

Collective Occupation of Residential Space: From Counter-cultural Practices to Cluster Cohousing and Hall Cohousing in Zurich, Switzerland

The residential hybrid spaces of intentional collaborative settings, which operate through collective intentions of the inhabitants and residential communities are attracting attention of urban dwellers in Zurich, Switzerland. Previously and currently, intentional communities have been viewed as laboratories for testing social structures. Historically, Tolstoy-inspired groups of the early twentieth century and the notable apartment blocks, which were realized after the Russian Revolution of 1917 with their collective living areas in the Former Soviet Union have had a major influence on the development of the collective living in Central Europe. Prewar Europe has experienced Tolstoyan colonies such as the microcosm of cooperative community of men and women in Monte Verità in canton Ticino, Switzerland (Kuiper, 2013). The colony that settled on the hill of Monte Verità in November 1900 was inspired by Lebensreform¹ (the Life Reform movement), while in 1904 its multi-functional Community House opened with a vegetarian restaurant, a library, a music room, a sun terrace, and a game room, and then from 1906, its bakery, Reform health-food store, Reform dressmakers and Reform school were in function (Figures 1 and 2). Eventually, the complex was sold in 1920.



Fig. 1 (left) Multi-functional Community House (1904) of Monte Verità, a utopian project in the early 20th century as a primitive form of socialism in Monte Verità, Canton Ticino in Switzerland; Fig. 2 (right) Casa Selma (in current status), built in 1904 in Monte Verità in canton Ticino, Switzerland (@ Author)

However, the communal apartments of the modern Soviet society of the 1920s and 1930s – the so-called Kommunalki, which accommodated several upper-middle class families in shared apartments could not encourage people to live together and each family cooked, washed and

¹ The Garden City movement, land reform, colony life and teetotaling, all have been perceived as undercurrents found in [Lebensreform], while vegetarianism, natural medicine, nudism, Reform food, Reform stores, and Reform dressing were at its core (Kuiper, 2013).

lived for themselves (Schmid et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the term *social condenser* was coined around 1925 in the Moscow Soviet by architects such as Moses Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis and the theory of the architects was the “dialectics of human development [...] and the transition to a socially superior mode of life, *stimulate but not dictate*” (Kopp, 1970: 141; Figure 3).



Fig. 3 Narkomfin building – the social condenser, designed by architects Moses Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis in Moscow (photographed by Robert Byron during the 1930s)

While Communes, squats and self-help projects appeared during the counter-cultural years of the 1960s and 1970s, the cohousing culture and projects arose from the 1970s in Scandinavia, in the other European countries and North America and cities such as Zurich, Berlin, Vienna, Stockholm and Copenhagen have been viewed historically as pioneers of community-oriented housing (LaFond and Tsvetkova, 2017). In Europe, the act of squats, which were occupying the vacant apartments, barracks and factories, as the result of inefficient urban renewal policies influenced and initiated the collective-housing models, too.

In Zurich, for instance large-scale squatting in the Wohlgroth quarter has been viewed as *non-hierarchical spaces*, where collective forms of living and working were tested (Kurz, 2017; Figure 4). Although, the similar movement of the rebellions in Zurich to promote new forms of urban life was shattered in the early 1980s and some squats failed, some others proved themselves as centers for social and urban repair. In 1986, a progressive administration replaced the conservative one, who called for a better quality of life in Zurich by better planning the former industrial zones (Hofer, 2019). This condition engaged the participation of the leading rebellious youth who had called for free space and alternative urban projects in the previous decade. They began to consider the housing cooperatives as an instrument to achieve

their utopian vision (Davidovici, 2017). In this manner, the squatters have been gone through transformation from being amateur, self-help activists to being expert nonprofit managers (Hofer, 2019). Accordingly, The principles of a century-old non-profit housing cooperatives of Zurich were reactivated with the aim to offer a suitable housing legal form to reassure creating quality housing (Figure 5). For those citizens, who were engaged in the analysis of the modern society, the cooperatives concept turned out to become a solution to the post-industrial society. By all accounts, although housing cooperatives experienced a decline in the 1960s, after the turn of the millennium, replacement construction with densely packed buildings in order to improve the social housing status was launched by the Zurich city and the younger generation of the housing cooperatives.

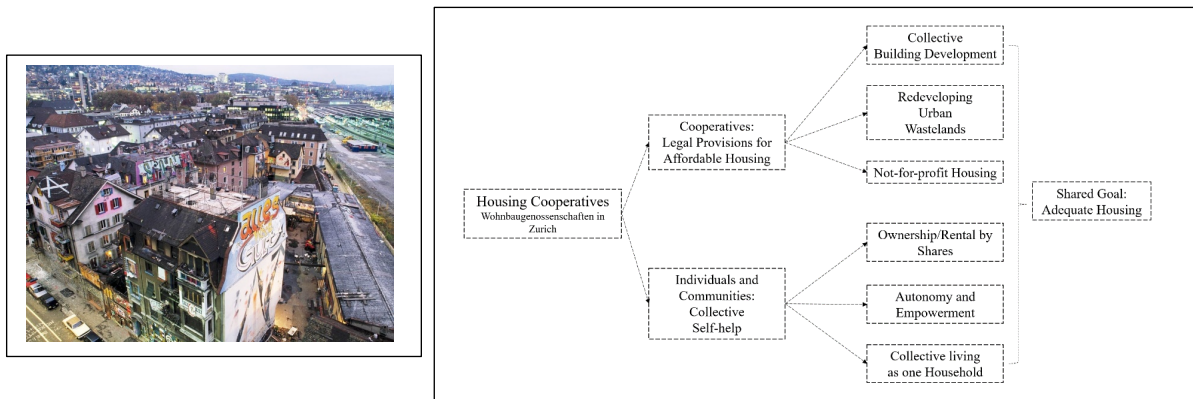


Fig. 4 (left) Wohlgroth quarter in Zurich, Switzerland (1991-93); Fig. 5 (right) Mapping the activities of the housing cooperatives in Zurich, Switzerland (Author)

Currently, every new project of housing cooperatives is an opportunity to analyze a new principle, trying to respond to the complex challenges of the society by different residential concepts. Moreover, the intentional residential collective settings, legalized by housing cooperatives are not practiced in large scales in Zurich and they are limited to just one building (such as cluster apartments of the mehr als wohnen ensemble, Zurich North) or a section of a building (such as Hallenwohnen [hall dwelling] in the Zollhaus complex, Zurich center). However, deliberately designed collective settings such as cluster apartments are spreading rapidly in central Europe. In 2018, 33 projects with a total of 82 cluster apartments in Switzerland, Germany and Austria are being recognized (Prytula et al., 2020). Cluster design creates a collaborative space and lifestyle, in which social, design, and organizational aspects are incorporated. Cluster idea, is moreover, ancient – “it is the principle of the medieval village, it is, in fact, the basic principle of community design since we first started building several millennia ago” (Whyte, 1964: 11).

Zurich City has 12 urban districts, which are called Stadtkreise (city districts), and the plot of mehr als wohnen cooperative project is located in Hunziker Areal in District 12 of Zurich North (Figure 6). Building A in mehr als wohnen project by Duplex Architekten (2015) is a 6-story building, which contains up to two cluster-concept apartment units on each floor, while its ground floor is used as a workshop for disabled people. A cluster-apartment unit with 10 inhabitants (aged between 30 and 44 years old and a very young child) encompasses eight individual sub-units for singles and couples, which are situated on the fifth floor of building A in the north unit. From the total 400 m², 150 m² is allocated to shared semi-private spaces, including the collective kitchen-dining area, collective living room, a common wardrobe, a guest bathroom, a common storage room, two shared balconies, and other shared semi-private corners. The usage and degree of access of each space are regulated by the decisions and actions of the residential community in accordance with their needs and circumstances (Khatibi, 2021a).

Zollhaus complex by Enzmann-Fischer architects (2020) accommodates the Hallenwohnen in building A of the project, which is the second project of the Kalkbreite cooperative and is centrally located in district 5 of Zurich (Figure 6). Hallenwohnen as a hall-concept apartment with heights of over one-and-a-half stories originates from the squatter scene, in which personal housing landscapes are self-built within empty office buildings (Schmid, 2019). In Hallenwohnen, which is the first legal hall cohousing setting in Switzerland, a large hall of 275 m² accommodates a self-built residential/working communal space, which is complemented by spaces such as a collective central courtyard, a workshop, communal laundry (laundry room is located in building B) and the community storage (Khatibi, 2021b).

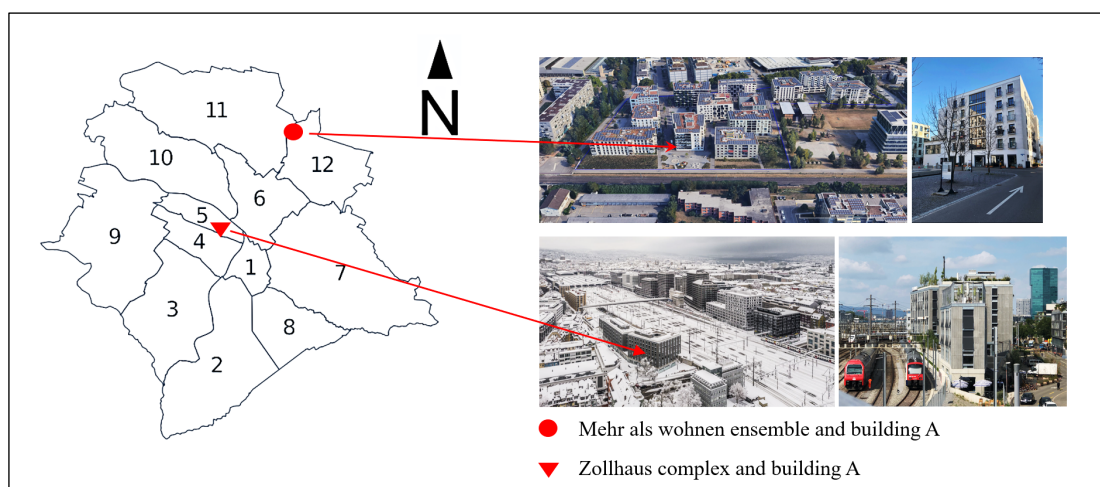


Fig. 6 Zurich map with location of mehr als wohnen project in Hunziker Areal in Zurich North and location of Zollhaus complex in Zurich center (@ Author)

Living as one household without familial bonds in a cluster cohousing setting and in the hall cohousing arrangement have provided the platform of change in social relations among inhabitants of these micro-communities in Zurich. The importance of the sense of belonging to a community is emphasized in the narratives of the inhabitants of these two settings by emphasizing the phrase *together*, repeatedly. Scholars highlight that the new forms of co-living combined with the new forms of working, such as digitalized ways of working, have the purpose of finding *like-minded people* (Schmid, 2019) and a *family of choice* (Zemp et al., 2019), while young cooperatives are at the *forefront of innovations* in Zurich (Hugentobler et al., 2016). The emerging social and spatial forms of cohabitation that catalyze the potentials of social innovation in these two cases are initially facilitated by forming housing associations among those residents, who are responsible for their own occupancy. Today, a majority of middle-class user inhabitants have established themselves in current collaborative models in the context of housing cooperatives of Zurich. Furthermore, alternative co-living models such as cluster-concept apartments and the hall-concept apartment operate collectively and each studied residential community lives as one household, catalyzing potentials of sociospatial innovations (Figures 7 and 8). In these novel interventions, the reciprocative dynamics of the collaborative communities have activated the residential intermediate spaces as participation-capable zones, while these new forms of collaboration are enabled by the bottom-up approaches and have been supported by the top-down incentives of the housing cooperatives in Zurich.



Fig. 7 (left) The collective roof-top of building A in Zollhaus complex, regulated by the inhabitants for a Covid-safe party during the second Covid-19 lockdown in Zurich, Switzerland; Fig. 8 (right) The collective kitchenware, shared by Hallenwohnen's inhabitants, Zurich center (@ Author)

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