



Principles for layout of co-housing units

This example of the layout of co-housing units is made for houses both for "the second part of life" as well as for houses "for all ages" and brought forward by the Swedish National Association for co-housing, Kollektivhus NU. It is meant as support for groups who are in the first phase of planning, builders, politicians, architects, and the public. It can be seen as an introduction and support into how a co-housing building may be designed.

What is a co-housing house?

A Co-housing house is a regular residential building with regular, fully equipped flats. In addition to this, there are shared spaces where the residents can cook and have meals together, cultivate hobbies and enjoy each other's company. It may have various forms of lease, rental, coop, condominium and so forth.

The community is based on doing activities and tasks together. The core of the community are the shared meals, with the large kitchen and dining room as the heart of the building and community. The main principle is that the flats in the building are approximately 10-15% smaller than other regular flats, with the "leftover" space added together and used for the shared spaces.

There are many kinds of co-housing units. This example is based on co-housing where the shared meals are the core and base for the community.

It is split in the two different types, houses "for the second part of life" with households living without children, and for houses "for all ages".

The main differences between the two are:

- The distribution of types of flats
- The possibility to shut off/lock up certain parts of the common area
- Functions of the common area.

Before you start planning a new co-housing house, there are some questions you need to address:

- Is the house for "all ages" or for "the second part of life"?
- How can you create conditions for co-operation and community?
- Which form of lease is to be used?
- Build a new building or re-build an old building?
- Where is the house to be built?
- What kind of relationship is the house to have to its environment?
- Who is to be the builder and implement the building? The group themselves or some other actor/actors?
- How should the co-operation between the group and the builder be formulated and formalized?

It is vital that the starter group formulate a shared vision by working through the questions above and state what their intention with the house is. This vision can later be a guide for the group when communicating with new people who want to join, or the builder/architect when the house is being planned.

Architectural design – Shared spaces

The home of a co-housing house starts as soon as you enter the building. The entrance area/lobby should be distinct and designed with care. The common areas should encourage social interaction and be designed flexibly so that they can be used for several different purposes and activities.

Ideally there is a central meeting place in connection to the entry, where the pigeonholes/letterboxes are and bulletin boards for information to be put up.

The shared kitchen and the dining room are the most important spaces, other spaces can be seen as “bonus spaces”. The size in square meters for the shared spaces is estimated to be about the same in both types of houses. The greatest difference is how the residents chose to use the spaces and how accessible the spaces are to be at different times of the day and week. In a house “for all ages” you need to be able to lock off more of the shared spaces (kitchen, workshops etc) due to safety issues for small children.

The shared spaces should be placed near each other to encourage interaction between the residents. Apart from that, it is a good idea to have some spaces for e.g., meeting rooms placed a bit aside for more private meetings which can be used both by the association as well as by residents.

Visual contact between the shared spaces is created by using glass partitions and encourages interaction between the residents. It is important to have many power outlets in both the common areas and the stairwells facilitates both a flexible use of the space and cleaning of the space.

Below we give examples of shared spaces and things that are necessary to think about when designing. More examples of types of shared spaces are in Attachment 1.

Kitchen and dining room.

The kitchen and the dining room are the heart of a co-housing unit. The dining room is the main space and gathering place for the community of residents, where they all can have a meal together at the same time. This puts specific requirements on the acoustics of the room, plus that it needs to be well sound proofed to lessen risk for noise disturbances to adjacent rooms, including flats. If the dining room is large enough, a folding wall or the likes give some flexibility to how the space can be used.

The kitchen must be designed and equipped to enable and encourage several people working together during the preparation of the meals, and even for children when accompanied by adults, depending on the type of house. The types of dishwashers most used when planning the space for the washing up can be either the large dishwashers used in commercial kitchens (they need space for the conveyor belt) or large fast-washing machines.

Most probably there will be a need for high standards set for the ventilation system in the kitchen and washing up area. Storage space for groceries, vegetables, fridges, and freezers should be placed close to the kitchen as well as ample space for kitchen utensils. A special delivery lock for deliveries that come from wholesale dealers is helpful. In a house with children, there needs to be a playroom next to the dining room, preferably with glass partition or window. A WC close to the dining room and the living room is needed, preferably two in a house with children.

Sitting room, room for activities and storage space

Shared spaces such as a sitting room /common room, rooms for various kinds of activities should be planned so that they can be used by different groups of residents. Over time, the purpose of the rooms will change, so keep the design simple and flexible. Sustainable and durable materials are advised throughout in the shared spaces, such as floors and kitchen and dining room counter tops etc., and walls need to be strong enough to carry storage and shelves. Some of the activity rooms need access to water. Storage space for things that are shared like games, sports equipment, tools, books etc is needed, and for the association itself.

Guest rooms

Guest rooms are important in a co-housing house due to the flats being smaller than regular flats. The guest room/s should be able to have space for more than one individual, even up to 4 people. Some houses use a whole flat for this purpose. If the guest rooms are solely for the purpose of housing guests, there need be a WC and/or a shower close by. These rooms can be used in many ways not only guest rooms, but as an office, or short-term lease for young people or students who can rent for a short period of time. The association of residents decides how much staying in a guest room shall cost, and provide the equipment for the room/s.

Shared spaces, not specifically only for co-housing units

Apart from the shared spaces that we have written about above, there are other spaces that also regular tenant buildings have, such as a

laundry room, a shed for bicycles, room for waste disposal/a recycling area, and broom closets for cleaning material needed for the common areas. These spaces should not be paid for via the individual rent (like the residents pay for the other shared spaces). The laundry room is well placed next to the common room and other shared spaces to increase interaction between residents and can be used by several households at the same time.

Storage space belonging to each flat, storage space for the caretaker/janitor, space for gardening equipment, garden furniture, grill equipment etc is also needed. Space for prams, wheelchairs, walkers for seniors need good accessibility. A room for waste and recycling can be located close to a space for giveaways. It should be possible to park bicycles both indoors and outdoors in a shed. These facilities should also not burden the rent for the flats more than in other residential buildings.

Outdoor Environment

When working on the design of the house, it is important to bear in mind that the garden, terrasse, a place to play and other outdoor facilities are important meeting points for the co-housing residents (and their environment). Terrasses and sitting areas should be reached directly from the shared spaces.

Distribution of flats

There are today around 50 co-housing units in Sweden. The number of flats vary, from a few and up to several hundreds. But experience has taught us that it is often easier to get smaller houses of 30 to 60 flats to function well, even though there are examples of both larger and smaller houses working well. For reference numbers for distribution of flats and square meter footage, see attachment 2.

The flats should be fully equipped with all modern conveniences and space efficient. Even

Attachments:

Attachment 1: The orientation of existing co-housing units

Attachment 2: Distribution of flats

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Architects Ingela Blomberg and Elin Persson

though the flats have been made smaller to advantage of the shared spaces, the flats should not be less functional. It should be possible to adapt kitchen and bathroom according to needs and preferences, for example having a narrow stove with three hobs instead of four, making it less than 60 cm, a one-piece fridge and freezer instead of a full freezer and a full fridge. Is there an opportunity to experiment and build for example a kitchenette in the smaller flats as there is the shared kitchen that can be used on special occasions? It should be possible to choose between a bathtub or a shower, and to not need a private washing machine when there is shared laundry room?

In houses for all ages there needs to be a diversity of size to the flats, from studio flats (one room plus a kitchen) to four rooms or even larger. In houses for the second part of life there is more a need for two- and three-room flats and many studio flats. One can also plan for sharing with a friend, or several friends sharing a large flat within the co-housing unit. Bearing this in mind, it would be advantageous to plan flats where you enter bedrooms from a "neutral place" such as the hallway instead of from the sitting room.

Contract and forms of lease.

In most cases the member tenants in a co-housing association have their own lease/contract for the flat, plus pay rent for a certain share of the shared spaces. The lease should have requirements stating that the lease holder must be a member of the co-housing association. When signing the lease, the association statutes are to be a part of the lease, and information given concerning what is expected of the leaseholder as a tenant and member of the co-housing association. The same applies for condominiums and rental co-ops.

Attachment 1 Shared spaces in sqm, House for the second part of life

	Färdknäppen	Sockenstugan	Kornet	Sjöfarten
Main Kitchen/Washing up, minus storage	44	45	59	48
Dining room /serving	61	70	76	70
Living room/library/TV	44	Incl dining room	113	39
Shared space with kitchenette	23			69
Office	14	7		
Gym/ physical exercise	49	25	31	
Sauna	25	13	14	14
Hobby room			98	22
Wood workshop	17	27		15
Weaving, sowing	10	23		
Guest room/flat	42	19	19	6
Total	329	229	410	283

Attachment 2 Distribution of flats, house for second part of life

	Färdknäppen	Sockenstugan	Kornet	Sjöfarten
1 room + kitchen sqm	19 37/47	14 31-38	8 41	19 40
1,5 room + kitchen sqm		1 55		
2 rooms + kitchen sqm	12 55	21 47-54	30 48-70	19 57
3 rooms + kitchen sqm	12 64/68/72	8 60-72	6 61-70	9 68-71
Total number of flats	43	44	44	47