



The definition and taxonomy of collaborative housing as bottom-up and community-based forms of meeting housing needs in Poland

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Abstract

The concept of collaborative housing emerged in Poland less than a decade ago. From the historical perspective, living in a community has a long tradition. In Poland, the first projects operating similarly to collaborative housing initiatives emerged right after World War I, when destroyed cities experienced scarcity of flats and houses. Currently, the form and conditions to be met by projects in order to be classified into collaborative housing as understood nowadays are changing. The concept is based on collaborative housing projects successfully operating in the countries of Western Europe. In Poland, only few such investments have been established (Nowe Żerniki, Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa Pomorze and Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa Konstancin – this project is constructed with support of Habitat for Humanity Poland). In the face of the ongoing socio-economic changes, however, they might become an interesting alternative to commercial housing construction. The aim of this article is to summarise the current knowledge on collaborative housing, including its definition and taxonomy. The author conducted desk research and analysed the works of leading researchers investigating co-housing in Europe. The article takes the form of a review.

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Keywords

- collaborative housing
- bottom-up housing
- community-based housing
- sharing economy
- economy and finance

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Introduction

Housing plays a vital role in the life of every person, and the right to housing has been incorporated in many international regulations (Rataj, 2018, Lis, 2008). An example of the oldest international deed recognising the right to housing among the fundamental rights is the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (United Nations, n.d.). Article 25(1) of the Declaration emphasises the need to provide for adequate housing to everyone.

In Poland, this area has been dominated for years by the ownership trend. Research conducted by Rubaszek and Czerniak in 2016 in a group of 1005 adult Poles showed a low share of commercial tenancy in Poland. Over 60% of the respondents claimed that owning a home was more cost-effective than renting one and gave greater sense of freedom and independence (Rubaszek & Czerniak, 2017). Research conducted by Lis, Rataj and Suszyńska in 2021 in a group of 407 students at Polish universities confirmed the trends observed by Rubaszek and Czerniak (Lis et al., 2022). The authors noted that strong preference for ownership appears as early as in the 18–25 age group: the answer ‘I prefer owning a home, regardless of any other incentives’ was chosen by 46% of the respondents, while 83% of the respondents planned to buy/build their own flat or house by 2030. The socio-cultural changes observed over the last two decades affect many economic sectors, including residential housing construction. Trends such as sharing, community, democratisation, the ethical aspect of human activity, caring for sustainable development and the natural environment are all gaining on importance. Their incorporation into the area of housing has offered a chance for the development of a new² paradigm – collaborative housing (CH). The contemporary collaborative housing is a revived idea of an old movement. For ages, people have organised themselves together to pursue various social goals, including raising children or eating meals. Technological advancement as well as social and cultural changes have resulted in abandoning group life in favour of individualism. In the late 20th century, however, people started to discover anew the potential of community, including in the place of residence.³

The concept of collaborative housing is based on projects successfully operating in the countries of Western Europe. In Poland, only few such investments have

² In the context of international research, the contemporary form of collaborative housing is a new paradigm. The first CH-like movements, though, emerged in Poland as early as in 1970.

³ In the literature on the subject referring to the history and sources of collaborative housing, authors discuss utopian visions of Plato or More (e.g. McCamant & Durrett, 1989; Twardoch, 2017a; Vestbro, 2000). The author of this article, however, decided to focus on the 20th century housing initiatives, as they belonged to the first actually completed investments, which also served as an inspiration for the contemporary collaborative housing.

been established so far (Nowe Żerniki, Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa Pomorze). They might, however, become an interesting alternative to commercial housing.

The works of Polish researchers aimed at systematising the knowledge about collaborative housing are mainly based on the taxonomy proposed by A. Twardoch in 2017 (Twardoch, 2017a). The research in this area, however, has developed significantly since then. Furthermore, in March 2023, the Act of 4 November 2022 on Collaborative Housing Projects and Rules of Transferring Real Property Belonging to Municipal Housing Stock to Support Housing Investment (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 28) entered into force in Poland. In the author's opinion, systematising the definitions found in the literature on the subject will allow us to carry out research in this area, including determining the potential and limitations involved in the new forms of cohabitation, and it will additionally enable cross-country comparisons among countries.

This article aims at situating Polish collaborative housing within the domain of European research on cooperation-based housing. It is thus a summary of the current knowledge on collaborative housing, including its definition and taxonomy. The article takes the form of a review.

Literature review

Collaborative housing – definitions

The reasons for the semantic inconsistency of the term “collaborative housing” may be sought in its translations and varying interpretations. The term is often used interchangeably with the term “cohousing” which has a much narrower meaning. The efforts of Polish authors and practitioners to adapt the term “collaborative housing” to the Polish context have resulted in a variety of equivalents, such as: *kooperatywy mieszkaniowe* (~collaborative housing), *budownictwo wspólnotowe* (~community housing), *budownictwo kooperatywne* (~cooperative housing), *budownictwo partycypacyjne* (~participatory housing), *oddolne budownictwo mieszkaniowe* (~bottom-up residential housing), *współzamieszkiwanie* (~co-living) or *współdzielenie* (~sharing). Each of those equivalents embodies certain elements of the CH definition but, in the majority of cases, they convey meanings that correspond to other forms of collaborative housing, which is a narrower semantic category (see: Collaborative housing – taxonomy).

The first projects of this type appeared in the 1970s in Liverpool (Czischke et al., 2020), but the literature on the subject most often refers to Danish initiatives

from 1988. These communities are called “bofællesskaber” in Danish, which may be translated (word for word) as “living communities”, and for which the term “cohousing” was proposed. They were a response to the limited ability to meet housing needs, isolation and impractical nature of the existing housing stock (McCamant & Durrett, 1989).

Later works in which the phenomenon of living together was discussed indicated that cohousing is a specific section of the broad area of collaborative housing. In 2010, Vestbro (2010) proposed the term “co-housing” as an umbrella term for community initiatives, and distinguished the following: cohousing, collaborative housing, collective housing, communal housing, commune and cooperative housing. Vestbro (2010) defined cohousing as a housing with common space and shared facilities, collaborative housing as housing oriented towards collaboration by residents, in collective housing he emphasised the collective organisation of services, communal housing was characterised as housing for togetherness and sense of community, commune as living without individual apartments and cooperative housing as cooperative ownership without common space or shared facilities.

In the foreign literature, CH is treated as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of housing forms with different degrees of collective self-organisation (Czischke et al., 2020; Lang et al., 2020). Depending on the definition, various characteristics are underlined, which usually include: shared areas, non-hierarchical decision making, social interactions and activities undertaken together (Czischke et al., 2020). Other important characteristics also include the creation of private areas in addition to shared ones (Fromm, 2012; Lietaert, 2010; Marcus, 2000; Vestbro, 2000), broad participation in organisation, decision making and financial processes (Bamford & Lennon, 2008; McCamant & Durrett, 1989; Tummers, 2016). A review of the most important definitions may be found in Table 1.

In Table 1, the author refers to international definitions of collaborative housing, because this trend has been present in Europe for years and is relatively well investigated. As an effect of exchange of international experience, a working group has been established, led by Czischke, which meets at annual European Network for Housing Research (ENHR) conferences as well as numerous academic seminars for CH. However, publications on this topic in Poland are scarce and narrow in scope.

Furthermore, Table 1 also demonstrates how the definition of collaborative housing has been evolving over years, which has been impacted by the popularisation such projects as well as development of research in this area. The last definition, proposed by (Czischke et al., 2021), was discussed in detail at the ENHR conference in 2021. In the opinion of the author of this article, it is a definition which may be adapted to the Polish context. Some of its elements only start to develop in Poland, such as the environmentally-friendly approach to housing investments, but research conducted by Lis, Rataj and Suszyńska reveal that this type of approach is gaining on importance among the young generation (Lis et al., 2022).

Table 1. Review of collaborative housing definitions over the years

Source	Definition
McCamant & Durrett, 1988	Co-housing: Each household has a private living space but also shares extensive common areas with a larger group, such as a kitchen and dining room, children's playrooms, workshops, guest rooms or laundry rooms.
Fromm, 1991	Collaborative housing includes various types of housing with shared facilities.
Vestbro, 1997	Cohousing is a part of collective housing, cohousing (Danish: bofællesskab), where a group of people initiate and plan their housing cluster collectively, and where indoor communication is not required; often with other communal facilities than a central kitchen.
Fromm, 2000	Cohousing has private dwellings and common facilities, and is planned and managed by residents. Cohousing's innovations put a greater emphasis on shared evening meals, common house use and design for social contact. A cohousing community consists of individual households with private dwellings and shared common facilities. The layout and design of the community strive to enhance social contact.
Vestbro, 2000	Collective housing is defined as housing with more communal spaces or collectively organised facilities than in conventional housing.
Fromm, 2012	Aside from autonomous housing units and the provision of shared common facilities, including – but not limited to – a kitchen, dining hall and meeting room. This housing type includes a strong social dimension. Before moving in, residents have the intention to balance the privacy of their independent households with the creation of a community in which they will participate.
Vestbro, 2010	Collaborative housing means housing with more space and services for communal use than are to be found in conventional housing. Households from several generations and relationships, who prefer to share spaces and facilities such as meals, may live in such housing.
Tummers, 2016	Contemporary co-housing is wider than the community-oriented model designed by the co-housing movement in the 1970s. Contemporary co-housing is a resident-led practice that provides a realistic and qualitative solution for highly committed citizens. Co-housing is promoted as an opportunity for more sustainable urban development, and top-down urban development may perceive co-housing groups as resilient agents of change, specifically for brownfield development and gentrification. Furthermore, co-housing is part of a wider movement looking for new practices to mediate local identity and globalisation, self-reliance and state-provision, introducing pluri-value instead of monetary-based economic models.
Lang et al., 2020	CH represents an umbrella term, less restrictive and broader than classic co-housing (Fromm, 1991; McCamant & Durrett, 1994), inclusive of many international models and variations. The term 'co-housing' or 'cohousing' is widely used to refer to different versions of the housing model that originated in Denmark in the 1960s, called bofællesskab, which was translated into English by McCamant and Durrett as 'cohousing' in the late 1980s. Over time, however, the use of this term has become conflated with other distinct forms of collective self-organised and self-managed housing. In this paper, we subscribe to the original, narrower definition of co-housing as a specific housing form, to differentiate it from other forms of collaborative housing.

Table 1 continued

Source	Definition
Czischke et al., 2021	Collaborative housing can be understood as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of housing forms with different degrees of collective self-organisation. Central to this type of housing is the presence of a significant level of collaboration amongst (future) residents, as well as between them and external actors and/or stakeholders, with a view to realising the housing project. In this sense, the term collaboration stands for coordinated action towards a common purpose. This collaboration can take place at different stages of the project – sometimes from the conception, design and development – and may extend to the daily maintenance and management of the housing. Collaborative housing forms can vary in terms of tenure, legal and organisational characteristics. Common attributes include a high degree of social contact between the residents and the presence, to different extents, of shared goals and motives in relation to the housing project, such as ecological sustainability and social inclusion. In many cases, these values also extend to the project’s external environment.

Source: own work based on referred literature.

On 1 March 2023, the Act of 4 November 2022 on Collaborative Housing Projects and Rules of Transferring Real Property Belonging to Municipal Housing Stock to Support Housing Investment (the Collaborative Housing Act) entered into force in Poland. The authors of the Collaborative Housing Act took international experience as a model. Pursuant to the Act, the goal of establishing a collaborative housing project is an investment and construction project aimed at meeting the housing needs of the members or their children, whether biological or adopted, and of their household members (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 28). The housing needs are to be satisfied generally by purchasing a plot of land and constructing a multi-family building or several single-family houses there (if the total number of dwellings is more than two), or, alternatively, by purchasing a plot of land with at least one building erected and carrying out construction works there so that after the completion of such works the said land property will have a building or buildings consisting of several residential dwellings or a single-family house or houses with no converted dwelling (if the total number of such dwellings or single-family houses with no converted dwelling is more than two). The Act also underlines the necessity for the collaborative housing project members to work together for the purpose of pursuing the residential project, so it introduces the aspect of active involvement of the future dwellers along with the joint and several liability for the obligations incurred in connection with the project.

Collaborative housing – taxonomy

One of the first authors who has dealt with the topic of contemporary collaborative housing in Poland is Twardoch (2017a). In her articles and conference lectures, she has focused on the bottom-up residential housing and its three types: small housing cooperatives, construction groups and cohousing (Twardoch, 2017b). International research, however, suggests that bottom-up residential housing is a much broader phenomenon, encompassing also other initiatives. A classification of collaborative housing proposed by (Czischke et al., 2021) reveals an abundance of bottom-up initiatives. The semantically broadest collaborative housing is divided into two large groups: community housing, the main goal of which is to live together, and collective self-provision, the aim of which is to create affordable housing by future users. Community housing encompasses three sub-groups: cohousing, eco-villages and living groups. Cohousing is one of the most popular initiatives, including in Poland. An example thereof is *Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa “Nowe Żerniki”*. Furthermore, cohousing also shows potential in its specific variety: senior cohousing, which allows older people to live together, share some areas and increase social interactions. Another community housing type, eco-villages, assumes living within an environmentally-friendly community. An example of such a place in Poland may be the project created by the organisation *Fundacja Pomocy Wzajemnej Barka* in Chudobczyce, where an eco-farm is run. The last type of community housing, the living group, means living together as a single household. In Poland, an example of this type of initiative may be squats. One of the most recognisable squats in Poland was the (now closed) squat at the Old Town Square in Poznań.

The second group, collective self-provision, includes such initiatives as: collective self-development (building groups), the goal of which is to build flats together, in Poland exemplified by *Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa Pomorze*, collective self-help, aimed at remodelling uninhabited buildings, non-profit housing, housing cooperatives and community land trusts. Housing cooperatives are further divided into rental housing and ownership-based housing.

In Polish conditions, collaborative housing is mainly based on its narrower form – cohousing. The specific features defining this type of housing differ from those adopted in the international classifications. The differences are mainly due to limited common spaces, while the similarities are related to tenant participation during the investment process. Since the definition proposed by Czischke is broad, it is also worth applying it to the Polish context, which is also due to the fact that the Act on Housing Cooperatives (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 28) does not define a cooperative as such, but only the rules of cooperation between members of a housing cooperative and the rules of disposal of real estate belonging to the municipal real estate stock to support the implementation of housing investments.

Let us note that the taxonomy of collaborative housing as proposed by (Czischke et al., 2021) is an ideal type, which is to help classify new bottom-up housing projects and allow international comparative research. The social reality, however, may differ from the ideal type, so it is possible that this taxonomy will evolve further.

Findings

Collaborative housing is increasingly more often discussed by the academia, and steadily begins to find its place in the mainstream discussion as well. The definition of collaborative housing developed over years by authors investigating this topic underlines that these are housing initiatives demonstrating various degrees of sharing (space, equipment, actions) among individual households, with considerable participation of dwellers in the conceptual, planning, construction management and revival processes (Tummers, 2015; Vestbro, 2000). The key features of CH include: dwellers' participation in the costs of dwelling construction and design, infrastructure fostering social integration, and democratisation of housing stock management (Tummers, 2016). Other features that are characteristic of this type of investment include: extensive shared areas, non-hierarchical structure as well as separate sources of income of the particular households (McCamant & Durrett, 2011).

Conclusion

Collaborative housing is a broad term within which a number of other, narrower terms may be found. Depending on the goal and motivation of the future dwellers, the form of the project, or ownership type, the area of research may be narrowed to a specific section of CH. The projects pursued in Poland, despite a common name of *Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa* ("collaborative housing project"), belong to different CH categories: cohousing (*Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa Nowe Żerniki*) and construction group (*Kooperatywa Mieszkaniowa Pomorze*).

From the perspective of international comparative research, it seems interesting to explore differences in the definition and understanding (also by tenants) of the concept of collaborative housing, as well as barriers to the possibility of developing such initiatives. In addition, it would be interesting to see if historical, social and cultural conditions influence the conceptualisation of collaborative housing.

According to the authors' previous research, it is important to underline that in Poland we have limited possibility to implement collaborative housing (Lis et al., 2023). The research shows the barriers to collaborative housing in Poland from the perspective of young people. The ownership of a dwelling is still a synonym of success for young people in Poland, which shows that the concept of collaborative housing is still not broadly known or desired by young people in Poland. The above-mentioned study (Lis et al., 2023) indicates that collaborative housing in Poland is incidental, but this form of residence can nevertheless be relevant for the development of affordable housing in this country.

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