

## **Her Space: Women's Collective Living as a Form of Emancipation**

*By Arianna Scaioli\**

*Collective and cooperative living; a free, nonhierarchical space to express their individuality. These are some of the characters that emerged in feminist and women-centred utopias. *La cité des dames* by C. de Pizan (1405) and *Herland* by C. Perkins Gilman (1915) are two literary texts that, far in space and time, reflect on the modes of inhabiting spaces, in a fictional way, through the construction of an ideal milieu. Charged with a transformational power that allows them to go beyond a mere narration and become space, they constitute a tool for these women to critique the hierarchical living which reproduced (and still reproduces) gender roles. However, "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?" through this question, Dolores Hayden condensed the lessons learnt from several built experiences of collective and collaborative housing that aimed at freeing women going from an androcentric to a gendered city. This contribution becomes part of the discussion about the spatialization – or translation – of gender equality into spaces and architectures by focusing specifically on women's collective living at different scales: the building, the block/complex, and the neighbourhood. These projects will be presented focusing on the role of architecture becoming a form of emancipation for women.*

### **Introduction**

"We need a different environment, and we shall never come into smooth, peaceful, richly productive life until we have it."<sup>1</sup>

The contribution, rooted and written from a feminist perspective, becomes part of the discussion about the spatialization – or translation – of gender equality and women empowerment into spaces and architectures, funnelling a reflection on how to design a non-sexist, democratic, and just transformation of human settlements. Drawing from the feminist critique of architecture developed in the 1970s, this contribution recognizes the partiality of this perspective, configuring itself as a terrain of discussion and further explorations, embodying the openness and unexpectedness of feminist spatial futures.<sup>2</sup> The aim is to reflect on the values of designing for gender equality and to what extent architecture, both in its process and outcomes, can become a form of empowerment for women and gender minorities.

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1. C. Perkins Gilman, 1916 as cited in P. Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism*. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 3.

2. M. Schalk, T. Kristiansson, and R. Mazé, *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms Activisms Dialogues Pedagogies Projections*. (Baunach: AADR - Art Architecture Design Research, 2017).

Building on this framework is not a matter of designing a “manual of feminist design” but of discussing which themes, tools, and methods could bridge the transition towards a Non-Sexist City<sup>3</sup> and how they could inform a spatial theory.

Feminist studies have articulated their reflections in various fields – in the profession, education, in the arts – producing a profound theoretical framework that still requires deepening in its material and spatial declinations.

Feminism, by breaking down spatial and social hierarchies, and counteracting the idea of ‘building as usual’, allows to practicing otherwise<sup>4</sup>, to face our current social, ecological and economic crises. By critically engaging the historically marginalized, unheard voices, and invisible bodies<sup>5</sup> it offers a framework to explore differences and how these relationship take place in the built environment. Replacing ‘power over’ with ‘power for’, as well as ‘designing for’ to ‘designing with’ and shifting from the idea of “usagers”<sup>6</sup> to ‘agents’, feminist methodologies value collectivity, cooperation and solidarity, but also justice, equity, care and engagement, positioning themselves at the crossroads of design, ethics, politics, and poetics. Exploring the relationship between architecture and gender from a feminist position opens up new interpretative scenarios of the forms and ways of inhabiting space. These, have been built and stratified over time around the entanglement between people and places constructed through a relationship of power and subordination of some groups over others.<sup>7</sup> Historically, the dominant voices in architectural discourse belonged to the mainstream space-makers: typically Caucasian, able-bodied males who approached design through the lens of a universal man, not considering the diverse experiences and needs of marginalized groups, with the result that this one-size-fits-all mentality flattened the richness and complexity of everyday spatial experiences.

By looking at women’s experience in space, women’s activities, and women’s places, they are recognized as different to those experienced by men; this diversity in inhabiting space has as its premise the fact that these two ‘worlds’ – the feminine

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3. D. Hayden, -What Would a Non-Sexist City be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work, | *Signs* 5, no. 3 (1980): S170–S187.

4. D. Petrescu, *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*. (London: Routledge, 2007).

5. The issue of invisibility and non-representation of women and gender minorities in space and architectures is a pervading one. If their bodies and voices are not specifically considered in design and planning going towards a neutral design, the risk is to leave outside at least the 50% of the population, having a design that implicitly (but also explicitly) discriminates them. This invisibility is not only present in the specific design solution, but is a structural problem related also to the profession, where women and gender minorities “disappear” or don’t acquire relevant roles in decision making. To deepen the topic: S. Singha, -Introduction: The Vanished, the Immodest, and the ‘Other Other’: The Virtues of Women in Architecture, | in *Women in Architecture: Critical Concepts* (ed.) S. Singha. London: Routledge, 2018.

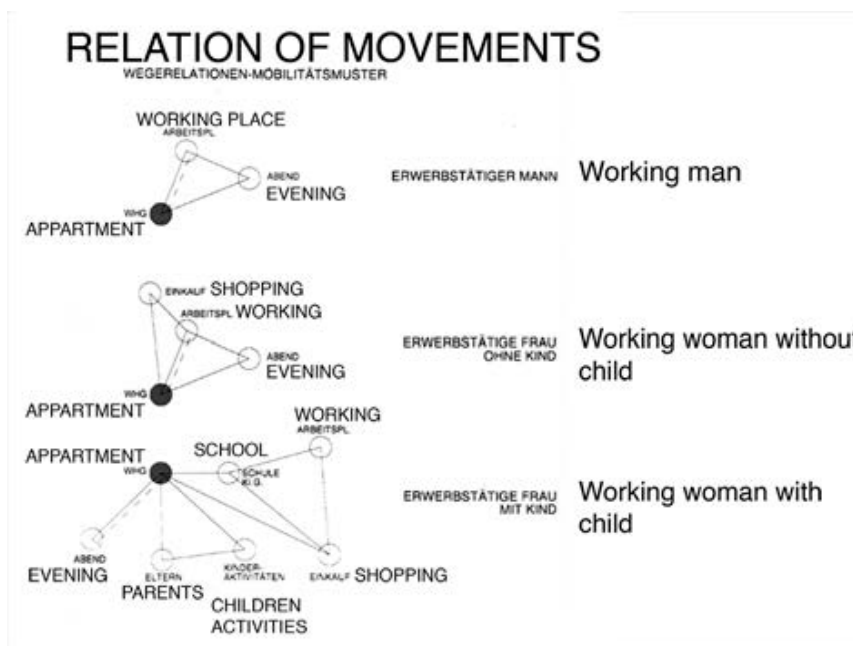
6. H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*. (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1974).

7. S. Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); M. Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World. Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design*. (London: Routledge, 1991); C. Booth, J. Darke and S. Yeandle, *Changing Places. Women's Lives in the City*. (London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2007); M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); H. Lefebvre, *Le droit à la Ville*. (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1968).

and masculine – are not entirely separate.<sup>8</sup> There are overlaps in the use of space that show that there are not two separate cities – the city of women and the city of men – and therefore, it is not a matter of replacing one with the other.

Instead, building on the notion of gender as a relational category<sup>9</sup>, it is possible to rebuild a synthesis understanding that the notions of masculinity and femininity have been interdependently shaped. This approach allows us to reframe designing for gender equality and the notion of inhabiting from and through a feminist perspective not as an only-women-issue but rather it involves dismantling and reassembling our urban landscapes to interconnect the ‘one’ with the ‘other,’ the “Ich und Du.”<sup>10</sup>

In this framework, the term inhabiting is understood as both a physical space and a space symbolized through gestures, practices, and being there. This is substantiated by a sense of belonging and the ability/willingness to transform a space into a place. However, it is necessary to recognize in the diversity of use of space, in the way of moving in the city, in the activities performed within communities, and in their caring and support for family members, that women inhabit space differently.



**Figure 1.** *Relation of Movements.* © Franziska Ullmann

8. C. Booth, J. Darke and S. Yeandle, *Changing Places. Women's Lives in the City*. (London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2007); G. Bassanini, *Per Amore della Città: Donne Partecipazione Progetto*. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008).

9. J. W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075.

10. M. Buber, *Ich und Du*. (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1923).

Accordingly, this calls for a reflection on the necessity of recasting how we perform architecture, in its process as well as the outcomes, going beyond the notion of 'universal design' towards the one of 'equity-focused'.

Thus, Gender equality is a design issue where discourse and matter are intertwined. Therefore, exploring it through a materialist perspective aims to reflect on the constraints and potential of material dimensions for architecture and spatial practices. The research-by-design exploration starts by looking at historical precedents developed by feminist practitioners, scholars, writers and intellectuals, understanding the recurring themes and how they became matter. Accordingly, the primary objective of this contribution is to delve into the intricate realm of designing for gender equality, where architecture catalyzes women's empowerment. Building on this first part, the contribution focuses on women's collective and collaborative living by presenting three projects based in Canada. By looking at themes, tools, methods, and processes and how these architectures are designed, the contribution highlights that the construction of these ways of inhabiting would allow for an active rethinking of proximity, everyday experience in space and the way architecture contributes to shaping our lives.

## Methodology

The contribution assumed the theoretical background developed within a doctoral research rooted in feminist and gendered critique of architecture and investigated through a research-by-design approach.<sup>11</sup> Building on the recognition that space is gendered<sup>12</sup> "whether by habitual use or by metaphor"<sup>13</sup> what emerges is the relationship between space, use, living bodies and form. In this sense, Lefebvre's notion of relational space, with its insistence on the entanglement of material, mental and social space, has led to view space as the product of social relations and, hence, constantly changing.<sup>14</sup> The contribution seeks to interrogate how a subject's experience in counteracting dominant or mainstream power structures can effectively imagine and build alternatives by articulating the relationship between architecture, embodiment, ethics, and politics.

How do people project desires and knowledge in the physical environment, and how does that become inhabited?

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11. M. Fraser, *Design Research in Architecture: An Overview*. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2013); R. Roggema, 'Research by Design: Proposition for a Methodological Approach', *Urban Science* 1, no.1 (2017): 2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci1010002>; M. Schoonderbeek, 'A Theory of 'Design by Research': Mapping Experimentation in Architecture and Architectural Design', *Ardeth* 1, (2017): 62–79.

12. D. Spain, *Gendered Spaces*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); J. Rendell, B. Penner and I. Borden, *Gender Space Architecture. An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 2000); E. Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. (New York: Routledge, 1995); B. Colomina, J. Bloomer, *Sexuality and Space*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992); A. Bingaman, L. Sanders and R. Zorach, *Embodied Utopias. Gender, Social Change, and the Modern Metropolis*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

13. A. Bingaman, L. Sanders and R. Zorach, *Embodied Utopias. Gender, Social Change, and the Modern Metropolis*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

14. H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*. (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1974).

This intrinsic dynamism, where everyday life activities and social relationships shape the built environment, is strongly related to the concept of “space as matrix” by Susana Torre, where architectural spaces are not isolated entities but rather interconnected networks of relationships, influences and meanings. This matrix perspective highlights how various elements within a built environment, such as layout, design, materials, and symbolism, contribute to creating spatial experiences inherently imbued with cultural, social, and gendered significance.

To navigate the potential trajectories of architectural and spatial design through a feminist lens in fostering gender equality through spatial transformation, this exploration is conducted within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the New European Bauhaus. Within the context of gender equality and architectural design, the SDGs set by the United Nations provide a framework that emphasizes inclusivity, social equity, and empowerment. Moreover, the objectives of the New European Bauhaus, a European Union initiative, intersect with the pursuit of gender equality in architecture by promoting sustainable, human-centred, and aesthetically pleasing spaces that prioritize diverse needs and experiences.

This endeavour begins with a retrospective examination of historical precedents. The contribution frames a reflection between design and built utopias, reconstructing, in the first part of the text, a genealogy of words, themes and projects that have addressed the production, written or designed, of cities and architectures that were women-friendly, and where women could find a form of emancipation from the man-made world. *La Cité des dames* by C. de Pizan (1405), *Moving the Mountain* (1911), but also *Herland* (1915) by C. Perkins Gilman are literary texts that, far in space and time, reflect on the modes of inhabiting spaces by women, in a fictional way, through the construction of an ideal milieu. Charged with a transformational power that allows them to go beyond a mere narration and become space, they constitute a tool for these women to critique the hierarchical living which reproduced (and still reproduces) gender roles. Among these novels, several concepts emerge: Collective and cooperative living; a free, nonhierarchical space to express their individuality; caring communities. The concerted effort by feminist designers and communities has been to translate these visionary reflections into tangible, transformative realities, with certain limitations that will be discussed later.

This investigation seeks to gather insights from these historical endeavours. It serves as a foundation for the subsequent examination of contemporary practices and how they align with the imperatives of gender equality and empowerment.

All the projects, The Beguinage in Toronto, Grandir en Ville in Quebec City and Constance Hamilton CoOp in Frankel Lambert, Toronto, are all located in Canada. It is a conscious choice to focus on Canada, owing to its intriguing context where women's cooperatives gained prominence from the 1970s due to a confluence of economic and political factors, alongside the influence of feminist movements and transoceanic currents. This analysis is indebted to the reports carried out with Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) funding on women's housing in Canada by Gerda Wekerle, a feminist sociologist with Joan Simon first (1988)

and Barbara Muirhead (1991) then,<sup>15</sup> but also from a direct survey of two of the project and a conversation with Gerda Wekerle in June 2023.

### Feminist Utopias: A genealogy of Projects and Words

“O Lord, take me out of this!  
I do not fit!  
My body does not suit my mind,  
My brain is weak in the knees and blind,  
My clothes are not what I want to find -  
Not one bit!  
My house is not the house I like -  
Not one bit!  
My church is built so loose and thin  
That ten fall out where one falls in;  
My creed is buttoned with a pin -  
It does not fit!”  
“A Misfit”<sup>16</sup>

To look ahead and trace a trajectory of development and reflection on the current scenario, it is helpful to look back at past design and theoretical experiences, both built and imagined, even if through words. In this sense, it is valuable to understand which lessons remain relevant, if any, and which themes, albeit evolving, are still pertinent. The contribution embraces the realm of feminist and women-centred utopian literature as a root of the discourse, significantly contributing to the feminist critique in architecture.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's words in *A Misfit* tell of the sense of nonbelonging through a parallel that connects women's bodies to clothes, but at the same time to the city, transcending the individual dimension and recounting a collective experience. Feminist utopias are an essential contribution to architecture. Just as utopia functions as a blueprint for envisioning an ideal societal structure, architecture acts as a medium through which a specific set of human values are embedded into physical space. Architecture, like utopia, becomes a tangible manifestation of these values, ideals, and the intricate interplay between individuals. Utopias propose novel concepts and ideas, and the spaces they portray serve as a means of translating these novel values into innovative physical forms.

The book-city envisioned by Christine de Pizan in 1405 and named after Cité des Dames, was a refuge, imagined and built by women for women, perfect, beautiful and without equals “Ainsi ta Cité sera d'une beauté sans pareille et demeurera éternellement en ce monde.”<sup>17</sup>

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15. G.R. Wekerle, *Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities*. (Ottawa, CA: Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 1988); G.R. Wekerle, and B. Muirhead, *Canadian Women's Housing Projects*. (Ottawa, CA: Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 1991).

16. C. Perkins Gilman, 1916 as cited in P. Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty*. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 27.

17. C. de Pizan, *La Cité des Dames*. (édition numérique, 2021).



**Figure 2.** Christine de Pizan, *La Cité des Dames*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

The goddesses of Reason, Rectitude and Justice help the heroine to build the foundations and external walls (Reason), the buildings and houses within the city (Rectitude) and the finishing touches and settlement of the city (Justice). This citadel protected noble-minded women, the dames. It is a special place where women are safe from misogyny. This work imagined a world free from patriarchal oppression, where women are empowered and self-sufficient. Adopting Maldonado's perspective in *La Speranza progettuale: Ambiente e Società*, what characterizes this 'architectural' utopic narration is hope. Charged with a transformational power that allows them to go beyond a mere narration and become space, they constitute a tool for these women to critique the hierarchical living which reproduced (and still reproduces) gender roles. Continuing through the centuries, and arriving in the early 1900s, at the height of the suffragettes' claims for women's emancipation, the work on both the theoretical and practical levels carried out by Charlotte Perkins Gilman through written and design production is relevant. A critique that feminist movements brought forward in the material dimension of the city. Women started to raise their voices and intervene in the physical construction of spaces, carving them out and redefining their relationship with the built environment, weaving together the imaginary of a 'New Woman' and the possibility of moving and inhabiting space differently.<sup>18</sup> Gilman, as well as other material feminists such as Melusina Fay Peirce, have campaigned to liberate women and empower them starting from the socialization of domestic work.

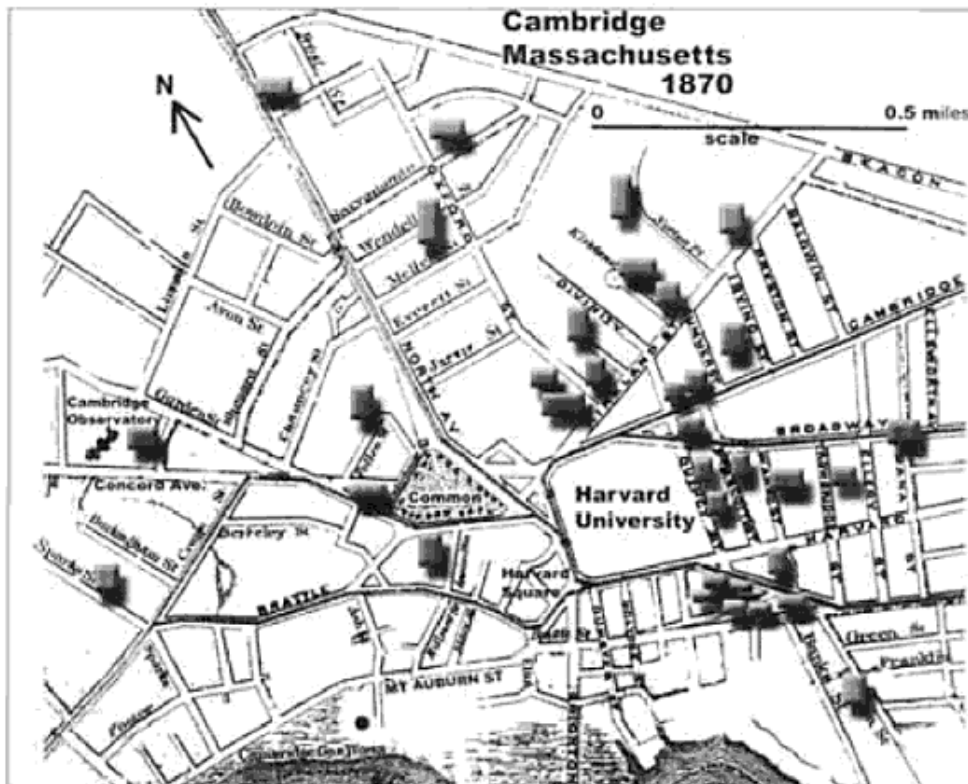
They argued for modifying the physical environment to reflect equality for women. Building on Fourier's work, which arrived in America as a translation in 1840, materialist feminists started to reflect on different spatial layouts that could

18. D. Stratigakos, *A Woman's Berlin*. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2008).



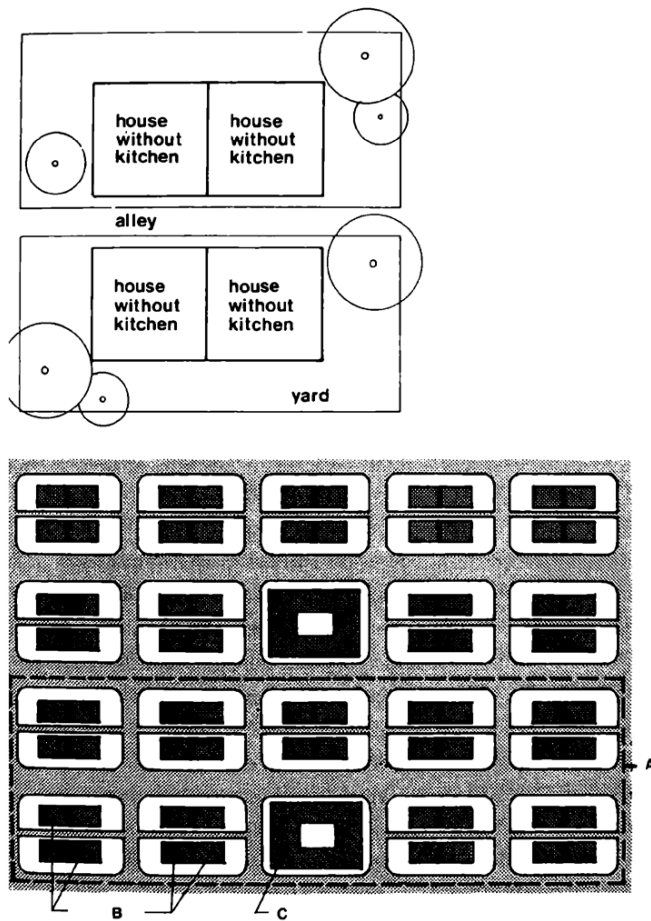
improve women's condition. Catherine Beecher with her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), and then Melusina Fay Peirce with her articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* about Cooperative Housekeeping, and her book *Cooperative Housekeeping: How Not to Do It and How to Do It* (1870) set the premises for a feminist reflection on space. Peirce's vision through her book aims to provide practical advice for women seeking to improve their domestic lives through cooperative living arrangements. Peirce critiqued the traditional household model, which she viewed as isolating and inefficient, and advocated for a more collaborative approach to housekeeping. She offered guidance on the organization of household duties, the creation of schedules and rules, and the development of a sense of community among housemates. The book highlights the potential of cooperative living to empower women and improve their quality of life.

Peirce's work remains relevant to contemporary discussions on domestic labour, gender roles, and communal living. The profound changes in the domestic organization had significant implications for spatial configurations both for housing design and the neighbourhoods.



**Figure 3.** *Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society*





**Figure 4.** *Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society di Melusina Fay Peirce, 1868-69, Diagram for Neighborhood Design, in D. Hayden, Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life, W.W. Norton & Co., New York e London 1984*

Perhaps the most exciting conversations about communal housework, which informed spatial design, were sparked by utopian novels envisioning futuristic cities with centralized services.

Gilman ideated different types of feminist environments in her novels. In one, she imagined apartment hotels or boardinghouses to set women free from domestic labour (*Forsythe and Forsythe*, January 1913); In a second group of tales, she designed a cluster of residences around central common facilities: Laundry, childcare, food delivery, cleaning (*A Cleared Path*, 1900-1904); In another cluster of stories she talked about women forming alliances in clubhouses to create a sisterhood and cooperation in everyday life (*A council of War*, August 1913). One of her masterpieces is *Moving the Mountain*, written in 1911, where she presents a detailed vision of architecture that aligns with her utopian ideals.

Architectural descriptions in the novel highlight the integration of living spaces, work areas, and recreational facilities. The buildings are designed to maximize natural light, fresh air, and green spaces, reflecting the importance of

health and well-being. Moreover, the architecture in the utopian society aims to eliminate hierarchy and promote communal living, with shared facilities fostering a sense of unity and cooperation among citizens.

These reflections also informed the short story *Bee Wise*, written in 1913, about a settlement “planned, built and managed ... by women—for women—and children!”. As one character says, “Men can help, but this time we will manage”.<sup>19</sup> It is composed of two parts: *Bee Wise* and *Herways*. They work as integrated ecology, even though they are located in two different places. The seaport community is *Herways* and is an industrial park. *Beewise*, on the side of the hill, is a residential community. The buildings are designed as kitchenless houses, and the neighbourhood also presents a guest house, a recreation centre, a sanitarium, food labs, kindergartens and schools. All these reflections informed the novel *Herland*, which is more ethereal and dreamlike.

Gilman conjured up a vision of a non-sexist environment in her written production. “She envisioned a world where the industrial and commercial buildings are connected with residences by direct, modern transportation systems. Clustered around parks and open spaces, the proximity of housing to workplace and childcare centres in utopia allows parents of young children, even nursing mothers, to commute easily by foot between their responsibilities.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the material feminists won allies in Europe, such as Alva Myrdal in Sweden, who, together with Sven Markelius, were behind the concept of collective housing as an instrument to promote equality between men and women.

In 1932 in *Tiden* magazine, Alva Myrdal wrote: “Urban housing, where twenty families each in their own apartment cook their own meat-balls, where a lot of young children are shut in, each in his or her own little room – doesn't this cry for an overall planning, for a collective solution?” This concept led the path towards more recent design experimentations of collective and collaborative housing, to foster a more democratic, just and equal way of inhabiting and living.

Through women's literature and built utopias, one can understand the changes and continuities that occur over time in the relationship between women and the built environment. Thus, by exploring women's lived and narrated spaces, one can identify the unique ways in which each woman establishes a relationship with her city and space, shaped by her emotions (such as love, hate, or indifference), imagination, and desires. All the texts have in common one aspect: the liberation of women from domestic labour. Authors of feminist utopian literature aim to challenge and transform societal norms and gender roles, offering an alternative vision of a more just and equal society.

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19. C. Perkins Gilman, *Bee Wise*. In R. Schulman (ed.) *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Stories*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 226–34.

20. P. Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty*. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 100.

## Feminist Housing Activism

During the 1970s, a pivotal era marked by amplified feminist consciousness and social transformation, housing emerged as a strategic focal point for feminist activism due to the convergence of multifaceted social, political, and cultural dynamics. In this period, an acute awareness of systemic gender-based inequalities emerged, prompting feminist activists to spotlight housing as a locus where these disparities were starkly manifested.

The emergence of the Second Wave of feminism during this epoch significantly informed feminist perspectives on housing activism. This wave, characterized by its emphasis on intersectionality and the assertion that ‘the personal is political’ increased women’s awareness and desire to challenge the status quo. Discriminations were not only related to gender but also class and ethnicity, increasing women’s incapability to find adequate housing solutions, especially if they were the head of the household.<sup>21</sup>

The seminal work by Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), is considered the catalyst for the contemporary women’s movement. She wrote about “the problem that has no name” among suburban women, who have not contented anymore by being only mothers and wives, following the preconceived image associated with them of the ‘angel in the house’ or the ‘queen of the home’ engrained in the cult of domesticity. House and work separation had spatial implications for women’s unpaid labour. Feminist scholars have questioned the functionalist model, where the gender binary is strengthened and even reflected in the spatial structure: the workplace/public realm was considered men’s space while the residential/private realm was considered women’s. This dichotomy of urban space has resulted in discriminative spatial experiences.

The legacy of feminist discourse in architecture also played a significant role in shaping feminist housing activism across the continents. Notably, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, which debuted in the late 1970s, became a platform for intersectional feminist discussions on architecture, space, and gender. Articles by scholars like Gerda Wekerle, MATRIX, and Leslie Kanes Weisman, among others, delved into the architectural dimensions of gender and space, challenging traditional design paradigms.

“What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?” through this question, Dolores Hayden condensed the lessons learnt from several built experiences of collective and collaborative housing that aimed at freeing women going from an androcentric to a gendered city.

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21. G. Wekerle, –Women in the Urban Environment. | *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no.3 (1980): S188–S214; Heresies Collective, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 11 (1981); D. Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); Matrix Feminist Design Co-Operative, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*. (London: Pluto Press, 1984); M. Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World. Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design*. (London: Routledge, 1991); L. Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992); D. Spain, *Gendered Spaces*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); C. Booth, J. Darke and S. Yeandle, *Changing Places. Women’s Lives in the City*. (London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2007).

Having delved into these historical examples of utopias, both in written form and as conceptual designs, the following section focuses on the Canadian context. Here, the themes of cooperative housing and feminist values gained prominence in the 1970s, offering a unique perspective on how spatial design and societal ideals intersected. By examining the Canadian experience, we can gain insight into the practical manifestations of these ideologies and their impact on architecture and living spaces.

These experiences have significantly influenced feminist narratives and the aspiration to materialize these written visions. The desire to envision communities where women could discover forms of emancipation led to establishing of cooperatives and collaborative housing. Through the collective use and sharing of spaces and daily activities, these endeavours aimed to support women. This endeavour extends beyond mere physical arrangements to encompass cultural and psychological dimensions, fostering a sense of support and creating social bonds that find their tangible expression within the space design.

### **Women's Housing Cooperatives in Canada**

*Why a Women's Housing Co-op?* An initial flyer for the coop stated: "The current crisis in housing inevitably has the greatest effect on the most vulnerable members of society. At a time when the proportion of women-headed households is on the increase, the availability of adequate, affordable housing is declining. Sole-support women of all ages, with and without children, face serious housing problems. The Toronto Women's Housing Cooperative is one answer to the housing needs of women."<sup>22</sup>

The provocative message contained within this pamphlet encapsulates the main reasons and expectations at the roots of feminist cooperative housing. Of Western industrialized countries, Canada led the path towards designing housing for diversity, equity, and empowerment of marginalized and invisible communities. These projects, which started during the 1970s but reached the peak during the 1980s also thanks to the establishment of the non-profit cooperative housing program by the Canadian Federal Legislation (1973), are located across Canada, in both large and small cities, in urban contexts as well as rural areas.

This legislation favoured an alternative to building affordable housing, which was a compelling issue due to the economic and housing crises which affected Canada at the time. Cooperative housing was recognized as a viable model. Unsurprisingly, groups of women initiated several of the cooperatives, many of them were heads of households, who had the most significant challenges in accessing the housing market because of lower incomes, part-time or precarious jobs, and more caregiving responsibilities. The focus on women is to discuss how they could create living laboratories of everyday empowerment through housing and decision-making, shifting their role from users to participants to agents, promoters, and owners.

Thanks to the extensive research done by Gerda Wekerle, a Canadian-based

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22. Toronto Women's Housing Cooperative, Inc., 1982, flyer, cited in G.R. Wekerle, *Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities*. (Ottawa, CA: Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 1988), 16. Retrieved from: <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.843904/publication.html>.

feminist sociologist, during the 1980s and 1990s, it is possible to have a greater understanding of this phenomenon all around Canada. Her collaborative work with colleagues such as Joan Simon (the architect who co-designed Constance Hamilton Coop) and Barbara Muirhead, funded by the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC), has been instrumental in shedding light on the challenges and experiences faced by women in the housing sphere.

In her seminal works, such as *Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities* (1988) and *Canadian Women's Housing Projects* (1991), Wekerle delves into the intricate intersection of gender and housing, where the aim was to collect all the women's coop they encountered around Canada. The reason behind this research was rooted in the lack of information available to promote this experience of women's empowerment through design.

Her contributions extend to gender studies as well, with publications like *Gender and Housing in Toronto* (1991), with S. Novac, reflecting her commitment to understanding the complex dynamics within the housing landscape. Wekerle's earlier articles, such as *Women in the urban environment* (1980), *Women House themselves* (1981), and *Women and Housing: a research agenda* (1987), have laid the foundation for exploring women's relationship with their built surroundings. Notably, her collaborative work with Joan Simon on Creating a New Toronto neighbourhood focused on the analysis of Frankel Lambert Neighborhood (where Constance Hamilton Coop is located) and provides insights into the planning process and residents' experiences, further enriching our comprehension of housing development in Canada at the scale of the neighbourhood.<sup>23</sup>

What emerged from these reports, a direct survey of the projects<sup>24</sup> and a conversation with Gerda Wekerle<sup>25</sup> is that what characterizes the Canadian experience in designing cooperative housing for women is the notion of diversity, as women's groups realized that there was the need to accommodate a diverse range of household sizes and family types, that could also change over time according to different stages of life. The concept of housing hence shifted, going beyond the idea of Housing=Shelter, to becoming a Housing=Supporting Community.<sup>26</sup>

They seek to avoid the standardization of suburban households, working on

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23. G.R. Wekerle, *Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities*. (Ottawa, CA: Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 1988); G.R. Wekerle, and B. Muirhead, *Canadian Women's Housing Projects*. (Ottawa, CA: Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 1991). Retrieved from: <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/392090/publication.html>; G.R. Wekerle, and S. Novac, *Gender and Housing in Toronto*. (Toronto: Institute on Women and Work, 1991). G.R. Wekerle, -Women in the Urban Environment. | *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no.3 (1980): S188–S214. G.R. Wekerle, -Women house themselves. | *Heresies* 3, no.11 Making Room-Women and Architecture (1981): 14–16; G.R. Wekerle, -Women and housing: a research agenda. | *Canadian Woman Studies* 11, no. 2 (1987): 66–67; G.R. Wekerle and J. Simon, *Creating a new Toronto neighborhood the planning process and residents experience*, prepared for the Ontario region Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 1985).

24. The author visited the project of The Beguinage Cooperative and Constance Hamilton Cooperative in June 2023.

25. The author had the possibility of meeting Gerda Wekerle in June 2023 and discussed with her about women's cooperative housing in Canada, her experience and her work on women and the built environment.

26. From the conversation with Gerda Wekerle.

both the physical design of spaces, the facilities, and the process of decision-making and management, and social diversity. Several projects have been designed for teenage mothers and their children, single parents, lesbians, women above forty, immigrant women, and indigenous women to find solutions that could respond to material but cultural needs.

**Constance Hamilton Housing Cooperative**

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**Address**

70A Lambertlodge Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario  
M6G 3X3

**Contact**

Coordinator, Linda St. James

**Phone No.**

(416) 532-8860

**Date of Completion**

1982

**Sponsor**

5-member voluntary board of directors drawn from social service field, professions, a municipal politician.

**Developer**

Bradsil

**Architect/Urban Design firm**

Joan Simon, Simon Architects and Planners

**Resource Group**

Toronto Labour Council Development Foundation

**Funding**

\$2,330,000 from CMHC 56.1 program

**Building type**

Three storey stacked townhouse new construction; concrete block.

**Number of units**

30 and 6 bedroom communal house for second-stage housing

**Type of units**

10 1-bed; 16 2-bed; 4 3-bed; 6 bedroom communal house

**Unique design features**

Laundry room at ground level overlooking parkette; shared courtyard; 7 different unit types; some entrances to kitchens.

**Objectives/Resident criteria**

To get affordable housing for women built as quickly as possible. Women are eligible to be members of the co-op.

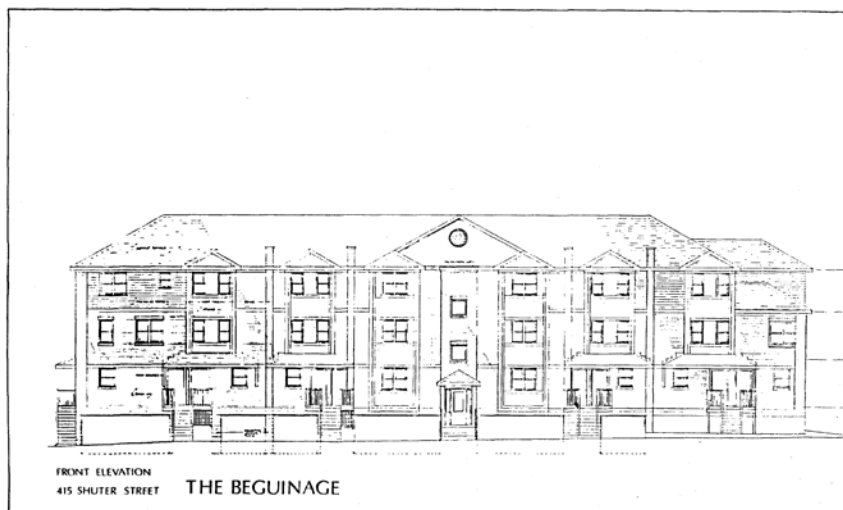
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**Figure 5.** Example of Co-op Factsheet in Gerda Wekerle and Barbara Muirhead's 1991 Report

These aspects found a translation in the housing projects leading to a great diversity of solutions and typological innovations where open and inner common spaces, and facilities for children were coupled with the maximum privacy of the units. Moreover, other important factors to consider included the location of the cooperative, which should be near public transport networks, public and care facilities (nurseries, schools, health centres) and construction materials, which should allow for simple and economical daily maintenance and foster lower energy consumption.

Following this introductory part, the discussion evolves around the presentation of three case studies, selected because they fostered women's empowerment in different ways, between spatial transformation and process-oriented approaches. All these projects started from feminist grassroots movements that were trying to provide affordable and dignified housing for women and marginalized communities. In this sense, the projects are presented in a multifaceted way, exploring the topic of the extension of living spaces in the same building and towards the neighbourhood, involving a multiscalar and interdisciplinary perspective. This research is meant to shed light on the potential of collaborative housing in improving women's everyday experiences. Specifically, these modes of designing space are grounded in developing a series of design actions based on the notions of care and women's emancipation. The aim is to disclose the relationship between gender and space and how it can foster a long-term transformation. The projects explore the theme of the extension of living spaces in the same building and towards the neighbourhood, becoming a way to empower communities.

### **The Beguinage | The Building**



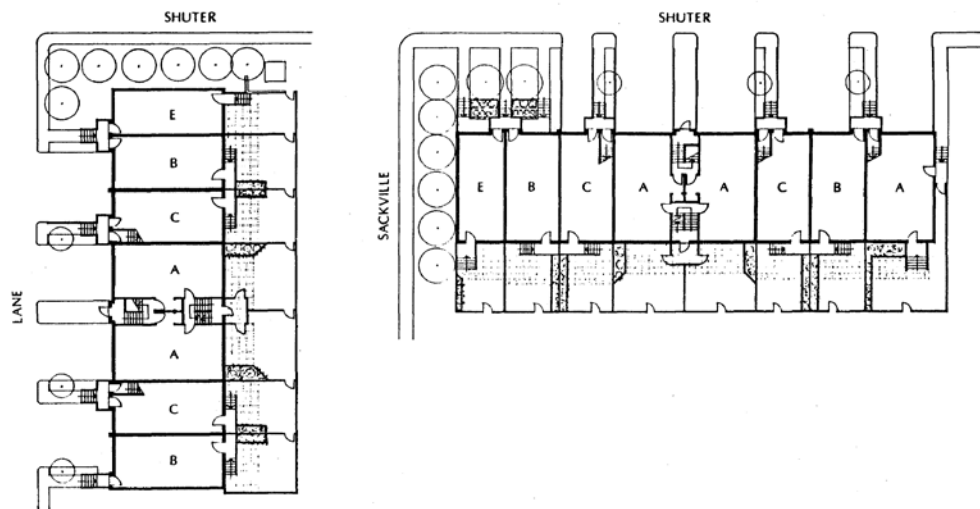
**Figure 6.** Drawings of the Beguinage in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report





**Figure 7.** *The Beguinage, Toronto. Photo by the Author*

The Beguinage, located in the eastern part of Downtown Toronto, is a women's housing cooperative composed of twenty-eight units of stacked housing completed in 1984. The symbolism behind its name is decisive: in fact, they referred to the movement of the Beguines, women who, especially during the 13th and 14th century, decided to live communally to escape from the man-made world and rules. Initially, they wanted to restore a stately downtown building but needed more funding to afford it. Instead, they were offered a site that had been cleared for urban renewal with the condition of building some form of nonprofit housing. The site, however, was split into two parts, making it difficult to have a cohesive community.

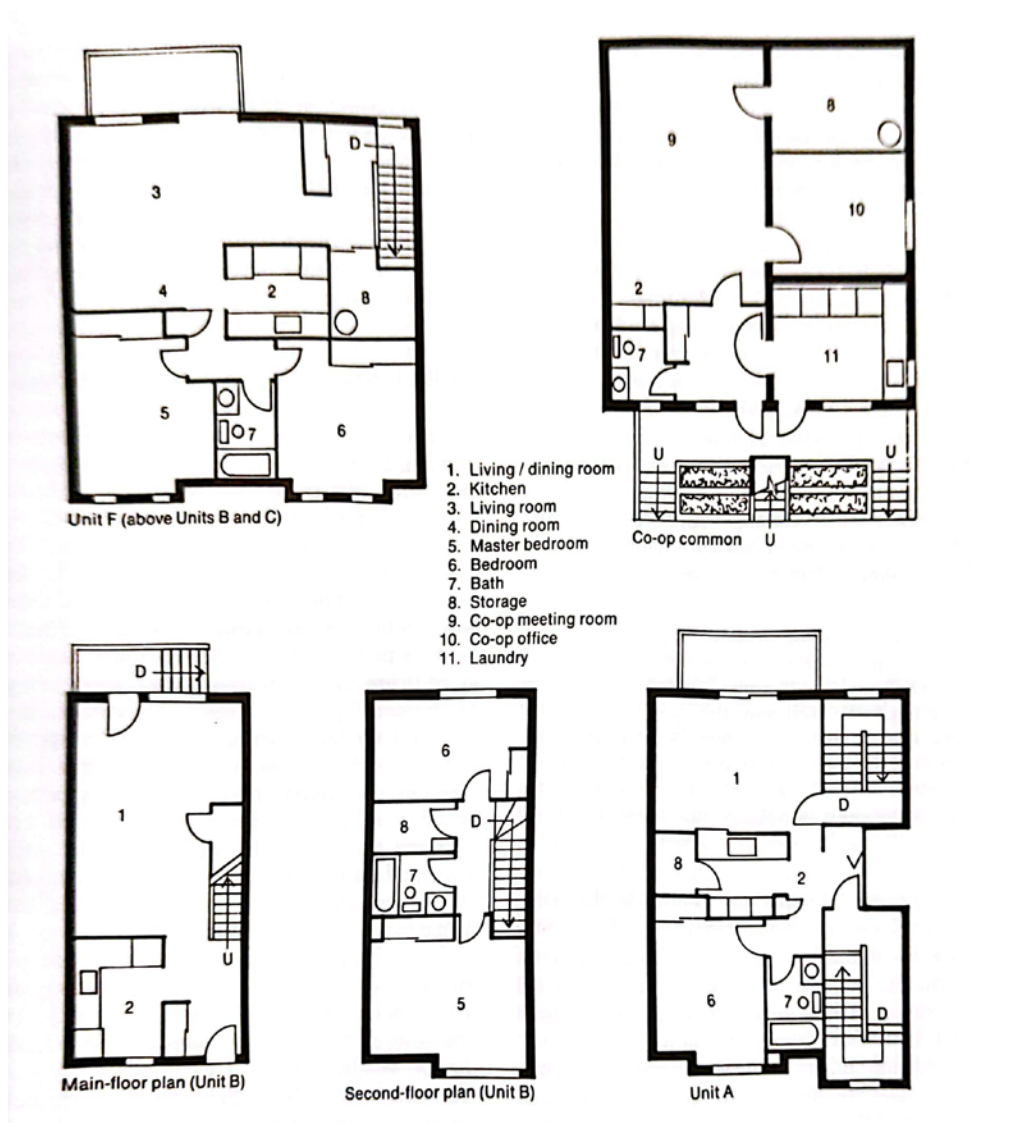


**Figure 8.** Drawings of the Beguinage in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report

The realization of The Beguinage's architectural vision is a collaborative journey involving architects, community members, and local authorities. Although the coop committed to involve a feminist architect in this participatory process, they had to compromise to finish the project reasonably and be more affordable. They had to work with an architect and builder the landowner had preselected. Despite these compromises, the coop was content with the architect, Phil Goldsmith, and Rich Tyssen. Through participatory engagement sessions, resident voices are transformed into tangible architectural features on different levels of design.

First, the initial number of units was the double of the final one; the coop members wanted to have a good quality of living and diverse unit sizes to host different needs. It is possible to find one-, two-, and three-bedroom units within a simple form linear building.

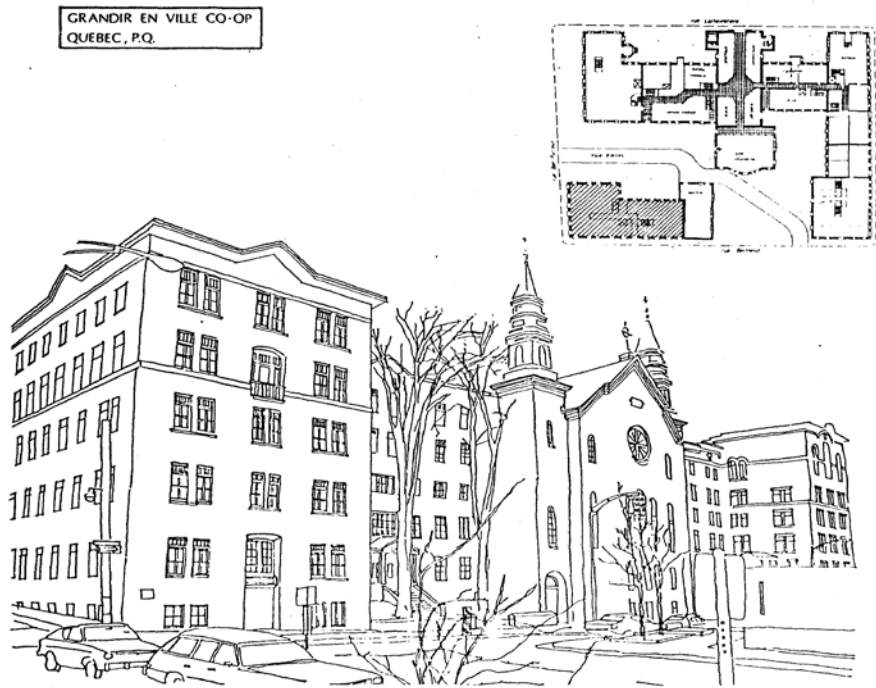
There is a core of six one-bedroom units in the central block, two-story townhouses with direct access to the street, and units stacked above the townhouses. One specific unit was also designed to accommodate an ex-psychiatric patient. The fact of having single entrances was to give both a sense of ownership and increase the entrance security; not having mixed entrances would allow checking who was going to enter the housing. Inside the house, the coop decided not to have master and junior bedrooms; they instead insisted on same-size bedrooms since they assumed that some women would be sharing units, which would also denote an equal status and no hierarchy.



**Figure 9.** *Plans of the Units of the Beguinage in Wekerle, Novac, Developing Two Women's Housing Cooperatives*

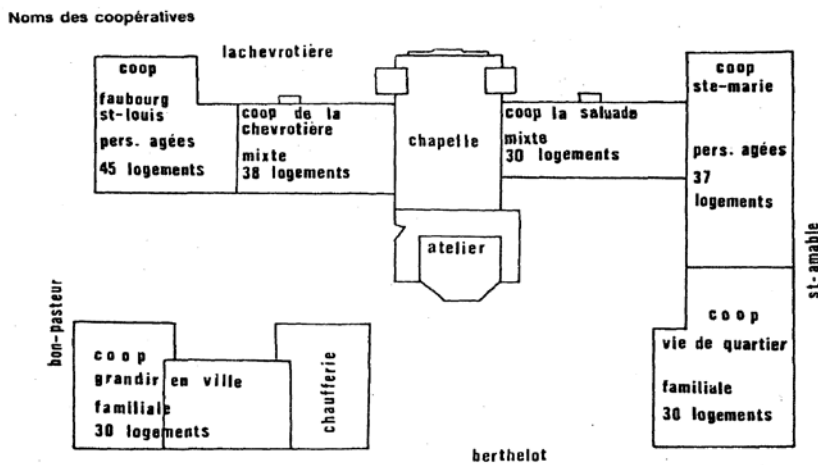
All the outdoor space in the Beguinage is private space attached to a dwelling unit. Large balconies are provided for upper units. "There was a discussion about backyards," says Phil Goldsmith, "whether there should be small patios and shared space. They decided on individual backyards rather than communal spaces. We had long chats, and they were most satisfied with it divided off. There was a possibility of creating a large communal backyard of the core six-unit walk-up building. However, the group assigned the backyard space to the bottom two units and split the space in two. That could have been a substantial communal space." The Beguinage has a small coop meeting room, a coordinator's office, and one laundry room for the whole project.

**Grandir en Ville | The Block**



**Figure 10.** Drawings of Grandir en Ville in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report

Grandir en Ville, a unique cooperative housing project located in Quebec City, is an exemplary model of adaptive reuse and community-driven design based on a feminist approach. Grandir en Ville emerged in 1981 as a response to the impending demolition of the Bon Pasteur Convent, an iconic heritage building in Quebec City's financial district. A group of women who were single parents campaigned for its preservation, convincing the province to use the complex for cooperative housing, and six co-ops were planned for the site.



**Figure 11.** Drawings of Grandir en Ville in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report

It is a four-story building made of stone, presenting an elevator that connects two-story apartments to the third floor. All the apartments face a double-loaded corridor but no balconies; however, there is a shared roof garden. Only the ground-level apartments have direct access to the outside. The main reason behind their campaign was to create a supporting housing environment for them and their children, and the cooperative approach suited their efforts. Marie Leclerc, one of the founders of the Grandir en Ville, said in an interview with Gerda Wekerle in 1986, "It did not take long to figure out that cooperative housing was the way to go. To share responsibilities, rights, democracy—it was a good model for us." One of the core priorities was housing diversity, so even though a group of women started the cooperative, they wanted it to be open to nuclear families as well as single parents. To translate in space this idea of designing for diversity, each unit has been designed individually; there is no plan for a typical unit. This complete absence of a standardized unit layout brought to the design of 30 different apartments, breaking away from conventional norms and accommodating various family types. Jean Cote, the architect, said, "The apartment layouts are unconventional. Living rooms are in the corners of the building to give them double exposures. Therefore, in some apartments, you must walk past the bathroom and bedrooms to get to the living room. This was disturbing to CMHC, but the residents didn't mind, and they opted for this layout to get better living space."

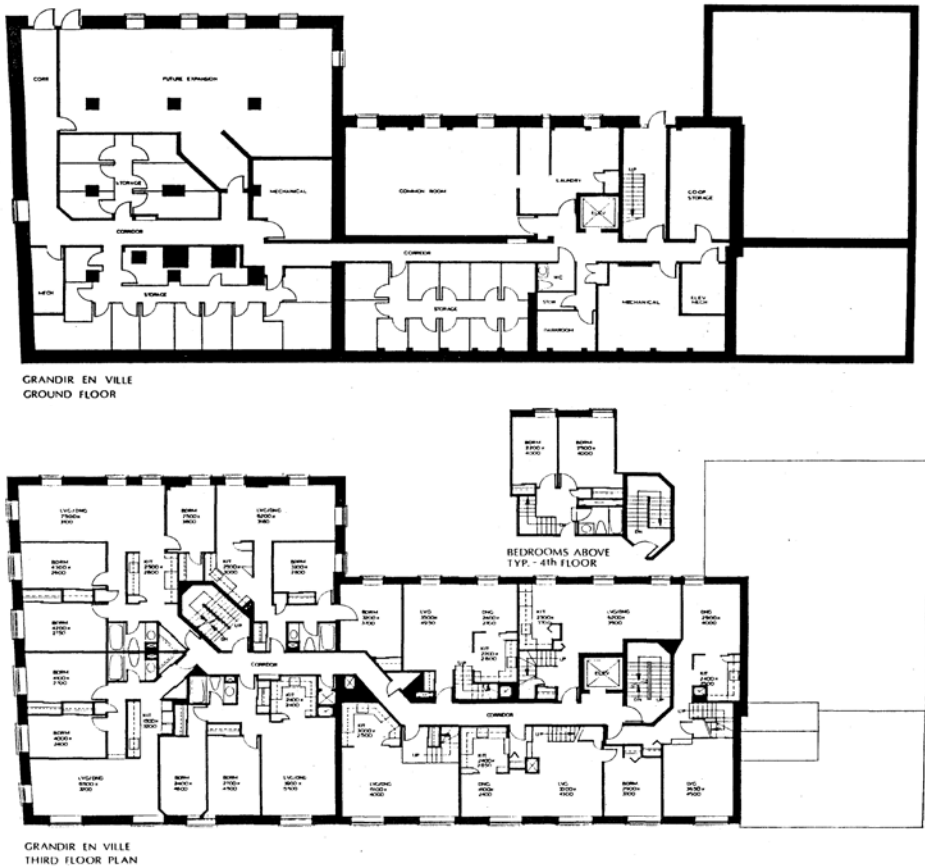


Figure 12. Drawings of Grandir en Ville in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report

At Grandir en Ville, the coop spent much time considering communal spaces. Initially, they all had an idealized vision of how they wanted to live. However, they faced the CMHC, who recommended producing a "normal, conventional" apartment building. Practically, they wanted an extra room for each floor that could be used as community space, for guests, or as an apartment extension. They managed to disguise a bachelor apartment (that should have been rented) as a guest room and common area for adolescents. Moreover, there is a laundry room in the basement and a playground next to it, where children can play under the surveillance of their parents. The position of the laundry was thoroughly discussed. In fact, they debated having small laundries on each floor or a communal laundry room as a gathering place. Initially, they also wanted to include spaces for home-based work; however, they could not integrate them. The different coops share childcare and commercial facilities, a grocery store and a recording studio that can be rented. The main gathering area in the inner courtyard, where all the entrances are. This is especially linked to the idea of having a much safer environment. Safety was another topic they discussed. The concept of the eye on the street introduced by Jane Jacobs was applied here, where there was a direct visual connection between the apartments, the courtyard, or the street.



**Figure 13.** *Images of Grandir en Ville in Wekerle, Canadian Women's Housing Cooperatives. Case Studies in Physical and Social Innovations. In A. Caroline and Beth Moore Milroy, Life Spaces. Gender Household Employment*



**Constance Hamilton in Frankel Lambert Neighborhood| The Neighborhood**

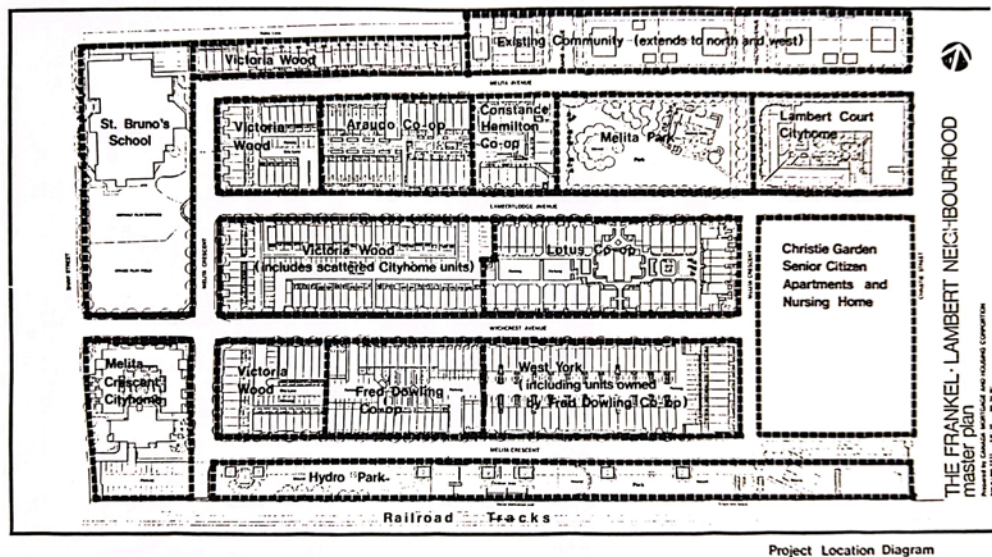


**Figure 14.** *Constance Hamilton Cooperative, Toronto. Photo by the Author*

Constance Hamilton Cooperative is a women's housing coop, the first built in Toronto, and located in the dense coop neighbourhood of Frankel-Lambert, a city-developed area. The first discussions started with a series of women's hostels working on the Metro Toronto Social Services Long-Term Housing Committee (1979) to develop a long-term accommodation for women. The final project opened in 1982. It was composed of thirty-unit stacked townhouses on three stories with an attached six-bedroom transitional house for single women who had been in shelters. Its feminist roots were clear from the beginning; the founding board wanted to create permanent housing for marginalized women, involving them in every design process.

The aim was to maintain control of the design and development process; this meant hiring their own architect and developer and where women could gain support from adequate housing and the supporting community. Joan Simon was the perfect match for them, as she was already engaged with community housing and was sensible to women's needs and aspirations.





CONSTANCE HAMILTON CO-OP  
Simon Architects

**Figure 15.** Drawings of Constance Hamilton Cooperative in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report

"The Board was very concerned with the habitability of the units. If we were working for a private developer, attention would have frequently been on gimmicks and trim rather than basic quality. The Board wanted to maximize living space and make houses better for people to actually live in" (Interview by Gerda Wekerle, 1982). The notion of designing for diversity was declined at different scales. The neighbourhood presents a great variety of cooperatives directed to multi-generational communities, city houses, and community houses. Within this neighbourhood, Constance Hamilton Cooperative was well-integrated regarding objectives and approaches. This housing project has seven different unit designs: ten one-bedroom units, sixteen two-bedroom units, and four three-bedroom. They were conceived for 2-3 women sharing, multi-generational families, two single parents.

Moreover, the units were conceived for multiple uses synchronically: the living areas were split, one for each floor (living room on one floor, kitchen, and dining room on another) to be used as social spaces simultaneously to have more privacy.

All two- and three-bedroom units have a private basement area accessible from within the unit for storage, private laundry facilities or an Indoor play area for bad weather. Each unit has a door on the ground level, a private balcony, or a small outdoor area. Moreover, there is a two-story unit of six bedrooms with a common living room, dining room, and bathrooms to accommodate single women that have been in shelters.

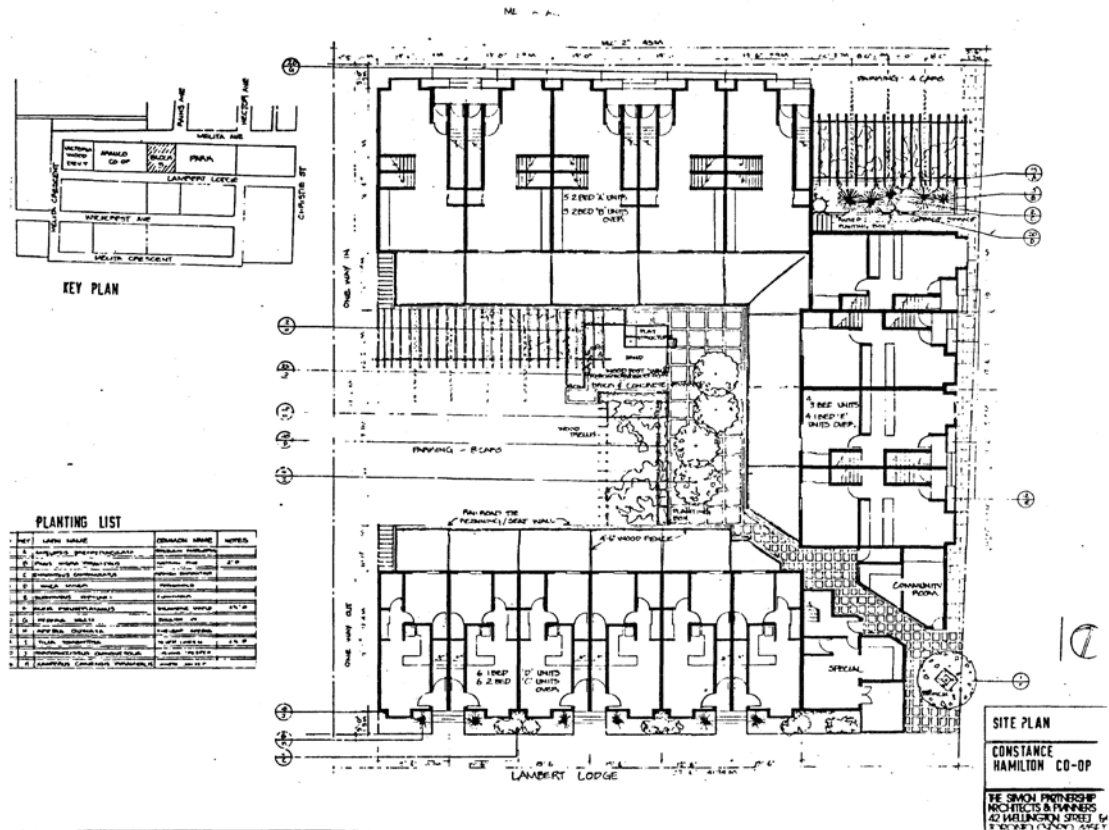
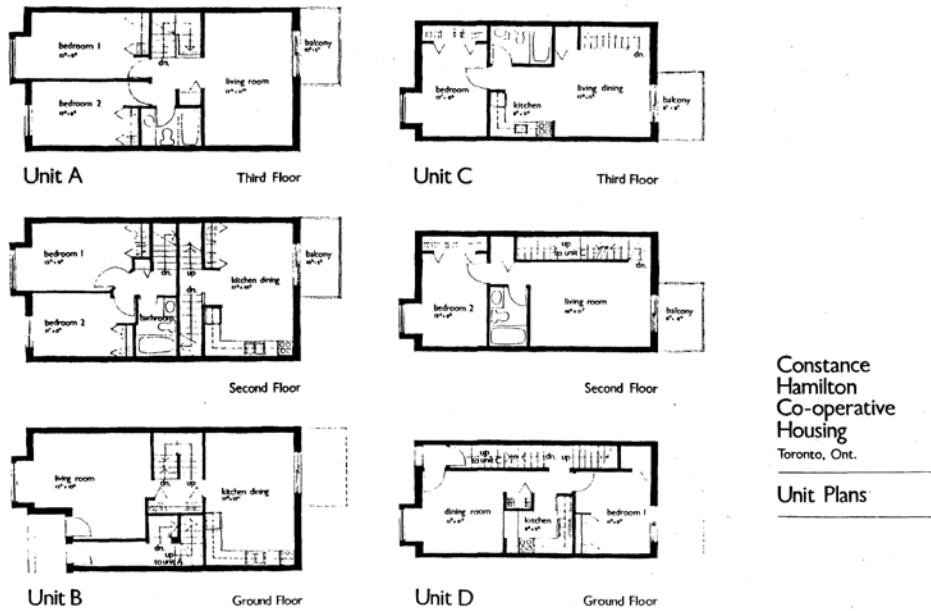
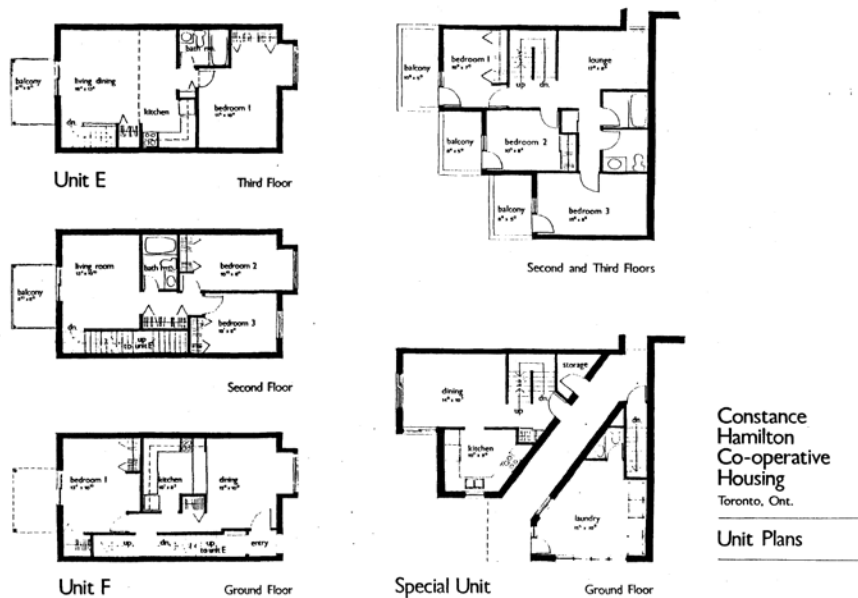


Figure 16. Drawings of Constance Hamilton Cooperative in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report



**Figure 17.** Drawings of Constance Hamilton Cooperative in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report



**Figure 18.** Drawings of Constance Hamilton Cooperative in Gerda Wekerle 1988 Report

There is a good balance between conviviality and privacy, as each unit has its own balcony, but on the top, there is a shared roof garden which all the coop members can use. Communal outdoor spaces are created by compacting the other uses: Joan Simon's program statement says: "Parking areas were squeezed and fragmented to create a community courtyard where the co-op members can come together informally. The courtyard is planted with large trees to balance community

and privacy." This communal area is used by children to play and for coop events with a communal herb garden. There is also a toilet in the laundry room for kids in the park, which had to be deliberately designed.



**Figure 19.** *Images of Constance Hamilton Cooperative in Wekerle, Canadian Women's Housing Cooperatives. Case Studies in Physical and Social Innovations. In A. Caroline and Beth Moore Milroy, Life Spaces. Gender Household Employment*

### **Designing for Gender Equality: A Discussion**

How can design empower women and gender minorities? What does it entail for the architectural and spatial project? Is it only about design or the process of building a community? Furthermore, in this framework, what could be the role of architecture and the architect in this scenario?

What emerges from the design experiences seen above is a conceptual richness beyond the design of spaces or the construction of supporting communities. Instead, there is a need to approach the feminist project with the lens of interdisciplinarity, considering synchronically tangible and intangible factors. Focusing on the concept of collective and collaborative living as a means of promoting gender equality, the discussion begins by challenging traditional housing norms, suggesting a shift towards a broader understanding of home that extends beyond physical boundaries where. Throughout Canada, women have gained insights from the experiences of their peers, realizing that if some women can achieve such goals, others are equally capable. This realization has empowered women to take control, acquire new skills, and enter unconventional domains. The notion that women can manage their housing situations has ignited a sense of empowerment, encouraging women to advocate for more control over their housing conditions across various sectors of the housing landscape.

Women-led housing initiatives have led to innovative alternatives that involve new ways of integrating housing and services, focusing on community engagement, and implementing collaborative management practices with active resident involvement. These initiatives emphasize the transformative potential of housing in women's lives, fostering self-esteem and offering a stable foundation for personal growth. By adopting a holistic perspective on the housing system, these initiatives have highlighted the need for housing to be intertwined with social services, thereby becoming a central concern for women's advocacy groups.

What informed these projects were both tangible and intangible values gained from the feminist critique of architecture available at the time, which highlighted the relevance of critical issues to be faced: affordability, security of tenure, and procedures; but also diversity; accessibility; care; facilities for children; minimal maintenance; sharing and communal facilities; and privacy.

These design experiences are not perfect projects, but their value lies in the fact that they are experiences that have spread like wildfire throughout Canada. The co-ops empowered the residents by providing them with improved material conditions to concentrate on other realms of their lives. This model carried out as a grass-root movement in Canada, and supported by government funds, deserves to be recognized and further analyzed regarding space design and process and management methods. Analyzing these projects almost 50 years after their construction, we can recognize some precursor aspects central to the design of homes and neighbourhoods through a gender perspective. Specifically, the attention to diversity and social and spatial complexity translated into different unit layouts, participation in the design process of its inhabitants from the conception to the construction and then management, deconstruction and flexibilization of spaces and at the same time de-hierarchization, attention to workspaces and processes, storage spaces, attention to intermediate spaces, adaptability and transformation over time.

Indeed, some aspects should be rethought and would have deserved more reflection in the design phase, but unfortunately, due to economic factors have not been carried out. These are connected to some central design themes from a gender perspective.

Looking at the *Beguinaige*, the project could benefit from having more common and shared areas, both open-air and inside. All the outdoor space in the *Beguinaige* is private, and there are no sufficient common spaces inside for everyone to gather. The cooperative could foster spontaneous interactions and strengthen the sense of community by strategically locating shared areas like lounges, kitchens, or garden spaces close to the residents' units. Moreover, it could foster greater openness and connection with the neighbourhood and the other building that belongs to the coop on the other corner of the area. One issue that has to be considered is affordability, which in this case, strongly informed some design and spatial choices.

The second project, *Grandir en Ville*, presents an intriguing challenge by renovating an existing complex. Here, there was a good balance between privacy and communal living, and the presence of caring facilities made this cooperative a good reference for other projects. Also, in this case, the coop had to compromise on some choices due to economic reasons. The initial desire was to integrate house and work facilities to improve women's (and single parents') everyday lives. However,

they failed to integrate it, and through a discussion with the inhabitants, it emerged that this was something they regretted later on.

Finally, the Constance Hamilton Cooperative would have benefitted from integrating social and common facilities both in the building and the neighbourhood. Contrary to Grandir en Ville, who provided on-site childcare, the Constance Hamilton coop relied on a nearby park where children could play.

While diversity played a central role in these housing cooperatives, it was interpreted differently across various initiatives. Some cooperatives embraced an intergenerational approach, others were open to nuclear families and males, welcoming individuals of all genders, while others chose to be exclusively women-only. This approach presented a dilemma for government authorities, as it appeared to segregate women potentially. However, two essential considerations underline the significance of these women-only cooperatives. Firstly, women sought environments where they could connect with others who shared similar life experiences, allowing them to relate and share everyday tasks and stories. These cooperative communities aimed to provide a space of understanding and support among women beyond housing. Secondly, the existence of women-only cooperatives addressed the specific needs of vulnerable populations, such as survivors of domestic violence or individuals who had faced violence in public spaces. For these women, living in a mixed-gender housing environment might not be conducive to their well-being and safety. Hence, while the concept of gender-specific housing cooperatives posed a challenge in terms of diversity, it fulfilled a critical role in meeting the unique needs and preferences of women seeking solidarity and refuge from past traumatic experiences. Balancing the principles of inclusion and addressing the specific concerns of marginalized women highlights the multifaceted nature of the decisions made by these cooperatives.

Much of the feminist design literature highlights the relevance of the physical space in conveying equity and diversity values; however, there is still the need to understand how to go beyond traditional ways of performing architecture and rethinking forms and types. Cooperative housing endeavours align with these evolving forms of social organization. Together with networks of shared values and diverse relationships, they offer innovative approaches to address life reproduction, caregiving, and nurturing aspects. Examining these projects from a feminist and gender-oriented viewpoint unveils a pathway to translate gender equality into architecture and design. These characteristics converge at the intersection of tangible and intangible dimensions, enabling the gradual construction of a community over time. In this sense, we should approach the design considering: The 'Hardware' or The Physical Dimension: The Materiality of Spaces; The 'Software': The Use of Space and the Experience of Architecture; The Symbolic Dimension: Visibility and Representation; The Perceptive Dimension: Thermal Comfort, Psychological and Physical comfort, and Sense of Belonging in Space; The Contextual Aspect: Safety, Noise, Crime.

## **Conclusion**

An intriguing question arises within cooperative housing: What happens once the original inhabitants, who served as the catalysts for the community, change, such as relocation? Does the cooperative project encounter challenges or even the prospect of failure? This critical aspect demands careful consideration, for it unveils an architectural dimension where spatial value becomes crucial. Beyond the physical layout, we must delve into the core principles that birthed the cooperative – elements such as diversity, shared engagement, equity, and mutual support. These principles constitute the bedrock of the cooperative's foundation. However, as time passes, residents may shift due to personal reasons. This is where the spatial design takes on a pivotal role. A strong connection is forged if the cooperative's fundamental principles can be translated into physical spaces – from communal areas to individual homes. The spatial design sustains the cooperative's principles even amid shifts in its occupants. It ensures the perpetuation of the cooperative's ethos beyond its initiators. When spaces are conceived to translate diversity, communal living, and equality, they become more than just architecture. They embody the cooperative's identity.

From this viewpoint, designing for gender equality encompasses more than mere values. It delves into a practical consideration of how the space can flexibly accommodate a changing resident landscape. Cooperative housing design should be adaptable, aligning with the needs of future residents.

With this holistic perspective, we could re-position the architectural and spatial project within the entanglement of form and use, of poetics of space and politics. The contribution, by looking at design experiences of cooperative housing through and from a feminist and gendered perspective, seeks to become a brick in the discussion about the spatialization of gender equality. While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework has aimed to establish specific objectives, the current convergence of social, environmental, and economic crises is reshaping our collective living circumstances.

This shift requires not only a reevaluation of our objectives but also a reimagining of our built environment. The architectural legacy we have inherited largely reflects patriarchal norms, characterized by universality, single-purpose design, and segregation. Therefore, it becomes fundamental to reconceptualize how spaces are inhabited, fostering a democratic, fair, and gender-aware approach.

## **Acknowledgements**

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