

Building Community: Experiments in Communal Living in Denmark

Semester & Location: Spring 2026 - DIS Copenhagen

Type & Credits: Elective Course - 3 credits

Major Disciplines: Sociology; Urban Studies; History;

Related Disciplines Philosophy; Urban Design

Faculty Members: Stephen Lloyd-Moffett

Time & Place: TBA

Course Description

Humans have experimented with different ways of living together since tribes first formed many generations ago. Denmark has been central to those experimentations in the modern era as the fountainhead of the cohousing, eco-village, and collective house movements. With the backdrop of these active Danish experiments in communal living in mind, this course asks you to consider the questions of community: how do/should we humans share space and resources together? Is there an alternative to the single-family living norms that dominate the modern developed world? What lessons can experiments in communal living offer for our wider society, even when they fail?

This course will contextualize the rise of alternative living environments in Denmark by highlighting the diversity of forms and their evolution over time. We will pay particular attention to past theorists such as N.F.S. Grundtvig and Rudolf Steiner as well as contemporary contributors such as the co-housing advocates/architects McCamant & Durrett. Our classroom learning will be supplemented by weekly “field classes” which often include visiting communities in Denmark but may also include interviews with relevant researchers, virtual visits via zoom, and trips to the museums in Copenhagen that touch upon collaborative living experiments. Finally, in stressing the importance of “learn-by-doing,” we will aspire to create the guidelines for our own imagined community of the future.

Learning Objectives

- Interrogate and analyze the different forms of human cohabitation across time, with particular attention to the contributions of Denmark.
- Connect the theoretical considerations and intellectual history to real-world examples of communal living “in the field” of Denmark.
- Employ the study of collaborative housing in Denmark as a lens to understand Danish culture and society.
- Develop senses of belonging among classmates as examples of the ways in which collaborative forms of housing are predicated on the formation of micro-societies.
- Develop research skills and academic writing proficiency through research of historical and contemporary communities.

Faculty

Stephen Lloyd-Moffett has been a professor of Religious Studies in Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, where he is also the co-founder of an intentional community, gathering space, and farm called The Lavra. For the last decade, he has been on the board of the International Communal Studies Association and has presented frequently at conferences dedicated to the academic study of community. He is currently a guest researcher at the Department of Built Environment (BUILT) at Aalborg University, Copenhagen. He received his PhD in Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2005, MA from UCSB in 2002, MTh in Theology from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in 2002, and BA in Economics and Film Studies from Claremont McKenna College in 1994.

Assignments

Danish Community Ethnographic Video Project (25%)

With over 800 communities in Denmark, there are many different forms that Denmark has experimented with communal living. Together with the professor, you will choose a community and practice our ethnographic skills by developing an ethnographic report on this community and then turning this report into a 4-8 minute videos. This may start off with internet research but it will also include an interview with a member of the community, and (if possible) a visit to the community.

Your ethnographic report will include elements such as:

1. The History of the Community

2. Biographical Notes on the Founders
3. The form or focus of the community (i.e., what brings them together, including perhaps spirituality, environmental concerns, socio-economic concerns, etc...)
4. The systems they have in place: how do they make decisions? Are they income sharing? What are their environmental goals?
5. The role of artistic expression, design, and shared ritual within the community.
6. An analysis of the unique challenges the community faces.
7. Lasting influence of the community (if applicable)

Your videos will be available to your classmates and offered to the community you profile as a gift for their participation but will only be made public at your own request.

International Communities Fair (15%)

Beginning in the 1960s, there was a revolution in collaborative living in many parts of the developed world but some of the most interesting were here in Europe. This project will highlight. This collective research enterprise will involve our class collecting and analyzing the stories of some of the most vibrant and interesting communities in Denmark, Europe, and around the globe. For each “entry,” you will analyze the community based on the same factors as the communities above but instead of creating a video, you will create a poster for our fair. Then, in lieu of class, we will have an open communities fair where you represent “your” community to other members of our broader DIS community.

Design your Community Project (25%)

After a term dedicated to studying the myriad forms of collaborative living—historically, globally, and locally—you will have a chance to develop a vision for your own imagined community. In this project, you will choose a partner as your “co-founder”, and you will together write the following documents:

1. Your “Manifesto” that outlines your case for the need for your community, paying particular attention to its diagnosis of the social ills that led to your community forming, your goals for the community, the values that you expect members to share, and the spirit that you hope will guide the community as it evolves.
2. A “business” plan with a timeline for recruiting the members, acquiring land, and creating your community.
3. The establishment of your community rules and guidelines, including how you make decisions, how you will deal with conflict, the economic model including a plan for the distribution of common work, the process for recruiting and initiating new members, and the process for asking members to leave

You will share your community with the rest of the class on the last day of class.

Community Consultant Interview (15%)

While this class does not lend itself to solely learning facts, formulas, or natural laws, it does ask you to internalize the benefits and challenges of various forms of collaborative living. In lieu of a final exam, you and a partner will appear as “community consultants” where you present (to me and an outside examiner) both the community you designed AND answer our questions on the formation of community, drawing upon specific examples from the class. We may also present scenarios and situational contexts that require reflective responses that integrate the historical examples, conceptual challenges, and benefits/trade-offs of living in community.

Participation (20%)

The classroom and site visits are our living laboratories where learning occurs and are predicated on each of you being present and prepared. My hope is that all of you will participate through being curious, attentive, and dedicated to the class. Do the readings. Ask questions. Engage with the generous people who invite us for site visits.

If it does not seem that students have engaged with the reading prior to class, I reserve the right to introduce reading quizzes to ensure that you are doing all the reading as requested.

Readings

The literature on alternative living, both in global contexts and in Denmark in particular, is vast. Instead of a single book, this class will employ chapters, articles, and excerpts to introduce you to this literature and isolate the bibliographic references that are most relevant to our themes and learning objectives. These will be provided in .pdf form on the learning management system of the school. They are noted below but they will be linked to each week’s topic.

Weekly Schedule

Week 4:1 Introduction to the Course: Community and Happiness, Part I

Week 5:1 Community and Happiness, Part II: Class Visit to the Happiness Museum in Copenhagen

Matilda Welin, “Why Communal Living Can Make Us Happier” *BBC Culture* (2024).

Week 5:2: Community and Happiness, Part III: Class session with Henrik Mahncke, lead researcher for “Our Happiness - What we can learn from the happiest Danes” for Realdania

Reading on Canvas:

Kirsten Ghodsee, *Everyday Utopia: What 2,000 Years of Wild Experiments Can Teach Us About the Good Life* (2023). Chapter 2: Home is Where the Walls Are: Thinking Outside the Single-Family Box.

Week 6: Core Course Week

Week 7:1 The Origins of Intentional Communal Living: Philosophical Communities, Buddhist Monasteries, Hindu Ashrams, and Christian Monasteries

Reading:

Leonid Zhmud, "Chapter 4: The Pythagorean Communities" in Kevin Windle, and Rosh Ireland (eds), *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans* (2012).

Week 7:2 Discussion with Danish Monastic from Åsebakken Priory

Week 8:1 The Basis of Community in Denmark: N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783 - 1882)

Readings

Excerpts from N.F.S. Grundtvig, "Small Pamphlets/Smaaskrifter" (1872).

Week 8:2 Visit to a Danish Folkschool-Singing or Grundtvig Forum in CPH

Week 9:The First Kollektives in Denmark

Readings:

Francine Port, "The politics of habitat" in *New forms of collective housing in Europe*, edited by Arc en rêve centre d'architecture (2009).

Optional Class Movie Night: "The Commune" (2016) together

Week 9:2 Kollektive Site Visit in Copenhagen

Week 10:1 The 1960s Communes & Anarchy, the Rise of Christiania

Reading:

“Chapter 2: Losers' Paradise” in David Bramwell, *The No.9 Bus to Utopia: How one man's extraordinary journey led to a quiet revolution* (2014)

Week 10:2 Field Class: Visit to Christiania

Week 11:1 Practicum: The Basics of Ethnography Workshop I

Reading:

Diana Leafe Christian, “Part One: Planting the Seeds of a Healthy Community,” *Creating a life together: practical tools to grow ecovillages and intentional communities* (2003).

Week 11:2 Practicum: A collective ethnography

Week 12: Long Tour Week

Week 13:1 The Origin of Cohousing in Denmark

Reading:

Excerpts from K. McCamant & C. Durrett, *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities* (2011).

Wednesday Field Visit to Monksgard or Svanholm

Week 13:2 International Communities Fair for DIS Classmates

Week 14:1 Contemporary Spiritual, Free Love, & Activist Communities in Europe

Reading: Timothy Miller, “Introduction” in *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (1999).

Week 14:2 Spring Break

Week 15:1 Classroom Session: The Origins of Eco Villages

Reading:

A. Whitney Sanford, “Sustainability in Community” Chapter in *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence* (2017).

Wednesday Field Class visit Karise Permatopia (~1hr from Copenhagen)

Week 15:2 Topics in Communal Studies: “Cults” & Community

Week 16:1 Topics in Communal Studies: Disabilities & Community: Camphill, Steiner, and Waldorff Schools

Reading: Dan McKanan, “Introduction,” in *Camphill and the Future : Spirituality and Disability in an Evolving Communal Movement* (2021).

Week 16:2 Discussion with representatives of Hertha Levefællesskab

Week 17: Long Tour Week

Week 18:1 Topics in Communal Studies: Aging and Community- The Rise of Seniorbofællesskab

Reading: Max Pedersen, “Senior Co-Housing Communities in Denmark” in *Journal of Housing for the Elderly* (2015).

Week 18:2 Visit and helping at a local seniorbofællesskab

Week 19:1 Topics in Communal Studies: The Future of Collaborative Living in Denmark and the world

Reading: Stephen Lloyd-Moffett & Jesper Ole Jensen, “Defining and Classifying Communal Living in Denmark,” Draft of working article.

Week 19:2 Community Consultant Interview Assignment

Week 20:1 Class Celebration: Sharing “Our” Communities

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY:

Danish Community Ethnographic Video	25%
International Communities Fair	15%
Design your Community Project	25%
Community Consultant Interview	15%
Participation	20%

GRADING SCALE

The following Grading Scale is utilized for student evaluation. Pass/Fail is not an option for DIS coursework.

Pluses and minuses are awarded as follows on a 100% scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Satisfactory/Poor</u>	<u>Failing</u>
97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%: F
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all classes, including the Field Classes, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories).

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

The classroom environment is founded on mutual respect, community, and an aim toward equity. These Community Values support the creation of a collaborative and vibrant community. Our community is the foundation of our learning, critical inquiry, and discovery. Each member of this course has a responsibility to uphold the following values when engaging with one another.

- **Well-Being:** We commit to the health, safety and well-being of ourselves, all members of our learning community, *and* the hosts we will visit.
- **Interconnectedness:** We understand our actions and attitudes have an impact locally and globally. We always seek to positively affect the planet and the people around us near and far.
- **Respect:** We honor the inherent dignity of *all people* with an abiding commitment to freedom of expression, scholarly discourse and the advancement of knowledge. We have the right to be treated, and the responsibility to treat others, with fairness and equity.
- **Inclusion:** We ensure inclusive environments that welcome, value, affirm and embrace *all people* within our learning community and among the site visits we visit.
- **Integrity:** We are honest and ethical in all of our interactions, including our academic work. We hold ourselves accountable for our actions.
- **Excellence:** We model the highest academic standards of preparation, inquiry and knowledge and consistently seek to understand complex issues and express informed opinions with courage and conviction.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

This classroom provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact DIS or me to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A letter from students' home institutions verifying the accommodations received on their home campuses (dated within the last three years) is required before any accommodation is provided for this class.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct.

Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the learning community are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity.