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The role of shared space for the building and maintenance of community from the gender perspective - a longitudinal case study in a neighbourhood of Helsinki

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Video of conference presentation: <http://youtu.be/DKybGcOCQWc>

Abstract

Cohousing is here referred to as a form of housing with communal spaces, shared facilities and activities. Irrespective of the long history of cohousing, it constitutes only a small part of the total housing stock even in countries that regard cohousing as an alternative dwelling choice. Surprisingly, the importance of shared spaces has often been underestimated, although their role in the coproduction of community is significant, which in turn is one of the key driving forces for expanding cohousing into new markets. The aim of the article is to examine and discuss the role of shared space for the building and maintenance of community and its consequences for everyday life from the gender perspective. I argue that shared spaces are important for the building and maintenance of community, but they have a triple role, which together has an impact. Nevertheless, the Community House is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the communal culture and its positive or negative consequences for the gender roles and the residents involved with care.

Keywords: cohousing, shared space, coproduction of community, gender perspective

Introduction

The history of cohousing started over two thousand years ago, when Pythagoras founded Homakoeion, a vegetarian commune, based on intellectualism, mysticism and the equality of the sexes (Meltzer, 2006). Today's development of alternative types of housing with communal spaces has been influenced by utopian visions, practical proposals and implemented projects far back in the past. The driving forces behind the various models of communitarian settlements, cooperative housekeeping, central kitchen buildings, collective housing and collaborative residential experiments have recently been analysed from the gender perspective in the historical account of the past two hundred years by Vestbro and Horelli (2012). The analysis disclosed that the driving forces behind the selected communal

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living models have varied strongly. However, gender equality through the community has been significant in all models, except for the one stressing the central kitchen as a provider of paid services. The reduction of housework has been important in all models, while the equal share of responsibilities for work at home has appeared only in the New Everyday Life-approach and the Swedish BiG-model based on self-work. All models have rich communal spaces, but only the material feminists, at the turn of the 19th century USA ¹, and the models appearing after 1970 have sought to promote community and cooperation among the neighbours.

Cohousing is here referred to as a form of housing with communal spaces, shared facilities and activities. Irrespective of its long history, cohousing only constitutes a tiny fraction of the total housing stock even in those countries where this form of dwelling is fairly frequent. According to Vestbro and Horelli (2012), the share of apartments in Swedish cohousing is estimated to be 0.05 per cent of the total housing stock. In Denmark, which is regarded as the leading cohousing country, the share is almost 1 per cent. The figure for the Netherlands is likely to be similar. Williams (2008) claims that the share of people living in cohousing in USA is about 0.001 per cent of the total population. Nevertheless, during the past decade a rising interest in cohousing has been conspicuous. This interest has been supported by several conferences (in Sweden, France, Germany, Finland, Scotland), networks (Cohousing Now; ICSA), publications and special issues on alternative types of living (Vestbro, 2010; Built Environment, 2012).

As there is no standard pattern of cohousing design, due to the variety of cohousing types, the importance of shared spaces is often underestimated. Karin Palm Linden (1992) has, however, shown that the location of common spaces has an important role for the spontaneous use of these spaces. Also the nature of “transitional zones” (entrances, elevator and stairs) are crucial for social interaction and also important for the cohousing to function as a whole. An interesting observation is that the residents may be attracted to these spaces in tower blocks with common rooms on the ground floor, when they pass the entrance, but not when they have reached their private apartments.

Jo Williams has made a valuable overview of the literature on design factors that encourage social interaction in housing. These are: high densities, good visibility, clustering, the inclusion of defensible space and car parking on the periphery of communities (Williams, 2005, p.196). These observations are valid both for the building and the neighbourhood levels. The author concludes that the communal facilities need to be centrally located with

¹ The material feminists had small private apartments with no or reduced kitchens, but the later models often have full-size private kitchens, since they are used for several meals besides the common dinners. *The Grand Domestic Revolution* by Dolores Hayden (1981) reveals how innovative plans and visionary strategies the material feminists had when they pursued economic independence and social equality. Their ambitious goals of socialized housework and child care meant revolutionizing the American home and creating community services.

shared pathways, and that private spaces should be reduced, if increased social interaction is sought after (Williams, 2005, p.199).

In addition, the community house or equivalent that provides opportunities to have shared meals, does have consequences for the transformation of gender roles. Literature on the history of cohousing from the gender perspective (see Vestbro & Horelli, 2012) provides evidence that cohousing increases equality between women and men by making the domestic chores visible and thus sharable by both sexes. This does not mean that women and men appropriate the spaces in the same way. Nevertheless, it is evident that cohousing has relieved women some of the extra housework so that they can participate in other activities either in the house or outside it. Cohousing has also expanded the traditional male role, which now entails a larger number of activities around daily reproduction than in "normal" dwelling (Vestbro, 2010, p.202).

The aim of this article is to examine the role of shared space for the building and maintenance of community and its consequences for everyday life from the gender perspective. I argue that shared spaces are significant for the building and maintenance of community, but they have a triple role which together has an impact. However, the Community House is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the communal culture and its positive or negative consequences for the gender roles and the residents involved with care. The argumentation is based on the analysis of relevant concepts within cohousing literature and on a longitudinal case study on cohousing in a neighbourhood of Helsinki, Finland.

The next section will deal with the building of the theoretical framework, followed by the description of the case study, after which the results will be discussed and conclusions drawn.

The Nordic models of cohousing as a theoretical framework

Irrespective of the lack of comprehensive theory on cohousing, a variety of relevant concepts exists that can be applied in the analysis of different aspects of the phenomenon. I have chosen concepts from the Nordic models of cohousing for the examination of the research question concerning the role of shared space for community building and maintenance. The chosen concepts are connected to the so called BiG-model and the New Everyday Life-approach.

The BiG-model

The BiG-model was created in the 1970s by a group of Swedish women who wanted to have a voice in housing issues. BiG refers to Swedish 'Bo i Gemenskap' (Live in community). The BiG-women rejected the idea of separating productive and reproductive work. Nor did they agree with the Modernists that housework should be minimized. Instead, they maintained

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that housework was part of the women's culture and it should be regarded as a valuable contribution to society. According to them, the disadvantage with traditional housework was that it is carried out in isolation by a small household. The BiG-group claimed that cooking and child rearing together with others is enjoyable, and it also saves time.

The BiG-model was based on the idea that the appropriate size for the new type of cohousing should be between 15 and 50 households. If each household transfers ten per cent of the normal apartment space, the collective will get a substantial amount of communal facilities without increasing costs. For example, 40 households can 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 common spaces by abstaining from only ten per cent of normal space standards in private apartments. The BiG-model was defined by Berg (1982) as "the small collective housing unit, based on togetherness through common work". Therefore, the model was also called the 'self-work model' in contrast to the former ones that were based on paid services.

The BiG-women wanted the new model to be an asset to other social groups as well. Therefore, they proposed that municipal housing companies should take the lead. At the end of the 1970s, it was in fact the previously hostile municipal housing companies which implemented most of the new experiments. Currently there are some 50 collectives in Sweden, based on this model (Vestbro & Horelli, 2012).

The New Everyday Life-approach

Irrespective of the provision of care services, the Nordic welfare states had not been able to relieve women's double burden when managing both work and home, nor to resolve the structural fragmentation of society resulting in frustrating daily experiences. Members of the BiG-group became key actors in the Nordic women's network on 'Housing and building on women's conditions', which gathered to its first conference in 1979. The conference came up with the idea of a better everyday life in which a supportive infrastructure would play a central role. This evolved into a decade long transdisciplinary project and approach, The New Everyday Life (Forskargruppen, 1987). It provided 1. a critique of the difficult conditions to balance work and private life, 2. a vision of a just society, and 3. a model of action. The central motives for action were the needs of children and women, as well as the social reproduction of people and nature. The yearning for personal and collective wholeness and integration was inspired, in addition to the early utopians and American material feminists, also by the critical texts of André Gortz (1980) and Henri Lefebvre (1971).

The vision of The New Everyday Life-approach was a concrete utopia of a post-industrial, mosaic-like society consisting of varying self-governing units that are responsible for the use of local resources. Important elements were work (paid and unpaid), care and housing, the separation of which was to be replaced by their integration in the living environment.

The theoretical framework comprised two central concepts: everyday life as a process and the Intermediary level as a new important structure to be developed. According to Birte Beck-Joergensen (1988), the root of everyday life lies in the reproductive actions that form the psychosocial forces with which people transform societal and cultural conditions into phenomenal experiences, enhanced or constrained by the built environment. Structural change can take place in the inter-subjective arenas – free living spaces – that are characterized by deliberations and digressions from the generally accepted ways of orientation.

The Intermediary level, as a mediating structure between individual households, and the public and private sectors, was developed as a concept that referred to the structural and functional basis for the reorganisation and integration of housing, work, and care in the neighbourhoods (Figure 1; Forskargruppen, 1987). As a new structure in the neighbourhoods the Intermediary level was also to comprise environmentally friendly housing, services, employment, and other activities, which may support the residents irrespective of age and gender (Horelli & Vepsä, 1994).

The action model (see Figure 1) comprised the creation of the functional basis of the Intermediary level by bringing to the neighbourhood some of the daily tasks normally located in different sectors and places. The care of domestic chores and children could be transferred from private homes to communal spaces, as in the examples of cohousing. Environmental planning and management, as well as care of older people, would be delivered in the neighbourhood and not in centralised institutions of the public sector. Even the private sector could occasionally find it interesting to create production to serve the local community. These transactions were to result in new activities, called the local housework, local care, local production, and local planning and management (The Research group for the New Everyday life, 1991).

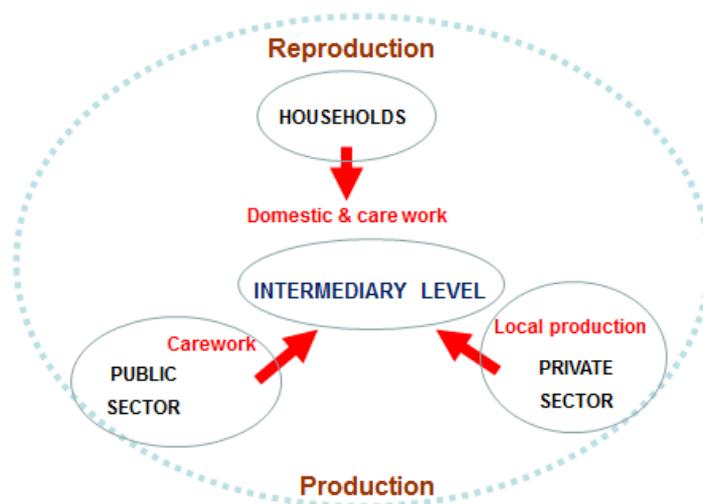


Figure 1. The action model for building an Intermediary level

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Geographically the Intermediary level was to be a locally limited territorial whole, varying in size from a group of dwellings or a block to a neighbourhood, village or part of a town. As a physical phenomenon, it was to comprise shared arenas and spaces of communication. In fact, its architecture would support different modes of housing and the identity of the local culture. It could be regarded as a mixture of New Urbanism and the Just City.

The current applications of The New Everyday Life-approach can be structured according to the level of aspired communality and the degree of informal/formal economy. This has resulted in a range of examples, such as a well-functioning housing area with shared spaces (for example the neighbourhood of Tinggården outside Copenhagen); cohousing communities or collective houses similar to the ones that the BiG-group has proposed; communes of different sizes; service house communities with both cohousing and an exchange of unpaid and paid services; and lastly communities in which members work in the same residence in which they live, such as Svaneholm in Denmark, kibbutzim in Israel and the eco-village Findhorn in Scotland (see McCamant & Durrett, 1988; Fromm, 1991; Durrett, 2009; Meltzer, 2010).

The local care in the Intermediary level has made it possible to conceptualize services in terms of social and material support networks, which later were conceptualized as the 'supportive infrastructure of everyday life' (Horelli & Vepsä, 1994; Gilroy & Booth, 1999; Horelli, 2013).

Thirty years later, The New Everyday Life-approach, which sought to embed the self-work model of cohousing in the neighbourhood context, still seems to be valid. It is currently being applied in a number of gender-aware neighbourhood projects in Germany, Spain, Austria, Italy and Finland (Horelli & Wallin, 2013). These examples seek to transform the neighbourhood settings into a supportive infrastructure of daily life in the same way that Dolores Hayden (1991/2005) speculated about the design of the non-sexist City.

The longitudinal case study on cohousing in a neighbourhood of Helsinki

The case study deals with the Kuusikylä housing project in which 21 families gathered together in 1980 to plan and build their dwellings and the Community House, at the outskirts of Helsinki, in a modified spirit of the Nordic models of self-work and the New Everyday Life-approach described in the previous section. The study was part of an action research project and a series of experiments launched in the 1970s by the Department of urban planning at the Helsinki University of Technology. The goal of the umbrella research was to develop a method of self-planning that enables residents to initiate a dialogue with the dwelling, the community and the surrounding environment (Kukkonen, 1984).

The description of the case study is based on my previously published PhD dissertation, *The Dwelling as a Psychological Environment* (Horelli, 1993), on the article *Self-planned housing*

and the reproduction of gender and identity (Horelli, 1995), as well as on a chapter on the communal processes that was not published in the dissertation. I followed the dwelling process during nine years. During that time the residents participated in the design, building, use and maintenance of their dwellings and the communal house.

The aim of this sub-study was to describe and evaluate, how the residents shaped, used and interpreted their self-planned house and the community. The research task also included an analysis of the role of the physical environment in the psychic self-regulation in the context of dwelling that was created through self-planning, as well as of the role that shared spaces had in the building of community.

The design of the study resembled that of “naturalistic inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research methods were mainly qualitative comprising thematic interviews, observations, psychological tests and content analysis. Later on, I have randomly continued to observe the case and the most recent interviews have been made in 2012 and 2013. The life cycle of the case can be divided into the following, somewhat overlapping phases of which I will focus especially on the second and third one:

- Construction through self-planning and self-building (1980-1983)
- Dwelling as a psychological environment (1983-1993)
- The rise and fall of community (1983-1995)
- Return to ‘normal housing’ (1996 - 2013)

Construction through self-planning and self-building (1980-1983)

A Helsinki-based housing association (Asuntosäästäjät ry), who collaborated with the Helsinki University of Technology, announced in their Journal for self-planners to build a “village” in North-Eastern Helsinki, on a lot of one hectare. The chosen 21 families were mostly skilled workers with a rural background. Thus they qualified for the state loan which was at that time extremely difficult to get. The participants were informed about the self-planning and self-building aims of the project and that all households would have to transfer some private space to the Community House in the spirit of the BiG-model.

The self-planning took systematically place in three groups, who met in a trailer on the site, twice a week during three months (Figure 2). It was aided by the main architect and six student-tutors who applied a design tool-kit specially made for this endeavour (Kukkonen, 1984). The self-planning phase went quite smoothly until the application of the building permit. The architecture of the housing community was too wild, according to the Helsinki Façade committee, although the location was at the intersection of a motor highway and an industrial area. The fight for the building permit took one year which meant that half of the self-planners had to leave, due to financial reasons. The building took one year. The original self-planners built their dwellings and the Housing Association, who had the rest of the dwellings built by professionals, sold the dwellings to outsiders, mostly residents with an

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urban background. The construction phase, which started by building the Community House, took one year (Figure 3). The residents moved in, in the spring of 1983.



Figure 2. The self-planning which took place twice a week in a trailer on the site, was aided by creative tools. The model of the 'village' with the Finnish flag in front of the community house

It turned out that that the self-planners and the Housing Association had designed and built 21 detached or semidetached houses, with one or two stories that were, irrespective of the harmonising requirements for the similar roof gradient and colour of houses by the City Façade committee, both individually and culturally varying (see Figure 3). The Community House comprised a small clubhouse with a kitchen and a washing house in the upper floor. The ground floor had a few stores, and a shared workshop with tools. The Community House was expanded during the construction phase from the planned 60 m² to 120m² (Figure 4). The shared playing spaces were originally planned to be bigger, but as the private gardens were expanded till the central pedestrian path, the shared spaces shrank, as can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 3. The residents planned and built individually and culturally varying dwellings



Figure 4. The first barn raising party outside the communal house (Nr. 1), which lies in the middle of the siteplan to the right. The floor plan of the Community House is to the left.

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Dwelling as a psychological environment (1983-1993)

The self-planned dwelling solutions varied a great deal in terms of structure, spatial type, architecture and manipulation of different elements in the dwelling. Socio-cultural variation was also conspicuous in the way the spatial layout was designed (open, semi-open or closed floor plan), the choice of the kitchen-dining-living room solution (open or closed), the spatial choreography of the sauna (one, two or three rooms), the type of garden (plants for cultivation or decoration) and the style of furnishing. The dwelling culture created by the residents could be described as a mixture of popular rural residential customs and urban ideals. The residents all shared a common satisfaction with their dwelling and its different elements, except for the entrance, which was mostly considered too small.

The dwelling gradually evolved during the planning, building and living into a meaningful psychological environment. The dwelling then acts as an arena for both internal and external action, as a psycho-environmental medium of regulation and as a mirror reflecting multi-layered meanings.

The role of the dwelling as a psycho-environmental medium of regulation was reflected in the fact that the residents produced structurally, spatially and decoratively varying dwelling solutions. These abounded in gratifying personal and cultural symbols as well as “breathing hole spaces”, which provide restorative experiences. This is a concept inspired by Winnicott’s (1971/1986) potential space. The breathing hole refers to a space between everyday reality and illusion in which occasional flow or restorative experiences of freedom can be had.

Most residents had a floor plan that was congruent with and supportive of family cohesion. Some residents projected their psychic and family conflicts into the dwelling, especially into the bedroom and kitchen. The regulation of the person – environment transactions also took place through the design, use, shaping and interpretation of the symbols of the dwelling in the cultural and societal context. Appropriate symbols enhanced the interpretation of the dwelling as being sensually attractive, therapeutic or supportive of creativity. Inappropriate symbols, on the contrary, sustained negative interpretations and tended to turn the dwelling into an arena for psychological conflicts.

The residents could also interpret the dwelling as a gendered structure. The dwelling elements that were interpreted as masculine in the Repertory grid test (Kelly, 1955) were the sauna, the entrance and all the exterior elements, except for the garden. Feminine elements were the kitchen, the bedroom and the garden. Gender-neutral elements were the living room and the dwelling itself. On the basis of the interpretations and use of spaces, there were men’s own masculine spaces (the storage, cellar and carpool), shared feminine spaces (kitchen and bedroom), shared masculine spaces (sauna) and shared gender neutral spaces (living room and the dwelling itself). Women had no feminine spaces of their own in this study.

The above interpretations can be explained by the time-dependent person-environment transactions. The interaction between the person and the dwelling is structured by the duration and type of activity in a specific space that simultaneously activates the tension between psychological autonomy and dependency. These dynamics and dialectics reproduce images that are connected with the activity in space and which also nourishes identity and the associated gendered images (see Figure 5). For example, women spent more time in the kitchen, which on the other hand affected both the interpretation of the space as feminine and the images that reproduced the feminine identity. In turn, the garage or other outside spaces are interpreted as male places. Helen Jarvis (2011) has also described, how the residents of cohouses tend to use a variety of alternative temporalities that interact with spaces and places, which in turn affect their gender identities.

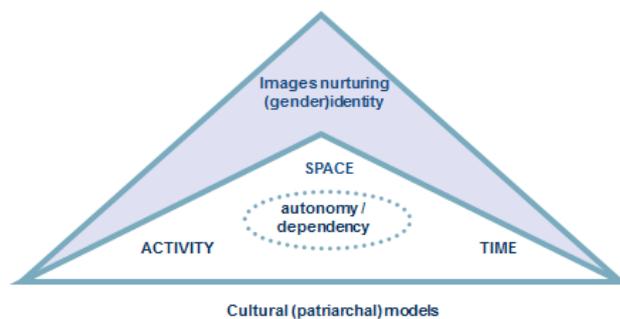


Figure 5. The indirect construction of gender identity through action in space and time in the dwelling, influenced by cultural models (Horelli, 1995)

However, environmental transactions do not take place in a vacuum, but they are influenced by cultural and patriarchal models or the so called gender contracts. The cultural and patriarchal patterns prevailing in Western society have evolved over a long period in history. They affect the division of activities, space and time among men and women also in dwelling. Thus, the planning and building of the dwelling offered an opportunity for men to reproduce the traditional male role and consequently traditional gender identities for both women and men. Although self-planning brought forth congruence between the intentions of the residents and the dwelling in the form of successful places (therapeutic settings and breathing holes), it tends to reproduce existing gender roles which do not easily change within the nuclear family. The patriarchal dwelling patterns may, however, change in a public or semi-public context, such as the shared spaces, where the modes of action and distribution of space and time are conducive to the integration of genders and generations (see Franck, 1985).

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The rise and fall of community (1983-1995)

The history of the building and maintenance of community in this housing case was of course tied to the overall history of the planning and building of Kuusikylä itself, but also closely intertwined with the access to and use of the Community House. It was possible to distinguish two phases of communality that could be named the Period of evolving community and the Period of Stagnation.

The Period of evolving community (1983-1985) started slowly during the spring of 1983, when the residents started to move into their dwellings. The original self-planners had known each other for years but the newcomers, who had bought the dwellings, were not familiar with the prevailing self-building, rural style of culture. Thus, there were cultural conflicts, but above all also unclear financial issues regarding the costs of the building, which brought forth tension among the residents. Thus, the formal housing meetings were quite dreary and comprised endless discussions around the accounts. However, it was the women who started to informally organize themselves, facilitated by the researcher. They began to arrange a variety of activities in the communal house for children (hobby activities), teenagers (music sessions), women (gymnastics and cooking) and also parties for the whole community. The women appropriated the upper floor, where the clubroom, washing and laundry places were, whereas the men took charge of the ground floor workshop. Gradually these activities became ritualized and the Community House became a symbol of the "village" as the housing site was then called.

The dwelling style of the residents revolved around the production and reproduction of the nuclear family. It was characterized by the fact that even though both spouses were active in the labour market, it was the wife who was in charge of the care of the interior of the home, as well as of the domestic chores and children, with some exceptions. The men were in charge of the tasks outside the home. Collaboration among neighbours was quite frequent with a variety of bilateral and multilateral projects. What was new, however, was that it was now possible to transfer some of the care and overall reproduction to the semi-public sphere, where it became a collective endeavour. Some of the shared activities took place in the Community House and around it, such as sporadic children's day care, club activities, transport of children to school, afternoon care of children after school, exchange of services and tools (LETS), part of the real estate management, parties and meetings. Also the formal General Meeting of the Housing company decided to found an Entertainment committee comprising both adults, teenagers and children of both sexes.

Consequently, this phase and the Communal House enhanced the integration of the formal and informal activities, the collective actions of both women and men, children and adults, the original self-planners and the newcomers (see Figure 6). Thus it functioned almost like an Intermediary level, as described in the New Everyday Life-approach. This cultural impact could also be seen in the more multifaceted roles of women and men, children and

teenagers, when all the stakeholders had the possibility to participate in different tasks and activities.

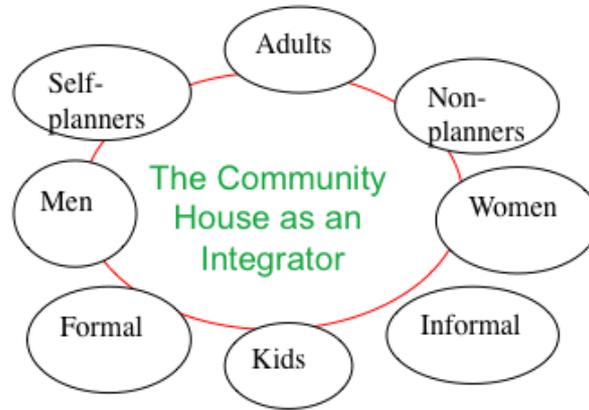


Figure 6. The Community House enabled the integration of different types of activities and stakeholders as it provided a semi-public shared platform, as part of an Intermediary level

The Period of Stagnation (1985-1995) started in Midsummer 1985, when the Community House had a fire and it was severely damaged. It took almost a year to repair it after which it was rented out. The reasons were that the financial situation of the majority of the self-planners was critical and the newcomers were no longer interested in the Community House. This was a kiss of death for the positive village culture, as there was no arena for collaboration, neither for collective care. The integration of the formal and informal activities withered and the interaction between adults and kids decreased. Even the formal meetings had to be organized outside Kuusikylä. The collaboration among neighbours continued but only bi- or multilaterally, without extending to the whole village. The social energy was now geared towards the family or outside the community or to just a few of its members.

The disappearance of the material support to the Intermediary level also meant that the former positive image of the Community House now reproduced negative images, as it represented the original self-planners in the minds of the newcomers. Thus, the Community House reproduced meanings of distress and disintegration, instead of integration.

Return to 'normal housing' (1996 - 2013)

After more than ten years the Community House was finally returned to the residents of Kuusikylä. The children had now grown and there was no longer the same need for collective care and reproduction as before. The Community House is now used more individually than

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at the Period of evolving community. The women still use the washing place and the laundry. The men use the workshop and the storage, but the clubhouse is only used for meetings of the housing company and for some private parties of the residents. The recent 30 years' jubilee was, however, organised in the Community House with great pomp. Summa summarum, although Kuusikylä is still called by the residents a village, it currently resembles more a normal housing area than a cohousing site.

Conclusions and Discussion

The aim of this article was to examine the role of shared space for the building and maintenance of community and its consequences for everyday life from the gender perspective. I argued that the shared spaces are significant for the building and maintenance of community, but they have a triple role. So what are the roles and the consequences for everyday life?

The triple role of shared space

It is evident that when the Community House was accessible and in use at the period of evolving community, it provided an arena that enabled different activities among the residents. Thus, the first role of shared space is that of an arena of action. The Community House also turned out to provide a variety of images and multi-layered meanings. Thus, the second role of shared space is that of a producer of meanings. However, the nature and type of meanings are dependent on the socio-cultural context of the community. In the Period of evolving community, the Community House symbolized the positive drive of Kuusikylä and opportunities to enjoy collective life with neighbours.

The Community House also functioned as a platform that enhanced or constrained collaboration between the residents. Thus, the third role of shared space is, perhaps not a medium of self-regulation, as was the case with the individual environmental transactions with the dwelling, but that of a medium of integration or disintegration.

Figure 6 showed that at different times the same material infrastructure had almost the opposite impact, positive or negative. The impact, however, was reinforced when the triple roles of shared space worked together. It is through these different roles that the impact takes place on the everyday life of women and men who are in charge of care.

The shared space is a necessary but not a sufficient condition

The different phases or periods of dwelling in the case study showed clearly, how the shared space was necessary for the evolvment of collective action and emergence of a communal culture. It enabled a certain transcendence of tensions between different sexes and ages, types of residents, as well as formal and informal activities. The Community House and activities around it were almost like a supportive infrastructure of everyday life, which was

able to sustain activities and interactions in the long run. It showed that materiality formed the basis of the Intermediary level (Figure 1), by being able to enhance the building, but also by demolishing communality, when it was no longer accessible. Thus, it can be said that shared space is a necessary condition for constructing and maintaining community.

However, the return of the Community House to the residents after ten years of absence did not transform the culture of Kuusikylä into that of vibrant communality. The dwelling form of Kuusikylä had meanwhile adopted the normal Finnish way of living and the status quo continued irrespective of the opportunity to use semi-public collective spaces. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the shared space is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for communality. The action model of the New Everyday Life-approach (Figure 1) demonstrates that the functional basis of the intermediary level also requires, in addition to the material infrastructure, a variety of activities (local care, local production etc.) and appropriate social organization.

The significance of shared space for gender roles and care

The construction of gender identity takes place through action in time and space, but it is culturally dependent on who spends time, where, how and why. The case study showed that self-planning reproduces existing gender roles, which do not easily change within the nuclear family (Figure 5). Although the Kuusikylä-case did not quite reach the ideals of the BiG-model, its short Period of evolving community revealed signs of how collective reproduction in and around the Community House can transform and expand the gender roles of men and women, girls and boys. This in turn might have affected the construction of gender identities.

Over 60 years ago, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) claimed that “one is not born, but becomes a woman”. This influential statement was followed by the recognition that gender deviates from the biological sex and is a social construction. Currently, gender is considered a dynamic and relational concept that refers to individual, inter-relational and institutional phenomena. “Doing gender+ in context” is something that has to be recognized or deconstructed in all gender-aware activities that intersect with class, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The dwelling process has an indirect role in the reproduction of gender depending on the amount of time women and men or boys and girls devote to the domestic chores, in the kitchen, in the garage or in shared facilities, such as the Community House. It is the temporal and spatial patterns of activities that reproduce the images of gender which, in turn, have an impact on the identity of the person (Figure 5). However, the process is affected by the cultural patterns that open new opportunities or constrain the choices of individual residents or households.

This study has corroborated the previous results showing that cohousing does contribute to an up-scaling of the gender roles of women and men and thus enhances equality among the sexes. It has also shown the significance of shared space for the building and maintaining of

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community which in turn is one of the driving forces for expanding this form of dwelling all over the world.

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