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Can Collaborative Housing Become an Opportunity for More People? – Insights from International Research and Implications for the Swedish Context

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Abstract. *Collaborative housing is an umbrella term for housing that is based on collectivity and self-organisation. In recent years, this form of housing has again been highlighted as an opportunity to create affordable and socially inclusive residential areas. However, collaborative housing is also recognised for its organisational complexity and legal uncertainty, particularly during the start-up phase. Research suggests that these issues may result in it being primarily accessible to the middle class, that is, people who generally already have access to the housing market. In some contexts, such as Sweden, there are discussions on its potential contribution to broader housing market problems and the hurdles that need to be overcome to make it more easily accessible. This study takes Swedish collaborative housing initiatives as its point of departure. It examines international research to identify what is considered crucial for collaborative housing to function as an affordable and socially inclusive housing option, and maps gaps in Swedish policy and research that may hinder broader access. The analysis is based on a two-step integrated literature review, combining Swedish policy documents and national literature with a systematic review of international research on legal frameworks, potential future residents, and cooperation with key partners. The findings indicate that collaborative housing has the potential to develop into an affordable and socially inclusive housing option for a broader segment of the population. However, realising this potential requires addressing underexplored legal challenges, reducing institutional, economic, temporal, and organisational barriers, establishing supportive relationships with public and private actors, and critically engaging with tensions related to social heterogeneity and inclusivity.*

Keywords: *affordable housing, collaborative housing, social housing, social mix, sustainable housing*

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1 Introduction

Collaborative housing is a term widely used for alternative housing forms based on collectivity and self-organisation. It is commonly described as a housing form in which residents collaborate at different stages of the project, from planning and design to the everyday self-management of the building (Tummers 2015; Lang et al. 2020: Bossuyt 2022; Fromm 2012). Collaborative housing is sometimes framed as a strategic component in the creation of mixed neighbourhoods that provide a platform for social cohesion and a sense of security, especially for people living alone and the elderly. In this regard, it is often discussed as a potential response to address broader societal trends that place new demands on the housing market, such as the growing number of single households and an ageing population (Vestbro 2010; Grundström 2021). Beyond its social dimension, collaborative housing is also associated with a range of additional societal benefits, including the provision of more affordable housing, the development of healthy and child-friendly neighbourhoods, improved energy efficiency, and its potential role as a mechanism for social integration (Fölster 2023). In addition, collaborative housing has been argued to contribute to architectural diversity, particularly in the design of neighbourhoods and common spaces (Sangregorio 2000). In a broader policy context, collaborative housing aligns with several objectives within the UN 2030 Agenda SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, including the goal of ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing (11.1), promoting inclusive and sustainable urban communities (11.3) and supporting sustainable urbanisation strategies (11.b).

Despite these potential benefits, collaborative housing has been criticised for being mainly accessible to more affluent households with the necessary social and economic resources, contributing more to gentrification than to integration (Czischke 2018; Reynolds 2018; Scheller & Thörn 2018). One reason for this critique lies in the conditions under which collaborative housing projects are typically initiated. Initiating a collaborative housing project often requires long-term collaboration between different actors, including future residents and external parties such as municipalities and real estate companies. As a result, committed individuals who are willing and able to navigate a complex and time-consuming process are crucial, with access to both capital and time being important factors for a household's ability to participate (Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019). In this context, municipal support is often described as essential, not only to provide access to land but also to facilitate the land development process and potentially also to act as a facilitator throughout project development (Boverket 2018). Beyond municipalities, other external actors, including consultants and financiers, may also play important roles.

This study takes the Swedish context as its point of departure, where collaborative housing is widely regarded as a promising and socially beneficial housing approach and is actively promoted by public actors, in particular municipalities. This positive orientation is reflected in a research and policy discourse that assumes collaborative housing can contribute to the broader housing market and the existing housing stock, while at the same time engaging

with questions of how such housing forms can be made affordable and socially inclusive form of living for a broader group of potential future residents.

Based on a review of the Swedish research and policy context, this study identifies a set of recurring barriers and proposed solutions related to the development of collaborative housing into an opportunity for more people. These insights are used as an analytical point of departure to formulate three research questions addressing how collaborative housing can be developed as an affordable and socially inclusive housing form for a broader segment of the population. The research questions are: (1) What legal frameworks are needed to support affordable and socially inclusive collaborative housing? (2) For which groups could collaborative housing present a new opportunity of living? and (3) What can build and facilitate essential relationships between collaborative housing communities and external parties?

Even though the study is grounded in the Swedish context, it recognises that the challenges, mechanisms and development pathways associated with collaborative housing are not unique to Sweden. Building on the three research questions, the study employs a systematic literature review of international research to examine what may be required to develop collaborative housing as an affordable and socially inclusive housing option for broader groups of residents.

The combined review serves two purposes. First, it examines to what extent and in what ways the challenges and potential solutions identified in the Swedish context are also addressed in international research and practice, and aims to identify potential research gaps. Second, the review has a broader analytical purpose: to map challenges and proposed solutions in the international literature on collaborative housing relevant to the development of collaborative housing into a viable option for affordable and socially inclusive housing for a broader segment of the population.

Moreover, the study contributes methodologically by combining a national policy-oriented literature review with a systematic international literature review. This dual approach enables the identification of research questions that are grounded in ongoing societal and policy debates, while simultaneously supporting systematic and scientifically robust analysis and conclusions. The methodology is adaptable and can be applied in other national contexts, offering both researchers and policymakers a structured tool for mapping challenges, research gaps, and development pathways in their own settings. In this respect, the comparative linkage between national and international perspectives may also facilitate cross-national and regional studies, for example across the Nordic countries, by highlighting shared challenges as well as context-specific solutions.

In the paper, collaborative housing has been widely defined in line with Fromm (2012), focusing on housing models designed to foster social community during both the development and operational phases. Further, the four criteria suggested by Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2020) (autonomy, participatory democracy, internal solidarity and external solidarity) have guided the selection of collective housing solutions included in the study. The chosen definition includes e.g., building communities, characterised by the collective involvement in the

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development and design of housing, as well as collective housing, characterised more by shared living arrangements and the collective organisation of everyday life. Further, there has been no pre-decided delimitation with regards to different forms of collaboration models, such as intergenerational, senior, and eco concepts, as affordable and inclusive solutions may be found in a wide variety of concepts. Both rental and ownership forms are included, if the forms cater for individual apartments as well as shared spaces, and if the form is initiated by residents or stakeholders aiming to keep housing costs low. Exclusion criteria apply to models lacking a social community focus, housing without individual apartments, and developments driven by external actors for profit, with little or no resident involvement during the planning stage.

Consequently, literature on co-living models has not been included in the study, except for Grundström (2021) who contrasted co-living against other forms of collaborative housing. Although co-living, and collaborative housing both involve shared living arrangements, co-living differs in its organisation and intent. Co-living is typically market-driven and professionally managed, with limited resident control and an emphasis on flexibility and short- to medium-term occupancy. In contrast, collaborative housing, as defined and used in this study, is generally resident-led, non-profit or cooperative in nature, and oriented towards long-term collective governance, and community-building.

After this introduction, the paper provides a description of the method, methodological considerations and limitations. Thereafter, the third section provides an overview of the Swedish context, elaborating on the challenges highlighted in Swedish reports, inquiries, and research that act as barriers to the development of collaborative housing into a more inclusive form of living. This section delineates the key focus areas and challenges, setting the stage for an in-depth examination of international research presented in the fourth section. Section five entail the findings from the integrating process of mapping the international literature into key themes. The paper concludes by addressing the three research questions through a synthesis of findings on legal frameworks, potential future residents, and cooperation with key partners. Drawing on international research on the barriers, solutions, and enabling conditions for collaborative housing, the paper identifies, in relation to the Swedish context, key gaps in existing research and policy relevant to developing collaborative housing as an affordable, socially inclusive, and viable housing option for a broader segment of the population.

2 Method

The chosen method for this study is a two-step integrated literature review, combining an initial national document and literature search with a subsequent systematic international literature review.

2.1 National document and literature search – Sweden

The initial national search includes grey literature and was conducted using university library catalogues (LIBRIS, DiVA), institutional and governmental websites (The Government, Regeringen.se; the National Board of Housing,

Building and Planning, Boverket.se), and complementary web searches using google and the following webpages: kollektivhus.nu, divcity.se, socialtbyggande.se and byggemenskap.se. In addition to these searches, manual searches of reference lists from key documents and snowballing techniques were employed to identify further relevant sources. To enhance the robustness of the search, both authors conducted the initial searches independently and subsequently compared and discussed their findings. This iterative process allowed for cross-validation of sources and the identification of complementary materials, thereby strengthening the breadth and credibility of the initial review despite its exploratory character.

The aim with the initial national document and literature search was to identify Swedish books, reports, governmental investigations, policy documents, research projects relevant to collaborative housing within the Swedish context, and materials produced by civil society organisations and sectoral actors. Search terms included Swedish terms such as *kollektivhus*, *bogemenskap*, *byggemenskap*, as well as English terms such as collaborative housing, given that these terms occur also in Swedish publications. The search includes documents and articles published in 2000–2023 (until September 2023). The search was exploratory in character and aimed to provide both an overview of existing knowledge and insight into recurring problem framings and identified potential solutions. This approach reflects the practice-oriented and policy-driven nature of knowledge production in the field, capturing the challenges, solutions, and experiences identified by those actively engaged in the idea-based and non-profit housing sector. By including grey literature, the study builds a foundational understanding of the societal debate, practical realities, and interpretative frameworks underpinning development and work with collaborative housing in Sweden. The findings were used to formulate three research questions that formed the basis for the subsequent international systematic literature review. Building on the identified barriers and opportunities in the Swedish context, the study departs from three key aspects (KA1–3) that structure current debates on the development of collaborative housing as an affordable and socially inclusive opportunity for a broader segment of the population; these KAs guide the formulation of the research questions explored through the review.

2.2 Systematic international literature review

Based on the research questions that were formulated by the initial national literature search the systematic international literature review was carried out in two stages. First, relevant sources have been identified and collected by means of a systematic literature search (Coren & Fisher 2006; Harden 2001; Peersman & Oakley 2001). The material was then sorted, systematised and critically analysed based on the research questions (Noblit & Hare 1988).

The systematic literature review is based on previously conducted literature studies on collaborative housing (Lang et al. 2020; Tummers 2016; Vestbro 2000). The selection criteria for including and excluding articles were informed by Fromm's (2012) definition of collaborative housing (see the Introduction section).

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These studies have been conducted with the aim of creating a clearer framework and understanding of the research field. In relation to these literature studies, this study constitutes a complement and a development of knowledge through deepening and a clear focus on a defined issue in a Swedish context.

The literature review includes published scientific articles dealing with collaborative housing in a mainly European context. The research questions have guided the selection of material, which means that literature covering other aspects has not been included. The literature review includes scientific articles written in English or Nordic languages. Searches have been made in several subject-specific databases and have been documented with number of hits, dates, keywords and inclusion and exclusion criteria. A first selection was made based on titles and abstracts. The articles included after this step have been screened to create a final selection of articles that are of direct or indirect relevance to answer the research questions.

In a first step, relevant search terms in English have been identified based on previous literature reviews, whereby search terms such as "collaborative housing", "co-housing" and "self-organ* housing" have been identified. These keywords have then been combined and supplemented with relevant keywords for the research Questions KA1–3. For KA1 additional search words were used to limit the search results in a relevant way within the subject, law. In addition to the basic search terms, used also for KA 2–3, search terms such as "housing co-op*" and "housing commons" were also identified as relevant. In addition, the search was limited using legal terms such as ownership and tenancy. The search terms for KA1 were also complemented with corresponding keywords in Swedish, Norwegian and Danish for searches in Nordic databases. In this part, relevant keywords have been defined and identified through translations and through snowball searches in relevant articles and websites. For KA2 and 3, the keyword afford* has been used to limit the search within the main research question of affordable housing for more people. Combinations with other possible keywords such as sust*, low-cost and access* did not lead to any improvement in relevant search results.

The literature review includes articles published in the period 2000–2023 (until September 2023). The period has been chosen in order for the research to reflect collaborative projects and discussions based on that time and with the incentives and societal organisational conditions that now prevail. Social norms and conditions, including visions and ideologies behind collaborative housing projects, have continuously changed. The chosen period, for example, limits research that is mainly based on the conditions that prevailed in the 1970s-1990s, during a time when the forms and objectives of collaborative housing projects were undergoing changes (Vestbro 2000).

The initial searches were carried out by both authors and a final control search was carried out by one of the authors to double-check and provide an opportunity to discuss the articles noted as relevant. Full text searches for KA2 and 3 have been conducted in Jstor, Web of Science, Scopus and Springer Link, and for KA1 in Westlaw, Heinonline, JUNO, KARNOV and Lovdata. In addition to database

searches, specialised searches were conducted in the Swedish Royal Library's Libris database.

The number of search hits in the various databases has been summarised in Appendix A (KA 1) and Appendix B (KA 2 and 3). After applying initial delimitation criteria and inclusion and exclusion strategies (search report Appendix C (KA1) and Appendix D (KA 2 and 3), 53 scientific articles were identified as relevant and included in the study. Finally, the sources included in the final selection of the systematic literature review were analysed for their relationship to each other using a qualitative meta-ethnographic approach. By categorising and translating studies into common concepts and themes, the conditions are thus created for adding a new interpretation that goes beyond the findings of the original literature (Noblit & Hare 1988). The results of the international systematic literature review were then contrasted with the insights from the national search, identifying gaps and overlaps in both contexts.

Including manual searches, reports, surveys and monographs, a total of 77 sources were used to inform the study.

2.3 Methodological considerations and limitations

The initial national document and literature search was exploratory and non-systematic in nature, and therefore does not allow for full control, reproducibility, or precision in terms of search coverage. The inclusion of grey literature entails certain methodological limitations, as such sources are not subject to peer review and may reflect normative assumptions or strategic interests of the producing organisations. At the same time, the use of grey literature allows the study to capture ongoing policy debates and practice-oriented knowledge that is often not yet reflected in academic publications. Given that the aim of this initial phase was to capture how challenges and opportunities related to collaborative housing are framed and debated within policy and practice, rather than to exhaustively map academic research, this approach was considered both relevant and sufficient for the purpose.

The subsequent systematic international literature review focused exclusively on scientific articles to ensure analytical rigor, transparency, and reproducibility. Limitations of this approach include reliance on selected databases, the choice of search terms, and language and publication-type restrictions, which may result in some relevant studies being excluded. The systematic international literature review included studies from multiple scholarly databases, covering a range of topics and research methods. Due to this diversity, and in particular because studies with a legal focus differ from other research in methodology, epistemological foundation, and database structures, the review required a minor adjustment in delimitation across research domains. For the legal analysis, the delimitation was based on legal tradition rather than strict geographical boundaries. While most European jurisdictions belong to Western legal systems, some do not fully conform to this categorisation. Including European non-western legal traditions in the study would be as problematic as excluding non-European jurisdictions that share the same legal tradition. Therefore, the review focused on Western legal

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systems in terms of legal family rather than geography, in order to capture central legal concepts and forms of reasoning relevant to the European, and specifically Swedish, context. A strict geographical focus, in law, is only appropriate for national doctrinal studies, which was not the purpose of this study. In recognition of the specialised methodological and epistemological requirements of legal research, legal literature searches and analyses were conducted by the team member with expertise in law before findings were compared and integrated. Conclusions were subsequently drawn with careful consideration of these distinctions, ensuring that the review maintained both methodological rigor and analytical coherence across heterogeneous sources.

Further, with regards to the Swedish focus of the study, findings from international studies may not be directly transferable to Swedish policy or practice. Differences in governance, housing systems, and social norms mean that conclusions must be interpreted cautiously when applied nationally. Accordingly, the findings are not presented as ready-to-implement solutions. Instead, they indicate areas for further investigation and potential adaptation within Sweden, providing a foundation for policy and practice-oriented research.

Together, the two approaches complement each other. The exploratory national search grounds the study in the Swedish policy and practice context, ensuring inclusion of perspectives that may not appear in academic publications, while the systematic international review strengthens the study's methodological rigor and provides a comprehensive overview of scientific evidence. This combination balances breadth and depth, allowing the study to address both practical and scholarly dimensions of the research questions.

3 Key aspects, identified barriers and potential solutions to developing collaborative housing as a viable option for a broader part of the population in Sweden

3.1 Background

The collective organisation of daily household chores in collaborative housing started already in 1907 in Stockholm. However, practical implementation of collaborative housing has been limited (Vestbro 2010). Vestbro (2014) describes two phases in the development of collaborative housing in Sweden: in the years 1930–70 well-serviced family hotels were in focus, thereafter self-organised collaborative housing came to dominate. The 1980s saw a rise in collaborative housing with approximately 50 projects built, often with the involvement of municipal housing companies and cooperative housing actors. (Sangregorio 2000; Vestbro 2014; Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019) After a quieter period in the 1990s, the 2000s have seen a rising interest in collaborative housing being manifested by the restart of the organisation *Kollektivhus NU* (Co-housing NOW) in 2005 and *Föreningen för byggemenskaper* (the Association for construction communities) in 2011, as well as measures taken by the state and some municipalities. *Boverket* (The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning) investigated the prerequisites for collaborative housing and published guidelines for municipalities

in 2018 (Boverket 2018). They also provide starter grants to new collaborative housing projects (Boverket 2021). A state inquiry mentions collaborative housing as a partial solution to the housing crisis for lower income households (SOU 2022:14). Several state research grants have financed research on collaborative housing, *eg*, Divercity (Divercity 2021).

There is a diverse collaborative housing scene in Sweden including all forms of tenures and different founding ideas such as intergenerational and second-half-of-life collaborative housing, self-build communities and eco-village concepts. Tenures and founding ideas are often mixed, making strict categorisation difficult. Despite the increased interest in collaborative housing, the number of active collaborations is limited. For example, the collaborative housing association *Kollektivhus NU* currently has 45 members (Kollektivhus NU 2024). The web page *Bygg och bo ihop* (Build and live together) provides information on collaborative housing and currently lists 184 projects (Bygg och bo ihop 2024).

The knowledge on affordability and accessibility in Swedish collaborative housing is limited. Scheller and Thörn (2018) claim that collaborative housing is dominated by the middle class, which is confirmed by the large number of ownership projects. Social mix is high on the agenda in Sweden and therefore projects that include people on lower incomes tend to have a core of residents with higher than average social and economic capital. Rental or cooperative rental collaborative housing that is built solely for or by lower income groups is very limited. Both the construction community organisation *Föreningen för byggemenskaper* and *Kollektivhus NU* still point to hurdles for starting new projects (Föreningen för byggemenskaper 2024) and the state continues to finance research on the topic. Distinctions between the different forms of collaborative housing and different founding ideas are seldom made, and various concepts tend to be bundled together. This might stem from the fact that there are few projects and that projects might mix various collaborative housing concepts, tenures and income groups. Top-down models, except for co-living, are not on the agenda in Sweden.

Based on the reviewed literature and policy documents, three key aspects repeatedly emerge in Swedish discussions on collaborative housing. First, the legal and institutional setting is highlighted as a crucial framework shaping both the feasibility and long-term sustainability of collaborative housing initiatives. Second, discussions focus on potential future residents, particularly questions of affordability, inclusivity, and the social and economic capacities required to participate in collaborative housing. Third, the importance of key partners, including municipalities, property owners (other than municipalities), financial institutions, interest organisations and civil society actors, is consistently highlighted as fundamental for initiating, developing and sustaining collaborative housing projects.

The following sections are organised around these three interrelated aspects. Together, they provide a structured account of the issues most frequently addressed in the literature, which subsequently inform the formulation of the research questions.

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3.2 The legal institutional framework

The legal and institutional framework for collaborative housing in Sweden is broadly characterised as straightforward, facilitating the development of these communities with mechanisms like cooperative tenancy (*Swe. kooperativ hyresrätt*) and ground leases of municipally owned land *(Swe. tomträtt*). These approaches are highlighted for their potential to reduce housing costs and enhance social cohesion (Divercity 2021; Boverket 2018). Despite the viability of cooperative tenancies, the cooperative rental model is discussed as encountering obstacles, including a lack of familiarity among banks and builders, as well as higher stamp duties compared to cooperative housing companies (*Swe. bostadsrättsföreningar*), which is highlighted as a significant challenge (SOU 2022:14; SOU 2017:108).

Legal and construction complexities are pinpointed as significant barriers to the development of collaborative housing, calling for enhanced architectural and project management support to overcome these hurdles (SOU 2015:85; Divercity 2021). The necessity for detailed planning and land development agreements that accommodate collaborative housing formats is also stressed, indicating a need for more inclusive and flexible planning policies (Divercity 2021). It is noteworthy that the legal and financial process for establishing collaborative housing projects is primarily discussed. The question of how the legal and financial organisation should work over time receives much less focus. However, the fact that there are differences between these two stages seems to be established as an important difference, for example the themes collective self-build (Swe. *byggemenskap*) and housing community (Swe. *bogemenskap*) have been launched to distinguish the initial formation of collaborative housing communities from their sustained long-term operation, suggesting that different strategies and considerations are required at each stage of development (Boverket 2018).

Based on these findings, the literature highlights legal and institutional arrangements, such as cooperative tenancies and the use of municipal land through ground lease, as central to both enabling and constraining the development of collaborative housing in Sweden. Legal, financial and planning-related complexities are discussed as key barriers.

3.3 Potential future residents

In Sweden, discussions on collaborative housing reveal a paradox: while aiming to address inclusivity and affordability for a wide variety of households like the young, single parents, the elderly, families, those with disabilities, the structurally homeless, and newly arrived migrants (Arroyo et al. 2022; Fölster 2023), current approaches demand significant time and resources, potentially excluding those they aim to benefit (Scheller & Thörn 2018). The involvement of future residents in the development process, while essential, might clash with the practicalities of their socio-economic capabilities (Caldenby 2019). To work towards inclusivity, strategies like creating larger communities to distribute individual burdens (Sangregorio 2000; Arroyo et al. 2022) and joint purchases to cut costs (Grundström 2021; Sangregorio 2000) are proposed. However, such models raise discussions on the balance of interests of households with different

socio-economic power and ability to contribute to the community. Creating a sustainable resident mix over time is pointed out as crucial. Scheller och Thörn (2018) point to that residents with a higher social and economic capital can assist in the inclusion of less privileged residents to a certain degree. Strategies and routines for selecting new residents are also said to have an important impact (e.g. Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019). Moreover, the literature includes reflections on Swedish cultural ideals related to autonomy and co-dependency, as well as privacy and community (Sandstedt & Westin 2015; Törnqvist 2019).

This juxtaposition of ideals versus realities underlines the challenge: striving for a housing model that is both inclusive and practical yet facing hurdles that could side line intended beneficiaries. The dialogue thus calls for innovative solutions to reconcile the desire for inclusivity with the complexities of implementation, ensuring collaborative housing serves all segments of society (Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019; Scheller & Thörn 2018).

Based on these findings, the literature highlights questions of inclusion and exclusion, specifically which additional groups may be included in collaborative housing communities, and frames social and economic capacities, as well as cultural ideals, as key factors shaping both barriers and opportunities.

3.4 Cooperation with key partners

Blomberg and Kärnekull (2019) emphasise the necessity of collaboration with external parties as a foundational requirement for initiating a collaborative housing project in Sweden. Interest organisations play a key role in gathering and disseminating knowledge, as well as educating project enablers and residents. Further, support from municipalities is deemed crucial in the establishment of collaborative housing, through customised land allocation and planning processes, on top of spreading information and other project enabling measures (Boverket 2018; Divercity 2021). It is also pointed out that municipalities need to develop new ways of working that fit the needs and composition of collaborative housing actors (Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019). The prospect of collaborative housing to include individuals who face difficulties in the housing market, such as the elderly, and the structurally homeless, is a factor that could align with the interests of municipalities and might therefore be a compelling reason for municipalities to engage in this form of collaborations (e.g. Arroyo et al. 2022). Further, collaborative housing is pinpointed as a strategic solution to reinvigorate areas that large developers often overlook (Divercity 2021; Hedström & Broms Wessel 2016). Financing is considered a cornerstone for initiating projects (Divercity 2021).

Partnerships with property owners have been pointed out as crucial both for developing new housing and getting access to existing buildings. Using existing buildings may be a path to cost-effective and resource-efficient housing solutions (Sangregorio 2000; Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019). Different types of property owners such as municipal housing companies, foundations or commercial property developers, create different types of collaborative housing. The choice of renting versus owning the buildings impacts household composition and community governance. The initiator of the community directly affects the dynamics and

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outcomes for residents. In cooperation with external parties, decision power of the various participants will influence the distribution of power, for example between the community, the municipality and intermediaries (Scheller & Thörn 2018). Civil society organisations also raise the question of support to vulnerable households, as for example in the Stockholm City Mission's initiative to develop housing for the vulnerable. Fölster (2023) also suggests that philanthropical organisations should support collaborative housing integrating immigrants.

Based on these findings, cooperation between collaborative housing groups and a varied set of partners, including the state, municipalities, property owners, interest organisations and civil society, is framed in the literature as central to addressing key barriers and enabling solutions related to affordability, inclusivity and project implementation in collaborative housing.

3.5 Research questions

Building on the identified barriers and opportunities in the Swedish context, this study departs from the three key aspects (KAs) that structure current debates on the development of collaborative housing as an affordable and socially inclusive opportunity for a broader segment of the population. These KAs guide the formulation of the research questions explored through the international systematic literature review.

KA1 Legal and institutional frameworks: What legal frameworks are needed to support affordable and socially inclusive collaborative housing?

KA2 Potential future residents: For which groups could collaborative housing present a new opportunity of living?

KA3 Cooperation with key partners: What can build and facilitate essential relationships between collaborative housing communities and external parties?

The next section will focus on findings in literature on Western legal systems, focusing och European literature but including also literature regarding other Western legal systems (KA 1) and literature encompassing European literature (KAs 2–3). Attention will be paid to both the start-up phase and the management phase of collaborative housing.

4 Findings

In this study, a meta-ethnographic approach has been chosen for analysing the identified and relevant sources, wherein the method, analysis, and findings are integrated into a process of mapping the literature into key themes. Thus, the presentation of the findings in the international literature in the following is structured according to this mapping analysis and the main thematic areas of the respective research questions. For the first question, key themes include legal ambiguity, obligation towards common good, planning process neutrality, and ownership models for stability. Key themes for the second question have been identified to be income, demographics, social mixing, and values/motives. The third question addresses the key themes: bottom-up vs. top-down models, public support, tenure types, cost savings, and relations with external actors. Relevant articles for this section were selected based on search methods outlined in

Appendices A and C for the first question, and Appendices B and D for the second and third questions.

4.1 What legal frameworks are needed to ensure affordable and socially inclusive collaborative housing both initially and over time?

Fundamental systematic legal ambiguity

A fundamental problem raised by, among others, Kassan et al (2012), Chiodelli (2015), and Schmid (2020) is that collaborative housing represents a legally intractable challenge that, for several reasons, cannot be handled within the framework of existing norms and principles on ownership and land use in the Western legal systems. Collaborative housing is situated within a broader, global trend toward the blending of individual and collective ownership and use of the same buildings and sites. Across jurisdictions, similar foundational legal challenges emerge: how to recognise, structure, and enforce collective rights and responsibilities alongside individual property interests. The literature suggests that these challenges are not merely practical or social, but fundamentally legal in nature, pointing to structural limitations within contemporary property law frameworks. These scholars observe that traditional property law, which remains largely centred on individual ownership and bilateral legal relations, struggles to accommodate legal structures that simultaneously regulate individual and collective interests. As a result, according to Hunter and Cowan, 2012, existing legal norms, particularly tenancy law, often fail to provide binding and enforceable mechanisms for governing shared obligations, collective decision-making, and common use within collaborative housing communities. Jespersen (2006) and Nasarre-Aznar (2018), pin points further problems that may arise against the background of the particular legal construction and needs, and formulates the problem with bindingness as twofold. On the one hand, that existing legal rules do not become applicable due to certain basic criteria not being met, and on the other hand, that existing legal rules and systems, such as tenancy legislation, become applicable but cannot be applied in an appropriate manner for collective housing forms such as collaborative housing.

Empirical legal studies further demonstrate that collaborative housing residents engage in more than informal social ordering. Blandy (2013) explains the situation as follows. The residents actively exercise rights of management and control over both their individual dwellings and shared spaces through collectively agreed rules and governance mechanisms. These working rules are often complex, adaptable, and responsive to changing circumstances, reflecting a high degree of collective self-governance. Equally significant is the strong sense of collective belonging and shared ownership reported among residents. Together, these practices constitute parallel normative systems that differ in material ways from formal legal rules and may be understood as an alternative form of property incorporating collective self-governance.

Another recurring conclusion drawn by, among others, Alexander (2019), Garciano (2011), Mattei and Quarta (2015) and Basas (2010) is that too little

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fundamental research is conducted in the area of collaborative ownership and use of land and buildings, and that more research on legal obstacles and on the creation of a greater variety of tenure and ownership forms is needed. Larsen (2019) believes that fundamental questions about the granting of tenancy rights and how they can function both relationally and spatially in a community should be emphasised as one of the most important issues to focus on if collaborative housing are to be able to develop and increase in scope.

Burgers & Pijl (2022) emphasise that the legal complexity that arises when creating collaborative housing means that it is important that legal expertise is involved at an early stage. However, Jespersen (2006) emphasises that certain issues simply cannot be solved with existing legislation and that even in collaborative housing community projects prepared under the guidance of knowledgeable lawyers, intractable legal problems arise.

Formalised obligation to contribute to the common

Di Robilant (2011) and Houlind and Fæster (2016) highlight the importance of legislation enabling the meaning of personal commitment to be formalised in the collaborative housing community. Basic issues that need to be regulated for the community to be maintained over time are according to Di Robilant (2011): entry rules that enable the association to select people with the intention of joining the community and exit rules that enable the collaborative housing community to resign and require the removal of persons who adversely affect the community. Lack of activity can also cause problems in the self-management of the common building. An example of a solution that, according to Houlind and Fæster (2016), can be used is that parts of the responsibility for the administration are assigned to an external party. However, Garciano (2011) points out that this arrangement entails a risk that the residents do not participate in the management at all or that it creates new grounds for disagreement in that some residents then consider that none of the residents should be actively involved in the management. Rohde (2006) emphasises the importance of, as far as possible, regulating the financial responsibility for non-payment of rent for common areas or damage to common parts of the building, and to ensure that the consequences of joint and several liability being exacted become clear to the residents. Widener (2010) addresses the need to create a predictable and formally enforceable order to both mediate and formally resolve personal conflicts and contradictions in collaborative housing.

Neutrality in planning processes

Lang et al. (2020) describes how building regulations and planning conditions do not always fit the layout of collaborative housing. One recommendation is to include housing and planning systems, also planning culture, in analyses of collaborative housing. According to Ginzburg (2003) and Silbaugh (2007), the formulation of zoning (*Swe. detaljplan*) can hinder the development of small-scale collaborative housing projects. Ginzburg (2003) believes that strong legal protection is needed for neutrality in planning and building legislation and Schmid (2020) presents reasons why there may be a legal obligation based on the right to housing for

municipalities to ensure that planning and building legislation is neutral and thus enables different collaborative forms of living. Bechtel et al (2022) advocate that flexibility is built into zoning (*Swe. detaljplan*) and that they are formulated with an awareness of the lock-out effects that different formulations can give rise to.

Mixed and regulated ownership for stability over time

The importance of financing and the form of ownership for the implementation of the projects is highlighted in a few articles. Decker (2018), Iaione (2017), Bechtel et al (2022) and Kelly (2009) highlight different forms of shared ownership, for example the land is owned by a municipality or non-profit organisation and the building is owned by the collaborative housing community, as the main form for maintaining economically sustainable and socially stable forms of collaborative housing over time. Okafor (2022) emphasises that if an organisation is to own the building, it is important that the use of the building is not regulated too much in bylaws as this may prevent necessary changes or additions to the collaborative housing community's operations in the future. Garciano (2011) also suggests mixed lease and ownership forms as a solution. Alexander (2019) highlights that by mixing rental and ownership models, the community form can be used both to fulfil social sustainability goals at the same time as financing is secured through the sale or lease of certain apartments with requirements for a lease fee. Kelly (2009) and Bechtel et al (2022) emphasise the importance of being able to apply price control clauses that keep the cost of living in the collaborative housing community consistently low over time. Reynolds (2018) mentions the potential to control resale values within cooperative bylaws to maintain affordability. However, Witte (2008) shows that it is difficult to formulate effective, fair and predictable rules for how price regulation should be determined, and that price regulation can lead to an increased risk of disputes in case of transfer.

4.2 For which groups can collaborative housing become a new opportunity?

Income

Collaborative housing is explored by Lang et al. (2020) as a multifaceted concept, serving both as lifestyle housing in the commercial market and as a tool in social housing policy, with potential roles in poverty reduction and anti-gentrification efforts. They highlight the lack of research on the socio-economic characteristics of residents, stressing the importance of future studies to identify who lives in these settings and who could benefit, especially marginalised groups like low-income earners and migrants.

Ledent (2021) discusses opportunities to reduce project cost, and thereby housing cost, in larger collaborative housing through economies of scale. Less resourceful groups are said to be more easily involved when a larger number of people share responsibility for the project. The anonymity of larger associations is also said to make them socially acceptable to more people. However, the author emphasises that social mixing is not seen as positive by everyone and that it can undermine solidarity within the collaborative housing community. There is also a

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countereffect between the wish to fulfil the needs of the households and the idea to reduce the individual influence through size.

Grundström (2021) contrasts co-living models to co-housing and describes co-living as an alternative for the less wealthy. The author asks the question whether the co-living residents have actively chosen a shared accommodation or whether they feel forced as they cannot afford anything else. Jakobsen and Gutzon Larsen (2019) write that the residents of Danish collaborative housing communities are socioeconomically and educationally privileged in comparison to the Danish population as a whole, and that the increasing multiculturalism in Danish society is not reflected in the resident composition.

Demographics

Horňáková and Jíchová (2019) mention young people and families as groups that can conceivably benefit from living in collaborative housing, but also point to the form's potential for older and vulnerable groups. Young people and families are taken up in several research studies where the focus is on ambivalent experiences of, for example, sharing an apartment and self-building, where collaborative housing is interpreted both as an economic unit and a social arrangement that compensates for difficulties in obtaining housing and weak family ties. The gender perspective shows broader changes in family structures and gender roles as well as increasing vulnerability and loneliness among older women. Better inclusion of migrants is also addressed in the literature. (Lang et al. 2020)

Egerö (2010) emphasises that collaborative housing in several countries is largely formed by the elderly and women. The idea behind this is said to be creating support, and to varying degrees social exchange, in everyday life. Furthermore, an opportunity to get assistance in aging and illness allows the elderly to stay in the community throughout their lives (Egerö 2010; Reynolds 2018; Dang & Seeman 2021). Lang et al. (2020) write that intergenerational collaborative housing communities tend to raise expectations among politicians and professionals, but that the evidence for the alleged positive effects on the elderly and young is mixed. Grundström (2021) cites examples in the international literature of shared housing forms being used as a substitute for nursing homes where the members of a collaborative housing community are expected to provide services to other elderly and disabled members.

Possibilities and obstacles to mixing different groups

Groups of initiators with time and a large social and economic capital with the ability to form bottom-up communities are described both as potential engines in creating socially mixed collaborative housing (Scheller & Thörn 2018) but also as potentially exclusionary as they are said to be based on certain cultural values and commitments (Ache & Fedrowitz 2012; Reynolds 2018; Bresson & Labit 2020; Arbell 2022; Barenstein et al. 2022). It is further discussed how the social cost of being recruited into this type of collaborative housing in terms of time and skills excludes people who immediately need a home or have a different cultural background (not necessarily linked to ethnicity) (Bresson & Labit 2020). In their

study of Hamburg and Gothenburg, Scheller and Thörn (2018) see a transfer of responsibility from the public to individuals in collaborative housing where the residents are expected to take responsibility for social mixing and inclusion of different groups, for example disabled, elderly and immigrants. Part of this is that households with higher incomes are expected to take a greater financial role in the projects than households with lower incomes. Arbell (2022) believes that there should be room to critically discuss the value of mixing in intentional communities and questions whether it is realistic and desirable to expect social integration on this scale.

The discourse on expanding collaborative housing highlights the urgent housing needs of potential new members and the challenge of their involvement in long-term projects. Bresson and Labit (2020) suggest that top-down collaborative housing projects offer broader inclusivity, allowing those without resources to participate. Such projects are mentioned as interesting not for their socio-cultural diversity, but for providing access to the kind of housing the participants wish to have (Paidakaki & Lang 2021). However, the challenge of balancing wider inclusivity with independence from municipal constraints was highlighted.

Ruiu (2016) emphasises the difficulty of meeting all collaborative housing goals, requiring significant commitment, time, economic resources and a will to cooperate and negotiate one's personal contribution from the residents. Commitment over time is needed to find a balance in the community. Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2020) caution that socio-economic and ideological diversity in resident backgrounds may lead to discord and weaken solidarity. According to Bresson and Labit (2020), mixed communities do not automatically generate inclusion as established groups often get more space to express their views. Further, established groups do not always react positively to mixing, especially in top-down models where residents have limited control over household composition. Girbés-Peco et al. (2020) highlight the importance of empowering less affluent groups and the risk of internal hierarchies. Arbell (2022) points out that ethnic exclusion can occur due to network-based recruitment as well as concerns related to traditional family values and family engagement, suggesting that mainstreaming collaborative housing is essential for wider acceptance and inclusivity.

Values and motives

Grundström (2021) observes that collaborative housing is often associated with left-wing ideologies, though the ideological emphasis varies across projects. Bossuyt et al. (2018) link the resurgence in collaborative housing to the 2008 global financial crisis and the perceived shortcomings of state and market solutions, viewing it as a means to foster community amidst market dominance and social fragmentation. Some, however, interpret the interest in collaborative housing as reflecting neoliberal values of choice and market-driven solutions to housing issues. However, it is pointed out that collaborative housing is ideological neutral and has existed also when it has not had political support.

In the Czech Republic, overcoming negative connotations associated with socialist collective housing is crucial for the housing form's development,

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according to Horňáková and Jíchová (2019). Sargisson (2012) views modern American collaborative housing as a reinterpretation of the individualistic American dream, influenced by a liberal home ownership ideology. Scheller and Thörn (2018) recognise this trend in Europe as well. Szemző et al. (2019) credit the duality between middle-class communities and those opposing mainstream housing market structures for the model's success in Germany.

In Sweden, Törnqvist (2019) identifies a unique form of collaborative housing characterised by individual autonomy, privacy, and the ease of exit, coupled with collective support and stability. This model, reflecting 'Swedish state individualism', is supported by the welfare and housing systems, promoting a culture of independence and self-reliance in interpersonal relations.

4.3 What can build and facilitate essential relationships with external parties for collaborative housing?

Bottom-up and top-down models

Lang et al. (2020) categorises the initiators of collaborative housing communities into three models: bottom-up initiatives by private individuals aiming to create homes for themselves, intermediate initiatives by private entities like small companies or architectural firms, and top-down initiatives by larger institutions such as municipalities or real estate companies. Bresson and Labit (2020) describe French top-down projects as collaborations among municipalities, the social housing sector, developers, and NGOs, including activist developers focusing specifically on collaborative housing. Co-living, according to Grundström (2021), exemplifies a top-down approach, initiated by private companies that design the project before selecting residents. Czischke (2018) explores the dynamics between resident groups and property owners, describing collaborative housing as co-production arenas with varying degrees of resident involvement, where property owners facilitated access to resources and professional expertise. This collaboration is analysed in terms of commitment, legitimacy, resource control, and process veto power. The author also notes the role of organisations like regional administrations, NGOs, and foundations in facilitating project implementation.

Ache and Fedrowitz (2012) observe that in Germany, many intended bottom-up collaborative housing projects struggled to materialise, leading to the development of municipal support models to aid their establishment. The La Borda project in Barcelona represents a bottom-up initiative, supported by external partners like architects, a service designer and financial advisors, as well as cooperation with other communities, and benefiting from leasehold land and alternative financing schemes (Girbés-Peco et al. 2020). De Vos and Spoormans (2022) emphasise the architect's role in creating spaces that balance privacy with community interaction, which is considered crucial for resident well-being.

Public support for collaborative housing

Collaborative housing is described as accessible mainly to higher-income households, and that it is a challenge making them affordable for lower-income

families, also in contexts where such housing is supported (Scheller & Thörn 2018; Szemző et al. 2019). Successful collaborative housing developments rely on effective collaboration between actors across various levels and consensus within the community. Given the context-specific nature of these projects, they may require diversified public support, complicating interactions (Szemző et al. 2019).

Bossuyt et al. (2018) argue for reforms in traditional land allocation to accommodate collaborative housing projects, suggesting adjustments in allocation procedures, pricing, and planning requirements. They emphasise the need for municipalities to adapt their approaches to work directly with residents and manage varying project needs. Political backing is deemed crucial for prioritising such changes, enabling collaborative housing to expand into a significant housing option (Szemző et al. 2019). German cities' support for collaborative housing stems from a political desire to foster community-oriented, affordable housing, necessitating shifts in municipal operations to facilitate knowledge sharing and networking (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012).

Ache and Fedrowitz (2012) describe different types of organisations that support collaborative housing communities in the establishment phase, for example NGOs and architects specialising in collaborative housing, but point to the municipalities as the most important cooperation partners. Several German municipalities offer support for collaborative housing, ranging from online information to comprehensive models including financing and land access. Some cities provide one-stop-shop services for collaborative housing, offering coordination, financial guidance, investor connections, and platforms for exchange (Szemző et al. 2019). In certain regions, collaborative housing projects may also qualify for social housing subsidies. Success hinges on equal dialogue between stakeholders, a transparent land allocation process that considers economic and social capacities, and collaborative housing communities' readiness to engage in neighbourhood development (Szemző et al. 2019).

Ache and Fedrowitz (2012) note that political prioritisation or budget neutrality is essential for impactful support to collaborative housing. German cities have a variety of criteria for municipal support, including social mix, number of apartments, affordability, inclusivity, and contribution to social infrastructure and multifunctional neighbourhoods. Research also explores why municipalities might not fully support collaborative housing, citing financial constraints, difficulty assessing demand, land availability, financial instruments, lack of self-build housing profile, and challenges in risk and feasibility evaluation. The blurred lines between private and public in collaborative housing further complicate public sector involvement (Szemző et al. 2019).

Tenure forms

Lang et al. (2020) position collaborative housing at the intersection of civil society and the private market, as they incorporate a range of tenure forms from renting to owning. However, many emphasize it as part of a "third sector" – neither fully private nor public. Larsen (2019), reflecting on the Danish experience, notes that tenure can both enable and restrict the development of collaborative housing,

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as well as affect access. He advocates rental models to make the sector more inclusive for lower-income individuals.

Bossuyt (2022) explores how collaborative housing can move towards decommodification through involvement from non-profit actors like municipal housing entities or regulated organisations, or through structures like cooperatives with non-profit orientations and market restrictions. Reynolds (2018) also points to the possibility to limit transaction values through the statutes of cooperatives. Barenstein et al. (2022) recommend a balanced relationship between housing cooperatives and the state, ensuring independence from political fluctuations.

Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2020) argue that collaborative housing needs to contribute to wider societal goals in order to be considered part of civil society, embodying autonomy, participatory democracy, internal and external solidarity (*eg*, through non-speculation, sustainability, and social justice efforts). However, they caution against three social mechanisms that risk the integrity of these communities: conflicting member interests, co-optation with the welfare state, and pressures from capitalist dynamics. It is proposed that conflicting member interests and capitalist dynamics could undermine solidarity, while co-optation could threaten autonomy and democratic participation. Grundström (2021) observes a trend towards prioritising private amenities over external solidarity commitments in contemporary collaborative housing.

Cost savings

The literature also contains interesting analyses and discussions about potential cost savings that, in the long run, can keep housing costs down (Ache & Fedrowitz 2012; Scanlon & Fernández Arrigoitia 2014; Brysch & Czischke 2021; Brysch et al. 2023). In relation to external parties, targeted measures are proposed to facilitate access to land and mitigate the cost impact of longer processes (Scanlon & Fernández Arrigoitia 2014). Brysch and Czischke (2021) propose standardised construction, a needs-based design and redefinition of minimum standards, which assumes that this is compatible with current law and municipal processes.

Trade-offs in relations with external actors

Several researchers argue that collaborative housing projects rely on external organisations for capital, expertise, and political legitimacy, but that this also may compromise their foundational principles (Tummers 2015; Lang et al. 2020). Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2020) note that while public support has enabled the success of many collaborative housing initiatives, it often comes with conditions, as public entities expect returns on their support. This may lead to prioritising affordable housing over other core values of the community. However, it's possible to mitigate deviations from original principles through active engagement and frameworks aligned with the community's founding ideals. Szemző et al. (2019) suggest that the extent of support for collaborative housing from municipalities hinges on how these projects align with municipal objectives, be they related to housing, urban development, or environmental sustainability.

5 Discussion

In the following, the results of the systematic international literature review are analysed against the backdrop of the Swedish problem description. The analysis highlight and discuss whether the existing Swedish problem description and the discussion on how collaborative housing could become an alternative for more people correspond with how problems and solutions are discussed in European social science research and Western legal research. The aim is to assess if the problem description, as emphasised in Sweden, needs to include more questions and to suggest areas for further research in the Swedish context.

5.1 Unexplored systemic legal issues

The first research question asks what legal frameworks are needed to support economically and socially sustainable collaborative housing both initially and over time. The Swedish problem description suggests that while the path to establishing collaborative housing is generally unencumbered by legal constraints, specific challenges related to financing, and planning regulations need to be addressed. The analysis of the international legal research and the Swedish problem description on collaborative housing highlights several similarities and differences regarding the legal challenges and opportunities faced by collaborative housing initiatives. A notable parallel is the advocacy for dual ownership structures, such as the ground lease model in Sweden, recognised both domestically and internationally as conducive to fostering long-term affordable and socially inclusive collaborative housing (e.g. Iaione 2017). Another similarity is the identification of the need to adapt building and planning regulations to collaborative housing's distinct layout, advocating for legal protections and flexible planning to support diverse living forms and to avoid excluding e.g., potential small-scale projects (Lang et al. 2020; Ginzburg 2003).

The most prominent difference is that the international literature presents a more complex legal landscape than Swedish reports typically convey. For example, while Swedish discussions often focus on initial challenges like financing and utilising future buildings as collateral, international insights also address deeper, systemic legal issues that collaborative housing faces over time (*eg,* Blandy, 2013, Chiodelli, 2015, and Jespersen, 2006). For example, the international research suggests that a broader range of legal adaptations might be needed to support the unique dynamics of collaborative housing, such as the need for mixed and regulated ownership models and the formalisation of community obligations (*eg*, Alexander, 2019 and Houlind and Fæster, 2016), or even the creation of new diverse tenure models (*eg,* Decker, 2018).

With regard to the legal prerequisites, in Sweden the institution of site leasehold (*Swe. tomträtt*) and the organizational form cooperative rental housing (*Swe. kooperativ hyresrätt*) have been highlighted as the principal alternatives for a future development of affordable and socially inclusive collaborative housing communities. This conclusion is supported to some extent by the literature review, but more knowledge about these forms of ownership and tenure is needed in order for the Swedish conditions for living in collaborative housing over time to be clarified. The main problem with the use of these forms has, in Swedish

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inquiries and reports, been assumed to be that they are unfamiliar to banks and developers and that they are therefore unwilling to engage in such projects. It has been emphasized that the legal framework and the construction process may be perceived as complicated and difficult to understand, and that there is therefore a need for project facilitators and architects in the initial phase.

However, in light of the legal difficulties that are highlighted and discussed in the international research, somewhat greater emphasis should probably be placed on the legal aspects and potential unresolved issues. It is likely that the legal issues are not only perceived as complicated, but that when initiating collaborative housing communities, it should be assumed that the project will probably contain legally difficult-to-resolve issues that cannot be entirely eliminated even with the assistance of an experienced legal adviser. One conclusion that can be drawn from the fundamental legal difficulties that may arise is that specialized legal expertise should be involved already from the start of the project, in addition to project facilitators and architects.

An important prerequisite to take into consideration is that the issues and legal ambiguities analysed in the international literature have not constituted the subject of legal analysis with regard to corresponding Swedish conditions. It is therefore not possible either to establish that the same legal problems exist under Swedish conditions or that the solutions used in other legal systems can also be applied in a Swedish context. Conclusions that can be drawn from the international literature reviews and the analyses and discussions contained therein are that it can be established that other Western legal systems have difficulty handling the collective and sometimes shared forms of ownership and habitation on which collaborative housing communities are based. Corresponding problems should therefore be assumed to exist within the Swedish legal system as well, since Swedish law in this respect is based on the same individual point of departure for ownership and use of land and buildings. This legal-systematic starting point makes it difficult to handle collective rights, regardless of whether they concern only common areas, shared obligations and rights relating to owned or used property, or even joint and collective ownership. That is to say, the collective foundation that permeates collaborative housing risks giving rise to legally difficult-to-resolve problems, in principle regardless of form.

On the assumption that the challenges identified in international research may reasonably be expected to arise also in the Swedish context, there is reason to examine these findings more closely in relation to the Swedish housing legal framework. From the international literature review it follows that certain issues are of fundamental importance for collaborative housing communities to be able to function as long-term affordable and socially inclusive housing alternatives. Several of these issues have not been highlighted as problems in the Swedish problem analysis, and the conclusions that can be drawn from the literature review are therefore of great value for the future further development of this form of housing from a legal perspective, even though the legal prerequisites can only be clarified following detailed and systematic legal analysis in relation to national factual conditions and future needs.

As these issues have not been analysed or articulated in a corresponding manner within the Swedish discourse, they can be assumed to constitute gaps in existing research and legal analysis. The legal prerequisites that are highlighted in the international literature as decisive for the creation of long-term affordable and socially inclusive collaborative housing communities, and which have so far received limited attention in the Swedish discourse, concern: (1) how ownership of land can most effectively be separated from ownership of residential buildings and how land can be distinguished in valuation terms from the free housing market so that the future value of the land is limited in accordance with a predetermined land-use purpose aimed at non-profit housing activities; (2) how the fundamentally free right to transfer a right of use or a share in a collaborative housing community can lawfully be restricted, both with regard to price so that the transfer of shares reflects the limitation in land value, and with regard to the collaborative housing community's right to select new members; (3) how it should be possible within collaborative housing communities to impose legally binding obligations on members to contribute positively to the community and in what way the intention to contribute to the community can be used as a selection criterion for new members and as a basis for requiring a member to move out if that member obstructs or causes disturbances within the community; (4) how formal rules, and potentially even a specific institution, for mediation and dispute resolution can be created; and (5) how detailed development plans can and should be legally formulated with the objective of achieving neutrality between different forms of housing organisations.

5.2 Limited knowledge of the balance between inclusivity and practicality

Our second research question asks for which groups collaborative housing could become a new opportunity. However, related to this KA, there are clear gaps both in the Swedish and European literature and hence a need for a better understanding going forward. Below, input to future research is outlined.

The main challenge according to Swedish collaborative housing discussions is balancing inclusivity with practicality, as strategies to lower costs and distribute burdens may inadvertently exclude the vulnerable groups they aim to serve. The solution highlighted in the Swedish problem description is to create innovative solutions to reconcile the ideals of inclusivity with the complexities of development, ensuring that collaborative housing meets the diverse needs of all segments of society without creating unintended barriers.

The importance of innovative solutions to bridge inclusivity ideals with real-world complexities is also underscored in the international literature. The findings from the literature review elucidates the significant challenge of inclusivity within collaborative housing communities, emphasising the lack of comprehensive research on the socio-economic profiles of households, particularly for marginalised groups like low-income earners and migrants (Lang et al. 2020). This research gap hinders understanding of inclusivity potential, underscoring the need for enhanced research to understand and address the dynamics affecting affordability and inclusion of lower income and marginalised groups in Sweden.

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Solutions proposed, such as leveraging larger project scales to distribute burdens (Ledent 2021; Sangregorio 2000) and minimising time and commitment demands (Scheller & Thörn 2018), correspond with Swedish calls for innovative approaches to inclusivity. These strategies aim to lower economic barriers and facilitate wider participation, echoing the Swedish call for reconciling the desire for inclusivity with developmental challenges. However, the international research introduces challenges not explicitly mentioned in the Swedish context, such as the tendency towards homogeneity, resistance to diversity, and the potential dominance of elite groups in collaborative housing communities. This complexity highlights a nuanced obstacle to inclusivity, emphasising the need for critical discussions on inclusivity and cultural sensitivities when integrating diverse groups (Arbell 2022; Törnqvist 2019), which adds depth to the inclusivity challenge by addressing socio-cultural dynamics alongside structural barriers. Research on the appeal of different collaborative housing concepts to various groups in Swedish society could inform policy and interest organisations on the demand for collaborative housing. Here, reflections on Swedish culture and relations to basic collaborative housing ideas, building on Thörnqvist (2019), could add interesting layers to the understanding of collaborative housing futures in Sweden.

Additionally, international research explores ideological perceptions of collaborative housing and the varying appeal to different demographics, influenced by views of collaborative housing as left-leaning or neoliberal (Grundström 2021). This discussion on ideological perceptions and the need for municipalities to effectively communicate the value and models of collaborative housing introduces a differential layer to the strategies for enhancing inclusivity, suggesting that addressing inclusivity challenges extends beyond structural adjustments to include socio-cultural and communicative strategies. This points to a broader research gap in the Swedish context, regarding the understanding of inclusivity challenges as not only structural but also socio-cultural and discursive in nature.

5.3 Expanding the circle of potential key partners

The third research question addressing the establishment and facilitation of necessary relationships with external parties is quite well covered both in the Swedish and European literature. However, the European literature includes some additional perspective that may be relevant to further explore in the Swedish context.

The international literature on collaborative housing emphasises that cooperation between housing communities and external actors, such as, municipalities, property owners, financiers, and non-profit organisations, is crucial. Yet, the cooperations is inherently associated with tensions related to power distribution, control over resources, and conditions attached to support (Czischke 2018; Lang et al. 2020; Tummers 2015; Sørvoll & Bengtsson 2020). Such collaborations are analysed as negotiated relationships, in which expectations of reciprocity and alignment with external objectives may affect communities' ability to uphold core values such as autonomy, solidarity, and democratic governance (Sørvoll & Bengtsson 2020; Grundström 2021). At the same time,

the international literature suggests that these tensions may be mitigated under certain conditions, provided that collaborations are carefully structured with clear roles, transparency, and balanced influence, and that municipalities possess both the capacity and political willingness to support projects through land allocation, financing, and adapted planning processes (Ache & Fedrowitz 2012; Bossuyt et al. 2018; Szemző et al. 2019).

The Swedish literature largely confirms the importance of cooperation with external actors and highlights municipalities, property owners, interest organisations, and civil society as key enablers of collaborative housing projects (Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019; Boverket 2018; Divercity 2021). Moreover, the role of individuals or smaller entities, like architectural firms, addressed by Lang et al. (2020), in propelling collaborative housing efforts through social capital and industry insight, mirrors trends in Swedish initiatives. The Swedish literature also confirms and underscore the importance of municipal partnerships with knowledgeable professionals for successful collaborative housing projects. However, the focus in Sweden lies primarily on collaboration as a positive and necessary precondition for project initiation, for instance through customised land allocation, planning procedures, information dissemination, and financing (Blomberg & Kärnekull 2019; Divercity 2021). Further, there is research that supports that issues of social inclusion, access for groups facing housing market disadvantages, and collaborative housing as a tool for area regeneration are factors that align with municipal interests and motivating engagement (Hedström & Broms Wessel 2016; Arroyo et al. 2022). However, current Swedish research does not sufficiently address how these correlating interests can be incorporated into a functional collaboration model.

The difference between the international and Swedish literatures therefore lies less in whether collaboration is important, and more in how its implications are analysed. In the Swedish context, the risks, trade-offs, and power relations inherent in cooperation with external actors are discussed only to a limited extent, despite indications that the distribution of decision-making power between communities, municipalities, and intermediaries is significant (Scheller & Thörn 2018). There is limited in-depth analysis of how conditional support, expected reciprocity, and dependencies on public and private actors affect the value base, governance, and long-term agency of collaborative housing projects. This points to a research gap in the Swedish context concerning how collaborations should be structured to both enable project development and safeguard their collaborative and civil society-oriented ambitions, an issue that is addressed more explicitly in the international literature.

Further, in Sweden, a strong preference for grassroot, resident-driven bottom-up collaborative housing dominates both practice and discourse. In contrast, parts of the European literature point to social and economic benefits of more top-down collaborative housing models for including lower-income households. Bottom-up initiatives are frequently associated with strong resident control but also tend to privilege groups with high social, economic, and cultural capital, as evidenced by studies showing that many such projects struggle to materialise without external

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support (Ache & Fedrowitz 2012; Girbés-Peco et al. 2020). In contrast, top-down and hybrid models, often involving municipalities, housing providers, professional intermediaries, or private developers, are described as having greater capacity to lower entry barriers through institutional support and professionalisation, thereby offering potential pathways to broader inclusion (Bresson & Labit 2020; Grundström 2021).

Taken together, this suggests a research gap and need for further research on top-down and hybrid collaborative housing models in the Swedish context, particularly in relation to affordability and inclusion of a broader segment of the population as potential future residents.

6 Conclusions

This paper synthesises international research on collaborative housing, focusing on legal frameworks, potential future residents, and cooperation with key partners, in order to examine whether and under what conditions collaborative housing can become an opportunity for a broader segment of the population. The findings are analysed in relation to Swedish conditions, with the aim of identifying key gaps in existing research and policy.

Concerning the legal frameworks needed to support collaborative housing (KA1), the international literature highlights, on the one hand, its potential to become a viable housing option for a broader segment of the population and. On the other hand, the literature highlights that this potential is contingent on recognising its specific legal characteristics. While collaborative housing is increasingly conceptualised in research as a distinct third form of housing, positioned between individual ownership and conventional rental models, Western legal systems have yet to fully adopt this perspective. As a result, collaborative housing continues to operate within regulatory frameworks not designed to accommodate its collective governance needs, despite evidence that tailored and binding legal arrangements are necessary for it to function across diverse social groups, remain affordable over time, and avoid social stress and management-related challenges. Whether and how similar challenges arise under Swedish housing law remains largely unexplored. However, given that Swedish land law is part of the Western legal culture, thus grounded in similar legal principles to those of other Western legal systems, and that the core of the problem identified in the international literature lies in these shared legal foundations, it is likely that comparable challenges exist in the Swedish context. Consequently, a research gap can be identified in the Swedish context, as there is a lack of context-specific legal analysis examining the relevance and applicability of the legal challenges and solutions identified in the international literature within the Swedish legal framework

Regarding potential future residents (KA2), the international literature suggests that collaborative housing has the potential to become an opportunity for a broader segment of the population. However, the literature also points to a significant lack of empirical research on for whom it can realistically function as an accessible housing option. While challenges related to affordability, ageing, and social inclusion are frequently discussed, the literature shows that social mixing

is difficult to achieve in practice. Despite well-documented challenges related to inclusion, research remains inconclusive as to how collaborative housing can be expanded to include more diverse groups without generating social stress or undermining community stability. In the Swedish context, inclusivity is primarily framed as a matter of practical and economic project design, with an emphasis on cost reduction and organisational solutions. Less attention is paid to the socio-cultural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion identified in international literature, such as tendencies towards homogeneity, resistance to diversity, and the dominance of groups with higher social, economic, and cultural capital. International research also highlights how ideological perceptions of collaborative housing and its varying appeal across social groups can influence inclusion, indicating that meanings and interpretations of collaborative housing form part of the inclusivity challenge. The limited empirical knowledge regarding who can realistically access collaborative housing means that ambitions to promote diversification and social mixing risk being driven more by normative ideals than by empirically grounded insights. Against this background, there is a research gap in the Swedish discourse, more knowledge is needed, that builds on international findings, to better understand for whom collaborative housing can function as a viable and inclusive housing option under national conditions.

Regarding cooperation with key partners (KA3), the international literature indicates that collaborative housing can become a viable option for a broader segment of the population only with strong and tailored public support. Municipal involvement in land allocation, planning, and financing, together with appropriate tenure models, often framed as part of a third sector between market and state, is considered central to affordability and inclusion. At the same time, studies highlight trade-offs in reliance on public and private actors, as support is often conditional and may shift priorities within collaborative housing communities, potentially affecting autonomy and long-term social sustainability. In the Swedish literature, collaborative housing is predominantly framed as grassroots, resident-driven models, and there is a reluctance toward top-down approaches. Cooperation with municipalities, interest organisations, property owners, and financial institutions is recognised as necessary, but these actors are mainly discussed as facilitators rather than initiators. In comparison with the international literature, this points to a research gap, as Swedish studies devote limited attention to how alternative forms of initiation or broader constellations of partners, such as stronger public involvement or engagement from civil society and other non-resident actors, might enable collaborative housing to become accessible to a more diverse group of people.

In summary, the international literature indicates that collaborative housing can become an opportunity for more people, but only under specific legal, institutional, and social conditions. Its potential to function as an affordable and socially inclusive housing option depends on recognising collaborative housing as a distinct form of housing with collective governance needs, on developing mechanisms that support inclusion without generating social stress, and on

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establishing supportive yet balanced relationships with public and private actors. In the Swedish context, collaborative housing has primarily been approached through practical solutions related to project development, financing, and resident-led organisation. While these efforts address important barriers, the findings of this review suggest that key questions remain insufficiently explored. In particular, there is a lack of Swedish research on how legal frameworks can support collaborative housing over time, for whom collaborative housing can realistically function as an inclusive option, and how broader constellations of key partners might contribute to developing collaborative housing into a viable option for a broader segment of the population. Addressing these gaps is central if collaborative housing is to move beyond a niche model and become a viable housing option for a broader and more diverse segment of the population.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

KA1 *(Search ended September 12, 2023)*

Database	Search		Hits
Heinonline	1	((("Collaborative housing") OR ("cohousing") OR ("co-op* housing") OR ("collect* housing") OR ("communal housing") OR ("community land trust*") OR ("housing co-op*") OR ("housing coop*") OR ("housing commons") OR ("Community housing")))	2,606
	2	(1) AND (((ownership) OR (tenant) OR (tenancy) OR (tenan*) OR (contract) OR (liability) OR (liabili*) OR (dispute) OR (resolution) OR (planning) OR (zoning) OR (tenure)OR (mediation)))	452
	3	(1) AND (2) manually delimitation in database:2000–2023, Articles, En, Sw, No, Dk	291
	4	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	50
Westlaw	1	((("Collaborative housing") OR ("cohousing") OR ("co-op* housing") OR ("collect* housing") OR ("communal housing") OR ("community land trust*") OR ("housing co-op*") OR ("housing coop*") OR ("housing commons") OR ("Community housing")))	3,090
	2	(1) AND (((ownership) OR (tenant) OR (tenancy) OR (tenan*) OR (contract) OR (liability) OR (liabili*) OR (dispute) OR (resolution) OR (planning) OR (zoning) OR (tenure)OR (mediation)))	2,096
	3	(1) AND (2) manually delimitation in database:2000–2023, Articles, En, Sw, No, Dk	681
	4	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	96
Lovdata	1	kollektivhus	3
	2	boligsamvirke	7
	3	co-housing	0
	4	cohousing	0
	5	collaborative housing	0
	6	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	0
Karnov	1	seniorbofællesskaber	0
	2	aeldreboliger	34
	3	Fællesbyg	0
	4	ungdomsboliger	19
	5	bofællesskaber	37
	6	almene boliger	108
	7	"co-housing"	0
	8	"cohousing"	0
	9	"collaborative housing"	0
	10	"andelsboliger"	280
	11	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	10
JUNO	1	kollektivhus	3
	2	bogemenskap	7
	3	byggemenskap	0
	4	"co-housing"	0
	5	"cohousing"	0
	6	"collaborative housing"	0
	7	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	0

Appendix B

KA 2 and 3 (Search ended September 12 2023)

Database	**Search**		**Hits**
JSTOR	1	((((((Cohousing) OR (co-housing) OR (“Collaborative housing”)) OR (“Collective housing”)) OR (“community* housing”)) OR (“self-organ* housing”))	3,981
	2	(1) AND Manually delimitation in database: 2000–20023, Articles, En, Sw (No hits on nordic languages)	768
	3	(1) AND (2) AND (afford*)	339
	4	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	5
Scopus	1	ALL ((((((co*housing)) OR (“Collaborative housing”)) OR (“Collective housing”)) OR (“community* housing”)) OR (“self-organ* housing”))	4,863
	2	ALL ((((((co*housing)) OR (“Collaborative housing”)) OR (“Collective housing”)) OR (“community* housing”)) OR (“self-organ* housing”)) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “ar”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “English”) OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “Swedish”) OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “Danish”))	2,794
	3	ALL ((((((co*housing)) OR (“Collaborative housing”)) OR (“Collective housing”)) OR (“community* housing”)) OR (“self-organ* housing”)) AND “afford*” AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “ar”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “English”) OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “Swedish”) OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “Danish”))	681
	4	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	20
Web of Science	1	((((((Cohousing) OR (co-housing)) OR (“Collaborative housing”)) OR (“Collective housing”)) OR (“community* housing”)) OR (“self-organ* housing”))	1,377
	2	1 AND Manually delimination in database: 2000–2023, Articles, En, Sw, Dk (no other hits in nordic languages)	977
	3	1 AND 2 AND (afford*)	73
	4	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	11
Springer Link	1	((((((Cohousing) OR (co-houisng)) OR (“Collaborative housing”)) OR (“Collective housing”)) OR (“community* housing”)) OR (“self-organ* housing”))	13,302
	2	1 AND Manually delimination in database: 2000–2023, Articles, En, Sw, Dk (no other hits in nordic languages)	3,008
	3	1 AND 2 AND (afford*)	702
	4	Title abstract (exclusion/inclusion criteria)	8

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Appendix C

KA1 Search report: databases och hand search (Articles), websites (investigations and reports)

Database	Search hits	Search hits after initial delimitation*	Search hits after thematic delimitation**	Search hits after application of inclusion and exclusion criteria
Heinonline	2,606	452	291	50
Westlaw	3,090	2,096	681	96
Lovdata	10	N/A***	N/A***	0
Karnov	478	N/A***	N/A***	10
Juno	10	N/A***	N/A***	0
TOTAL	**6,194**	**2,548**	**972**	**156**
Hand search				3
Website hits				5

* Initial delimitation using thematic keywords
** Initial delimitation using database search functions: 2000–2023, language (En, Sw, No, Dk), scientific articles
*** Search not completed because the database does not support the search function/too few hits

Database flow chart

	Heinonline	Westlaw	Lovdata	Karnov	Juno
Search 1	2,606	3,090	10	478	10
Search 1–4	50	96	0	10	0
Full text reading, duplicates removed			28		
Included in review			23		

List of inclusion and exclusion criteria KA1

	Inclusion	(Common) criteria for exclusion
Form of community	Intention to live in social community initially aswell as long term (Fromm, 2012)	Lack intention of living in social community. Other intention for community; environmental, ecological, cultivation.
Organisation of living	Tenancy forms, ownership forms (direct and indirect, e.g. owner-occupied apartment, tenant-owned apartment), individual apartments and common areas	Only traditional forms of rental, condominium, Home owners association (equivalent for Scandinavian law)
Developer and initators	Initiation of habitants or external stakeholders with the aim of keeping cost of living low	Future residents are barely/not at all involved in the development stage. Traditional condominium, collective rental property developed by an external actor according to their own developed/mainstream concept. Market profit possible upon exit planned.
Subject areas	Land law, property law, tenancy, tenant-ownership, condominium, planning and construction law, contract law	Tax, homelessness, discrimination, environment, procurement, general jurisprudence, banking and finance, police law, mobile homes, human rights, indigenous peoples, sharing economy, legal history, psychiatric law, VAT,
Material/sources	Articles: published, available online, peer-review, editorial peer review, no documented peer review.	Reports, conference papers, case comments, comments, submission responses, book reviews, full text not available via database.
Geografical focus	Article with main European focus, other Western legal systems; USA (civil law, common law, Scandinavian law)	Oriental and mixed legal systems; Japan, China, African state
Language	English, Swedish, Norwegian or Danish	Abstract English but full text Spanish or French
Date of publication	2000–2023 (September)	2023 not published full text, October-December

Appendix D

KA 2–3 Search report: databases och hand search (Articles), websites (investigations and reports)

Database	Search hits	Search hits after initial delimitation*	Search hits after thematic delimitation**	Search hits after application of inclusion and exclusion criteria
Jstor	3,981	768	339	5
Scopus	4,863	2,794	681	20
Web of Science	1,377	977	73	11
Springer Link	13,302	3,008	702	8
TOTAL	**23,523**	**7,547**	**1,795**	**44**
Hand search		6		
Website hits		9		

* Initial delimitation by database

** Search term: afford* functions: 2000–2023, language (En, Sw, No, Dk), scientific articles

Database flow chart

	Jstor	Scopus	Web of Science	Springer Link
Search 1	3,981	4,863	1,377	13,302
Search 1–4	5	20	11	8
Full text reading, duplicates removed		34		
Included in review		30		

List of inclusion and exclusion criteria KA 2 and 3

	Inclusion	(Common) criteria for exclusion
Form of community	Intention to live in social community initially as well as long term (Fromm, 2012)	Lack intention of living in social community . Other intention for community; environmental, ecological, cultivation.
Organisation of living	Rental, ownership (direct and indirect, eg. condominium, housing association) individual apartments and common areas	No separate individual space/apartment.
Developer and initators	Initiation of habitants or external stakeholders with the aim of keeping cost of living low	Future residents are barely/not at all involved in the development stage. Traditional condominium, collective rental property developed by an external actor according to their own developed/mainstream concept. Market profit possible upon exit planned.
Subject areas	Social sciences	Medicine, psychology, architecture, design, homelessness, discrimination, environment, migration, health, articles on perceptions and attitudes about living together
Material/sources	Articles: published, available online, peer review, editorial peer review, no documented peer review.	Reports, conference papers, short case studies, comments, book reviews, full text not available via database.
Geografical focus	Article with a main European focus	Focus on USA, Australia
Language	English, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish	Abstract english but fulltext spanish or french
Date of publication	2000–2023 (September)	2023 not published full text, October–December

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