

The concept of inclusive Cohousing and the value it adds to society



Figure 1 Ivan Simonov Men and women welcoming people with disabilities

This article will portray CoHousing as a possible solution for different major problems of the 21st century's society. By doing so the concept of cohousing will be explained. Furthermore, there will be the elaboration, on how it will tackle the problem of an exclusive society. To embrace the project, the article will refer to one of many unique projects. The last part will relate the CoHousing initiative towards the feasibility in the Belcrum area, especially the Havenkwatier.

The concept of Cohousing, short for Collaborative Housing, came up in the 1960s in Denmark and embodies the idea of a self-sustained community. To break it down a little bit, CoHousing is an alternative housing project which offers the dwellers not only a roof over their heads but also a community to rely on. Similar to student buildings these facilities have shared space to encourage human interaction. Cooking and dining together are part of everyday life. Also, a common garden or a little terrace are often included. At the same time, the residents have their private space when needed. These communities are often shaped by their mixed social classes and different cultures. This is what makes those places of human open-mindedness and soundness so special.

But there are even more advantages, due to sharing common space. The mixed income of the residents with less need for private space allows the Cohousing to be built in a central location. Energy and heating prices drop due to the denser living form, food and time will be saved by community cooking and sharing.

In our modern society, we are very used to being separated. Separated by social classes or by culture. We are used to facilities that give housing to people with disabilities, retirement pensions, and refugee accommodations. A split-up society can negatively affect all kinds of people. In addition, a united and diverse society enables all its people to take part and find their way.

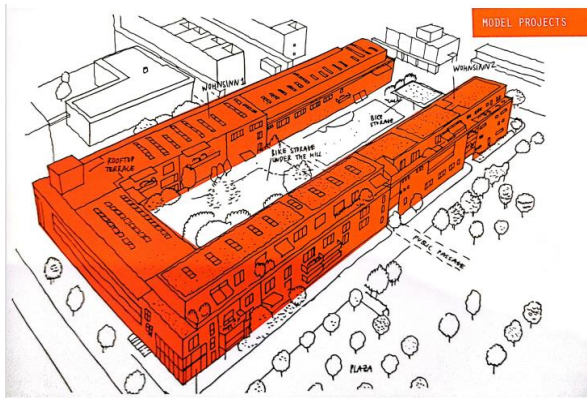


Figure 2 Modell Project Wohnsinn Facility

Continuing, this article will show the positive aspects of the inclusion of different groups of people. A great example of inclusion is the model project “Wohnsinn 1&2” in Darmstadt (Germany). With the slogan “Colorful Mix under One Roof”ⁱ it became home for more than 150 people.

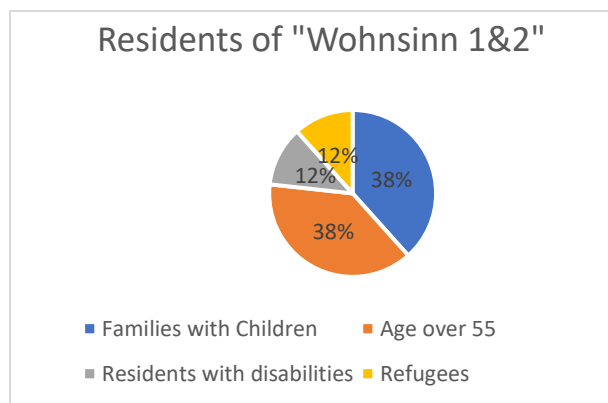


Table 1 Residents of "Wohnsinn 1&2"

The framework of the building is a sustainable and barrier-free construction. That includes a big outdoor space, terraces, urban gardens, and bicycle storage. The Indoor area contains a community kitchen, a bar, indoor terraces, a Sauna, and lots of more community space. The created environment embraces people of different social classes, cultures, with and without handicaps not only to coexist peacefully but to **live and learn** from each other. The inclusiveness expands even up to their neighborhood. They organize a weekly market, food sharing, and German classes for refugees.

A resident, Renate Kindel, comments on her life at Wohnsinn2: “Accessibility and high ecological standards in this project make it

possible to live independently for a long time, even as an older person and with physical limitations. Apart from that, the distance to friends and neighbors are very short. Each person can establish friendly relationships with a range of others and thus learn to be more tolerant [...]”ⁱⁱ



Figure 3 Plenary meeting "Wohnsinn 1"

“Wohnsinn combines different legal forms, and financial models, whereby a clear tendency can be seen for the cooperative rental flats and against ownership-like, life-long usage rights. [...]”ⁱⁱⁱ

The question occurs, can Cohousing be an alternative for Breda, Belcrum, and the Havenkwatier?

“Cobblestones have been renewed, to make the medieval city center accessible for elderly people and wheelchair users.”^{iv} This quote sums up the authorities’ effort to create a barrier-free space. But the city’s engagement does not end there.

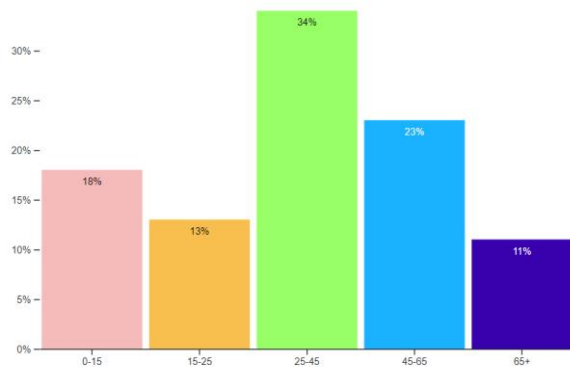
The city’s initiative for volunteering “Breda Gelijk” tries to create an inclusive and accessible society. Their message is, that “everyone is equal, belongs and can participate.”^v. With this engagement, Breda even won the “2019 Access City Award” given by the European Union^{vi}.

When discussing creating a new project somewhere, it is important to first analyze the prevailing situation. The population diagram shows that most of the people living in Belcrum are young families from 25-45, often with children.

Since the idea of Cohousing is to create a diverse society embracing the interaction of different groups, the vision should aim to support underrepresented groups, such as young and older people. Ideas such as caring programs for students and the elderly can be implemented. ^{vii}

Population per age group [↗](#)

The percentage of inhabitants per age group in neighbourhood Belcrum in Breda in the Netherlands



Neighbourhood Belcrum, 2021, age groups.

Table 2 Population per age group Belcrum

To answer the question about feasibility, Breda is objectively seen one of the best places in Europe to create an inclusive CoHousing project. Other reference projects have shown that the community has a direct positive impact with all kinds of initiatives. Also, people

in the neighborhood will learn to be more tolerant and look out for each other. Since the Havenkwatier is a mostly empty space the facility can be created newly. This would mean the new design will match the needs of the residents perfectly. When thinking about the accessibility of the area the basic needs such as alimentation are covered.



Figure 4 Image of Residents of Wohnsinn 1&2

To sum up, the residents of “Wohnsinn 1&2” have shown, that their way of inclusion has brought them not only a great community feeling but also improved the lives of people who could normally not participate. With the provided evidence it should be clear, that inclusive CoHousing should be implemented for the renewal of the Havenkwatier.



Figure 5 Diorama “Friday Afternoon in an inclusive Cohousing”

References:

- ⁱ Birgit Diesig, Retrieved January 06, 2022, from <http://www.wohnsinn-darmstadt.de/pdf/wohnsinn-konzept.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ *Institute for Creative Sustainability,(2017)“Cohousing Inclusive”. Jovis.*
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Institute for Creative Sustainability,(2017)“Cohousing Inclusive”. Jovis.*
- ^{iv} European Commission, Retrieved January 03, 2022, from https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/breda-category-winner-accessibility_en
- ^v Breda Gelijk, Retrieved January 03, 2022, from [Breda Gelijk - Platform for people with disabilities and informal carers \(breda-gelijk.nl\)](http://breda-gelijk.nl)
- ^{vi} European Commission, Retrieved January 03, 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1141&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9257>
- ^{vii} Insider, Retrieved January 03, 2022, <https://www.insider.com/intergenerational-living-senior-citizens-college-students-2020-1>

Sources of Graphics

Figure 1: Ivan Simonov; Men and women welcoming people with disabilities ; <https://www.stocklib.com/media-169600504/men-and-women-welcoming-people-with-disabilities-group-of-people-meeting-blind-female-character-and-male-in-wheelchair-people-talking-smiling-inclusion-concept-for-banner-website-design.html>

Figure 2: Modell Project Wohnsinn Facility; *Institute for Creative Sustainability,(2017)“Cohousing Inclusive”. Jovis.*

Figure 3: Plenary meeting "Wohnsinn 1"; *Institute for Creative Sustainability,(2017)“Cohousing Inclusive”. Jovis.*

Figure 4: 4 Image of Residents of “Wohnsinn 1&2”; *Institute for Creative Sustainability,(2017)“Cohousing Inclusive”. Jovis.*

Figure 5: Diorama Inclusive Cohousing; Jannik Junkers

Table 1: Residents of "Wohnsinn 1&2"; Jannik Junkers

Table 2: Population per age group Belcrum; <https://allcharts.info/the-netherlands/neighbourhood-belcrum-breda/>