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LGBTQ+-inclusive Co-Housing: Queer Senses of Home in a Mixed Development

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ABSTRACT

Amidst housing crises, co-housing initiatives have emerged as a strategy to advance social inclusion in European cities. This study examines the experiences of queer-identifying residents within a queer-inclusive co-housing group that is part of the social housing system in Vienna. Through interviews and narrative mapping, we uncover the challenges of creating a sense of home in such environments. Our study shows that mere intentions of inclusivity do not guarantee a feeling of belonging among residents. The findings shed light on the nuanced experiences of community, control, and safety among queer-identifying residents. They underscore the need to reassess normative design and management practices to achieve genuine inclusion and highlight that the inclusion of minoritised groups might require excluding others. The paper thus advocates for a critical mass of marginalised group members sharing similar intentions, recognizing the inherent challenges of creating a cohesive community in top-down orchestrated co-housing initiatives.

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Introduction

Many European cities are experiencing severe housing market strains, whereby young, low-income, and marginalised groups are increasingly struggling to access and afford decent housing (Madden and Marcuse 2016). Suggested solutions typically rely on the (re) introduction of some level of decommodification or "commoning" in housing provision. In addition to state-based arrangements, collaborative housing forms – such as co-housing – have been touted to offer affordable and accessible living to diverse populations (Droste 2015; Scheller and Thörn 2018). While such projects have been critiqued for being middle-class affairs (Arbell 2021; Lang, Carriou, and Czischke 2020), a recent wave of collaborative housing projects has been actively seeking to address issues of exclusion (Czischke, Carriou, and Lang 2020; Scheller and Thörn 2018), and urban policymakers are keen to facilitate such projects as part of a social inclusion agenda. As such, new configurations of co-production, or collaboration, between prospective residents, state actors, and non-state housing providers have led to the development of co-housing projects that aim to

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be affordable and socially inclusive (see Bresson and Labit 2020; Czischke 2018; Droste 2015). Scholars have started to examine how co-housing may offer housing to poorer households (Bresson and Labit 2020; Droste 2015). However, there has been relatively little attention to how co-housing may provide a home for other marginalised groups, particularly for those who fall outside norms of gender, sexuality, and family, i.e. LGBTQ+ and queer residents.[1]

LGBTQ+ groups tend to be omitted in discussions of inclusive housing provision, although they generally have more difficulties finding suitable housing (Addis et al. 2009; Matthews and Poyner 2019; Matthews, Poyner, and Kjellgren 2019). Gieseking (2020) highlights intersections with class: marginalised queer subjects are often unable to live up to homeownership ideals as many cannot afford it. Moreover, planning practices usually neglect the needs of the LGBTQ+ community (Doan 2011). What is labelled as conventionally safe, such as the home (Mallett 2004), is often not perceived as safe by queer and LGBTQ+ subjects (Flood and Hochstenbach, forthcoming; Fox 2007). Given the risks of expressing identities that fall outside dominant norms, many queer groups would benefit from having and creating "their own" spaces. Such queer spaces allow for queer subjectivities (i.e. sense of self) to become natural, which may amount to a localized subversion of dominant imaginaries, providing "alternative frameworks of identity, social allegiance, and support" (Bain, Payne, and Isen 2015; Valentine and Skelton 2003, 853).

This paper aims to understand how co-housing may provide inclusive spaces to middle- and lower-income residents who identify as queer. It does so by studying the lived experiences of home of queer residents. Presenting findings from a newly developed co-housing project in Vienna, we answer the following research question: What are the meanings and experiences of home and belonging of queer-identified inhabitants in a queer-inclusive co-housing group? The co-housing project, Queerhaus,[2] was designed to be, and advertised as, queer-inclusive – normative and non-normative families, sexualities, and gender identities were invited to create a community together. As initiators sought to make the project broadly inclusive, it also reserved dwellings for the city's social housing waiting list. The mix of queer-identifying and social housing residents makes our study an "extreme case" of socially inclusive co-housing. To our knowledge, by creating space for various queer and non-queer households with different incomes, few projects have aimed to be so ambitious.

Next to the lack of research on the inclusive housing provision for LGBTQ+ groups, housing research has neglected the impact of "inclusive" co-housing on the lived realities of minoritised[3] groups in general. Bresson and Labit (2020) show that researching social inclusion in collaborative housing requires attention to affordability, the social diversity of inhabitants, and the social impact of life in such a project on "included" minoritised groups. The latter remains understudied. Yet, urban scholars have long pointed to the challenges of living with difference in urban areas (Valentine 2008). Notably, work on "social mixing" has shown that managing differences can be difficult and that, despite well-meaning efforts, social differences in close proximity may lead to exclusionary processes (Chaskin 2013; Chaskin and Joseph 2010; Tersteeg and Pinkster 2016). Social inclusiveness of co-housing, thus, cannot be conflated with the presence of minoritised groups in co-housing projects. Doing so misses micro-level social dynamics that impact the lives of minoritised groups.

Social Value of Co-Housing

In its current-day form, co-housing emerged in Denmark in the 1970s (Beck 2020). Its implementations vary, but generally, households live in private dwellings, share common areas, and engage in collective decision-making(Beck 2020). Co-housing projects typically encourage social interaction and seek a community based on shared values. As such, co-housing is not just a form of tenure but a socio-spatial phenomenon (Jarvis 2015). There is no unifying terminology in the field, but we follow Czischke, Carriou, and Lang (2020) who describe co-housing as one of many forms of "collaborative housing". Collaborative housing is an umbrella term encompassing various housing forms such as co-housing, Community Land Trusts, or co-operatives.

Co-housing and collaborative housing initiatives increasingly opt for co-production with non-governmental or state organizations (Bresson and Labit 2020; Czischke 2018; Droste 2015). Compared to single ownership models, partnerships with municipalities, non-state organizations, or private developers give access to financial backing, legal assistance, property permits, vacant land, or organizational resources. The support can make the development of and access to housing more affordable and better suited to accommodate marginalised groups (Bresson and Labit 2020). Vienna has a more extended history of partnerships between collaborative housing initiatives and the social housing system (Czischke 2018, Butzlaff et al. 2024).

Co-housing has been shown to foster a sense of home for minoritised groups by offering community, safety, and control. Studying a co-housing group of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands, Meijering and Lager (2014) show that a community with people from a similar background contributes to a sense of home and safety. This anchors everyday mobilities (Meijering and Lager 2014) and can be enhanced when residents have positive relationships (Ruiu 2014). When there is a focus on neighbourhood outreach, collaborative housing may create and connect networks of communities within the city (Fromm 2012). Lastly, participation in collective living and decision-making opens the possibility of social inclusion of marginalised groups (Semprebon and Vicari Haddock 2016).

However, despite their social potential, co-housing groups are often challenging for minoritised groups to access. There has been critique for lacking racial and ethnic diversity (Lang, Carriou, and Czischke 2020) as well as the exclusion of lower classes through financial entry barriers and a domineering middle-class (Arbell 2021). In their evaluation of bottom-up and top-down projects in France, Bresson and Labit (2020) found that social accessibility, socio-economic and cultural diversity, and social inclusion (conceptualised as the impacts on the lives of vulnerable groups) vary. Even when projects are socially accessible, they are not necessarily culturally diverse, and minoritised groups can still find them exclusionary.

Co-Housing for LGBTQ+ Residents

There is little scholarship looking at collaborative housing for LGBTQ+ groups despite a growing number of developments (see Marocco 2023; Rosenwohl-Mack et al. 2022; Griffith, Jepma, and Savini 2024). Given the social value of collaborative housing, however, it seems promising to provide queer residents with a sense of home. Below, we will discuss three aspects central to a sense of home and belonging for LGBTQ+ subjects:

community, safety, and control. We draw on urban research on everyday social difference to highlight mechanisms that may encourage or undermine a sense of home for queer residents.

First, home is often understood as something inherently related to a sense of community, usually associated with family (Mallett 2004). Such a sense of community can be vital for LGBTQ+ subjects, who frequently seek a support network among other queers, allies, and chosen families (Putney et al. 2021). Urban scholars have long been studying conditions for interaction and inclusion, as well as for avoidance, defensiveness, and conflict (e.g. Matejskova and Leitner 2011; Valentine 2008; Van Gent, Brugman, and De Craene 2023). Different groups typically have varying and often contrasting needs and expectations concerning their housing. Social mixing projects can lead to "social compartmentalisation", a split of residents into factions (Chaskin 2013, 250; Chaskin and Joseph 2010). However, compared to other mixed housing developments, co-housing groups bring together people who share a common goal: collaborating to make a home together. That a shared purpose can create ties between people with different backgrounds has been shown by Aernouts and Ryckewaert (2018) in their study of a Community Land Trust.

Second, a home can provide safety for queer subjects who face stigma and discrimination (Browne 2007; Gorman-Murray 2007). Distinct queer spaces can establish queer bodies as the provided-for and normative person (Carr et al. 2022) and create spaces outside of cis-hetero norms that allow for identity formation (Valentine and Skelton 2003). However, queer spaces like gaybourhoods or LGBTQ+ bars are changing or even disappearing as urban space is becoming more expensive and some queers who fit into normative expectations prefer to live alongside straights (Ghaziani 2016; Gieseking 2020). This can prevent designated queer spaces from existing for those who might need them to feel safe. Importantly, what constitutes a safe queer home can vary and be subject to disagreement. For instance, some LGBTQ+ populations may prefer invisibility to be queer safely (Bain and Podmore 2021). Housing studies focussing on social differences based on income or tenure show that differences often become evident when it comes to the "safety" of shared spaces (Stokoe 2006; Tersteeg and Pinkster 2016). In such conflicts, the organisational structure may favour the interests of some groups of residents over others (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph 2012; Tersteeg and Pinkster 2016).

Third, given that the distinct realities of queers are often side-lined in city planning (Doan 2011), co-housing could give LGBTQ+ residents a voice in shaping their environment. In co-housing, such a measure of control is structured by the degree to which residents can collectively design and manage their (shared) spaces. Co-housing groups are becoming increasingly top-down governed, leading to less resident involvement (Czischke 2018). Studies on mixed-income and mixed-tenure housing developments indicate that top-down management can harm community building. Top-down organized events, for example, can lead to segregated attendance by class and race (Chaskin 2013). Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph (2012) highlight two approaches to design the participation of minoritised groups: their participation can be "mainstreamed" into already existing governance schemes, or active efforts can be made to maximise involvement by their terms. "Mainstreaming" often hinders minoritised groups to advocate effectively for their needs.

So, creating co-housing as places of home and belonging for queer residents is riddled with potentials and pitfalls in terms of community, safety, and control. Yet, finding and feeling a sense of belonging is not a binary state or a (future) outcome. It is highly

processual, meaning it can evolve and emerge in daily life and activities in and around the home (Pinkster and Loomans 2024). Drawing on Muñoz, Alison Bain, William Payne, and Jaclyn Isen (2015) argue that individual and collective work on creating and re-imaging the residential environment as spaces of queer belonging can drive queer groups to engage in the "politics of possibility". Consequently, queer place-making – like the development of a co-housing project – should be understood as an ongoing material and discursive process that is local but also shaped by broader power relations and institutional structures. People may find belonging in building a better future. In this process of belonging, conviviality and generosity are crucial (Bain and Podmore 2021; Bain, Payne, and Isen 2015). As such, queer co-housing groups – while not necessarily unified – can form an alternative to capitalistic, individualised, and straight understandings of housing spaces (Bain, Payne, and Isen 2015).

Methodology

The presented study was part of a research project on queer homemaking practices in two co-housing groups (*Baugruppen*) in Vienna. We draw on 11 resident interviews, including narrative maps in one of these groups – Queerhaus – and one interview with its two initiators conducted in 2023.[4]

Queerhaus

Queerhaus comprises around 30 housing units and community spaces (café, craft room, garden, and a common room) in four buildings on one plot. The project idea arose in 2016 when the initiators and a cooperative (a large housing provider) competed for the building plot in a development area on the city's edge. Prospective residents joined the planning bit by bit and were involved in the building's architecture and conceptualisation to different degrees. Later, the cooperative hired one of the initiators as a community manager who acted as a liaison between the residents and the cooperative until the residents moved in September 2022. Under the instructions of the community manager, residents were invited to govern the community spaces.[5] However, these community governing bodies were not functioning during our research.

Legally, tenants rent their flats from the cooperative but can opt to buy their apartments after 5–10 years (except the SMART apartments; see below). As part of a scheme subsidising land and construction, tenant costs (rent and a cooperative contribution) are capped at cost price. With rents at 7,50–8,50 € per m^2 including running costs, apartments are cheaper than average.[6] The one-time financial contribution (€500,00 per m^2)[7] is paid back when moving out with 1% yearly depreciation (Friesenecker and Kazepov 2021). A handful of SMART flats were incorporated – these are smaller and more heavily subsidised apartments with a rent of 7,50€ per m^2 and a financial contribution of a maximum of 60€ per m^2 (W. Wien, n.d). The social housing scheme also comes with income eligibility criteria for all prospective residents, which around 80% of Vienna's population fulfil (Marquardt and Glaser 2020). Additionally, each household had to pay a community contribution of 1500€ (Queerhaus' website) to an association founded to manage the communal spaces.

From its initiation onward, the project aimed to house a socio-economic mix of residents and accommodate non-normative living arrangements. However, legally speaking, the social housing framework cannot ensure LGBTQ+ participation. A diverse group in terms of income levels is guaranteed, though, as the social housing funding scheme requires one-third of all flats to be allocated through the Viennese Housing Service ("Wohnservice Wien"). The allocation for this third worked through a platform that advertises available social housing. The ad for Queerhaus included a description of the queer-inclusive aim of the project. Legally, positive discrimination of LGBTQ+ identifying residents through the Viennese Housing Service was not possible. To the authors' knowledge, none of the residents who entered through the housing service identified as LGBTQ + or participated in LGBTQ±-related tasks. Flyers calling for participation in our research project were distributed in all residents' post boxes, and no queer-identifying residents from the housing service responded to our calls. At the time of research, residents had only lived in Queerhaus for around 1 year. However, most of them knew each other well before that – the group formed in 2016.

Interviews

The interview with two initiators (see Table 1) centred around the emergence of Queerhaus, their roles in developing it, and their motivations for doing so. Additionally, we discussed their expectations towards queer inclusion in the project. Both initiators had already been involved in developing another LGBTQ+ inclusive co-housing group and do not live in Queerhaus.

Additionally, the first author interviewed 11 inhabitants from Queerhaus (see Table 1), around one-third of all households. To what extent this population represents the residents can only be approximated. Participants have expressed that roughly a third of the residents identify as LGBTQ+. The project accommodates single lesbians and gays, lesbian couples with children, pansexual-, and queer-identifying people. To our knowledge, Queerhaus houses no trans, non-binary, asexual, or agender people and no gay couples Thus, most residents identify as cisgender and heterosexual.

In the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked whether they identify as queer, what queerness means to them, and what they expected from Queerhaus. We refrained from imposing a definition of queerness because it was central to our research

Table 1. Participant overview.

Name	Gender (self-identification)	Age[8]	Sexuality (self-identification)
Paul	male	40s	queer
Astrid	female	40s	queer, pansexual
Julia	female	40s	queer, pan-poly
Laura	female	40s	queer, lesbian
Barbara	female	50s	queer, lesbian
Ilse	female	–	queer, lesbian
Benedikto	male	50s	gay
Camille	female	40s	hetero
Hanna	female	20s	hetero
Kristina	female	30s	hetero, queer in a broader sense
Ulli	female	60s	hetero, queer in a broader sense
Initiator 1	male	–	queer, gay
Initiator 2	male	–	queer, gay

question to understand what queerness means for this development and its residents. Of our participants, seven people identify as queer, two do not, and two identify as queer in "a broader sense". The latter are single or foster moms, but not queer in terms of their sexuality or gender. We thus "oversampled" queer-identifying participants, as we were interested in understanding their lived experiences of home.

Our interviewees have diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, reflecting the target group of the subsidised housing scheme. Four participants' professions indicate lower socioeconomic status (unemployed, multiple-side jobs, maintenance work). They entered the project through the Viennese Housing Service or live in SMART flats. The rest of the participants' occupations vary: participants work in IT, social work, medical services, coaching, graphic design, or own a small business. Four people in this sample have a migration background.

Crucially, with lived experiences as an out queer and bisexual person as well as previous theoretical engagement with the topic, the first author understands queerness as a category of self-identification but also as a political category. These preconceived notions made it easier to relate to queer-identifying residents who are more in line with an understanding of queer that goes hand in hand with a wish for designated queer-friendly spaces and activities. The second author has experience in studying urban geographies of sexuality but does not identify as queer. Coming from different academic and personal dispositions, we constantly searched and debated how to balance avoiding, "judging", or sympathising with participants' perspectives on queerness with analysing exclusionary processes in the group. Regardless, our positionality and perspectives are part of the co-construction of research, researchers, and interlocutors, unavoidably giving us a partial view (see England 1994).

Narrative Mapping

Building upon these conversations, we asked participants to draw a map of their "home," starting with their co-housing estate and neighbourhood and leaving space for feelings of home elsewhere. Narrative mapping is a method that helps understand how people perceive places and how their experiences connect to them. By asking participants to draw, we get an articulation of mental maps and affect (Reinders 2015; Tersteeg and Pinkster 2016). We provided blank paper and colourful pens for this. These maps revealed where participants spend time with their neighbours, where they participate in shaping their surroundings, and which places they frequent (see also Bain, Payne, and Isen 2015). Moreover, they uncovered how different participants use and experience the co-housing spaces and how this connects to their identities.

All interviews and narrative mapping activities were recorded with the participants' written informed consent. Eleven interviews were conducted in German (including the one with the initiators) and one in English. Interviews were transcribed and thematically coded in atlas.ti in German. We themed the data towards identifying meanings and experiences of home (Saldaña 2009). Going back-and-forth between data, theory, and codes, we identified subthemes. We categorised people's expectations when moving into the co-housing group and their experiences in the group. In that way, we revealed sense of safety, community, and control as three suitable concepts to grasp home and belonging. Narrative maps were used during this interpretation process to reference the spatiality of participants' narrations.

Findings

Our study reveals that many residents who sought out the project for its queer character do not experience it as a queer-friendly project and only partly feel at home. We trace this back to varying expectations towards the co-housing community, conflicts around safety and visibility, and the extent to which residents can control their surroundings. In this findings section, we first show that some queer-identified residents feel marginalised in the project, using one narrative map as an example. Then, we dive into three aspects – sense of community, safety, and control – and their influence on residents' sense of home or lack thereof to explain the observed marginalisation.

At the heart of exclusionary processes in the co-housing group lie varying ideas of what queer co-housing is or should be. Simply put, some residents adopt a broad approach to queerness, citing any unusual living arrangements – such as foster families and single mothers – and a general attitude of tolerance towards everyone as "queer". Yet, other residents are critical of this approach. Paul, a queer man, argued that it "*[brings] at best tolerance towards non-normative ways of life, but definitely not assistance or active support and that just [is not] enough for many people*." Because residents like Paul have a narrower and more activist conceptualisation of queerness, they do not feel at home in Queerhaus. One prominent example is the lesbian Barbara. In her map (Figure 1), Barbara draws her apartment (indicated with a "W" for *Wohnung* (apartment)) using the colour purple, which befits her as an "*old feminist*". She feels at home in her apartment but expresses her disregard for the other three buildings in the project, stating that she is trying to ignore them. "*I do not feel at home there*," she says as she intentionally marks the other three houses with the "*ugly*" colour grey on her map. Barbara refrains from utilising communal areas and visually indicates her negative sentiment towards the other three houses with grey "*X*" symbols.

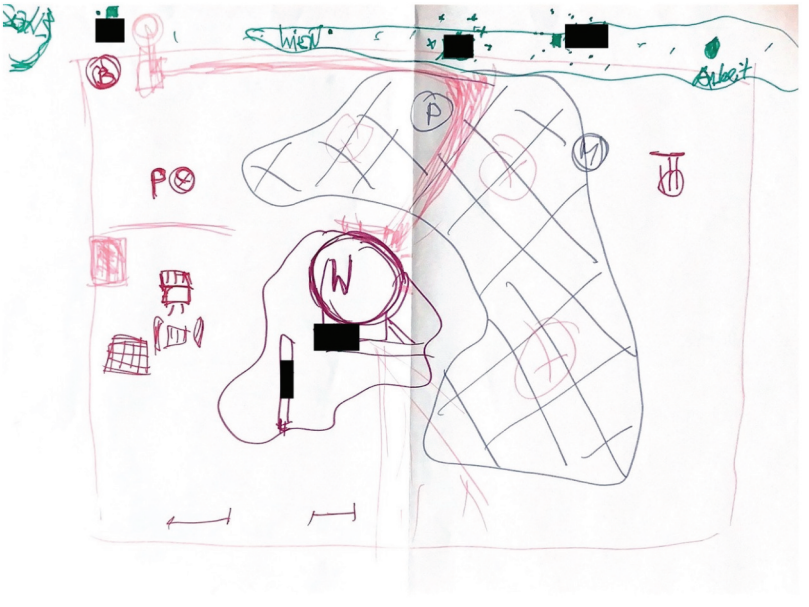

Figure 1. The narrative map of Barbara (redacted by authors to ensure anonymity).

These two mentioned social groups are in conflict, which most interview participants explicitly mentioned. The first group (broad approach to queerness) dominates decision-making, organisation, and representation and is larger than the second group (activist approach to queerness). In addition to these two groups, some residents do not participate in the community at all. Most of this latter group joined through the Housing Service and are unknown to the more active residents. The following paragraphs will discuss the lived experiences of home of various queer residents, showing processes of social inclusion and exclusion for LGBTQ+ groups in co-housing.

Expectations and Sense of Community

A root cause of a lack of sense of home in the co-housing group are residents' varying expectations about conviviality. We identify four different types of expectations towards Queerhaus, stemming from varying personal dispositions, lived realities, and past experiences of discrimination.

First, some people moved into the project because it is affordable, accessible, and conveniently located. These residents had no aspiration of moving into a community-focused project, though the idea might have appealed to some. Hanna's heterosexual family, who joined the project through the Viennese Housing Service, was looking for a flat because their former one-room apartment was too small. While Hanna did take notice of the project's queer focus, her primary motivation for moving was practical; she was not looking for collaborative housing or a queer residence. Kristina, a heterosexual single mother, applied to the project for similar reasons:

> I didn't consider other projects because I was not eligible for any other projects. I am a third-country national [. . .]. I have no money. I have no bank account with money. I have no fixed job. I am a freelancer. I am an artist.

Second, some residents choose to live in collaborative housing to find community and daily support. For instance, Ilse is a single and older lesbian who wants to have people around daily. She says about her previous dwelling: "*I could have died there, and people would have only noticed if it stank out of my flat*". Likewise, Astrid, a pansexual single mother, also expected a community that would provide support and care. She recounts how she decided to move to a co-housing group:

> I had a birthmark removed behind my back, so actually nothing tragic at all; my daughter was 7 or 8 years old, and it was really just about changing the band-aid on the back, yes, something completely banal and I did not have anyone to do it. My little one was terrified of that thing, and she did it anyway. And that was [. . .] the turning point. [. . .]

Third, some residents were expecting to move into a *queer* community. *"For me, the co-housing group is queer because queer people want to feel at home here"*, says Laura, a mother in a rainbow family. For Laura and others, queerness is central to their sense of home. They value shared experiences, shared ethics of care, active engagement against discrimination, and shared interests in making queerness visible. Ilse, mentioned above, was not only looking for a community but specifically for a community that would be sensible towards her sexuality and her past experiences of discrimination. Also, Barbara (see above), imagined a community that would foster queer values and promote a queer political agenda.

Finally, some residents do not have specific ideas as to what it means to live in a queer-inclusive home, and some even want to give queerness a less prominent role in the house. Astrid, for instance, states: "*Well, I have a rainbow doormat, but it's also not like we're running around all the time saying 'Ahh, I'm a lesbian, you are a lesbian, do you feel lesbian enough?*'" She goes on to say that she does not want to live in the "Türkis-Rosa-Lila Villa", a queer political centre in Vienna and highlights that Queerhaus is not supposed to be a political project; the partly queer community is an attribute of Queerhaus, but not its primary focus. She, and many others, interpret the "queer" aspect as a general attitude of tolerance towards different people but not as a call to actively engage with and promote queerness.

The differences in expectations and reasons to move into the project are directly related to the charred sense of community, particularly among the queer residents who expected an active identity-based group. Furthermore, they are also the basis of feelings of unsafety and conflict among residents.

Visibility and Sense of Safety

Having a sense of safety is integral to a feeling of home. Queerhaus is located at Vienna's edge and is relatively isolated from everyday infrastructure and public transport. Additionally, the surrounding area barely displays any signs of LGBTQ+ representation. Interviews and mapping exercises reveal that residents are anxious about queerphobic threats coming from the neighbourhood. "*We have huge municipal housing estates, so it is not the case that this [queerness] is normal to everyone*," says Laura, who sees the inhabitants of municipal housing as a potential threat. Astrid refrains from placing a rainbow flag on her balcony because she fears young men from the municipal housing estates might throw something towards her. Such narratives of fear are connected to an association of municipal housing with lower-class and immigrant-status inhabitants, which is in line with literature that has highlighted queer spaces of fear in Vienna as classed and racialised (Klapeer and Schönpflug 2020). This perceived threat is omnipresent among the interviewed residents of Queerhaus; however, there are no reports of hostility from the surrounding area. This may be because the house barely signals queerness to the outside – Queerhaus does not display queer flags or promote queer-focused events.

However, creating a sense of safety through hiding the project's queer focus stands in contrast to the collective queer identity expression that some residents had hoped for. This tension becomes visible in discussions around the community café, originally meant to be open to the public. Located on the ground floor of Queerhaus, the space has big glass windows, and a terrace oriented towards the estate's centre. It promises a lively community; however, there is disagreement over questions of "how queer" and "queer how". Some think that the café should be a queer space, with ideas ranging from labelling it as queer-friendly to making it a pillar of the queer community in the neighbourhood and providing social support for young queer groups in the surrounding districts. Conversely, others conceive Queerhaus as a residential place and argue that the café was primarily meant for co-housing residents. Some fear that they will feel excluded from a queer space because they do not identify as queer or are not recognised as "properly" queer. Others fear to feel uncomfortable frequenting a queer centre that might attract unwanted attention.

The question of what the café should be is a point of conflict among co-housing residents, which has led to the café's indefinite closure. When looking back on it, Barbara (lesbian) remains indignant: "*The others had a vision of a café that was not queer at all*." The conflict around sense of safety and queer identity expression has deepened social fault lines within the project. Fierce discussions about identity have led to a hostile climate whereby some residents feel that their neighbours have crossed the line into queer-phobia, finding themselves constrained from expressing themselves as queer. Furthermore, by being marginalised within the project, many queer residents feel unable to co-create a safe queer space, as will be discussed in the next section. In the end, the discomfort of some residents with a communal public space that is deliberately and explicitly outside the general norm – i.e. marked as queer – has frustrated the LGBTQ+ café initiative and led to the discrimination of queer-identifying residents.

Co-Production and Sense of Control

Participating and having their voice heard generally gives residents a sense of ownership and control over their living space. However, sense of control has been undermined by the way co-production has been organised. The embedding in the social housing system, the role of the community manager, and the dynamics among the residents have hampered the way queer residents can participate and feel at home.

First, the fact that Viennese Housing Service recruited a third of the inhabitants meant that many residents did not intentionally choose a (queer) co-housing group. We already described how these are generally less interested in participating in a (queer) co-housing community, undermining the enthusiasm and initiatives of more idealistic or activist residents.

Second, numerous participants question the central role of the community manager. They believe that the presence of such a top-down "manager", who exerts his own beliefs surrounding the meaning of queer inclusion in group processes, defeats the aim of collectively co-creating a home. Being one of the project's founders and appointed by the cooperative, the community manager has had a significant role in shaping the project. He presented the group to the outside in the early stages, had the final say in accepting applicants (except those from the Housing Service) and was the first point of contact for new members. He also met prospective residents from the Housing Service to present the queer-inclusive focus of the group. Notably, the initiator has a specific view of what a queer-inclusive co-housing group should look like. "*I am someone who wants to live with other people*", the initiator tells us. He then explains that he does not want to overwhelm the surrounding neighbourhood with queerness and distance himself from normative society. As we have described earlier, such an approach to queer inclusion that does not ask for exclusively and explicitly queer spaces can exclude those queer bodies who would only feel at home in a more safeguarded space (Ghaziani 2016). Residents who disagree with the manager's view on queer inclusion and who want a stronger queer identity in the project are generally unhappy with the initiator's power. Until his appointment as community manager ended, he was shaping the co-housing community without even living there, they say.

Lastly, the means of communication has also been a factor in the conflict. A larger group of residents communicate using a WhatsApp chat to which many queer-identifying

co-housing residents have not been invited. This way, some are excluded from information and further community building. Additionally, Queerhaus' email account and website are administered by people in this dominant group. Thus, not everyone has a say in Queerhaus' online presence.

How Much Mixing is Too Much?

Despite social ambitions, Queerhaus does not foster the desired social inclusion of LGBTQ + groups. Feelings of home and belonging are partly present, yet the residents are split on what their community should be. Despite inclusion efforts through social mixing, inhabitants segregated (social compartmentalisation, see Chaskin 2013) due to differences in ideas and expectations of what queerness means. This split related to how the project came into being and signified a disturbed home-making process, undermining a sense of belonging. Early working group meetings were mainly concerned with architecture, construction, and general community building – but what it means to be queer only came up for debate after conflicts first arose. There was and is no agreed-upon interpretation of queer inclusion in Queerhaus.

Many residents also see the composition of the group, and particularly the share of LGBTQ+ inhabitants, as fundamental. According to participant estimations, around a third of the households identify as queer. Ilse (lesbian) comments:

> If we had been 90/10 [(90 per cent queers and ten non-queers)], then the 90% would not be hindered in their queer way of life. However, if you turn it around, the queers are gone. Then no queer way of life exists anymore.

As an example, she mentions issues around being visible as a queer co-housing project. *"I think there is a lot of fear involved, and because they are the majority, there is no will to engage with it."* The low presence of LGBTQ+ residents is, as discussed, a result of the selection process of the Housing Service and the community manager, who selected the other residents. Some non-queer participants among the interviewees do recognise that queer residents are excluded from participating in the co-housing group. Yet, they are reluctant to make the project more visible as queer. By not acting against exclusionary processes and maintaining the status quo, they effectively reproduce normative society within an intended queer space. The cohousing group thus promotes a notion of home for residents whose lived experiences lie closer to societal norms of private homes for heteronormative household arrangements – even if they identify as queer or LGBTQ+. The subjectivities of queers who had hoped for a home that is queer-centred are often marked by discrimination experiences; in the investigated group, these residents continue to remain on the margins.

Conclusion

This paper sought to understand the inclusive potential of socially mixed "queer" co-housing groups where LGBTQ+ individuals can feel at home. In our unique case study of Queerhaus, a queer-inclusive co-housing group in Vienna, we examined the sense of community, safety, and control of queer residents. In general, many queer residents do not feel like they belong due to diverging expectations and ambitions towards the group, leading to an unresolved

conflict over what queer co-housing should entail. Contradictory understandings of purpose hindered a sense of conviviality, instrumental to queer belonging (cf. Bain and Podmore 2021), and led to fractions. The conflicts in the group are rooted in the set-up of the project in two ways:

First, the mix of top-down and bottom-up co-production in Queerhaus hampered the formation of an inclusive community. While the project was subject to formalised rules and regulations regarding income defined by Vienna's housing system, it aimed to attract LGBTQ+ participants mainly through word of mouth and online presence. No rules and regulations – not top-down nor bottom-up developed – existed to ensure a diversity of gender and sexual identities. Technically, this less formalised way of enabling the presence of a minoritised group in a co-housing project gives this group the opportunity to decide on their neighbours communally. However, in practice, the combination of the entry criteria of the social housing system and the influential position of a community manager hindered many queer inhabitants from finding belonging through participating in a project that could question housing norms. While the social housing subsidies are vital for affordability, such a queer project would need to include queer residents in decision-making, even in top-down initiated or subsidised co-housing groups. Furthermore, as England (2022) has shown for homelessness services in Wales, social institutions often structurally discriminate against queers. This points to the need for protected spaces for queer residents through legally implemented positive discrimination (ibid).

Second, more than simply ensuring the presence of LGBTQ+ groups in co-housing, our study points towards the importance of similar ideas and intentions regarding the potential and meaning of a queer-inclusive co-housing project among residents for them to feel at home. Queer geography studies have indicated that working on a future in a spirit of conviviality and generosity can foster a sense of queer belonging (Bain and Podmore 2021; Bain, Payne, and Isen 2015). Likewise, housing studies have examined the motivations for joining co-housing and forming intentional communities (see Lang, Carriou, and Czischke 2020). However, how those motivations relate to queer inclusion has not been investigated. We found two approaches to queer inclusion in Queerhaus that contradict each other: queerness as a general attitude of accepting different lived realities, or queerness as directly engaged with through specific queer practices and visible representation. Particularly when negotiating visible identity expression versus a sense of safety, the two approaches are contradictory and lead to conflict. This points to the importance of recognising that the queer community, such as other minoritised groups, is itself diverse. Some LGBTQ+ people embrace assimilation to cis-hetero norms. In this way, they are "straightening" (Ghaziani 2016, 128), which can lead to the closure of designated queer spaces (Gieseking 2020). However, not everyone can or wants to "straighten" themselves. In our case, those residents who are easily read as queer (e.g. a lesbian couple with children) and those who have been subject to discrimination throughout their lives would benefit from working towards a queer space. This calls for designated queer co-housing groups and social housing projects, which see queer bodies as the "normative, anticipated, and provided-for person" (Carr et al. 2022, 13).

So, paradoxically, too much diversity in a co-housing group can lead to exclusionary processes instead of promoting inclusion. This conclusion aligns with the literature on social mixing in housing (Chaskin 2013; Tersteeg and Pinkster 2016; Valentine 2008). Our study contributes to housing studies that seek to understand how we may design and manage inclusive and affordable co-housing (Bresson and Labit 2020; Droste 2015; Scheller and Thörn

2018). Including marginalised groups cannot be done by simply "mainstreaming" them into existing structures (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph 2012). Instead, these groups need to be centred on the co-creation process. For this, a more significant number of queer inhabitants and more similar ideas of queer inclusion would have been required. There is a need to question normative practices of inclusion, recognising that the meanings of inclusion are specific to minoritised groups. In general, the ambitious aim of making co-housing groups affordable and LGBTQ±centred should not be abandoned but explored further through modes of co-production that could lead to a more intentional community while still assuring affordability and accessibility.

Notes

1. We use the terms queer and LGBTQ+ interchangeably.
2. Project name and location pseudonymised.
3. We use the term "minoritised" instead of "minority" to highlight the active process that leads to the minoritised position of certain individuals and groups (Selvarajah et al. (2020).
4. The first author also visited participants' apartments and community spaces.
5. They followed sociocracy principles, a method to govern groups, which is based on consensual decision making instead of majority voting. This method was abandoned after conflict arose in the group.
6. Average rent in Vienna was 9,30€ including running costs (measured in the second quarter of 2023 across all housing types (municipal, cooperative, private rental), Statistik Austria 2024)
7. As stated by the initiators as well as on the project's website (legal limit (Stadt. Wien, n.d.) plus running costs).
8. Age is approximated to ensure participant anonymity.

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