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Living with strangers: exploring motivations and stated preferences for considering co-housing and shared living in Bergen, Norway

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest among urban residents, policy makers, and researchers in co-housing as a socially, environmentally, and sustainable housing alternative. In Norway, however, co-housing is still a relatively unknown and niche housing option among the general population. This paper presents a qualitative research study of potential residents' stated preferences and underlying motivation concerning co-housing and shared living in Norway. We conducted ten semi-structured interviews with potential residents for a co-housing pilot project in the city of Bergen, Norway. We analyzed the data using thematic analysis and categorized different motivational reasons and preferences. The mix of age groups in the sample contributed to understanding differences and similarities in motivation and preferences, as well as the likelihood of converting co-housing interest into action. We found that pragmatism and social motivation were the main drivers for co-housing. Although environmental concerns were ranked second, they were consistently prevalent among the participants. Esthetics – for example, a “wow factor” – were emphasized as important for co-housing building preferences.

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Co-housing; motivation; preferences; qualitative; norway

Introduction

In the context of increasing urbanization, rising housing prices, shrinking living spaces, and loneliness epidemics, co-housing has emerged as a sustainable alternative for urban development (Williams, 2005). However, despite public policy makers' enthusiasm and the growing body of research on the benefits of shared living, co-housing does not appear to be in high demand among the general population in Norway (Giorgi, 2020; Lang et al., 2018; Vestbro & Horelli, 2012; Wechuli, 2017; Williams, 2005). In 2019, according to Statistics Norway, 50% of the population lived in detached houses and 95% lived in single family homes, making co-housing schemes a *de facto* niche housing commodity (SSB, 2020). In 2020, there were 35 co-housing projects in Norway, of which only six were multi-generational co-housing projects, seven were ecovillages, and 22 were shared living schemes reserved for older people (Plan_og_bygningsetaten_i_Oslo, 2021).

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The topic of housing preferences continues to be heavily researched from a variety of theoretical perspectives (Gurran & Bramley, 2017). However, our understanding of the underlying motivation for these preferences is still fragmented (D. F. Clapham et al., 2012). Investigations into the basic driving forces behind engagement in co-housing are even more limited (Lang et al., 2018). Context-specific, in-depth insight into co-housing motivation would not only contribute to a more nuanced body of research, but would also supply valuable information to urban planners, architects, and public policy makers. This knowledge could be used to guide future co-housing design, and to tailor policy incentives that facilitate co-housing demand and/or remove barriers – thus contributing to more sustainable urban development. Correspondingly, the research question guiding this paper is: What motivates individuals to consider a co-housing scheme, and what preferences for shared living do they have?

We took an exploratory approach to the social phenomenon of co-housing, and aimed to produce a detailed, rich picture of individuals' preferences and motivations. Qualitative, in-depth interviews were selected as the method most suitable for this purpose (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Random sampling across age groups and life stages was conducted to 1) obtain insight into any between-group differences that should be examined further; and 2) explore which motivations and preferences were prevalent regardless of individuals' sociodemographic characteristics and life situations.

The study was conducted in Norway, with participants who were living in the city of Bergen. Co-housing projects in Norway are rare and consist predominantly of co-housing communities for older people. To obtain a cross-sectional sample, we recruited participants who did not live in co-housing projects but who explicitly expressed interest in doing so in the future.

In November 2019, as part of the research and innovation project BOPILOT,¹ the Bergen municipal architects office – in conjunction with the architecture firm Leva – conducted a quantitative survey among Bergen residents, mapping interest in shared living (Byarkitekten_i_Bergen, 2019). In total, 7,500 Bergen city residents, aged 20–69, received an invitation via SMS to participate in the survey. Of the 7,500 residents, 766 ($766/7,500 = 10.21\%$) chose to participate, 56% of whom were women and 44% men. We attribute the high proportion of females to the fact that women seem to be more interested in the topic of co-housing, wondering whether men are less interested in participating in digital surveys. The age distribution among the respondents mirrored the age distribution of the population in the municipality, except for those aged 30–39, which were underrepresented in the survey. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported that they have positive attitudes toward shared living, while 20% were unsure how they felt, 11% reported being uninterested, and six percent reported negative attitudes. Furthermore, respondents in the survey were most comfortable with sharing at a neighborhood/community level: for example, sharing community centers, including workshops or hobby rooms, bicycle parking, activity spaces, and greenhouses. Sharing at the building level was less popular: this included libraries (within the building) and spare bedrooms. Moreover, respondents were least interested in sharing areas that are traditionally private (i.e., kitchens and bathrooms). Students

and single parents were most interested in co-housing in the near future (43% and 41%, respectively), while retired residents and couples without children expressed the least interest (13% and 22%, respectively) (Byarkitekten_i_Bergen, 2019).

The BOPILLOT survey produced a list of residents who stated their interest in co-housing, as well as interest in participating in further research. This list was used to recruit 10 participants from the 25–65 age group for face-to-face explorative, in-depth interviews. The data from this study were analyzed using thematic analysis and are expected to be generalizable inferentially, rather than statistically. This study is also expected to be the first of several qualitative investigations of co-housing preferences and experiences in Bergen and Trondheim, another city in Norway. The results from this study may be useful in guiding strategic sampling in future studies, as well as providing a direction for future research on specific target groups and topics of interest.

The Norwegian housing context

In 2020, there were 2,610,040 housing units in Norway. Fifty percent of these were detached houses, 21% were semi-detached houses, 25% were apartment blocks, and five percent were alternative housing solutions. Most residents (82.1%) owned their home, while 17.9% were renting (SSB, 2020). As such, the Norwegian housing market appears to be dominated by detached and semi-detached houses, with most people owning their residence.

Today's housing market reflects historic housing developments and prevailing housing aspirations among many Norwegians. For Norwegians, detached homes are preferable, as they offer space, symbolize affluence and success, and are regarded as a part of Norwegian tradition (Ruud, 2009; Ruud, 2014). Norway has always had low residential density and urbanization lagged behind compared to its European and even Scandinavian neighbors (Guttu, 2003). Sweden and Denmark had over 80% urbanization level already in the 60s, while Norway reached 80% urbanization only in 2013 (NOU, 2015). Considerable focus has been placed on sustainable and environmentally friendly housing construction in Norwegian legislation and regulations, but little on the utilization of space.

High (and increasing) housing prices in Norway are driven by market fundamentals – i.e., high household incomes, accumulation of wealth, low unemployment rates, low interest rates, and a growing population. However, housing prices in the largest cities in Norway are unreasonably high compared to income levels and interest rates. A growing number of individuals in Norway therefore cannot afford homeownership in urban areas, despite having an average income. Each year, Real Estate Norway – a national association for real estate brokerages – calculates a “nurse index”; this index depicts the percentage of the housing market in each city that is affordable for a single nurse, teacher, or police officer. In 2019, only 2.7% of the housing market in Oslo was considered affordable for an average single person; the situation in Norway's three second-largest cities (Bergen, Trondheim, and Stavanger) was significantly better, yet still challenging, with 34, 31, and 34% of the housing market considered affordable (Den norske sykepleierindeksen, 2019).

Co-housing in the contemporary landscape

What is co-housing?

There are many different forms of collaborative living arrangements and a plethora of terms to describe them. The empirical literature reflects this varying terminology (Tummers, 2016). In this paper, co-housing schemes are housing projects that entail participatory development and a form of shared living among a group of residents (Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012). Co-housing projects can be developed from the bottom up, led by grassroots or residential initiatives (Fois & Forino, 2014; Thompson, 2015); from the top down, led by a developer's initiative (D. Clapham et al., 1996); and as an initiative facilitated by local public authorities (Lang et al., 2018; Lang & Novy, 2013). Co-housing projects usually entail private units, semi-private spaces, and shared indoor and outdoor spaces. The design and function of co-housing facilitate and encourage collaboration and interdependence between residents (Giorgi, 2020).

A clear distinction was made for participants in this study between co-housing and flat-sharing or dormitory living: in these latter two (in Norway), residents have their own room but share a bathroom and kitchen and sometimes a common living room. The residence itself is usually an apartment originally built for one household, and spaces are therefore not optimal in terms of privacy, size, or function. In this study, co-housing individual co-housing units are smaller than traditional single household apartments but have all the facilities, including a bathroom and small kitchen. The individual units offer as much privacy as traditional apartments, while shared areas and features offer opportunities for socializing and activities that would otherwise be impossible; these may include a spare bedroom, roof garden, swimming pool, gym, and a community center with a kitchen for larger celebrations and gatherings).

Why co-housing?

Co-housing has captured policy makers' attention as a viable option for the housing market due to its unique characteristics of being economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. Co-housing communities can often be more environmentally friendly than conventional housing because they share resources and space (Crabtree, 2006; Meltzer, 2005). By sharing things and services via co-housing arrangements, Vestbro (2012) argues that the overall consumption of resources per person can be lowered; indeed, cohousing "can be assumed to facilitate behavior change on the grounds that community cooperation is already established and that consumerist lifestyles are often not highly valued" (Vestbro, 2012). There are likely also less visible mechanisms of social control that reduce residents' consumption of unnecessary things. Moreover, co-housing groups are heavily involved in the development of the project from the beginning, and have the opportunity to influence material, technology, and design choices to significantly reduce energy consumption (e.g., solar PV and the Passive House standard) (Jarvis et al., 2016).

Co-housing contributes to economic sustainability through car-sharing, carpooling, sharing common facilities, and beneficial homeownership models. This makes co-housing accessible to groups that struggle in the traditional housing market (Chatterton, 2014).

Shared ownership models in co-housing schemes allow a wide range of affordable housing strategies, including subsidies from local municipalities and community loans (Corfe, 2019).

Finally, numerous studies have demonstrated that mutual support networks and social relations are stronger and more developed in co-housing communities than in residential areas (Marcus & Dovey, 1991; Meltzer, 2000, 2005). Co-housing design and social structure encourage social interaction among neighbors. Indeed, Fromm (2000) found that, in co-housing communities, neighbors interacted up to 400% more frequently than in a traditional residential setting. Co-housing fosters both proximity and the frequency of interactions and thus promotes a sense of community (Hill, 1996); moreover, proximity and frequent unplanned interactions are key determinants of lasting friendships (Rose & Serafica, 1986). Research indicates that friendships and a sense of community help combat loneliness and social isolation (Hopwood & Mann, 2018). This in turn has a positive influence on individuals' quality of life (Steg et al., 2019), which is also an indicator of social sustainability (Dempsey et al., 2011).

While it is useful to distinguish between social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainability for analytical purposes, it is intuitively evident that these aspects are causally interrelated. Economic disparities in populations are reflected in social inequalities, which are reportedly among the causes of environmental degradation (Lehtonen, 2004). Here, the implication is that co-housing's contribution to one aspect of sustainability will have spillover effects to other areas, thus further substantiating the claim that shared living fosters sustainable development. In this study, we qualitatively explored 1) whether participants' preferences and motives are in accordance with all three sustainability aspects; 2) which preferences and motives dominate; and 3) whether there are differences between age groups in the hierarchy of preferences and motives.

Motivation for co-housing

As interest in collective housing and shared living increased over the past two decades, so did the number of studies on co-housing motivations (Lang et al., 2018). Empirical evidence from around the world indicates that potential co-housing residents are motivated by their search for tailored and non-mainstream housing options to support alternative lifestyles – based on ideals of feminism, equality, and cooperation, or induced by digitalization in society (Choi, 2013; Davidova & Zímová, 2018; Jarvis et al., 2016; Roux, 2014; Tummers, 2016; Vestbro & Horelli, 2012; Von Zumbusch & Lalicic, 2020). Others are driven by financial constraints (Green & McCarthy, 2015; Maalsen, 2019), or environmental awareness (Daly, 2017; Lang et al., 2018; Pruvost, 2013; Wang et al., 2021). Several studies have reported co-housing as being motivated by post-modernist, post-capitalist ideology, as well as a form of political expression against segregation or social inequalities (Chatterton, 2016; Cunningham & Wearing, 2013; Delgado, 2012; Pruvost, 2013; Vanolo, 2013). Here, by “post-modernist ideology,” we mean a striving to overcome traditional social relationships and functional urban specialization. In turn, motivation for co-housing driven by post-capitalistic values implies transitioning from consumerist behaviors to those that are socially and ecologically informed.

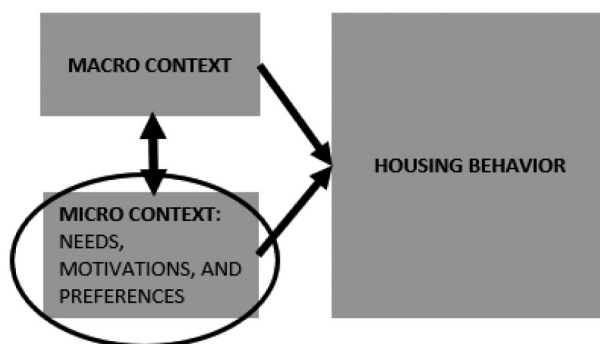


Figure 1. Housing behavior – macro and micro context. Source: authors.

Housing behavior

Housing behavior is a multidisciplinary field that has been approached from a variety of perspectives. Researchers usually distinguish between the macro and micro context: The macro context is represented by the status quo in political, economic, socio-cultural, and housing market conditions that can be summed up in one oft-used concept in housing research: life situation. The micro context includes an individual's values, beliefs, goals, needs, and preferences (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001). Both contexts are intertwined and mutually interdependent; therefore, while this study focused on the micro context in housing behavior, we interpreted the results by taking the macro context into consideration. [Figure 1](#)

Furthermore, housing behavior is a study of housing choices. The focus of the study may be on the process of decision-making (e.g., searching for information and ranking attributes) or the motivational drives triggering and shaping the decision-making process (Boumeester, 2011). This paper examines participants' preferences and motives for entering co-housing, and thus contributes to the body of research on motivational drives.

To understand housing behavior, we must understand the ways in which housing preferences are shaped. Studies of residential preferences distinguish between two types: stated preferences and revealed preferences. Stated preferences are preferences that people say they have, while revealed preferences mirror people's current living circumstances (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001; Timmermans et al., 1994). As new housing and living concepts cannot accurately be assessed via revealed preferences, we focused on stated preferences in this study. If the current housing situation diverges from personal preferences, individuals will have a drive or motivation to move or adjust their expectations in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (Hasu, 2018). It is also worth noting that stated preferences might differ from revealed preferences due to the respondents' social identity: in other words, respondents might report preferences that they believe are in accordance with their social status, rather than those that mirror their true personal preferences.

Materials and methods

We selected a qualitative approach to describe and examine co-housing preferences and motivation, due to the explorative nature of the inquiry and need for rich and detailed data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Participants and recruitment

As a digital survey had already provided quantitative data on some co-housing preferences and their attitudes' distribution based on sociodemographic parameters (Byarkitekten_i_Bergen, 2019), there was no need at this stage to choose a strategic sample based on sociodemographics or life situation. Following the quantitative survey, we examined whether there were aspects that were not included in the survey that should have been, and where we could obtain more detailed description of factors. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to the first ten participants (representing different age groups) who registered in the survey as willing to contribute in further research. Further recruitment was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Of the ten participants, nine were women; moreover, nine were Norwegian nationals and one was a foreign citizen with permanent residence in Norway. None of the participants had significant experience with co-housing, apart from the experience of sharing a flat when they were students. Further sample characteristics relevant to this study are provided in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Source: authors.

Sample size

The sample size for this study was evaluated using Malterud's information power (IP) model, in which the more information the sample contains, the fewer participants are needed. Information density and the spectrum retrieved from the sample depends on the research question(s), the sample specificity, whether or not the theory is well-established, the quality of dialogue, and the analytic strategy. Though the combination of study participants was less specific for the research question, the aim of our study was theoretically informed, the dialogue was robust, and the analysis employed an analytical cross-sample approach. We therefore deemed it appropriate to have only ten participants in the study, as we believed they would yield sufficient information for the study's aim.

Ethical considerations

The interview study was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD), and the data collection process followed NSD's ethical guidelines. All participants received written information about the purpose of the study and interviews. Written consent forms were distributed, and signatures were collected and archived accordingly. Participants' confidentiality was maintained throughout the study; the participants were anonymized during the entire data analysis procedure and also during the dissemination of results.

Procedure

We developed the semi-structured interview guide based on a review of the literature and input from the Bergen municipal architect's office. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in offices at the University of Bergen campus in February 2020. Each interview lasted between 50–65 minutes. Participants were asked the following main questions:

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Respondents	Sex	Age	Cultural background	Household size	Household composition	Co-housing experience	Living arrangements today	Location	Tenure	Profession related to sustainable living
1	Female	25–35	Norwegian	3	3 adults	3 adults	student shared apartments	student shared apartment	Central	Renting
2	Male	35–50	Norwegian	5	2 adults 3 children	2 adults 3 children	student shared apartments	Detached house	15–	20 min driving to the city center
3	Female	50–70	Norwegian	2	1 adult 1 child	1 adult 1 child	none	Apartment	Central	Renting
4	Female	35–50	Norwegian	2	2 adults	2 adults	student shared apartments	Detached house	15–	20 min driving to the city center
5	Female	35–50	non-Norwegian	4	4	4	2 adults 2 children	student shared apartments	Semi-	detached house
6	Female	25–35	Norwegian	1	1 adult	1 adult	student shared apartments	Apartment	15–	20 min driving to the city center
7	Female	25–35	Norwegian	2	2 adults	2 adults	student shared apartments	Apartment	15–	20 min driving to the city center
8	Female	35–50	Norwegian	4	2 adults 2 children	2 adults 2 children	student shared apartments	Detached house	15–	20 min driving to the city center
9	Female	50–70	Norwegian	1	1 adult	1 adult	none	subsidized apartment	15–	20 min driving to the city center
10	Female	50–70	Norwegian	1	1 adult	1 adult	Shared holiday apartments	Detached house	15–	20 min driving to the city center
Owning	No									

Source: authors.

- What prompted your interest in co-housing?
- How familiar are you with co-housing?
- Why do you find shared living interesting?
- What do you imagine your life will be like if you move into co-housing?
- How might your ideal co-housing look and function?
- What do you think about living collectively with people from different vulnerable groups?
- What are your main concerns about living collectively?

Based on participants' responses to the questions above, we asked follow-up questions to obtain more detailed descriptions and understandings. The interviews were audio recorded with the interviewees' permission, and then transcribed verbatim. While the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Norwegian, specific quotes were translated to English for this article; the quotes may therefore be grammatically incorrect and may have lost some of their character, but the meaning was preserved. In addition, post-interview impression notes were logged and used in the interpretative aspect of the data analysis.

Data analysis

We conducted an inductive analysis; in other words, while it was grounded in the data, the discussions around and interpretation of the data were also informed by prior research. Further, we based the data analysis on the critical realist perspective on knowledge (Smith, 2015), and used thematic analysis as a qualitative method. The aim of the analysis was to organize the data in a meaningful way to demonstrate participants' co-housing motivations and preferences. The organization and analysis of the data followed these seven steps, as recommended by Clarke and BraUN (2016), p. 1) *familiarization with the data*, in which we listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts several times; 2) *generating initial codes*, in which we used inductive open coding to name initial codes and code the transcripts; 3) *searching for themes*, in which we critically analyzed the codes and grouped them into enveloping themes; 4) *reviewing themes*, in which we revised the themes several times, ensuring that they were distinct from other themes and internally coherent and consistent; 5) *defining and naming themes*, in which we interpreted the themes further and gave them analytically meaningful names, and identified thematic extracts; 6) *generating a thematic network*, in which we produced and evaluated several variants of thematic constellations based on the previous research and their relevance to the research question; and 7) *producing the report*, in which we interpreted and reported the themes and assessed their interconnections, ensuring that all reported analytical claims were congruent with the thematic extracts.

Limitations

As noted earlier, nine of the ten participants were women. Interviewees were recruited from the respondents who participated in the BOPILOT survey, of which 56% were women. The overrepresentation of women in the survey is thus mirrored in the present study: this represents a limitation, and future studies should include more men to

investigate whether additional or similar themes and points of view are present. Another limitation is that the present study’s recruitment strategy was based on residents’ initiative, which might have resulted in a more positive overall attitude toward co-housing than if residents who were less positive toward co-housing had been interviewed.

Results and discussion

The research question targeted participants’ motivations and preferences for co-housing in Norway. Based on this question, two clusters of themes emerged from the data analysis: one pertaining to motivation and underlying values, and another centering on the participants’ stated preferences. In this study “preference” is defined as an expression of the relative attractiveness of an attribute, function, or context. While preference alone does not guarantee action, it can guide choice and influence co-housing decision-making (Boumeester, 2011). Here, we adopt the understanding that motivation and preferences are conceptually related (see Figure 2): in other words, that motivation can shape and change preferences (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001).

Motivation

Motivation-related themes that emerged during the interviews mirrored key aspects of sustainable living: social motivation, pragmatic, individual utility-oriented motivation, and environmental motivation.

Social motivation

Motivation connected to some form of social interaction was the most explored theme among participants. Based on the research question and thematic framing in this study, we further divided this theme into four subthemes: *emotional*, *self-realization*, *professional*, and *social inclusion* (see Figure 3). We explore each of these themes in detail below.

Emotional. In psychology, emotion can be described as a complex state of feeling resulting in physical and psychological changes that influence thought and behavior (Fox, 2008). In a somewhat simplified perspective, we understand emotion to be a motivating force behind behavior. Nostalgia and the wish to recreate childhood experiences and sense of community was mentioned by all but the oldest participants. As one participant recounted,

I have an idea that I like very much ... I often think about where I grew up (...). It was quite dense but a really nice suburban neighborhood and when it was the football championship, usually in June, families used to gather in the evenings and watch football games ... people just sat on their terraces together with their neighbors and watched football.

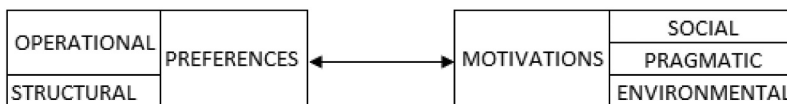


Figure 2. Thematic categories. Source: authors.

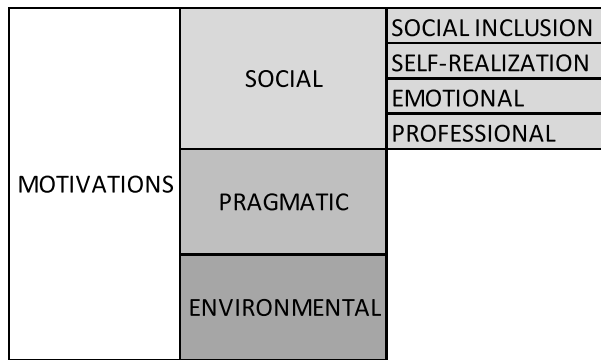


Figure 3. Subthemes for social motivation. Source: authors.

This sense of community and belonging was the highest prioritized and most elaborated upon social motive expressed by participants. As another explained:

It is the sense of community among the neighbors that is the best part of all . . . and that it is an optimal way of living if you think about the number of square meters necessary per person . . . but for me it is the social aspect that I find most appealing, yeah . . . that you have all those informal small daily interactions in common spaces.

Numerous previous studies mirror the above sentiment, reporting how co-housing enables increased social interaction through proximity and social design (Fromm, 2000; Hill, 1996). Prior research has also indicated that communal living aids in combating loneliness (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Hopwood & Mann, 2018). In the present study, participants over 50 years of age were aware of the potential of loneliness and social isolation. All three participants in this age group expressed their wish to live surrounded by other people, and to feel part of a community. The youngest participants reflected on this issue by referring to their family and relatives who lived alone and isolated, suggesting that a co-housing scheme could be a life-long solution for avoiding loneliness at any age.

Participants with children living at home also contemplated loneliness and social isolation; however, unlike the younger and older participants, this group expressed that they were not yet ready to move into a co-housing project. Instead, they considered it an option for when their children moved out. One participant explained, laughing:

I took the common road and ended up with a detached house in a suburb, garage, two cars, two kids and a dog . . . full of stuff . . . I think our family needs more time to mature a bit to consider a co-housing scheme . . . I live with what a colleague of mine calls a “squirrel” of a husband . . . a collector of things . . . I mean he just became like that because we can afford it . . . he is not so keen on sharing . . . “Sharing your tools is like sharing your wife,” he says.

For participants in this stage of life, the need to belong does not appear to be essential (or perhaps it is already satisfied in other ways); the prospect of loneliness is a hypothetical potential issue for the future, to be considered pragmatically.

Professional. Here, we define “professional” motivation as motivation that is initiated and guided by the participant’s formal education or vocation. This subtheme was singled out within the social subtheme, as it emerged organically and was evident across the

sample. It was considered a social motivation since it pertains to an individual's achievements, confidence, and self-esteem. Participating in a co-housing scheme would therefore strengthen an individual's image and perception of themselves and communication of their personal and social identity to others (UN, 2016). A participant described it in the following way:

I find it fascinating to follow how it is all planned when it comes to urban planning, if they actually manage to think holistically and have a big picture in mind or are they still building with one project in mind at a time?

All but the two oldest participants had a profession that was in some way related to sustainable living. In the sample, there were urban planners, geographers, and people working in the recycling field, sustainable product design, and renewable energy. The two participants who did not have a vocational connection with sustainability were actively engaged in grassroots sustainable living initiatives. In this study, the sample was over-represented by residents with firsthand knowledge and an above-average interest in sustainable practices. This may have been a result of a biased recruitment strategy, as recruitment was based on individuals' expressed and active interest. It may also confirm the idea that co-housing is a relatively unknown form of housing in Norway today, and only those with a special interest in it would be potential residents.

Social inclusion. In this article, we follow the United Nation's definition of social inclusion: namely, "the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights" (UN, 2016, p. 19). Although social inclusion-related narratives did not emerge during interviews organically, the interviewer initiated and investigated them. This could imply that respondents were not considering co-living with people in vulnerable groups or that it was not perceived as an issue and therefore not mentioned. Their responses to follow-up questions indicated that they had mixed feelings and concerns pertaining to co-housing with those belonging to vulnerable groups.

The first set of code categories belonging to this subtheme clustered around the discussion of whether the participants preferred age-homogenic or multi-generational co-housing schemes. Only one older participant expressed a preference for age-homogenic arrangements, stating a preference to live with people who had similar experiences and preferences. The rest of the participants stated their preference for multi-generational co-living arrangements; these preferences were rooted in expectations for mutual assistance and social inclusion. Some of the participants were concerned that older members of society often feel lonely and in need of stimulation and inclusion. These participants viewed co-housing projects as a good opportunity to include older people – both for the latter's wellbeing and because it is the "right thing to do." Previous studies on co-housing have also demonstrated that communal living cultivates solidarity and empowerment among residents, which combats social exclusion (Fromm, 2000; Huber, 2017).

The inclusion of vulnerable groups was a separate topic in the interviews. By "vulnerable groups," we mean groups within society that face higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population. These vulnerable and marginalized groups include but are not limited to people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities, homeless people, ex-prisoners, drug addicts, people with substance abuse challenges and isolated

older people. While it was not something that participants had reflected upon beforehand, they expressed a positive inclination toward including people from vulnerable groups in co-housing schemes under the assumption that they would comprise a small proportion of residents compared to the rest of the community. This could indicate that respondents had mixed feelings regarding inclusion.

There are social housing blocks 400 meters away from our house, a block with refugees and drug users ... I feel actually, they should be integrated more ... those blocks are not the environment where they can be integrated ... They are ... sort of over there ... and we don't do anything together with those living in those blocks ... and that I think is important ... I mean, if you're trying to integrate somebody, then they have to live among the rest of the population ... not just gather all drug addicts together under the same roof and expect that they will rehabilitate by themselves and re-join society just like that.

Participants under 60 years of age were the most skeptical toward the notion of integration and inclusion of vulnerable groups. Here, the main argument centered on the risk of reduced quality of life for other residents in cases of substance abuse. The older participants expressed a willingness to include refugees, ethnic minorities, and single mothers. However, they perceived any integration of groups with disabilities or substance abuse problems as dependent on the level of care provided by the municipality. The question of including vulnerable groups in co-housing is a topic for further research, as it was clearly a controversial topic in this study, and one that sparked mixed feelings.

Self-realization. The final subtheme under the social motivation theme is self-realization. By "self-realization," we mean the degree to which a person is an agent and a determining force in their own life. When asked directly, "Why do you want to participate in a co-housing scheme?" participants reflected on the changes in their own attitudes and consumption behaviors and used terms like "maturing," "personal growth," and "self-development." They expected that living in a co-housing scheme would unite them with like-minded individuals, which would be a reinforcing influence on pro-environmental and social-inclusion behaviors. This was something that participants regarded as a form of personal growth.

Table 2 below displays the main categories of codes that belong to each theme and subtheme under the umbrella of "motivation."

Table 2. Themes and subthemes for motivations.

Source: authors.

Pragmatic motivation

By "pragmatic motivation," we mean motives that are either directly or indirectly based on financial gain and utility value for the individual. All but one participant explicitly stated that pragmatism is a driving force in deciding to participate in the co-housing scheme. The participants' current life situations heavily influenced their pragmatic motivation. Younger participants (under the age of 35) without children and living in apartments emphasized their expectations that participating in a co-housing scheme would give "more value for money." Due to financial constraints, alternatives for these participants included either continuing to rent rooms or apartments in the city center or buying apartments in more peripheral and affordable areas. One of the older participants lived on disability benefits due to somatic illness. This participant was explicit in saying that

Table 2. Themes and subthemes for motivations.

Motivation					
Pragmatic Theme	Social Theme				Environmental Theme
	Emotional subtheme	Professional subtheme	Self-realization subtheme	Social inclusion subtheme	
code categories:	code categories:	code categories:	code categories:	code categories:	code categories:
downsizing	nostalgia	image and identity	personal growth	balanced social diversity	reduced consumption
life situation	belonging	status	civic engagement	homogenic neighborhood multigeneration	vegetarian
mutual assistance value for money benefits for children	sense of community sharing meals	vocation		no mental disability	composting
				segregation	pro-diversity
					sustainable interior reduced transportation sustainable building

Source: authors.

participating in the co-housing scheme would allow them to live “with dignity.” These expectations regarding affordability confirm prior study’s findings that co-housing is thought to be a viable option for groups that would otherwise be excluded from the housing market (Corfe, 2019). Younger participants also emphasized their prioritization of experiences and leisure activities over owning property; previous studies on co-housing consumption patterns are in line with these findings as well (Chatterton, 2014).

Participants under 50 years of age were preparing to downsize, as their children had moved out and they lived alone (divorced, widowed, or unmarried). Living centrally was important for this group, as they wanted to be able to enjoy urban activities while being conveniently located for visits from friends and family. Older participants stressed their reluctance to invest capital in buying a residence; indeed, even those who could afford to buy an average apartment in the center of the city were not interested in doing so. The latter stated their plans for renting and participating in a co-housing scheme as a means to free their finances for alternative uses, like traveling and socializing with friends.

Participants with children living at home focused on the benefits of mutual assistance in the co-housing project community. They mentioned a need for babysitting and preparing food for children in exchange for company and practical assistance when needed by older members of the co-housing community. This kind of mutuality and collaboration are conceptual foundations of co-housing, as has been illustrated in prior research (Jarvis et al., 2016). Participants with children also had the perception that multi-generational co-housing communities were beneficial for child development, especially because their extended families were geographically far away and absent in everyday life. They expected that exposure to other children of various ages in the home environment, as well as many adult role models, would have a positive influence on children’s development of social skills, maturity, and well-being. Although there is a strong social component in the expectations described above, the primary motivation was explicitly individual- and benefit-oriented (and is thus categorized as “pragmatic” in this article).

“More value for money” was an overarching category of codes across the sample. Regardless of their life situation at the time of the study, participants expected that shared facilities in a co-housing scheme would give them access to a wider variety of facilities and activities than they could otherwise afford or would be willing to invest in. One participant described it in this way:

I've bought a treadmill for 13,000 kroner and it's just me who can use it . . . I would not mind sharing it with others . . . it is a question of money really. If I buy a jacuzzi for 100,000 and use it twice a year for five years it will cost 10,000 kroner per bath but if the community buys it then it actually can be reasonable.

Environmental motivation

Sustainable living and an environmentally friendly way of life emerged as an important motivating factor. All participants stated explicitly and unprompted that they care about the environment and regarded shared living as an environmentally friendly housing alternative; this finding is consistent with prior studies (Crabtree, 2006; Meltzer, 2005). Moreover, all participants were currently engaged in various forms of pro-environmental behavior. Indeed, the popularity of secondhand consumption and re-use among the participants mirrors previous research on consumption patterns in co-housing projects that neither favor nor value consumerist lifestyles (Vestbro, 2012). Further, participants across the group talked about sustainable material usage and sustainable co-housing building design. As with the above, this topic also emerged unprompted, and was discussed in previous studies (Jarvis et al., 2016).

Most participants (except for those in the oldest age group) expressed an awareness that environmental concerns and sustainability will be increasingly important in the future, and their intention to participate in co-housing was as a way to adapt. There was also an awareness in the younger and middle-aged segments that the current housing infrastructure is a structural barrier to pro-environmental behavior. Participants intended to continue their pro-environmental behaviors while living in co-housing; moreover, they looked forward to co-housing to further reduce barriers so that they could engage in these behaviors more frequently, and on a larger scale.

Preferences

Based on the interview data, we organized the participants' stated preferences about co-housing into two major themes: *structural* and *operational* preferences (see Figure 4). The first theme comprises descriptions of preferences about how the co-housing building (i.e., the structure itself) should be. The second theme encompasses all the codes regarding participant preferences about how the co-housing project should operate.

Below, Table 3 briefly summarizes the main categories of codes belonging to each theme and subtheme under the umbrella of preferences.

INITIATIVE	OPERATIONAL	PREFERENCES
GOVERNANCE		
AESTHETICS	STRUCTURAL	
FUNCTION		
LOCATION		

Figure 4. Co-housing preferences. Source: authors.

Structure preferences

The participants reported numerous preferences concerning the structure of the building. Many of these were rooted in participants’ personal previous experiences, and were not necessarily directly related to the co-housing or sharing aspect. In this study, we divided the structural preferences theme into the subthemes of *esthetics*, *function*, and *location*.

The *esthetics* subtheme dominated across the participants. By “esthetics,” we mean the subjective assessment of beauty and taste, as illustrated by participant statements like “attractive, obviously, it has to be attractive” and “it really has to be this kind of ‘wow’ building if I’m going to move there.” Future studies might investigate the underlying causes around the dominance of esthetic preferences. For instance, it is unclear whether this was characteristic of this specific sample, or women more generally. Alternatively, residents that are interested in novel and/or alternative housing solutions may also be interested in exclusivity. Another explanation for the dominance of this theme may be

Table 3. Themes and subthemes for preferences.

Preferences				
Theme: structure			Theme: functioning	
Subtheme: Esthetics	Subtheme: Function	Subtheme: Location	Subtheme: Governance	Subtheme: Project initiative
Code categories: wow factor interior design glass innovative materials sustainable materials natural materials vertical garden inside court plants inside natural light cool recreational area	Code categories: universal design sound isolation multifunctional spaces multifunctional buildings own kitchen own bathroom spare room pool gym/yoga room boat storage kayak storage washing room storage facilities hobby room sauna hot tub	Code categories: city center close to transport nodes not rural close to the water close to the mountains close to the park no car car sharing	Code categories: house rules cleaning maintenance concierge outsourcing noise entrance barriers fines for misconduct ownership renting Airbnb	Code categories: developer-initiated residents-initiated facilitated my municipalities real estate regulations subsidies for buyers information dissemination success stories

Source: authors.

linked to co-housing's possible associations with affordable housing; as this latter has connotations with poverty, potential residents may want to communicate the opposite – i.e., prosperity – through modern design choices.

The *function* subtheme in structure preferences accounts for the preferences for sharing amenities, centering on which functions and features should be shared. As none of the participants had ever lived in co-housing, they had very few and diffuse notions on the details of the buildings' layout and design at a functional level. All participants were conscious that small kitchen and bathroom facilities should be included in individual residential units, as these were areas over which participants wanted control. One participant told us, laughing, "I have to feel that my private sphere is within my unit – I don't want to live in a dormitory." All participants had expectations of access to an array of amenities for leisure activity; however, due to their lack of actual experience, they could not provide details on what those facilities might be.

The final subtheme under structure preferences is *location*. All participants stated that they were primarily interested in co-housing projects in the center of the city. They were adamant that they were uninterested in suburban or rural locations for a co-housing project.

Operational preferences

Operational preferences emerged as a second theme under the preferences umbrella. This theme concerned how a co-housing community should be initiated (i.e., *project initiation*), and how it should operate from day to day (*daily governance*).

Project initiation. This subtheme comprises participants' ideas around how co-housing initiatives should arise and be managed. The participants had limited knowledge and interest in resident-led co-housing scheme development and expressed some favor toward developer-led and municipality-facilitated processes. Future research might investigate further whether these are sample-specific characteristics, given the empirical evidence demonstrating that most co-housing initiatives are initiated and developed by residents themselves (Tummers, 2016).

Daily governance. Within this subtheme, the house rules and regulations represented the most important topic across the sample. As one participant noted,

[P]eople have different requirements when it comes to cleanliness and routines . . . you have to have house rules and regulations, like Trine cannot book a common area every Wednesday for her book club and stuff . . . things like that have to be regulated.

All oldest age group participants expressed a preference for renting a unit in a co-housing scheme; they substantiated this preference by expressing a desire to use their money for experience-based activities, and their lack of need to leave an inheritance. The rest of the participants reported their preference for owning a unit in a co-housing scheme.

Conclusion

We conducted a qualitative, interview-based study on residents' motivations and preferences for co-housing in Bergen, Norway. Individuals of all ages and life situations were interested in shared living. Pragmatic and social motives accounted for much of their interest. The life situation of younger, childless participants and "empty nesters" (people

whose children had grown up and moved out) seemed to be optimal for recruitment into co-housing schemes. Indeed, in the literature on housing, significant life events are an acknowledged trigger for moving in; our findings further highlight the window of opportunity for pitching co-housing as an alternative choice to “empty nesters” (who are planning to downsize) and young professionals (who are finished with their studies, have a steady income, and are ready to invest in housing). Pragmatic and environmental motives appear to be the dominant drivers for co-housing interest in the youngest groups; for the older participants, the primary motives were social and pragmatic.

Among individuals with children still at home who lived in detached houses in the suburbs, there was a distinct lack of triggers to move into co-housing. This group showed strong but hypothetical interest in co-housing, reporting an intention to move after their children left home. As attracting families with children to the city center is one of Bergen’s urban planning goals, this segment could be investigated further in future studies. In the absence of life events to trigger a move, other potential triggers should be considered: for example, the cognitive dissonance emerging from the gap between preferred and actual housing arrangements. With increasing housing prices (due to rapid urbanization), families with children must live in the suburbs of the city, in smaller apartments than they would like, or settle in detached houses in surrounding municipalities. Reaching out to these two segments of the population and mapping their interest in co-housing could be a topic for future research, with practical implications for urban planning. Studies from other countries have demonstrated that housing mobility can be purely value-based, if cognitive dissonance is strong enough and the external context does not impose limiting factors.

All age groups regarded co-housing as an environmentally friendly housing alternative. There were clear expectations that co-housing would enable residents to engage in more frequent and varied environmentally friendly behaviors. However, although environmental motivation was present in all age groups, the youngest segment had the most internalized motivation. This also indicates a potential future trend, in which environmental values are more highly prioritized. In general, further inquiry into the younger segment of the population could help us better understand future trends. Some studies have shown that the combination of growing up in a detached house in the suburbs and the fatigue of living in dense, overstimulating, overcrowded, and shared student apartments can lead young professionals to actively seek a return to the suburbs and single-family homes (Gifford, 2014). Nevertheless, co-housing could represent an alternative to traditional apartment-sharing, potentially combating negativity toward shared urban living. Further, promoting co-housing among young professionals today could result in young families with children living in co-housing in the future. As the Bergen municipality is aiming to attract families with children to settle in the city center, enabling young professionals to continue living in the city center after having children might be a more successful approach than attempting to lure families back from the suburbs. Future studies into this segment could explore this hypothesis.

With regards to social inclusion, there were varying attitudes among participants regarding the inclusion of residents from vulnerable groups in shared-living projects. As no one in the study sample had lived in a co-housing project, it may have been difficult for them to imagine practical consequences; current impressions thus reflected both general altruistic values and prevalence of stereotypes. In this study, the oldest segment of the

participants distinguished themselves from other age groups in relation to the issue of social inclusion. While the integration of single parents and ethnic minorities was perceived as non-problematic, the inclusion of people with disabilities was met with strong skepticism. Other age groups reported positive attitudes toward the inclusion of all vulnerable groups. All participants, however, emphasized that a balanced and dispersed distribution of individuals from vulnerable groups among the rest of the residents was a condition for their inclusion in the co-housing scheme.

It should be noted that social inclusion is an area of concern and responsibility for politicians and local municipalities, and social design in co-housing has the potential to enhance social inclusion. Following Allports' intergroup contact theory (1954), under the conditions of equal status, cooperation, and common goals, increased intergroup contact may combat segregation and exclusion (Paluck et al., 2018). Co-housing offers equal status for the residents and shared living gives common goals and requires cooperation; as such, co-housing represents a housing design that has an in-built potential to combat segregation and exclusion. If this is the case in practice, this represents a subject for future research.

An analysis of the participants' preferences underscored the idea of one's home as an expression of individuality and symbolic communication of identity. Esthetics, a "wow factor," and "coolness" were strongly emphasized in participants' reflections on their preferences for the buildings – here, we did not find differences among age groups. While notions of what is beautiful and "cool" may be subjective, participants could not specify details about their esthetic preferences, when asked: this could indicate an openness to different suggestions and give room to architects and developers.

The participants' lack of co-housing experience influenced the level of detail in the majority of their preferences. An emphasis on the necessity of comprehensive and compulsory house rules was common across participants, showing that all had apprehension toward potential conflict situations.

Finally, there was a strong preference for municipal involvement in facilitating the development of co-housing projects. As co-housing projects in other countries are most often initiated by residents themselves, these findings could be specific to the study sample, or explained by Norway's general lack of co-schemes. This should be investigated further in future studies.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.ntnu.no/ad/forskning/bopilot>

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