HousingLab, Exploring new ways of housing the city.

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Abstract

HousingLab is an innovative service design laboratory for housing. It is offering research and experimentation for the development of sustainable housing across 3 main areas: information, coaching and experimentation. HousingLab is using active participation to transform the housing system into a product-service system. In this paper we describe the design process of HousingLab and two ongoing experiments: on-line tools for improved neighbors' relationship and a coaching method to enable groups of people in envisioning and designing their *Collaborative housing* solution. From these 2 experiments, it is clear how co-design tools are functional for trust building among all stakeholders (public and private constructors, inhabitants, etc.) and therefore increase the chance for successful projects.

KEYWORDS: Housing, collaboration, product-service system, participatory design.

Introduction

By introducing the ongoing changes that affect the everyday life of people living in the city and the city itself, this paper propose two new definitions of the housing system: the house as a product service system and the community collaboration as a motor for this PSS. Moving from these premises, it presents the Collaborative Housing model as a tool to compare and evaluate the variety of housing forms. From the experiences gathered around Europe, the researchers propose a methodology to be used in defining the design of agency able to support and diffuse the collaborative housing initiatives in Italy. The second part of

this paper presents the process that was followed and the community that was involved in the definition of HousingLab as a service design laboratory for Collaborative Housing.

1. A human dimension city.

The utopian hope that ideal and organized communities could act as a leaven upon the urban masses was frequently disappointed (Rykwert, 2000). Never the less, cities have great potential of becoming incredible places, places that offer opportunities for everyone. The power of the city is actually to found in its density. As Jane Jacobes said in an interview (Los Angeles Times, October 12, 1997)[1]: "Cities are the mothers of economic development, not because people are smarter in cities, but because of the conditions of density. There is a concentration of need in cities, and a greater incentive to address problems in ways that haven't been addressed before (...)".

One of the most important recent changes is in the family structure. Due to demographic changes and work patterns modifications, new kinds of families rise. Family arrangements in the United States, for example, have become more diverse with no particular household arrangement representing half of the United States population (Williams, Brian, Stacey C. Sawyer, Carl M. Wahlstrom, 2005). Married couple without children, singles, extended families or complex families are more and more frequent. These changes are bringing about a revolution of daily life. No wonder, people are looking to find new kinds of relationships that will allow them to cope with a new family structure or it's absence, with the difficulties of instability or with growing old alone. People put their forces together to deal with everyday life and to make their living more sustainable. They organize themselves self help centers, buying groups, community gardens and even plan whole neighborhoods.

What we define Creative Communities are groups of people that organize themselves to obtain a result in ways that are, with good probability, promising concrete steps towards sustainable ways of living and producing (Meroni, 2007).

As much as the family is changing and its definitions change, there is still one thing that holds it together, the household. The house. Some Creative Communities indeed tackle the issue of housing, and some find new creative ways of living together.

2. A city dimension housing.

The house, inseparable part of the city, is in our view the starting point for an improved welfare in the city. "It is (the home), most basically, shelter from the elements; it is security and privacy from the outside world; it is space in which to relax, learn and live; it is access to more or less comfort, but the home also places the household in a specific neighborhood context which may influence accessibility to relatives, friends, shopping, leisure, public services and employment". (European parliament, 2006)

When talking about the city it is often said that there is isolation and loneliness. The common image is the one of separate people living in private apartments under the same

[1] http://articles.latimes.com/1997/oct/12/opinion/op-41978#.Tstnp23VipE.email

roof, without knowing their neighbor name. The planning of apartments and building remains the same while the people living in it and their needs are changing radically. "The orthodox space spacialisation of city space has lost its purpose and is on the way out, as homes become extensions of offices, shops and schools and take over most of their functions, thereby casting a question mark over their future" (Zygmunt, 2003). There is a need for community and a need for a new definition of what is house suitable for a community and not only for single users. This is why we will be talking mostly about community-centered design for housing in the city.

3. New definition for the housing offer.

New definitions are needed for housing that go in two levels:

- The house as a product service system

- The community collaboration as a motor for this PSS.

3.1 The house as a product service system.

Today's city dwellings can still be defined as "products": they are designed to offer a space for living and sold in single units for a single user (usually a family). The people buying or renting an apartment expect from it to satisfy their needs of living such as: space for cooking, washing, storing and sleeping. There are other factors considered regarding aesthetics or quality of materials. Very few, however, are asking about the quality of relationship with the neighbors, the services offered in the building or the activities the people living there share. We suggest that those last ones are of great importance and shall change the way we think about a house: no longer a product for a single user, but a product service system for a whole community (the neighbors).

This PSS can provide a solution to every day life difficulties found in daily life and can bring to a new welfare system centered in housing. People in the city, in fact, find it difficult to manage their family-work balance, to grow old not having relatives nearby, or more, not being able to afford a big enough apartment or those services that could facilitate the children activities or the care of the elderly. Putting the house in the middle of the welfare system is not a new idea; the structure of city housing makes it easier to implement services. When many people share the same roof, one can easily imagine they can also share a series of services fitting their needs. Through history, many talked about communities sharing facilities and few were also experimented. Some models in northern Europe were build and tested in the beginning of the 20th century and are probably the rout of Collaborative Housing forms: the central kitchen idea, "the family hotel" and the first co-housing building in Sweden. In all of those solutions though, services were offered to the family to ease its daily life and especially women life. Really managing the collective services themselves is an evolution of those forms (Vestbro, 2010).

3.2 The community collaboration as a motor for a PSS housing.

If thinking of the house as PSS for a community, it is important that the design approach shifts from a simple top down approach to a community centered design one. Not many people can afford to design their own private houses and have the economic means to

choose their architect and work with her on the plan to fit exactly his specific needs. The vast majority of professionals devote their energies as consultants of small groups of rich clients, while very few use their skills to address the most urgent human settlements problems (Vestbro 2000). "Re-designing together everyday life" means creating a new welfare for a city or quarter that can respond to new housing needs and on the same time create and enable communities. The empowerment of communities to create bottom up solutions is important for avoiding some city-planning common errors, or, as Geoff Mulgan and Charlie Leadbeater (Kahn, Ali, Buonfino, Leadbeater, Mulgan, 2009) points out: "Top-down city planning all too often extinguishes vernacular, everyday innovation or drives it underground. All too often the places created by these top-down plans sap the spirit, suck out hope and ambition, wreck community and family bonds, and draw in apathy and nihilism in their stead". If community centered design is the heart of the new housing system then the community participation in the process is the motor for it success. Only by understanding the community (existing or future one), and involving people in designing their own solutions we can create innovative housing system that last in time.

4. Collaborative Housing, a definition.

When housing units offer not only a basic solution (product/accommodation) but integrate collaborative services (Manzini, 2008) for everyday life management, the solutions can be called Collaborative Housing. Or else, where people collaborate to overcome difficulties and create pleasurable urban life. We define Collaborative Housing, the solutions where collaboration between the residents is an inseparable part of the housing model. Some examples are: co-housing, self constructing groups, joint ventures, cooperatives, communes, integrated residences, student houses and elderly co-housing. All are different models that have different structures. All of them, however present some advantages that make them more sustainable housing solutions:

- They consist on recovering a lost social dimension of mutual aid and a sense of community, contrasting exclusion and reducing the stress and complexity of life in modern society.
- The sharing of goods and services allows a considerable saving of energy and costs, facilitating the management of daily activities and generating a more sustainable lifestyle.
- Involving people in designing their own solution creates a variety of housing options, enlarging diversity and fitting all types of families.
- Co-design of common spaces facilitates the development of relationships in the neighborhood and increases the sense of belonging to a community, maintaining at the same time the individuality of ones dwelling.

In the figure below (Fig. 1), Collaborative Housing types are distributed to show the following aspects: the amount of common space available vs. the intensity of collaboration. The homogeneity of the people living there (only students, only elderly, mixed, etc.) and their openness or not to the surroundings. Looking at this scheme, the different areas drawn are as followed:

- On the top right, the best practices. Where collaboration happens in appropriately designed spaces; for example Swedish co-housing[2] or Italian cohousing[3].
- On the bottom right, collaborative solutions based on community participation that can be improved. These are of easy access since the people involved are already collaborating; some examples are social housing in Milan[4] or Comunità di famiglie[5].
- On the top left, luxury solutions where people are not interested in collaborating even if they share many space. These are most likely to remain that way;
- On the bottom left, solutions that are not collaborative and are the biggest challenge of all since they are the most common solutions today.
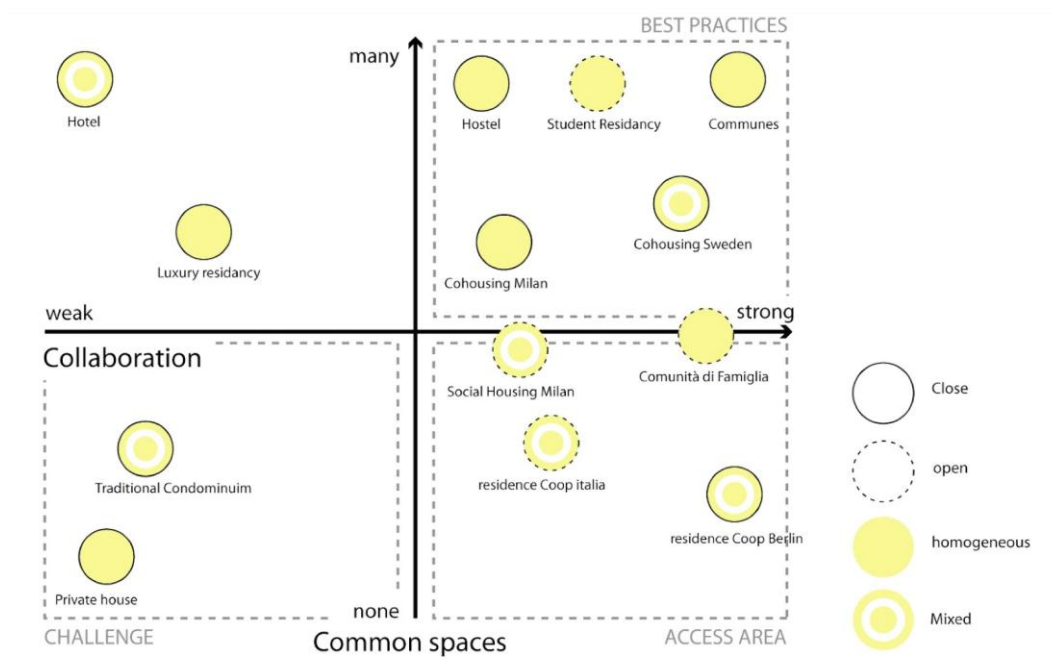

Figure 1: Collaboration and common spaces scheme

5. Why is it then that Collaborative Housing is not so common? The resistance to change.

Two are the main barriers that prevent the diffusion of collaborative housing practices: The first one has a bottom-up perspective and regards the (future) inhabitants. It comes mainly from little and poor information about the variety of solutions grouped under the name of Collaborative Housing. The words "community" or "sharing" often let people imagine a daily life where the group rules the private life of the inhabitants. Collaborative Housing has a lot to do with blurring the borders between private and public. This sound often frightening and has many recalls to other models like the ' 60 communes that are not suitable for many people.

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[2] A lot of Information about co housing in Sweden can be found here: http://www.kollektivhus.nu/

[3] www.cohousing.It, is one of the first to built and promote cohousing in Milan.

[4] Social Housing Foundation is building now in Milan and is promoting social housing issues. Information can be found here: http://www.fhs.it/

[5] http://www.comunitaefamiglia.org/

Moreover, when this first hurdle is cleared, there is still a lack in information on the process and steps needed to form a group, on its costs and duration, on the range of competences required.

The second one is a top-down driven barrier and it involves institutions of the public sector, no-profit organizations (like co-operatives, foundations, etc.) and the private sector, who do not have a clear and immediate perception of the advantages, in terms of social renewal, market advantages and innovative offer that such an approach in the housing sector can bring to the whole city.

Since all the possible advantages described in the previous paragraphs are not to be seen immediately, the diffusion of such forms is very slow and challenging and it contributes to the lack of enough models to follow. This increases the difficulty in accepting changes in the model of housing we know so well. The reason is related to a resistance to change and the difficulty to manage transformations both from top down and bottom up. These issues are tackled in the principles and fundamentals of change management: a structured approach to shifting/transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state. It is an organizational process aimed at empowering employees to accept and embrace changes in their current business environment (Hiatt, 2006).

Following the ADKAR model (developed by Prosci[6] in 1998), there are personal (of each actor) factors that should be approached:

Awareness of the need to change.
Desire to participate and support the change.
Knowledge on how to change.
Ability to implement required skills and behaviors.
Reinforcement to sustain change.

According to this model, the change is therefore possible only if each actor can reach those five elements. But to accept change is only the beginning. We also have to sustain it and keep it going. The last point in the Adkar model as well as Lewins model (Lewin, 1947) suggests: first unfreeze the current situation, apply the transformation and then refreeze the results in order to maintain the desired status reached through the change process. The ADKAR model as well as other models of change management is not traditionally applied to the housing field and to the social management in housing. Radical innovation can be achieved in housing by the adaption of such models to the specific needs.

6. Experiences in Europe and in Italy.

Around Europe and the world there is a growing movement of agencies or organizations that take upon themselves the role of helping and facilitating the creation of Collaborative Housing forms. These offer information, consultancy and usually create networks between all the interested stakeholders in a specific city. Some examples around Europe are:

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[6] http://www.change-management.com/tutorial-adkar-overview.htm

Experimentcity[7] in Berlin, Kollektivhus Nu[8] in Stockholm or The Initiative for Collaborative Building and Housing (Initiative für gemeinschaftliches Bauen und Wohnen / IgBW)[9] in Wien. The tradition in experimenting new form of collective and shared living spaces finds its roots in the '60 and '70, mostly in the North Europe countries (Lietaert, 2007). These early experiments were able to start an experimentation phase that is still on going. The results in the evolution of the housing solutions are a series of models accepted and encouraged by the public and private sector and well known by the inhabitants. This led to the creation of a system of actions and organizations (both from the public and the private sector) to support the transition towards Collaborative Housing forms and to overcome the initial resistance to change.

In Italy, despite a wide experience and knowledge on co-operative housing, the idea of collective housing referred to a system where apartments and houses were usually offered to disadvantaged sectors of population or to particular categories of people embracing precise ideologies or religions.

In the last decade several types of Collaborative Housing example started to emerge, especially in the Milanese contest, including social housing, solidarity communities, co-housing etc. Only few of them however have a support system for their specific creation and development. No agency or organization is supporting Collaborative Housing of all types. This makes it difficult for many people even to recognize the differences between the Collaborative Housing types and orient theme-selves in the maze of housing.

7. HousingLab as a service design laboratory for Collaborative Housing.

The following questions have led us to conduct our research:
- What is the suitable model for such agency in Milan?
- Can design tools help develop a repeatable scalable model to use in other contexts?

Considering the differences between countries (or even cities) we believe an efficient, flexible model for an agency can be created for promoting Collaborative Housing forms, if involving all stakeholders from the very first moment, using change management knowledge and community centered design approach.

7.1. Methodology and design process.

We have chosen a Participatory Action Research Methodology to develop a process that could define a flexible and replicable model for an agency. Participation and collaboration are at the heart of Collaborative Housing and the design of a support system should follow the same lead.

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[7] http://experimentcity.net

[8] http://www.kollektivhus.nu/

[9] http://gemeinsam-bauen-wohnen.org/

The process that led us to the first definition of HousingLab is a continuous sequence of definition, testing and re-formulation. It includes a group of experts across Europe, stakeholders on the Italian context from various sectors (no-profit, co-op, foundations, architects) and a group of future inhabitants of 2 different collaborative housing settlements in Milan. This community was involved, at different levels and moments, in a process that, to date was made of the following steps:

a. Initial research and networking.
b. HousingLab: first definition of the structure.
c. Mapping of areas of intervention.
d. First actions to be prototyped.
e. Monitoring and feedback system.

a. Initial research and networking. To meet the actors and the various European situations, we have participated in a European project called Experimentcity[10]. The project is a collaboration of members from eight different European countries that meet to compare and discuss their experiences on the issue. Through the development of common tools and terms, the meetings aimed to create an exchange platform of experiences among European partners.

b. Housing Lab: first definition of the structure. Networking and researching has shown the presence of several "agencies" around the world working on the same topics, but at the same time it has highlighted the need for methodologies and tools, able to encourage and increase the change of success of the Collaborative Housing projects.

The concept of HousingLab aims at supporting the Collaborative Housing initiatives by operating by small-scale experiments in order to achieve a series of exportable methods and tools. The HousingLab structure aims at working with all the stakeholders on a local scale by involving them in different initiative. This participative community centered approach applies the principles expressed by the change management theories throughout the activities of the laboratory and especially on three main levels of action:

» Information: increasing the awareness of a variety of Collaborative Housing solution and its advantages for the stakeholder's community.
» Coaching: building trust and competences in order to enable people in a Collaborative Housing project.
» Experimentation: testing ideas immediately on field to verify hypothesis and build solid models.

Tools will be developed according to the 5 phase of the ADKAR personal phases of change as shown in Fig. 2, such as establishing a support network, promoting a series of events, building an online platform and a coaching program, co-creating a toolbox and information tools (see paragraph Action1 and Action 2 for an initial experimentation of some of the actions described in Fig. 2)

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[10] Having started within the framework of the 2010 European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Experimentcity explores questions of affordability and social inclusion, as well as political, social and economic conditions supportive to collaborative and innovative housing projects. http://experimentcity.net/en/excity-europe/
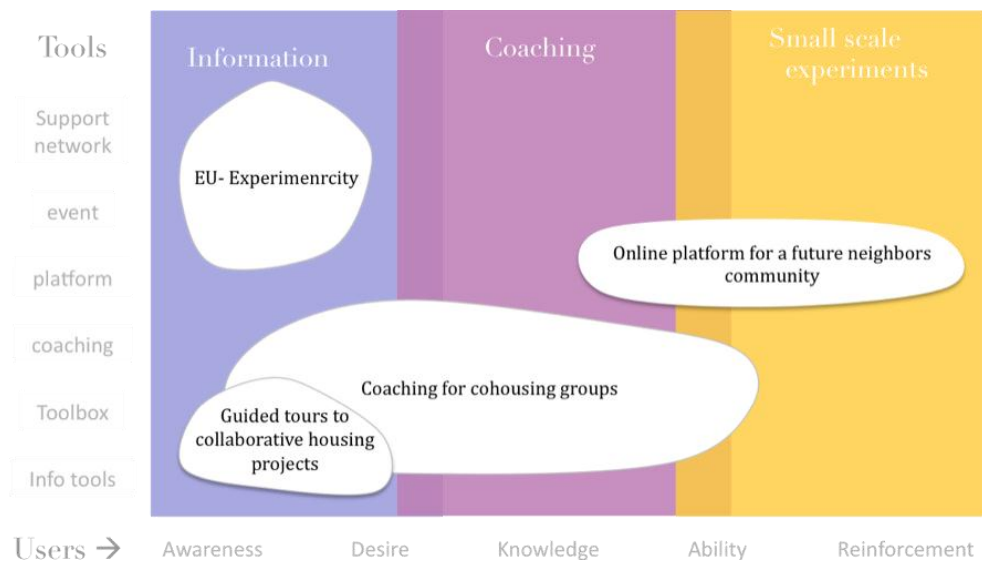
Figure 2: Adkar Model applied to the HousingLab Actions and tools Plan.

c. **Defining the areas of interventions.** Through the meetings with the European partners and through a study of the specific Milanese context, we have delineated some initial macro areas that can boost the HousingLab intervention. These areas are:

» Assisting independent groups in planning and building their own solutions. (To arrive to best practices examples in Fig.1).
» Promoting the creation of communities in developing co-op buildings. (Area of access).
» Improving neighbours'" life in existing buildings (the challenge area).

Operating within these three areas HousingLab has specific aims to achieve:

» Create repeatable and flexible processes.
» Invent and/or adapt specific enabling tools.
» Address every action to stakeholders from both bottom up and top down.

Among the macro areas identified as starting point, two were the actions that were undertaken and that will be described in the following paragraph.

d. First actions to be prototyped. The initial networking phase that HousingLab made on the Milanese context led to the activation of two initiatives: the first is a bottom up one (a group of people interested in co-housing models), while the second one involves a top down stakeholder (co-op constructor company). The actions we decided to activate immediately were:
Action 1, coaching for the independent group oriented in co-housing solutions;
Action 2, a social network on-line for a future neighbor community.

Action 1. Coaching for an independent group oriented in co-housing solutions.

Figure 3: A group of future cohousers in a meeting about the area in the city they would like to focus on.

Aims:

» Verify if a coaching program can enable a group bring their dream project to realty.
» Define a series of steps in order to create a replicable and adaptable model of process.
» Adapt existing PSS design tools to the housing context.

Description:

In this action, a group of people interested in creating their own Collaborative Housing solution entered a coaching process from the very first moment. The group had neither previous experience on Collaborative Housing, nor any competences in dealing with co-design processes or constructive task. The process, that was build with the group, aimed at defining a series of steps and tools to be used before and during the co-housing construction.

Action:

The group is assisted during several meetings in transforming them from singles to a group capable of managing a co-housing project. It was defined as a sequence of meetings with precise tasks.

» Inform the group on the various models Collaborative Housing solutions in order to orient their vision (benchmarking activities).
» Visioning: transform the desires of each single person into coherent and shared visions of the future of the group. Tools such as mood-boards and scenario building were used.
» Deal with fears and conflicts: a facilitator expert in group management was involved with the aim of transferring to the group the competences needed in managing future conflicts that could arise in the process.
» Solution oriented activities: co-designing the characteristic of the future co-housing settlement by defining, for example: must have, nice to have and not to have features. Storytelling and visualization tools were useful to let people see their future co-housing and enable them to take more aware decisions.

Outcomes of this coaching process are two documents written by the group:

1) The Vision&Mission shared by the people, working as a reference for both the participants and future cohousers.

2) A Brief to be given to the professionals that will work for the group at different stage: e.g. it contains the recommendation for the architects that are now looking for an available construction site.

Action 2. A social network on-line for a future neighbor community.

Figure 4: The members page of the on-line platform for the future community of Scarsellini condominium.

Aims:

» Explore the use of digital tools for the creation of an active community.
» Understand if pre-housing intervention are useful for the community life.
» Explore both top down and bottom up interventions.

Description:

The house in Scarsellini Street is being built by a construction co-op who clearly understands the need and the importance of community life in the building. This can be seen by the way the residents are involved in the decision making process and by the fact that the constructor includes some common areas in the building plan. Never the less, in all the past housing projects in co-op, the work on "making a group" did not happen before moving in. In a construction co-op the inhabitants are involved in the construction process, but there is no time dedicated to allow bottom up ideas related to community life to grow and therefore to influence the design of common areas and spaces available.

Action:

During this initiative, a social on-line network is built to support the creation of the community. This is accompanied by a presentation and a series of meetings with both the co-op president and the inhabitants. The idea is to open up the possibilities to the future residents and create active participation in creating their still-to-come social life in the new condominium. The action is divided in several phases:

» Discussion with the co-op president and consortium.

- »   The creation of the on-line tool.
- »   Launch of the tool and presentation to the habitants.
- »   Use of the tool and face to face meetings.

e. Monitoring and feed back. Several tools were designed in order to gather useful feedbacks from the stakeholder involved in the actions. All the activities were monitored through photo and video-capturing systems and written documentation of the meetings organized with the communities.

For both the actions, short interviews of the participants were registered in order to capture suggestions on the process, an evaluation about the competences and skills gained through it, and the expectations on the next steps. In the second experiment (co-op intervention) participants were also asked to leave a call for action to activate new, shared initiatives.

Moreover a survey system was dedicated to collect the impressions and suggestions of the top-down stakeholders (co-op director and collaborators), with the aim of investigating the advantages that this approach brought to the process compared to the traditional methodology and the opportunity of applying it to future co-op initiatives.

8. Results and reflection on the first actions of HousingLab.

From the initiatives carried on by HousingLab we can draw some first reflections on both the two specific actions and on the first structure concept of HousingLab.

Action	Observations	Reflections

Action	Observations	Reflections
Coaching program	- The group feels the need of a facilitator to start and go on. - The group had need for valid information throughout the way. - After a few meetings the group met also independently	- Face to face meetings are essential - A list of books and movies are helpful to involve people - Partners from different disciplines are needed in order to give full service coaching

Action	Observations	Reflections
Community building, Scarsellini	- Good response on the first presentation. - Slow involvement on-line, fear of digital tools. - The first activities suggested do not relate to the common spaces	- Face to face meetings are essential for the success of the platform. - There is a need for a "pusher" to sustain the platform. - The "forum" feature is the most suited one for the early discussions.

	available.	
	- Security can be a good point for involving people to participate	

It is clear from this two experiments, how co-design tools are functional for trust building among all stakeholders (public and private constructors, inhabitants, professionals, etc.). In particular the first action show how co-designing tools such as Mood-boards and Scenario Buildings, left people free to express them-selves, along with the task of planning a project together. Moreover, the networking approach let the group to identify specific needed skills and to involve professionals to help them in overtaking and clearing hurdles in the path towards the co-housing solution. The community design process facilitated the group in defining a common vision, in expressing and experiment ideas from either the explicit requirements or the unexpressed needs, gathering indications, suggestions and requirements to build a dialogue between them and the professionals. Design oriented activities and tools are helpful in enabling people visualizing and evaluating alternative solutions, thus increasing the awareness and trust in the decision making process. The group became more and more independent in managing encounters alone, contacting members and making decisions.

From the second action we could see how important was the role of participation both from top down and from bottom up, for the success of the online tools. During the process the presence of the co-op president in all meetings and her support to the initiative has helped having the trust of members and to make some decisions quicker and easier. The presentations and the first meetings made it possible for the project to really sustain itself. An extremely personal approach was taken to make people feel they matter. HousingLab role was pushing in the direction of self-sufficiency and this has indeed happened after only two face-to-face meetings. Once the social network started working fluently many project were created in the virtual community that otherwise would not have the time to be developed before moving in to the building. The group of "active" neighbors has taken upon itself many projects including: purchasing groups, condominium WIFI installation, car sharing, the design of the common rooms, do it yourself group and more.

9. Conclusions and next steps.

As anticipated in the previous paragraphs, one of the goals of HousingLab is to encourage a shift of the Housing sector from a Product to a Product Service System. From the actions presented, we can trace a first positive reflection on this.

In both experiments, we can see a first resistance that is easily overcome when people imagine the future life in the settlement. As soon as initial fears are solved, a proactive approach is activated and people start to refer to the house (the product) as enabling spaces, a platform on which to create services to share in their daily life with the neighbor and the district's inhabitants. This appears clear in the second experiment (co-op intervention) where the collaboration and discussion among neighbors on specific initiatives (purchasing group, car-sharing, shared Wi-Fi connections, baby sitting) begins months before they move in.

From a top-down perspective, the HousingLab initiatives help the institutions (in this case the co-op sector) to build a meaningful dialogue with the future inhabitants, thus decreasing

the approach based on assistance. The co-op director highlighted how, thanks to this initiatives, she could see the participants as proactive and helpful partners of the project and less as clients to be satisfied. Moreover, the action could build a reference model to be applied in various contexts and, as future actions, to be implemented in existing settlements.

Future issues to tackle with in the development of HousingLab structure were gathered thanks to the monitoring and feedback system.

The information level of HousingLab interventions should be reinforced: the dissemination of knowledge about Collaborative Housing is a need expressed by all the stakeholders involved. Giving more information generally means helping people to orient theme selves before entering a process and by this saving a lot of time for them and the others.

The coaching program and the tools used can indeed be called a Model. There is now a clear sequence of encounters to address the most important steps in becoming a community. The tools used are easily repeatable and scalable.

The experiments so fare has been very useful in verifying hypothesis in real life and in a relatively short time. The missing experiment now is one on existing condominiums. Our aim is to begin with this last experiment as soon as possible. It will complete the actions on our goal-areas of interventions, but most of all, since the majority of buildings are already built in a "traditional" way and are already hosting so many citizens, the intervention in this case, if successful can make the biggest different in urban housing as we know it today.

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