

Redefining Co-Living Typologies for Intergenerational Communities

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Background

Co-living has emerged as an alternative housing option in recent years, fuelled by widespread housing shortages and rising property prices. With shorter leases and lower rental fees, co-living offers flexibility and affordability, in addition to an instant community where spaces and amenities are shared, and social events and activities are organised.

Contemporary co-living is a form of communal living, a concept that has existed since the beginning of human civilisation, when food and resources were shared for the purpose of survival. The need for communal living diminished during the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s, when a large proportion of the

world's population moved from the countryside to the city and found that they were able to thrive as individuals rather than as a collective. Those who could afford it built private homes for themselves in the city, and communal living became associated with the working class. Since then, private homes organised around single-family units have become the norm.¹

The concept of communal living was revived by Danish architect Jan Gudman-Høyer in the 1960s, in what he termed “co-housing”. One of the defining characteristics of co-housing is the participatory design process that the intended residents engage in, with the aim of creating a community of private homes and shared community spaces that are “co-developed, co-designed, and co-organised with the group”.² Gudman-Høyer's co-housing developments contain shared facilities for dining, cooking, and other amenities, and housing units may be aggregated to take the form of almost any housing typology from apartment blocks to clustered single-family homes, depending on the site.³ Notably, these co-housing developments are commonly designed for multigenerational living.

The term “co-housing” is sometimes used interchangeably with “co-living”. However, while both describe a form of communal living that is characterised by a combination of private rooms and shared spaces, the premise for each type is quite different. Co-housing is generally designed as long-term housing in conjunction with a more diverse demographic, including families, seniors and singles, whereas co-living is designed for a transient community, generally comprising young people looking for short-term rentals and social networking opportunities, including expatriates, students and travellers.

With the co-living movement showing no signs of slowing down, there is growing interest in expanding its reach to include seniors and intergenerational communities. This is largely attributed to the ageing population in highly developed countries like Singapore, where more than 21% of the population is projected to be 65 years old or older by 2026. To support healthy ageing, the Singapore government has rolled out a variety of senior housing options in recent years. This includes integrated developments like Kampung Admiralty and Yew Tee, where senior housing is co-located with other social and community support facilities in one convenient location, and Community Care Apartments (CCAs), where seniors can age in place while having access to a scaled range of care services.

Adding to the spectrum of senior housing options is a new model for intergenerational co-living residences that is being test-bedded by co-living operator The Assembly Place and its collaborators at the former Henderson Primary School, a leased state-owned facility. Slated to open in 2025, the facility is aimed at seniors seeking short-term accommodation within a vibrant community of seniors and young people. One of the goals is to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst older adults by providing a space for them to mingle with one another, and with young people, and exchange their experiences and knowledge in a way that is mutually beneficial and fulfilling.

In reusing a former school building to testbed new concepts for senior accommodation, Singapore is attempting to address the issue of an ageing population from both ends of the problem – lower birth rates and changing demographics within residential neighbourhoods give rise to reduced enrolment in schools, which frees up old school buildings that can potentially house an expanding senior population. From the sustainability perspective, an adaptive reuse approach maximises the use of vacant state properties while lowering the risks associated with launching new typologies and new business models.

Primary and secondary schools appear to be prime candidates for conversion into intergenerational community-oriented facilities as they are well equipped with large halls and sports facilities that are available for public use after school hours. In addition, most schools are well located with good access to residential neighbourhoods, public transportation and other amenities. Repurposing old schools into intergenerational co-living residences can help to revitalise ageing communities by maintaining their role as social gathering spaces.

¹ Pepper, S, & Manji, A (2019). Co-Living as an Emerging Market: An Assessment of Co-Living's Long-Term Resiliency [Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. Dspace.mit.edu.

<https://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/123605>

<https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/123605/1135867129-MIT.pdf>

² Medar, K, & Čurčić, A (2021). Cohousing and Coliving - Comparative Analysis of Two Alternative Housing Typologies by Reviewing Contemporary Trends. *Architecture and Civil Engineering* Vol. 19, No 1, 2021, pp. 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.2298/FUACE210329007M>

³ Wilkinson, T (2023). Typology: Co-housing. *The Architectural Review*, AR September 2023.

Studio Brief

In designing a new co-living typology for intergenerational living, references will be made to case studies for communal housing across different cultures and time periods, with a focus on spatial concepts that foster cross-generational interaction and healthy, active ageing for different group sizes and social settings. Based on this research, students will formulate their design brief for a hypothetical intergenerational co-living residence.

The next part of the research involves a study of old school building typologies in Singapore, to understand the spatial implications and potentialities involved when repurposing them into intergenerational co-living residences. Going beyond the technical aspects of space optimisation, opportunities for strategic architectural interventions that offer a positive transformation and reinterpretation of the existing spaces in line with the newly defined programme and spatial concepts will be identified and developed as part of the design proposal.

The studio will be organised into several stages, with students working in pairs throughout the term:

1. Research on communal living typologies and case studies
2. Spatial studies of the types of private, communal and in-between spaces for different group sizes and social settings, and strategies for integrating landscaping and other elements of nature within the programme.
3. Formulating the design brief for a purpose-built intergenerational co-living residence
4. Site visits to school buildings that have been converted to other uses
5. Research on common school typologies and identifying suitable school buildings for conversion
6. Review of design brief to incorporate the adaptive reuse component
7. Design Development