

Expanded abstract

Effects on social cohesion of the grant of use cooperative housing model in Catalonia

Objectives

This research sets out the general objective of evaluating the impact on social cohesion of the grant of use cooperative housing model, based on the sense of community and civic participation of the members who participate in the cooperative housing projects in grant of use of the Sostre Cívic housing cooperative. For which the social and biographical profile of the members of the cooperative is described; in their practices and arguments are identified elements of the sense of community; civic participation practices are described; the impact of the model on the sense of community and civic participation is analyzed; and the opportunities, difficulties, and challenges of the model are identified according to the practices and arguments of the partners participating in the research.

Design

The research design is exploratory and descriptive with a qualitative methodology, specifically, case study method. The data collection techniques were group discussion and semi-structured interview. The sample consisted of 17 participants recruited through snowball sampling. All the projects involved in the study are cooperative housing initiatives operating under the grant of use model. Of the total sample, 13 participants took part in semi-structured interviews and came from 2 intergenerational projects and 1 senior project. The group discussion included 4 participants from a senior project. Data analysis were conducted using a deductive-inductive thematic content analysis process, constructing a categorical system derived from the theoretical framework. Emergent categories were also identified and inductively generated from the participants' discourse. An analytical matrix was used to organize and compare all the information, integrating the categories for data processing and interpretation.

Results

The results show responsibility and commitment in the care of the common spaces. Also, the collective spaces, as in the activities in which they participate together, contribute to strengthening the ties between the members. In addition, there is a personal investment that is made in the projects that generates the feeling of having worked to earn the condition of being part of it. They recognize that overcoming obstacles and effort strengthens the group. Added to this, the participants understand that the collective has its own characteristics and needs.

The participants feel that being at the project gives them a shared identity and that they share similar values. In addition, mutual help allows them to feel that if they need it, their needs will be covered by the group. This is even more evident in senior projects where the dynamics of interrelation and mutual support are the core of the project and in which co-responsibility in care is promoted.

The members, in their great majority, state that they have collaborated in practices serving the community. Some of the places where they have contributed are at nursing homes, esplais, volunteering in activities managed by the church, with homeless people, in community development with women and children, with people with intellectual disabilities, homeless people, and consumer groups. The collectively promoted actions in which they participate are related to the cooperative housing projects and the needs and goals that these pursue. Likewise, it is a collective influence on the neighborhood to spread the model, organizing activities inside and outside the common spaces of the projects in coexistence.

Conclusions

Throughout this research, the impact of participation in cooperative housing projects on the social cohesion of the members of the Sostre Cívic cooperative is evaluated. Among the participants' arguments and practices, it is recognized that being a member of a collective property generates the security of remaining there, with stable monthly contributions and social support, knowing and recognizing their neighbors and their life stories. Furthermore, there is a sense of belonging and identification that generates a desire for consensus, prioritizing the collective benefit. Likewise, personal investment is made in strengthening the group and the projects, seeking the integration of group members. The influence of members on the group and the group on them is evident, recognizing shared values with an ideology in projects that emphasize social and community interest. Likewise, emotional connections are generated among participating members, overcoming obstacles that strengthen bonds, and attachment to the place is expressed in statements such as feeling at home just by entering the building. Mutual aid and co-responsibility in care are promoted, collectively addressing individual needs. Based on the above, the positive effect of the elements of a sense of community on participants is recognized, as well as the strengthening of social integration networks and the reduction of disintegration and social isolation among their members. Furthermore, the model promotes non-speculation and access to the fundamental right to housing.

Civic participation practices were identified, such as community service in nursing homes, esplais (scholarships for the elderly), volunteering in church-run activities, with the homeless, in community development with women and children, with people with intellectual disabilities, with the homeless, and in consumer groups. Collective action was identified to disseminate the model in neighborhood associations, cooperatives, feminist organizations, feminist migrant groups, in the social economy network, and in care for the elderly. Political activism was also identified to demand housing, jobs, feminist rights, rights of migrants, people with intellectual disabilities, and LGBTI rights in unions, housing sectors, and political associations.

Furthermore, the model generates support networks that reduce social isolation, fostering active and self-managed aging, which improves the physical and mental health of older adults.

The model also recognizes the opportunity it offers to remove public and private land from the speculative market with a self-managed and collectively owned construction process, as well as increasing social interest and participation. On the other hand, among the difficulties expressed regarding the model, the initial monetary contribution is mentioned as the most limiting factor, as well as the need for more projects to meet demand. Furthermore, access is restricted by the requirement of a maximum annual income allowed for public housing with social security. Likewise, the lack of a specific legal framework for the model in Catalonia is noted. Some people also express a lack of time for greater participation in the projects as a difficulty.

Finally, regarding the challenges, participants affirm that more public land and tax breaks are needed to enable people with different savings capacities to access the projects. Furthermore, specific legislation should be established to help increase the possibilities for project financing. It is also argued that the right-of-use cooperative housing model for seniors should be incorporated into the social housing services law. Additionally, there is a clear need to optimize the management of project participation time, and it is identified that deep-rooted individualism constitutes a challenge for the model, which falls on some participants, for whom thinking collectively is a challenge.