2018). The uncertainty of organisation and market for this new model of design makes it a harder business case. The first barrier is the lack of research and development because co-living is a transdisciplinary field of study that addresses complex issues of sustainable urban development, housing policy, and questions of civil society and engagement. The second one is the negative preconceptions of sharing within co-living environments but also due itself to the limited tools and the restrictive start-up costs. One of the most significant is regarding the artefacts fail to encourage collective use and user engagement even if sometimes the lack of implication is related to the difficulty in organizing negotiations between a diverse range of stakeholders. (Green, 2017). Another important factor is the facility management. Indeed, this operation is the art of maintaining a building over the time and there are alternative models that operate with shared ownership and responsibilities (such as *Andelsboliger* in Denmark and *Baugruppen* in Germany) but largely, however the current investor-driven model does not support community-based facility management (SPACE10, 2018).

Today the investor-driven markets are not capable of producing genuine diversity because in terms of ownership it's limited to only two options : owning and renting. But there are so many other ways to use and consider ownership of urban territories (share, trade, borrow etc...)

B- Is there a difference with gated communities ?

Even though contemporary co-living offers a promising alternative housing model, its positive effects are still disputed. Both in science as in society, co-living finds its critics. The most common criticism on developer-led co-living is :
"They tend to become closed-off spaces, privatizing semi-public space, comparable to shopping malls, in addition becoming financially inaccessible."

(Tummers 2017, p254)

Co-housing typologies are sometimes compared to gated communities. Others highlight negative aspects such as that the common spaces that are privately used or controlled can withhold access for neighboring residents. On the other hand, states that in co-housing “safety is in knowing your neighbor, and not in walls and barriers”. Despite this, there are organized activities, meetings and services within co-housing communities which often are “public” and potentially accessible to people who do not belong to the community. The primary aim is interaction, whereas gated communities are focused on protection. Furthermore, it is understood that certain co-living facilities cannot be realized without the wider neighborhood, such as more commercial facilities like bars, café’s and daycare facilities. Features such as these promote the interaction amongst both residents and the neighborhood and are a positive asset for the project (Ruiu, 2014).

4 Urban Shelter Design

I) Design to share, strategies :

Before identifying the different co-living strategies in term of designing I would like to highlith the importance of the 4C in co-living (according to the PureHouse Lab) :

Convenience – Co-living spaces provide short-term solutions to most of its occupants who belong to the working professional segment that requires home locations to be near their offices. Aside from that, co-living offers flexible and shorter lease terms and often monthly lease options. Co-living contracts generally cover all services and move-in requirements. The spaces are fully furnished, utilities are set-up, and cleaning and maintenance services taken care of.

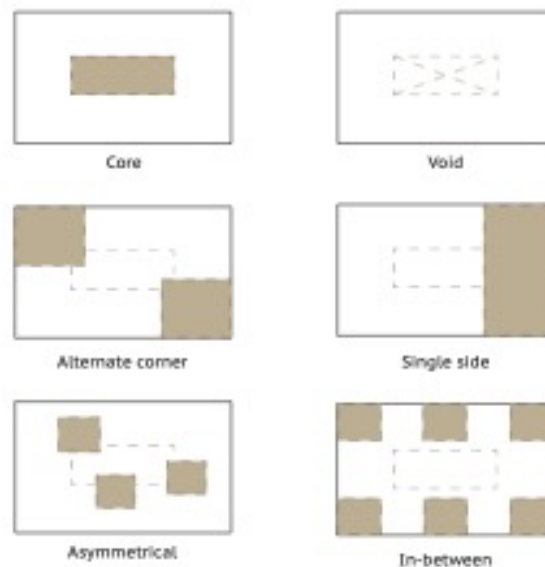
Cost - Co-living operators are using the space better and reducing underutilized space. Economies of scale for things like utilities, wi-fi, furniture and cleaning services are also creating cost efficiencies for all parties involved. While a co-living space may cost more than a room in a shared apartment at first glance, once all the additional costs like move-in and move-out, agent fees, utilities, maintenance and furniture depreciation are factored in, the pricing is relatively similar – with the added benefit on having flexible lease terms.

Community- The biggest differentiator for co-living compared to traditional shared residences is the emphasis on community. With the smart blend of private and communal spaces, co-living makes it effortless to bond with like-minded people.

Collaboration - Catering to a young, aspirational demographic, residents within co-living spaces enjoy the collaborative benefits that the community provides. Some co-living models cater entirely towards a certain profile or profession, with co-living operations that specifically house 'digital nomads', blockchain communities or tech start-ups.

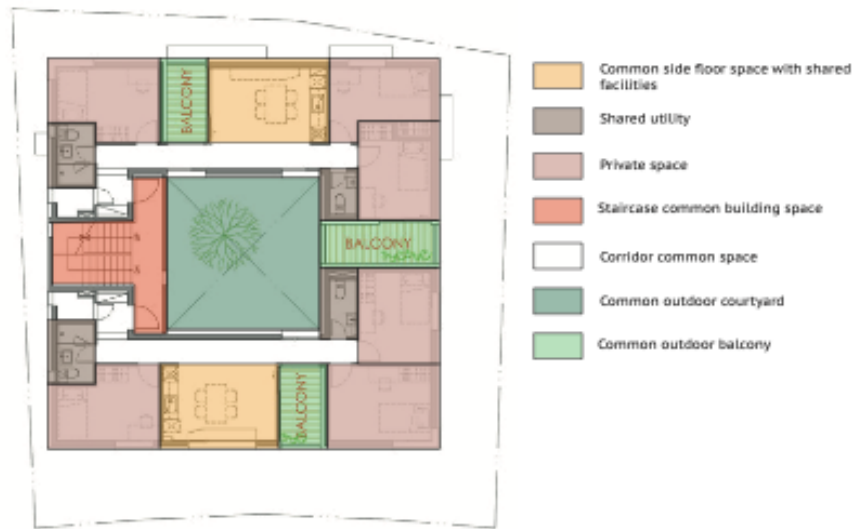
According to this 4C, we can now explain the other main key of designing co-living, the balance to find between privacy and communal space. The practical layout of a home defines how we live. Can a spatial design balance the need for privacy and the desire to socialise ?

These diagrams illustrate the various possibilities in the spatial layout and movement :



The variety of organisation will create a wide range of opportunities to socialise for the residents. In this case I only illustrate the opportunities on one floor-level but it could also be organized with two different floor-level to create an architecture mediating privacy and sharing.

We can analyse a typology of co-living as an example to illustrate one kind of layout :



This Seoul residential block called “**the Gap House**” was designed by local studio Archihood WXY to look like a cluster of four buildings, with each facade featuring a gabled profile in just one corner. Being in an area that has couple of universities nearby, a demand for student studio-type accommodations have risen. The concept of the Gap House is to support the new lifestyle of the young, single-demographic household by sharing common spaces such as the living room, kitchen, and dining area. The positioning of the balconies, as well as the recessed oblong windows that puncture both the street and courtyard-facing facades, provide some privacy for the overlooked plot. Downstairs, a U-shaped block contains a shop and stairwell, and wraps three sides of the courtyard, blocking through-access. In this project the communal spaces are organized around this void and there is one living room-kitchen and two toilets for three bedrooms.

It’s also really important in the designing of co-living building to think about the private unit. This unit can be used only for sleeping, or sleeping and working, sleeping, working and hygiene and finally sleeping, working, hygiene and cooking. According to the implemented utilities of the unit, there will be a different kind of organization for the common spaces.

II) Design for sharing in the Philippines :

In the capital region of the Philippines young professionals are seeking co-living facilities near their workplaces instead of enduring hours-long commute, according to a real estate service company. Workers are willing to live with their peers in shared housing facilities to cope with worsening traffic. So it's more a short-term solution (LAMUDI, 2019). Armed with a monthly paycheck, they often have more upscale tastes in living compared to students. To meet the demand of this new market, developers have created a new kind of housing that feature budget-friendly yet chic living spaces. Dubbed as "dormitel," this new kind of housing setup has been slowly making waves in Metro Manila.

Philippines, however, is not the first one to come up with this kind of housing in Asia (LAMUDI, 2019). Philippines are facing rapid urbanization and have to deal with the gap between social needs for land, urban services/housing and the economic capacity to provide this and the political. In these country the land access and the mechanism for housing provision are more complex (Jenkins, 2007). Indeed they are currently facing an imbalanced housing supply situation where there is an estimated backlog of 6.0 million units from 2011 to 2015, mainly in the affordable segment, while there was an excess of about 250,000 and 310,000 built high and mid end homes; both of these are mostly located within Metro Manila. Furthermore, the affordability gap continues to widen with new condominium prices in Manila rising 11.6% year- on-year in H1 2019, which is starting to price out the young working professionals looking to live within the city and near their workplaces given the notorious traffic conditions within the city (KNIGHTFRANK Santos, 2019).

With Manila's economy expected to continue its rapid expansion over the coming years, the city will continue to be a source of jobs within the country and a magnet for its young working population; ripe conditions for the co-living sector to thrive. At present, more property developers are starting to enter the co-living market segment by developing their own co-living brands and by establishing similar developments in the fringe areas of Makati and Bonifacio Global City central business districts (THE HOUSEMONK report, 2019).

5 The Role of Architects

Do architects and planners have a responsibility to change perceptions of the spaces we inhabit?

Thanks to different studies of co-living the role of architecture evolved not only as a means to organise physical space, but as a way of representing a community attitude and collective identity. Architects and designers have a responsibility to make a difference by improving spatial quality as well as the inclusion of service layers, technologies and facilities that support the needs of the residents and improve their quality of life. If we design for inclusivity and flexibility, it can have huge health benefits on its users by encouraging certain behaviors (Vestbro, 2010).

The Ikea's future living lab Space10, involved in the the shared living experience think that :

« architecture plays the essential role in facilitating not only the meeting between residents but also the activation and behavioral roles that the residents take on. A well designed, inspiring and quality drive space is proven to encourage better behavior whereby residents are more considerate and committed to the wellbeing of their surroundings and the people that share it with ».

Co-living shouldn't just be about those residing in the shared-living community itself, it should be inclusive of those living and working within the area. In some ways a shared-living space can act as a community space or hub.

Architects must inspire new mindsets, tools and methods into the world of development.

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