

Keywords cooperative housing, ageing-in-place, participatory engagement, carescapes, feminist housing

Abstract Amidst today’s housing crisis, there is much to learn from the large-scale cooperative housing experiments that occurred in Canada throughout the 1980s. In Toronto, the Beguinage and Constance Hamilton—two cooperatives for women—developed from urgent calls to reimagine single-women households. Like the Arauco, housing for Chilean refugees, these identity-led initiatives remain successful examples of non-profit housing. By analysing the participatory processes involving politicians, academics, and architects, as well as activist collectives that spurred and emerged from these projects, this paper draws upon the notion of expanded commons to illustrate the broader socio-political discourses surrounding women’s cooperative housing. Using the framework of the “carescape” proposed by Sophie Bowlby, the paper explores the socio-temporal dimensions of informal care practices and reveals the processes of maintenance that are required to support long-term and flexible care exchanges and to promote the accessibility of collectivity. Follow-ups with current cooperative members, architects, and advocates for these initiatives show that cooperative housing has built communities and provided financially viable modes of housing, although more meaningful efforts are needed to sustain continuous participation and community cohesion, over time, so that a cooperative can be a lifelong home.

Résumé Face à la crise du logement, il est utile de revenir sur des expériences coopératives menées au Canada dans les années 1980. À Toronto, les coopératives Béguinage et Constance Hamilton sont nées d’appels à réimaginer les logements pour femmes seules. Avec l’Arauco, résidence pour des réfugié·es chilien·es, ces initiatives identitaires sont des exemples réussis de logements sans but lucratif. Cet article analyse les processus participatifs auxquels ont pris part des politicien·es, des universitaires et des architectes, ainsi que les activistes qui ont été à l’origine de ces projets et qui en sont issu·es. Les discours sociopolitiques qui entourent ces coopératives sont abordés à travers la notion de biens communs élargis. Le cadre du « carescape » proposé par Sophie Bowlby permet quant à lui d’explorer les dimensions sociotemporelles des pratiques informelles de soins en révélant les processus de maintenance qui sont nécessaires pour soutenir des échanges de soins flexibles et durables et pour promouvoir l’accessibilité de la collectivité. Le suivi des membres actuels des coopératives, des architectes et des défenseur·ses de ces initiatives montre qu’elles ont contribué à créer une communauté d’habitant·es, en plus d’avoir fourni des logements bon marché. Plus d’efforts sont toutefois nécessaires pour maintenir une participation et une cohésion communautaire durable, de manière à constituer un foyer tout au long de la vie.

Building, Dwelling, Sustaining: Learning from Women's Cooperatives

The idea of home, along with its associated domestic and reproductive labour practices, has long been centred by care-focused scholars. Housing, however, is rarely given the same care-oriented focus, even though it shelters care labour, requires processes of complex sustenance that bridge different timescales, and is shaped by the reciprocal relationships of kinship and family life (Tronto, 1993; Krasny, 2019; Mee and Power, 2020). The history of cooperative housing, however, challenges scholarly discourses that conventionally separate the research on home from housing, by conceptualizing housing as an expanded field—more than shelter—with the potential to facilitate civic and domestic agency, spatialize maintenance practices as a reciprocal activity, and respect relational and interdependent relationships outside the nuclear family.

Housing as a lifelong home is explored in this paper, through the lens of cooperative housing, particularly the activist-led collectives developed during the 1980s in Toronto, including two women's cooperatives, Constance Hamilton and the Beguinage—founded as women-only and continuing to offer board membership to women—and one Chilean-led housing collective, the Arauco Cooperative. These cooperatives were developed with unprecedented community engagement and government support for those conventionally alienated from affordable housing due to race, sex, gender, and

class. However, these cooperative “experiments” remain isolated examples in Toronto due to waning public financial support in the 1990s. While small-scale interventions have filled the vacuum and mobilized collective spatial agency to produce innovative models of housing (Doucet and Cupers, 2009)—for example, Land Back, Community Land Trusts, and Laneway Housing—they operate amidst austere public housing programmes. Responding to increasing pressure, provincial and federal governments have developed plans to mitigate the nation-wide housing crisis. Accompanying these plans are rhetoric espousing the need to build housing in the broadest sense possible: literally build more aggregate housing stock. Startlingly few of these plans have involved the creation of non-profit and cooperative housing, with most geared toward for-profit condominiums and market-value rentals. Yet the cooperative projects built throughout Toronto in the 1980s still provide meaningful opportunities for housing, offering rents that are much lower than market value and generally successful long-term occupancy.

The historical and political contexts that shaped these transformative movements as well as the processes of participatory engagement are the subject of this research, which aims to reassess the collective role of women and new immigrants in Toronto's cooperative housing and community planning. Exploring civic engagement, as well as the

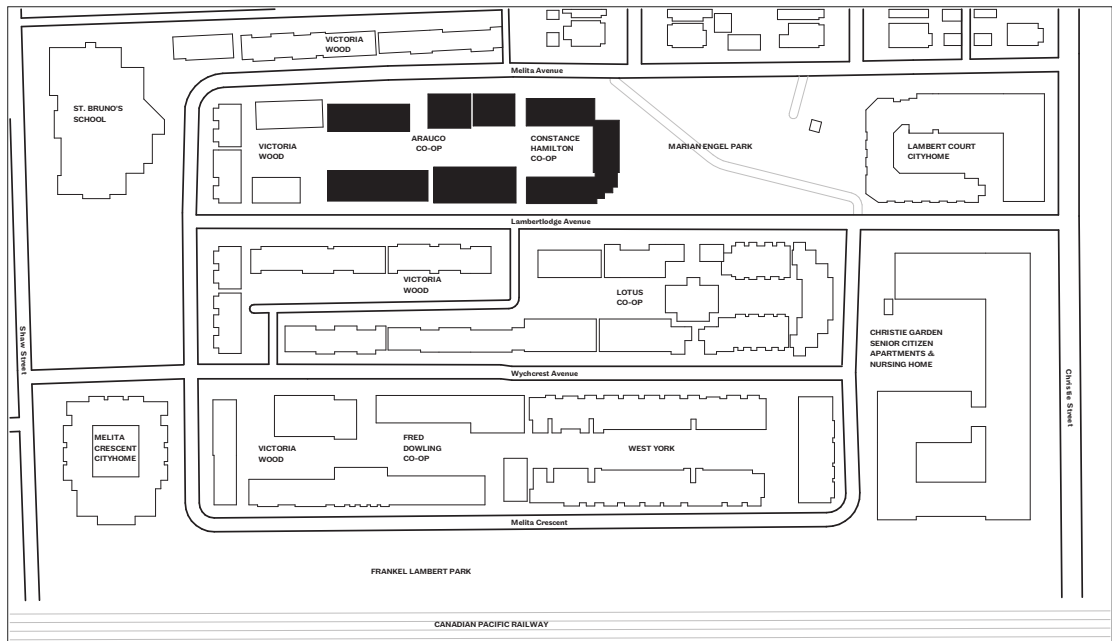


Fig. 1 Map of the Frankel Lambert neighbourhood, comprising cooperative and non-profit housing. Arauco and Constance Hamilton are two of four original identity-based demographic cooperatives. Drawn by author based on Google Maps.

methods and tools comprising the feminist commons toolkit in the wake of Toronto’s cooperative housing movement, this paper draws upon the concept of the “carescape” (Bowlby, 2012), the socio-temporal terrain that enables sustained participatory engagement over time so that housing can become a lifelong home. Follow-ups with cooperative members, architects, and advocates stemming from these alternative housing initiatives show that cooperative housing has sustained communities and provided financially viable models of housing amidst the housing crisis, although more meaningful efforts are needed to nurture long-term participation, agency, and community cohesion over time.

Historical Context: Identity-Led Cooperatives

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, the Canadian government conducted unprecedented research into alternative modes of housing geared toward two aims: rethinking non-profit housing models and regenerating the urban core. In 1973, a national non-profit housing programme was established,

and five years later, the Housing Act was amended to give more agency to local actors, including activists and professionals, in shaping the housing landscape. Municipal researchers undertook extensive studies on urban housing, leading to a significant shift in housing policy that resulted in an amendment to Toronto’s Official Plan. This policy aimed to regenerate the city by developing large-scale projects of mixed and affordable housing in the inner city (Simon and Wekerle, 1985: 13). Its main goals were to preserve urban dwelling units, designate half of the units for low- to moderate-income households, and allocate 25% of the units to families with young children.

One of the results of these studies was a brief proliferation of cooperative housing across the country, with two cooperative and community-based housing neighbourhoods created in Toronto. Two large parcels of land in central locations were set aside for the construction of multiblock, mixed income, and cooperative housing ‘experimental neighbourhoods’—St. Lawrence and Frankel Lambert—which were unique in their time for providing high-density housing without resorting to the prevailing modernist high-rise superblock typologies. Influenced by Jane Jacob’s ideas that thriving cities should have high density and mixed-use

neighbourhoods that are street-oriented with short walkable blocks, Toronto-based planners inserted the cooperative units into a conventional grid of streets predominant in 19th-century planning (Hulchanski, 1990: 12) (Fig. 1), with each unit defined by the mid-rise townhouse typology (Figs. 2–4).

Unique to the Frankel Lambert cooperative neighbourhood was that most of the housing complexes were defined by specific ethnicities or genders (women) traditionally alienated from affordable housing. Toronto was already a city composed of multicultural neighbourhoods, but the idea of housing built to support identity-based (i.e. Chilean, Vietnamese, or women) citizens was relatively new, especially at that scale. Three of these cooperatives are still identity-defined: the women's cooperative Constance Hamilton (1982), the Chilean-founded cooperative Arauco (1980), and the women's cooperative the Beguinage (1984). The first two, located adjacent to each other within the Frankel Lambert neighbourhood, are three-storey townhouse typologies; the Constance Hamilton contains 30 units and a six-bedroom housing unit (originally for second-stage transitional housing), while the Arauco is slightly larger with 50 units in total. The Beguinage, though not located in the same neighbourhood as the other two, shared original board members with Constance Hamilton. The 28 units of the Beguinage include three-storey townhouses lining the streets as well as six one-bedroom apartments in a walk-up midrise building (Fig. 3).

The Beguinage and the Constance Hamilton changed the urban housing landscape for single and coupled women, especially single mothers and lesbians.¹ Still functioning as cooperatives to this day, they offer relatively stable opportunities for women-organized housing. Although in some cases, male residents (i.e. grown sons or romantic partners) reside in the homes, men are

precluded from having a vote on the boards. The Arauco provides an interesting historical counterpart to the two women's cooperatives, due in part to its neighbouring proximity to the Constance Hamilton but also because it is maintained by Chilean members, who are related to the original inhabitants, and has a sizeable Spanish-speaking community, although it has always opened its doors to varied demographics (Fig. 4). Of the several cooperatives that grew from the experiments in 1980s Canadian housing, these three case studies are remarkable due to their development from wider feminist and political discourses, respectively, linking them to grass-roots movements external to city planning agents.

Research Methodology

The processes of agency surrounding the construction and inhabitation of identity-led cooperatives is a central focus in this research, drawing from Isabelle Doucet and Kenny Cupers, who describe agency as a “vehicle of such drive or intention to create alternative worlds” (Doucet and Cupers, 2009: 1), with particular focus on the concrete processes, practices, and facilitators of participatory engagement. In the words of Peter Marcuse, “Only in the experience of getting there, in the democratic decisions that accompany the process, can a better future be formed” (Marcuse, 2009: 194). Agency as a vision of an alternative world, on one hand, and a series of concrete processes, on the other, becomes an integral tool in the pursuit of the lifelong home.

The possibility of remaining in one's home over the course of an adult lifetime is increasingly rare in North America, coming under threat by skyrocketing land value and shrinking per-capita housing stock, but also by a lack of domestic infrastructures for ageing in place. Cooperative housing somewhat resists these threats, in part because it offers an ‘alternative world’ to traditional tenancy and home ownership models by centering collective and interdependent maintenance as a form of domestic agency. As Iris Marion Young has argued, the act of making a home is tied to a spectrum of maintenance practices that include “washing the unhealthy

1 Note that I specifically use the term “lesbian”, instead of LGBTQ2S+, because at the time, the Beguinage advertisement phrasing was “women-identifying” women. The practices around the acceptance of transgendered women into the two communities are unclear to me.



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Fig. 2
Constance Hamilton
Cooperative, from top left
clockwise: rowhouses with
original transition homes
on right; park-facing
townhouses with windows of
the laundry facility looking
onto the playground; courtyard
garden; close-up of original
transition home. © Photos:
Tara Bissett.



3



4



Fig. 3
 Beguinage Cooperative, showing the 1980s interpretation of a Victorian townhouse with walk-up steps to each apartment; back gardens and yards. © Photos: Tara Bissett.

Fig. 4
 Right, top and bottom: Arauco Cooperative and mural by members of the Chilean community facing the street; front summertime gardens in small yards. © Photos: Tara Bissett.

bacteria out of the bathroom” (Young, 2005: 134) as well as “the preservation of the meaningful things that constitute home” (*ibid.*: 136). Deeply rooted in identity, acts of preservation can be public or private; the governance structure of cooperative dwelling offers the potential for acts of collective preservation, such as the maintenance and programming of shared spaces, community safety networks, or gardens, bolstering a connection between place and identity over time.² The ability to participate in the practice of preservation, as such, thrives amidst robust access to a domestic commons. For Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis, the commons is a field that fundamentally challenges capitalist frameworks by contributing to the “long-term construction of new modes of production” (Federici, 2019: 93), while establishing and preserving a “shared property, in the form of a shared natural or social wealth—land, waters, forests, systems of knowledge, capacities for care” (*ibid.*). Commons are not “things but social relations” (*ibid.*: 94) that value the social bonds and reciprocal acts comprising the practice of commoning.

When bolstered by a commons infrastructure, cooperative housing’s day-to-day maintenance apparatus supports reciprocal relationships, interdependence, financial agency, and collective maintenance—operations that facilitate long-term home tenure. A socio-temporal dimension, or “carescape” (Bowlby, 2012), allows for informal and in-kind care exchanges that unfold over time. These non-institutionalized systems of care sustain cooperative housing: communication systems, maintenance of collective space, integration and preservation of barrier-free access, etc. Sophie Bowlby offers the framework “carescapes” to understand the “resource and service context” of informal care as a series of “exchanges over space and across time” (*ibid.*: 2112). As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa has argued, such exchanges are

often adapted as embodied habits and quotidian processes in which “care is embedded in the practices that maintain webs of relationality and is always happening in between” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 166).

In exploring how cooperatives can sustain meaningful and ongoing agency and participation to offer the possibility of a lifelong home, I ask: how have participatory practices led to long-term empowerment or collective agency in cooperative housing for women and immigrants? What were the challenges facing housing activists (architects, grassroots urbanists, scholars) and cooperative residents? This research draws upon archival documents, such as pamphlets, journals, and municipal reports, as well as contemporaneous publications, and recent interviews with residents and activists. It is also indebted to the contributions of Dr Gerda Wekerle, a housing scholar and women’s advocate, which are essential to the insights gained in this study. Wekerle wrote extensively about the inception of women’s cooperative housing throughout Canada and, with architect Joan Simon, demonstrated both the successes and shortcomings of each project (Simon and Wekerle, 1985a; 1985b; 1987; 1988a; 1988b). Toronto’s cooperative neighbourhoods and housing for women, in general, have not been well studied since Wekerle’s important work, although recently Ipek Türeli has contributed valuable research on Montreal women’s cooperatives (Türeli, 2018; 2022).

Some of my research involved telephone interviews with current cooperative residents of Arauco, Constance Hamilton, and the Beguinage. Most of the interview participants were recruited by emails sent to the individual boards, allowing for voluntary and non-intrusive participation. Through other channels, I was put in contact with three other long-time residents. To encourage trust and honour the privacy of each resident, I offered confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were structured to determine the perception of informal collectivity, how participatory engagement or agency can be maintained so that over time a cooperative can become a lifelong home, and whether the cooperative effectively spatializes

2 As Iris Marion Young argues, Martin Heidegger in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* characterizes dwelling in terms of the acts of both building and maintenance but “nevertheless seems to privilege building as the world-founding of an active subject” (Young, 2005: 116).

collective activities. They were asked if their identity-led cooperatives developed in the 1980s have provided (or are perceived to have provided) lifelong homes. A secondary aim of the interviews was to understand if participatory frameworks maintain robust ecologies of care, age/disability inclusion, and a shared perception of a commons.

The Cooperative Movement and the Feminist Commons

After writing the renowned article “What Would a Non-Sexist City be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work” (Hayden, 1980), Dolores Hayden visited Toronto and declared the Constance Hamilton cooperative as the first of its kind in North America (Simon, 1982: 21). Named after Toronto’s first woman city councillor, the Constance Hamilton cooperative forged a path for the development of the Beguinage cooperative, which itself was named after the historical communities of women who lived collectively in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands.³ Bringing extensive expertise to the table, the boards of both women’s cooperatives were led by women from various backgrounds, including social housing, cooperative labour, social work, women’s shelter organizations, politics, architecture, academia, and planning.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, feminist housing cooperatives engaged with wider discourses that promoted cultural acceptance of alternative housing. Beginning in 1976, a municipal research report showed that women, particularly those with children, were systemically disadvantaged in the housing market and, in many cases, unable to access long-term housing in Toronto. In response, two women (a municipal alderman and a housing advocate) established a plan to actualize affordable housing for women, establishing the cooperative board for Constance Hamilton.⁴ At the same time, much like in the UK and the US, though far

less documented, Canadian women were asking: what is a feminist city? What does housing for women look like? What needs to change to involve more women in housing development? Women architects and planners in Toronto looked to Matrix in the UK and Dolores Hayden in the US to reimagine processes, architectures, suburbs, and cities through feminist lenses (Modlich, 1987; Matrix, 1984; Hayden, 1980). Undergirding the women’s cooperative movement were strong, politically oriented commoning practices bound by social aims: fair housing for women, wages for housework, and systems that recognize the vast terrain of care labour. In line with international housework-centred political movements (Federici, 1975), the Canadian Wages for Housework movement demonstrated that gendered labour prevailed in the home and demanded that housing and other civic amenities reflect and mitigate these realities. Safety, accessibility, and especially affordability were major concerns for women, particularly considering the increase in female-led households since the 1970s. These discourses, local and global, fomented conversations about how the layout of homes and neighbourhoods might be more responsive to women, who were over-represented in the labour of cleaning, caring, looking after, chaperoning, or maintaining families and extended communities.

Spatializing Women’s Cooperatives: Innovations and Challenges

The Constance Hamilton and the Beguinage have been dismissed by architectural historians due to a perceived lack of design innovation, however, many of the cooperatives’ programmatic details show the architects’ subtle awareness of architecture’s power to mitigate gender inequity and the burden of care labour (Hayden, 1980). Joan Simon, the woman architect who was hired to design the Constance Hamilton cooperative, pushed through thoughtful plan elements that challenged conventional home organization. Simon concretized as many domestic details in the plan and construction drawings as possible, including a toilet in the laundry room overlooking the park, to fix the space as a communal one with amenities

3 The Beguinage cooperative is now called the Toronto Women’s Co-op, but I will continue to refer to it in the former terms for historical clarity.

4 These were Janet Howard and Jean Woodsworth, respectively.

before it was built (Wekerle, 1988) (Fig. 2). She designed the door frames so they could be altered to allow for flexibility and change of domestic programme through time, pending more available funding in the future (Simon and Wekerle, 1985). Simon also incorporated higher quality materials—using wood around the windows, for instance—in an attempt to lessen the appearance of austerity that frequently accompanied non-profit housing in Toronto.

By honouring the autonomous but inexorably linked worlds of mothers and their children, Simon programmed domestic social spaces to respect the labour of care. The laundry room was functionally maximized by doubling its use as a large communal space overlooking the park, so women could rest or socialize while children played (Wekerle, 1988b) (Fig. 2). The entrance to the upper units opened to the kitchen to prevent women from having to traipse through the apartment with heavy groceries (Fig. 5). Additionally, gradient relationships between private and communal spaces within each home and building were carefully planned. Simon sensitively distinguished the social areas within the home to allow for multiple synchronous social activities to take place in their own discrete spaces. As she put it, “to facilitate sharing arrangements, the living areas in all the family units are on different floors. This is to allow individuals to maintain separate social lives, or for teenagers, grandparents, etc. to watch t.v., do homework or entertain friends separately from their mothers. The pressure of non-stop parenting which is characteristic of single parenthood is recognized by allowing a degree of privacy within the dwelling” (Wekerle, 1988b: 46). Simon developed seven different types of units accommodating diverse living arrangements, including some wherein the living room and dining room are located on two different floors, allowing for two single women sharing the unit to have distinct social lives within their homes (Fig. 5). Although no longer used as such, the corner unit overlooking the park was originally developed as a six-bedroom transitional home for single women. All units, including

the bedrooms in the transitional home, had their own outdoor space.

Similarly, under pressure from the cooperative board, the Beguinage’s architect Phil Goldsmith defied the conventional family-oriented layout that dominated housing design in Canada. The cooperative board insisted that the plans reflect the quotidian reality of two or three single-mothers or multigenerational families sharing a home. The architect dismantled the normative bedroom hierarchy that reflected nuclear family organization, by removing the “master bedroom” type in some of the units. Despite this seemingly small change, the Canadian Mortgage Housing Cooperation (CMHC) planning committee (mostly men) who reviewed the project questioned it before ultimately giving their approval (Wekerle, 1988a).

Though these represent small interventions in programme, they are significant in terms of imagining how social relationships might determine the plan of the home. However small, these innovations were hard to push through in non-profit housing. One architect of several later Canadian women’s cooperatives has suggested that building and designing generously within the stark limits imposed by Canadian housing guidelines and building codes was a skill that architects of non-profit housing learned to master over time (Allen, 2023, interview). Architects in Canada’s non-profit sector were severely limited by the maximum unit price (MUP) system, which often resulted in buildings located in undesirable areas, constructed with cheap-looking materials, and geared to *Existenzminimum*, by allotting the smallest possible dimensions to any given room. Under this system, there is no provision for communal space or generosity of circulation; anything beyond the bare minimum was considered a transgression against the “modesty” expected in non-profit housing (*ibid.*). Wekerle argued that even the smallest innovation in the design, plan, or programme of these spaces was extraordinary due to the conservative restrictions within the CMHC (the governmental planning board to which all cooperatives submitted designs). Although the feminist commons extended beyond the physical

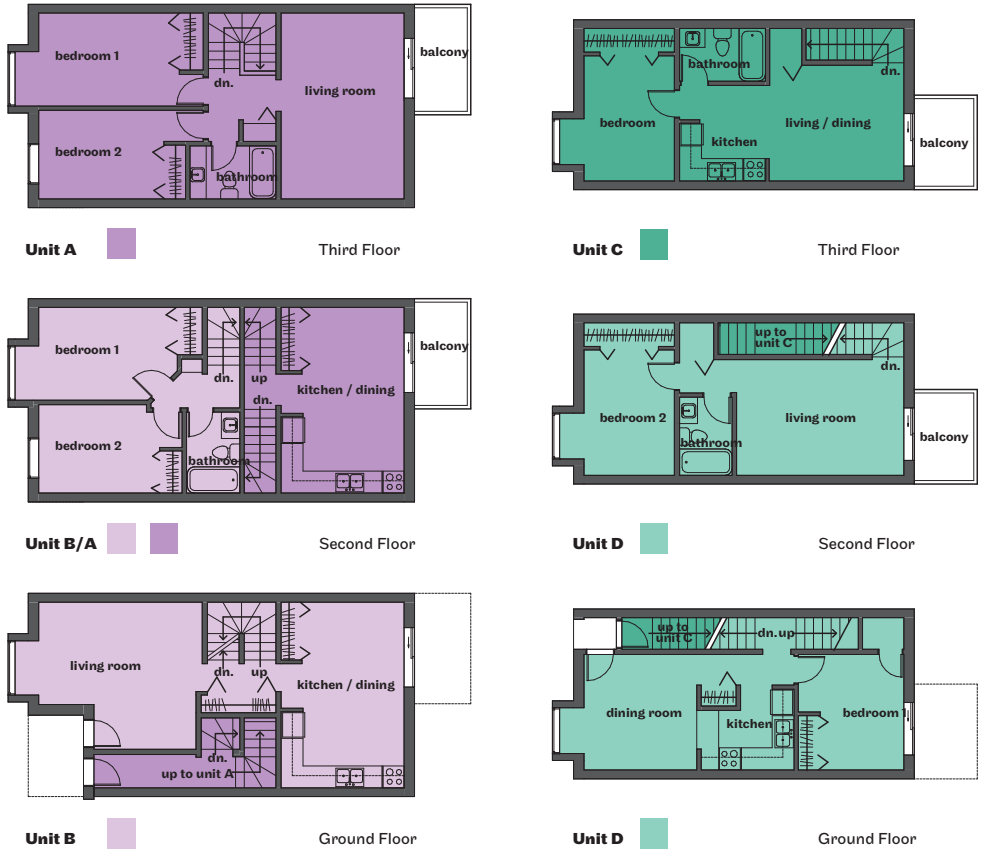


Fig. 5 Plan showing some of the programmatic innovations of the Constance Hamilton Cooperative, including the upper floor’s entrance into the kitchen and the sensitive separation of ‘social spaces’ within the apartments. Drawn by author based on illustrations from Wekerle’s *Women’s Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities*, 1988b.



Fig. 6 Left: Beguinage Poster. Right: Women Plan Toronto (WPT) poster, derived from collaborative workshops, 1986. © University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections.

space of the cooperatives to include events (board meetings, gatherings, and DIY workshops) and political apparatuses (magazines, zines, and flyers) (Fig. 6), neither of the women's cooperatives offered meaningful indoor communal space. Aside from Constance Hamilton's extended laundry room and the one basement room at the Beguinage that was originally designed for board meetings and gatherings, due to financial restrictions, the buildings were geared toward private living. In the words of Simon and Wekerle, "The emphasis on the privatization of functions within the individual dwelling unit is reminiscent of the planning philosophy apparent in suburban single-family neighbourhoods..." (Simon and Wekerle, 1987).

Housing Agency: Comparing the Chilean Experience

Another identity-led cooperative, created by a group of Chilean refugees, who supported

ousted President Salvador Allende and fled to Toronto after Pinochet assumed the dictatorship of the country in 1973, experienced similar challenges. Yearning for a collective lifestyle bound by political identity as well as agency over housing tenure (Arauco Cooperative member, 2023, interview), a small group of Chilean expats developed La Cooperativa de Viviendas Arauco, or Arauco Cooperative, just after the plans for the Frankel Lambert neighbourhood were laid out (Fig. 4). With a history of community-led and politically engaged practices, the idea of working collectively toward a common urban goal was not illusory (*ibid.*). An interview with one of the founding members, an engineer involved in the creation of social housing for miners in Chile (Rodman and Cooper 1995: 96), demonstrates that the residents saw themselves as community leaders who had experience as organizers in Chile: cooperative housing builders, architects, lawyers, engineers, and finance specialists. In addition to providing housing, the indirect benefit of the cooperative was that it created a physical place to gather, even if in private

homes, which in turn solicited other forms of cooperative culture, mainly in protest of the Chilean political dictatorship. *Penas*—political gatherings honouring Allende's ideals of socialism and remembering friends and family who disappeared in the early years of the dictatorship (Rasile, 2003)—would be held weekly. From these gatherings, members developed new action collaboratives to sustain their left-leaning values, including the development of a school programme for Chilean children (*ibid.*).

Limited by Canadian rules and guidelines, the original Chilean architects (names unknown today) provided a modern proposal for the building that was rejected by the government because it did not 'appear' modest enough for non-profit housing (Rodman and Cooper, 1995). Because Canadian building code had no framework to allow for open-plan interior collective space within housing, the vision for a communal space was not realized. Arauco's consistently low rents have been a constant source of tension between the cooperative board and planning authorities, with the latter insisting that rents should be raised to bring them closer to market rates. Arauco has refused, and reportedly still functions successfully with some of the lowest rents among the city's cooperatives (*ibid.*). Ultimately, the architects of Arauco, as well as Constance Hamilton and the Beguinage, were forced to work within relatively inflexible guidelines and systems that encoded the spaces, programmes, and architecture of cooperative housing in terms of nuclear family housing.

Expanding Housing into the Feminist Commons: Women Plan Toronto

Despite the difficulties in breaking the housing template in Toronto, the cooperative housing movement in the 1980s nonetheless stimulated a rich civic discourse led by women and geared to equitable and sustainable ways of organizing society. An expanded commons (Federici, 2019), it fostered new practices that were oriented to the restructuring of systems, whether housing, labour, or other urban activities. Advocacy from within Toronto's York University

bolstered the effort, particularly from Wekerle and her student, Regula Modlich, who wrote a master's thesis on urban participatory infrastructure and laid out a framework of cooperative engagement strategies that invited Toronto-based women to share urban experiences (Rahder, 2023, interview). Throughout the 1980s, when feminism was dominated by the middle-class white demographic, Modlich established a series of workshops on housing and urban planning with women from diverse backgrounds: single mothers and young, immigrant, indigenous, unhoused, disabled, and elderly women (*ibid.*). These workshops would flourish into the 1990s. The movement, called Women Plan Toronto (WPT), was influenced by the original Women Plan London consultative processes in the UK (Modlich, 1987) and involved a vast network of women interested in housing and cities (**Fig. 6**).

Key to the structure of the workshops was the removal of hierarchy and the creation of a relaxed, inclusive environment (*ibid.*). Only women were welcome in these workshops, and both compensation and childcare were provided. Braille and auditory devices were available for low-sighted and d/Deaf people. Translators were invited to enable women from immigrant and refugee communities to fully participate. The workshops drew women into cafes, homes, and community centres. Women from various backgrounds, including artists, architects, scholars, homemakers, and city politicians gathered to advance the common aim of women's housing equity in a city long controlled by the male-dominated construction and planning industries.

For WPT, bringing women into the process of imagining equitable cities was the first step in establishing a meaningful dialogue between marginalized voices and structures of power. Ultimately, they sought to establish a system that would empower women to claim their right to the city. Many WPT workshop participants said it was the first time they felt their opinion about the city was respected. Women were invited to "draw and describe their communities, areas of activity and aspects of their environments which support and frustrate their varied

activities and roles” (Sterner, 1987: 9) with the aspiration that drawing collectively was not only enjoyable but also allowed women to visualize everyday aspects of their urban environments that they might not otherwise notice (Fig. 6). At one event, a guest illustrator asked women to imagine and describe the changes they would like to see in their world, a project they called “blue skying” (Modlich, 1986: 9). At another, a length of paper unrolled on a table served as a timeline of events related to women’s liberation. Each participant was invited to mark a date or event, no matter how small (Rahder, 2023, interview).

Out of these workshops grew concrete demands for urban equity, including the right to mobility for disabled people, seniors, and women with children, and the rights to urban safety, affordable housing, public washrooms (especially those safe for children), and more age and “function appropriate park facilities” (Modlich, 1986: 9). Other grass-roots organizations were spurred in the wake of WPT, including the collective Women in Toronto Creating Housing (WITCH) and Women In/And Planning.

Carescapes as Participatory Process

The rise of identity-led cooperatives has resulted in an offer of affordable housing for over four decades, and encouraged meaningful platforms for collective organization. But since the 1980s, they have faced challenges in maintaining cooperative, or collective, action. In what follows, we return to one of the questions laid out at the outset of this paper: how can participatory engagement be maintained so that over time a cooperative can become a lifelong home?

Revisiting Bowlby’s carescape framework, which conceptualizes the “terrain” of collaboration, cooperation, interdependence and, generally, caring and receiving actions as they unfold over time (Bowlby, 2012), we explore how cooperative housing might produce an ecology of informal care (Bowlby and McKie, 2019). A carescape acknowledges the temporal dimension of reciprocity and care in non-profit housing—the processes and maintenance activities that prolong and nurture cooperative ideals in daily,

weekly, monthly, and annual labour interactions. The house, no longer envisioned solely as an object, becomes a vessel for these processes, and with the addition of the time element and the conception of carescapes as complex and ongoing interactions in cooperative housing, the maintenance process becomes as important as the creation and development of the projects. For cooperative housing to become a long-term home, it must adapt to significant life events, such as illness, ageing, childbirth and childhood, and facilitate interdependent relationships. It must maintain infrastructures to support the development of new skills in board membership, the operation of safety networks and communication systems, and the management of finances. And it must spatialize the informal reciprocal relationships that emerge in domestic situations.

How have these cooperatives maintained an ecology of care, or a carescape, over time? In conversations with the women’s cooperative tenants with between five and 25 years of residential tenure, I noted three common problems within the cooperatives that show the fractures between the intent of the original cooperative boards and the reality of long-term residence: lack of structures to support the labour of care, difficulties of ageing in place, and a decreasing sense of the commons.

Designing and Maintaining Care Ecologies

North American women’s movements and WPT workshops focused extensively on paid or unpaid labour, performed outside or inside the home; in the 1970s and 1980s, it was assumed that women were performing the bulk of it. Out of the WPT workshops rose the idea that domestic infrastructures were required to support informal care labour over time. As Modlich wrote, “[C]aring is enormously emotionally and physically demanding, underpaid, undervalued, time consuming and often without alternatives for the care giver. Comprehensive policies on community care should include hostels, facilities for their residents, as well as for care givers and residents in private dwellings” (Modlich 1987: 16). In particular, she noted that racialized people and refugees,

many of whom work in formal caregiving professions or whose intergenerational families depend upon intertwined structures of giving and receiving care, would benefit enormously from housing, transportation, and other structures that include long-term strategies for ageing, childcare, unforeseen hardships, and disabilities (*ibid.*). The Constance Hamilton's transitional home for women—originally a hostel that blurred the boundaries between home and institution—was an interesting example of such an infrastructure. However, the prospect of including a day care centre, a cooperative store, or even more collective indoor space to share domestic tasks was out of the question in the design of the cooperatives. Such 'extras' would have excluded the housing from government funding and, secondly, building code legislation had no provision for such communal spaces in housing (Simon, 1983).

Ageing in Place and Disability Inclusion

None of the cooperative housing units of the 1980s were built as inclusive of people with disabilities or those desiring to age in place. At the time, one of Constance Hamilton's board members, Janet Howard, warned that the townhouse typology was not disability inclusive (Wekerle, 1988b). But the townhouse walk-up typology allowed planners to adhere to the 19th-century street pattern, which conformed to the desires of the homeowner neighbours already present in Frankel Lambert, who believed that higher-density towers would depreciate the value of the surrounding neighbourhood if the cooperative housing did not have typical family home features like lawns, parking, and street-facing units with front steps leading to a porch (Simon and Wekerle, 1985). While participatory processes can restore faith in public decision procedures and perhaps even help to resolve conflicts of interest about how space should be used, sometimes public engagement strategies do not benefit the public seeking the 'right to the city' (Richardson and Connelly, 2005). Over time the townhouse model has not facilitated long residential tenure because it is not disability and age inclusive and does not allow for the structures of care that were integral in the

original intent of the cooperative boards and, later, the WPT workshops. Indeed, current members of each of the three cooperatives have expressed grievances about their townhouse-type buildings, which feature stairs and walk-up entrances that ageing residents find increasingly difficult to manage (Figs. 2-4). "You keep fit or move out", said one member, while another mentioned that the older members who "tried to foster a community spirit, eventually had to move because of stairs" (Beguinaige member, 2023–24, interview).

Sense of the Commons

For many resident members, the women's cooperatives promised an enfranchised community linked to the idea of a women's or feminist commons. Many residents felt the cooperatives would allow them to have "more say in how [they] lived" (Constance Hamilton member, 2023–24, interview). However, despite these wishes, the physical spaces and structures that enable and continue collective processes over time have not been maintained. Members of one cooperative told me that they increasingly seek community outside the housing, volunteering in community kitchens and tent cities. However, some residents lamented that practices of planned or impromptu gathering and shared labour in indoor collective space has not been preserved. In one example, although the board collectively makes decisions, an external management company is responsible for service, repairs, and other similar tasks. This external company has seized the open-programme rooms on the lower floor of the cooperative as its office space, which now spills into the original common area. As one resident put it, the original lower floor space "used to be called a common room" but has recently been renamed the "meeting room" to suit its new managerial function (Beguinaige member, 2023–24, interview). Currently filled with "old filing cabinets", the room's stove has recently been removed, modifying its programme from the sole indoor community space to an office.

A more surprising factor limiting members' accessibility to the board and

restricting the perception of the commons involves the reliance on modern communication technology. Since the global pandemic began in 2020, collective activities and common spaces have migrated online or to outdoor gardens. Since then, many board meetings have been held remotely. One resident admitted that she “can’t figure out the social media” used in board communications and that “analog helping situations” should be made available (*ibid.*). She also commented that community was fostered more meaningfully when they gathered in real space: “[I]t is hard to have a community because we feel disconnected,” especially when it is impossible to “gauge the whole room” (*ibid.*). Alert systems, information pipelines, and meetings are now mediated through technology, alienating those who are not comfortable using it. In short, the modes and processes of cultivating the commons need to be continually re-evaluated and addressed.

Conclusion

In Canada, cooperative housing from the 1980s offers a valuable model in terms of its successes and shortcomings. Activist-led and identity-based cooperatives, like the Chilean-founded Arauco cooperative, the Beguinage, and Constance Hamilton, are particularly interesting because they arose from political relationships with networks outside of the cooperative itself. Thus the involvement across demographics of various community members in the cooperative housing movement offered unique and multiple levels of engagement, which informed the designs, processes, and demographic aspects of the housing. However, analyses of these processes reveal a fracture between the intent of the initial cooperative boards and the government planners at the CMHC, which saw cooperative housing as substandard to traditional housing and enforced its adherence to a sense of “modesty”. A larger problem, however, emerges in the analysis of the service of these buildings over the decades. When considering the women’s cooperatives within the socio-temporal framework of carescapes, some of their operations betray their boards’ original visions. First, while arrangements to mitigate and respect the labour of domestic

care have tended to be informal, these practices could be better formalized or spatialized with the inclusion of childcare facilities, eldercare accommodation, or collective indoor gathering space that uniquely reflects reciprocal, interdependent, or intergenerational relationships. Second, the buildings were never designed as disability inclusive nor conducive to ageing in place due to planners’ wishes to create cooperative housing that resembled a typical home-ownership neighbourhood. Third, systems of communication have not been maintained nor made accessible to ageing inhabitants and, in some cases, external management maintenance systems have supplanted the original cooperative structure, taking over common areas. For cooperative housing to enable long-term housing tenure, it must be considered more than ‘shelter’, and rather be understood as a platform for fostering commons, proliferating systems of interdependence, and meeting the everchanging demands of life at any age. The processes that enable care in cooperative housing also need maintenance.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the generosity, suggestions, and pointers of Vera Ellen Allen, Barbara Rahder, Gerda Wekerle, and Carolyn Whitzman. Our conversations and their pioneering research in women’s urban equity greatly shaped this article. I also thank the peer reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

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