Communal Urbanism
Applications in Densified Urban Environments

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Contents

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH
1| The urban space
   i. An economic definition
   ii. A sociological definition
   iii. Neoliberal urbanism

2| The housing question
   i. Current housing conditions
   ii. Segregation
   iii. Gentrification
   iv. Alternative solutions

3| Communal urbanism
   i. Defining communal urbanism
   ii. Design features
   iii. Advantages
   iv. Disadvantages
   v. The Swedish 'kollektivehus'
   vi. Examples

4| Communal urbanism & densification
   i. Current densification methods
   ii. Densification & diversification through communal urbanism

URBAN ANALYSIS

CONCLUSION

REFERENCES
Keywords

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the housing question, the failure to solve mass housing needs and the lack of affordable, alternative housing typologies. It consists of two parts; the first part is a research and the second is an urban analysis implementing the outcomes of the research.

The first part begins by providing an economic definition of the urban space. Looking into the historical evolution of the urban space through the ages, it becomes clear that cities are agglomerations of people and activities, products of economic growth that are essential to the efficient function of the economic system. Next, the research investigates the social aspects of urban space and the way cities generate and are, in turn, generated by complex social phenomena. Through this combined research on the sociological and the economic aspects of the urban space, it becomes easier to identify neoliberal urbanism and the role of the cities as machines of growth and of redistribution of this growth upwards. In the second chapter, the research focuses on the current neoliberal housing conditions: the disengagement of the welfare-state, the domination of the real-estate market, and the commodification of housing. The phenomenon of housing segregation, resulting in the perpetuation of poverty, injustice, and inequality, is analyzed. The promoted integration and gentrification policies and proposals, which are promoted as a way to tackle these inadequate conditions, have the exact opposite results and cause community displacement, disruption of the socio-spatial relations and loss of place attachment. Finally, the essay presents communal urbanism; a term describing alternative and more radical housing solutions in the architectural and the urban scale. Especially, nowadays, when many cities experience rapid densification, the research investigates how communal urbanism can be implemented leading towards a diversification of the urban environment.

In the second part of the thesis, the outcomes of the research are used in the case study of Stockholm. The Swedish capital, like many other cities, is growing while the demand for affordable housing is very high. Besides, the expansion and the growth of the city outwards, there is an effort to densify the city. However, this densification is unevenly implemented, since many single-family-housing areas around the inner city are left unaffected. These areas are characterized by low density, homogeneous housing, and a rising segregation while their densification is considered necessary for environmental and social reasons. The thesis presents design guidelines for the densification and the diversification of these areas while investigating the possible applications of communal urbanism.
Research
The Urban Question

i. An economic definition

Nowadays, cities expand rapidly all over the world and urbanization numbers are rising higher more forcefully than at any other time in human history. Indeed, one of the most prominent characteristics of our world is urbanization. It goes without saying that the urban question has always attracted the attention of thinkers and throughout the ages, a plethora of urban and spatial theories have been continuously produced. Today, this theoretical cerebration has reached its peak; this can be easily explained by the fact that the majority of the world’s population nowadays lives in cities, turning urbanism into one of the most urgent and demanding topics of our days. These theories mainly aim to describe the causes of urbanization and the complex nature of the urban environment.

In general, ‘all cities consist of dense agglomerations of people and economic activities’ (Scott, A. J. & Storper, M., 2014). Historically, the first cities emerged where and when a food surplus was extracted; in areas with productive lands, qualified population and an agricultural technology efficient enough. This food surplus generated the first agglomerations of people and fundamental social and economic activities such as political and religious organization, administration, production, and trading. It is worth to mention that, for many centuries, the urban growth of these first settlements was rather slow, due to the fluctuating agricultural production. It was in the late 18th century in Europe, during the Industrial Revolution, that these limitations imposed by agriculture were surmounted. During that time of mechanization, the world witnessed an unprecedented increase in the productivity and quantity of goods leading to higher levels of agglomeration of people and economic and social activities in the cities. As A. Scott and M. Storper point out, ‘this is an era when the fundamental relationship between economic development and urbanization becomes especially clear’ (Scott, A. J. & Storper, M., 2014). This urban and economic growth continued until the 1970s and decreased when a lot of the manufacturing companies moved their facilities to low-wage countries overseas. This period of deindustrialization was followed by a transitional period of slow growth until the 1980s when cities experienced a fundamental shift of their economy generated by the division of labor: from a manufacturing-based economy to a technology and service-based one. Nowadays, cities in the developed countries experience once again high rates of urban growth. In addition, the developing countries are undergoing a rapid urbanization as their cities become the main manufacturing producers and exporters of the global market.

Overall, it is safe to say that there are strong commonalities across all types of cities and the processes shaping them. As it is mentioned above, the relationship between economic development and urbanization is fundamental. Economic development feeds urban growth and shapes the urban environment through processes of agglomeration and specialization. Naturally, there are variables that change between cities, such as the level of economic development, the social stratification, or the cultural norms. However, in general, it is safe to say that the scope of the urban space is to support the economic system, to provide the physical space in which the economic system functions.

ii. A sociological definition

At this point, it is important to look into a sociological approach to the urban question. Indeed, the city is not only a physical entity or the physical expression of an economic system; it is also a system of social organization, a set of attitudes and ideas, and a constellation of personalities (Wirth, L., 1938). Thus, it is produced by and reproduces complex social phenomena. According to Wirth, there are three main characteristics of the city that generate social after-effects: the large population, the high density and the heterogeneity of inhabitants. It turns out that these characteristics can generate both positive and negative phenomena. On the one hand, the high numbers of the population can be translated into a dynamic range of people which provide the cities with variation and differentiation. On the other hand, Wirth points out that the urban mode of living initiates processes of depersonalization since the individuals have to coordinate themselves with the community (Wirth, L., 1938). In addition, since groups are less homogenous in urban settings, human relationships become segmented, while the bonds of solidarity are often lost. The higher density increases the complexity of the social structure and in most of the cases, the diverse social groups tend to be segregated from one another.

Overall, the urban space should be perceived as the habitat of diverse socioeconomic groups with opposed relationships and conflicting interests. Each group experiences the city quite differently; this experience is determined by the level of control over the urban space and the amount of representation in the urban space. Therefore, since the city is the field of diverse experiences and everyday lives, it can be seen as a twofold space, both utopian and dystopian. These contradictory realities are
expressed as spatial and social phenomena and thus can be located in the physical space of the city.

iii. Neoliberal urbanism

By now, it has become clear that the urban space is the geographical articulation of diverse social, political, and economic phenomena. Therefore, a combined research of sociological and economic aspects is essential, when investigating the urban question. This dynamic socioeconomic correlation has been forcefully supported by Castells and other analysts, such as Lefebvre and Harvey. These thinkers insisted on a concept of the city as a theatre of class struggle and they identified the role of the cities as machines for distributing wealth upward (Scott, A. J. & Storper, M., 2014).

The current crisis of the economic and political system has made more evident the tensions and the conflicts between different socioeconomic groups expressed in the urban space. Margit Mayer focuses on the neoliberal urbanism that has been imposed and shaping the cities during the last decade and explores its impacts. According to her, the urban space is currently shaped by economic and political forces that focus primarily on economic growth. Across Europe, cities have been pushed to adopt entrepreneurial modes of governance, which usually involve privatized forms of governance. Furthermore, privatization of the public space, infrastructures, and services has been intensified dramatically.

i. Current conditions of housing

As it has been mentioned above, cities are agglomerations of people and activities; the working areas and the residential areas are the two broad divisions of the urban space. Therefore, apart from centers of activity, cities are home to people. However, this fundamental function of a city is more and more often found to be altered and underestimated by neoliberal urbanism. After the selling of the so-called failed social housing around the 80s, the model of home-ownership has been promoted intensely. As a result, the idea of housing as a universal right has been abandoned and the nature of the home as a place to live has been altered to a commodity.

Over the last decades, the housing provision has been conceded to the real estate business, while the state has gradually disengaged itself from it. While cities around the world strive to become more economically powerful and competitive, their land values and housing costs escalate. The big real estate companies - that are in control of housing provision - offer poor-quality products at the highest price possible. Thus, the housing market is used as a financial instrument which attracts foreign or local real estate investments. This results in an oversupply of luxurious housing which often remains uninhabited since it is used solely as an investment vehicle. In the same time, there is an alarming shortage of affordable housing in many cities around the world. The commodification of housing and the market domination has resulted in growing numbers of people that find it increasingly difficult to gain access to self-determined, functional and affordable housing. More and more people can’t maintain adequate living conditions or don’t have access to housing at all. The failure to provide adequate housing for the poor or even the middle class is a global phenomenon and can be found in developing countries with a shaky economy to more affluent countries with a strong economy.

Housing injustice, segregation, social inequality, displacement, homelessness; a plethora of social phenomena is related to housing, making it obvious that, indeed, this is one of the major challenges every city must face.
ii. Segregation

One of the most common and well-known phenomena related to housing is segregation; racial segregation, income segregation or combined. According to Iris Young, the urban space in many cities around the world is racially marked (Young, I. M., 1999). This racial segregation isn’t entirely explained by lower incomes of the segregated or by the tendency to live with people of the same culture, language or religion. Young points out that segregation is produced and maintained by legal and illegal discrimination that landlords, real estate agents, banks, and institutions display (Young, I. M., 1999). In many of the cases, it is the state housing policy -or the lack of it- that reinforces and perpetuates this phenomenon. Neoliberal urbanism erodes the last remnants of the welfare state and further monetizes and hijacks the idea of the universal right to housing.

Indeed, since cities attract high numbers of people from lower socioeconomic groups like immigrants, refugees, and minorities, the housing market appears to be the mechanism that imposes a social stratification in the spatial level of the city. The lower socioeconomic groups don’t have the financial means to own a place of their own and can only afford to rent. The high rents in most of the urban settlements make it challenging for these groups to choose their place of residence and are therefore pushed into poor and unprivileged residential areas. The effects of housing segregation include unequal living standards and a reinforcement of poverty. Through housing segregation, social injustice and social division are reproduced; the economic disadvantages of the poor and the correlative privileges of the privileged are perpetuated. Naturally, the overall social cohesion is directly affected.

iii. Gentrification

In response to segregation, gentrification has been promoted by many as a way to fix the problem by mixing together the different socioeconomic groups. Gentrification has been labeled as a way to upgrade deteriorated urban neighborhoods and to increase their quality by increasing the numbers of more affluent residents. However, the implementation of gentrifying policies often leads to rising property values and higher rental costs. Since many of the existing residents are renters and not owners, they are heavily influenced by the rising rents. Studies show that rent prices in many metropolitan areas are so increased that people have to spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (Florida R., Schneider, B., 2018). Consequently, lower socioeconomic residents are displaced due to the fact that they can’t afford to live in their neighborhood anymore. They are either pushed to the periphery of these places or pushed out altogether.

Naturally, these methods of urban renewal have been heavily criticized for displacing lower-income groups and undesired uses. Young criticizes these methods for focusing on the wrong issues and for failing in most of the cases (Young, I. M., 1999). Loretta Lees also criticizes the gentrifying policies of social mixing that are promoted as a way to generate social cohesion and to strengthen the economic opportunities (Lees, L., 2008). Through her research on housing policies implemented in UK, USA, and Netherlands, she concludes that the poor and the working class are consistently displaced during gentrification processes and their quality of life gets worse resulting in increased segregation and polarisation. She stresses the fact that policy-makers should try to limit gentrification, rather than promoting it as a positive solution.

Mark Davidson highlights the socio-spatial relations that are extremely relevant in the discussion of displacement caused by gentrifying policies (Davidson, M., 2009). Displacement is not a purely spatial process; it is a socio-spatial phenomenon, not to be reduced to a merely spatial event. Davidson explains that people can be displaced without being spatially dislocated, meaning that they can’t construct place anymore. This spatial abstraction and the equalization of displacement to the movement of people derive from the prevailing, capitalist hegemony of the abstract space. Davidson urges us to understand and protect the social relations that are impeded in the urban space.

At this point, it is interesting to refer to place attachment, a term that is closely related to Davidson’s point of view. Place attachment describes the emotional relationship and the effective bond between people and places. By influencing individual and group behavior, place attachment affects communities at large both in a positive way or a negative one, by creating conflicts among various community members. Gentrifying and integrating processes are often expressed as disruptions of place attachment or are perceived as a threat to place attachment; they displace and divide the communities and cause feelings of loss and alienation (L. Manzo, D. Perkins, 2006). Many times, urban planning projects undermine –intentionally or unintentionally- place attachment and people’s connections to their communities.

iii. Alternative solutions

It has been proved that gentrification and integration are expressed as community displacement policies that gradually change the residential character of areas that are upgraded. It is clear that such policies bring devastating consequences to the local communities and the cities. After analyzing the complex issues of segregation, displacement, social mixing, and gentrification and their -often difficult to grasp- interrelations, the
essay will now focus on alternative ways of housing.

Many researchers, architects, and urban designers have tried to provide alternative solutions—both theoretical and practical—to the housing crisis. A housing policy that has been used to tackle segregation and the perpetuation of poverty with overall positive effects is upward mobility programs. The mobility programs are policies that encourage residents of very low-income neighborhoods to move to more economically integrated areas, typically neighborhoods with lower levels of poverty. Usually, this becomes possible by giving the residents some form of direct housing assistance like vouchers to move to privately operated rental housing. Studies show that these programs have a positive influence on the residents since their new neighborhoods provide them with many social and economic opportunities.

However, this measure can’t be a solution to the housing injustice. Besides simply helping people to leave neighborhoods with high concentration of poverty, it is important to find ways to attract investments and resources to the remaining communities of these areas, while at the same time protecting them from gentrification. Young proposes the ‘Together-in-difference’ method. She suggests that residential clustering is not always wrong; especially when it emerges from people choosing to live in communities with cultural, economic and political characteristics of their taste. This way, she fully accepts and recognizes social differentiation and she cultivates openness to unassimilated others. She proposes that in practice moving resources to people is more effective than moving people to resources. Therefore, planners should help create neighborhoods that flow into one another without clear borders between them, resulting in a movement of resources to the disadvantaged people (Young, I. M., 1999).

More generally, it is safe to say that mixed-income neighborhoods that are open to everyone seem to reduce poverty and injustice while promoting social cohesion and equity. In order to achieve this diversity, plurality, and tolerance in a neighborhood it is important to promote alternative models of housing and therefore alternative lifestyles. Another major issue related to the current housing crisis is the fact that the produced housing stock is not only unaffordable, but it is also anachronistic, confined in the promotion of mainly two typologies, the single-family house and the multi-family house. However, nowadays, we witness the gradual disappearance of the nuclear family and a pluralization of new types of families and lifestyles. Therefore, besides affordable housing, there is a need for new housing typologies that can cover these needs. Indeed, there have been many practical efforts to provide alternative solutions to the housing crisis during the last years. This experimentation emerges as a reaction to the housing market and the above-mentioned methods that are applied with devastating results. Many practitioners challenge the existing housing provision policies and try to de-couple the housing question from the real estate business. Practically, they aim to rethink of what housing can be by inventing new housing typologies. Therefore, various forms of joint living are becoming a realistic model among increasing sectors of the population. Especially, communal housing is promoted as a model of living that can cover more effectively the current needs.
Communal Urbanism

i. Defining communal urbanism

In an effort to define communal urbanism, the evolution of different cohousing typologies will be presented shortly.

The concept of communal housing first appeared in the Soviet Union as a response to the housing crisis in urban areas. It was presented as embodying the new collective vision of the society, a new model concept of housing in favor of the public benefit. During the 1970s, it reappeared and proliferated in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia. This cohousing movement had explicitly utopian visions and radical roots and intentions, following the example of the Soviet collective housing. Many communal living typologies were created at the time; in the Netherlands, it was called ‘central wonen’, in Sweden ‘kollektivehus’ and in Denmark ‘bofælleskaber’. These typologies describe self-initiated projects which aimed to accommodate specific needs and provide otherwise unaffordable or inaccessible services. In most of the cases, they were intentional communities which challenged in practice the traditional family structures and the gender roles in the domestic sphere.

Nowadays, there is a ‘second-wave’ cohousing movement, especially in Europe and North America. While the ‘first-wave’ cohousing in the 1970s was a radical movement that aimed to a widespread social change, the “second-wave” is considered antiradical, seeking a local and limited change towards a community-oriented way of life within the existing status quo. However, these projects attempt to respond to the current housing issues and promote non-speculative, affordable housing with reduced ecological footprint, care for the young, the aged and the disabled, social cohesion, diversity and participation in the urban development.

There are different types of cohousing depending on the different levels of sharing:

- Cohousing is housing with common spaces.
- Collaborative housing is oriented towards collaboration between the residents.
- Collective housing has a strong collective organization of services.
- Communal housing builds togetherness and a sense of community.

Coming back to communal urbanism, it can be defined as an urbanism that involves all of the above typologies of housing in an effort to create community-oriented and inclusive neighborhoods. Besides, the architectural scale, the urban space is characterized by inclusive and diverse public spaces which promote social interaction, participation, and involvement.

ii. Design features

Typically, space in communal housing is divided into private spaces and common spaces. Emphasis is given to the shared spaces and the provision of infrastructure for people to come together, thus ensuring and cultivating community activity. In the urban scale, there are specific design features which are used in order to encourage social interaction such as pedestrian areas and paths, proximity to the buffer zone, accessible and diverse communal spaces with plenty opportunities of surveillance and informal meetings. When it comes to the private spaces, diverse dwelling typologies and mixed forms of tenure are used in order to attract many different levels of financial accessibility. As a result, the social diversity of these projects is planned in order to achieve a mixture of generations, a mixture of single, couple, and family households and a multiplicity of ethnic and racial groups.

Communal houses are usually run by housing cooperative organizations through bottom-up, democratic procedures and collective decision-making. There are specific community agreements and codes about appropriate behavior, activities, and processes, to minimize conflicts and to ensure a well-functioning community. It is worth to point out that there are a strong involvement, participation, and control of the habitats from the first phase of planning and construction to the last phase of management and organization of the project.

iii. Advantages

Communal housing has been praised by many because it can provide a decent standard of living in lower prices; in many of the cases, residents have access to luxurious amenities and activities that otherwise they couldn’t afford. Furthermore, cohousing has been promoted as a way to alleviate the solitude and the living costs of the elderly while providing quality housing to young, middle-class and working-class families. Several authors point out that the re-emergence of cohousing
is actually a pragmatic response to the current housing crisis, the undergoing demographic changes and the multiplicity of new lifestyles. Therefore, it could be incorporated easily as an official housing policy and become a model for future housing provision. Apart from the spatial advantages, communal housing also promotes an alternative way of social organization based on co-living and co-existing with others. In parallel, the self-organized and self-determined function that communal housing typically follows empowers people and gives them more control over their home and their way of living.

iv. Disadvantages

However, communal housing has also received severe criticism as being the latest, marketable housing typology used by the real estate business to cover the acute housing shortage of many major cities. Many newly-built communal housing projects provide less and less private space to their residents for higher rents. Therefore, their target group shifts from low-income families or immigrants facing difficulties in finding a decent home to more affluent, young professionals. Indeed, many sociological studies confirm that the cohousing residents are predominantly well-educated and middle-class despite the effort to create a mixed-income environment. Thus, what is labeled as a new way of living, socially and environmentally sustainable, is, in fact, a commodified old way of living that has lost its radical social intent and has been politically neutralized.

Indeed, cohousing can help create better communities and more active citizenry among its members but until now it remains limited and restricted to the domestic sphere. In order for communal housing to become a model for housing provision, it should be seared against the latent elitist tendencies and the possible risk of segregation and gentrification. Furthermore, cohousing should extend on the neighborhood level, in order to define the surrounding urban tissue and include non-residents.

v. The Swedish ‘kollektivehus’

Sweden is one of the few western societies to experiment extensively with introducing ‘kollektivehus’ (collective housing) to all sectors of the housing market, including the public housing (Woodward, A., 1991). The main reason behind this experimentation was the struggle of women to achieve equality within the private sphere of the home. The first attempts for communal housing started in the 1920s and 1930s when the Social Democratic Women’s movement envisioned many alternative housing projects, similar to projects in the Soviet Union, and privately financed them. These projects promoted communal living as an attempt to introduce shared domestic labor into the family units. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the commune movement is on the rise and there is a wide experimentation with communal housing. In most of the cases, the initiatives are privately financed, by small groups of friends or movement members who share housing around a central kitchen. These extended families were called ‘storfamilj’. In the meantime, a number of communal housing projects are publicly financed. During the 1970s, the new commune groups join the earlier women’s movement and they form altogether their vision for communal living and for the ideal future neighborhoods.

In general, the Swedish communal housing experiments combined private spaces and substantial common facilities for people from all generations. Singles and single-parent families expanded their social network, while families with children were supported with everyday problems such as daycare, babysitting, and meal preparation. In addition, the elderly and the disabled were included in a wider community and got special support. Regarding the management of these projects, a multitude of alternatives emerged throughout the years. However, there are mainly two models: (i) the service approach, where residents pay for services that management provides them and, (ii) the tenant-management approach, where residents decide together on the type and the level of services they need and may undertake the provision of services themselves.

In the following pages, some distinctive examples of communal housing are presented, focusing on their design features, their organization, and their management. The examples are both international and Swedish and they represent the evolution of communal housing, starting from one of the first examples, the Narkomfin Building, to one of the last ones, the Genossenschaft Kalkbreite.
The Narkomfin Building (Dom Narkomfin) in Moscow was designed by Moisei Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis in 1928, while construction was completed in 1932. The complex was designed as collective housing for high-rank employees of the Commissariat of Finance. It is one of the few built examples of constructivist that aimed to reinvent the everyday life of people. It is an experimental building that embodied the new Socialist ideals.

It consists of a long block of apartments raised on pilotis and a smaller, glazed block of collective facilities. The two blocks are connected by an enclosed bridge. The long block has five floors with 54 apartment units without a kitchen. However, many of the residents divided their apartments, in order to make room for a tiny kitchen. The communal facilities - such as kitchens, laundry rooms, a library and a gymnasium - aimed to encourage tenants to follow a more socialist and feminist way of life.

The building influenced deeply many future projects. Le Corbusier studied the building and implemented many of its pioneering ideas, such as the duplex flat plans, in his Unité d’Habitation.
One of Le Corbusier’s most famous works, this project proved enormously influential and it is widely considered the initial inspiration for Brutalism. The Marseille Housing Units project was to design specifically to rehouse 1600 people, victims of the neighborhoods destroyed in the city. With this example of communal housing, Le Corbusier expressed his opposition to the undergoing de-urbanization. The twelve stories building comprises of 337 apartments, while it is suspended on large pilotis. Each floor contains 58 duplex apartments, accessible from a large internal corridor every three floors. Le Corbusier imagined these corridors as “streets in the air”, aiming to enrich the interaction between neighbors. The flat rooftop was designed as a communal terrace, a place with the most vitality. It includes a 300m athletics track, a covered gymnasium, a club, a health center, a nursery, and a social space.
Siedlung Halen has become a prototype for low-rise, high-density housing in suburban settings. The complex consists of 81 affordable terraced houses and it is built on a south-facing hillside on the outskirts of the city of Bern. The layout of each house is always the same, regardless of size and it consists of 3 floors. The architects of Atelier 5 were disciples of Le Corbusier and incorporated many of the modernist ideas about community and privacy. Their design protects the internal and external private spaces, while at the same time it promotes social interaction in the common areas. One of the main benefits for the residents of this was the provision of common spaces and services. Around the central, public piazza there were several other public facilities such as a small store, a restaurant, a meeting room, a laundry and boiler room.
This communal housing project aimed mainly to achieve a more integrated care of individuals across their life cycle. It consists of block towers connected through common corridors which provide indoor circulation but also become places for meetings and interaction between the residents. The whole complex has 186 apartments; 35 of the units are designed for the elderly and 9 units are designed for the disabled. There are many common facilities for the residents such as hobby rooms, a large meeting room, a library, gymnastic and sauna facilities, kitchens and dining rooms. In total, 2000 m² are devoted to common facilities. It is worth to point out that social-welfare services for aged, preschoolers and disabled residents are integrated into the housing project.
The cohousing project Stacken in Göteborg became Sweden’s first collective house of the self-work model, where housekeeping and childcare were shared by both male and female residents. The project was initiated by professor Lars Ågren and a Kollektivhus NU group with the support of the municipal housing company which wanted to find a solution to the vandalism and the under-usage of the unpopular building in the outer suburbs of the city. The existing ten-story tower building was rented to the group and it renovated into a self-managed cohousing project. It was modified to host 50 adults in 34 apartments. The residents prepared meals five days a week, run a parent-owned cooperative day-care center, and carried out most of the maintenance tasks themselves. The common facilities included a central kitchen, a dining room and a nursery for children and were located in the 5th floor, in the middle of the building, to ensure that no resident was more than four floors away from it. Many residents left the project because of conflicts, and over time fewer households took part in communal activities. 25 years later the project was taken over by younger people who bought the building and started a process of substantial refurbishment.
The complex consists of eight buildings with four or five stories in height. The development is characterized by a wide range of apartment sizes. There are 133 communal apartments and 175 service apartments for the elderly, while there are also several apartments specifically designed for disabled residents. The common facilities are located on the ground floor and comprise of a restaurant and facilities for extended nursing care for the elderly. In practice, the restaurant is occupied by the different user groups at different times of the day; the elderly use it during the day, while the communal residents use it in the evening when they return from work. The restaurant is also open as a commercial facility for lunch or dinner, while elderly citizens from the neighborhood are entitled to eat in the restaurant at reduced prices. Interestingly, this facility becomes a meeting point for the whole neighborhood. The complex is run by a tenant governing board which is elected by the assembly. Every month there are meetings in order to resolve the various conflicts or organization difficulties.
The complex occupies a corner block in the 14th district of Vienna. A large range of people lives together in the complex; traditional nuclear families, single-parent families, singles, young people, retirees, refugees and people with disabilities. All the residents are members of an association, the Association for Integrative Lifestyle (VIL), which is simultaneously owner, builder, and landlord of the complex. There are 39 units in total consisting of single story apartment, maisonettes and larger dwellings with three floors. There is a range of communal facilities and spaces that contribute to the communication and the interaction between the members of the community, such as a community kitchen, a library, a rehearsal room, a cultural house, a restaurant, a kindergarten, and a 24-hour bathhouse that is also publically accessible. Even the vehicles are shared by all the residents.
This 97 apartment complex in central Zurich was completed in mid-2014. 80% of the houses in the complex are affordable with rents well below the local market rents, while 11 of the apartments are used specifically as social rented housing. The project was built and managed by a local community group that set up a housing co-operative. The typologies of the houses are very diverse, in order to ensure a multiplicity of household configurations. As a result, besides conventional apartments for traditional nuclear families with 2,3,4 or 5 bedrooms, there are also apartments with up to 17 bedrooms for extended households. There are also clusters of studios with bathrooms and small kitchenettes that share a kitchen and other common spaces. There is also one large cluster of 20 studios inhabited by 50 residents who share a staffed kitchen. Last but not least, there are 9 small studios with private bathrooms but no kitchens which are located around the complex and can be rented temporarily.
Communal urbanism & densification

i. Current densification methods

Nowadays, many cities around the world undergo densification processes in order to respond to the housing crisis and the continuous rise of their population. In most of the cases, densification takes place solely in the urban core and the metropolitan periphery of the cities. In the meantime, the single-family-house neighborhoods which are built around the city centers are rarely part of the densifying development. Thus, higher densities are achieved exclusively in the urban core and the metropolitan peripheries, while the areas around the city center remain untouched and are characterized by a dysfunctional and unsustainable low density. The reason for this uneven densification is the restrictive land-use policies along with a strong NIMBYism that characterizes these areas. The results are devastating since urban growth in many cities is expressed as urban sprawl; more and more people are pushed further out into the badly-connected, low-income urban fridge. Relaxing the existing zoning rules and abolishing the single-family zoning restriction would alter the densification patterns towards a more sustainable and equitable distribution of the population across the urban space. In addition, a more even distribution of the densification development across the cities would decrease the high housing prices in the urban cores solving the gentrification and displacement phenomena, while it would avoid the unsustainable urban growth in the periphery.

ii. Densification & diversification through communal urbanism

Besides the urgent need to densify the close-to-the-inner-city suburbs, it is also important to make sure that alternative housing typologies are implemented in this densification. As it has been mentioned above, communal urbanism can be used to create mixed-use, intergenerational, multicultural, mixed-income and dense suburbs. The promotion of affordable, alternative models of cohousing will ensure that communal urbanism is inserted into the urban tissue in order to densify and diversify effectively these areas.

In the following urban analysis, Stockholm is chosen as a case study to test the above questions. The goal is to identify densification methods promoting communal urbanism and to evaluate them based on their socio-spatial outcomes.
Urban Analysis
An overview of Stockholm - facts & figures

Population:
910,000 residents in the city
2,2 million residents in the metropolitan area
27% non-swedish background

Area:
209 km², of which 21 km² water
City built on 14 islands
Metropolitan area: 26 municipalities
40% is parks and green areas

Inner city density:
4800 people/km²

Clear growth rings

“Today’s Stockholm shows clear growth rings, with each age leaving its mark on the cityscape. The growth rings comprise everything from the city’s grid layout from the Age of Greatness and the industrialisation of the late nineteenth century to garden cities of the early twentieth century and 1950s suburbs such as Vällingby. All these growth rings are the result of a strong planning tradition, where urban districts are expanded following a relative rigidly regulated pattern.”

A growing population

200,000 new city residents by 2030
3 million metropolitan area residents by 2045
Population rising by more than 10,000 per year

Density

“Stockholm is quite sparsely populated in comparison with other major cities. The plot ratio is highest in the dense built environment of the inner city, together with other parts of the central region and Kista. There are, of course, dense centres of population in other parts of the region, for example in Vällingby and Skärholmen, but these are only limited areas of the suburbs. The conclusion is that there is considerable potential for increasing density in large parts of Stockholm and that greater density can help to create a more vibrant environment in line with the city’s vision.”

A growing city

Up to 2030, 100,000 new homes will be built.
Around 30 major urban development projects are currently under way.
Current housing conditions

Variation in the existing housing stock

“...There are very large differences within the city, and in certain districts the range of housing is quite unbalanced. Some districts are dominated entirely by low-rise housing, which makes it difficult for people to remain in the area if they need to move to an apartment. Other districts are completely dominated by blocks of rental apartments, and in such areas it is hard to climb the property ladder.”

Continued high demand

“...New developments have reduced the housing shortage in recent years, but there is still a major need for housing for people with limited finances and for housing in attractive locations.”

“...Forecasts of future population growth averaging 7,000 per year to 2030 suggest that demand for housing will remain high. According to these forecasts, there will be a need for around 70,000 new homes by 2030.”

Targeted initiatives for specific groups

“...With the city needing to plan for the housing needs of all groups in society, there is collaboration within the city to expand specialist forms of housing. Currently around one in ten rental properties are set aside for older people, students, disabled people or young people.
Households with limited financial means have a weak position in the housing market, despite the housing service being open to everyone. In spite of major effort, it is proving difficult to bring down the price of new apartments to a level that can be compared with that of older stock. However, attractive new-builds can create chains of movers that free up cheaper apartments. This assumes that the new builds are of high quality.”

Densification of villa areas

The villa areas close to the inner city prevent the city from being cohesive and well-functioning. A person living in a villa occupies approximately 400 m$^2$ of land, while a person living in a multi-family house occupies between 25-70 m$^2$. The villa areas are characterised by low density and homogeneous housing (single-family homes). They can hardly adapt to different income groups or to all stages of life and they contribute to a rising segregation.

The existing structure of the city maintains an uneven distribution of resources. More densely populated neighborhoods are located in the outskirts of the city leading to unnecessary travel and making hard the interconnection of the city. The benefits of a cohesive urban space are lost.

The densification of the villa areas is necessary for environmental and social reasons. An enrichment with apartment buildings can reduce housing segregation and create more diverse communities.
The Villa Areas
Area 1

Stora Mossen - Äppelviken - Smedslätten - Älsten
**General**

- inhabitants: 9,315
- land area: 3,86 km²
- density: 2,413 people/km²

**Average Block**

- land area: 17,000 m²
- built area: 2,000 m²
- block coverage: 12,5 %
- number of plots: 16

**Average Plot**

- land area: 1000 m²
- built area: 125 m²
- plot coverage: 12,5 %
- dimensions: 25 m x 40 m

**Description**

- elongated plots with the building located on the edge of the plot that borders the road
- elongated blocks consisting of two series of plots
- crooked and bent streets
Densification methods
i. addition of detached houses

ii. addition of row houses

iii. addition of multi-storey housing

iv. modification to semi-detached houses

v. modification to row houses

vi. modification to row houses and addition of row houses

existing detached houses
Area 2
Mälarhöjden - Hägersten
General

inhabitants: 7,759
land area: 2,18 km²
density: **3.559 people/km²**

Average Block

land area: 15,000 m²
built area: 1,700 km²
block coverage: **11,5 %**
number of plots: 17

Average Plot

land area: 700 m²
built area: 90 m²
plot coverage: **12,8 %**
dimensions: 25 m x 28 m

Description

- elongated plots with the building located on the middle or on the edge of the plot that borders the road
- elongated blocks consisting of two series of plots or square blocks consisting of three series of plots
Densification methods
i. addition of detached houses

ii. addition of row houses

iii. addition of multi-storey housing

iv. modification to semi-detached houses

v. modification to row houses

vi. modification to row houses and addition of row houses
Area 3
Enskedefältet - Stureby
**General**

inhabitants: 7,400  
land area: 2.4 km\(^2\)  
density: **3.083 people/km\(^2\)**

**Average Block**

land area: 10,000 m\(^2\)  
built area: 1,300 m\(^2\)  
block coverage: **13 %**  
number of plots: 13

**Average Plot**

land area: 800 m\(^2\)  
built area: 100 m\(^2\)  
plot coverage: **13 %**  
dimensions: 20 m x 40 m

**Description**

- elongated plots with the building located on the edge of the plot that borders the road or more rarely on the middle  
- elongated blocks consisting of two series of plots  
- crooked and bent streets
Densification methods
i. addition of detached houses

ii. addition of row houses

iii. addition of multi-storey housing

iv. modification to semi-detached houses

v. modification to row houses

vi. modification to row houses and addition of row houses
Area 4
Gamla Enskede - Tallkrogen
**General**

inhabitants: 14,175  
land area: 4.17 km²  
density: **3,396 people/km²**

**Average Block**

land area: 8.400 m²  
built area: 1.400 m²  
block coverage: **16,7 %**  
number of plots: 18

**Average Plot**

land area: 450 m²  
built area: 75 m²  
plot coverage: **16,7 %**  
dimensions: 15 m x 30 m

**Description**

- elongated plots with the building located on the edge of the plot that borders the road  
- elongated blocks consisting of two series of plots  
- straight or curved streets
Densification methods
i. addition of detached houses

ii. addition of row houses

iii. addition of multi-storey housing

iv. modification to semi-detached houses

v. modification to row houses

vi. modification to row houses and addition of row houses

eexisting detached houses
Categorization of densification methods

Densification by addition of new housing

- addition of detached houses
- addition of row houses
- addition of multi-storey housing
Densification by modification of existing housing and addition of new housing

Modification to semi-detached houses

Modification to row houses

Modification to row houses and addition of row houses
Average area

based on the previous figures
General

inhabitants: 39
land area: 0.128 km\(^2\)
density: 3.112 people/km\(^2\)

Average Block

land area: 12.800 m\(^2\)
built area: 1.760 m\(^2\)
block coverage: 14 %
number of plots: 16

Average Plot

land area: 800 m\(^2\)
built area: 110 m\(^2\)
plot coverage: 14%
dimensions: 20 m x 40 m
inhabitants: 2.5

Goal

density: 4.800 people/km\(^2\)
added inhabitants: 22
total inhabitants: 61

Note: Based on the previous figures of all four areas of investigation, an average area is generated. The reason behind this simplification is to focus more productively on finding densification methods which promote communal urbanism, without being confined by specific site features. It goes without saying that the following densification methods should be adapted carefully to their context and altered accordingly to consider many more site features which are out of this thesis's range.
Addition of public space
The existing plots are reduced by one-third, which is bought by the municipality. The previously private land is unified; now one-third of the block becomes public space. It can include various uses depending on the needs of the community, such as a playground, a square, a community garden, etc. This new public space becomes a vivid meeting point for the community. No other elements of the existing suburban environment alter.
Addition of public facilities
The existing plots are reduced by one-third, which is bought by the municipality. The previously private land is unified; now one-third of the block becomes public, hosting new public facilities. The new buildings can host various public uses which might be missing. Additionally, a community center can be hosted in one of them. There, members of the community can resolve conflicts, coordinate or organize events. No other elements of the existing suburban environment alter.
Addition of detached houses
The existing plots are reduced by half and new plots and narrow connections to the street system are produced. The plots can be private or municipal properties. The newly-built houses preserve the character of the villas areas, while density is smoothly increased. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. However, the public space remains extremely low, which prevents social interaction and community action.

### OUTCOMES

<table>
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Addition of row houses
The existing plots are reduced by half and a new line of plots and a street are formed in the middle. The plots can be private or municipal properties. The newly-built row houses preserve the character of the villas areas, while a high urban density is achieved. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. In the meantime, between the row houses, small public spaces are created. These spaces are valuable for the interaction between old and new residents.
Modification to semi-detached houses
The existing plots are reduced to the end of the houses and two new lines of plots and a street are formed in the middle. The plots can be private or municipal. The newly-built houses are attached to the existing ones, modifying them into semi-detached houses. The character of the villas areas remains quite the same, while density is smoothly increased. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. In the meantime, narrow public spaces are formed between the plots, valuable for the interaction between old and new residents. However, the modification costs might be quite high, while the privacy of the old residents is more affected than in the previous cases.
Modification to semi-detached houses
The existing plots are reduced to the end of the houses and two new lines of plots and a street are formed in the middle. The plots can be private or municipal. The newly-built houses are attached to the existing ones, modifying them into semi-detached houses. The character of the villas areas remains quite the same, while density is smoothly increased. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. However, the modification costs might be quite high, the existing houses lose one facade and the privacy of the old residents is affected. In addition, public space remains extremely low, which prevents social interaction and community action.

**OUTCOMES**

- low density → high density
- suburban → urban
- high income → mixed income
- private space → public space
- conventional housing → communal housing

The existing plots are reduced to the end of the houses and two new lines of plots and a street are formed in the middle. The plots can be private or municipal. The newly-built houses are attached to the existing ones, modifying them into semi-detached houses. The character of the villas areas remains quite the same, while density is smoothly increased. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. However, the modification costs might be quite high, the existing houses lose one facade and the privacy of the old residents is affected. In addition, public space remains extremely low, which prevents social interaction and community action.
Modification to row houses
The existing plots are reduced to the width of the houses and new plots are formed in-between. These plots can be private or municipal. The newly-built houses are attached to the existing ones, modifying them into row houses. The character of the villas areas remains quite the same, while density is considerably increased. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. However, the modification costs might be quite high, the existing houses lose one long facade and the privacy is limited. On the other hand, long public spaces are formed between the plots, connecting the existing pedestrian system and encouraging movement, social interaction and community action.
Modification to row houses and addition of row houses
The existing plots are reduced to the width of the houses and new plots are formed in-between. These plots can be private or municipal. The newly-built houses are attached to the existing ones, modifying them into row houses. In addition, a new line of plots with row houses and a street are formed in the middle of the block. The character of the villas areas remains quite the same, while density is highly increased. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. However, the modification costs might be quite high, the existing houses lose one long facade and privacy is limited. On the other hand, long public spaces are formed between the plots, connecting the existing pedestrian system and encouraging movement, social interaction and community action.
Addition of urban villas
The existing plots are reduced by one-third and a new line of plots and public spaces is formed in the middle of the block. The plots can be private or municipal properties. The newly-built urban villas alter gradually the character of the villas areas, making it more urban than suburban, while a high urban density is achieved. The four-story urban villas provide more affordable housing which will encourage lower-income families to move in. In the meantime, this typology is suitable for communal housing. In addition, the public spaces, created between the urban villas, are important for the interaction between old and new residents. Both the new plots and the new public spaces in the middle of the block are connected with the existing street system via narrow streets.

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Addition of urban villas
The existing plots are reduced by half and a new narrow block and two streets are formed in the middle. The new block is a municipal property with urban villas and large public spaces for interaction between old and new residents. The newly-built urban villas alter gradually the character of the villas areas, making it more urban than suburban, while a high urban density is achieved. The four-story urban villas provide affordable housing which will encourage lower-income families to move in. In the meantime, this typology is suitable for communal housing.
Addition of multi-storey housing
The existing plots are reduced by half and a new long plot and a street are formed in the middle of the block. The new block is a municipal property with multi-story solitaire housing buildings and large public spaces for interaction between old and new residents. The newly-built buildings alter drastically the character of the villas areas, making it more urban than suburban, while a high urban density is achieved. The six-story buildings provide affordable housing which will encourage lower-income families to move in. In the meantime, this typology is suitable for communal housing, with the ground floor providing an opportunity to be used as a shared space between the residents but also as a space open to the neighborhood. In addition, the public spaces, created between the buildings, are important for the interaction between old and new residents.
Addition of multi-storey housing
The existing plots are reduced by half and a new long plot and a street are formed in the middle of the block. The new block is a municipal property with multi-story linear housing buildings and public spaces for interaction between old and new residents. The newly-built buildings alter drastically the character of the villas areas, making it more urban than suburban, while a high urban density is achieved. The six-story buildings provide affordable housing which will encourage lower-income families to move in. In the meantime, this typology is suitable for communal housing, with the ground floor providing an opportunity to be used as a shared space between the residents but also as a space open to the neighborhood. The ground floor can also be used for public facilities or retail, contributing to the urbanization of the area. In addition, the public spaces, created between the buildings, are important for the interaction between old and new residents.

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Replacement with row houses
Some of the existing plots become empty and are sold to private owners or to the municipality. The newly-built row houses preserve the character of the villas areas, while a higher density is achieved. The houses owned by the municipality can be affordable to secure that lower-income families will move in. However, the public space remains extremely low, which prevents social interaction and community action.
Replacement with urban villas
Some of the existing plots become empty and are sold to private owners or to the municipality. The newly-built urban villas alter gradually the character of the villas areas, making it more urban than suburban, while a higher urban density is achieved. The four-story urban villas provide more affordable housing which will encourage lower-income families to move in. In the meantime, this typology is suitable for communal housing. In addition, the public spaces, created between the urban villas, are important for the interaction between old and new residents.

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Replacement with multi-storey housing
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Conclusion

In the past, urban planning and architecture have been heavily criticised—and for good reasons—for considering the population as a unity; for reducing people of different cultural, socio-economic, and gender backgrounds into a generic type of person, the ‘average’ person. Nowadays, architects and planners include in their designs more and more types of people, after realizing that people are different and as a result, they have different needs. The fact that cities are home to so diverse socioeconomic groups makes it challenging to create a more cohesive environment with lasting relationships. While understanding and mapping the different needs and expectations of a diverse population is easy, to apply this knowledge in practice is very hard.

It is clear that nowadays the housing market focuses solely on the needs and the expectations of the affluent socioeconomic groups. The current housing conditions make it urgent for urban designers and policy-makers to find ways to face the housing crisis while decreasing displacement and forced social mixing. More importantly, they must aim to cultivate social interaction and communication between different groups through properly designed urban spaces. Planners should acknowledge the political aspects of the place and they should act as advocates for the underrepresented groups, remembering the social mission of urban design and architecture. This knowledge must be incorporated into the development plans in order to ensure social justice and cohesion. It is important that the current housing conditions are tackled through suitable urban policies that help to reinforce a sense of community and solidarity among diverse socioeconomic groups.

Communal urbanism and alternative ways of housing can become efficient solutions to cover the needs and the expectations of different social groups, especially the more vulnerable ones. However, as long as these projects aren’t accompanied by suitable policies that regulate the real-estate market they can’t really achieve their proclamations. Therefore, besides architecture and urban design, policy-making and state regulation of the real-estate market is necessary in order to ensure that the right to housing of the vulnerable groups is protected.


