AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF SOCIAL SPACE: RESEARCH ON THE POTENTIAL FOR COHOUSING IN SERBIA

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This paper explores the social background of the contemporary community housing model (cohousing) whose representation in discursive theory is considered in relation to the crisis of the structural approach to housing issues. On the other hand, this model is investigated as a possible response of collaborative interdisciplinary practices to the volatile trends dictated by the market, aiming to achieve a socially sustainable urban form. In the first part of the paper, the concept of communal habitation is critically examined from the standpoint of the relationship between the private and public, through a comparative analysis of cohousing and residential models sharing similar spatial typology but having differing social profiles. This includes an overview of the broader circumstances related to spatial segregation issues and the aim to eliminate undesirable encounters. The second part of the paper relates to the specific professional and social context in Serbia, stemming from the gap between the mass implementation of socially-owned residential settlements and the interruption of planned urbanization amidst political and transitional crises. The analysis aims to identify problems affecting the largest segment of the population, considering the loss of neighborly connections, spatial stratification, growing social differences, and the deterioration of the housing fund due to construction speculation and the exclusivity of new residential complexes. The study results provide a foundation for the ongoing development of the idea of collaboration for the defense of shared space, forming a basis for investment and superstructure, gradually elevating quality towards socially sustainable urban development.

Key words: housing, community, interaction, flexibility, open practice.

INTRODUCTION

Cohousing is a residential concept based on the grouping of private housing units around a common space. In the basic sense, the cohousing community means that each of the units, whether it is a family house or an apartment, has the traditional amenities of a private home, while the common space is organized as a common house that can include a large kitchen, dining room, living room, laundry room, children's play area and recreation areas, and outdoor parking, walkways, playgrounds and gardens. Households have their own independent income and private lives, but neighbors together plan and manage activities in the community and common spaces. The socio-spatial typology of the cohousing community corresponds to an association of owners or a housing cooperative, and activities include joint meals, meetings and work activities, gatherings, recreation, social events, and organizing the care for children and the elderly (Siciliano, 2009). By facilitating the interaction between neighbors, the concept of a common household provides various types of advantages, from practical and economic to environmental. The architectural design of the space corresponds to the principles of the community, with the aim of encouraging interaction and forming close relations among members. In order to enable a balance between personal privacy and joint engagement, the number of housing units is limited to between 20 and 40, and the spatial organization is such that it includes large common rooms whose capacities can be used by everyone, thus usually achieving economic savings in terms of additional life quality.

In the context of the research, sources and literature from the fields of urban theory, architecture theory and history,

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philosophy, and social theory were utilized. Primarily, the study refers to texts that address the spatial typology of the cohousing model and its potential for social sustainability in design and housing construction, including "Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities" (McCamant and Durrett, 2011), "The Process and Issues of Creating a Cohousing Development with Affordable Units in an Affluent Community" (Siciliano, 2009), "Doing family in co-housing communities" (Westcombe and Rydberg, 2010), and "History of cohousing – internationally and in Sweden" (Vestbro, 2008). Furthermore, to interpret the differences between cohousing and co-living typologies, we relied on "Significance of Territoriality in Spatial Organization of Co-living Communities" (Alfirević and Simonović Alfirević, 2020), and to interpret the differences and intersections between cohousing and gated community typologies, we referenced a series of studies, starting with "Mechanisms of Solidarity in Collaborative Housing – The Case of Co-operative Housing in Denmark 1980–2017" (Sørvoll and Bengtsson, 2018), followed by "The Social Logic of Space – Community and Detachment" (Caldenby *et al.*, 2020), "What is really different between cohousing and gated communities?" (Chiodelli, 2015), and "Living together privately: for a cautious reading of cohousing" (Chiodelli and Baglione, 2013). Publications in the field of social theory provided the foundation for interpreting the social aspects of cohousing and the potential of this model of housing collective in relation to the contemporary problem of the loss of public space, along with the specific urban phenomenon of neoliberalism in recent decades. Among the studies addressing these aspects, we primarily refer to observations from *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1998), *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman, 2000), *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (Sennett, 1978), *The Social Logic of Space* (Hillier and Hanson, 2005), and *The Cultures of Cities* (Zukin, 1995). In the chapter dealing with the phenomenology of space and design experiences in shaping harmonious environments that connect people, various literature was used, ranging from the history of architecture (Vitruvius, 1914) to philosophy (Foucault, 1986), as well as examples from recent architectural practice. As the second part of the research relates to examining the potential for cohousing in Serbia, the interpretation relies on the results of an authorial survey, for which the concept was greatly informed by the experiment *One Shared House 2030* (Repponen and Pereyra, 2017).

The common housing project is not limited exclusively to its program advantages, but also includes a characteristic form of everyday behavioral practice based on a higher degree of mutual interaction. Residents who take part in it, starting from the contract that formulates the community rules, through the conceptual planning phase to the implementation of the project, are interested in closer social contacts and social participation, additional activities, mutual support and a stable neighborhood in general. More and more frequently, analyses and examinations of the psychological aspects of the cohousing lifestyle show that there are sensitive relations between the success of individual cases and the general trend in residential planning, the nature of which will be highlighted in this paper. The first part of the research aims to critically examine cohousing from the perspective

of the relationship between private and public. Considering that communal living is a form of a private residential community, if the strategy and process of association are neglected, it does not differ in ownership structure from a gated community. The circumstances of desirable and undesirable social interactions, whose balance is articulated through the cohousing model, cannot be compared to the mere exclusion of those deemed not to belong. However, Jakobsen and Larsen (2018), authors of multiple studies on this topic, using examples from a country with a developed cohabitation practice like Denmark, warn of the risk of auto-segregation and a tendency towards social and ethnic homogeneity (Larsen, 2020). Emphasizing the necessity for a more careful interpretation in communal living projects, Chiodelli and Baglione (2013, p. 4) problematize "introverted spatial organizations", i.e., structures that, as described by Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2018, p. 21), function like "isolated island communities."

The fundamental hypothesis of this research is that the spatial conditions of open-type cohousing enable social integration and interaction with the broader urban space. The research objective is to examine the characteristics of cohousing as an urban element, with a specific focus on identifying spatial conditions that enable cohousing communities to engage with the broader urban space and contribute to social integration. The following chapter encompasses the analysis of key concepts and phenomena, exploring strongholds in the history of the relationship between the private and the public, with the aim of identifying the social and spatial possibilities of coexistence, and thus the potential differences in the contemporary methodology of association. In this chapter, the concept of communal living is explored through a theoretical analysis of the circumstances of spatial alienation – consequences of the degradation and disappearance of public space, as well as social practices for which that space served as a foundation. The contemporary problem of segregation, arising from the desire to eliminate undesirable encounters, is a result of far more complex processes than the visible facts of spatial crisis. Studies addressing this issue, starting from Hillier and Hanson's (2005) "The Social Logic of Space" (based on the methodology of system theory), follow structuralist logic, defining a precise analytical framework for dissecting the most complex phenomena. By reducing the aspects of design and factors of social interaction to common denominators, research based on process analysis yields comprehensive and accurate proposals but not necessarily revelations about the essence of connection. The breakthrough by Caldenby *et al.* (2020, p. 170) in "The Social Logic of Space - Community and Detachment", emphasizes the temporal dynamics of the concept of "social logic", assuming its conditioning by a certain system of truth. Modernist compositions of cohousing communities corresponded to the idea of an inverted building, the so-called "inverted syntax", where individual units would be located in the center, while common spaces, staircases, and galleries are oriented outward. In the early 1980s, this arrangement changed, and the form of cohousing acquired an internal character – collective facilities in the central space are surrounded by apartments that, by changing their position, achieve a greater degree of privacy (Caldenby *et*

al., 2020). According to that analogy, spatial identity follows the postmodern logic of the market, adapting to the forms of consumer culture in transition.

From the perspective of this research, the ambivalence of the boundary between private and public opens up the possibility for various displacements, for example "a trampoline or the ping-pong room in the example above, became a semi-public place, and the residents in the co-housing project had to deal with questions concerning spatial solidarity versus detachment from the surroundings, with the risk of reproducing a sense of 'we' and 'them', in opening up the space for external use" (Caldenby *et al.*, 2020, p. 175). In the third chapter of this study, the research subject is defined through examples that illustrate dual spatial intentions, activate places that deviate from typical usage patterns, and offer potential for social interaction by blurring socio-spatial boundaries within the community. Positions that distinguish between cohousing and a gated community present the possibility of a space without hierarchy, internal yet simultaneously open. The social spaces of our time correspond to Foucault's definition of heterotopia: "they exist in a manner that challenges the spatial system in which we live" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25).

The second part of the paper includes an examination of potential users in Serbia regarding their desire to live in a cohousing community. The research was conducted in 2022 through a survey, using a paper questionnaire and interviews to assist in completing the survey. The aim of this overview was to connect personal data with affinities for communal living and gain insights into target groups more closely interested in the development of cohousing. The questionnaire was based on the assumption that the distinctive living conditions in a cohousing community are correlated with the levels of dysfunctionality in urban life. Cooperative living and cohousing, as forms of organizing one's immediate surroundings, are aligned with the ideas of sustainability and efficiency, providing possibilities for reducing consumption and saving time and resources. The survey results provide a foundation for the further development of the collaboration concept, where, depending on user groups and their participation, appropriate investment and upgrade models are conceptualized.

DESIRABLE AND UNDESIRABLE SOCIAL CONTACTS

The social context is an integral element of housing, such as the immediate environment that we share with others whose influences we transfer to the private world. The uncertainties of the accelerated and mass urbanization of the modernist period ended the traditional stability between these two forms of housing space and brought them into a continuous state of contradiction and conflict. At the present time of so-called *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2000), the social conditions of housing have become even more complex, given the loss of the function and meaning of public space. Compared to the social relations that have been based on the consensus of the collective identity (large social groups), today we can speak more about social contacts as a multitude of insecure relationships to which the individual is fully exposed. Social bonds have become ambivalent and undefined, while the demands of communication are imposed and intensified,

forming an ever-changing environment of elusive possibilities whose paradoxes are no longer a collective issue. Cohousing has no predecessor in urban forms of housing, but finds inspiration in the traditional form of a cooperative that has proven to be an economically viable model, even in the most unfavorable natural and geographical environments. The growing contemporary interest in this topic shows that the successful micro-organizations of collectives, in addition to their practical benefits, provide the security and stability of an integral, almost utopian inner world in the midst of urban chaos.

The concept of *community* as an attribute of the neighborhood is crucial for understanding this unique phenomenon against the backdrop of various increasingly popular hybrid residential concepts. In addition to *co-living*[2] (Alfirević and Simonović Alfirević, 2020), there are *condominiums*[3] and *gated communities*[4] that formally align with the spatial distribution of shared facilities, but they differ based on the main principles that enable and condition cohabitation. In the first case, individuals and families are connected by joint activities and practices, and in the second and third cases, there are priorities of security and control, the homogeneity of material status, and the class identity of users. Nevertheless, all of the abovementioned environments are based on the programming, furnishing, and functioning of a common space that is fully interiorized. This is in contrast to modernist patterns in single-family and multi-family settlements where the common environment, reduced to technology and communication, has been identified with the function of social space. Viewed as a trend in contemporary residential architecture, the neighborhood becomes a trump card of the program upgrades that move in the direction of embodying the new communitarianism, or in the more conservative direction of the new territorialization with the equipping of all kinds of services and commercial offers. In this discourse, an understanding of the community is diametrically different from the historical urban commune. The community, in the modern sense, is a conceptually determined added factor of value that is entered into by signing a contract, by specifying

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[2] Unlike the *cohousing* typology in which families own their private housing units while jointly using common areas and additional facilities, *co-living*, according to Alfirević and Simonović Alfirević, is a residential community model that accommodates three or more biologically unrelated people living in the same dwelling unit. It is a type of intentional community that provides shared housing for people with similar values or intentions, and therefore unlocks the same benefits as the cohousing model, including "comfort, affordability, and a greater sense of social belonging" (Alfirević and Simonović Alfirević, 2020, p. 7).

[3] A *condominium* is an ownership regime in which each tenant owns their apartment and is also a co-owner of the common areas and facilities, which include shared land, communication systems, and various types of commercial services and recreational amenities.

[4] A *gated community* is a form of residential community or housing estate containing strictly controlled entrances for pedestrians, bicycles, and automobiles, which is often characterized by a closed perimeter of walls and fences. Besides the services of gatekeepers, many gated communities provide other amenities, depending on the type of housing, for example: swimming pools, bowling alleys, tennis courts, community centers or clubhouses, golf courses, marinas, on-site dining, playgrounds, exercise rooms with workout machines, spas, coworking spaces, etc.

the rights and obligations undertaken by its members. Signs of a deep crisis regarding public space include separation into enclaves with selective access instead of negotiating a common life, levelling and connecting through identity instead of dealing with a common place, and the introverted and secretive profile of a hybrid community. In this century, the community is offered as the last relic of modern utopias about a better society (Bauman, 2000). Given that the possibility of living in harmony with the environment has been reduced to the size of the immediate neighborhood, we should not be surprised that the active relationship between the individual and the collective is considered in the same spatial terms as the selling trump card that offers the comfort of a carefree life in a controlled all-inclusive environment. In both cases, the key word is territorial belonging as the basis of a common identity that provides a secure formula for intensifying desirable and eliminating undesirable encounters.

According to Richard Sennett's definition, "a city is a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet" (Sennett, 1978, p. 39). Unlike the rural way of living, urban living has a high degree of public exposure, and therefore requires a special culture in the articulation of encounters, which, instead of eliminating undesirable contacts, practices respect for the personal space of others. The interaction between strangers, as an implicitly urban category of relationships, is fundamentally different from private encounters that are certain to be repeated sooner or later. Encounters with strangers require a special form of skill which Sennett defines under the epithet "civility" (Sennett, 1978, p. 264). The ability to live with diversity, let alone to enjoy and benefit from such a life, does not arise by itself but requires exercise and practice, unlike the innate feeling of growing discomfort when dealing with the irritating plurality of human beings and the plurality of the world. The problems addressed by Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man* include the progressive tendency to privatize common spaces in order for the individual to feel at home in them, and for them to survive as a form and subject of individual interest and action. The contemporary cohousing model of association, from that point of view, functions as an alternative to social space in the conditions of the current economy of life, characterized by the discreditation of the time and effort required by the culture of encountering strangers. What connects cohousing and the gated community is a model approach that eliminates undesired contacts and interaction with a multitude of people of different points of view, statuses, interests and practices. The contemporary community is reduced to a neighborhood as a paradigm of a unique and protected identity. The neighborhood as a construct reduces the need for the political engagement of subjects – an activity that has become almost impossible in the current age if it is not viewed as a profession, but as an action or practice. The direct interaction between private and public spheres, a constant feature of urban housing, has transformed citizens into political subjects, shaped by their unavoidable exposure to the public realm (Arendt, 1998). The separation of citizens from their own institutions results from a number of different factors whose common contributor is the alienation of space, which, instead of gathering and attracting, repels and separates people with its arrangement. A cohousing association in theory resolves a double-conflict urban situation, enabling, on the one hand, the economy of

an apartment of minimum dimensions, and, on the other hand, the controlled structure of the immediate environment. Nowadays, housing concepts embody the principle of the homogenization of space, the public and exposed character of which is perceived as inadequate in the age of the domination of enclosed settlements.

If the heterogeneity of the public space, in a historical urban context, has allowed for an objective connection with others, then contemporary tendencies towards homogenization have naturally led to subordination to the subjective sense of reality. The cohousing model, taking into account the moment of its appearance, can be seen as a response, as well as a strategic reaction of contemporary culture to the growing crisis of public space and the loss of social relations for which that space has provided a stronghold. As a relatively new conception, cohousing arose at a moment of cultural and social transition, marking the end of an era of great social movements and the rise of the culture of individualization. This model of association has appeared in practice since the 1970s (Caves, 2005) as an alternative to the common space of mass housing, which, due to decreasing use, had ceased to be the subject of collective investment. The turning point in planning has not been so much the architectural concept but the initiation of private participation, a response to spatial degradation due to which the former idea of *the common good* and *the good society* is tendentiously being rejected as vague and dubious. The emergence of cohousing coincides temporally with a turning point in the "institutionalization of urban fears", as described by Zukin (1995, p. 39). This denotes the moment when elites in the USA, instead of pursuing policies to eradicate poverty and ensure the equal integration of all social groups into shared public institutions, chose to invest in private security measures. In his book *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis explains how the consequences of such a campaign led to the destruction of accessible public spaces. The American city was systematically transformed from the outside in, converting once pedestrian streets into traffic flows and relocating places of public activity into the interiors of commercial megastructures (Davis, 2006).

The trend interpreted by both Davis (2006) and Zukin (1995) is one of the spatial effects of globalization, which, along with a sharp increase in urban populations, has led to ever-growing structural contrasts to a greater or lesser extent. As explained by Colantonio and Dixon (2011), differences in economic and social conditions between neighborhoods in the same city have become more significant than differences between cities themselves. This, among other things, has influenced the development of the concept of *social sustainability*[5] and strategies to initiate numerous studies related to models focused on reducing inequality, as well as taking an integrated approach to urban reconstruction (Jenks and

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5 Social sustainability refers to the ability of a society to maintain and improve its social well-being over time. It encompasses the principles of equity, social justice, and community engagement, ensuring that all individuals have access to essential resources, opportunities, and services. Social sustainability aims to foster inclusive communities where diverse populations can thrive, emphasizing the importance of cultural identity, social cohesion, and the protection of human rights. It is a critical component of sustainable development, as it seeks to balance economic and environmental considerations with the social dimensions of human life.

Jones, 2010). From the perspective of social sustainability, the difference between cohousing and gated communities is of crucial importance, which is why this study focuses on exploring possibilities for more open forms of integration that, by enhancing the neighborhood itself, contribute to the overall quality of the urban environment. As Francesco Chiodelli (2015) warns, the degree of openness of shared spaces is not necessarily a straightforward indicator of the community type. Due to the phenomena of socio-spatial polarization, marketization, and individualism, even cohousing communal areas tend to be restricted to residents, mirroring the exclusivity often associated with gated communities. As a result, the variability of openness is a fundamental starting point from which we can consider architectural means to achieve this delicate property within the specific spatial typology.

THE CONTINGENT FRAMEWORK OF A COHOUSING MODEL – CULTURE OF INTERACTION

Today, cohousing is the subject of a general housing reform movement whose followers are committed to the revitalization of value through the social alternative offered by the community (Wang and Hadjri, 2017). As the popularity of this concept in theory significantly exceeds the percentage of its implementation, the question of its real capacities in experience remains open. This discourse is based on research into the functional organization of a housing space unit in accordance with modern life, family structure and the organization of time. The loss of these criteria in actuality speaks of the nature of the new ambivalence, which instead of the logic of planning imposes unpredictable market conditions. In theoretical terms, cohousing represents a form of process certainty; however, it is fundamentally based on an inherently informal concept, which largely sidesteps traditional elements of architectural design.

A question of primary importance for the architectural method relates to the establishment of the principles of designing common spaces that inspire the cooperation and closeness of their users. The physical properties of a space can increase the possibility of social contact, inspiring new relationships by working on solving practical needs. The very decision to live in a cohousing community implies the initial engagement of users in its organization, whose contractual relationship is based on mutual responsibility, providing security and a sense of belonging in return. The participative nature of the project requires from the architect a social skill that does not fit into the conventional vocational profile or the idea of the autonomy of the integral design process. On the other hand, a relatively small number of completed projects in practice indicates the inexhaustibility of the symbolic and functional potentials of the space of the common house-related facilities that represent "the conceptual heart of the community" (McCamant and Durrett, 2011, p. 29) as a true extension of the private home, inspiring the development of solidarity and the spread of social practice.

The metaphor of the "common house" as the center of the community originates from Vitruvius, so it can be said that it has retained its spatial idea for centuries. Equating the house with the city as a common form of housing has enabled inner unity and solidarity through the identification of the individual with the collective good (Vestbro, 2008). Vitruvius' thoughts on the creation of the house from the construction of huts (lat. *tecta*) should have revealed the essence of the individual home and transferred its temperature into the appropriate collective format (Vitruvius, 1914). For the ancient Greeks and Romans, the centripetal focus of the family residential building played a crucial role in the development of culture, uniting the source of heat and the preparation of meals as a place where the spirits of closeness reside. These ideas are transferred to the urban space through common rituals such as the maintenance of fires dedicated to the city gods, which become objects of symbolic transfer of inner unity to the outer identity. For Vitruvius, the house is the embodiment of a unique spatial situation that is transposed from the inside to the outside in accordance with the idea of *the spirit of the place* (lat. *genius loci*). By recalling the old technique of initiation of the collective spirit and civic solidarity through a heat source, the authors of *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities* emphasize the common kitchen and dining room as the very core of social interaction in the residential community (McCamant and Durrett, 2011). The idea of a communal kitchen, which traditionally represented the central and unifying place of a rural cooperative, was revived during the urbanization and expansion of cities in the 19th century. It served as a practical solution that allowed less affluent families from higher floors of buildings to collectively organize food preparation in shared spaces equipped with modern infrastructure and technology (Vestbro, 2008).

Rooms for daily activities have great flexibility, enabling the organization of a wide variety of amenities and their variability. The non-hierarchical organization of the neighborhood is a condition of its multi-functionality. The dislocation of common spaces in relation to the means of everyday communication enables a greater degree of privacy, but such an arrangement reduces the common zone to a mere convenience in the use of resources (Wasshede, 2020). The obligations of community members differ depending on the inclusiveness of the concept, but one of the primary activities is organizing the care for children and the elderly. Accordingly, playrooms for young children are usually situated in central locations; they are viewable and easily accessible from all private units (Westcombe and Rydberg, 2010). The transformation of common spaces takes place through a wide range of informal or organized activities, starting with tea parties, music classes for children, discussions on daily topics, political debates, showing films, presentations and parties, work and study rooms for children and adults, craft workshops, libraries, laundry rooms, communal and technical rooms, parks and gardens, as well as outdoor gathering places. The design of communal spaces should be an open process, and filling them with content should be largely left to the community members. The possibility to redefine spaces depending on events and even on a daily basis, based on a few simple elements and interventions, such as movable partitions that adapt their ambiance to another function, is a fundamental assumption for the architectural design, orientation, and articulation of the zone of social activities

within the community. Ephemeral, modular-demountable constructions enable the organization of diverse activities in the zone between the communal and the public, whether in the form of galleries, greenhouses, spaces for domestic animals, garages and workshops, sports playgrounds, bathrooms, or pools located outside *the common house*, thus expanding the significance of social interaction. Public programs that attract visitors from outside, in addition to the members themselves, and allow their presence, are feasible as a collective endeavor since the resources owned by the collective enable practical and social conveniences, whereby the first function encourages the evolution of the second one (McCamant and Durrett, 2011). On the pragmatic side, residents gain access to a much wider range of assets, while the use of equipment is shared between families in order to rationalize costs and storage space.

Starting with gardens and greenhouses, common amenities may have a floating character, serving as program upgrades for open positions like flat roofs, free ground floors, and spaces of horizontal and vertical communication. The cohousing model does not have a fixed pattern or spatial paradigm; neither does it refer exclusively to new projects, but rather it opens up a wide range of possibilities for the reconstruction and improvement of the existing housing stock. The image of ready-made and assemblage corresponds to the elements of variable interpolation, adaptation and upgrade, and in terms of materialization, it refers to the prefabricated-disassembly character of greenhouses, auxiliary structures and pneumatic structures. The receptivity of such solutions is reflected in the ability of community members to manage the implementation themselves and through a series of actions to literally create, build and transform, and possibly dismantle, common platforms through a series of actions, depending on weather conditions, seasons, current wishes and needs. Receiving the character of a garden, common spaces become carriers of its symbolic functions, defining a landscape of intriguing programs whose meaning is constantly explored and revealed through joint actions. As specific heterotopias, they connect activities incompatible with each other, so that space and its hidden dimensions become visible in unexpected ways (Mitrović, 2021). The focus of architectural engagement from the point of view of creating a common space shift from the conceptual design to a workshop, developing networks that connect the concept with the construction, and the creative with the practical (Rizzotti *et al.*, 2010). By accomplishing a certain level of openness and interaction, cohousing thus opens up the opportunity for critical reflection on the architectural techniques and effects.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, free space within buildings and around them experienced a state of devastation, and the impossibility of shaping the sphere of communal living paved the way for various forms of misuse and appropriation by individuals. In today's context, the cohousing model has potential for creating value through shared functions. More importantly, it offers communities a perspective for the protection and enhancement of empty roof areas and parks within blocks, through collaboration and cooperative management. Constructlab's projects such as "Southwark lido" (2008) illustrate the unlimited range of content that recreates platforms for social interaction and expresses their public event-life potential. Although the survey "One Shared House 2030", which involved more than 200,000 respondents worldwide, pertains to the spatial typology of co-living, it sheds light on some issues raised in this section. It demonstrates that of the total number of interested parties, the majority believe that designers and architects are key professions that should be responsible for organizing the community. Additionally, the primary spaces of interest for communal activities include living rooms, large communal kitchens, and spaces for children's work and play, but foremost self-sustainable gardens (Repponen and Pereyra, 2017).

EXPLORING THE ATTITUDES OF THE POPULATION IN SERBIA IN RELATION TO LIVING IN A COHOUSING COMMUNITY

Following the example of "One Shared House 2030" (Repponen and Pereyra, 2017), this research, which includes a survey and questionnaire, was designed and conducted by the author in 2022. The specifics of the community to which the survey related (cohousing) were explained in the questionnaire, but nevertheless its disadvantages emerged due to the lack of previous knowledge of the respondents in this area, which brought answers to an imaginary situation. The aim of the survey was to connect individual information with general affinities for cohousing in order to gain insight into which target group of residents is more closely interested in the development of communities in Serbia.

The questions in the questionnaire include age, gender, and occupation, with respondents remaining anonymous. The questionnaire consists of questions related to the affinity for living in a cohousing community, suggesting characteristics such as:

- organizing care for children and elderly individuals, and shared transportation;
- organizing communal meals, meetings, workdays, and entertainment;
- reducing living costs, participating in construction; and
- the possibility of socializing and engaging in communal activities to the extent that suits members while owning a personal unit and maintaining a necessary degree of privacy.

Respondents were then asked to choose the type of community they would prefer, based on the degree of urbanity. All three categories – city, suburb and village – were presented, with photographs based on selected characteristic examples that illustrate the prevailing type of open/closed space and communal activities. Respondents from the urban population group were selected based on probability (random sampling). The results were analyzed based on a group of 300 respondents. The survey results are presented in Figure 1. Of the total number, 83% expressed a positive attitude towards living in some type of cohousing community. Within the group of interested respondents, 65% were female, and 80% had a high level of education. 50% expressed interest in urban cohousing, 37% were interested in the suburbs, and 13% were interested in village cohousing. As the respondents were given the opportunity to comment
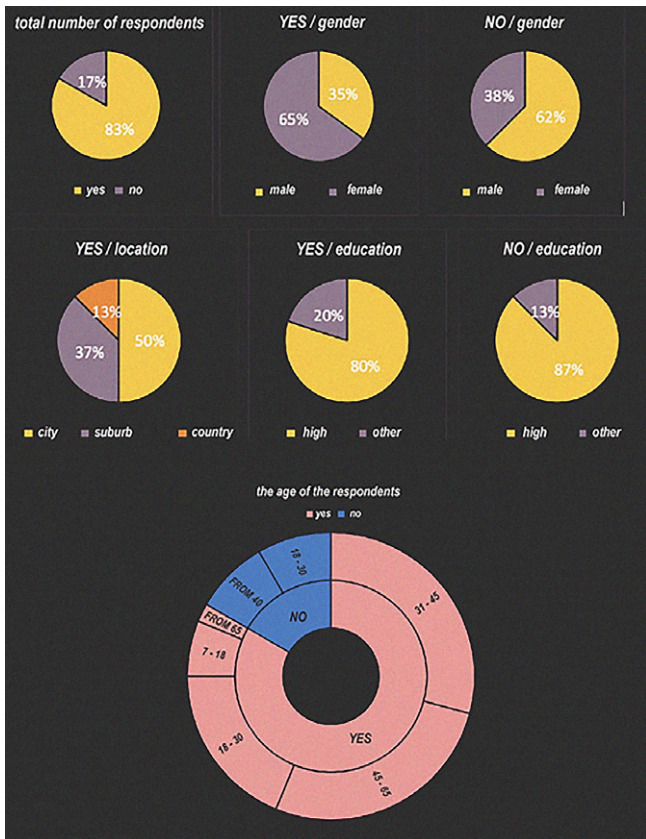
Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of survey results at the level of a group of 300 respondents
(Source: Authors, 2022)

on the type of settlement in which they would choose to live in a community, some of the characteristic responses from the group interested in rural living relate to a vision of a peaceful life without noise and pollution, the possibility of shared self-sustaining gardens and growing crops, families together, and the quality of care for children and the elderly. Most respondents attracted by cohabitation in the suburbs envisioned comfortable, well-equipped suburban areas close to preschool and school facilities, as well as other conveniences of urban life, but without the density and crowd characteristic of highly urbanized environments.

The analysis of the age structure of respondents confirms that for the approximate age group between 18 and 30 years, cohabitation in the community provides the least benefits due to an independent lifestyle and freedom of choice, as well as interests and time spent outside the house. Co-living is a model that is much more suitable for this profile of users, as they connect and share housing with people of similar age and interests. A large percentage of interested participants (over 80%) confirmed the assumption that the benefits of living in a cohousing community are inversely related to the challenges of urban life, affected by negative phenomena such as overpopulation and unsystematic growth. These contribute to increasing inequality, stratification, and segregation of urban populations. Moreover, varying levels of investment in urban areas lead to stagnation, poor maintenance, inadequate communal infrastructure, and unequal positioning in relation to transportation networks and public transit

systems. Residents in cities across Serbia face dysfunctional transportation and impaired communication due to rising living costs and reduced available free time. The decline in strategic capacities and the quality of spaces negatively impacts social sustainability, influencing ecological and economic factors, as well as the overall mood and outlook of the community. These phenomena, given the status, size, and number of inhabitants, are primarily considered in relation to Belgrade. For the largest percentage of the urban population, the living horizon progressively narrows without the possibility of significant influence through their own abilities and efforts. The circumstances described define a precondition for the general interest of citizens in the appropriate age group in the cohousing model. It is seen, on one hand, as an opportunity to improve individual chances through the division of responsibilities, including socializing (for which there is increasingly less time – most residents are aware of the absence of gatherings with family and friends as a form of forced isolation). On the other hand, it provides an opportunity to unite and gain a position for potential action. Although the results of the survey confirm the given assumptions, they do not provide insight into the actual possibilities of planning cohousing communities. The lack of practical experience on one hand, and traditional frameworks on the other (which view family life and its spatial domain as the nucleus of social structure), are factors that necessitate interpreting the research results in Serbia more as prevailing attitudes than genuine potential.

New residential models, which include a cohousing community, represent the images of solutions based on the harmonization of spatial organization and the demands of contemporary life, and it is assumed that by decreasing conflict relations, they raise the value of collective housing to a satisfactory level of comfortable living. The results of the survey show that interest in these models is relatively high in the urban population of the age structure between 31 and 45 years, whether in individuals, couples, or younger families with children, while in users under 30 and over 45 years this interest decreases. The mood for shared ownership and the use of additional resources that raise the quality of life is not a new tendency, but in the decades-long process of social ups and crises, it has become increasingly prominent as an ideal solution to common problems. Most people identify the same negative phenomena which shape the aspects of urban housing in overcrowded and insecure environments. Increasing interest in community reflects the anxieties of the individual experience facing the lack of transparency of the system structure and the loss of control over the articulation of one's own time. The conditions of cohousing in Serbia, considering the economic and social pressures, would, however, be different from Nordic and Western European examples. In the context of living in Serbia, the concept of cohousing still signifies an idealized image of community. However, due to the social unsustainability of contemporary urban development and strategies, it must find itself a different, very particular form.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Conducted in 2022, the survey aimed to gauge public interest in cohousing – a concept that was translated into the Serbian

context as a "community" to enhance understanding among respondents. This adaptation introduces potential biases stemming from respondents' unfamiliarity with the concept of cohousing, which may have led to responses based on hypothetical scenarios rather than informed opinions. The results indicated a significant interest in cohousing, with 83% of respondents expressing a positive attitude. Notably, the demographic breakdown revealed that the majority of interested respondents were female and highly educated, suggesting that the findings may reflect the perspectives of a specific segment of the population, rather than a comprehensive view of societal attitudes.

While the survey successfully identified preferences for urban, suburban, and rural living arrangements, it fell short of addressing the practical implications of implementing cohousing models in Serbia. The analysis highlighted a disconnect between expressed interest and the realities of urban living conditions, such as overpopulation and inadequate infrastructure. This gap suggests that while respondents may be drawn to the idea of cohousing, their enthusiasm may not translate into actionable support or participation in such communities. Furthermore, the survey's findings indicate that interest in cohousing varies significantly across age groups, with younger individuals (18-30 years) showing less inclination towards communal living due to their independent lifestyles. This demographic insight is crucial for understanding the potential market for cohousing but also raises questions about the long-term viability of such models in attracting a diverse range of residents. The research also points to broader societal issues, such as the impact of urbanization on social sustainability and individual well-being. The acknowledgment of these challenges is important, yet the survey does not provide a framework for addressing them within the context of cohousing. The idealized vision of community living, as expressed by the respondents, may not align with the practical realities of establishing and maintaining such environments in Serbia, particularly given the socio-economic pressures unique to the region.

In conclusion, while the survey provides valuable insights into the attitudes of the Serbian population towards cohousing, it is essential to interpret the results with caution. The findings reflect prevailing sentiments rather than definitive potential for implementation. Future research should aim to bridge the gap between theoretical interest and practical application, exploring how cohousing can be adapted to meet the specific needs and challenges of Serbian society. This approach will be vital in transforming the concept of cohousing from an idealized vision into a feasible and sustainable living model. The transition process in Serbia, which began in the 1990s and is still ongoing, has shown that the housing policy of post-war Yugoslavia has paradoxically experienced the same fate as other political achievements of the socialist period. The processes leading to increasing social differences and divisions over the last few decades are too complex to be fully addressed in this research. However, it can be stated that among the negative transitional phenomena affecting the architectural profession, the loss of critical discourse about the city as a social entity and the divergence of architectural concepts

from their urban context are particularly significant. The tendency toward social and ethnic homogeneity, highlighted in critical reviews of cohousing as a form of private housing community (Williams, 2005), is a prevalent circumstance in the socio-cultural context of present-day Serbia. The lack of examples implemented further underscores the need for cautious interpretation; however, it is essential to recognize that cohousing simultaneously represents a form capable of resisting such exclusionary practices.

Cohousing, in the form of ownership cooperatives, offers the potential for implementation as a model for the reconstruction of inherited housing stock and strategies for upgrading and improving the quality of these settlements. If apartment owners join forces to take over adjacent spaces, they can open up possibilities for further investments. This form of cohousing would inherently be open and represent a step toward sustainable social development. The tendency to connect cohousing with a subset of new urbanism is increasingly evident, both in theory and practice. Under these conditions, this study reveals that understanding the application of new design principles can lead to better cohousing design. Transferring the experience of communal living into urban development planning is a viable way to enable deep spatial and social connectivity between neighborhoods. In addition to transferring design techniques from one space to another, there is a necessity for the involvement of all residents on a broader scale, almost in the original sense of a political act. Achieving this goal entails not only revising the urban scale of these developments but also reconsidering the participation afforded to residents in shaping their physical community.

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