

# Senior Cohousing: An Organizational Model for Elderly Care. A Trentino Case Study

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*Abstract.* Senior Cohousing is an innovative practice of cohabitation for elder people. This model if on the one hand is oriented to build and maintain relationships of social solidarity, on the other, it supports families in caring for elderly people. Cohousing is based on the active involvement of each member and on cooperation between people. For these reasons it could represent a new organization model for the care of people and could promote their active ageing. To testify the positive effects of Senior Cohousing the paper presents the results of a research carried out in Trentino during 2017.

The case study analyzed the practices of cohabitation realized by “The Homes of SAD”. These experiences turn out to be innovative both because they are rather far from the traditional models of assistance, and because they value the abilities of individuals, promoting their self-determination and empowerment.

*Keywords:* active ageing, care, cohabitation, family, welfare policies.

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## **Introduction**

During the past fifty years various phenomena have altered the significance and approach to care for the elderly both in Italy and abroad. The most important changes affecting the need for and fulfillment of care roles include: the increased life expectancy of individuals; the improved living conditions of the elderly; and the shifts in the social and familial structures (as with the collapse of the patriarchal family model and the entry of women in the job market). For a long time, the nuclear family was integral to exercising an exemplary function of care for the aging, often exclusively responsible for the well-being of its family members; nowadays, however, social changes have made performing roles of care at elderly more complicated (Bissolo *et al.*, 2009). For these reasons society there is the need to find new ways of meeting the demands of the growing elderly population, which can no longer rely solely on familial support.

The matter is of concern to the elderly themselves, who, although self-sufficient and in good psychological and physical shape, often find that they are living alone in houses with structural obstacles that impact their autonomy and well-being (Falasca, 2017). This puts them a risk of social isolation and of bearing a certain precariousness in their housing situation, and what worries most is that the risks of their living condition are often underestimated by the society.

In considering these issues some countries have been focusing on promoting solutions that can provide basic support and care to the elderly, without necessarily proposing totalizing models (Lietaert, 2007). With the aim of devising innovative cohabitation practices and implementing strategies that favor the building and maintaining of relationships of social solidarity to effectively support families in the onerous task of caring for the elderly, senior cohousing projects have been initiated (Brenton, 2007). This endeavor is an adaptation of a form of cohabitation aimed at categories of individuals, backed by representatives of the elderly population.

This paper presents the results of research carried out in Trentino concerning the defining and implementation of some forms of cohabitation for elderly individuals in the province.

## **Definition and characteristics of senior cohousing**

Before defining what is meant by “senior cohousing”, two issues relevant to the topic should be addressed. The first is related to the absence of a single

criterion establishing the minimum age parameter to participate in a senior cohousing project. If, on the theoretical level, all those who are aged  $\geq 65$ <sup>1</sup> are considered as elderly, it should be emphasized that this limit is not universal. For this reason, some projects defined as senior cohousing include people who are even younger (50-55 years old) (Durrett, 2009).

The second consideration concerns the term “senior cohousing” itself, which, though recurrent, is not the only term used to describe this type of cohabitation. Sometimes other words are preferred or used as substitutes, such as “silver cohousing” or “elder cohousing”, which have the same literary meaning, but can lead non-experts into believing that the difference in terms represents a difference in types of structures. The absence of a univocal term generates debate among theorists who would like to push for the usage of a single term in order to avoid confusion.

For the purposes of the analysis presented here, the expression “senior cohousing” will be used to reference the projects aimed elderly population, on average of 65 and over. This choice is justified by the common use of the term by experts in the field to refer to the practice in question.

Beyond the more strictly technical issues, which are not always unanimously agreed upon, it is opportune to define on a practical level what senior cohousing is. This type of living arrangement essentially involves the cohabitation of older people who share both the internal and external areas of a house; they cooperate with each other and support each other in daily activities.

The model in question seeks to enhance the community living experience, which is more likely to be accepted by the elderly, as it evokes feelings of returning to their pasts. It should be remembered that in earlier times families consisted of a decidedly greater number of individuals: there were many more children in each family and the nucleus was often composed of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family members. In the “extended families”, traces of the oldest forms of cohabitation can, in fact, be found. In fact, these types of familial organization were based on the dynamics of cooperation and solidarity. Senior cohousing, a re-adaptation of cohousing, has characteristics that are similar to the model which can be synthesized in the following ways:

*Sharing spaces and resources.* Sharing spaces and resources refers to the sharing of both the large, common areas of collective use in a house and the

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<sup>1</sup>This criterion is among the most widely used and universally recognized in the study of population. The same index of old age considers this age as entering the age group in question.

allocation of available resources and communal expenses for the house. The latter, from the perspective of sharing economy, allows for the reduction of many costs and helps make a part of the living expenses more sustainable;

*Social contact design.* The cohousing is planned and organized in such a way to promote a sense of community and create opportunities for interaction;

*Participation of cohousers.* The inhabitants of the house actively participate in all the phases of communal life: from the initial planning phases establishing the organization of the house through to the management of the house. The cohousers themselves take part in all decision-making processes and all decisions are made during meetings in which each inhabitant is involved, following the principles of democracy;

*Cooperation and mutualism among cohousers.* Cohabitation is based on solidarity and mutual aid, and it is established through co-care practices initiated by the inhabitants. They are put in place both when carrying out daily activities and in taking care of each other<sup>2</sup>.

Another element common to senior cohousing should be mentioned: the accessibility of the homes. The cohousing is free from structural barriers that may make living otherwise difficult for the household. They are equipped with safety devices, such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and protected electrical sockets.

Seniors often share socio-health workers (for example, the family assistant) who can help prevent the emergence of possible problems and guarantee the safety of the individuals and their families (Casotti, 2014; Lodi Rizzini, 2016).

The innovation brought about by this new organizational model enables the elderly to live in a house, responding to the innate needs of each individual, while at the same time avoiding the limitations of self-determination and human dignity that totalizing models, like nursing homes<sup>3</sup>, implement through the way in which they are set up and carried out.

The opportunities for interaction with other cohousers, as well as the possibilities for collaboration in managing the home and living in a safe and protected environment, make senior cohousing the ideal solution for the elderly who, while enjoying their positive psycho-physical state, experience anxiety and

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<sup>2</sup> These characteristics are to be considered as the reworking of who writes of the aspects theorized by McCamant and Durrett (2007), the leading exponents of cohousing in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> This expression was also used to refer to Residenza Sanitaria-SocioAssistenziale (RSSA) and Residenza Sanitaria Assistenziale (RSA). These residences, in Italy, are often the only alternative when the elderly can no longer stay in own home.

loneliness in their homes. Cohousing bears a positive impact not only on the elderly individual, but also on his or her family, since they support the caregiver in his or her role, thereby reducing the overload that family members would have in assisting their elders. At the same time cohousing, by promoting the maintenance of autonomy of each, contributes to the reduction of healthcare and social assistance costs that the welfare systems must bear when an individual is no longer able to be self-sufficient.

Some states (especially the Netherlands and Denmark) are aware of the potential benefits of cohousing and senior cohousing to society and its economy and have chosen to invest public resources in the implementation of these projects (Brenton, 2007). Unfortunately, however, these projects are still quite rare internationally, and even more so in Italy.

### **Active ageing and senior cohousing**

The expression “active ageing” has spread extensively in recent years, especially since the elderly population in good health has grown.

To speak of active ageing necessitates redefining “old age” understanding as a period of decadence and dependence and replacing it with a meaning that considers this phase of life as a moment in which individuals can still seek fulfillment and new experiences (Laslett, 1991).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has paid much attention to the topic, developing a special strategy called “Active Ageing”, with the scope of creating and strengthening the conditions to promote active ageing, understood as the «process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age» (WHO, 2002, p.12)<sup>4</sup>.

First, the Active Ageing strategy provides for the investing of resources in illness prevention, which it does by continually monitoring the elderly’s health status, intervening even when minor problems arise, thereby avoiding chronic illness and disability, which bears a heavier health expenditure to society.

Second, the participation, it gives importance to leveraging the roles of the elderly, allowing them to feel like active protagonists in their own lives and avoid frustration when they feel they lack control over their daily activities.

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<sup>4</sup> The definition is taken from the World Health Organization’s document “Active Ageing. A Policy Framework” (2002) and is shared by the entire scientific community.

Third, security, which takes on importance when reducing inequalities and ensuring adequate protection for all people who age.

Health, participation and safety are, according to the WHO, the “three pillars” on which the initiatives and interventions aimed at promoting active ageing need to focus.

The growth of the elderly population in Europe<sup>5</sup> has drawn the attention of the European Union which has promoted policies focuses of supporting public initiatives aimed at improving the working conditions of senior staff, on promoting the social inclusion of the elderly, and on developing educational programs that help with raising awareness about how to facilitate ageing healthily.

The initiative promoted by the European Union clarifies a fundamental aspect: that society must not err by restricting the three pillars to solely the physical health dimension, as all three need to be considered and applied during any intervention that impacts the lifestyle of individuals. Interpersonal relationships and recreational activities are decisive for the success of ageing well.

The effect of social relationships on the lives of individuals has been the subject of many scholars’ analyses. Sociologist Émile Durkheim, at the end of the nineteenth century, had already shown through her research that the involvement of the individual in social relations was a protective factor in his/her health (Maturo, 2004).

In the senior cohousing the aspects are manifested in a real and concrete way. Thanks to the dynamics of cooperation and participation that characterize it, the cohousing promotes not only the interaction between senior cohousers, but also the assumption of certain responsibilities and the openness to new existential possibilities, permitting individuals to recognize themselves as protagonists in their lives (Boniatti & Brammerini, 2014).

All of this is in sharp contrast with what often happens in traditional residential structures, where the elderly experience a passive role, because of the totalizing approach and to how their living environments are organized. It is evident that these aspects have a negative effect on the psycho-physical condition of a person and can cause a decline in the elderly’s well-being in the medium to long term (Bissolo *et al.*, 2009).

These considerations clearly show the positive correlation between cohousing practices and the promotion of active ageing. The first to recognize this connection

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<sup>5</sup> The ageing demographic, despite being a worldwide phenomenon, is of particular concern to Europe, which appears to be the continent with the largest number of elderly people (Rosina and Golini, 2012).

was Charles Durrett, an architect passionate about the subject and author of one of the few texts on senior cohousing, “The Senior Cohousing Handbook”, in which he states that «*Cohousing provides a significant and supportive community environment in which seniors find opportunities to express and empower themselves. In a community, seniors (...) can remain socially engaged with their neighbors through simple and everyday activities (...). This makes it much easier to be active and more engaged. This creates opportunities that help seniors to remain viable members of society, rather than become isolated and barely able to take care of themselves*» (Durrett, 2009, p.132).

This field is still little explored, though it is full of potential. Except for a few authors, national and international attention given to the topic is still limited. It is precisely for this reason that the research presented in this article was developed.

### **Senior cohousing practices in the “Homes of SAD”**

The study features two of the limited number of senior cohousing projects nationally. They are in Trentino and identified by their brand, “The Homes of SAD”, coined by the social cooperative to which they belong to and which has been providing social assistance services in the province for over twenty-five years.

The starting point was the correlation reported in the literature between cohabitation projects and active ageing. The study aimed to highlight whether “The Homes of SAD”, which represent a re-adaptation of the original cohousing model, promote cohousers’ active ageing.

Due to the specificity of the research hypothesis and to allow for a detailed definition of the field of investigation, it was necessary to:

1. outline the characteristics and purposes of the senior cohousing projects promoted by the SAD cooperative in order to compare them to the theoretical prototype emerging from the analysis of the literature;
2. verify whether the houses achieve their declared purposes, without neglecting their coherence to the research hypothesis.

### **Method**

The specificity of the research hypothesis guided the methodological choices. It was decided to carry out a qualitative survey, as it was considered more

compatible with the predefined objectives. It lasted six months (from March to September 2017) and was divided into two parts:

- a) a background analysis, which supported the study of the cohabitation phenomenon and to define the cohousing “prototype”;
- b) the implementation of the case study.

The two instruments were semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

To collect information consistent with the pursuit of the aims of the empirical investigation, different interviews-guide were prepared, depending on the subjects to whom they were addressed. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were given to the various people who - directly or indirectly - cohabit, in order to analyze their experiences from different points of view.

The leaders of the SAD cooperative, the managers of the houses, the operators and the cohousers’ family members were interviewed. The reference set<sup>6</sup> consisted of fifteen people total.

The information was collected using audio recordings in order to ensure that an “objective and faithful” storage. Subsequently, the data collected were processed by transcribing the recordings, taking care to transcribe the answers given to each question. During data analysis phase, this aspect has allowed the comparison between the answers supplied from the various stakeholders.

The observation of participants, instead, allowed for the deepening of the knowledge of the field of investigation and to make comparisons with the theoretical prototype of cohousing. Particular attention was given to the main people involved in cohabitation projects, the cohousers themselves, observing them in their habitat, defining their roles and their relational dynamics. The information collected has been recorded each time on a notebook and coded below. The direct interaction with the inhabitants proved to be important, as it allowed for hearing their opinions about their experiences with cohousing and to “touch with hand” how their psycho-physical conditions were.

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<sup>6</sup> The expression, coined by Cipolla, indicates the «sums (...) or unity of facts or social relationships that do not aspire to be representative (...). These are evidently empirical entities that do not have the theoretical characteristics to be defined as samples and enter a strategic research design according to other paths» (Cipolla, 1998, p.126).



## Study field description

From the first information collected within the houses made by SAD cooperative, it was found that the two senior cohousing projects, “Casa alla Vela” and “Casa Tassullo”, each had their own features and specificities.

“Casa alla Vela” was the first cohabitation project established by SAD in 2014 in the Vela neighborhood, which lent its name to the house. At the time of the study (July 2017) seven partially self-sufficient, elderly women lived there. Their average age was 90.

This cohabitation project is different from classic ones in that it includes an intergenerational element: in addition to the elderly, three girls also shared the space<sup>7</sup>. Contrary to what one might think, the project was not born from the desire to create an intergenerational cohousing project. This fact emerges clearly from the interviews of SAD managers, who stated that the house had been purchased with the intention of carrying out another project which, for various reasons, could not be done.

In order to make use of the house the cooperative later decided to invest in a service that could respond to the needs presented to it every day by the elderly, namely: loneliness, anxiety and the fear of remaining alone in their homes. They then planned the project for the elderly women, unaware that what they were creating essentially followed a cohousing model. This classification was subsequently made by some experts who, when analyzing the project, recognized that some aspects present in the house were typical of cohousing structures.

The lack of awareness extended also to the intergenerational approach to cohousing used in “Casa alla Vela”. The choice to involve young people was initially made as a means of redistributing the investment risk among different stakeholders and avoiding problems if the elderly were to respond negatively to the project.

Though creating a cohabitation project was not its original aim, “Casa alla Vela” has been successful for Trentino and Italy, leading the cooperative to found another, “Casa Tassullo”, opened in November 2016 in Tassullo (Val di Non).

The first distinguishing feature of “Casa Tassullo” can be seen in its constitution; it was founded by the cooperative in partnership with local institutions. At the time of the study (July 2017) the house was inhabited by five

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<sup>7</sup> They are generally Italian students or young foreigners involved with the European Voluntary Service.

people: three men and two women, with an average age of 67. The cohousing is characterized by two traits, it is heterogeneous in terms of gender (both men and women are included) and age (coholders on average less elderly).

Like “Casa alla Vela”, “Casa Tassullo” features a special program, that in this case consists in the local entertainment for community. Three times a week the house hosts activities open to all people in the area. The program aims to limit the risk of social isolation and exclusion while demonstrating that the house is open to the community, thereby strengthening its connection to the local community.

Finally, a common feature of both houses is the sharing of a family assistant. This person is present throughout the day and supports all cohousers in their daily activities (cleaning the accommodation, preparing meals and helping in personal care) and responds to any other needs they may have.

### **Trentino’s cohabitation model**

The observations made at the dwellings allowed for the examination of the specifics of each project and the comparison of the cohabitation model proposed by SAD with the prototype of senior cohousing highlighted in literary analyses.

This made it possible to identify some particular elements of cohabitation in the Trentino projects: the creation of houses for small groups of people; the presence of common areas inside and outside the house (dining rooms, activity rooms, TV rooms, gardens, terraces and vegetable gardens); the adoption of the logic of a sharing economy which, through the sharing of resources (including the family assistant) and the distribution of expenses, allows for the significant reduction of living costs (Polci, 2013). These traits are reported, in fact, in the best-known cohousing experiences; at the national can be mentioned: “Cohousing Numero Zero (Torino)”, “Ecosol in Fidenza (Parma)”, “Il Fragolone in San Lazzaro di Savena (Bologna)”, “La Corte dei Girasoli in Vimercate (Monza-Brianza)”, “Solidaria San Giorgio (Ferrara)”.

It is important, however, recognizing that, within the SAD houses the presence of aspects that recall the prototype of cohousing should not induce the reader to think that they represent a full and complete application of the theoretical model. In fact, there are some elements in Trentino cohousing that differ from the prototype, especially with respect to its origins. The cohabitation projects, in fact, have arisen from the initiative of the SAD Cooperative, third sector organization, and this is in sharp contrast with the original projects, which have seen

cohabitation as the outcome of community activities or institutions that consider it as an alternative to traditional welfare policies.

The different nature of the senior cohousing founded by SAD also leads to the lack of three principle features of cohabitation projects in general: the elective neighborhood, which calls for self-selection by potential future cohousers; the consequent creation of an intentional community, which implies the will of each person involved in the project to live with others; the participatory planning with cohousers (Lietaert, 2007). In Trentino projects the choice is made by the organization’s representatives, who evaluate each application request and the cohousers are involved only when the project is ready, without being active part in the path of designing and realizing the cohousing.

With respect to cohousing models widespread into the national territory as “Cohousing Numero Zero (Torino)”, “Ecosol (Parma)”, “Il Fragolone (Bologna)”, “La Corte dei Girasoli (Monza-Brianza)”, “Solidaria San Giorgio (Ferrara)”, in which the project arises from the activation of the local community and it is possible identifying a model "community-driven", in the Trentino projects, because of the role played by the Cooperative, we can speak of model "3rd sector-driven" (Boniatti & Bramerini, 2017). Table 1 shows aspects characterizing the model proposed.

Similarities with cohousing prototype	Differences compared to the prototype
<p>The cohabitation between small groups of people                      The presence of common areas inside and outside the house (dining rooms, activity rooms, TV rooms, gardens, terraces and vegetable gardens)                      The adoption of a sharing economy logic                      Cooperation and mutualism among cohousers.</p>	<p>Absence of elective neighborhood, intentional community and participatory planning;                      Central role of cooperative in the creation of cohabitation projects “cohousing “3<sup>rd</sup> sector-driven”                      Status of cohousers = tenants.</p>

Table 1. *The Trentino’s cohabitation model: similarities and differences compared to cohousing prototype.*

A final feature that distinguishes the houses in Trentino is the status of the senior cohousers, who are not owners of the property as generally happens, but tenants.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the information gathered during the study shows that the cohabitations included in this research present many of the principle features of the cohousing model but, as compared with the standards, the projects in Trentino have re-adapted the structure to meet their particular needs.

### **Data collected**

Once the first objective of the research had been achieved, the study focused on its second objective, to verify whether the houses met their formally stated goals.

Two steps were necessary to complete the study:

1. the reconstruction of the cohousers' lifestyle (before they are living in cohousing), with focus on their habits and the dangers they were exposed to in their homes;
2. the analysis of the current psycho-physical condition of the cohousers, in order to evaluate whether and how cohabitation impacted them.

A semi-structured interview was used to pursue the first action. The main stakeholders involved in this phase was: family members, leaders and operators working in the SAD houses, for a total of twelve people. Although in different terms and ways, all stakeholders surveyed unanimously have stated that before moving into the cohousing the elderly were exposed to multiple risks in their homes: accidents caused by the inadequateness of the structure of their houses; they felt isolated; and they were socially marginalized. As to confirm this, the family members interviewed said:

*«Before living in cohousing, my mother no longer wanted to live alone in her home»; «She used to do a life in perfect solitude and isolation»; «The house was very dangerous, narrow, many stairs to do .... The risk of domestic accidents was around the corner!».*

The staff of SAD houses additionally declared:

*«Many of our cohousers at home were isolated... They experienced fears and anxieties even for the least important things»; «In their old houses, without elevators and security systems, they risked their lives on many occasions»; «Some people when they arrived in this house were very*

*precarious on a physical level: not moving much and were looking for constant reassurances».*

The observation of participant behavior was used to collect data about the current psycho-physical conditions of senior cohousers, in addition to semi-structured interviews.

Interviews administered to staff showed that since the elderly living in cohousing have maintained and, in some cases, made psycho-physical improvements. They've become more autonomous, have improved their communicative-relational skills, considerably reducing the anxieties they previously felt. Confirm this, some family members said:

*«My mother is more serene now than when she was living at her home»; «She's has maintained her autonomy, despite advancing age, and she carry out the same activities as before: law, goes on walks, plays cards»; «In the last period he potentiated his autonomy, language and reasoning activities».*

Additionally, Staff members interviewed declared:

*«Even the timidest people, who were at risk of exclusion, in cohousing they socialized and participated actively with the group»*

*«In all cohousers I have seen day after day the maintaining, and in some cases a strengthening, of the autonomy».*

In addition to semi-structured interviews, participant observation was crucial to analyze the characteristics of the cohousing model (described in the previous paragraph), but especially the psycho-physical condition from inhabitants; the role of each individual within the home; and the relational dynamics between the cohousers and the family assistants.

About the psycho-physical condition in the course of the observations has emerged a good level of autonomy of cohousers in the actions of hygiene and personal care. For example, the senior was able to get dressed, put on makeup or shave and in some cases wash themselves autonomously, requiring only a minimum support to the family assistant.

On the cognitive level, residents appeared clear-headed. This was detected by observing them during cognitive stimulation activities organized by the staff. The cohousers participated in activities such as reading of the daily paper, creative workshops and crossword puzzles and they have completed by successfully the assigned task.

Compared to relational dynamics, the cohousers observed in their habitat exhibited healthy and positive relationships with both each other and with family assistants. The groups appeared cohesive and united: in the conversations members interacted serenely, listening to each other. Moreover, some cohousers have asked to spend their free time with the other inhabitants also outside the houses, organizing walks. In this regard, interesting are the dynamics of mutualism and co-care observed at various times of the day, characterized by the mutual search between some inhabitants and the reciprocal support in daily *ménage* as setting the table.

## Results

SAD houses do reach their intended goals. This result is favored by the own characteristics of cohabitation that is inherently able to counteract loneliness and social marginalization, while effectively cutting living costs for the elderly.

The results of the psycho-physical conditions of senior cohousers proved the research hypothesis to be correct. The next step was to see if the cohousing projects used in the study promoted active ageing. It was necessary, therefore, to define the research parameters that determine it and analyze their presence in this field of study.

In order to make the analysis more effective, the three pillars of active ageing were adapted to the field of investigation, since they are rather general factors and applicable to a wide range of circumstances.

The first pillar, that of *participation*, is understood as the active involvement of cohousers in their everyday routines. In the SAD houses the inhabitants were found to be protagonists in their daily activities. The two structures have promoted some activities considered as significant: cohousers participation in various internal and external events of the house (*ménage* daily, entertainment, cultural events and excursions). This provided concrete opportunities for interaction and the expansion of social networks, while countering the risks of the social isolation to which some individuals was exposed before living in cohabitation.

The second pillar, *health* (defined as the prevention and reduction of disability and chronic disease), suggests that this aspect becomes increasingly important with the advancing age of the individuals. A healthy lifestyle, diet, the maintenance of an adequate level of autonomy can, of course, promote healthy ageing. Data collected have showed that these elements are encouraged in the SAD houses, where attention is given to providing a balanced diet, promoting

autonomy and preserving cognitive skills of cohousers.

According to the third and final pillar, *safety*, the cohousing projects in Trentino follow the established parameters. Here safety for individuals is meant as guaranteeing their physical integrity and dignity; reducing inequalities; and meeting all needs of physical, psychological and social origin. In Trentino the cohousing environments are safe. There are gas detectors, fire and burglar alarm systems, architectural barriers have been removed and family assistants are present on the premises daily. The houses present no structural risks and this, combined with the philosophy of co-care and the dynamics of mutualism, allows for cohousers to feel safe and protected.

Data collected suggest that the cohousing projects in Trentino promote active ageing. It must be stated, however, that further interventions can promote qualitatively better active ageing.

## **Conclusions**

The results of this empirical study induce to think that senior cohousing projects are suitable in meeting the needs of modern society.

Cohousing is an organizational model capable of meeting multiple needs: promoting the psycho-physical well-being and the active ageing of individuals; allowing for the caregiver's support in care and reducing social health care costs, which burden public services when citizens are unable to be self-sufficient. These aspects render cohabitation projects innovative and, in a certain sense, "revolutionary" when compared to traditional welfare models, as they are based on their propensity to promote the skills of individuals and encourage the empowerment and self-determination of the elderly.

With the conviction of the opportunities that characterizes senior cohousing projects, this empirical research (described above) took shape. In addition to witnessing the various aspects and positive results of the projects in Trentino, the research process was followed by reflection and further questioning. It has been questioned, for example, on the existence of "pure" practices of senior cohousing in Italy. The literature on the subject is still in its formative stages and the lack of a data bank for collected information makes empirical analysis difficult. In fact, it is currently impossible to identify the exact number of senior cohousing projects in the country; "The Homes of SAD" are among the few known examples nationally. The research has allowed to delineate some traits that differentiate the projects in Trentino from the cohousing prototype, thereby leading to defining

better how SAD cohabitation practices re-adapt the original cohousing model.

This finding, however, leads to further questioning of some aspects that condition how cohabitation functions nationally. The most important is the lack of attention paid by the institutions to cohousing and senior cohousing projects.

The cohousing projects in Italy have been created, for the most part, by civil society, through grassroots, bottom-up processes that have seen non-profit organizations take the initiative; any further expansion of cohousing projects cannot happen without the involvement of public administrations.

Given the potential of cohousing and senior cohousing projects and their propensity to promote active ageing, it would be advantageous for local authorities to include them in the provision of services and, for their implementation, to act in partnership with the non-profit organizations, as has long been the case in other countries.

A further aspect for consideration is the possibility of applying the values and principles emphasized in cohousing projects to other residential services. The protagonism and the active involvement of cohousers, as well as the cooperation and feelings of mutualism present among those who live there, should not be considered as exclusive to this practice. Perhaps they are best applied in a cohousing context, but they could also spread to other areas, for example in nursing homes, which too often adopt totalizing and depersonalized approaches to health care and assistance.

To put this into practice, a transformation of the underlying health care culture is needed; it should mark the transition from the logic of mere welfare to projects that promote the empowerment of individuals. This type of change would be neither simple nor quick but could have positive effects on social and health care policy and make way for a new logic on intervention.

This work suggests that cohabitation projects can rise to be an innovative model capable of promoting the welfare and active ageing of individuals. It is, therefore, hoped to see in the near future an increase not only in the number of cohousing projects but also in quantitative research studies on this topic, in order to better highlight the potential of the proposed model.

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### **Sitography**

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