

International Conference
UTOPIAN STUDIES SOCIETY/EUROPE
Valencia – 2-5 July 2025

Carla Danani – University of Macerata
Co-Housing: seeds for Utopia?



Smart solutions and educational programs for anti-fragility and inclusivity





Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

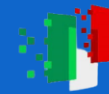
CISU

CENTRO
INTERUNIVERSITARIO
PER LO STUDIO
DELLE UTOPIE

ABSTRACT

Cohousing: seeds for utopia? Ageing populations demand new housing models that ensure dignity and sustainability across generations. Utopian dwelling envision spaces that balance equality, security, and environmental stewardship, ensuring that both present and future generations thrive in interconnected, resilient environments. Co-housing and social housing can provide solutions, fostering intergenerational justice and building anti-fragility by creating supportive communities.

Project VITALITY – Antifragility and Inclusion - This work has been funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU under the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) National Innovation Ecosystem grant ECS00000041 - VITALITY – CUP D83C22000710005



1. UTOPIA



eu-topos - no
- good

Two elements characteristic of utopia:

- a) form: its function, which is critical and transformative
- b) content: it refers to something that is understood as “good”, but not yet realised

Utopian thinking

critiques the status quo and
imagines alternative social arrangements





Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



2. CO-HOUSING

I propose reflecting on co-housing as a means of expressing the dual nature (critical and proactive) of utopian intentionality.

As always, in the case of utopia, co-housing can only foreshadow the ideal place, identifying levers to work on to build it, without claiming to be its fulfilment.

Co-housing: a “heavy marker”

The hypothesis is that,
on one hand – from a critical-functional perspective – it can serve as an emancipatory reflection on modern ways of living, and
on the other – from a content perspective – as a proposal for lifestyles that overcome the critical issues of today.



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

CISU
CENTRO
INTERUNIVERSITARIO
PER LO STUDIO
DELLE UTOPIE



Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



Utopia and Co-Housing - a long history of friendship

Thomas More in *Utopia* describes communal meals in large dining halls.

Three hundred years later, Fourier proposed a communal lifestyle in the Phalansteries, which included communal dining halls, schools, kindergartens, libraries, lecture halls, a theater, and other shared facilities for everyone.

Alice Constance Austin – in 1915 - in her plans for the Llano del Rio colony (founded by Job Harriman in 1861), proposed a town of houses without kitchens, replaced by centralized facilities that served ready-made meals (the project was never realized due to lack of funds).

Marie Stevens Howland (1836–1921) also envisioned houses without kitchens, but with designated spaces for childcare. She imagined cities with collective, free kitchens and laundries, viewing collective services as a way to support women's independence.

A hundred years later, in 2016, architect Anna Puigjaner received the Wheelwright Prize from Harvard University for her “Kitchenless” project, along with a \$100,000 grant to research existing models of communal housing worldwide.

See Dolores Hayden: **Seven American Utopias. The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism 1790-1975**. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1977.

See M. Iribarren, **Utopian Dreams in the New World and for the New Woman: The Influence of Utopian Socialism in First Wave Feminism. The Case of Marie Howland and Topolobampo's Community**, in **HISPANIA NOVA. Revista de Historia Contemporánea**, 18, 2020, pp. 380-418.

See Vestbro, Dick Urban (ed.). **Living Together – Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World**. Proceedings from the international collaborative housing conference in Stockholm, 5–9 May 2010. Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology.

<https://kollektivhus.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Livingtogetherwebb-1.pdf> (retrieved 01.06.2025)



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

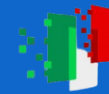




Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



About the «CO» in co-housing

The prefix “co” generally **refers to all the realities** through which we establish (different) connections of existence:

other human beings – all the people or those who share specific characteristics (age, gender, income, political ideas, ethnicity, etc.);

other living beings;

natural inorganic elements;

and mechanical devices.

Therefore, “co” **means a variety of relations and practices:**

social Connectivity,

resource sharing,

learning and mentorship,

enhanced community resilience

place belonging

technological literacy.



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

CISU
CENTRO
INTERUNIVERSITARIO
PER LO STUDIO
DELLE UTOPIE



Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



Co-housing as utopian hermeneutical key

The concept of **‘co’ cannot be limited by a perimeter.**

‘Everything hangs together’
is the maxim of integral ecology

The fact of living together reveals a **normative consistency**

- one cannot live except as living-with,
- this raises the question: how to make the fulfillment of shared life possible?



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

CISU

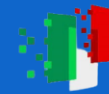
CENTRO
INTERUNIVERSITARIO
PER LO STUDIO
DELLE UTOPIE



Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



Utopian claim and its pathologies

Risks:

Exclusion

Subjugation

Suggestions from the spatial side

universal designs

space syntax

shared space balanced with dedicated and isolated spaces

Suggestions from the social side

Financial accessibility

Deliberative approaches to decisions making

Co-creation/Co-transformation of spaces

Focus on education and mentorship

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Celebrate intergenerational activities



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA





Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



Utopian thinking: critical and proactive

While the intersection of utopia, intergenerational justice, and co-housing presents attractive possibilities, it is crucial to engage critically with these concepts for presenting “co-housing” as a valuable utopian hermeneutical key.

First, from a synchronic point of view, the activation of utopian ideals through co-housing confronts systemic barriers such as familiarity bias, income obstacles and a general prevailing market-oriented real estate ideology that privileges profit over people. Moreover, it may inadvertently reproduce existing social inequalities, because the myth of community resilience can mask structural inequalities present in society.

Secondly, from a diachronic perspective, intergenerational reciprocity, while noble in theory, raises questions about the equity of responsibility and what is expected from different age groups.

Third, a new approach to the natural world. It requires deep ontological reflection, beyond any dualisms and all forms of separation and disjunction between human as subjects and non human beings as mere objects. However, an ontology capable of value differences. A purely pragmatic approach to environmental ethics based on utilitarian perspectives is not enough.

In conclusion, we can say that **the concept of “co-housing” has the potential to serve as a utopian hermeneutic key**, transforming the current reality toward greater intergenerational justice, as it offers utopian intentionality a framework that highlights various aspects to focus on. However, the question requires careful examination and active engagement with many potential issues.

Anyway, utopian thinking should always be both critical and proactive.

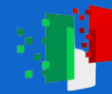




Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



Literature

Hayden Dolores, *Seven American Utopias. The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism 1790-1975*, Cambridge (Mass), MIT Press 1977

Id., *The Grand Domestic Revolution. A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1981

UhligGünther, *Kollektivmodell 'Einkuchenhaus'. Wohnreform und Architekturdebatte zwischen Frauenbewegung und Funktionalismus 1900-1933*, Berlin, Werkbund Archiv 6, Anabas 1981

Austin Alice Constance, *Building a Socialist City*, in «The Western Comrade» 4, no. 6, October 1916 <https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/>

Iribarren M., *Utopian Dreams in the New World and for the New Woman: The Influence of Utopian Socialism in First Wave Feminism. The Case of Marie Howland and Topolobambo's Community*, in «HISPANIA NOVA. Revista de Historia Contemporánea», 18, 2020, 380-418

VestbroDick Urban , (ed.). *Living Together – Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World*. Proceedings from the international collaborative housing conference in Stockholm 5–9 May 2010, Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology.

<https://kollektivhus.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Livingtogetherwebb-1.pdf>

Benevolo Leonardo, *Origins of Modern Town Planning*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1971

Horelli Liisa –Vestbro Dick Urban, *Design for Gender Equality: The History of Co-Housing Ideas and Realities*, in “Built Environment”, July 2012

Vestbro Dick Urban *Living together – Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World. Proceedings from the international collaborative housing conference in Stockholm 5–9 May 2010*, Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology, [https://kollektivhus.se/wp-](https://kollektivhus.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Livingtogetherwebb-1.pdf)

[content/uploads/2017/06/Livingtogetherwebb-1.pdf](https://kollektivhus.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Livingtogetherwebb-1.pdf)

Ricoeur Paul, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York, Columbia University Press 1986

Mannheim Karl, *Ideologie und Utopie*, Bonn, Cohen 1929 (Engl. transl. *Ideology and Utopia*, London, Routledge 1998).



unimc
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION



www.safina-vitality.it

This work has been funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU under the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) National Innovation Ecosystem grant ECS00000041 - VITALITY - CUP n° D83C22000710005.

I punti di vista e le opinioni espresse sono tuttavia solo quelli degli autori e non riflettono necessariamente quelli dell'Unione europea o della Commissione europea.
Né l'Unione europea né la Commissione europea possono essere ritenute responsabili per essi.



Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA

