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Shifting domesticities: recent social housing practices and policies in Spain

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Abstract

Instances of crisis have always marked pivotal moments in housing design, acting as catalysts for re-evaluating models and practices and bringing forth systemic changes already latent in the discipline. Such revelation of hidden latencies is a characteristic phenomenon of today's housing panorama, influenced by factors such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the imperative shift toward ecological sustainability, and a growing discourse prompting the reconsideration of the human body at both individual and social levels. This article delves into such a system of adjustments within the contextualised case of Spanish social housing. It does so by focusing on two complementary sources. Firstly, recent shifts in housing policies, encompassing new regulations, programs, legal frameworks, and urban strategies; and secondly, a selection of projects emerging from competitions and new developments that either anticipate or result from these policy changes, introducing innovative design devices working on the following fronts: (1) the presence of nature and open space, interpreted as a fundamental element for social comfort related with broader ecological concerns, (2) a heterogeneous and complex articulation of in-between collective spaces, responding to emerging trends around the concept of sharing, and (3) the reconceptualization of the traditional core of interior private space, namely the kitchen, which in turn raises important questions on gender equality and care. Analysing the ever-evolving interplay between policies and practices, theories and projects, will reveal that the multifaceted crises of recent decades have played a pivotal role in shaping a redefined understanding of domestic spaces. Most significantly, this reinterpretation goes beyond addressing environmental sustainability and energy efficiency, placing a great emphasis on social innovation within and beyond the home, inside and outside the building.

Keywords Domestic space, Social housing policies, Experiment through design, Inside-outside integration, Services collectivization, De-genderization of domestic space

Introduction: crises and experimentation

The home embodies the archetypical manifestation of architecture, whose agency has always been ineluctably connected to providing a safe refuge for humans. To achieve this, the design of housing has undergone a constant process of reformulation, boosted by a field of changing forces that have threatened and, at the same time, stimulated the search for and experimentation of new solutions. The moments of crises constitute

the culminating moment of this process when conflict assumes its most intense imbalance and the reformulation of models takes place at the fastest speed. In his 2021 book, Mirko Zardini draws an insightful reflection on the crisis as a practical paradigm to interpret the history of the last fifty years. Starting from the energy crises of 1973, he states that rather than introducing new ideas, crises “function as accelerators of trends already underway”.¹ In other words, the perception of an impending traumatic advent provokes the emergence and concretization of systemic changes already hovering within the discipline in a state of invisible latency. Such revelation

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¹ Doglio et al. (2021) *Dopo le Crisi*. 1978, 2001, 2008, 2020. LetteraVentidue, Siracusa, p 15 (translation by the authors).

of hidden latencies is indeed a characteristic phenomenon of the contemporary housing condition, pushed by several factors, from the recent covid-19 pandemic –still projecting its shadows in our everyday life– to the urgent issue of the ecological transition –with its call for more sustainable building strategies–, or the growing and spreading critical debate embracing a reformulation of the human body –from both an individual and social lens, each with its own spatial consequences.

The emergence of critical latencies has produced and is still affecting the conception of domestic space. This article sets out to investigate such a system of adjustments within the contextualised case of Spanish social housing. To do so, it will focus on two complementary sources. Firstly, on a set of recent housing policies shifts, including new regulations, programs, legal frameworks, and urban strategies; and secondly, on a selection of projects related to competitions and new realisations that have been anticipators or products of such policy changes, introducing innovative design devices and expedients working on the following fronts: (1) the presence of nature and open space, interpreted as a fundamental element for social comfort related with broader ecological concerns, (2) a heterogeneous and complex articulation of in-between collective spaces, responding to emerging trends around the concept of sharing, and (3) the reconceptualization of the traditional core of interior private space, namely the kitchen, which in turn raises important questions on gender equality and care.

After a short introduction to the Spanish social housing context, the text will focus on revealing the dense filigree of design actions and regulatory reactions stemming from the three above-mentioned points, following a gradual transition from well-known architectural polarities, from exterior to interior, from natural to artificial, from public to private realms. The analysed reciprocities between new design models and public policies will ultimately prove the weakness of thinking in such binary terms when dealing with contemporary housing, revealing the complex network of shortcuts, simultaneities, and hybridizations that can be established between the above-mentioned poles.

Contextualization: social housing in Spain

Architecture and housing have recently become fore-fronts for legal innovation in Spain. In 2022 the “Quality of architecture law” (Ley 9/2022, de 14 de junio, de Calidad de la Arquitectura) was approved, presented “as a legal tool to consolidate a new model of economic, energy and environmental transition that promotes greater social

inclusion and cohesion”.² The text explicitly remarks how “the pandemic and the periods of confinement related to it have highlighted the importance of the physical environment in providing health, well-being, and quality of life” and how architecture can contribute to environmental protection by “integrating the building into the natural ecosystem of the environment in which it is located”.³ The “incorporation of gender perspective in architecture” is listed among its main goals, along with the more expectable “economic, environmental and social sustainability”.⁴ Moreover, the law acknowledges the crucial role of technical regulations and promotes the creation of a “Quality of Architecture Council” to develop and adapt those regulations “to the state of the art and new social demands”.⁵ Thus, the law assumes that architectural design must contribute to a qualitative change related to the main social and environmental challenges of the present like the ecological transition, social inclusion or gender equality.

Even if there is no explicit mention of it, the scope of this new law cannot be detached from the issue of housing, in which architectural quality intersects with a major social problem in Spain. In fact, barely a year after its publication, the first “Right to housing law” ever promoted by a Spanish national Government was passed (Ley 12/2023, de 24 de mayo, por el derecho a la vivienda). This law enables a new regulatory framework for regional policies, which, according to the Spanish Constitution, are in charge of housing and urban planning issues, partially delegated to municipal administrations. The possibility that public entities define limits to private rental prices in the so-called “tensioned residential market zones” (“zonas de mercado residencial tensionado”)⁶ has become the most controversial point for public and media debate since the legal text was first published in draft form.⁷ However, the law is much more than that and includes a complex set of measures related

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ España (2023) Ley 12/2023, de 24 de mayo, por el derecho a la vivienda, articles 17 and 19. Published on «BOE», núm. 124, de 25.05.2023, law that came into force from 26.05.2023. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2023/05/24/12/con>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

⁷ Among these articles: delle Femmine (2023) Las claves de la nueva ley de vivienda: un tope al alquiler, zonas tensionadas, honorarios inmobiliarios a cargo del casero y normas para grandes tenedores”, *Diario El País*, 14th April 2023 (https://elpais.com/economia/2023-04-14/tope-del-alquiler-zonas-tensionadas-y-grandes-tenedores-las-claves-de-la-nueva-ley-de-vivienda.html?event_log=go); Ramírez Cerezo (2023) Los topes al alquiler de la ley de vivienda adelantan más precios récord y fuga de caseros”, *Diario ABC*, 24th April 2023 (www.abc.es/economia/topes-alquiler-ley-vivienda-adelantan-precios-record-20230424220752-nt.html); Salvador (2023) La ley de Vivienda puede sacar del mercado de alquiler más de 100.000 pisos, *Diario La Vanguardia*, 12th July 2023 (www.lavanguardia.com/economia/2023/07/12/9104350/ley-de-vivienda-alquiler-precio-mercado-oferta-retirar.html). All accessed 30 Nov 2023.

² España (2022) Ley 9/2022, de 14 de junio, de Calidad de la Arquitectura, Preamble – iii. Published on «BOE», núm. 142, de 15.06.2022, law that came into force from 16.06.2022. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2022/06/14/9/con>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023 (translation by the authors).

to the actual development of the constitutional “right to housing” through the increase of the public housing stock.

Such is indeed the main goal of the new legal text, which is especially focused on the promotion of social rental housing as an alternative to the ownership-based Spanish system in the last sixty years. The paradoxical results of that system are harshly criticised in the preamble of the law: 31,5% of the total housing units built in the country between 1962 and 2020 were subsidised under some public program, but most of them were sold to their dwellers, and soon became privately-owned market products. Hence the public housing stock (meaning publicly owned houses) in 2020 amounted to an insignificant 1,6% of the total of 18,6 million Spanish households.⁸ Apart from expressing a striking dilapidation of public means, this last figure marks a strong contrast with other European countries like France, UK, Sweden, The Netherlands, Austria or Denmark, in which the public housing stocks rise above 15% of the total housing stock.⁹ The law includes specific measures to increase the amount of land assigned to the construction of social and social rental housing by urban and territorial planning, and generalises the possibility of building public housing for specific target groups combined with other public programs (schools, libraries, day-care, and health services, etc.) in non-residential public land.¹⁰ The latter are the so-called *viviendas dotacionales*, boosted by a main regulatory innovation in the region of Catalonia since 2007 and soon spread to other regions, which originated a new kind of hybrid (multi-functional) architecture that will be later analysed in this text. Environmental, gender, and other social issues are also part of the reference framework for the 2023 “Right to Housing law”,¹¹ but the main focus of this legal text is the increase of the public housing stock and the urgent promotion of affordable rental housing. In this line, the Spanish Government has adopted the goal of providing more than 184.000 social or affordable rental dwellings in the next four years through the “Affordable Rental Housing Plan” (“Plan de Vivienda en Alquiler Asequible”), which includes several policies, actions and agreements with other public administrations.¹²

Starting from this general framework of national legal innovations and state policies, the article deepens into regional and local experiences, analysing the interrelation

between the policies’ formalisation and the actual realisation of social housing projects. In some cases, the latter have anticipated the policies; in others, they have been developed simultaneously with them; finally, some of the projects have been designed and built following the new policies. The analysis of the relationship between social housing policies (including legal and regulatory innovations) and architectural design is thus the very scope of this article. The research work has been carried out by tracing the different fields of force that induced the changes, that is, by noting cause-and-effect relationships: on the one hand, the cases in which the project itself became the forerunner and prototype of specific regulations introduced later and on the other those in which the domestic space was shaped in response to the regulation itself. The reflection focuses specifically on four different Spanish regions: Madrid, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and the Basque Country.

Exterior care and ecological transition

The increasing demand for external space and contact with nature in urban housing not only responds to the traumatic experience lived during the pandemic lockdown, but also raises broader critical issues of environmental sustainability and ecological transition, already latent in our societies for a long time. In this sense, a recent strand of housing policies and design practices can be traced in some regions of Spain, which reveals an attentive focus on the adoption of local materials and a greater integration of new housing proposals within the environmental landscape. As for the need for more intense contact with nature, some relevant changes can also be identified in recent regulation shifts, recognising the humans’ need for external space itself – where people can breathe clean air and experience a renovated environmental comfort – whether private or shared.

In this line, an apparently minor but significant regulatory change has been recently approved in Madrid in the summer of 2023: the modification of the city planning standards (Normas urbanísticas del Plan General de Ordenación Urbana) shows a new attention to outdoor spaces within collective housing by enlarging the size of balconies that can be built as an extra to the maximum gross floor area. More specifically, article 6.6.19 called “Overhanging or cantilevered façade elements” (“Salientes o vuelos en fachadas”), states that “the incorporation of balconies is encouraged by increasing their overhang from 40 to 75 cm, without needing to include their surface in the calculation of the buildable area”.¹³ By

⁸ España (2023) Ley 12/2023, de 24 de mayo, por el derecho a la vivienda, Preamble, pp 8, 13.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Ibid, article 15.

¹¹ Ibid, preamble.

¹² To further deepen into this topic, see the website: <https://www.mitma.gob.es/vivienda/plan-estatal-de-vivienda/plan-vivienda-alquiler-asequible>.

¹³ Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2023) Compendio de las Normas Urbanísticas del Plan General de Ordenación Urbana de Madrid de 1997 (updated 05.06.2023), by Dirección General de Planeamiento. Available at: <https://>

explicitly promoting larger balconies, this policy recognizes the role of outdoor spaces within the house as a dispositive to increment the inhabitants' environmental and social comfort.

Being so recent, the consequences of this regulatory modification in housing design are still to come, but there is a whole set of anticipatory social housing projects in Madrid, which, struggling against the previous law, succeeded in designing generous outdoor spaces. One of the most revealing examples in this sense is the competition winning project for **78 social housing units at the "Ensanche Carabanchel 12"** (architect Jacobo García-Germán), promoted and built between 2003 and 2006 by the Madrid municipal housing entity EMVS (Fig. 1 left). Structured as a continuous band of double orientation dwellings, the design was able to juggle with the area's restrictive regulations, offering a communal garden of public character and a double skin facade including a system of individual terraces with grating floors. The perforated floor was the easy trick that allowed the construction of extra exterior spaces, avoiding counting them as built areas. Another project that insists on providing, against the mainstream trends, a renovated value to external domesticity is the **social housing building in Carabanchel designed by FOA and AZPML**, built in 2007 also by EMVS (Fig. 1 right). Here, the building's second skin, which can be fully opened, conceals again a diaphragm of private terraces facing both orientations, expanding the size of each housing unit even more conspicuously. The project is characterised by the use of materials which, in contrast to what will be seen for the IBAVI case studies, do not seek a direct dialogue with the local context, but emphasise the buildings' singular

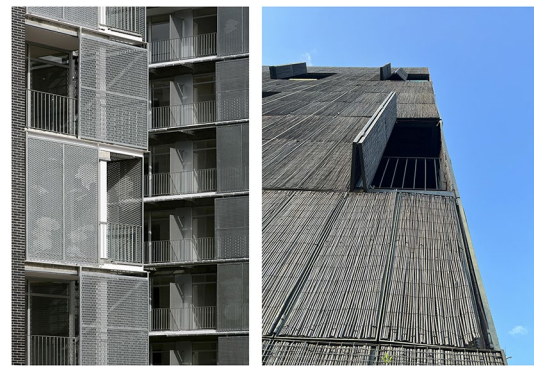


Fig. 1 Double skin facades by Jacobo Garcia-Germán and FOA & AZPML in Carabanchel (© left: Garcia-Germán; right: Mariacristina D'Oria)

character. The final image is that of a bizarre artefact built in bamboo that, depending on the rhythms of domesticity, generates an ever-changing façade.

Other interesting projects in Madrid have elaborated on external spaces through the reinterpretation of the *patio*, a traditional climatic device in Spanish vernacular architecture. Among them, Blanca Lleó and MVRDV's so-called **Celosia building in Sanchinarro**, completed in 2008 (Fig. 2 left), proposes a fragmentation of the collective courtyard into smaller units introduced into shared semi-private patios on each floor. The same strategy seems to be evoked in a quite literal manner in the project for **82 social housing units in Carabanchel**, by Amann, Cánovas & Maruri, built in 2009 (Fig. 2 right). Again, through the slippage of living units along the different floors, a system of elevated *patios* is created



Fig. 2 Reinterpretation of the *patio* by Blanca Lleó and MVRDV in Sanchinarro, and Amann, Cánovas & Maruri in Carabanchel (© left: MVRDV; right: Mariacristina D'Oria)

Footnote 13 (continued)

transparencia.madrid.es/portal/site/transparencia/menuitem.3efdb29b813ad8241e830cc2a8a409a0/?vgnnextfmt=default&vgnnextoid=37fbd1a807bf8810VgnVCM2000001f4a900aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=eae9508929a56510VgnVCM1000008a4a900aRCRD&vgnnextlocale=es. Accessed: 30 Nov 2023 (translation by the authors).

with the goal of enriching the quality of domestic space through its outdoor expansion, in this case, fully private. Both projects, promoted by EMVS, struggled to find a regulatory gap regarding how those passing-through



Fig. 3 TAA's social housing in Carabanchel views of a so-called "social condenser" and general floor plan showing the building's relation to cool nocturnal winds (© Javier y Alia García-Germán and ©TAA's totem arquitectos asociados)

voids can be excluded from the gross floor areas. By doing so, they found a new role for exterior space in urban collective housing.

The regulatory change of 2023 in the city of Madrid can be interpreted as a consequence of these and other experiences taken to the fore by the COVID-19 crisis, but the concern about a healthier and more sustainable relationship with the environment is not limited to the definition of terraces and balconies in the new modified planning text. In fact, the law introduces another essential concept that aligns with a broader ecological understanding: the "bioclimatic galleries". The modified planning text defines these elements, at a different point of the aforementioned article, as "glazed projections which, acting as solar collectors, improve the energy efficiency of buildings".¹⁴ Moreover, it states that, in order to fulfil their purpose, these galleries "shall be suitably oriented and fitted with the necessary solar protection elements".¹⁵ Like balconies, these elements are excluded from the computation of the buildable area, being recognized as a key strategy to improve both the building's bioclimatic behaviour and the residents' environmental comfort, thanks to the inclusion of greenery.

Strictly connected to this topic, a project that anticipated the definition of "bioclimatic galleries" in the 2023 modification of Madrid's urban regulations is the **social housing complex built in Carabanchel** between 2017 and 2021 by the architectural practice TAA's (Fig. 3). This project is characterised by the complex articulation of open collective, semi-private, and private spaces. Firstly, the two big *plazas* at the ground level constitute a prominent public space that connects directly to the

access halls and stairways. Then, a collective network of wind-catching patios, corridors, and "social condensers" contribute to impulse social interactions throughout the complex, simultaneously guaranteeing light and ventilation and assuring the building's climatic performance. Finally, at the private level of the single units, each apartment is also equipped with a quite generous terrace, connecting the three bedrooms with the living area. This project demonstrates an extreme sensitivity toward sustainability issues, focusing on ventilation and air circulation as dispositifs to improve the energetic comfort of the housing units. Even if they are not explicitly called "bioclimatic galleries", the in-between spaces are actually treated as so, capable of filtering the heat and controlling the energetic behaviour of the whole building.

Taking a step further towards the external natural environment and the new ecological demands, the discourse must shift towards the recent experience of the Balearic islands, disseminated among other sources by a 2023 monographic issue of the prominent architectural publication *El Croquis*.¹⁶ The fact that this exclusive periodical devoted one of its issues to the activity of a social housing regional agency, the Instituto Balear de la Vivienda (IBAVI), is a significant symptom not only of the innovative character of that experience but, more generally, of the increasing attention to the quality of social housing architecture in Spain.

Even if not included in that issue, **Ripoll and Tizón's design for 19 social housing built in Ibiza in 2022** (Fig. 4) is a good example to summarise the more general principles guiding the Balearic experience, connected to the role of exterior and in-between spaces analysed in

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ *El Croquis* (2023) 219 "IBAVI 2019-2023".

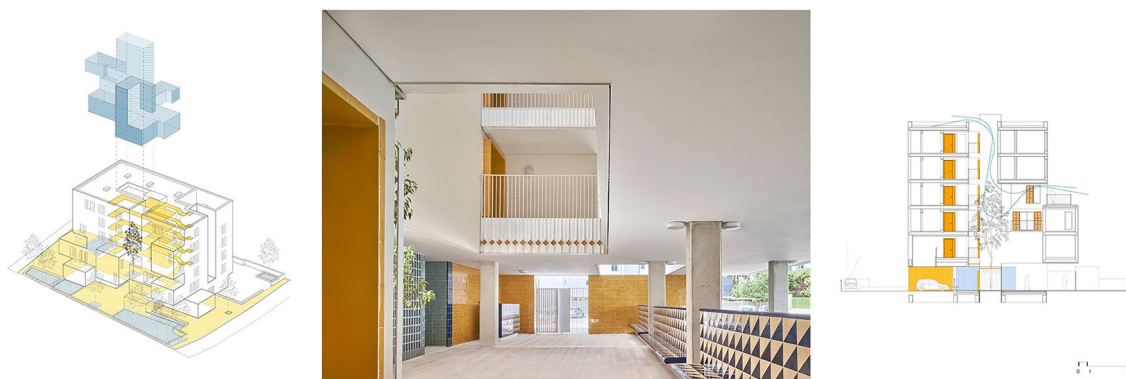


Fig. 4 Ripoll and Tizón's project in Ibiza: 'in-between' collective spaces (© drawings: ripolltizón; © photo: José Hevia)

Madrid's cases. In fact, this project can only be understood through its strict connection with the Balears' climate, which requires controlled openings with solar protections, porches, and shaded spaces. Moreover, its design strategy aligns with the local architectural tradition based on accretive strategies, allowing for the addition of new modules and spaces over time. Different housing typologies have thus been included within the complex through the dissemination of small additional modules containing bedrooms and wet areas. The resulting system is articulated around a central void: the interior common space which breathes in several directions through connected openings, patios, and porches, while also organising the areas for community use, from circulation and access to dwellings to other common spaces. This irregular volume, which changes its conformation on each floor, gives shape to an interconnected landscape in which inhabitants can share their time with others, meeting either in the big spaces of the ground floor or in the capillary inter-spaces constituted by corridors and covered walkways, not to forget the possibility of observing and interacting with everyday scenes taking place right beyond their private terrace.

The attention towards outdoor social, shared, and private spaces constitutes a strong guideline for the experience of the already mentioned Instituto Balear de la Vivienda (IBAVI), in which the agency's prototyping, regulation, and design policies are strictly intertwined. With the approval of the Balears Housing Law in 2018 (Ley 5/2018, de 19 de junio, de la vivienda de las Illes Balears), some crucial criteria regarding these issues and further economic and sustainability topics saw the light. In particular, article 15 about "Residential Housing Quality and Innovation Standards", states that "in the building process, as well as in the conservation and rehabilitation of the residential housing stock, care will be taken to ensure

social cohesion, eco-efficiency, optimization of available resources (and) architectural innovation".¹⁷ This process is promoted through diverse strategies, namely paying particular attention to the use of local materials and to the building life-cycle, with the global aim of preserving the natural and social environment of the islands.

Along with focusing on these key topics, the work developed by IBAVI is highly innovative in methodological terms. Indeed, the realisation of prototypes paved the way for both the formulation of new social housing policies and the organisation of architectural competitions that called to think specifically about environmental issues and to experiment with local materials and construction systems. Among the prototyping research triggered by IBAVI, we must highlight the **14 Social Housing Units in Sant Jaume street, Formentera** (2009–2017), the **5 Social Housing Units in Regal street, Palma de Mallorca** (2009–2018), and the **8 Social Housing Units at Salvador Espriu 39, Palma de Mallorca** (2018–2021), all of which share a rather similar approach in terms of size, materials and geometrical configuration, following the logics of local construction techniques, spatialities and dimensions. Following these preliminary small-scale experiences, and as a direct consequence of the above-mentioned **Ley 5/2018**, the competition for the design of **6 Social Housing Units at Ses Monges street, Santa Eugènia** (2020–2023) opened the way to systematise all previous results. The participants were invited to respond to the updated European Directive on Energy Efficiency, aiming at Zero Emissions Buildings, and to reason on the entire life cycle of the housing building, taking into

¹⁷ Comunidad Autónoma de Islas Baleares (2018) Ley 5/2018, de 19 de junio, de la vivienda de las Illes Balears, article 15, "Criterios de calidad e innovación en materia de vivienda residencial". Published on «BOE», núm. 169, de 13.07.2018. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es-ib/l/2018/06/19/5>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023 (translation by the authors).

account the emissions generated by the buildings' manufacturing materials as well as their dismantling processes. The most striking result was the use of local stone for the whole structural system in the winning competition entry, producing a set of equally sized vaulted rooms that express a paradoxical balance between formal stability and its adaptability to future changes in use. Thus, the consistency between ecological awareness and the new housing models extends from the ecology of local materials to the changing social structures and interactions over time. In other words, design deals with a timeline that considers the whole construction process, the persistence of the inhabited building, and its final dismantling.

These and other innovation lines can be traced in many other IBAVI projects, displaying an already institutionalised policy that is recognizable in the proliferation of similar forms and design strategies. For instance, the **9 social rental units in Inca** (2020–2023) designed by Estruch, Martorell, Torres Pujol, and Ripoll Tizón, or the **35 social housing units in Fornaris street, Palma de Mallorca** (2020–), by DATAAE, insist on the same material and spatial systems that allow for a strong connection with the local landscape, but also an innovative interior configuration in which the kitchen becomes an open core, a central space crossed by every movement inside the house. This importance of the kitchen illustrates the emergence of a new design tendency that resonates in the design of co-housing projects, as it will be analysed further on. The exploration of co-housing is in fact also very present in the Balearic experience, like the proposal for **35 Temporary Cohousing Units, Menorca** (2022). The design, in this case, organises the units on a grid made of solids and voids, shaping a system of courtyards that again seeks to increase the inhabitants' social and environmental comfort by using exterior space. The same generosity toward a high environmental quality in domestic spatialities can be encountered in the **42 Social Housing Units at Son Servera** (2020–2023) by Marta Peris and Jose Toral, directly inspired by vernacular architecture. This project is articulated on two big and opposite landscapes, representing the starting point for a system of open spaces with different degrees of privacy that pervade all the complex in the form of *patios*, gardens, and living streets, encouraging social interactions and enhancing the building's thermodynamic performance.

All the previous cases in the Balearic Islands and Madrid prove that social housing design started to test new relationships with the environment, both in terms of intermediate exterior or in-between spaces and of ecological processes, both by using regulatory gaps in competitions or by consciously experimenting with prototypes, before policies and regulations shifted to produce new

housing practices and models, which finally transformed such singularities into rules.

Shared space as healing community spaces: breaking isolation

"Isolation is the physical or psychological separation of humans from others. In certain environments, humans become a constant within a system, remaining apart from the outside. [...]. In these circumstances, the enclosing environment must support all requirements for survival!"¹⁸

What is the survival kit for a human forced to spend time isolated from his community? Which spaces, services, and social commodities should human beings be supported/accompanied by in such a condition? The pandemic passage has inevitably brought to the fore an extreme situation in which we had to confront some basic questions about the ultimate role of domestic space, especially for those living in highly poor spatial conditions and/or having special needs. As a result of this crisis, it seems even harder than before to see the dwelling unit as a physical environment that is able to assure an autonomous and self-sufficient human life. Instead, it has been exposed as a quite fragile reality whose interior-exterior balances –affecting programmatic, social, and urban issues– cannot be taken for granted.

In this line and back to the analysis of public policies and interrelated design practices, it is necessary to draw attention to a series of new housing models originated in Catalonia –and Barcelona in particular– and progressively assumed by other Spanish cities and regions, finally taking the leap to national law. These are the already mentioned *viviendas dotacionales* and the so-called *co-viviendas*, intensely linked to the cooperative system, and further taken into consideration in Madrid's latest modification of the urban regulations as *co-housing and co-living*.

The concept of *viviendas dotacionales* pioneered in the 2007 "Right to housing Law" (Ley 18/2007, de 28 de Diciembre) of the Catalonia region, which stated in its preamble that "(...) the plans of the municipalities must qualify land for the new urban system of public housing, as a realistic way to meet the needs of assistance or emancipation of specific groups that arise from social

¹⁸ Kallipoliti (2018). *Closed Worlds Lexicon*. Available at: <https://www.closed-worlds.com/lexicon>. Accessed 14 Nov 2023. This work is derived from her PhD thesis (2018) *The Architecture of the Closed Worlds. Or, what is the power of shit?* Lars Müller, Zurich.

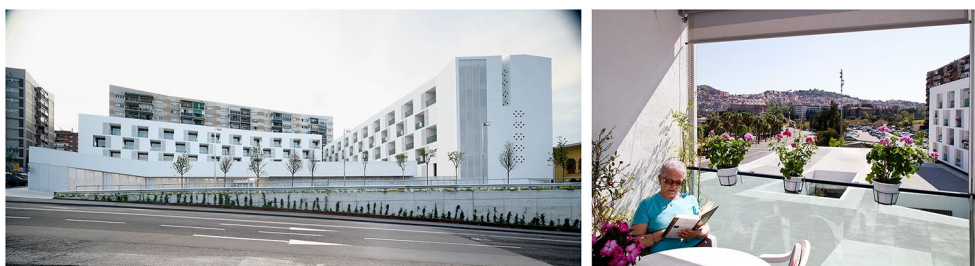


Fig. 5 GRND82's project in Can Travi: general view of the residential block over the cultural plinth and detail from a private terrace (left photo: © Adria Goulaa; right photo: © Jordi Castellano)

memory".¹⁹ A first definition of this concept came soon after, in article 3, where *vivienda dotacional pública* is identified as “public housing intended to meet the temporary needs of people with emancipation difficulties or who require shelters or residential assistance, such as young people, the elderly, women victims of gender-based violence, immigrants, separated or divorced people who have lost the right to the use of shared housing, people pending rehousing due to public housing replacement operations or urban planning enforcement actions, or the homeless”.²⁰ This housing model was specially thought for short-term stays of people who do not necessarily share family ties but need temporal accompaniment to ensure their social integration. However, the innovative character of the *viviendas dotacionales públicas* concept is fully developed in article 18 of the law by pointing out that these subsidised homes can be located on land that is classified as public equipment or facilities, fully integrated with them in the same project and/or building.²¹ This opened up a great opportunity not only to fight against social housing shortage, but also to create a more diverse urban fabric in functional and social terms.

The idea, formulated by the regional government of Catalonia, soon produced some interesting results in Barcelona, allowing for an unprecedented combination of residential programs and public services. Among them, the **85 apartments for elderly people** in Can Travi (2007–2009), designed by the architects GRND82 (Ginès Egea, Cristina García, Sergi Serrat) for the Barcelona municipal housing authority (currently named Institut Municipal de l’Habitatge i Rehabilitació de Barcelona, IMHAB) explores a different living model that overcomes the traditional concept of “nursing home”

(Fig. 5). Over a plinth containing a cultural/educational facility, the apartments are organised in an L-shaped block, each of them exposing their individuality through a very generous south-oriented terrace intended to function, according to the architects, as a “condenser of life”. In compositional terms, these terraces are treated as deep voids excavated into the pure white volume; its alternating rhythm transforms the facade into a sort of gigantic and three-dimensional chess board. The small size of the units is compensated by the generosity and quality of the shared spaces inside the residential complex, and the proximity of the public facility integrated into the same urban block, which attracts different kinds of people and activities that mix with the daily life of the residents.

Another example that takes profit from the Ley 18/2007 is the project for 77 apartments for the elderly called **Torre Julia**, built in Barcelona (2009–2011) also by IMHAB and designed by Paul Vidal, Sergi Pons, and Ricard Galiana (Fig. 6). Beyond the housing units themselves, integrated into a 17-storey tower, the complex includes a sports centre and a conventional old people’s home at the ground level, where a system of interconnecting public spaces weaves together all the functions. In the tower, units are strategically grouped into three intermediate communities, each of them with their own spaces for common activities. Such a system of collective areas and circulations permeates the whole building through wide corridors, outdoor stairs, sun-shaded terraces, and even a community roof. The result is an innovative high-rise typology intended to give elderly people the chance to socialise and engage with their neighbours at the small community scale, while maintaining their independence and a direct connection to a larger health institution whenever needed. Just like the previous project, Torre Julia demonstrates the delicate attention given by Catalan public institutions towards the special needs (and rights) of different fragile communities and the intrinsic potential of integrating them in more complex and diverse urban realities.

¹⁹ Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña (2008) Ley 18/2007, de 28 de diciembre, Preambulo III. Published on «BOE», núm. 50, de 27 de febrero de 2008, páginas 11653 a 11696, Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es-ct/l/2007/12/28/18>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023 (translation by the authors).

²⁰ Ibid., article 3, point j.

²¹ Ibid., article 18.

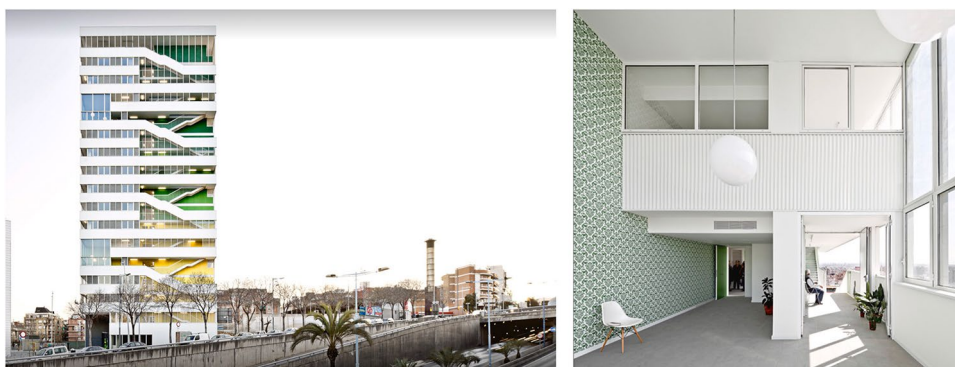


Fig. 6 Torre Julia, mixing residential programs and public services in Barcelona (© Paul Vidal, Sergi Pons, and Ricard Galiana)

The success of the 2007 law is not only endorsed by further development of the *viviendas dotacionales* concept in subsequent regional decrees (Decreto 75/2014 and Decreto-ley 17/2019)²² but, more interestingly, by the fact that it has spread throughout the country, starting with the already-mentioned **Ley 5/2018**²³ in the Balearic Islands and most recently, at a national level, with the **“Right to Housing” Law 12/2023**. Both cases confirm again the symbiotic potential of combining rental housing for vulnerable communities and public facilities in the same plot.

Along with the *viviendas dotacionales*, another forefront of innovation in the Catalanian context lies in the field of housing cooperatives, which lack a strong historical tradition in Spain. Regarding this topic, it is hard not to mention the renowned and acclaimed experience

of **La Borda housing cooperative**, born in 2012 from the “simple” will of a group of people to access decent, non-speculative housing through a collective structure. The idea started to materialise thanks to the agreement signed on 30 November 2015 with the Barcelona City Council, which granted La Borda cooperative “the right to use” a plot located on Carrer Constitució, classified as subsidised housing (HPO), with a leasehold of 75 years, and regulated by the payment of an annual fee. The agreement implied that the dwellers were not owners nor renters of the single houses promoted by the cooperative but holders of a right to use that could be transmitted and transformed over time, but never put into the speculative market. The agreement also established a maximum annual fee, thus seeking to make the payment affordable for medium and low-income households, one of the central objectives of the cooperative.

The project for La Borda was entrusted to a group of young architects, Lacol, who were also members of the housing cooperative. The design and building process, in which the future inhabitants were deeply involved, started in 2014 and finished in 2018. Based on a collaborative agreement between the future dwellers, the project accepts the dilution of the concept of privateness at various levels and the promotion of a sharing philosophy (Fig. 7). The 28 units, scaled in three different dimensions to respond to the heterogeneity of their future users, are grafted onto a central patio and accessed by a wide corridor that recalls the popular typology of the *corralas*, increasing the possibility of spontaneous encounters among neighbours. This circulation system is accompanied by a generous set of shared spaces, both interior and exterior, that allow stretching the private domestic activities into the collective realm: from the kitchen-dining to the laundry room, from the multi-purpose double-height space to the smaller health-and-care space, from the inner patio to the rooftops. Each housing unit is further equipped with a room of undefined function, accessible

²² Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña (2014) Decreto 75/2014, de 27 de mayo, del Plan para el Derecho a la vivienda de la Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña, Órgano: Departamento de Territorio y Sostenibilidad, publicado en DOGC núm. 6633 de 29 de Mayo de 2014. Available at: <https://portaljuridic.gencat.cat/eli/es-ct/d/2014/05/27/75>; and Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña (2020) Decreto-ley 17/2019, de 23 de diciembre, de medidas urgentes para mejorar el acceso a la vivienda de la Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña, «BOE», núm. 45, de 21 de febrero de 2020, páginas 16253 a 16298. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es-ct/dl/2019/12/23/17>. Both accessed: 30 Nov 2023. In this second law, the “alojamiento dotacional” is defined in Sect. 2. Furthermore, article 11 refers to specific measures to increase the stock of social housing. To this end, the urban planning system of public housing is integrated with that of community facilities in order to reinforce a welfare response to special situations of people in need of temporary accommodation and to emphasise the idea that people’s temporary housing needs can be met through collective accommodation, sharing living spaces with other people who are not part of the same living unit.

²³ España (2018) Ley 5/2018, de 11 de junio, de modificación de la Ley 1/2000, de 7 de enero, de Enjuiciamiento Civil, en relación a la ocupación ilegal de viviendas. Published on «BOE», núm. 142, de 12 de junio de 2018, páginas 60209 a 60213. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2018/06/11/5>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023. In particular, Article 4, Point 1, defines the “vivienda dotacional” as: “housing intended to meet the need for accommodation, both temporary and for particularly vulnerable groups, by means of the payment of a rent or fee”. Moreover, the law states that this type of housing “may be located on land or in buildings, or parts thereof, intended for publicly-owned facilities or equipments”.

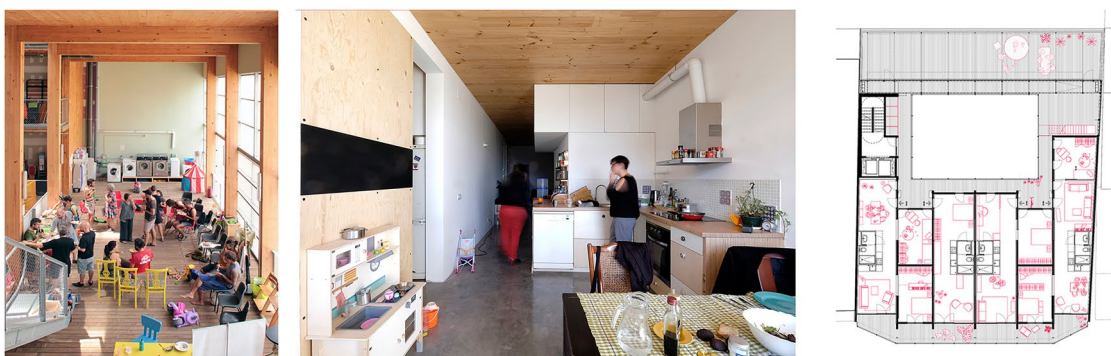


Fig. 7 La Borda Cooperative, collective space at first level, view of the living and kitchen area within a housing unit, and floor plan with common rooftop (© Lacol)

from the corridors, that can be used independently from the rest of the house, even by other members of the cooperative, an innovative feature derived from Xavier Monteys' "satellite room" concept.²⁴ Significantly, within the housing unit itself, the kitchen is located at the very baricentrum, a key tendency against the stereotyped treatment of service spaces that will be further developed in the next section of this paper. For sure, Lacol listened to the inhabitant's needs, but a great part of their typological innovations are also derived from a long tradition of architectural and urban academic research that has been carried out by the above-mentioned Xavier Monteys and his Habitar research group from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya since the beginning of the 2000s.

Even if the 2007 Catalanian "Right to Housing Law"²⁵ (Ley 18/2007) had already adopted among its goals "to promote the participation of housing cooperatives and social and welfare entities in housing policies, in actions of promotion, construction, conservation, rehabilitation and renovation of the housing stock and housing administration and management tasks,"²⁶ the truth is that only after the experience of La Borda, this path has acquired a real significance, having measurable effects in further design initiatives and public actions. In fact, La Borda triggered a process that brought to light a critical debate around the concept of *co-vivienda*, stimulating the organisation of various conferences and architecture conventions, as well as the realisation of actual projects, directly inspired by such experience. In particular,

the Municipality of Barcelona launched an initiative in 2021, entitled "**Covivienda, a change of model**,"²⁷ which invited to reason on how cooperative housing, or co-housing, could improve both the housing stock and the services connected with daily life, by guaranteeing affordable housing and encouraging the community management of the properties. The experience of *co-viviendas* surely recalls that of the *viviendas dotacionales*, but the design process and the property management work very differently. In this latter case, the Municipality or the private landowner transfers (for a period that spans from 75 to 90 years) an unused property or a plot to a cooperative, lending it the right to use and build. In this way, housing is conceived as a good for use and not as a good for sale or a merely economic investment. After the period of transference, the property returns to the Municipality or its original owner. This new form of housing development surely has a positive effect on at least two critical urban issues: the shortage of housing units at affordable prices within the city centre and the redevelopment of disused or unused sites. Moreover, it broadens the traditional understanding of social housing in Spain, still trapped in the idea of a public investment that supports the building sector and promotes private ownership, in which public properties are moved to the private market as soon as the owners are allowed to sell.

The number of projects based on the idea of *co-vivienda* has multiplied in Catalonia in an astonishing manner after 2018, from the **Carrer Tànger 40** (IMHAB development with 47 social rental housing units and 20 temporary emergency housing units) built in 2017 and designed by Coll-Leclerc, to the **APROP Glòries** (with

²⁴ Monteys (2014) *La habitación: más allá de la sala de estar*. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona.

²⁵ Comunidad Autónoma de Cataluña (2008) Ley 18/2007, de 28 de diciembre, del derecho a la vivienda. Published on «BOE», núm. 50, de 27 de febrero de 2008, páginas 11653 a 11696. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es-ct/l/2007/12/28/18>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

²⁶ Ibid., article 2 (translation by the authors).

²⁷ A description of this initiative is available at the following link: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2021/02/06/sobre-el-termini-perque-fundacions-i-cooperatives-presentin-projectes-dhabitatge-social-per-a-18-solars-i-edificis-municipals/>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

24 housing units), built in 2022, the **Carrer Ciutat de Granada** (IMHAB development of 105 housing units for the elderly), or **Glòries urban block** (Illa Glòries, including IMHAB projects in **Carrer Castillejos** and **Carrer Encants Vells** with 125 rental housing units and 113 under the right to use principle). The latter is the largest development undertaken by a City Council in Spain, designed by Marta Benedito (Cierto Estudio), in which the concept of the “kitch-room” has been included, which again claims the centrality of the kitchen space within the home.

The architects of Lacol themselves won the competition in 2020 to build a new complex, with **38 residential units, in carrer Constitució 43** (Sotrac housing cooperative), only 100 m away from the Borda. As for its predecessor, this project is articulated around the system of community spaces, from the ample public space of the ground floor to the diffuse ones located at the different building levels: the main accesses to the building, the shared kitchen-dining room, a multi-purpose and a domestic area as a children’s space or space for work. All these spaces are designed with particular attention toward accessibility, inclusivity, and the gender perspective, both in the private units and community spaces. Homes consist of various sizes and morphologies to meet the needs of the different inhabitants and satellite rooms are introduced again, allowing the homes to be expanded or reduced in a discontinuous manner, opening up the possibility of diverse uses: productive work-from-home, autonomy for the elderly/teenagers, play or study space for small children, reception of relatives or friends, etc. Like in the La Borda case, particular attention is also paid to the building life-cycle and environmental sustainability: the main structure of the building is made with CLT-type laminated wood panels, supported on a ground floor base of reinforced concrete, reducing 40% of CO₂ emissions in the structure of the building. Furthermore, the compact morphology of the volume, the houses’ orientation, the floors’ thermal inertia, and the use of the atrium as a temperature-regulating element improve the thermic and isolating performance of the building.

The search for a policy systematisation for *co-viviendas* has surely accompanied the proliferation of good practices at various levels. In 2022, an important step was made in this direction: the **Agreement between the Instituto de Crédito Oficial, the Municipality of Barcelona and the Catalan Finance Institute**, for the financing of social housing.²⁸ Within this text,

the housing policy was recognised as “a priority of the municipal government of Barcelona”.²⁹ This agreement intended to develop a previous alliance from 2020, the so-called ESAL agreement (Convenio ESAL), signed by several municipal entities and associations with the specific goal of promoting the provision of affordable rental housing and co-housing “through the constitution of a surface right in favour of non-profit social entities on municipal land”.³⁰ This framework made it possible to generalise even more than before the transfer of land done in the specific case of La Borda for other cooperatives. Most recently, in May 2023, the Municipality of Barcelona, through the IMHAB, signed the right-to-use deed on two new plots of land in the districts of Sants-Montjuïc and Sant Andreu for two new cooperatives: the **Sotrac housing cooperative** (with 38 households), already mentioned above, and the **Sostre Cívic cooperative** (with 71 units).³¹

It is undeniable that the pioneering experience carried out in Catalonia around cooperatives and *co-viviendas*, in general, has become a model for other Spanish regions. Coming back to Madrid, it is remarkable that the above-mentioned 2023 modification of the municipal urban regulations (*Normas Urbanísticas*) includes the definition of two residential formulas that were not specifically regulated so far, focusing on the increasing demand for collective values: cohousing and co-living.³² The first concept maintains the private housing unit with all its essential services (namely kitchen and bathroom) but allows for a considerable enlargement of common services and social areas; the second takes this idea further and reduces the private core to its minimum, even extracting the kitchen and the living area away from it. Considering the date of publication of this regulation, it is too soon to assess its impact on built projects. However, the idea was already latent in previous local experiences, such as the **Las Carolinas building by Entrepatrios cooperative** (2018–2020). This is actually publicized as “the first eco-social right-to-use housing cooperative in Madrid”, which “comprises a heterogeneous group of people with a common goal: to implement other ways of living in the city

Footnote 28 (continued)

[boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-13372](https://boe.txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-13372). Accessed 30 Nov 2023. Particularly relevant to this issue is Point 10.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ For a deeper understanding of these and other examples of Barcelona’s most recent cooperatives, see Devesa et al. (2023) Cohousing in Barcelona Architecture from/for the Community. Actar, Barcelona.

³² Ayuntamiento de Madrid, Modificación Puntual de las Normas Urbanísticas del Plan General de Ordenación Urbana de 1997, 2023, articles 7.3.1 to 7.3.8 and 7.3.11.

²⁸ Instituto de Crédito Oficial (2022) Resolución de 1 de agosto de 2022, del Instituto de Crédito Oficial, E.P.E., por la que se publica el Convenio con el Ayuntamiento de Barcelona y el Instituto Catalán de Finanzas, para la financiación de vivienda social. Published on «BOE», núm. 189, de 8 de agosto de 2022, páginas 116167 a 116188. Available at: https://www.boe.es/diario_

that do not allow real estate speculation, consider environmental sustainability, and create community”.³³ An essential feature of the project is the medium-environmental certification “ECOMETRO”, which assesses the impact of the building throughout its life cycle and calculates its carbon footprint. This certification was surely gained thanks to specific architectural decisions like the wooden structure and the system that collects rain and recycles water or the generation of energy from renewable sources, such as solar panels on the roof. However, its most innovative feature may be the adoption of an access corridor of varying width that faces the exterior public space; a type of arrangement that has hardly ever been used by private promoters (including cooperatives) in Madrid, despite its socialising potential.

Entrepatrios’ Las Carolinas could not profit from the surface right transfer or any other support from the municipal government of Madrid. It is, indeed, the only project derived from a strict private initiative in this article, but it is characterised by an equally attentive design of communal spaces which permeate the whole: from the ground common floor to the attic spaces, from the external distribution galleries to the meeting room; like some of the *co-vivienda* projects in Barcelona, it is also equipped with a community kitchen, another key function to reconsider social housing models, which lies at the centre of design and policy innovations in Spain. Sharing ordinary actions like cooking or eating is, in fact, a potential way of breaking not only personal isolation but also social stereotypes associated with issues like gender, income, age, race, or origin. If housing cooperatives tend to combine homogeneous social contents, public regulations, and policies must go a step further and adopt measures to promote true diversity, through the cohabitation and proximity of differences. In this line, the recent experiences of the Municipalities of Barcelona and Madrid prove that public housing policies can adopt a leading role in social innovation when supporting specific singular solutions, instead of just accepting speculative market tendencies that tend to phagocytize and denature the original anti-capitalist ideas behind the cohousing and coliving concepts.

Re-conceptualising gendered and stereotyped spaces

The last passage of this article enacts a further shift, penetrating the house’s most private inner space: the kitchen. Through its spatial configuration, architecture shapes typified scenarios that allow the reproduction of collective behaviours within its interiors. Accordingly,

the kitchen embodies not only a functional space, but a narrative one, a *mise-en-scène*. Concretizing the literal and psychological space of home and family, it epitomises a complex terrain of social and sexual significance. Its “interior” contains within it “interiority” the psychic spaces of desire and anxiety and the private scenarios of feelings, “a female sphere of emotion within the female sphere of domesticity”.³⁴

In contemporary times, characterised by the growing criticism of the concept of the “human” and, at the same time, a mounting sensitivity to gender discrimination, the kitchen seems to have become a significant battlefield to eradicate the gendered and stereotyped socio-cultural connotations of domestic spaces. The current debate on the importance of overcoming traditionally sedimented issues concerning “man-made” environments and “women-dedicated” spaces takes its roots much before the first feminist movements of the seventies. In the nineteenth century, the focus on the design of domestic spaces recorded a gradual shift from the living room to the kitchen, which became increasingly integrated with the centre of household life. The work of Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), and *The American Woman’s Home* (1869)³⁵ represent essential examples of this shift. In her book, written together with her sister, she delineated “the Cristian house”, characterised by a central space occupied by the entrance, the stairs, and the kitchen. In particular, the latter was described as the place where the domestic tasks were performed for the most extended periods. Thus, Beecher suggested that the minimum dimensions for a kitchen should be 9×9 feet (2.74×2.74 m), anticipating some of the most recent tendencies to consider dimension as a critical feature to transform this space.

Taking a leap forward the recent Spanish context, the process of de-genderization of domestic spaces has been triggered by an intertwined sequence of policies and projects that, by influencing each other shifting from a regional to a national level, achieved a tangible legal result in the Basque Country Decree 80/2022 of 28 June.³⁶ By detecting this system of policies and projects,

³⁴ Colomina (1992) *Sexuality and Space*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York, p 55.

³⁵ Beecher’s work claims that the kitchen has to be efficient and central: “well-lit, generously sized, centrally located in the house, with easily accessible pantry and storage space” (quote taken from Muxí Martínez (2018) *Mujeres, casas y ciudades. Más allá del umbral*. DPR-Barcelona, Barcelona, p 107).

³⁶ Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco (2022) Decreto 80/2022, de 28 de junio, de regulación de las condiciones mínimas de habitabilidad y normas de diseño de las viviendas y alojamientos dotacionales en la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco. Published on «BOPV» (País Vasco), núm. 168, de 28.06.2022. Available at: <https://www.legegunea.euskadi.eus/eli/es-pv/d/2022/06/28/80/dof/spa/html/webleg00-contfich/es/>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

³³ As stated on the official website: www.entrepatrios.org



Fig. 8 Alberola and Martorell's project in Carabanchel: plan of housing units with the kitchen area and courtyard at their center and view of the external walkways (© alberolamartorell)

a first interesting case of interaction can be retraced between 2004–2005. The Basque Country, which has been particularly precocious in confronting the gender issue, approved in 2005 **Ley 4/2005**, the “**Basque Law for Equality**”, focusing on the gender perspective in its articles 18 “Measures to promote equality in regulations and administrative activity. General provisions”³⁷ and 46 “Environment, spatial planning, urban planning, housing, transport, and rural areas”³⁸.

The recognition of the importance of redefining spatial configuration on an architectural and urban level begins to assume a fundamental role in combating gender stereotyping. Interestingly, what was recognized and normalised through these policies finds an essential predecessor in a project realised only one year before in Madrid. The complex of **122 social housing units in Carabanchel designed by Mónica Alberola and Consuelo Martorell**, promoted by EMVS, and built in 2004, embodies a series of configurations and elements that show a particular caring for domestic gender issues (Fig. 8). The architects shaped a building that presents an extremely attentive calibration between public, semi-public, and semi-private spaces and, most importantly, shared and intimate places within each housing unit. Regarding the

first issue, the distribution system and the articulation of the outdoor areas assemble a sequence of spaces with a recognisable domestic scale: the distributive system is inserted within the vast internal courtyard, fragmenting it into smaller and more human-scale spaces. Access to the different units occurs through a series of footbridges that multiply the possibilities of social encounters with neighbours before entering one's front door. For its part, the kitchen occupies the very centre of the house, completely integrated with all the other rooms. This hinge thus becomes an obligatory passage space, replacing the traditional corridor, but also a place to linger, giving a new value to the domestic cooking task. Moreover, it is precisely from the kitchen that an inner *patio* space can be visualized, highlighting, once again, the importance of transforming this space from a traditionally separate environment, in its roles and spatial conformation, to the essential core of the home, both fluid and flexible.

This seeking to overcome the traditional household roles by eventual designers, has triggered a further chain-process of public policies. In 2007 the national **Ley Orgánica 3/2007** of the “**Effective equality between men and women in Spain**”³⁹ was approved. Article 31.3 resounds the observations already drawn before by the Basque policy: “Public administrations will take into account the gender perspective in the design of the city, in urban policies, in the definition and execution of urban planning, especially using mechanisms and instruments that encourage and favor citizen participation and transparency”⁴⁰.

³⁷ Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco (2005) Ley 4/2005, de 18 de febrero, para la Igualdad de Mujeres y Hombres, published on «BOPV» (Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco, núm. 42, de 02.03.2005, law that came into force on 24.03.2007. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es-pv/l/2005/02/18/4/con>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023. In particular, article 18 states: “The Basque public authorities must actively take into account the objective of women's and men's equality in the preparation and application of regulations and plans, programs and other tools for the formulation of public policies, as well as in contracts, eligible programs and administrative acts”.

³⁸ Ibid, article 46. More specifically, this article states: “The Basque public authorities shall arbitrate the necessary means to guarantee that the gender perspective is integrated in the design, execution and evaluation of their policies, regulations, plans and programs in the areas of land management, urban planning, transport and housing”. This is further developed in several points, from (a) to (f).

³⁹ España (2007) Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres. Published on «BOE», núm. 71, de 23.03.2007, law that came into force on 24.03.2007. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2007/03/22/3/con>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

⁴⁰ Ibid., article 31.1 (translated by the authors).

From this moment on, and also thanks to the work of several practising architects and theorists, the urgency of intervening in the re-definition of domestic space began to assume an even more critical depth. Among others, the theoretical and, at the same time, pragmatic contributions of Inés Sánchez de Madariaga and Zaida Muxi Martínez, are particularly relevant. Important texts by these authors were published between 2017 and 2018, referring to the relationships between gender and urbanism and gender and domestic architecture.⁴¹ Almost simultaneously, in 2016, Anna Puigjaner's work derived from her PhD dissertation at UPC in Barcelona, *Kitchenless City*, received the Wheelwright Prize from Harvard Graduate School of Design. Her analysis of the late nineteenth century metropolitan tendency, in the United States, to increase the spaces dedicated to collective domestic services triggered her critical observation of housing with collective kitchens, enforcing, once again, the ambiguous conviction that the elimination of the kitchen from the house was substantial for the construction of the collective and for the domestication of the urban sphere. This theoretical work has been enlarged in the last years, applied to several design proposals developed by her studio, MAIO, based in Barcelona.

In 2018, MAIO presented their “**Plan Maestro de Territorio de Gigantes**,” a 37 social housing units complex for Aguascalientes (Mexico), where “following a system of medium-scale concatenated squares, public and domestic spaces have been assigned an equivalent area. On the ground floors, the different buildings host different community spaces such as a shared kitchen and a common dining space in direct contact with the street, as well as other commercial spaces and housing.”⁴² The kitchen does not only find space in the ground floor of the complex but, furthermore, it is also conceived as an outdoor collective space, favouring the community

to enjoy and share the social moment of the meal also in the open air. The same spatial configuration characterises the 2018 project for 40 **social housing units in Sant Feliu de Llobregat**, Barcelona. The apartments are arranged around two central nuclei containing community functions and collective spaces. The expulsion of the kitchens from the private units leads to a non-hierarchical distribution of rooms, more flexible and adaptable to changes according to the inhabitants' vital needs. Lastly, an alternative exploration of the “kitchenless” issue has been carried out by the studio in 2023 through the “**Urban K-Type**” proposal for the exhibition “Home Sweet Home” at Triennale Milano (Fig. 9). This project pushes further the reconceptualization of the kitchen, now interpreting the act of cooking as a “form of political emancipation and social empowerment and mutual support,”⁴³ in contrast with the original “kitchenless” idea. The kitchen is reinterpreted here as a totally open space that the community can dispose of freely. Moreover, it becomes the very dispositif through which “not only blurs the established limits between private and public, between family structures and domestic roles, between labour and housekeeping, gender roles, etc., but also acts as a place for neighbourhood management.”⁴⁴

From this moment on, a diffuse system of projects that use this mutated kitchen configuration is recognizable at national and regional levels, which in turn laid the foundations for drafting the 2022 Basque Decree. Among them, particularly interesting are the proposals presented at EUROSPAN 15 and EUROSPAN 16 for the locations in the Basque Country, which introduce another key topic related to gender and taking a step further: productive housing (*vivienda productiva*). Many of the submitted projects to this competition pushed further the reinterpretation of the kitchen, configuring it in strict relation to the concept of the “productive home.” The kitchen becomes not just a terrain on which to operate the redefinition of gender issues and the stereotyping of domestic environments, but also a space to reflect on the ecological transition, seeking direct contact with the local context and with a sustainable food chain. Some of the projects presented at the EUROSPAN 15 of 2020 in Lasarte-Oria (Basque Country) operated in this very sense. The **Common Node**, developed by Alex Etxeberria and Eduardo Landia and the winner of the competition, organises the 100 housing units within a single long and articulated building that, following the terrain morphology, frees its corners to ensure permeability and ventilation. The domestic spaces display attractive solutions that favour

⁴¹ Among them: Muxi Martínez et al. (2011). ¿Qué aporta la perspectiva de género al urbanismo? *Feminismo/s*, 17: 105–129 <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2011.17.06>; Muxi Martínez et al. (2020). Aplicación de la perspectiva de género al urbanismo y la arquitectura. Experiencias a escala regional y municipal en Cataluña. *Ciudad y territorio. Estudios Territoriales* 52(203): 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.37230/CyTET.2020.203.05>; Sánchez de Madariaga (2017). Una nueva generación de políticas de igualdad de género en el urbanismo: de la nueva Agenda Urbana a las Directrices de Ordenación del Territorio del País Vasco. In B. Serrano, et al. (eds.) *Género y política urbana. Arquitectura y urbanismo desde la perspectiva de género*. Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación, Valencia, pp 113–136; Sánchez de Madariaga (2018). La igualdad efectiva en las políticas de vivienda y en el planeamiento urbanístico. In A. Ventura Franch, y S. García Campa (eds.) *El derecho a la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres. Una evaluación del primer decenio de la Ley Orgánica 3/2007*. Aranzadi, Madrid, pp 601–620; Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril (2020). *Género y urbanismo en España: experiencias y perspectivas*. Ciudad y territorio. Estudios Territoriales 52(203): 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.37230/CyTET.2020.203.01>.

⁴² Description of the project taken from MAIO website: <https://www.maio-architects.com/project/37-social-housing-units/>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ Idem.



Fig. 9 Reconceptualizing the kitchen by MAIO: Urban k-type at Triennale Milano (© MAIO, Simone Marcolin, Paula Fernández, photo: ©Simone Marcolin)

transversal permeability and use flexibility (Fig. 10). In particular, the kitchen, recalling Carabanchel’s project, is located at the very centre of the house, embodying not only the place to develop the cooking activity but also the place to stay and chill, fully integrated with the rest of the house.

The winner of the second prize adopted a similar solution. **LO-LO-LAND**, designed by Begoña de Abajo, Irene Campo, Carlos García, and Jesús Lazcano, combines domestic functions with productive activities deriving from the local context. The housing units are conceived as functionally fluid and variable, considering the users’ uncertain cyclical evolution. Within the different unit typologies, the kitchen occupies again a central role, located, as in previous projects, at the very centre of the house, and integrated with all the daily domestic activities that can take place around it.

These proposals reverberate in the ones presented the following year for EUROPAN 16 (2021), also settled in the Basque Country, now in the small rural village of Beizama. In this case, the winning project, **ONGI ETORRI**, by Juan Carlos Martín, Clara Alsedà, André Del Río, Pol Mensa, Jordi Olivella, and Cynthia Rosalia Rabanal, focused on the definition of 12 new homes based on the traditional typology of the *caserio*, extracting and manipulating its typical elements to delineate a contemporary housing system, where productivity and the re-connection with the environment become the central point.

Furthermore, the winner of the second prize, **Rhizoma**, by Victoria Collar, Jon Garbizu, and Gonzalo Peña, based its housing on the typology of the *baserri*, conceiving the home as a productive, social and historical entity, again reconnected to an old Basque housing tradition (Fig. 11). The whole ground floor hosts a productive and community space for the 12 housing units, hosting various shared services and facilities: from bike renting, to cinema/theatre, market, library, and a co-kitchen. The spatial configuration of the units recalls once again Carabanchel’s project: the kitchen becomes the very central nucleus of the house, through which it is possible to reach the outdoor patio, drawing a new symbiotic relation between private, shared places and the external environment without breaking its continuity.

This agitated re-configuration of the kitchen as a de-gendered and productive space has endured through the approval of new policies, the experimentation with spatial solutions, and the renovated theoretical research in the field of gender studies. All these inputs together have formed a solid base for the publication of general guidelines for the design of domestic spaces, like Inés Sánchez de Madariaga and Inés Novella Abril’s “Designing spaces

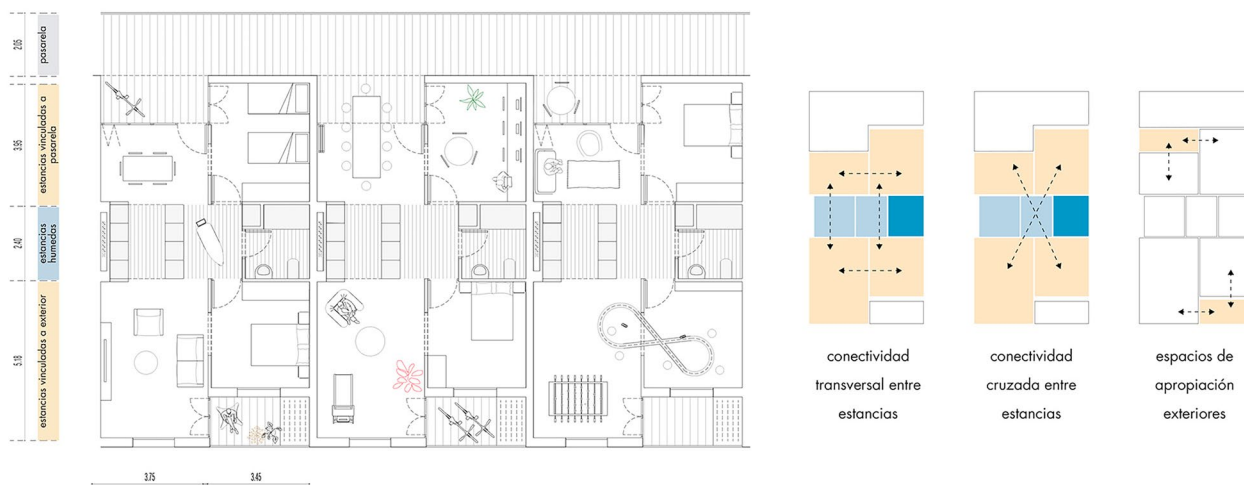


Fig. 10 Common node: flexibility and permeability around the service area (© Tarte arkitektura+ Ele arkitektura)



Fig. 11 European 16, Rhizoma: masterplan and view of productive spaces (© Gonzalo Peña (KRI), Jon Garbizu y Victoria Collar (Garbizu Collar Architects))

for daily life. Gender standards and public housing promotion” (2021). This text, conceived as a manual, was financed by the Generalitat Valenciana (Dirección General de Innovación Ecológica en la Construcción) with the goal of defining a series of recommendations to avoid the sedimentation of inequalities within the domestic space. In particular, it sought “to ensure that women and men have equal influence, participate and benefit equally in all areas of politics, society, and culture”.⁴⁵ The book was accompanied by a series of images and drawings (Fig. 12) that, for each domestic space, exemplified more preferable spatial configurations, enduring concepts such as transparency and view permeability, fluidity, and flexibility, as well as more comfortable sizes that ensure spaces to be experienced beyond their mere function. All of this was done with the aim of improving “the spatial and architectural quality of the parts of the dwelling where care activities are concentrated, e.g. the kitchen or bathroom”.⁴⁶ Among other issues, the text develops some very attentive reasoning on kitchen space. As Sánchez and Novella state: “to ensure that the kitchen functions properly, the following dimensions can be taken as a guideline: avoid a usable area of less than seven square meters, and have at least three linear metres of worktop”.⁴⁷ Other elements that have to be kept in mind are: “good natural lighting and ventilation, the kitchen layout and orientation, preferably allowing visual contact with an active outdoor space, trying to avoid layouts where the

kitchen is isolated from the day rooms by establishing a direct connection with the living-dining room, facilitating the visual and functional relationship between both rooms”.⁴⁸ Last but not least, kitchen layouts must facilitate simultaneous use by more than one person.

In sum, a whole series of regional policies, theoretical publications, and competition projects have laid the foundations for the approval of the Decree 80/2022 of 28 June, of “**Regulation of the minimum conditions of habitability and design standards for dwellings and housing facilities in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country**”.⁴⁹ If, as seen before, the Basque Country has always been particularly precocious in the reasoning on gender discourse, the approval of the 2022 Decree marks a crucial event. By reasoning on the connection between gender-critical issues and domestic space configuration, the Decree focuses on one of the house’s most gendered spaces, the kitchen, confirming many of the intuitions previously explored through competition proposals and fixing them as a new starting point for future projects. The confirmation of this process begins with the increase of the kitchen minimum legal surface, which passes from five to seven square metres, a value that was prescribed within the guidelines published a year earlier by the Valencian Region but which, ultimately, seems to recall what was already anticipated in the second half of the nineteenth century by Catharine Beecher. This brief analysis of recent Spanish tendencies shows the close intertwining between general cultural,

⁴⁵ Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril (2021). *Proyectar los Espacios de la Vida Cotidiana. Criterios de Género para el diseño y contratación pública de vivienda*, Vicepresidencia Segunda y Conselleria de Viviendas y Arquitectura Bioclimática, Generalitat Valenciana, p 4 (translation by the authors).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 60-61.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 61.

⁴⁹ Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco (2022) Decreto 80/2022, de 28 de junio, de regulación de las condiciones mínimas de habitabilidad y normas de diseño de las viviendas y alojamientos dotacionales en la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco. Published on «BOPV» (País Vasco), núm. 168, de 28.06.2022. Available at: <https://www.legegunea.euskadi.eus/eli/es-pv/d/2022/06/28/80/dof/spa/html/webleg00-confich/es/>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

Iluminación, relaciones visuales y funcionalidad de la cocina

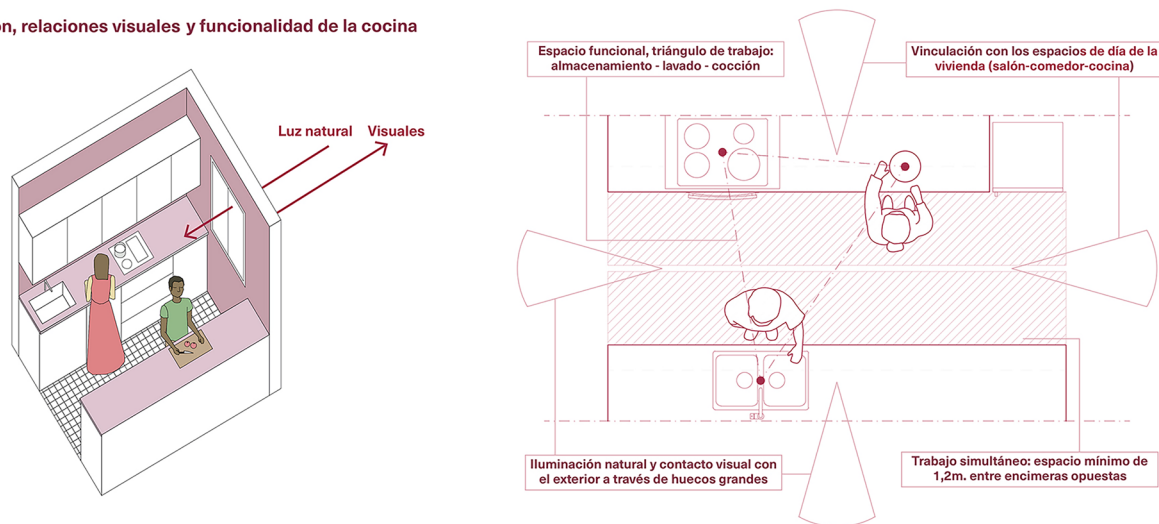


Fig. 12 Kitchen studies by Inés Sánchez and Inés Novella (© drawings: Patricia Chillón, José Manuel Monteagudo, and Isabel Campos)

social, and political shifts concerning gender, identifying the kitchen as a key to unlocking social transformation.

Conclusions

This article aimed to prove that innovative, singular, even heterodox, housing design plays a crucial role in the formulation of new housing policies, which in turn can promote and generalise innovative solutions, producing a complex matrix of interconnected practices that include academic research, competition projects, and prototypes. The analysis was focused on the case of Spain in the last two decades. It was structured by a sequence that starts from the environment and the exterior spaces, goes through the shared collective spaces, and reaches the traditional inner core of the home, the kitchen. These successive steps relate to very specific contemporary anxieties: sustainability, health, community, or gender. Beyond the partial conclusions drawn from each section, three more general conclusions can be formulated.

First, many of the specific case studies that precede and inspire changes in housing policy and regulations relate to the possibility of breaking the rules or finding gaps in the legal framework at an architectural scale, like the Madrid cases regarding exterior spaces. The fact that all those were competition winning solutions prove how fruitful such a territory of action can be for innovation. However, the influence of such practices in actual regulatory changes in Madrid seems to be poor when compared to the more structured processes of the Balearic Region, Catalonia, or the Basque Country, where institutions have supported systematic and explicit testing of models informed by a more general conceptual framework: the ecological understanding of material and

design processes, a political, legal and economic support to self-managed collective initiatives or the exploration of the productive components of the dwelling and its potential to break social and gender stereotypes. In this sense, the media success of Madrid social housing architecture seems a mirage: while architects do their best and achieve remarkable results, there is no feeling of collective accumulation of knowledge that can lead to more general results, a movement that only institutions and policies can foster and consolidate.

Second, the leading role of public policies and legal-regulatory frameworks emerge at the urban scale though innovations like the *viviendas dotacionales*, exploiting the urban vitality of hybrid buildings with complex social and functional programs, or the temporary transfer of surface rights related to the activation of public land for non-profit housing initiatives, as proved in Barcelona. In these cases, new housing models follow a logic that stems from land management policies and tend to acknowledge the potential of collectively shared spaces as mediators between the public and the private, between ground and building.

Third, the whole analytical sequence from exterior to interior, from public to private, from big to small, proves to be ultimately inadequate. Such conclusion becomes evident if we just consider the huge ecological connotations of the kitchen, the part of the house where the environment is metabolised and processed in a continuous material cycle. In fact, the kitchen seems to hold together all the other issues, collecting them within a heterogeneous space, breaking the wall of the typical and traditionally sedimented separations which have always inhabited the domestic realm: internal–external, common–private,

shared-excluded, genderized-fluid. The kitchen emerges as a hinge to hold together significant parts of domesticity and to canalise most of the current social and environmental concerns. This, however, is not completely new: apart from Catharine Beecher, Melusina Fay Peirce (1836–1923) also claimed in the second half of the nineteenth century for “houses without kitchens”, stating that the elimination of this element from the dwelling unit and their replacement with collective services was the best way of stimulating the women’s emancipation process. With the diffusion of a renovated understanding of collectivity within social housing, it is now possible to recognize the very meaning and power of these words, fully valid for the contemporary era.

All in all, through the continuously shifting game of balances between policies and practices, between theories and projects, it has been shown that the contemporary crisis triggered by diverse inputs and agencies in the last decades has contributed to redefining our idea of domestic space, focusing both on the critical issues of environmental sustainability and energetic efficiency and on social innovation inside and outside built spaces.

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Availability of data and materials

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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