

Growing old together

1 Work with a partner. Look at the photos and answer the questions.

- 1 How do you normally picture someone over the age of 65? Why?
- 2 How old is 'old'?



2a Read the magazine article about co-housing for older generations. Which countries are leading the way in this idea? Why do you think this is?

LIVING TOGETHER

Average life expectancy in general is increasing. This is good news, but as life expectancy increases, so does the number of older people. This means more pressure on families, communities and governments to look after them. But in addition to this is an increasing desire among those of the third age to be in control of their own life. For many the great fear of old age is isolation and loneliness rather than age itself. As a result, one solution that is growing in popularity is co-housing.



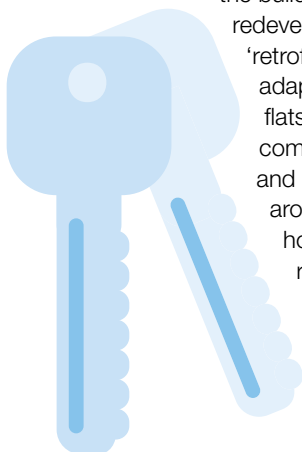
Origins of co-housing

Denmark

Co-housing started in Denmark in the 1960s as a solution for professional families with childminding needs, who were dissatisfied with existing housing and wanted to live in a more supportive environment. They were influenced by Bodil Graae's idea that "every child should have 100 parents." It then spread quickly to Sweden and the Netherlands. Co-housing is the idea of living in a community, which could be a family-oriented community, a group of older people, or even a single gender group. It is becoming an increasingly popular idea among the senior age group. As a healthy older generation, they have aspirations for a socially active life for years to come. They relish the idea of living as empowered residents with friendly neighbours.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands the government views co-housing as a means of reducing care costs, and it offers funding to finance the building of new communities or the redevelopment of existing buildings. These 'retrofits' are increasingly popular as they adapt and renovate run-down blocks of flats, leaving one empty to act as the common area. This recycles buildings and uses the current infrastructure around it. There are now over 200 co-housing projects in the Netherlands, referred to as 'living groups of elderly'. The Woongroep Castellum in Amersfoort is one such project which is working very well. The residents have their own living space but meet regularly for coffee, meals and other activities.



Co-housing in the US

In the US, self-financed groups have taken off and places like the Elderberry community in North Carolina, which is for elderly people seeking picturesque country views, and Mountain View in California, which is well-connected to the bustling city of San Francisco, are up and running. These communities have private flats and large communal areas where they have regular meals and events together.

Co-housing in Europe

The idea is taking off slowly in the Mediterranean but it's a very gradual process due to the fact that the family unit is more close-knit here, and the tradition of looking after older relatives is still very strong. People of the third age are also reluctant to move – they want to stay in their local area, but co-housing still isn't widespread enough to facilitate this.

The UK has also been slow to back co-housing. However, there are now several developments in progress, including Older Women's Co-Housing (OWCH) – a small development for senior women in London. OWCH was founded in 1998 but the first residents only moved in in 2016. The development took years because of problems finding a suitable location, obtaining planning permission and getting government funding; in fact, in the end the group had to finance itself. These difficulties highlight some of the reasons for the slow uptake in the UK.

In general, however, the senior age group like the idea of combining independence with companionship. As it states on the OWCH website, "What we all share is a determination to stay as self-dependent and active as we can as we get older." Co-housing certainly looks to be a good solution for those of the third age.

2b Read the article again and decide if the sentences are True (T) or False (F). Correct the false sentences.

- 1 People of the third age are more worried about being lonely than needing care. T / F
- 2 Co-housing is the idea of living in a community with people of the same age and gender. T / F
- 3 There are over 200 living groups of elderly in Europe. T / F
- 4 In the US, co-housing projects funded by the residents are growing in popularity. T / F
- 5 Co-housing has been slow to take off in the UK due to problems with planning permission and funding. T / F
- 6 Older people are attracted to the idea of being in control of where they live but sharing this responsibility with others. T / F

2c Read the article again and choose the best alternative to complete the sentences.

- 1 As people are living for longer they are
 - a keen to remain active and in control of their lives.
 - b looking for ways to stay close to their family.
- 2 Co-housing has been popular in some northern European countries
 - a for several decades.
 - b for ten years or so.
- 3 In the Netherlands, some co-housing communities are formed
 - a by tearing down old blocks of flats and rebuilding purpose-built communities.
 - b out of existing blocks of flats which are modified.
- 4 In the Woongroep Castellum, people live
 - a in shared accommodation and have meals and do activities together.
 - b in private flats and enjoy meals and activities in communal areas.
- 5 The Elderberry community in the US is aimed at
 - a elderly people who enjoy living in the countryside.
 - b older people who want to remain living in town.
- 6 OWCH spent 18 years in development due to problems with
 - a finding a building location, planning permission and funding.
 - b plans for redeveloping an existing building and funding.

Gateway to culture

3a Work with a partner and discuss the questions.

- 1 Do you think co-housing for the elderly is a good idea? Why/Why not?
- 2 Do you know of any co-housing projects for any age group in your area?
- 3 Do you know anyone elderly who lives alone? Do you think they would like to live in a co-housing project? Why/Why not?

PROJECT

3b You are going to work on a project to find out about co-housing in two different countries. Read the questions and prepare your project research.

- 1 Work in pairs and find a co-housing project in your country and one in a different country. They don't have to be co-housing projects for the elderly.
- 2 Find out more about the projects. Answer the following questions:
 - Where is the community and who is it for?
 - Is it a new built-for-purpose community or a renovated area?
 - Is it privately owned or government financed?
 - How does the community work?
 - What is the interaction with the local community like? Why?
 - How do the two projects compare with each other?
 - Are there any projects like this in your country? Are they successful or could they be successful in the future? Why/Why not?

3c Using the notes you have made in pairs, write your own report about the two projects. Describe each project and compare and contrast them. Check your writing before you hand it in.