

TOWARDS COLLECTIVE FORMS OF DWELLING: THE GRANT-OF-USE HOUSING COOPERATIVES IN CATALONIA

HACIA FORMAS COLECTIVAS DE VIVIENDA: LAS COOPERATIVAS DE VIVIENDAS EN RÉGIMEN DE CESIÓN DE USO EN CATALUÑA

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ABSTRACT

The grant-of-use cooperative housing model that has emerged in Catalonia since 2015 has received interest as an alternative form of housing. Groups engage in self-organization and collective decision-making to assess their needs, negotiate resources, and co-create alternative housing options. This article examines the characteristics of the current state of cooperative housing in Catalonia through a comparative analysis of the existing cases, using graphs with the data from the Observatory of Cooperative Housing of Catalonia. The analyzed attributes are categorized into five main areas: location, constitutive characteristics, the process of participation, economic characteristics, and communal living. It is observed that Catalonia's cooperative housing model is offering new possibilities for dwelling and fostering community-oriented housing. However, to address challenges related to inclusion, long consolidation processes and financial barriers, there is still room for improvement.

KEYWORDS

Affordable housing, collective housing, community, communal living, participation

RESUMEN

El modelo de cooperativa de vivienda en régimen de cesión de uso que ha surgido en Cataluña desde 2015 ha suscitado interés como forma alternativa de vivienda. Los grupos se autoorganizan y toman decisiones colectivas para evaluar sus necesidades, negociar recursos y cocrear alternativas de vivienda. Este artículo examina las características del estado actual de la vivienda cooperativa en Cataluña a través de un análisis comparativo de los casos existentes, utilizando gráficos con los datos del Observatorio de la Vivienda Cooperativa de Cataluña. Los atributos analizados se clasifican en: localización, características constitutivas, proceso de participación, características económicas y convivencia. Se observa que el modelo de vivienda cooperativa de Cataluña está ofreciendo nuevas posibilidades para habitar y fomentar la vivienda orientada a la comunidad. Sin embargo, para hacer frente a los retos relacionados con la inclusión, los largos procesos de consolidación y las barreras financieras, todavía hay margen de mejora.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Vivienda sostenible, vivienda colectiva, comunidad, vivienda en comunidad, participación

INTRODUCTION

The housing crisis in Spain has resulted in rising evictions and challenges in accessing affordable housing. This has sparked a debate surrounding “the right to housing and the city” (García-Lamarca, 2017) and the current state of housing conditions (Miralles Buil, 2019). Over the past decade, there has been an increase in studies focused on the housing crisis (Sala, 2018). Many of these studies diagnose problems stemming from the growth model, the commodification and financialization of housing, and their impact on urban spaces, such as the gentrification or the touristification of neighborhoods (Mendoza Ayala, 2019). Additionally, they address the shortcomings of existing housing policies (Hoekstra et al., 2010). In response, many studies have explored alternative forms of property and tenure, such as cooperative housing (Etxezarreta et al., 2018). However, authors like Sala (2018) have highlighted gaps in the existing research, including the lack of holistic, comprehensive studies that address the housing problem. These studies should encompass community participation in housing, empowerment of affected groups, and examine synergies between public and non-profit actors (Cutts, & Moser, 2015). Consequently, only a few studies have shed light on citizen movements that advocate for housing strategies outside traditional markets (García-Lamarca, 2017).

Cooperative housing emerges as an alternative to market and state housing provisions (Thörn et al., 2020) when groups self-organize to access housing, creating collective forms of property, management, and decision-making (Vestbro, 2010). According to the literature, housing cooperatives appear at different periods as solutions to the following issues. Firstly, market-provided housing, which is the dominant mechanism in place, is failing to provide adequate and

affordable solutions for many households. In response, groups engage in self-organization to pursue non-speculative alternatives, emphasizing the right to long-term and secure housing use over ownership and profit-making (Ehlenz, 2018; Ferreri, & Vidal, 2021). Secondly, market or state-provided housing often fails to create dwellings that meet the needs of inhabitants, as they follow top-down processes without the active involvement of future residents. In community-led housing, we observe a diversification of apartment typologies and shared spaces, facilitating the inclusion of various households and accommodating different lifestyles (Jarvis, 2015). Finally, individualistic dwelling practices contribute to a “crisis of care” and to an uneven distribution of the reproductive and caregiving responsibilities, primarily burdening women (Jupp et al., 2019). In community-oriented ways of dwelling, there is an intention to socialize reproductive work by collectivizing the sharing of domestic activities, reducing reliance on private domestic space, and incorporating communal spaces (Power, & Mee, 2019). Community-led housing can have multiple positive impacts within communities, such as reducing housing costs, providing more affordable solutions, prioritizing care as a central aspect of co-living, enhancing sustainability, and promoting mutual support and communal living among residents.

The current research explores the manifestation of these characteristics within the emerging cooperative housing movement in Catalonia, which began in 2015 under the term ‘grant-of-use’. In this article, data from the Observatory of Cooperative Housing of Catalonia is being used to analyze a sample of 50 cases that are in progress or completed. The selected data are categorized into five groups: location, constitutive characteristics, participation process, economic characteristics, and communal living. Each category is analyzed by comparing different attributes. The first category explores the geographic concentration of the cooperatives in Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia. The second category focuses on the evolution of the constitutive characteristics of the model, such as the number of inhabitants, the size of the units, the type of construction, and the access to land. The third category examines the type and duration of the participatory process to identify potential barriers for the participants. The fourth category investigates the affordability of the model and the relationship between the initial contribution and monthly fees. Finally, the fifth category investigates the connection between the size of the common areas and the type of community to understand group preferences. Through this analysis, we gain insights into the characteristics of Catalonia's current grant-of-use cooperative model and its evolution in recent years, thereby recognizing the defining features of this alternative form of dwelling.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Spain, cooperative housing appears for the first time at the beginning of the 20th century, with the immigration flows of populations from the countryside to the urban centers to access decent and affordable housing (Fernández, & Miró, 2016). During this first wave, cooperatives act mainly as promoters of housing or even of entire neighborhoods. The apartments were transferred as property to the households after construction. Only in a few cases did the cooperatives keep functioning after the construction of the houses. The second wave starts at the end of the sixties, and during the last years of Francoism, housing cooperatives appear from the bottom up. During the eighties, the movement becomes more robust, and its main objective is to make affordable houses by reducing the costs of the intermediaries. In a similar way to the previous phase, once construction is completed, the ownership of the apartments is transferred to each household and only in a few cases the cooperative keeps its role as a community of owners.

The current wave of cooperative housing under the grant-of-use model started in Catalonia around 2004, when international reference points of cooperative housing, such as the Andels model of Denmark, became widely known as the result of the publication of a report (Turmo, 2004). In the same year, the association Sostre Civic¹ was created to support groups developing cooperative housing. During the following years, rural cooperative housing projects will appear in Catalonia, such as Cal Cases in 2007 and the first senior cooperative housing projects, such as La Muralleta in Tarragona. However, such initiatives appear as independent efforts, and it takes some years until cooperative housing scales up, reaching more social groups with the creation of networks and alliances.

The main difference with the previous two phases of cooperative housing in Spain is the maintaining of the ownership by the cooperative that grants the long-term use of the apartments to its members. In that way, the use value is prioritized over the market and exchange values, reinforcing the idea of the decommodification of housing, and moving towards collective and non-speculative housing. The objectives of the third phase of cooperative housing can be better understood by looking at its socio-political context. In the years following the financial crisis of 2008, housing movements became prominent in Barcelona, some seeking immediate solutions to protect households, and others looking for alternative and non-commodified models. The anti-austerity movement in Spain, also referred to as the 15-M² Movement, is an essential reference point, as many grassroots groups emerged at that moment (García-Lamarca, 2017), such as the Integral Cooperative of Catalonia (Cooperativa Integral Catalana). However, it is only after 2015 that grassroots groups reclaim access to public land using the grant-of-use model.

¹ Sostre Civic is an entity that supports the creation of cooperative housing projects, and is referred to as secondary cooperative, cooperative of projects, umbrella cooperative or support entity (more information in <https://sostrecivic.coop/>)

² 15M is an abbreviation for 15th of May, which was the day that the anti-austerity manifestations started in Spain, in 2011.

In 2015³, the city council of Barcelona transferred a public plot and a building to the first two pilot projects, La Borda and Princesa 49, for 75 years, after the pressure of activist and neighborhood movements that had been reclaiming them⁴. The same year, the board for Cooperative Housing (Mesa por la Vivienda Cooperativa de Barcelona) is created, a working group within the Barcelona Social Housing Council, which is the first coordination space for the sector, driven by the demands of cooperative entities and local promoters (Michellini et al., 2021). In 2016, the city council will launch the first public competition to adjudicate four public plots. The winners of the public competition were: La Xarxaire, La Chalmeta, Cirerers, and La Balma. In 2018, the second one for another three plots: Sotrac, La Regadora, and Torrent Viu (City Council of Barcelona, 2021).

In 2020, the ESAL Agreement⁵ was created (City Council of Barcelona et al., 2020) between the Barcelona City Council and non-profit entities that promote social housing. On the one hand, the Federation of Housing Cooperatives of Catalonia (Federació de Cooperatives d'Habitatges de Catalunya-FCHC), the Coordinator of social housing foundations (Coordinadora de Fundacions d'Habitatge Social-Cohabitac), and the Network of Solidarity Economy (Xarxa d'Economia Solidària-XES); and, on the other hand, the City Council of Barcelona, the Municipal Institute of Housing and Rehabilitation of Barcelona (Institut Municipal de l'Habitatge i Rehabilitació de Barcelona-IMHAB), and the Association of Social Housing Developers of Catalonia (Associació de Gestors Polítics Socials d'Habitatge de Catalunya-GHS). The city council adjudicates the available plots directly to the board of the non-profit entities that promote social housing, and according to the criteria that have been settled, the plots are distributed internally.

Several studies analyze the housing cooperatives in Barcelona from different perspectives. Cabré, & Andrés (2018) focus on the socio-political conditions that led to their development, Girbés-Peco et al. (2020) on their governance and organizational structure, Asara (2019) on the social innovation and Etxezarreta et al. (2018) on the communal aspects of housing. Brysch (2018) uses case study analysis, focusing on the design aspects, and Avilla-Royo et al. (2021) to the current housing regulations. The issue of the decommodification of housing has also been analyzed through the conceptual framework of the commons (Ferreri, & Vidal, 2021; Leyva del Río, 2022; Miralles Buil, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

For this research, comparative data analysis was applied to the current cases using different graphs. The cases were also geolocalized using QGIS software to explore their location. The data comes from the Observatory of Cooperative Housing of Catalonia database (Llargavista, 2023). In cases where data was missing, it was

³ In 2015, Ada Colau, the founder of the Platform for those affected by the mortgages (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca - PAH) is elected as the mayor of Barcelona.

⁴ The plot is part of the former industrial site of Can Batlló and was the outcome of the neighbourhood movement "Recuperem Can Batlló" that took the initiative to occupy the site, as a reaction to a process of urban renewal

⁵ More about the ESAL, Agreement: <https://habitatge.social/barcelona/convenio/sobre-el-convenio/>

complemented by information published by each group and document analysis. Also, data were used from the National Institute of Statistics of Spain and the Autonomous Government of Catalonia database to compare it with the existing state of housing in Catalonia (Government of Catalonia, 2023). The data were analyzed statistically and using graphs to explore trends and patterns. As mentioned, the data selected for the current article is classified into five categories (Table 1).

TABLE 1
List of categories and attributes of the housing cooperatives

Category	Attribute
Location	Urban/ rural location
	Address
Constitutive characteristics	Number of housing units
	Construction type
	Land access
Process of participation	Year of initiation of the group
	Year of initiation of the construction
	Year of moving in
	Type of group’s initiation
Economic characteristics	The initial contribution to entering the cooperative
	Monthly fee
Communal living	The total surface of the construction
	The average size of apartments
	The total surface of community spaces
	Identity of the group

DATA ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE GRAPHICS

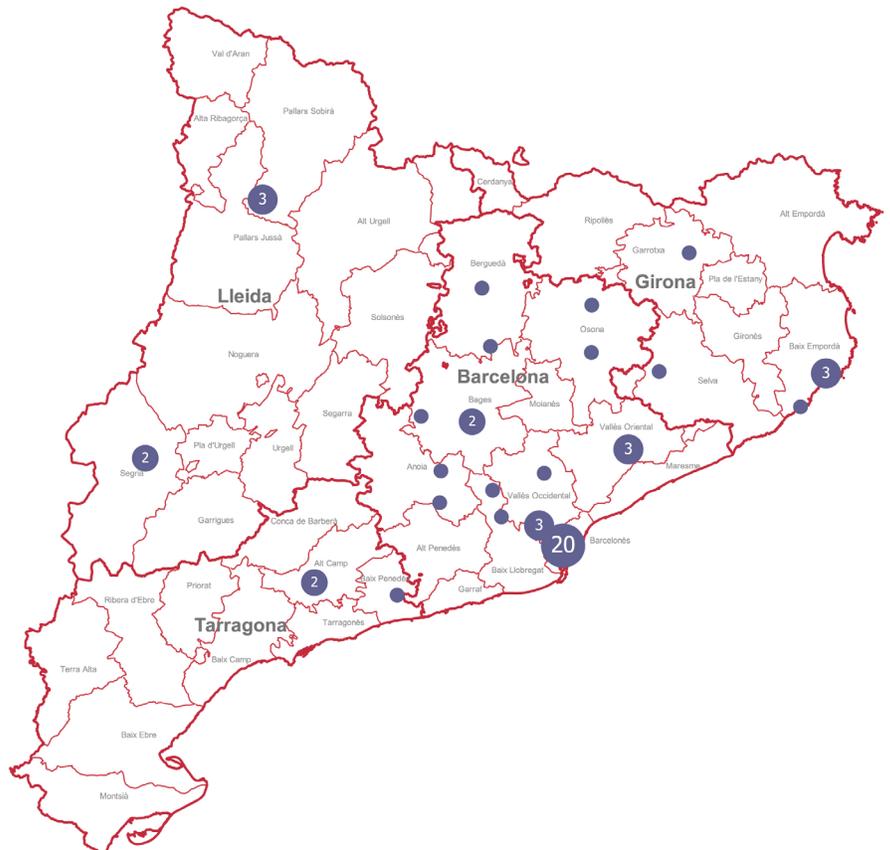
Location

According to the data, 71 groups are currently in the process of creating a housing cooperative. The groups are found in different stages of development, ranging from the initial group formation, to already living together. Out of the 71 projects, 50 are in a more mature stage: having found a plot, being in the construction process, or already living in. It is important to note that the number of groups at an early stage is not precise, as some are dissolved before they manage to find land, or others might not be registered. Examining the 50 projects that are in a more mature phase, with access to land, under construction, or already living in, we observe that 39 % (19) are in the urban area of the city of Barcelona, 34 % (17)

are in other metropolitan areas of Catalonia, and 28 % (14) are in a rural zone. Besides, looking at the provinces where the projects are located, 72 % (36) are in the province of Barcelona, 12 % (6) are in the province of Girona, 10 % (5) are in the province of Lleida, and 6 % (3) in the province of Tarragona (Figure 1).

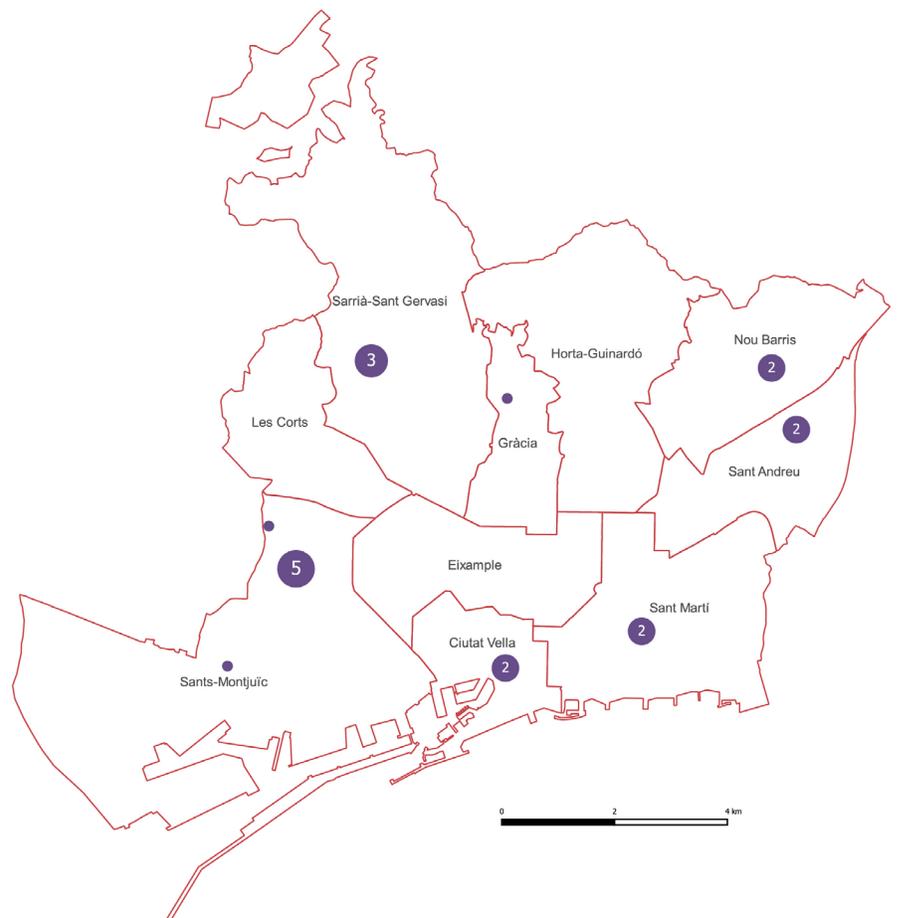
Most of the projects are in the urban area of Barcelona, which means that the main objective of the groups is still to access housing in the capital. After the city of Barcelona, most housing cooperatives are found in other municipalities in the same region near the capital, manifesting their influence in the surrounding areas. This happens as many people are moving out of the capital in search of opportunities for creating a housing cooperative. Finally, although the current wave of cooperative housing started in Barcelona, cases have appeared in other regions of Catalonia, such as Girona or Lleida over the last few years. This indicates that the model is expanding geographically, proliferating in more municipalities each time, and acquiring more diversity. To access land, the groups are using different mechanisms that we will see in the following chapter.

FIGURE 1
Housing cooperatives in
Catalonia



Looking at the city of Barcelona, we find 19 housing cooperatives in the construction process or with people already living in them. Most of them are located in the district of Sants-Montjuïc, with a percentage of 37 % (7), 16 % (3) are in the district of Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, 10.5 % (2) in the district of Nou Barris, 10.5 % (2) in the district of Sant Andreu, 10.5 % (2) in Sant Martí, 10.5 % (2) in the city center and 5 % (1) in the district of Gràcia (Figure 2). There is an apparent concentration in the neighborhood of Sants, which relates to the fact that the initial neighborhood movement appeared there during the occupation of the industrial site of Can Battló. After the realization of the first cooperative, La Borda, at a plot of Can Battló, many new groups emerged from neighborhood residents or people interested in living at La Borda. This resulted in five more projects in the surrounding area. The cooperatives in the district of Sants have strong relations, working on joint projects, such as a renewable energy network and supporting the creation of new ones. Apart from the district of Sants, the rest of the projects are distributed around Barcelona in various neighborhoods, manifesting a diversification of the locations. Mostly they are found in peripheral plots, and not so much in the central districts, except for two projects.

FIGURE 2
Housing cooperatives in
Barcelona



Constitutive Characteristics: Size, Construction, and Access to Land

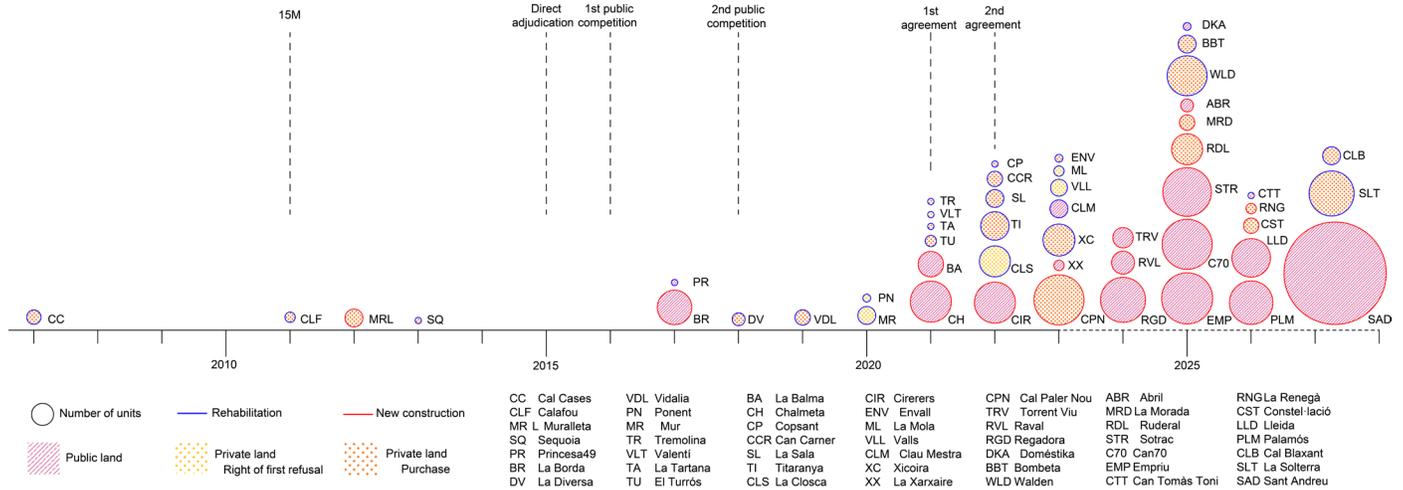
The emerging cooperative housing model is also studied through the evolution of the constitutive characteristics of the projects to understand how they are being conceptualized and implemented. The characteristics analyzed in this study refer primarily to the provision and production of housing. They are the number of units, the type of construction and the land access, and their evolution over time. Firstly, the number of units refers to the number of households that live in each housing development to identify the tendency of the size of the cooperatives. Secondly, the type of construction refers to the decision to rehabilitate an existing building or to opt for new construction. Finally, the access to land is being studied to investigate the main mechanisms in place, and if the projects are mainly on public land, or if they manage to acquire private plots through purchase or the “Right of first refusal” mechanism that will be analyzed further on.

Looking at the evolution of cooperative housing provision, we see a constant increase in their number every year (Figure 3). The co-habitation of the first cooperative started in 2007, and for the next ten years there has been a sporadic appearance of projects until 2017, when the cases scaled up. Especially after 2021, the number escalates and continues increasing until today. After 2015, the cooperatives start accessing public land with the two pilot projects of La Borda and La Princesa. This is a crucial factor, significantly reducing the total development cost. The foreseen projects have also been included, showing the expected increase of the cooperative housing stock in the following years. The final number might differ, as new projects are emerging, and unforeseen factors might prevent the realization of the expected ones.

We observe that the initial cooperatives started as the rehabilitation of existing buildings on private land, with the members collectively purchasing the property. However, during the following years, there was as much development of new projects as rehabilitation of existing ones. Until today, there is an equal number of new constructions and rehabilitations of existing buildings. Comparing the construction type with the buildings' location, we see that all the rural projects rehabilitate old buildings, either old farms or abandoned industrial sites. In contrast, almost all the projects in the urban area of Barcelona are new constructions on public land.

Regarding the number of units, there is an increase in the apartments incorporated in each project. Generally, the number of units is more significant in new constructions than in rehabilitated buildings. The more significant number of units relates to distributing the development cost among more households. This relates to the fact that, in new

FIGURE 3
Evolution of the housing cooperatives in Catalonia, in relation to the number of units, construction type and land access



buildings, there is greater flexibility in the spatial distribution, the typologies, and the size of the units, which allows the optimization of the space and fitting more units. The figure ranges from 5 to 80 units for the housing cooperatives; the average among all the projects is 17.5 units. The buildings with fewer units are rehabilitations in smaller towns or rural areas acquired from the private market. The projects with the most units are new urban constructions built on public land. Until 2023 the most significant project has 32 units, while until 2025, four projects are expected to have 40 units. Sostre Civic is currently promoting the creation of a cooperative with 80 units in the neighborhood of Sant Andreu, a significant increase in the number of dwellings.

There are three options concerning land access: grant-of-use of public land, collective purchase of private land and grant-of-use of private land, typically through an intermediate organization. Most of the projects are on private land 68 % (34) that has either been bought collectively by the cooperative, which assigns the right of use to each member, or has been purchased or acquired by an external entity, which assigns the right of use to the cooperative. The remaining projects, with a total of 32 % (16), are on public land. The grant of use of public land is made between a cooperative or a secondary cooperative and the public administration. Out of the 16 projects, there are 13 in the municipality of Barcelona, one in Sant Cugat del Vallès, one in Manresa, and one in the municipality of Sant Antoni de Calonge. Since 2020, secondary cooperatives and support entities have started using the “right of first refusal”⁶ mechanism to acquire land from the private

⁶The “Right of first refusal” is translated from the Catalan term “Tanteig i retracte”: <https://habitatge.gencat.cat/ca/Perfils/mon-local/tanteig-retracte/>

market and make it collective. This refers to the priority given to social promoters to buy a residential property at the same price and conditions as when it had been previously sold. This applies to housing acquired with mortgage foreclosure, or through compensation, or debt payment with a mortgage guarantee. Out of the projects on private land, 17 % (6) have been acquired through the right of first refusal and 83 % (28) by collective land purchase.

Participation Process

Community participation of future residents is a central aspect of cooperative housing in Catalonia. Since 2015, many groups that have emerged as individuals interested in the model have come together to co-create their own projects. The process encompasses several stages, including group consolidation, development of a shared vision and values, financial planning, legal establishment, finding land, co-design of the building, co-habitation management, and building maintenance. The groups can vary in motivations, objectives, level of commitment, expectations, and trust among members. Due to differences in capacities, resources, and prior experience in participatory processes, some groups may require more significant support in fulfilling their objectives regarding knowledge, legal matters, financial aspects, or technical assistance.

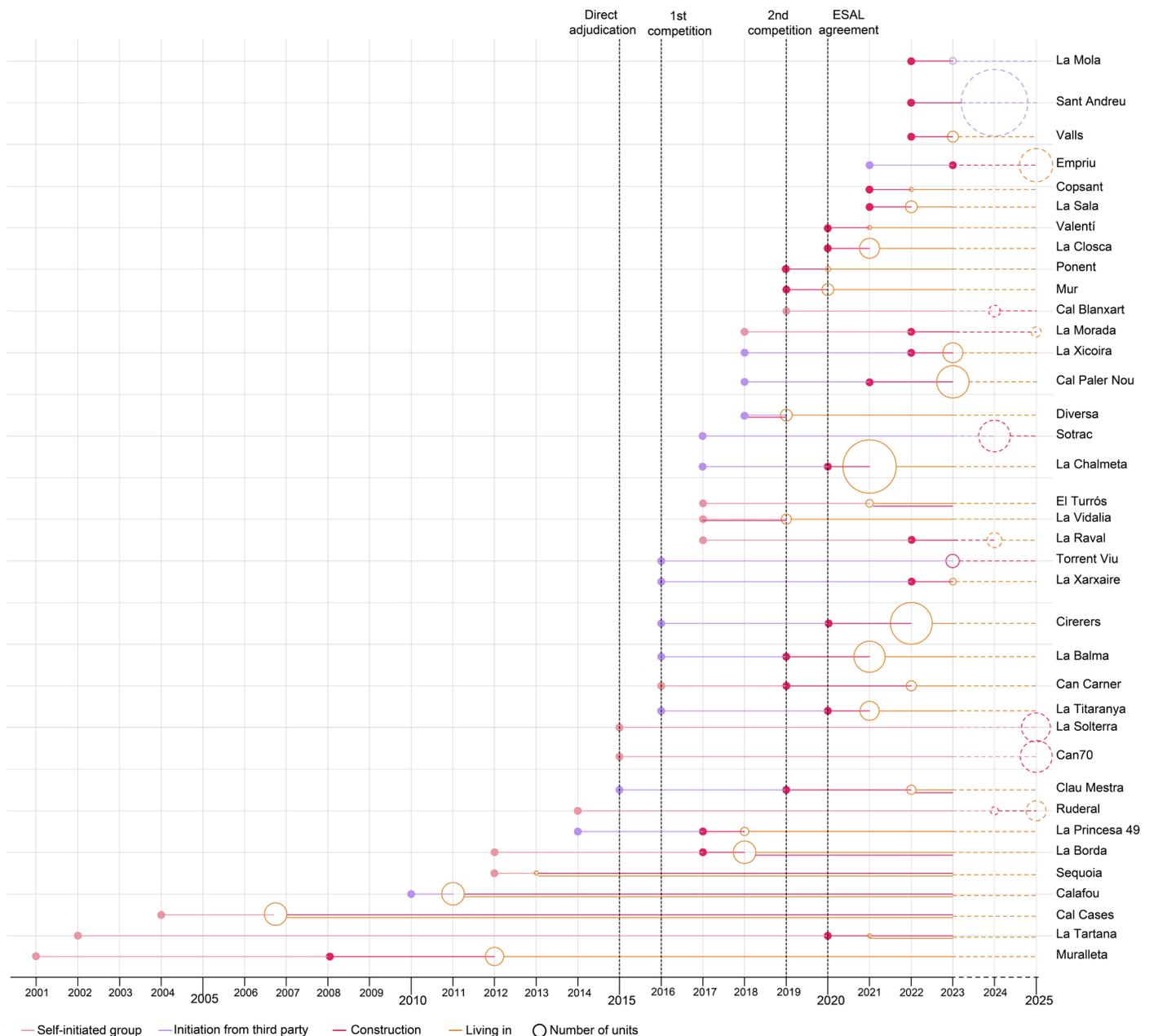
The groups can be categorized as self-initiated or initiated by secondary cooperatives, such as Sostre Civic or other non-profit organizations like La Dinamo⁷. Self-initiated cooperatives start with a core group of individuals who already know each other and decide to live together. On the other hand, in the case of groups formed by organizations, the members do not have prior acquaintance. Those groups are formed from waiting lists of existing or secondary cooperatives or through open calls from entities with access to land. The presence of non-profit entities that support new groups in realizing their projects can enhance accessibility to this type of housing and promote inclusivity. These entities can fall into three categories: secondary cooperatives, which promote the model and develop various projects for their members; providers, which assist groups in creating cooperative housing with the help of a professional team; and service entities, which facilitate specific tasks for the groups.

We compare the processes followed, examining the duration from the group formation to the start of cohabitation. Additionally, we consider how each group is formed and the number of units involved (Figure 4). We observe that, on average, it takes 5.2 years for the groups to realize their projects. Upon examining the progression of this duration over the years, we notice a trend towards shorter processes. This occurs because cooperative housing provision is

⁷ Fundación La Dinamo: <https://ladinamofundacio.org/>

becoming increasingly professionalized, with non-profit entities playing a more decisive role. In recent years, we have witnessed cases where secondary cooperatives and non-profit providers acquire land or buildings before forming the group. In these instances, the intermediate organizations expedite the process by offering already rehabilitated buildings to future residents. However, this approach does come at the cost of compromising some of the group's self-definition.

FIGURE 4
Analysis of the process of forming cooperative housing



Economic characteristics

The affordability of the cooperative housing model is a significant concern, as it is one of the primary motivations of the groups. The economic characteristics of the housing cooperatives are compared to understand the economic effort required from the households to access a flat. The attributes considered include the initial contribution households must pay to become cooperative members, which is typically refundable if a member wants to leave the cooperative, and the monthly fee. Furthermore, we compare the monthly fee with the average rent prices in Catalonia and Barcelona for further analysis (Figure 5).

We observe that senior cooperative housing requires the highest economic commitment, with a monthly fee of approximately 900 euros and an initial contribution of around 40,000 euros. The most affordable cooperatives are those acquired and rehabilitated by intermediate organizations using the 'right of first refusal', with

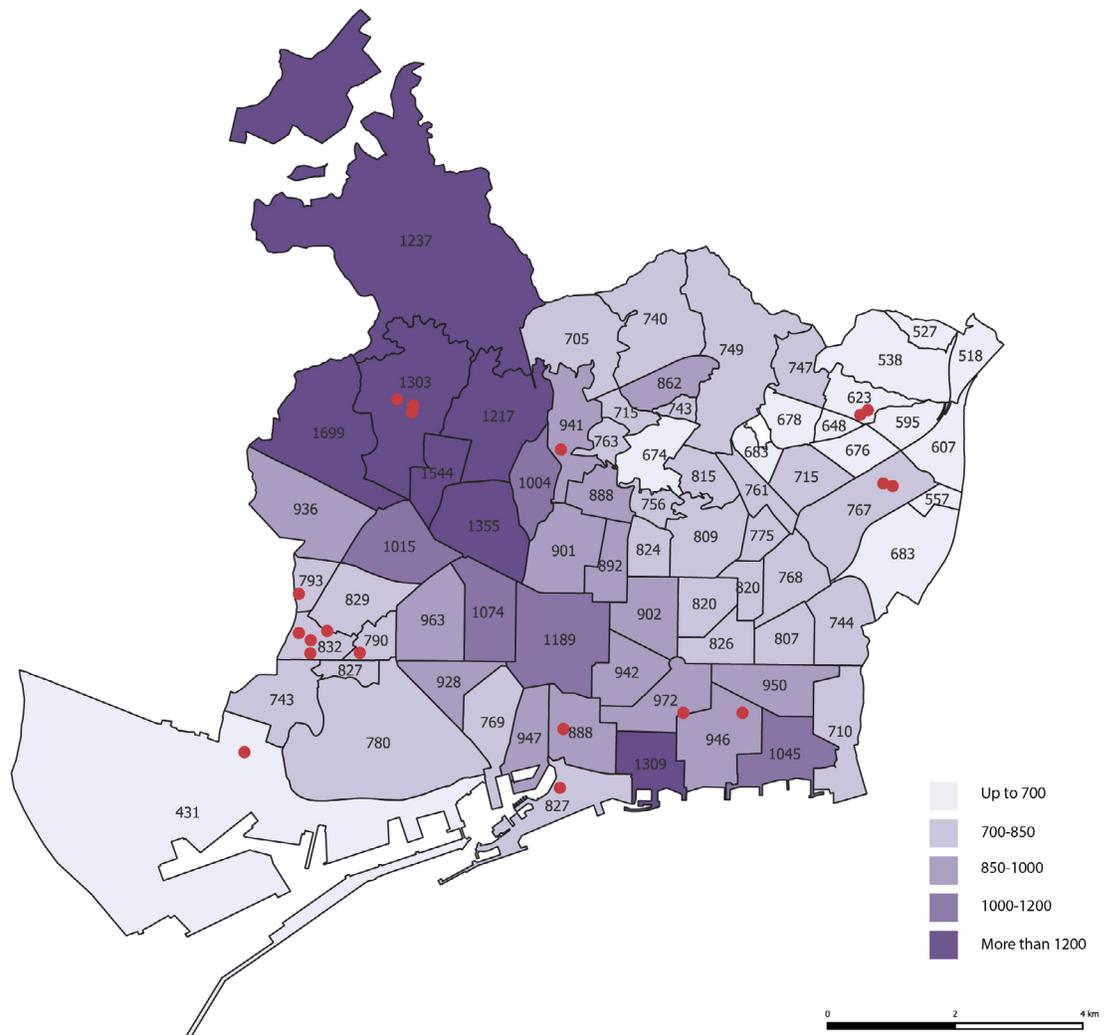
FIGURE 6
Average monthly fees in relation to the size of the apartments



monthly fees of around 400 euros and initial contributions of around 5,000 euros. In the middle range, we find cooperatives, primarily consisting of new constructions on public land, with monthly fees of around 550 euros and initial contributions of around 20,000 euros. The average monthly fee among all the housing cooperatives is 566 euros. In comparison, the average rent in Barcelona in 2022 was 1,066 euros, while in the rest of Catalonia, it was 805 euros.

Furthermore, we analyzed the monthly fees for housing cooperatives about the average apartment sizes. This comparison was also made with the average data for Barcelona (City Council of Barcelona, 2022) (Figure 6). Although each cooperative comprises apartments of varying sizes, we calculated the average size for the apartments within each cooperative. The average apartment size in the cooperatives was 57.3 m², which is significantly smaller than the

FIGURE 7
Cooperative housing and neighborhood rent prices in Barcelona



average apartment size in Barcelona, measuring 78 m². When considering the city of Barcelona, cooperative apartments range in size from approximately 60-65 m², with average rents of around 550-600 euros. In other municipalities in the rest of Catalonia, the cooperatives show an average rent range of 350-500 euros, and apartment sizes averaging around 45-50 m².

Additionally, the location of the housing cooperatives in the city of Barcelona is analyzed, about the average rent prices per neighborhood, as published by the Catalan autonomous government for 2022 (Government of Catalonia, 2022) (Figure 7). This analysis reveals a distribution of cooperatives across different city areas, each with varying rent prices. The neighborhood with the lowest average rent price is Zona Franca, with an average of 431 euros, housing a single cooperative. The neighborhood with the highest average rent is Sarrià, with an average of 1,303 euros, accommodating three cooperatives. As mentioned earlier, most of the cooperatives are in the district of Sants-Montjuic, specifically in the Sants, la Bordeta and Hostafrancs neighborhoods, where average rent prices range from 790 to 830 euros. Two cooperatives are located in Les Roquetes, with an average of 632 euros and two in the neighborhood of Poblenou, with an average rent of 946 euros. Finally, one cooperative in Sant Andreu has an average rent of 767 euros. The monthly fees of the cooperatives are below the average rents of their corresponding neighborhoods. However, it is essential to note the economic burden of the initial contribution, and that cooperative apartments are generally smaller than conventional ones.

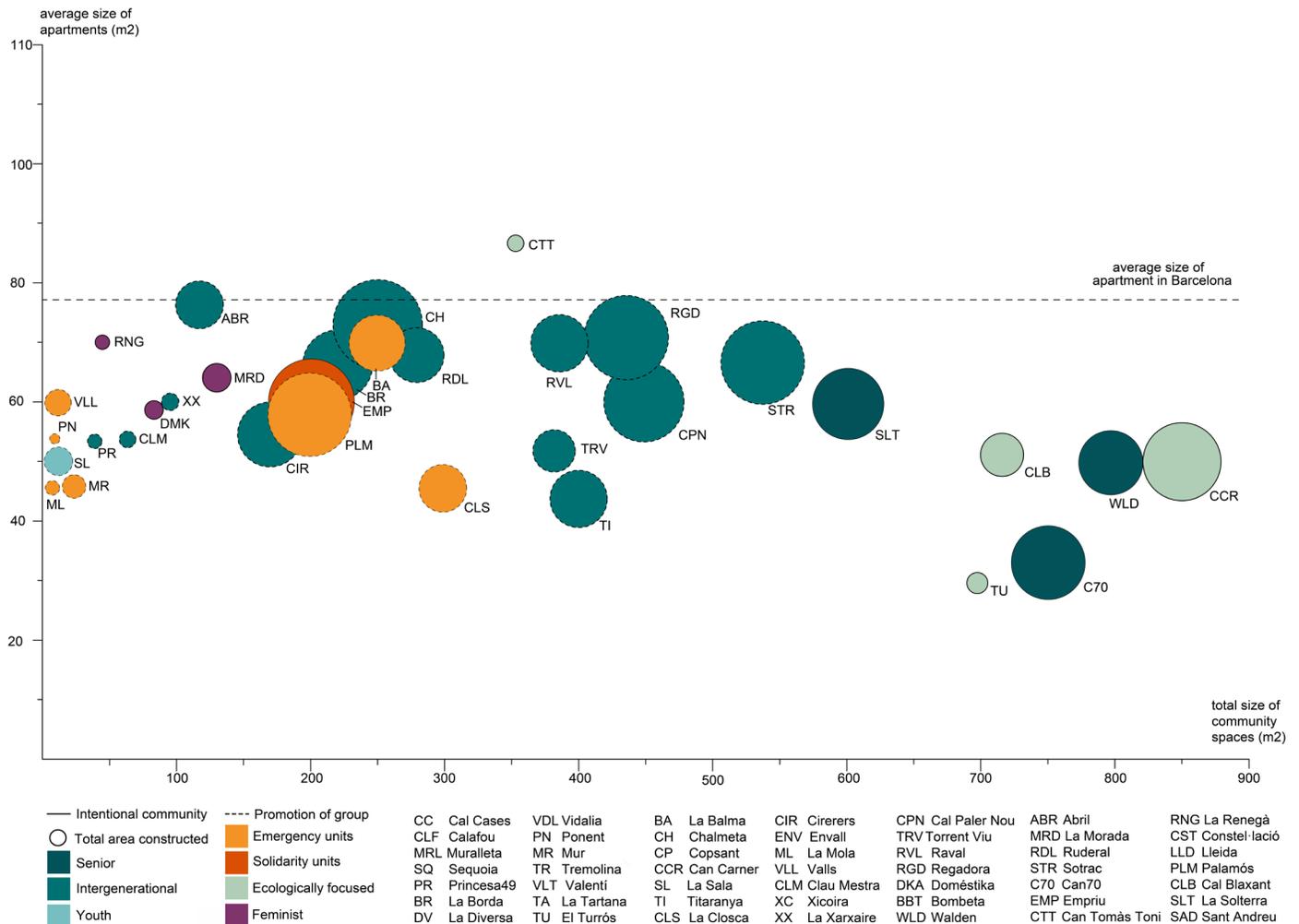
Communal living

The current phenomenon of cooperative housing in Catalonia represents a collective approach to housing provision and inhabitation. This is evident not only in the active involvement and participation of communities, but also in incorporating numerous community spaces within the buildings, and reducing private areas. This alternative approach to housing suggests reconsidering individual modes of dwelling, providing opportunities for sharing everyday tasks like cooking and childcaring, enjoying communal activities such as workshops, opening up spaces to the neighborhood, and facilitating informal meetings. The housing spaces are understood as a continuum from the personal to the public, creating different opportunities for sharing among the residents.

The size of the private apartments is related to the size of the community spaces to explore the choices of the different communities (Figure 8). In cooperative housing, community spaces go beyond the shared circulation spaces in the building typically found in conventional residential buildings. Instead,

these spaces serve a collective purpose, such as community kitchens, dining rooms, laundry rooms, multipurpose rooms, co-working spaces, libraries, workshops, care rooms, play areas, gardens, etc. The cooperatives are categorized according to the identity of each group, which helps us understand the spatial decisions made by different communities. Regarding the first attribute, the groups are either intentional communities or groups initiated by a support entity. About the identity of the groups, they could cater to specific age groups, such as seniors, youth, or intergenerational housing. They may also include flats designated for particular social groups, such as emergency flats for individuals facing housing difficulties or solidarity flats developed in collaboration with NGOs, typically aiming at immigrant integration or providing accommodation for people with disabilities. Finally, some groups may have a particular intention or ideology, like the case of feminist groups or ecologically focused cooperatives, often involving productive activities.

FIGURE 8
Community spaces in relation to the total area, the size of the apartments and the type of community



The decision to incorporate community spaces implies a decrease in the size of private units. We had previously observed that the cooperatives' apartments were smaller than the average size of conventional apartments. The cases with the most community spaces are the seniors, with approximately 800 m². Also, ecologically focused cooperatives in rural areas incorporate many community spaces, with a higher percentage of the total area built than the senior ones. The ones with the least community space, which typically include the entrance and storage spaces, are the ones that were acquired with the 'right of first refusal' by the support entities. These cooperatives encompass emergency units, fostering greater inclusivity within communities and proving to be the most affordable ones, as we have seen before. However, they lack community spaces and the group's involvement in adapting the building. This category appears to align more with social housing provision than community-led housing.

In the mid-range category, we identify two groups. The first group consists mainly of self-initiated projects, while the second group comprises projects initiated by intermediate organizations. Self-initiated projects have prioritized the inclusion of more community spaces, which occupy around 400-500 m² in every cooperative. On the other hand, the projects initiated by intermediate organizations tend to have around 200-300 m² of community spaces. This may happen because when future residents actively participate in the housing definition process, they can imagine more diverse ways of living. Conversely, when professionals undertake the design without significant resident involvement, the decision-making process may be more conservative, resulting in fewer shared spaces.

CONCLUSIONS

Cooperative housing has a longstanding history in Spain, dating back to the 20th century, as a means for groups to collectively provide affordable housing solutions. However, the recent emergence of grant-of-use cooperatives since 2015 represents a distinct phase that surpasses the mere provision of apartments. This movement has been re-negotiating the dominant structure of housing, including its material, relational and financial aspects. It challenges the notions of private ownership and profit-making out of housing. Instead, the focus is on creating non-speculative alternatives, utilizing space rather than owning it. A significant element of the current movement is the active involvement of the residents throughout all stages, from creating the vision and the values to the self-management of the housing. Additionally, there is a deliberate intention to foster strong communities, weaving the social fabric of housing. As we see from the literature, the experimentation with cooperative housing models not only aims at more affordable solutions, but also reconsiders sustainability and care as collective housing components.

In this analysis, we looked at the emerging cases of the grant-of-use cooperatives of Catalonia. To understand the current state of cooperative housing, we graphically compared data from the Observatory of Cooperative Housing of Catalonia. By doing so, we aimed to identify the defining characteristics of this alternative dwelling form. We selected the 50 cases in a more mature phase, with at least access to land. We examined 15 attributes for each one, which were grouped into five categories: location, constitutive characteristics, process of participation, economic characteristics, and communal living. Based on the analysis, we can conclude that although the current period of re-emergence of cooperative housing has been relatively short, it is experiencing significant growth. We observe the creation of viable alternatives to conventional housing models and increasing diversity. This diversity manifests itself in various ways, such as expanding its geographic reach, introducing different spatial distributions, and including a broader range of social groups.

The model has significantly expanded into various municipalities throughout Catalonia, including urban and rural areas. While most cooperatives are located in the area of Barcelona, the realization of those projects relies on the grant-of-use of public land due to the high prices of the plots. As a result, most cases in Barcelona involve new constructions, whereas rural places and smaller municipalities involve rehabilitation of existing buildings. For most projects, access to land has been achieved through collective purchasing and by the cooperative granting its members the right to use. Finally, in recent years, we have seen non-profit organizations acquiring buildings through purchasing from the private market, or utilizing the right to first refusal mechanism, thereby granting the use to the groups. While these cases offer more affordable housing within a shorter timeframe, they come with certain risks. As the model becomes more institutionalized and professionalized within established structures, this can result in reduced engagement and self-definition opportunities for the groups and a potential compromise of the communal nature of the housing.

The creation of cooperative housing requires a significant amount of time. The initial phase, which involves defining the project, finding land, and securing financing, tends to be the longest. These time-consuming processes can pose a considerable challenge, as they may exclude many individuals. However, when examining the evolution of the processes, there is a decrease in the time it takes for groups to access specific projects. This reduction can be attributed to the professionalization of the sector, supported by non-profit organizations, secondary cooperatives, and other entities that provide resources and necessary training to the groups.

We have observed the incorporation of a significant number of communal areas in the buildings, and smaller sizes of private spaces compared to the average for conventional apartments. This creates opportunities for sharing reproductive and care work, such as cooking, laundry, and childcare, strengthening the support networks and increasing well-being. In general, there are more communal spaces in the senior cooperatives, the ecologically-oriented ones, and self-initiated ones. The communal spaces have been smaller or absent in cases of existing buildings, which were acquired and rehabilitated by the intermediate organizations, which tend to the typology of social housing provision. Significant challenges for the model are to mobilize access to land and secure financing for projects to promote inclusion and diversity by including people from different social, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. One way cooperatives intend to achieve this is by incorporating apartments destined for a specific social group. These aim to incorporate vulnerable households such as people in urgent housing situations, integration of immigrants or apartments for people with disabilities.

Finally, in terms of affordability, we see that the monthly rent paid by the households is lower than the average apartment rent in Barcelona and Catalonia. However, the households need to assume the payment of the initial contribution, which may not always be a financially feasible option. It is essential to pay attention to the evolution of affordability over the coming years. As the cooperative housing stock grows and loans from the initial cooperatives are repaid, the surplus funds generated by the monthly fee are intended to be allocated towards establishing new cooperatives, potentially eliminating the need for initial contribution. The creation of federations and alliances is crucial in facilitating the development of more affordable cooperative housing. Additionally, support from public administrations is vital in providing resources, services and implementing policies and mechanisms that assist individuals with limited resources in accessing cooperative housing.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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