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Third places in the home. The idea of cohousing

Abstract. The aim of this article is to analyse cohousing in the context of Ray Oldenburg's theory of a third place. The author argues that cohousing, which promotes the idea of deep social relations in connection with respect for individualism and sustainable consumption and prosumption, can be viewed as a new form of socialization similar to Oldenburg's concept of the third place. The first part outlines ideas underlying the concept of a third place, while the second part focuses on the assumptions of cohousing and demand conditions for its development. This theoretical article continues the author's considerations about the concept of third places in the era of globalization.

Keywords: cohousing, third place, community

JEL Codes: O44, R31, Q01

1. Introduction

According to David Bakan (1966), agency and communion are the two main aspects of human existence – each person is the achiever of his goals (*agency*), a member of the community and a participant in social relations (*communion*). Efficiency is connected with the pursuit of individualism. Although it can be assumed that the process of individualization produces a proud, free and independent individual, aware of his or her choices and consequences of his or her own decisions, it should be remembered that individualization creates the risk of being unhappy (Elias, 2008), which can be manifested by a withdrawal into

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privacy, isolation and powerlessness, with a negative impact on social relations (Bokszański, 2007, pp. 77-79). These processes are deepened by the virtualization of consumption, which leads to increased anonymity of the individual and a lack of belonging. Everyone searches for a sense of togetherness in an attempt to satisfy the eternal human need to get together in groups. As a result, new forms of social integration are emerging. The new forms of socialization that are emerging now guarantee social recognition, while preserving the freedom and individuality of each participant. As Olcoń-Kubicka rightly points out, individuality acquires meaning only within a group of people who feel the same way: by identifying with them, the individual begins to understand what their individuality is (Olcoń-Kubicka, 2009, p. 38). One example of a new form of social integration is *cohousing*, which promote the idea of deep social relations in connection with respect for individualism. It can be viewed as an alternative perspective on Oldenburg's concept of the third place, providing a bridge between the traditional approach to the third place and its application to the virtual world (virtual spaces)[1].

2. The concept of a third place

The concept of a *third place* was proposed by Oldenburg in his 1999 book entitled *The Great Good Place: cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. The concept was an attempt to capture the changes that had taken placed in the second half of the 20th century, namely the declining importance of a multi-generational family and the impact of corporate trends, which created a need for places where people could rest from the hardships of everyday life at home and responsibilities at work. Oldenburg referred to such places as third places (with home being the first place, and work – the second place) and defined them as physical places where people spend their free time, public spaces where those seeking happiness outside the home and work get together to enjoy various informal and often spontaneous meetings. The third place was supposed to be primarily a space for establishing interpersonal relations, an anchor of social life stimulating creativity. The space of third places is important for social sustainability. Communities in a given society have different dimensions, therefore places that help to maintain interpersonal contacts also vary. A third place is just as important as a community itself; if there are no places to meet and act together, the community may not survive (Ellis, 2019). The main activity that people in third places are involved in is talking and exchanging ideas to get to know each other and, since these spaces tend to be close to home, to unite the local community

[1] More about virtual third places: (Markiewicz, 2019).

and help it identify with the surrounding space. These places are inconspicuous, available for everyone and at any time, where no formal criteria of participation or exclusion apply, although they owe their unique character to the regulars. They are places for relaxing, but also for having fun, places outside the physical home environment, but close to it in terms of mental comfort and support. The local community identifies itself with the place, which gives rise to a sense of identity, which, apart from vitality and accessibility, is a basic determinant of the value of space as a place of possible social activities and behaviours (Wicher, 1999). In this way, by increasing social trust, security, individual satisfaction and happiness, these places allow the regulars to improve their quality of life.

In Oldenburg's view, third places are located in the public space, which can be treated as a common good. It can be an external space (open space) e.g. streets, squares, parks, or an internal space (closed space), located within buildings that can be accessed by everyone: pubs, cafes, hairdressers. This space provides an opportunity to meet other people. However, the mere existence of a generally accessible space where interpersonal contacts can be made does not necessarily mean that it will be a space of real interactions. Several types of interpersonal contacts can occur within this space: intimate contact (a distance of less than 0.5 m) reserved for family members and close relatives; individual contact, usually reserved for relatives (0.5-1.2 m), social contact (1.2-3.6 m) between people who do not know each other well or at all (no physical contact); and public contact (3.6-7.6 m) between strangers (only through eye contact) (Hall, 1966). Depending on the type of contact, we can speak of different depths of relations between the participants, ranging from fleeting ones (*so-called passive sociability*), which do not require direct contact, to very close ones (*so-called permanent sociability*) (Mehta, 2013). Hence, meetings in third places do not always involve close contact between the participants and do not evoke a sense of identification with the place and the community on their part.

The third place concept is mainly applied in works on the psychology of place, the management of public spaces in cities and sustainable development (e.g., "sustainable socialization" – Dudek, 2019; Dymnicka, 2011; Finlay et al., 2019; Jagodzińska, 2018; Jeffres et al., 2009; Kosiacka-Beck, 2017; Lewicka, 2012; Mehta, 2013; Mikunda, 2004; Mao & Kinoshita, 2018) and increasingly often in the context of the influence of the media (including the Internet) on consumer behaviour (Hadi & Ellisa, 2019; Markiewicz, 2019; Peachey, 2008; Wilkowski, 2016).

3. The idea of cohousing

The concept of *cohousing*, which is a translation of the original Danish term *bofællesskab* (living community) was introduced by American architects Charles Du-

rett and Kathryn McCamant in the early 1980s. The idea of a "living community" was born in Denmark in 1964 and referred to residential settlements tailored to individual needs and expectations of their community members, who were obligated to take part in house design. The first community was supposed to consist of 12 houses located around the so-called Common House. Unfortunately, the project faced opposition from potential future neighbours, who associated the community with the left-wing movement. Despite the project's failure, its architect Gudmand-Hoyer began to promote the idea of cohousing. As a result, in 1968, further attempts were made to create housing communities in accordance with the principles of bofællesskab, which resulted in the creation of two cohouses – Skarplanet in Jonstrup and Seattedammen in Hillerod (Jagiełło-Kowalczyk & Ptaszkiewicz, 2018). In order to facilitate the process of establishing cohouses, the Sambo association was established in 1978, which consisted of lawyers, engineers and social scientists. The association significantly influenced the development of these cohousing communities throughout Denmark, and enabled the spread of the idea in Europe and the United States (Jagiełło-Kowalczyk & Ptaszkiewicz, 2018). Currently, cohousing is most popular in Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United States and Canada.

Dick Urban Vestbro defines cohousing as housing with shared spaces and shared facilities for residents (Vestbro & Horelli, 2012). It is a bottom-up, non-institutional housing model with an emphasis on a healthy balance between private, family and community life (Meltzer, 2005). The idea of cohousing is to create a sustainable residential environment that takes into account the expectations of future residents, their goals and social needs (Jagiełło-Kowalczyk & Ptaszkiewicz, 2018). Residents form an integrated group, who share values and goals. It is an authentic community of residents, which is based on cooperation and close, even social relations with the neighbours, and thus helps to continuously strengthen neighbourhood ties.

The main principle of cohousing is that a community should be formed by people of different gender, with different educational backgrounds, interests and lifestyles. This lack of homogeneity in the community provides opportunities to learn from others, share experiences, skills and views. Additionally, it prevents social exclusion, e.g. of the elderly or lonely people, and limits the level of unequal division of household duties between men and women.

However, there are also communities formed by social groups with certain common characteristics, such as female, gay, religious or senior cohousing. Cohousing habitats vary depending on how they function. They can consist of several single-family houses, terraced houses or a single residential building. Different organizational models of habitats can be distinguished depending on cultural differences of the regions in which they function and preferences of their inhabitants. They can manifest in architectural forms (such as those mentioned above),

criteria for the selection of residents (e.g., in the USA there are cohousing communities for white and wealthy members only), the size and number of housing units, the size and type of common space (e.g., in the Netherlands there is no common kitchen, which in other communities is treated as a basic element), shared duties, forms of ownership (rented or owned) or the state's involvement in the organization and management of the community (private, local government, built by foundations or associations).

Kathryn McCamant, Charles Durrett and Ellen Hertzman distinguished six main features of cohousing: participatory process, intentional neighbourhood design, extensive common facilities, complete resident management, non-hierarchical structure and separate income source (McCamant, Durrett, & Hertzman 1994, p. 38). The **participatory process** refers to the participation of future residents in the process of planning, designing, organizing and managing the habitat. Both the individual residential units and the common space are adapted to the needs and requirements of the community. At the same time ensuring privacy and social interaction means that each community member has their own apartment (with basic rooms, i.e. bedroom, bathroom, kitchen) with access to the common area, a space where community members interact. In order to provide a sense of individuality on the one hand and a sense of community on the other, it is important to design two types of space: private and public. The appropriate delineation of these spaces is meant to ensure optimal conditions for community life (**intentional neighbourhood design**), which are enabled by **extensive common facilities**. Within the common space, one can distinguish between internal and external spaces. Internal public spaces include laundries, workshops, playrooms, common rooms, reading rooms, shared balconies, saunas, yoga rooms, rooms with discussion circles, film meetings, open lectures. External public spaces include playgrounds, barbecue areas or a vegetable garden cultivated cooperatively. Also important are places where community members meet regularly for common meals, such as dining rooms and the shared kitchen. **Management** by cohousing residents means democratic decision making at community meetings and the creation of working groups responsible for particular activities within the community. Residents organize themselves into smaller groups responsible for organizing the life of the community, activities that are supposed to bind the group together, or for resolving any conflicts that may arise. **Non-hierarchical structure** and co-decision making means sharing responsibility for the majority of decisions by all community members, although this does not exclude the possibility of delegating leaders responsible for particular matters, such as community finances. What is important is the egalitarian treatment of all residents, which makes each resident feel responsible for his or her goods. The last characteristic of cohousing is **separate income source**, which means that each resident is responsible for earning their own income, and the common

budget, created from contributions of community members, is used to cover the costs of habitat renovations or, for example, child care during joint community meetings. Social interactions within a cohousing community are possible thanks to the existence of common goods (common infrastructure), which are usually located in the so-called common house. The co-ownership of some of the goods within the cohousing community requires certain design decisions and ways of clearly distinguishing between the private and public spheres. This separation can guarantee that residents have a sense of intimacy and exclusion, which, as Anna Sokołowska rightly points out, paradoxically supports the development of internal contacts in the public space: thanks to a momentary exclusion from the life of the group, the individual is all the more willing to return to it and continue the relationship of sociability (Sokołowska, 2009). Architectural solutions concerning space in a cohousing community should enable its residents to participate spontaneously in activities undertaken in the common house. If the space outside individual residential units is too large, residents may find it difficult to interact in the common area and participate in joint actions, if it is too small, it may make residents feel like they are violating the privacy of other community members. It is, therefore, important to make sure that the transition between the separated zones (private and public) is smooth and easy, because this is what determines the relationship of the individual to the group and the group to the local community (Sokołowska, 2009). This smooth transition in the semi-public zone, also called the *soft edge* (McCamant, Durrett, & Hertzman 1994, p. 180) is provided by alleys, squares, corridors. Properly planned space within a cohousing community is intended to establish interpersonal relations while guaranteeing the privacy of the residents. As for the sense of security, it is not created by installing bars and locks, but through an appropriate architecture and system of neighbourhood cooperation (so-called *security by design*) (Cieślik, 2014).

4. Third places in the home, demand conditions for *cohousing*

The existence of a common house in a cohousing community makes this model similar to Oldenburg's idea of a third place. And although in this case we cannot speak of a public space but rather a third place in the home, only accessible to community members, the main purpose of a third place is achieved: relaxation, fun, conversation and exchange of thoughts to establish interpersonal relationships. According to George Hillery (1955), a community can be identified through three elements: social interactions, social bonds, and common territory (common space). And while in the traditional community (created e.g. around

a third place in Oldenburg's view) the common space is created through interactions and social bonds due to spatial proximity, in the case of a cohousing community the opposite is true. It is the space that does not exist yet, which is the reason for the creation of interactions and social bonds in the community, which are formed in order to create this space. The maintenance and strengthening of interactions and social bonds is facilitated by the existence of common spaces (Kutypa, Wójcik, & Piotrowski, 2018).

Cohousing can be regarded as a new version of Oldenburg' concept of third places, a new form of socialization that was born in response to the changing needs of society and changes in consumer behaviour. Among the most important demand-driven conditions of cohousing are consumers' search for a balance between agency and communion, sustainable consumption and prosumption.

The ubiquitous heterogenisation of consumption is associated with an increase in individualization and the growth of diverse consumer attitudes and behaviours. The number of consumers with sophisticated tastes who openly express their needs and demand products and services through which they can express their identity and individuality is growing. On the other hand, the search for a sense of community is a response to the declining role of a multi-generational family and virtualization of consumption. Technological development and its impact on social relations lead to a sense of loss and isolation and a question arises about the depth of qualitative changes that new technologies are introducing into social life (the problem of treating media as a kind of alternative to the social environment). Cohousing assumes a balanced model of agency – communion of social perception, in which agency means focusing on one's own self and oneself as an achiever of goals, while communion means focusing on other people and one's own relations with them. Unrestrained agency means maximum concentration on oneself and one's own goals, which leads to ignoring relationships with other people and ignoring their goals. On the other hand, an extreme form of communion (unrestrained communion) means such a strong concentration on other people and their relationships that it leads to the abandonment of one's own goals (Bakan, 1996). In the long run, such extreme forms of behaviour have negative effects for the individual and cohousing helps to keep them in balance. On the one hand, the fact of cohousing satisfies individual needs of community residents, private spaces provide them with an opportunity to rest from others on their own terms. As Anthony Giddens (2001) points out, people of late modernity look for a place with which they identify themselves and which identifies them more or less. Members of cohousing communities identify themselves with them, which increases the level of individual satisfaction and happiness and, consequently, the quality of life for each person involved in this form of socialization. On the other hand, as Karin Krokfors rightly points out, cohousing can be an answer to the problems of modern society, its alienation and isolation (Krokfors,

2012), since the main reason people decide to join cohousing communities is because they are seeking to increase the intensity of interpersonal contacts and thus build a sense of security and trust (Sokołowska, 2009). Thus, cohousing can be an ideal combination of agency and communion, providing a guarantee of social recognition while preserving the individuality of each community member. Members of one cohousing community in Tucson, Arizona "seek diversity of backgrounds, ages and opinions, and our common value is our commitment to solving our problems and finding compatible solutions that satisfy all members, each of us wants a greater sense of community, as well as strong interaction with and support for our neighbours" (*What is cohousing*, n.d.). In addition, cohousing can also be a kind of compromise between Oldenburg's idea of third places and virtual online communities. The sense of authenticity of relations, experiences and sensations within a cohousing community (the importance of authenticity as a factor stimulating the growing interest in cohousing) becomes more and more important in this case.

As Vestbro and Horelli (2012) note, cohabitants belong to new groups of "postmaterialists", who differ from members of the consumer society in that they focus primarily on values such as good social contacts, time spent with children, cultural and recreational activities. Sustainable consumption and the emergence of a socially responsible consumer who limits his material needs to what is really necessary, prefers an eco-friendly lifestyle and takes action to limit the destruction of the natural environment is another demand-driven condition of cohousing. The consumer takes on, in a way, the role of a citizen, who appreciates the intangible pleasures of life, practices active neighbourly contacts, which involve, for example, exchanging, lending or other forms of community building (Lorek & Fuchs, 2005). Cohousing is characterised by a rational management of goods, which is based on the principles of sustainable housing and therefore assimilates easily in social groups that value sustainable consumption (in terms of economic, ecological and social rationality). Cohousing can be a new solution in the face of dualism in the behaviour of some consumers who, on the one hand, try to limit their consumption and, on the other hand, fall into the trap resulting from an overabundance of products and services offered (the paradox of choice and the so-called Diderot effect). Cohousing can be treated as one of the forms of shared consumption, as its idea coincides with the assumptions of the economy of sharing space (Common House), objects and equipment (common lawn mower, washing machines, bicycles, cars) or skills (mutual assistance regarding plumbing, carpentry, accounting services or child care). This allows consumers to experience what various products and services can offer them, without many inconveniences resulting from owning them (including the negative environmental impact). Cohouses are usually created with great respect for the surrounding area. Some of them additionally meet the conditions of so-called ecological villages,

where all activities undertaken by their inhabitants are performed without harming the environment and are integrated with the natural environment in order to support healthy, natural human development (Sokołowska, 2009). Cohousing additionally promotes a lifestyle with a greater emphasis on social cohesion and creates conditions to ensure that all its inhabitants can meet their basic consumption needs. The heterogeneous nature of cohousing communities is conducive to intergenerational dialogue, which prevents social exclusion. In addition, cohousing, which promotes the model of sustainable development, takes into account not only the short-term benefits of specific actions but also long-term effects of decisions on future generations and their environment (Sokołowska, 2009). According to some members of cohousing communities, the goal of cohousing is to study and model innovative approaches to ecological and social sustainability, to have a minimal impact on the land and create a place where all inhabitants will be equally valued as part of the community (EcoVillage Ithaca, 2020; Sonora Cohousing, 2020).

Prosumption, which consists in the consumer's active participation in the creation of the product in order to better satisfy his or her needs, is another important condition of cohousing. Modern consumers do not want to be passive recipients, they want to be active, they want to participate not only in consumption, but also in product development. Thus, a new model of consumption is being created, not only by offering the consumer the possibility of choosing products but also an opportunity to get involved in the development process, from the very first stages. Prosumption is primarily an expression of opposition to mass, standardized production based on uniform consumer needs and tastes. Prosumers want to emphasize their originality and uniqueness, to receive a product that is a reflection of their own ideas, and this is possible only if they can participate in the process of its creation. The creation of a cohousing community starts with the creation of a vision of community by defining common expectations and needs. This means choosing a specific place of residence, selecting a specific type of cohousing, its size, form of ownership, use of the common area, mutual relations and neighbourly cooperation, etc. At this stage it is important to take into account individual needs of particular members and to envisage how they can be satisfied within that cohousing community. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of space management within a cohousing community is to get all its members involved in the community's life. This is done by creating working groups (based on members' knowledge and skills in specific fields) responsible for particular activities within the community. In addition, management carried out by residents means democratic decision making at community meetings. The revolutionary principle of treating future members of the cohousing community as prosumers, who actively participate in the process of creating and functioning of the common space (from design to space management), ensures social recognition while

providing each participant with a chance to express their individuality. It translates into a sense of responsibility for the common space and a sense of attachment to the community. It should be emphasized that the demand conditions of cohousing discussed above complements and strengthens the other conditionality while prosumption makes it possible to find a balance between agency and communion and strengthens activities in the field of sustainable consumption.

5. Conclusion

Third places are changing because the needs of society are changing, requiring the creation of new spaces suited to the needs of new consumers. Third places need to be developed and improved to meet new needs and to enable modern consumers engage in creative activities. Creating a space that could be used as a third place is difficult, especially in the context of defining parameters that have a psychological impact and generate specific social behaviour (Dudek, 2019). Third places have to provide comfort to their visitors on different levels. And since modern consumers have different needs, places that are supposed to satisfy these needs should also differ. The traditional concept of third places needs to be expanded and adapted to new trends in consumer behaviour, including the search for a balance between agency and communion, sustainable consumption, and prosumption. According to the author, the idea of cohousing can be viewed as an answer to modern consumer requirements and can be viewed as a new form of socialization similar to Oldenburg's concept of the third place.

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Trzecie miejsca w domostwie. Idea *cohousingu*

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest analiza cohousingu w kontekście teorii trzeciego miejsca Raya Oldenburga. Autorka stawia tezę, że cohousing promujący ideę głębokich relacji społecznych w powiązaniu z poszanowaniem indywidualizmu oraz zrównoważoną konsumpcję i prosumpcję może stanowić nową formę uspołecznienia zbliżoną do trzecich miejsc Oldenburga. W części pierwszej artykułu przedstawiono główne elementy pojęcia trzeciego miejsca Oldenburga, w części drugiej zaprezentowano założenia idei cohousingu oraz popytowe uwarunkowania jego rozwoju. Praca ma charakter teoretyczny i stanowi kolejną część rozważań autorki dotyczących koncepcji trzecich miejsc w dobie globalizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: cohousing, trzecie miejsca, wspólnotowość

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