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## Coliving, a housing alternative? The case of the city of Malaga

José Romero-Padilla

[romeropadilla12@gmail.com](mailto:romeropadilla12@gmail.com)  0000-0002-0916-1850

*Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Málaga.*

*Bulevar Louis Pasteur, 26. 29071 Málaga, España.*

Yolanda Romero-Padilla

[yromerop@ucm.es](mailto:yromerop@ucm.es)  0000-0001-9753-5113

*Departamento de Organización de Empresas, Facultad de Comercio y Turismo,  
 Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Avenida de Filipinas, 3. 28003 Madrid, España.*

### KEYWORDS

Coliving  
 Digital nomads  
 Rental

### INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS

The economic and labor situation that has prevailed for more than a decade in Malaga and Spain in general has had a negative influence on access to housing. These, together with other elements such as technological advances and social changes have been able to favor the development of the coliving modality (Sepúlveda, 2020). This model, in which different individuals share common spaces and services (Corfe, 2019), has recently begun to be implemented in Spanish cities such as Malaga.

Although in the scientific literature the terms cohousing and coliving are used to refer to the shared lifestyle phenomenon, the main differences lie in their dimensions and the duration of the stays. Coliving tends to be small in size and for short stays, while cohousing tends to be larger and for longer or even permanent stays (table 1). This is why cohousing is better positioned as an alternative to traditional rentals.

**Table 1.** The construction of the definition of coliving versus cohousing.

Coliving	Cohousing
Housing with more quantity and variety of services available to users, but of reduced dimensions (sector companies).	Type of housing with more common spaces and collective facilities (Vestbro, 2000). Larger spaces (sector companies).
Short stays (sector companies).	Long or permanent stays (sector companies).
Housing as a service, not home (De Molina and Ramos, 2020).	Home, feeling of belonging (De Molina and Ramos, 2020).
Especially aimed at digital nomads (Steding, 2019) and young professional profile (sector companies).	Broader public: families, seniors (sector companies).
Location in urban areas (Sepúlveda, 2020; sector companies).	Location away from large cities. Search for contact with nature (Kindred Quarters, Primer Grupo Blasco).

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**Correspondencia autores:** [romeropadilla12@gmail.com](mailto:romeropadilla12@gmail.com) (José Romero-Padilla)

**Table 1.** The construction of the definition of coliving versus cohousing.

Collaborative housing with economic independence of its members (Sepúlveda, 2020).	Covivienda with rights of use (VidaCaixa).
Creation of social ties among its members (Thees et al., 2020).	Long-term common project (La Caixa).

Source: own elaboration.

Denmark is situated as a precursor country, between 1960 and 1970 (Corfe, 2019; Thess *et al.*, 2020; Sepúlveda, 2020; De Molina & Valero, 2020). Small groups of communities emerge that seek an alternative way of life, sharing in their residence services such as dining room, kitchen and laundry, although each household maintains its private autonomy (Sepúlveda, 2020). A housing alternative based on sustainability (De Molina & Valero, 2020), with a lifestyle based on coexistence between people, supported by the exchange and collaboration between them (Thess *et al.*, 2020).

Over the years, this alternative spread to other European countries, such as Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany, among others. In Spain, it was in the 1990s when the first projects appeared, although more focused on the senior sector (Rubio, 2023), with Madrid and Barcelona being the most relevant cities of implementation.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to analyze the consequences of the implementation of the coliving model as a housing option in the city of Malaga from a legal-social approach. The following specific objectives have been established: (a) to clarify the definition of coliving; (b) to study the effect of its implementation as a housing alternative in the city of Malaga; (c) to assess the target population; (d) to examine the legal framework of its implementation.

Firstly, the scientific literature on the coliving phenomenon has been reviewed to clarify its definition and background, as well as the target groups. Secondly, examples of coliving in Europe and Spain were studied on the basis of their websites.

Thirdly, the implementation of coliving in the city of Malaga has been analyzed. To this end, the problem of access to housing has been contextualized, the regulatory framework of this modality at state and municipal level has been reviewed, and its possibilities as a housing alternative have been studied, contrasting the main positive and negative aspects. In addition to the documentary sources –scientific articles, press articles and statistical sources–, the information has been complemented by structured interviews with local agents from the academic, administrative and associative spheres, in order to know their perception of coliving as a housing modality in Malaga.

## DISCUSSION OF MAIN RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The coliving housing model is understood as an alternative shared lifestyle phenomenon to conventional housing, which emerged relatively few decades ago, and which in recent years is gaining more and more strength in large cities. In this way of life, tenants can rent, in the short or medium term, a small private apartment, which is compensated with shared access to spaces and services, such as kitchen, gym, leisure areas, coworking areas, laundry and cleaning services, security, maintenance, etc. The main differences with respect to cohousing lie in the duration of their stays and their size. Cohousing is usually larger and the stays are designed for a longer term or even permanent. Not all cohousing are the same, as there are some with more services and shared spaces than others, and even “false” cohousing, such as those located in Malaga city (Nordik and THR), which simply offer room rentals similar to those provided by tourist housing.



Regarding the assessment of its legal framework, coliving is currently in a legal vacuum in Spain. It lacks specific regulations governing this model, both at the state and regional level, being the municipalities the ones who have to deal with this issue (De Jubera, 2018; Simón, 2020; Sepúlveda, 2020). The housing cooperative on a cession of use basis has been the most similar legal figure (Simón, 2020) and the one followed by most of the coliving projects implemented in Spain. In Malaga, the provisions of the General Urban Development Plan in force (2011) do not include the coliving modality either, so the projects analyzed frame it within the type of use similar to lodging.

Coliving is not yet widespread in Malaga. The cases examined show a certain lack of shared services typical of this modality, compared to other cities with a greater implantation. According to the experts interviewed, this new housing phenomenon could expand in the future and add value to the city of Malaga, although they warn of the possible repercussions it could have on the already strained real estate market for renting and selling homes. They consider that it can be a housing alternative, agreeing with authors such as Corfe (2019), Thess *et al.* (2020) and Simón (2020). However, there are some discrepancies among them. On the one hand, if the percentage of rent allocated to rent payment remains high, the situation would not differ from the current traditional rent. On the other hand, facilitating access to housing would in any case be temporary, so it would still not solve the problem of accessing housing on a permanent basis.

If we compare the monthly fees to be paid for a coliving versus a traditional rental, we can see that the prices of the former are significantly lower than the latter. With respect to the target public, there is a wide acceptance in the scientific literature in affirming that most of the demanders of this type of housing today are young entrepreneurs who need greater mobility and at the same time to be located in urban nerve centers where they are well connected to work centers. This is what is defined as “digital nomads”, due to the technological and digital profile of the new professions (Steding, 2019; De Molina & Valero, 2020; Thess *et al.*, 2020). A statement in which most of the experts interviewed agree, along with young people, students and workers in general.

In short, the main advantages of this new housing alternative are basically based on three aspects: easier access to housing, especially for young people, the lower cost involved and the benefits they provide in terms of social component –interactions–, sustainability –lower consumption of resources– and urban enrichment –more services, greater diversification of activities–. But there are also some drawbacks in addition to the absence of specific regulations, such as social reluctance to embrace this new model and the risk of adulterating the real estate market with false coliving that is camouflaged with other figures such as tourist housing.

As a final conclusion, and in response to the general objective of this paper, coliving can indeed be an optimal option that helps to access housing in Malaga, as long as it has a legal framework that provides certainty. According to the data collected, coliving seems to be the low-cost solution to a housing market that is unattainable for a large part of the population, especially young people.