

Design and Research

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# *Collective Intimacy*

**BACK TO A UTOPIAN OASIS IN COLLECTIVE HOUSING**

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Workers' Village, Shenyang, China



1-2

# What am I doing?

What does it mean to develop a sense of closeness with strangers within a domestic context? The research explores how collective housing promotes this sense of intimacy, and how the pre-existing forms fit into shifting notions of the intimacy sphere and public life.

The article begins by clarifying two research subjects, namely collective housing and collective intimacy, based on the history of collective housing in Central Europe (Schmid S, 2020) and the Scandinavian area (Vestbro), in combination with theories of utopia (Tafuri 1979). Collective housing can be seen as a form of group living in which the ideal life is externalized into a series of organized private and communal spaces or shared facilities. Intimacy, as an inherent attribute of a home, also extends to the relations between co-living dwellers through joint domestic areas and shared responsibilities, which in turn are constantly evolving as new social, political, and economic challenges emerge.

The decaying utopia and shifting notions of intimacy lead to the main question of how established forms of collective housing confront changing circumstances of the 'ideal life'. As a manifesto of ideal life and a rational response to transient challenges, collective housing is displaced and marginalized in the face of the devastating metropolis. Also, the shifting scope of collective intimacy poses a problem of balancing collectivism and individuality. In the context of the Workers' Village in Shenyang, China, it also becomes challenging to find a moderate condition between going back to the utopian oasis under the planned economy and embracing real estate development.

Finally, the findings of the research will be the thread of future design. Intimacy may be designed through a series of spaces with varying degrees of openness and collectivity. Sinking into the ground produces a framed backdrop and thus creates a sense of closure and collectivity. The boundary between the external world and the inner context is shifting, where people share an enveloping collective consciousness and remain anonymous.

I. Problem Statement	Decaying Utopia	A Universal Question	A utopian oasis in collective housing
	Fluid Intimacy		
II. Theoretical Modeling	Layers of Intimacy	Workers' Village, Shenyang China	
	Models of Collective Housing		
III. Design	Sinking into the ground		
	Between Privacy and Connectedness		

# Collective housing and collective intimacy

Collective housing in terms of form can be defined as housing with separate or shared living units, communal spaces, and facilities. It is not a unified ideology or a specific structure but is rather a heterogeneous collection of different projects and experiments. Each of them is a reflection of the zeitgeist, heavily influenced by economic, political, and social conditions at the time (Schmid, 2020). But whatever the reasons behind it, collective housing is essentially a collection of living resources and means of production in varying degrees. Thus, bonds between dwellers in collective housing are formed, leading to different degrees of cohesion and coordination between group members, which I define as collective intimacy. This sense of closeness can be confined within an individual or family, or it can extend to a wider group, community, or even part of society.

Collective housing is a manifesto of how we want to live and work together. It has been articulated as a utopian practice against either the exploitation of labor by industrialization or the alienation of individual intelligence by the metropolis. Utopian socialists fight for “the poor and the uneducated working classes” (Owen, 1970). Phalanstère, as a representative, was an experimental model that combines families that are unequal in fortune and reward each person according to the three properties: Capital, Labor, and Talent. These experimental and radical practices are characterized by the pure and ardent passion to fight against “a wasting disease, an inner vice, a secret, hidden venom (Fourier, 1996).

On one hand, collective intimacy is generated from homogeneity and unity of life due to the top-down and paternalistic

system of collective housing. In the manifesto, collective intimacy is part of the overall scenario of an ideal life through the well-established social order.

Based on egalitarianism, welfare rationing systems, and reorganized family structure, the similarities or common identities promote emotional we-ness and thus create intimacy. (Törnqvist, 2021). In the Workers' Village (1951), all the means of subsistence were social welfare attached to a homogeneous identity: the worker class. Rent, children's education, medical care, and canteen were almost free. The equality brought an opportunity for equal dialogue within the group: Anyone is a comrade whether they know each other or not. The homogeneity and depersonalization, or the public existence as Fourier argues, would create a profound and unshakable happiness.

On the other hand, it is partly rooted in human nature, that we cannot realize ourselves except as part of a group (Miller, H. A. 1921), thus making collective living a spontaneous form for people who believe there is something wrong with life in most cities (Sargisson, 2012).

Part of the motivation for collective housing stems from a rational and logical expression of modernization (Dick, 1992). Kitchen, toilets, bathrooms, and laundry are centralized to reduce living costs and create standardized hygienic living conditions for the working class and nuclear families, or to free people (especially women) from the drudgery of domestic and isolated lives in order to integrate women into the paid workforce (Schmid, 2020). Domestic life breaks through traditional family boundaries and extends

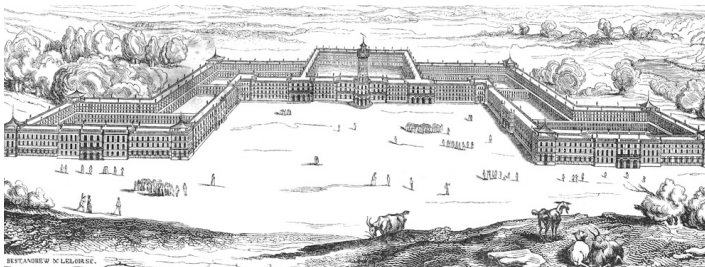
to common spaces shared by community members. Therefore, collective intimacy, a sociality of closeness, grows through the slow repetitive rhythm of everyday life in the joint domestic area (Törnqvist, 2021).

When intimacy replaces rationality as the primary goal of living together, there also needs to be shared responsibilities among members, not just equipment and space. In the case of Prästgårdshagen, compulsory work from the co-housing association such as cooking or house cleaning is requested in the tenancy contract (Dick, 2014). The direct contribution and participation of the individual are strengthened by replacing employed service with the inhabitant's collective work (Dick, 1992).

*".....cooking, baking, sewing, child-rearing and other house-bound activities would be enjoyable if carried out together and would be time-saving....when carrying out everyday chores together, a simple type of attractive togetherness is created....." the group argued (Berg et al 1982)*



Prastgardshagen\_ Alvsjo, Stockholm\_ 1983  
Cleaning common spaces, composting, lawn cutting, cultivation of berries and flowers was taken care by dwellers, by which Prastgardshagen cohousing association can earn money from the landlord for equipping the collective spaces.



Design of an ideal Phalanstère. Jules Arnou, "Vue générale d'un phalanstère, ou village sociétaire organisé d'après la théorie de Fourier," 1847. Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, France

### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

## Decaying oasis and fluid intimacy

Tafuri sees utopia, the oasis of order for the working class, as an inevitable failure because it is against the highest levels of capitalist organization. In addition, the absolutist and paternalistic system advocated by utopian socialists (Schmid, 2020) makes the spiritual model not only vulnerable to external challenges, such as economic difficulties after the war and right-wing ideological radicalization, but also not self-consistent enough to form an independent organization.

*"this anguished revolt against the 'inhuman metropolis' dominated by money economy is only nostalgia...it is inevitably destined to be reabsorbed and deformed by the contingent needs of an opposing set of circumstances....The settlement was thus to be an oasis of order...but this was not possible. The city of development does not accept 'equilibriums' within it, thus the ideology of equilibration also proved a failure." (Tafuri, 1979)*

Another challenge comes from the shifting scope of collective intimacy, depending on the extent of the group relationship which ranges from maintaining the independence and individuality of individual existence (Simmel, 2012) to searching for antiurban utopias of the re-establishment of equilibrium (Tafuri, 1979). Self-work model that highlights collaborative responsibilities only succeeds in a few countries like Sweden and Denmark. A return to family idealization and ever-tightening privacy leads to a finer boundary between socialization and sharing responsibility within the living domain.

A subjective, experiential perspective indicates the shifting boundary between privacy and intimacy that can be controversial to different individuals. Collective household activities can be enjoyable as Prästgårdshagen

dwellers described as "a simple type of attractive togetherness" (Berg, 1982). While it can also be seen as the adults' fantasy as children carry too much weight and responsibility of the social experiment (Susanna, 2020). For those who experienced the collective housing recession as the planned economy faded, it is a combined emotion of pride and loss of past glory (Yang, 2021).

*"Often in those years, I experience a glorious sense of freedom. Anything is possible..... there is no application of child development theory or safety belts provided for the knowledge that 'the real' is a tunnel that has no end. The poet René Char wrote in 'Leaves of Hypnos' (1943-44): 'Lucidity is the wound closest to the sun.' Often, like Icarus, I fly too close and I am burnt." (Susanna, 2020)*





# Workers' Village in Shenyang, China

All these dilemmas are reflected in the case of the **Workers' Village in Shenyang, China**. Due to historical and geographical reasons, socialist collective housing has been heavily promoted and accepted here. It never transits into a moderate variation of the ideal life, but suddenly jumps into the ocean of real-estate development with mass-land planning and rapid modular construction.

Before massive demolition, the Workers' Village provided 7000 unified living units for working-class families. Four living units shared two kitchens and two toilets. To concentrate the labor force on industrial production, other aspects of domestic life are centralized in service blocks and allocated as

an additional benefit of working in industrial production. Some are nearby the community, such as a hospital, a cooperative store, a photo studio, a restaurant, and a bathhouse. Others are combined with working life, including kindergartens, staff canteens, and bathrooms operated by each factory. Thus, a collection of individual forces rather than family was the smallest social unit, which was organized by communes or state-owned companies.



After a series of social and economic reforms, this model quickly declined. Three-quarters of the houses were demolished and lands were auctioned for commercial housing development. Remained buildings were also transformed into individual unit mode. Residents who remain living here are aging and unemployed due to the privatization of state-owned companies.



### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

## A universal question

What will happen  
when the form loses  
its original intentions?

Assetization   Gentrification   Preservation   Museumization   Demolition

- How basic living needs are fulfilled through the household division
- How do we spend leisure time
- Where is the line between privacy and publicity
- What are the distribution of roles and the operation of work and services.



Courtyards in the Workers' Village, before and now



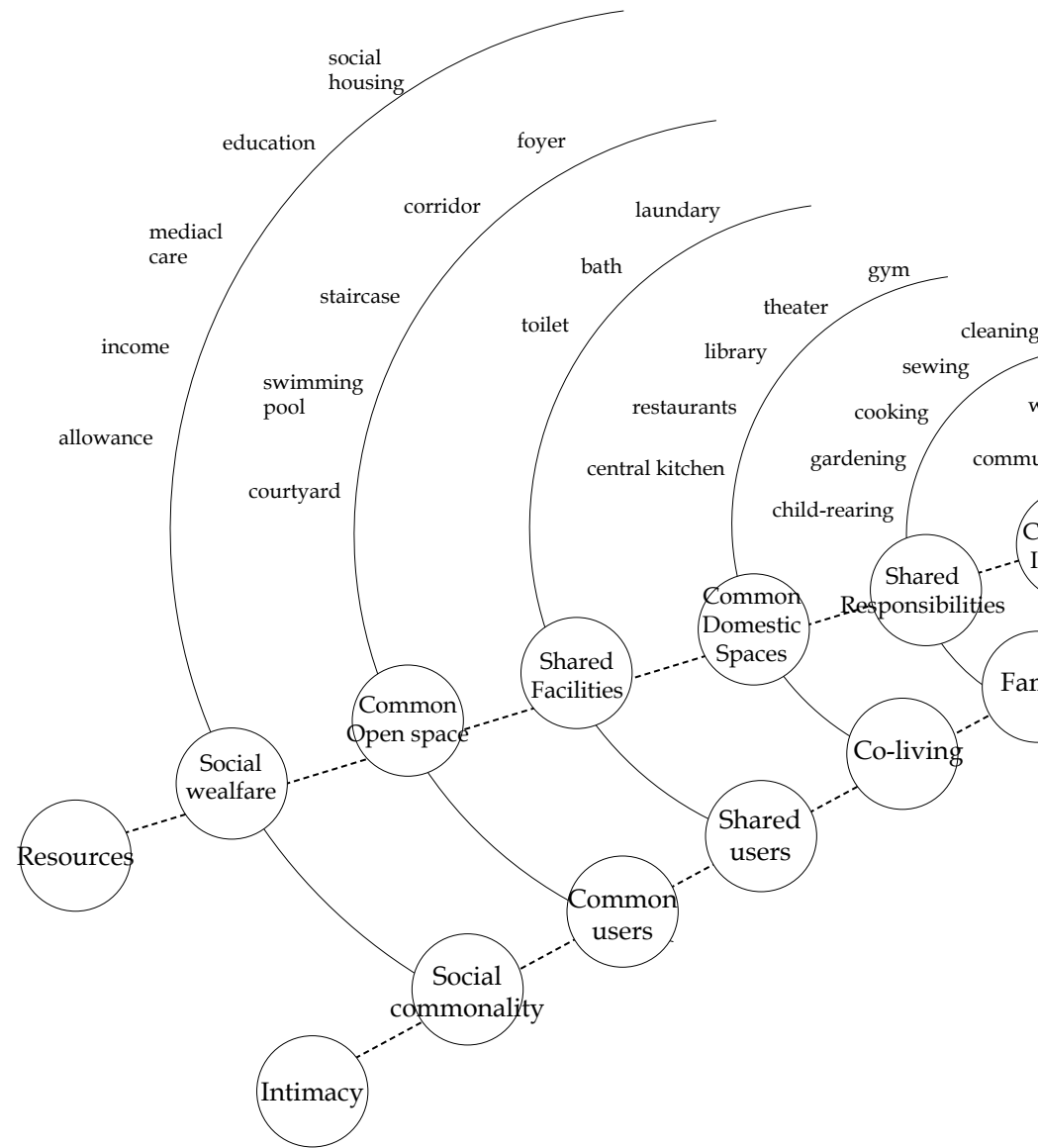


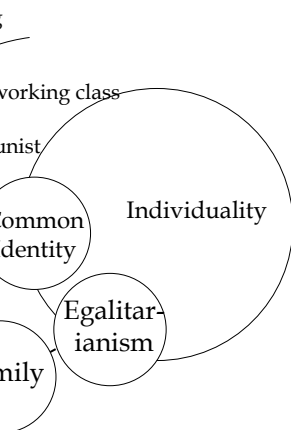




Courtyard, Shenyang Workers' Village,  
China, 2023

# Layers of intimacy





Beyond the individuality are layers of collective spaces and relations that are shaped by pooling resources.

**Collective intimacy is not a single notion, it is a series of togetherness with different degrees of cohesion and coordination between group members, formed primarily through varying degrees of resource gathering.**

The degree of pooling of resources is progressive, ranging from relatively loose, such as social benefits, to strong ties, such as shared family space and shared responsibilities. Correspondingly, the range of intimate relationships is progressive. Occupants of collective housing have loose ties as co-users of communal open spaces, while these are much stronger when they share household responsibilities for the group as a whole. These ties are not linearly progressive; they sometimes overlap with each other.

For example, in the case of the Workers' Village, social welfare, courtyards, toilets, bathrooms are all shared due to the common identity of the dwellers. In the case of Prästgårdshagen, responsibilities for common domestic spaces are taken by all tenants, which is also a way to keep the group united as those not participating in the group work are likely to be rejected by the residents' association.

Collective housing ultimately presents a complex sense of detachment and connectedness, and a series of relationships that are both close and distant.

## 5. THREAD OF DESIGN

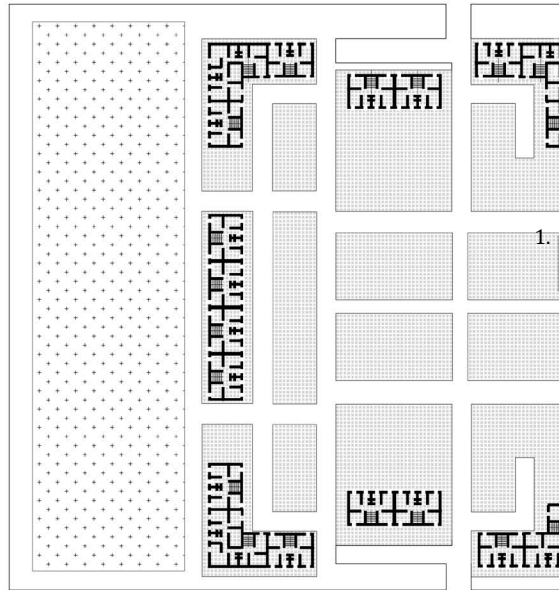
# Design intimacy

The workers' village is in Shenyang, China. The city is close to capital Beijing and once received Soviet aid for urban development. For historical and geographical reasons, socialist collective housing was heavily promoted and accepted here. The site is in Tiexi district, an old urban industrial area. Most dwellers here were workers.

The factories have been relocated since 2000. These lands were auctioned for real-estate development. Only a quarter of the original workers' village is left. This group is well preserved as the original idea.

The neighborhood is mainly residential, with about 24 schools, 5 hospitals or health centers. There is also a huge park south of the site, within 15-minute walking. Neighboring residents also use the yard as if it were a civic square or a park. It can be seen from the live video. There are three main groups of people: students, young children and their parents, and the elderly.

1. tool storage
2. sanitation station
3. boiled fish restaurant
4. kindergarten
5. Shengjing Power Company
6. nursing home







Plan of the Workers' Village indicating the condition of occupation

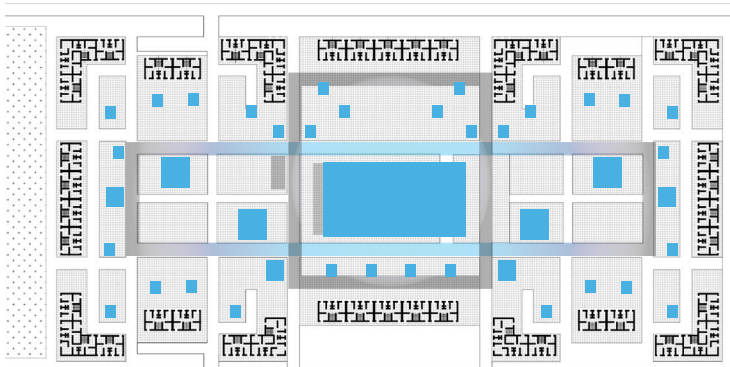
## 5. THREAD OF DESIGN

# Design intimacy

Intimacy cannot be designed, I think, but a series of spaces for progressive interactive encounters and private domains can be designed.

The community has some characteristics of a city square or a park, which makes it a unique housing group here. The road network division of the plot is 500-150 meters. But this community has an entrance every 30-50 meters. Inside the yard, smaller grid roads make it accessible. The internal road is like a playground track, where many people walk and ride bicycles. As a result, these yards are part of the urban green belt. According to the interview, some people who do not live here come here just for leisure.

As the main skeleton of the community, the inner ring will be the thread that connects a series of spaces with different degrees of openness and accessibility. The whole yard thus is divided into several smaller pieces. A community center locates at the heart, providing a central kitchen, restaurants, a library, and bathrooms for dwellers and the neighborhood. Tenants run the center collectively and the income can be used for improving community facilities. The compulsory collective labor is to prevent the gentrification of the plot or the rise in land rents and to avoid occupation by the elite middle class. Scattered along the ring road are collective facilities such as toilets, bookshelves, barbecues, cellars, exercise equipment etc., which are only available to the occupants in the collective housing. These shared facilities are to designed to make up for the lack of space in the housing units.

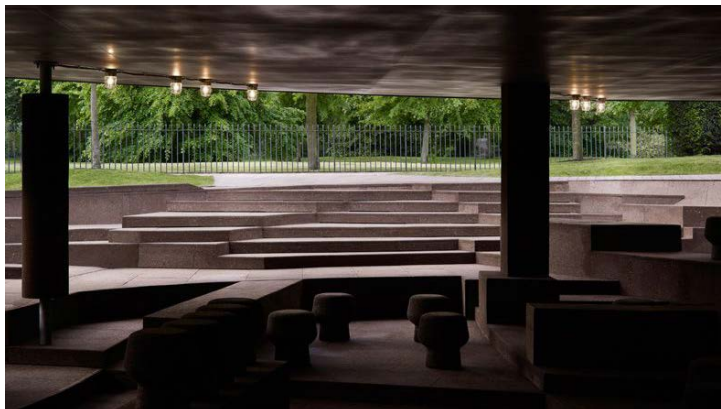


The loop and shared spaces in the Workers' Village

These artifacts are underground, semi-underground, and above ground, corresponding to intimate, semi-private, and public relationships respectively. There are two references of the core gathering center for the community, in which sinking and boundaries are the focus of attention. (1) The Serpentine Gallery Pavilion by Herzog & de Meuron and Ai Weiwei is an interpretation of internal and external boundaries as digging down five feet into the soil gives an accessible

yet introverted atmosphere. (2) Ishigami's proposal for a curved pavilion also creates an ambiguous perspective from one meter below ground level. The curved glass as a seemingly absent border units the separate interior space with the exterior.

The external world is the inner context of a wrapped collective consciousness. Sinking into the ground generates a framed background and thus creates a sense of closure and collectivity. The boundary between individual and the collective is shifting, where people share ephemeral common identities and remain anonymous.



(1). Serpentine Gallery Pavilion\_Herzog & de Meuron and Ai Weiwei, Photograph by Jim Stephenson



(2). Ishigami's new glass pavilion for Park Groot Vijversburg, in the Netherlands. Photograph: junya. ishigami+associates

# Terminology

### ***Collective Intimacy:***

A shared closeness between strangers within a collective group. The group is formed due to transient or repetitive behaviors intersections, in which individual is autonomous and anonymous.

Maria Törnqvist

#### ***'Communal Intimacy' \_***

*Communal intimacy emerges not primarily in exclusive dyads, such as love relations or parent-child bonds, but in larger inclusive groupings. It refers to a sociality of closeness that is not liminal but that grows in the slow repetitive rhythm of everyday life, thus constituting a cool form of togetherness with existential bearing.....communal intimacy involves autonomy and integrity and is not informed by total loyalty to the collective.*

Kathryn Brown

***'A Space for the Imagination: Women Readers in the Nineteenth-Century City' \_***  
*it is the particular nature of what it means to be 'in public' in the modern city that affords the individual anonymity, and thus the possibility of something akin to public privacy.*

#### ***<Intimate Metropolis> \_***

*The intimate metropolis is thus a place in which boundaries between public and private, individual and multitude have been blurred.*

Schocken Architects \_

*Intimate Anonymity prescribes the intimate and simultaneous sharing of public space by anonymous people. In order to achieve this, urban public space should not be seen as an end in itself. It must be a part of a network of urban spaces that allow random movement of people through.*

Jane Jacobs \_

*Sidewalks[ ...] are public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion.*

### ***Collective Housing:***

Dwelling occupied by a group of individuals subject to a common system or authority not based on family or cohabiting ties.

The term 'collective housing' can be defined as :

'housing with more communal spaces or collectively organized facilities than in conventional housing' (Dick Urban Vestbro, 2000).

'Three main objectives characterize collective housing, namely rationalization of housework, informal mutual support among the inhabitants, and an interactive social environment' (b Krantz, kp linden, forms of collective housing, forms of living alternatives).

'characterized by joint domestic areas and daily chores' (Maria, 2020)

'spaces and facilities for joint use by all residents, who also maintain their own individual households' (Franck 1991)

Manfredo Tafuri

#### ***'Architecture and Utopia' \_***

*The settlement was thus to be an oasis of order, an example of how it is possible for working-class organizations to propose an alternative model of urban development, a realized utopia.....But this was not possible. The city of development does not accept 'equilibriums' within it. Thus the ideology of equilibration also proved a failure.*

# Models

## Scandinavia

The term 'collective housing' can be defined as 'housing with more communal spaces or collectively organized facilities than in conventional housing (Dick Urban Vestbro, 2000). It contains five basic models in terms of the location of shared facilities and the identities of residents.

**Model I.** collective housing unit with a central kitchen and other shared facilities, connected by indoor staircase.  
I.1\_ employed staff, reduce housework  
I.2\_ Swedish cohousing, self-work model, communal services by residents

**Model II.** Danish cohousing. Housing with common space and shared facilities

**Model III.** service block or integrated service center

**Model IV.** for special categories such as the elderly, students, women with no children and other dysfunctional residents

**Model V.** commune, non relative residents live and eat together as a large one-family unit.

## Central Europe

Collective living involves an ongoing balancing of private and collective interests, private and community use or possession, and individual living culture in public spaces.

**Model I.** Large housing complexes of the Utopian Socialists.

**Model II.** Men's & Women's hostels + Boarding houses

**Model III.** Central-Kitchen Model

**Model IV.** Garden Cities and courtyard apartment buildings

**Model V.** Community settlements

**Model VI.** Cooperative living

## Resources

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# Models of collective housing

I research the history of collective housing in Central Europe (Schmid S, 2020) and the Scandinavian area (Vestbro), in combination with theories of utopia (Tafuri 1979). By analyzing the history and formation of different cases, the ideology behind them comes clear and helps me with the design intention.

### RATIONALITY

The early model of collective housing, mainly driven by changing society due to Industrialization, was the practice of social theories aimed to achieve a new social order as well as better living conditions for the predominantly working class. Some are experimental and radical, characterized by the pure and ardent passion to fight against “a wasting disease, an inner vice, a secret, hidden venom (Fourier, C. 1996). Phalanstère, as a representative, was an experimental model that combines families that are unequal in fortune and reward each person according to the three properties: Capital, Labor, and Talent. It later was combined with the well-known Garden Cities, adopted by the new developers: municipalities and housing cooperatives in the early 20th century. after the period of the Russian Revolution of 1917 also established a way of life for the working class (soviet decentralization). The most popular one was kommunalka. These models are seen as a realized utopia, an oasis of order that proposes an alternative model of urban development, which later was proved to be a failure as the city of development does bit accept ‘equilibriums’ (Tafuri, 1957).

### UTOPIA

Another model is related to social change of family structure and the women’s movement corresponding to newfound lifestyles. The idea of minimal living subsistence led by CIAM and liberation from the household burden promoted several new models combining a standardized and compressed private living unit and centralized services. One-room living unit housing, such as Men’s and Women’s Hostels and Boarding Houses, was designed for diverse individuals rather than the traditional family with a couple and children. As a logical expression of modernization (dick 1992), the central-kitchen model collectivizes households and integrates women into the paid workforce (Schmid S, 2020). It later develops into a self-work model which replaces employed service with the inhabitant’s collective work (dick 1992). The direct contribution and participation of the individual are strengthened. In the case of Prästgårdshagen, compulsory work from the co-housing association such as cooking or house cleaning is requested in the tenancy contract (dick 2014). All these practices reveal how domestic duties can be re-distributed, helping us rethink the traditional division of labor between the families and sexes and the freedom and legitimacy of a modernized urban dweller.

*...the antiurban utopias have their historical continuity reaching back to the era of the Enlightenment and embrace the theory of the Garden City, Soviet decentralization, the regionalism of the Regional Planning Association of America, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City...*



The sketch shows how 40 households may get access to a central kitchen, a common dining room cum assembly hall, a laundry, a TV room, a workshop, a children's play room, a library and other spaces at no extra costs by abstaining from 10 percent of normal space standards in private apartments.



Central Kitchen, around 1926. @ Wien Museum



Ground floor of Prastgardshagen\_by the municipal

Legend: 2. Dining room, 3. Kitchen, 4. Laundry, 5. Ceramics workshop, 6. Photo lab, 7. Sauna, 8. Relax room, 9. Common spaces such as children's play room, workshop, office (later TV room), 10. Daycare centre (run by the municipality), 11. Storage.



In the middle of the main courtyard stands the bronze figure "Samann" by Otto Hofner, 1920/29  
The Red Vienna in the Laundromat, Association Red Vienna Collection

# List of case studies

	<i>Collective housing</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Descriptions &amp; Relevance</i>	<i>Individual Units</i>	<i>Shared Elements</i>
<b>1825</b>	New Harmony Community	UK	an ideal living model combining education, leisure, and consumption	for families	a central kitchen, dining halls; shared bedrooms for children; educational facilities such as a library, meeting rooms, and a school; other facilities- gymnasium, an inn, and a hospital ward.
<b>1829</b>	The Phalanstery	FR	the dissolution of family, different units for children, working people and the elderly; mixed societal classes.	N.A 1620 people	apartments with various sizes and prices; collectively organized spaces- rues-galleries, a walkable roof; interior courtyards, workshops; central kitchen and dining rooms,
<b>1849</b>	Cite Napoleon	FR	a community for the working class in every district, for a philanthropic and controlling aim	rents for different units- 200 families	from 100 francs for a room to 300 francs for larger units; free services: toilets, a crèche, free doctor, a laundry and a drying room; strict rules: inspectors and a gate curfew.
<b>1849</b>	Familistere residential	Guisse FR	support families with shared spaces and facilities	for families; 500 units for 2000 people	a social palace; a central kitchen and dining room; collective bathrooms, laundry, schools, nurseries, and a library, a swimming pool, a theater and various shops.
<b>1903</b>	Homesgarth House	Letchworth UK	part of Letchworth Garden City	for 24 families; 48 apartments	a central kitchen, dining hall, recreation rooms, a nursery, a collective colonnade, a central courtyard
<b>1918</b>	Karl-Marx-Hof	Vienna AU	to provide the starving people with shelter and food after war	1382 apartments with own toilets, 5000 residents	shared facilities in central courtyards: baths, a launderette with 62 washing stations, 2 kindergartens, a maternity counseling service, a library; clinics, a tuberculosis center, a pharmacy; a post office, a restaurant, coffee houses, shops, and assembly halls.
<b>1930</b>	Narkomfin (Kommunalka)	Moscow USSR	A complete collectivization dissolution of the family units	23 apartments, 15 living cells, 8 family apartments	hall kitchens, recreation rooms, cafeteria, library, gym, laundry, rooftop terrace
<b>1951</b>	Workers' Village	Shenyang PRC	to provide standardized rooms for employees working at state-owned factories	64 buildings, 7000 units for working-class families	1 standardized unit: 4 rooms with 2 kitchens and 2 toilets. Central courtyards, schools, kindergarten, proper food stores, restaurants, pharmacy, shop, rice stores, post offices and banks.



	<i>Model</i>	<i>Collective housing</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Individual Units</i>	<i>Shared Elements</i>
s, s;	Hostels & Boarding Houses	Rehloff straÙe Hostel	Hamburg 1913	112 single functional and refurbished rooms of 8m <sup>2</sup> , <u>for men only</u>	cleaning and laundry rooms and toilets, a bathhouse, a restaurant with dining room, leisure areas, a reading room, a coop store, and administrative offices, a steward
		Lettenhof Women's Colony	Zurich 1927	29 apartments, 22 single rooms <u>for 60 single women</u>	an alcohol-free restaurant, shared bathrooms for several rooms, various kitchens,
t: d	Central-Kitchen	Service House	Copen- hagen 1925	26 separate apartments,	a central kitchen (only for employees) ; Laundry and dry cleaning services by employees
		John Ericsons-gatan House	Stockholm 1935	50 apartments each with a small kitchen connected by a waiter from the central kitchen	a nursery (baby rooms, sleeping auarters), a restaurant (these were open to the public after 1980)
	Community settlements	Høje Søborg Collective Housing	Copen- hagen 1925	124 apartments, 223 residents	shared ground floor: a restaurant, cafeteria kitchen, daycare, various creft rooms
th s, re and	Cooperative living	For the first time, community cohabitation and participation became central intentions of collective living, with the desire for community and exchange now exceeding economic consideration			

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