

THE ARCHITECTURE OF COMMUNITY. THE CASE OF BARCELONA COHOUSING UNDER GRANT-OF-USE

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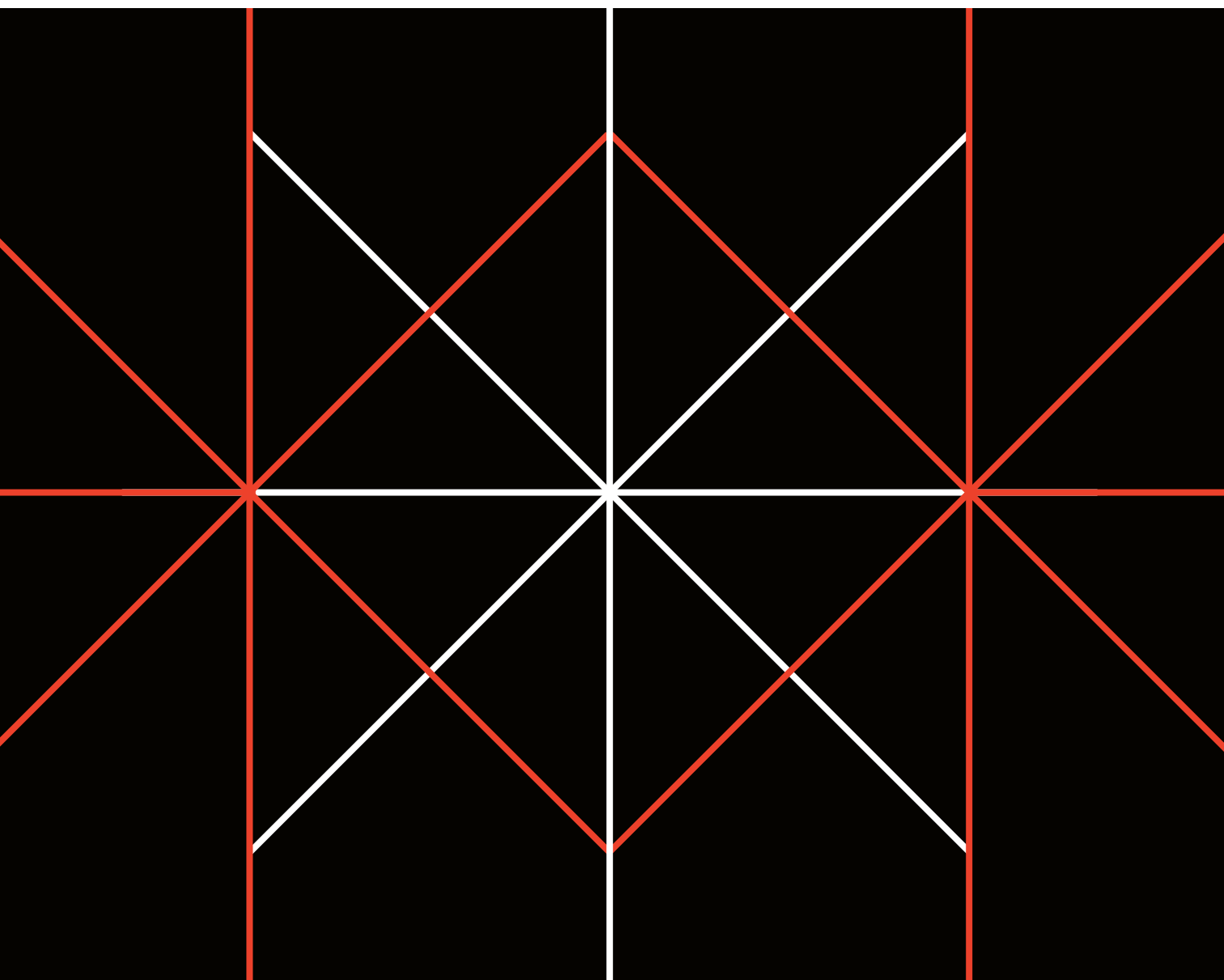
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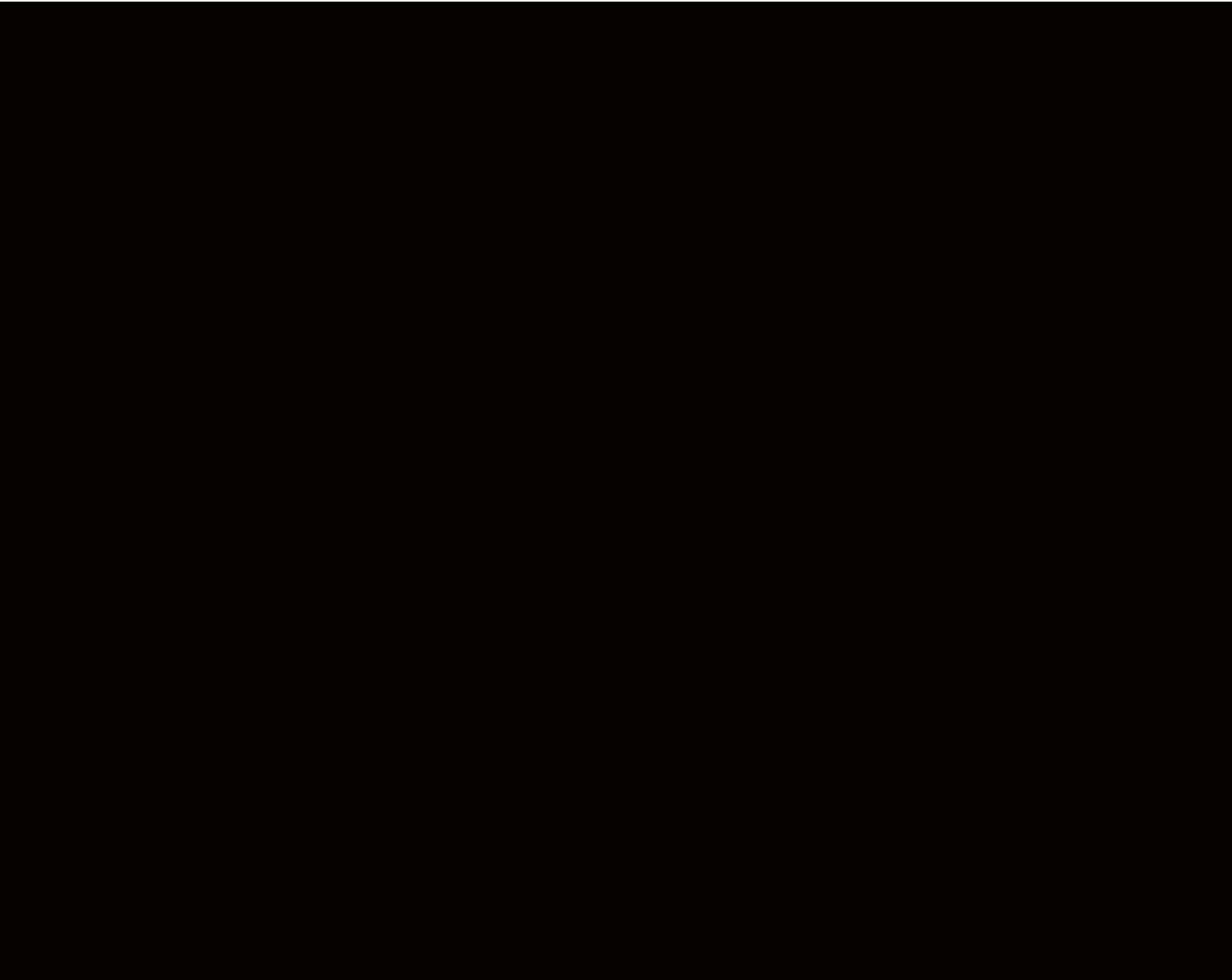
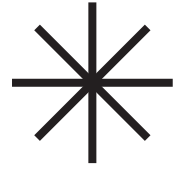
SPACE

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PhD in Architecture.
History and Project

GENERAL INDEX

000

INTRODUCTION

| | |
|--|------|
| Torino 10125. Out of the DASP-Home.* An Introduction | 0010 |
| DASP Constellation Map <i>in movement</i> | 0012 |
| Legenda. How to read this publication | 0014 |

001

XXXVIII CYCLE

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| Map of XXXVIII Cycle PhD Candidates | 0018 |
| XXXVIII Cycle PhD Candidates research | 0020 |

002

XXXVII CYCLE

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Map of XXXVII Cycle PhD Candidates | 0054 |
| XXXVII Cycle PhD Candidates research | 0056 |

003

XXXVI CYCLE

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Map of XXXVI Cycle PhD Candidates | 0098 |
| XXXVI Cycle PhD Candidates research | 00100 |

004

XXXV CYCLE

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Map of XXXV Cycle PhD Candidates | 00132 |
| XXXV Cycle PhD Candidates research | 00134 |

005

DASP ACTIVITIES

| | |
|--|-------|
| ACC Lectures | 00138 |
| European Researchers' Night | 00140 |
| DASP Lunch Seminars | 00142 |
| "Progetti & Storie" Publication series | 00144 |
| Workshops and Conferences | 00145 |

006

COLOPHON

00147

THE ARCHITECTURE OF COMMUNITY. THE CASE OF BARCELONA COHOUSING UNDER GRANT-OF-USE



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The housing debate typically focuses on increasing the quantity of available housing to improve adequacy and affordability, not considering the potential of community living. Community living, a form of communal living that involves sharing living spaces and resources, has been practised across different cultures since the dawn of civilisation. The idea of living in a close-knit community to pool resources and unlock a variety of benefits is as old as humanity itself. Reducing private space in favour of shared ones means access to large, quality spaces and facilities at a lower cost. Additionally, shared spaces can offer a network of mutual aid, care, and a sense of community often lacking in modern urban living. Today a re-emergence of co-housing models (Tummers, 2016) is acknowledged as a possible solution to counteract social and demographic changes, isolation, political issues such as housing commodification and the decline of social welfare systems, as well as concerns for the climate crisis.

Collaborative housing has been adopted by many researchers and practitioners over the last decades as an umbrella term to encompass a wide variety of housing forms. The terms and definitions used for co-housing and other forms of shared housing are often contradictory or simply overlapping, and the field lacks an accepted categorisation. Therefore, part of the research has been dedicated to the study of the definition of cohousing and a taxonomy of collaborative housing sub-terms with different sharing methods (Babos et al., 2020; Tummers, 2016;

Vestbro, 2010). Among the different models of shared living that fall under the umbrella term “collaborative housing”, this research focuses specifically on cohousing.

Cohousing was born during the late Sixties due to a radical contestation of current lifestyles and the quest for different solutions to market or residential policies (McCament & Durrett, 1988). The “Housing Revolution” of the 1970s marked a paradigm shift from a deterministic point of view to a pluralistic perspective, where the future inhabitants contribute to the design, tailoring it to their needs and values. This approach is part of a broader cultural shift (Harvey, 1989), including architectural practice. The study of the work of architects such as Habraken, Turner, Ward, and De Carlo offers a critical reflection on architectural design as a process in which future users are actively involved. This contribution occurs during the design and the building's lifetime, foreseeing that the architectural projects can adapt to the use change over time. The openness of buildings (Habraken, 1972) or, more generally, the indefiniteness of artefacts (Eco, 1962) and other strategies linked to the concept of flexibility (Forty,

Habraken, N. J. (1972) *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*, London: Routledge
Hagbert, P. et al. (eds) (2020) *Contemporary co-housing in Europe: towards sustainable cities?* London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
Lefebvre, H. (first ed. 1974) *The Production of Space*, Nicholson-Smith, Donald (Translated by). New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, (Ed.1991)
Rolando, L., (2022). How we will live together? A Comparative Analysis of Housing Cooperatives in Zurich and Barcelona. *TECHNE*, n.24.
Tummers, L. (2016) Re-Emergence of Co-Housing in Europe, *Urban Studies*, May 2: 1–18



La Borda interior courtyard
© Ludovica Rolando

2004) lead to thinking of architecture in a transformative perspective and are the room for user's intervention from a productive point of view. The housing project is, therefore, the result of a collective agency, dynamic because of its capacity to transform itself over time, and political because of the relationships established between those who inhabit it (Lefebvre, 1974). Cohousing is regarded as a tool for testing how this perspective and design process is materialised through architectural design. Even if cohousing origins can be traced back to the secular history of utopian communities and communitarian movements (Jarvis, 2011; Vestbro & Horelli, 2012), its current form originated in Denmark, related to the realisation of the community Skraplanet (1973). It first spread to Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, then to Continental Europe and English-speaking countries in the 1990s, and only from the 2000s to Southern Europe (Bianchi, 2020; Hagbert et al., 2020).

The expansion in Southern European countries has yet to be studied: systematic research with listing and data on cohousing projects needs to be included. Political issues, such as the struggle for the right to housing and the debate against the commodification and financialisation of the real estate market (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Rolnik, 2019), social and demographic phenomena, such as the dissolution of the modern nuclear family and pluralisation of family fabric, a more significant fragmentation of society and

the loss of minute welfare system (Allen et al., 2004; Aureli & Giudici, 2016; Tomka, 2013; Tosi, 1994), but also ecology and environmental sustainability issues (Giorgi, 2020) have increased the attention and demand for collaborative housing models also in the Southern European context. Therefore, the research aims to contribute to the knowledge of the state of the art of the cohousing phenomenon in Southern Europe.

The investigation is carried out by a multiple case studies methodology with mixed methods. The cross-qualitative and quantitative methodology integrates the formal analysis of buildings and quantitative data with extensive fieldwork and ethnographic methods. Recurrent design strategies and architectural characteristics are analysed through design research and the critical re-drawing of the selected projects. Quantitative indicators compare contemporary case studies regarding scale, program and surfaces, density, and development time. Qualitative research methods such as fieldwork and ethnography are also applied. The primary sources accessed are buildings visits, architectural drawings, interviews and a survey; the secondary sources comprehend bibliographical sources and desktop research. Data are collected, analysed, and documented in reports for individual case studies. Afterwards, a cross-case analysis is realised.

Relevance is given to the case study of Barcelona as a paradigmatic case (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Among the most relevant European cases analysed, Barcelona stands as the one that is more explicitly focusing on cohousing, able to transform a bottom-up model into a systematic production in just a few years. Nowadays, it is the city in Southern Europe with the highest number of cohousing projects – seven built and 23 under development (COPHAB, 2023) – thanks to the collective action of communities of citizens, cooperatives, foundations, technical experts, and public actors. These initiatives combine excellent architectural quality, flexibility of use and wide typological variety, low costs and low environmental impact with collective self-production and self-management of the project. Originating as a grassroots movement, cohousing production has been systematised thanks to the intervention of the public actor by land leases and other incentives.

The study explores the nature and characteristics of the cohousing model. However, it focuses mainly on the design strategies and typological configurations adopted in the architectural projects, how these have been defined through a collective decision-making process, and how spaces are used and appropriate during post-occupancy. The research aspires to verify how cohousing design strategies foster social relationships (Williams, 2005) and how the collective agency that characterised these project processes has driven the architectural innovation of housing types. The anticipated impacts of the investigation are the outline of collaborative housing terms taxonomy and definitions, to draw a picture of the state of the art of cohousing in Southern Europe and to provide guidelines about cohousing design strategies for future applications.