

# COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY IN THE SWEDISH COLLECTIVE HOUSE.

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*In modern collective houses in Sweden, the idea of fellowship and social contact among the inhabitants is emphasized to a higher degree than in other dwellings. This should, however, not be created on the expense of the privacy of the members. When creating a collective house, one quality is thus of basic importance: the balance between community and privacy. The question raised is what spatial circumstances collective houses of today provide to balance privacy and community. Some examples which give different premises for the residents are discussed. It is stated that the most common collective house of today, in its spatial organization puts forward privacy and individuality rather than the communal life of the group.*

### **Background**

The idea of collective living has appeared in periods during the last two centuries. The question of how to balance the family life versus the common life of the group, privacy versus community, has every time been crucial. This becomes evident when studying the design of the buildings.

In the 19th century, the utopian socialists, e g Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, Jean Baptiste Godin, in communities for their own employed workers wanted to raise the living standard by providing good communal facilities and limiting the private sphere. In their proposals for new ideal societies were found design elements such as a central yard or a glassed-over hall, that gave room for social gathering and supervision, and loggias and indoor corridors for comfortable communication and for the inhabitants encounter. In the most far reaching proposals, man and wife, parents and children were separated in different lodgings. (Fourier 1836, Hayden 1979, Vestbro 1982).

When the idea of collective living first appeared in Sweden, it was influenced by the utopian ideas. In contrast to these, however, the benefit of the nuclear family became the main subject. In Sweden, the collective house concept was put forward during the 1930's by functionalist architects, inspired and supported by groups of intellectual upperclass women, who wanted to combine professional work with traditional family life and saw the collective houses as a solution to this dilemma. In collective houses from this period, employed personnel served the families by washing and ironing the private wash in a laundry down in the basement, and serving dinner in the common diningroom, arranged and furnished like a traditional upperclass dininghall. The privacy was protected by design elements such as a food elevator leading from the common kitchen to every apartment, to make it possible to get a dinner directly to the private kitchen table. However, with the rise of the

salaries, those houses soon were "decollectivized" and started functioning as ordinary apartment houses.

In the radical period around 1968, the collective living appeared again, this time in the form of communes. Now the balance between privacy and community had swung back towards the utopian ideas, only on a smaller scale. The idea of the communes was, in the extreme cases, total communal life and no privacy, i.e. common household and lodging for all members despite family bonds. In any case, this model of communal living soon developed to more pragmatic peer-groups living together. (Palm Lindén 1982)

### **The idea of collective living today**

At the end of the 1970's, the idea of collective houses arose again in Sweden. The radical ideas of total community among the members were gone, and so were the ideas of common service by employed servants, found in the functionalist collective houses. In the collective houses of today the pendulum between privacy and community has stopped in a delicate position of trying to combine both.

Compared to the former Swedish collective houses, the ideas of today do not to the same extent emphasize the individual families' need for service, but rather put forward the goal of more fellowship and social contact among the inhabitants. The starting point has again been women's needs and ideas. A group of female architects and researchers presented 1982 an outline to a small collective house. Since then, that outline has functioned as a ideological and practical programme in the design of new collective houses (Berg et al 1982). The ideas of cooperation, common responsibility, and common use of goods and localities were emphasized. For common use, the building should contain a big common kitchen, a livingroom and other facilities. Those areas were, according to the programme, intended to be "the families' enlarged dwelling space". In the common kitchen, no longer hired personnel, but the inhabitants themselves take responsibility for preparing a common dinner some days of the week. The inhabitants also are responsible for the upkeep of the building. In addition, the families should have their own apartment, equal to ordinary apartment houses, i.e. fully equipped with kitchen, bathroom, livingroom, and bedrooms.

### **The research question**

A basic question, essential for architects and planners, is how those buildings in themselves coincide with the ideas underlying the collective living. What conditions does the spatial organization provide for privacy versus community? Starting from the same programme, the collective houses of today have varied design and spatial organisation. What different implications for the social life are embedded in the layout?

The area that is most crucial for social interaction is the transition zone. This is where two spheres meet, i.e. the private family sphere and the common sphere of the group. This is also where inhabitants meet strangers, who might be welcomed visitors to the inhabitants, or perhaps intruders with less good intentions.

## Methods

The transition zone has been focused on in a research project underlying this paper (Palm Lindén 1992). From a basic categorisation of all existing Swedish collective houses (fig 1), ten buildings with different layouts were chosen and analysed with Space Syntax methods. The spatial analysis was carried out on the transition zone and the common rooms. The private areas and the outdoor space were reduced to just the entrances. The elevator was treated equally to the stairs, i.e. as a connection between two floors. Convex analyses have been carried out on all the buildings, and axial analyses on half of them, namely those that have a horizontally extended transition zone. (For the analyse methods, see Hillier & Hanson 1984).

The analyses was supplemented by participant observations and interviews concerning where people meet and gather in the buildings, how the areas are used, and by whom. Traces of use and activities were also observed.



















	LOCATION OF COMMON ROOMS		
	All common rooms at bottom floor	Common kitchen and diningroom at bottom floor	Common kitchen and diningroom at upper floors
<b>HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS</b>			
One staircase system - without corridors and galleries (A)	 Orion x 7 Tuunanen Pultersta gård	 Katthuvudet Trädgården Bergsviken Täljan	 Stacken
- with corridors or galleries (B)	 Jakobberg C Mårsta dal Söderström	 Prästgårdsbagen Blenda Lina Haga	
Several staircase systems - connected on bottom floor (C)	 Måttbandet Flygfärfika	 Fortuna	
- connected on several floors (D)	 Blomstret Svärdet Kupan		
Central hall/yard (E)	 Yzan	 Skottet Ångviktsgården	
<b>LOW-RISE BUILDINGS</b>			
Corridor systems (F)	Common rooms placed together		Common rooms split
Central hall/yard (G)	 Regnbågen	 Björkåsa	 Jernstøberiet

Fig 1. Scheme of all collective houses

### Collective houses of today

The collective house of today is a fairly small building, in size between the functionalist collective house and the commune of the 1960's. There are today about 50 such houses in Sweden, containing 15-80 apartments each. The average size is about 30 apartments. Both new buildings and rebuilt ones exist.

In fig 1 the existing collective houses were organized according to the shape of the transition zone and the location of the common kitchen and diningroom.<sup>1</sup>

In the first category (A) are found buildings with one single stairwell, the tower principle. The common rooms mostly are placed in the bottom floors but one example of common rooms on an upper floor exists as well. Those buildings often are former apartment houses from the 1960's. In the second category (B), we find buildings with one stairwell that in addition has corridors or outdoor loggias. All buildings have common rooms on the bottom floor and in the basement. The next category (C) contains buildings with several separate stairwells, either in the same building block or placed in separate blocks, connected by common rooms in the bottom floor. In the buildings in the next group (D), the stairwells are connected on more than one floor. The following category (E) is the high central hall building. The common rooms could be on any floor. Finally we have two types, where the communication space is mostly horizontal. The first (F) is based on corridors and the second (G) on a central yard.

In the following discussion, some collective houses will be used as concrete examples. *Trädet* and *Stacken* belong to the first category (A) and *Yxan* to category D. A Danish example, *Jernstøberiet*, is chosen as an example from category G, the central hall, as this type is missing in Sweden. The discussion will focus on three points: the location of private areas and the common rooms (primarily the kitchen and diningroom), and the organization of the transition zone.

### Private areas versus common rooms

The collective houses *Trädet* and *Stacken* are two typical highrise suburban buildings from 1960's, both situated in Gothenburg (fig 2a, 3a). In *Trädet* the apartments on the bottom floor have been converted to a common area with kitchen, dining room, laundry and hobbyrooms. A souterrain floor contains a day nursery and private storage. On the upper floors four or five apartments gather around identical platforms. In *Stacken* the common living area instead is placed on the sixth floor, and laundry and hobbyrooms on the bottom floor.

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<sup>1</sup> A list over collective houses existing 1989 was used. Certain buildings were excluded, such as those where collective houses were combined with institutions for social care. Also buildings with common rooms only in the basement, or buildings with no indoor connection between dwelling areas and common rooms were excluded.

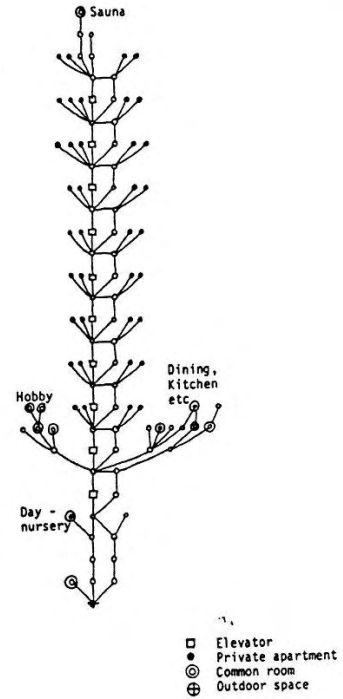
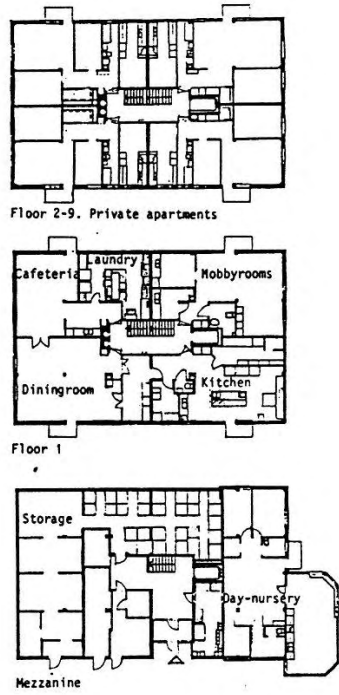


Fig 2a Trädet, plan

Fig 2b Trädet, graph with outdoor area in bottom

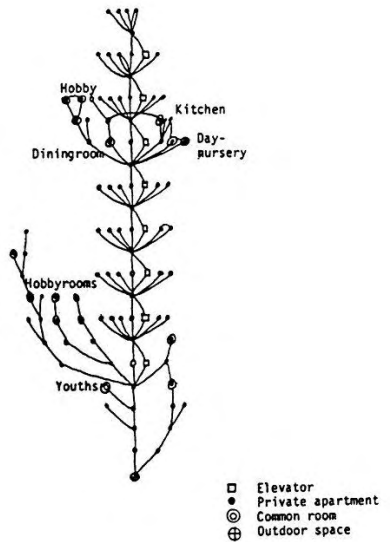
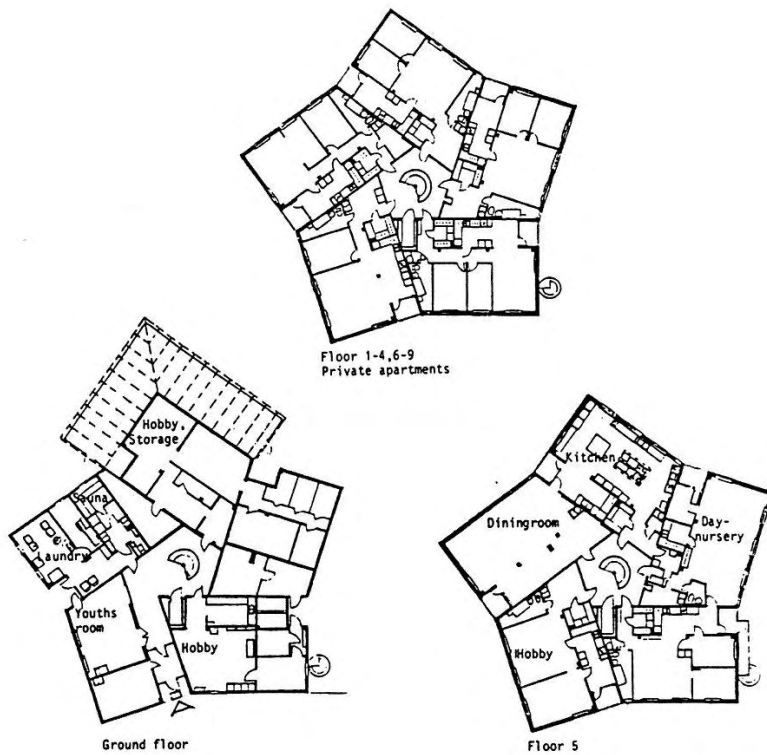


Fig 3a Stacken, plan

Fig 3b Stacken, graph with outdoor area in bottom

The spatial organization of those buildings is characterized by a deep and non-branching transition zone when seen from the outdoor area (fig 2b, 3b). Before rebuilding, there were no rings of connected rooms, and now there are rings only on the common floors (note that the private dwellings were excluded in the analysis). Only the elevator connects the deepest areas with the shallowest ones. The systems are strongly segregated, and the integration core is found inside the system. (Fig 4 a, b)

	Min RRA	Med RRA	Max RRA
Jernstøberiet	0.547	1.052	1.972
Yxan	1.013	1.531	2.258
Stacken	1.315	1.965	3.064
Trädet	1.452	2.112	3.277

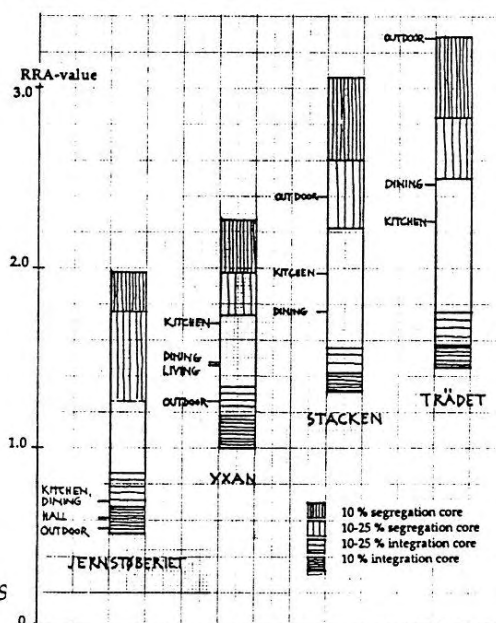


Fig 4a Max, medium and min RRA-values

Fig 4b Diagram showing RRA-values

The dwelling situation for the individual members of those collective groups differs between the high-up position, the location in the middle, or close to the entrance. Places situated deep in the building, as well as places close to the entrance, both have a segregated position. It is interesting to note, however, that the different locations, in spite of both being high segregated, give different social implications. The inhabitants deep in the building feel, they say, that this is a "calm and nice" position where few persons pass. "High up you are in a way inviolable", one woman in *Trädet* says. People living here seem to look upon their landing as more private than other areas, and have expanded their dwelling by putting private belongings (shoes, childrens outdoor toys, flowers, pictures on the wall) outside the door. It is also here, in out-of-sight nooks, that left-over things and pure garbage might be found more than in other places in the building.

Those who live on the lowest apartment floors have another situation. It is not described as "calm", but rather as a place where one can come and go without the other inhabitants knowing. Those dwellings are said to attract inhabitants who (by the judge of other neighbours) do not quite seem to belong, mentally, to the collective group, nor take much part in the common life. The place closest to the entrance is traditionally the place for supervision, the concierge's position, where he or she may easily observe strangers entering

the building. In the two examples though, the ideal concierge position was used for common rooms and the private dwellings come some steps further in. In *Trädet* instead the childrens day nursery has this position, in *Stacken* the carpentry.

The position of the private apartment in the most integrated areas in the middle of the building is commented in terms of: "you meet a lot of people", "you are close to everything". Those areas would probably mostly have been places for just passing by, if it were not for the existence of the elevator (discussed later). Now they often become local meeting-points for the surrounding neighbours. This is demonstrated by the fact that also here private belongings are placed outside the entrances. In *Trädet* a common newspaper had its place on a bench on one middle floor, for the neighbours use.

*Trädet* and *Stacken* differ greatly on one essential point, that is the location of the common diningroom and kitchen, the most important rooms for the group's social life. In *Trädet* all the common rooms are situated on the bottom floors. This means that rooms, that were intended for the common daily life of the group, have been given the most segregated position. They are by this situated closer to the public areas than to the inhabitants dwellings. A consequence is that the common rooms might attract the inhabitants at times when passing the entrance door, but not when they have reached home. The common rooms are instead easily accessible for visitors and furthermore for intruders, and the fact that there is a lack of surrounding private dwellings contributes to the risk of theft and vandalization in these areas. When visiting common rooms situated like this the doors were always found locked. In another house with similar arrangement a big common TV was locked to the wall by a steel chain to prevent theft.

In this case *Stacken's* common dining area has a more protected location. It is placed on the sixth floor, in a very integrated position, and is thus more probable to be used spontaneously by the inhabitants. This diningroom in *Stacken* had from the beginning no furnitures for social meeting, unless dining-tables. The fact that the inhabitants themselves have changed and rearranged the diningroom with sofas and armchairs, points out that there has been an urge for a common livingroom in this part of the building.

In *Jernstøberiet* a different arrangement of private and common areas, and a more uniform location of private dwellings is found (fig 5 a,b). *Jernstøberiet* is a Danish example, an old ironfactory which was transformed into a "bofællesskab", the Danish counterpart to the collective house. Ten apartments gather around the big former factory hall, a strongly controlled and well integrated place. In one part of the hall, a separate common house has been built in, which contains the common kitchen, diningroom, and on the upper floor a workshop, a guestroom, and a livingroom. An interesting fact is that



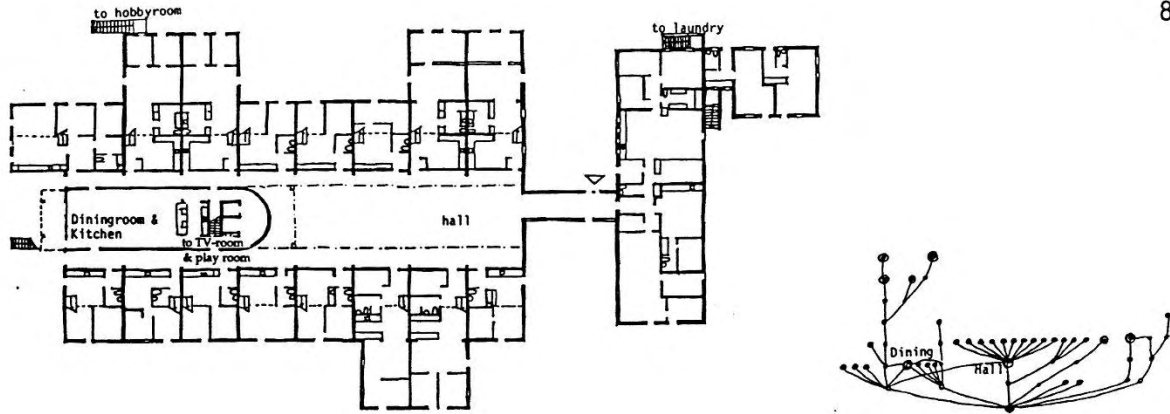


Fig 5a Jernstøberiet, plan

Fig 5b Jernstøberiet, graph with outdoor area in bottom

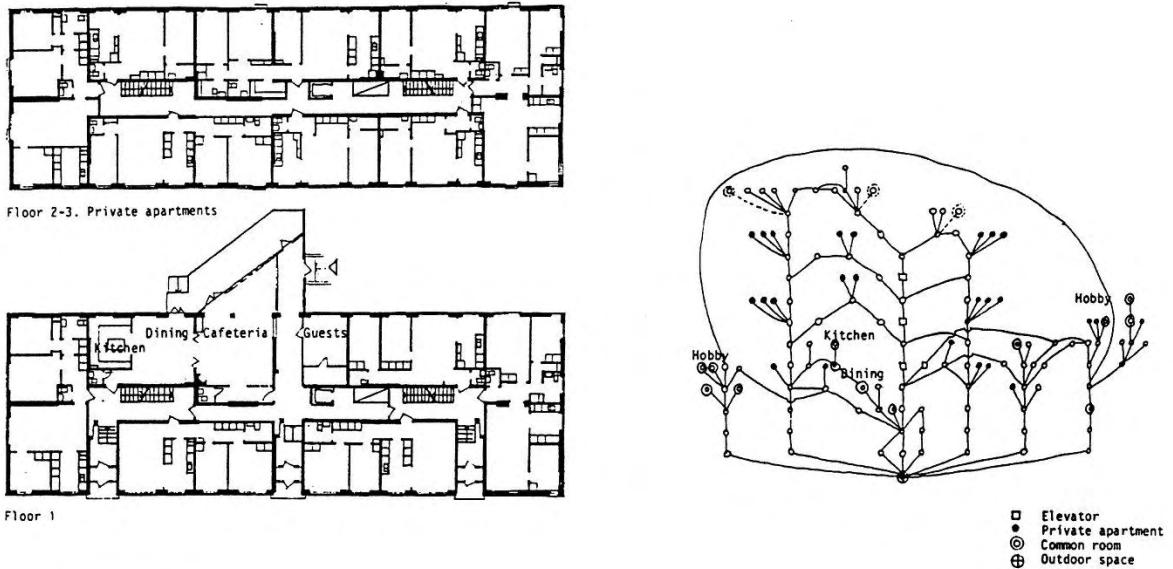


Fig 6a Yxan, plan

Fig 6b Yxan, graph with outdoor area in bottom

connected annex, a very segregated position which gives a more isolated situation for some residents. Separate entrances to the building in the corridors beside the common house have also been added. The inhabitants have shown will to avoid the too strong focusing on the community and to give privacy more weight.

The common facilities are in *Jernstøberiet* placed in the middle and the dwellings are situated farther out, closer to the outside world. The building is closed towards the outside and turns inwards, the system is 'introvert'. The same was found in the former example, *Stacken*.

The risk for intruders in the common rooms is small, as the inhabitants surround the entrances. The arrangement emphasizes that those rooms are intended for the group's common use, not for outsiders. No locks are found at the doors to those rooms. In the workshop on the upper floor private sewing-machines and piles of cloth demonstrate that this room functions as a prolonged private living space as well as a common area.

*Yxan* is a former apartment house, built in 1940, situated in Landskrona, in the south of Sweden (fig 6 a, b). *Yxan* is an example of a building with a spread-out transition zone where two stairwells have been connected by long corridors. This gives a special situation for the dwellings as well as for the common rooms. Private apartments are spread out along the corridor on every floor. The width of the corridor varies, it has got nooks and narrow parts, and the degree of privatization varies according to this, but also according to the degree of spatial integration. It is notable that here as well as in *Trädet* and *Stacken* the most frequent use of this space for private purposes is in the ends, i.e. the widest and most segregated parts of the corridors.

The overall spatial organization in *Yxan* is different to the other examples shown. *Yxan's* spatial system is more integrated than the earlier examples. It has all common living areas on the bottom floor, like in *Trädet*, but in *Yxan* this position is high integrated. The common rooms are further more surrounded by apartments, like in *Jernstøberiet*. When visiting this building it is notable that the common livingroom to a great extent is used for spontaneous gathering. People sit around smoking, reading newspapers or having a cup of coffee. (The fact that this is the only place where smoking is allowed also contributes). The rooms are, in opposite to *Jernstøberiet*, turned towards the garden and the surroundings, with a huge terrass as a common outdoor space.

As common rooms are situated close to the outdoor world at the same time as they are closely connected to the inhabitants private areas, one could call this a 'extrovert' system, in opposite to the two former examples *Stacken* and *Jernstøberiet*.

### **The transition zone**

The meeting of the private and the common sphere takes place in the transition zone. Thus the social conditions depend to a great extent on the spatial characteristics of this area.

To return to *Trädet* and *Stacken*, it has been shown that the transition zone in those two buildings consists of a single high stairwell, a communication system which works like a cul-de-sac: you take one way up and the same way back. There are few possibilities to move around in these buildings. The few rings of rooms that are found are situated in the common rooms and contain few rooms. In *Trädet* this means that there are rings only in the outer and most segregated parts of the building, not in the inner ones, which facilitates

communication in the visitors' part of the building, instead of in the parts where the residents themselves live and move.

The *elevator* in *Trüdet* and *Stacken* works against the cul-de-sac-principle of the stairwell. The elevator creates all rings and routes needed for both inhabitants and visitors, and works thus as a connecting spatial element. As it, in opposite to other rooms, is mobile, it could be looked upon as an indoor vehicle, a floating room enclosed in the static spatial structure of the rest of the building. Those who live in the deep located dwellings use it for rapid transportation. In fact, compared to other spaces, the elevator is the most integrated space in the building. It was therefore often used as a noticeboard for urgent messages for everyone to observe. "Sometimes I go all the way up just to get time to read everything", a woman said.

The elevator also in some situations functions as an "escape route" when people don't feel like meeting anybody (although they can not, for the short period of transportation, avoid other travellers). For people living on one of the central floors, the existence of an elevator gives more isolation to that single floor, as just the inhabitants on nearby floors use the stairs and the others pass unseen.

The central hall in *Jernstøberiet* most evidently supports the sense of belonging to a group, but also mutual supervision and social control through kitchen windows and entrance doors of the surrounding dwellings (fig 7a, b). The hall was used for the children biking and playing. Private sitting arrangements gather along the indoor facades and a big noticeboard covers one side of the hall. It is, however, interesting to note that in spite of those arrangements, the outdoor corners of the building are preferred before the central hall for spontaneous gathering in smaller groups.

The strong social control which lies embedded in the mode of arranging the transition zone in *Jernstøberiet* is extreme. It has already been pointed out that the control value has decreased by the intervention of adding new entrances. Furthermore every dwelling has its escape route through the private garden on the back side of the building which are used when somebody does not want to be sociable or even observed by the others.

During the rebuilding of *Yxan*, the transition zone was changed radically. The former separated stairwells were connected by long corridors, giving large internal spatial rings. Old glazed openings between the floors were saved, and you can see from one floor to another. The effect is that *Yxan's* transition zone is interwoven spatially and visually to a greater extent than any other collective houses. Those rings mean possibilities for making shortcuts between the different parts of the building, but also allows the choice of different routes. From every place you can choose at least two different ways out, which sometimes might be a benefit. The rings give opportunities for children to run

around in the whole building chasing each other. The fact that the rings include the corridors on the bottom floor, where the common living area is situated, contributes to the fact that they are used as indoor streets. Here the inhabitants take a walk when they feel like meeting somebody and having a chat.

It is interesting to note that the increase of rings in *Yxan* is not a result of conscious spatial considerations but are due to the architects' efforts to create indoor communication to the common rooms, and to save money by just installing one elevator.

### Final discussion

The new collective houses in Sweden aim at a combination of privacy in the family sphere and a higher degree of fellowship and community in the group than in ordinary dwelling areas. In some examples, it has been shown that this ambition has yielded different spatial solutions that give varying premises for privacy or community.

In *Trädet* and *Stacken* measures in the spatial organization that support privacy were dominating, while steps in the layout that could support community were less considered. Privacy was supported by the placement of private apartments, by avoiding connecting rings in the inhabitants' parts of the building, and in *Trädet* also by locating common rooms in areas that are closer to visitors than to the inhabitants themselves.

*Yxan* has in its spatial organisation provided premises for both community and privacy. Big spatial rings that both connect and separate different parts of the building give possibilities of individual choice, and the common living areas are placed in a well integrated position, surrounded by dwellings.

In *Jernstøberiet* the community within the group was emphasized. The central hall has provided premises for contact and interaction within the group, and the placement of the common rooms gives good possibilities for the inhabitants' use, but not for outsiders. It is also shown that the communitarian efforts were neutralized by complementary arrangements in the layout, such as new entrances and private escape routes.

When considering all the collective houses of Sweden (fig 1), it is notable that buildings with spatial arrangements similar to *Trädet* and *Stacken* are more common than the other examples. The *Yxan* model, with more ring-type spatial systems, is rare. The type that traditionally was most connected with collective living, the central hall, does not exist at all in Sweden.

Against common prejudices in society that fear that collective living means losing all privacy, it shows that more houses were built that emphasize privacy than the opposite.

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