Chapter 1: Introduction

Aims

The primary aim of this research is to compare the architectural objectives of the Social Condenser to 21st century Intentional Communities. While the Soviet Avant-Garde, epitomised by the Narkomfin Building, experimented and professed an understanding of how human behaviour could induce collectivism. Modern intentional communities like Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue suggest a shift toward voluntary, agency-led social cohesion.

This study aims to determine whether the agency ascribed to architectural devices of the contemporary case studies is of the same ilk as the Social Condenser. From opportunities of state-led social engineering to tools for fostering personal autonomy, security and communal belonging. Ultimately, the research seeks to determine whether the Social Condenser remains a valid typology for addressing modern urban isolation or whether the Intentional Community represents a fundamental paradigm shift in how we design our cities and spaces for social interaction.

Objectives

The first objective is to synthesise a definitive set of Social Condenser criteria by analysing the Narkomfin Building in detail. This involves a thematic review of Constructivist theory to identify specific architectural catalysts such as the internal street, the reduction of the private domestic sphere, and the integration of collective social cells. This benchmark will serve as the lens through which modern case studies are evaluated.

Secondly, I will conduct a detailed spatial analysis of Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue. This involves how the initial architectural devices identified in the Narkomfin Building translate into the contemporary case studies, whilst assessing whether residents respond well to them and whether the designs enhance their lives. The contemporary case studies have slightly different initiators (clients/funding) and architects, which provides a good scope to understand where concepts could derive from.

Proceeding to gather primary qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with both architects and residents. By interviewing Meredith Bowles, the architect of Marmalade Lane, and Chris Wilkins for Ty Darren, I intend to understand the specific social ambitions behind their design choices. Simultaneously, resident interviews will provide a critical reality check to see if these spaces successfully deliver a sense of community, or if they create unintended social friction. This objective addresses the gap between architectural intention and lived reality.

The final objective is to cross compare the findings from the historical benchmark and modern case studies. Evaluating the success of voluntary collectivism by analysing the results. The dissertation will conclude by proposing whether intentional communities could be classified as the "new Social Condensers" and what this would mean for the future of socially resilient housing design.

Methodology

This research uses a comparative case study design. To answer whether intentional communities are the new Social Condensers, analysing a historical and architectural benchmark, the Narkomfin Building in Moscow, against contemporary examples like Marmalade Lane, a co-housing scheme in Cambridge, Ty Darren, an over-55s later living scheme in Caerphilly, Wales and Appleby Blue, a

modern take on an almshouse, in Bermondsey, London. These three contemporary case studies closely compare to the different standpoints of architectural theory in the Narkomfin Building, the community led Marmalade Lane, the local authority version with Ty Darren, and the urban charity take with Appleby Blue. This selection enables an analysis of social groups, inter-generational residents and political contexts to understand how socially ambitious architecture operates across different socio-political climates.

The Research seeks to establish which architectural devices encourage a sense of community and general wellbeing, based on Moisei Ginzburg's principles of programmatic layering of different functions and spaces to encourage more communal behaviour. This is then compared to similar architectural preoccupations in our contemporary society.

A study of the Narkomfin Building's original plans and socialist intent to define the "Social Condenser" baseline. Primary qualitative data was collected through interviews with residents and architects from Marmalade Lane and Ty Darren. These interviews explored the positive social interaction intended by the architects versus the lived reality of the inhabitants. Conducting project analyses of Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue, focusing on architectural devices that act as modern catalysts for social interaction, such as utilising the circulation, private outdoor spaces and facilities in other communal areas. Conducting an initial pilot questionnaire for a broader subject served as a scoping tool for this methodology. It provided early indicators of user attitudes toward shared domesticity and community in later life, which informed the specific prompts used in the later, directly relevant interviews.

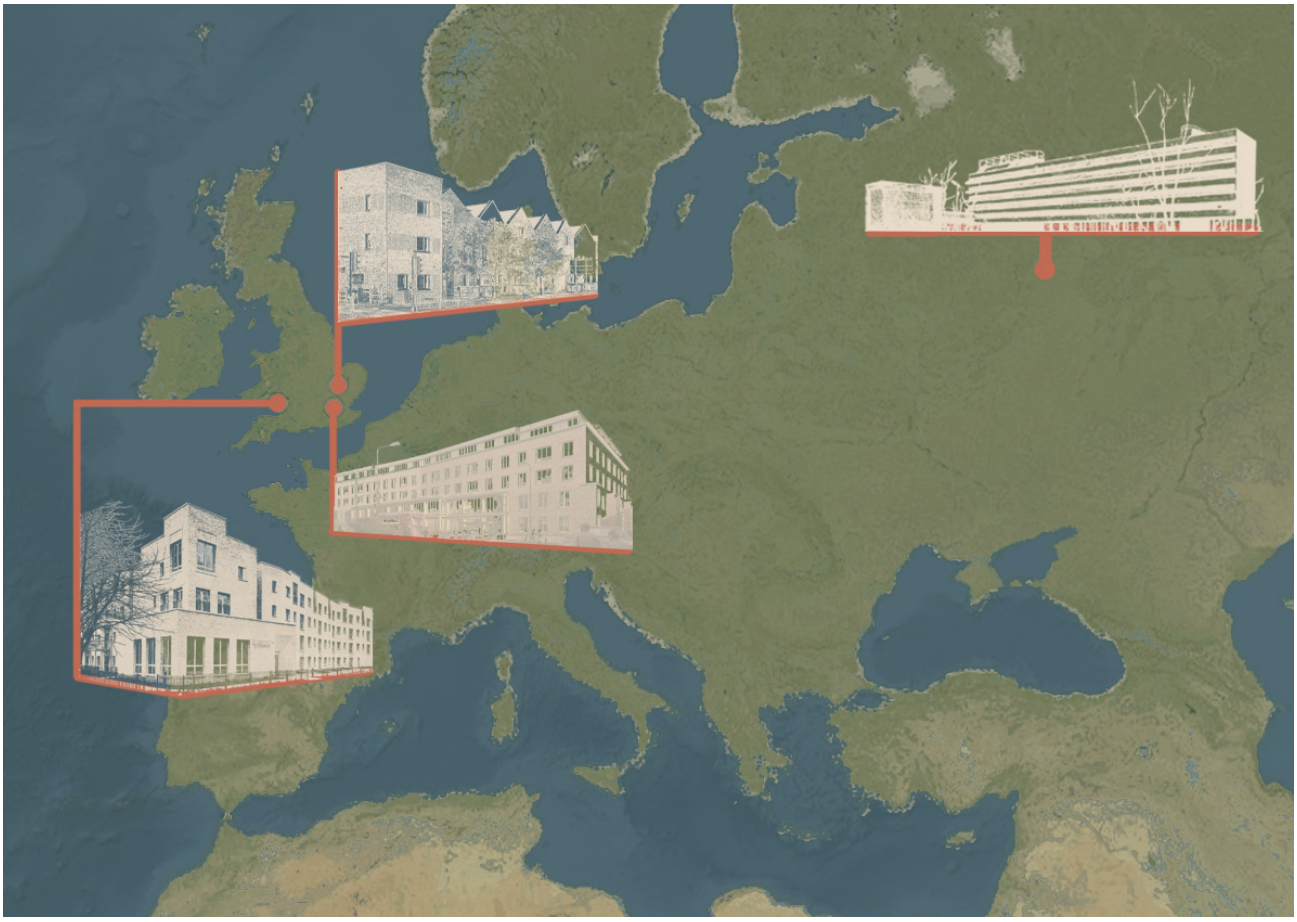


Figure 1: Map of Case Studies (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Chapter 2: Literature Review of The Evasive Concept of Contemporary Community.

The Sense of Community

A community is both a place and a psychological experience. The duality is key to explaining why so many people experience communal problems today and why intentional communities have become more attractive.

Psychologically, the sense of community is distinguished as a community of location, a geographically bound zone of a town or neighbourhood, or a community of interest and identity, which can be locationally fluid (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 5). Nasar and Julian (1995) suggest that aspatial networks can be based on profession, lifestyle, ethnicity, or shared opinions.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as a dynamic force comprising membership, influence, reinforcement and shared emotional connection. When a person, or group of people have a strong psychological sense of community, it is repeatedly linked to greater life satisfaction (Farahani, 2016, p. 17), lower loneliness and depression rates (Steidle et al., 2021, p. 6), as well as having higher civic and political participation with improved collective efficacy (Spezia, De Rosis and Nuti, 2025, p. 12). Samman (2025) argues that the dilution or absence of a sense of community is the most destructive dynamic in people's lives within society.

In current society, it is argued that there is a simultaneous abundance and deficit of the psychological sense of community within individuals. People now belong to multiple overlapping communities: local, digital, professional and identity based. Surveys and qualitative studies in Australia, Canada and Europe report that people still feel some sort of neighbourhood belonging, but there is widespread concern that the sense of community is declining throughout the Western world (Francis et al., 2012, p. 1). This is enabled by the evolution of commuting and car dependency (Best et al., 2009, p. 13), the development of internet platforms, and the dispersion of family members.

Nasar and Julian (1995) note that the spread of increased individualism has encouraged a culture of privacy and convenience, therefore isolating people from each other, albeit by their own choice. Enhancing the isolation that comes with individualistic privacy is the commercialisation of public spaces, such as shopping centres and parklands (Gehl, 2010, p. 122). Qualitative research captures this tension; people describe their neighbourhoods as both familiar and fragmented. People appreciate local ties but lament isolation, fear of crime and the loss of shared public life (Chen et al., 2025, p. 3).

Societal Changes

Studies have shown a shift from a single centred notion of local community to a multi-layered, fragmented ecology of communities, under pressure from spatial, technological and demographic changes. Car oriented planning and therefore out of town shopping centres are examples of suburbanisation and sprawl that have dispersed everyday life and undermine walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods that traditionally support casual encounters (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977, p. 187). Mixing into this concoction are precarious rental conditions, housing shortages and cuts to local services. Thereby weakening ordinary neighbourhood life, placing burdens on the individuals that live there and idealising an individualistic lifestyle, where people provide everything themselves and have no direct community reliance (Carrere et al., 2020, p. 2). Creating a cultural

emphasis on autonomy encourages withdrawal into private homes, cars and personalised media, rather than shared spaces (Nasar and Julian, 1995, p. 2).

Alexander and Gehl's work, with more recent 'ageing in place' and 'HAPPI' reports, all criticise environments that separate homes from work, services and public spaces, arguing that this erodes the everyday interactions on which community rests.

Social Consequences

In the United Kingdom, we currently have an ageing population. Periods of ill health, especially among older people, are intensified by the consequences of weak support networks (Hammond and Saunders, 2021, p. 31).

Socio-economically, rising inequality contributes directly to spatial segregation and feelings of relative deprivation, further straining the social cohesion (Stanley, Stanley and Hensher, 2012, p. 13). Additionally, migration and multiculturalism have made local communities more diverse, raising both opportunities for rich pluralism and tensions around belonging, discrimination and perceived exclusion.

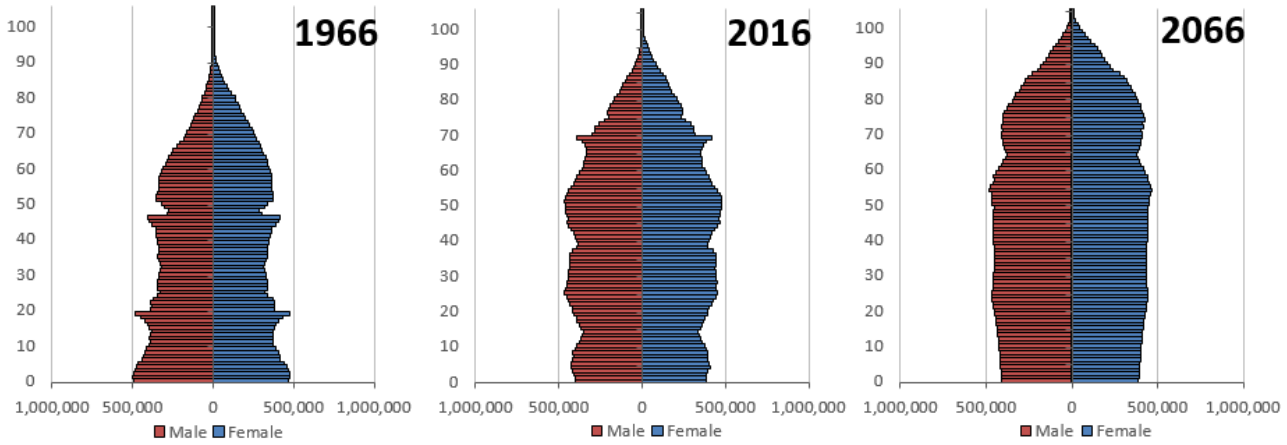


Figure 2: Population pyramids, 1966, 2016 and 2066 (principal projection), UK (Office for National Statistics, 2018)

Across the board, a low sense of community and weakened communal ties are consistently associated with loneliness and social isolation, along with generally poorer mental health within individuals. Social epidemiologists have demonstrated that community connections, belonging and social capital play a significant role in the health and mental well-being of populations and sub-groups (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 9). Modern intentional communities directly address the unmet psychological and practical needs that society faces. Architecturally and organisationally, intentional communities deliberately embed workflows that encourage a psychological sense of community.

Intentional Communities

Intentional communities echo Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein's (1977) hierarchy of governance/community organisation, using "house clusters" and "communities of 30-50" as an optimal scale for self-management and meaningful participation. But, blending the communal narrative with the contemporary feeling of wanting to retain one's individualism unearths concerns about autonomy and privacy. The balance of self contained homes complemented by common

houses, shared gardens, pedestrian oriented paths and social thresholds provide gradual opportunities for interaction without sacrificing privacy or personal space.

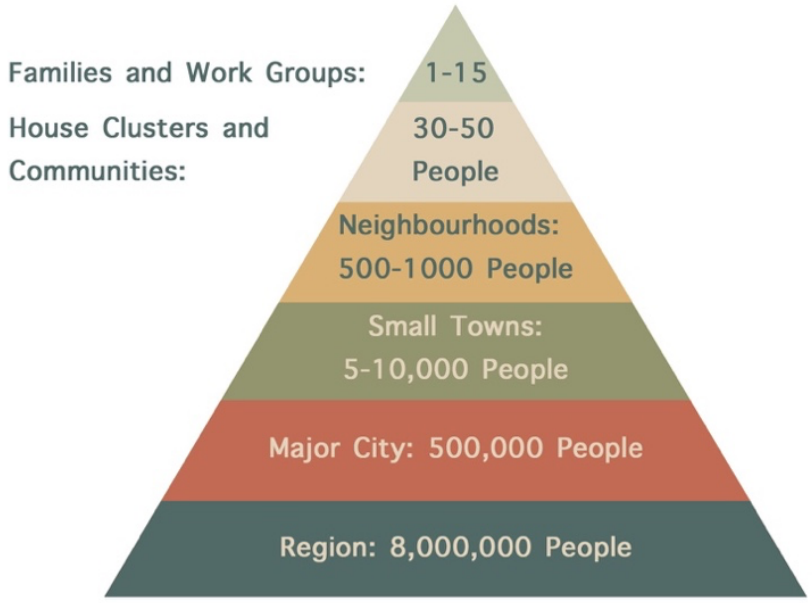


Figure 3: Graphic depicting the information from the Town and House Cluster Section from A Pattern Language. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Residents ultimately expect to give and receive practical, emotional and informational support in everyday ways, rather than being alone and turning to formal care services (Carrere et al., 2020, p. 15). Many of these modern schemes integrate members of the wider community to use the shared facilities. Therefore, intentional communities are rising in popularity as they offer a solid, designed response to a problem many people are feeling the effects of. Psychologically, they attempt to restore the interdependence Sarason (1977) identified as central to wellbeing, not by returning to nostalgic village models, but by consciously constructing new forms of living together suited to contemporary conditions.

Marmalade Lane



Figure 4: Axonometric Drawing of Marmalade Lane. (Mole Architects, 2018)

Located in Cambridge, Marmalade Lane is the city's first purpose built co-housing scheme, completed in 2019, consisting of 42 privately owned homes. The lane is the main design feature of the scheme, as it is a car free space arranging the homes in two parallel east to west terraces. TOWN (2023), the developer, and Mole Architects used a collaborative design process involving the future residents to ensure that the physical layout reflected the community's social aspirations.

The heart of the site is a 396 m^2 Common House, which houses a large catering kitchen and dining hall, a children's playroom, flexible workspaces, three guest bedrooms, a gym, a workshop, a community laundry and a small internal shop. Around the perimeter, a 0.25 hectare shared garden provides space for food growing, wildlife habitats and informal recreation, while the lane and

extensive cycle parking create a pedestrian focused streetscape that encourages spontaneous interaction. Together, these intergenerational, resident governed facilities create a built environment that deliberately supports social contact, mutual support and a strong sense of belonging.

Ty Darren

There are different forms of intentional communities, and another rendition of one is an over 55's living scheme. Ty Darren is situated in Risca, a town within Caerphilly County Borough, in a U-shape, with a column of communal facilities at the main entry. The general idea was to achieve public gardens that blend into community only spaces. The communal areas above the entrance consist of a residents' lounge or shared space, a library/reading room, and an IT workspace for residents to interact, learn from each other and work from home. Locationally, creating a communal space for people to flow in and out of at ease, acting as a pillar of the community.

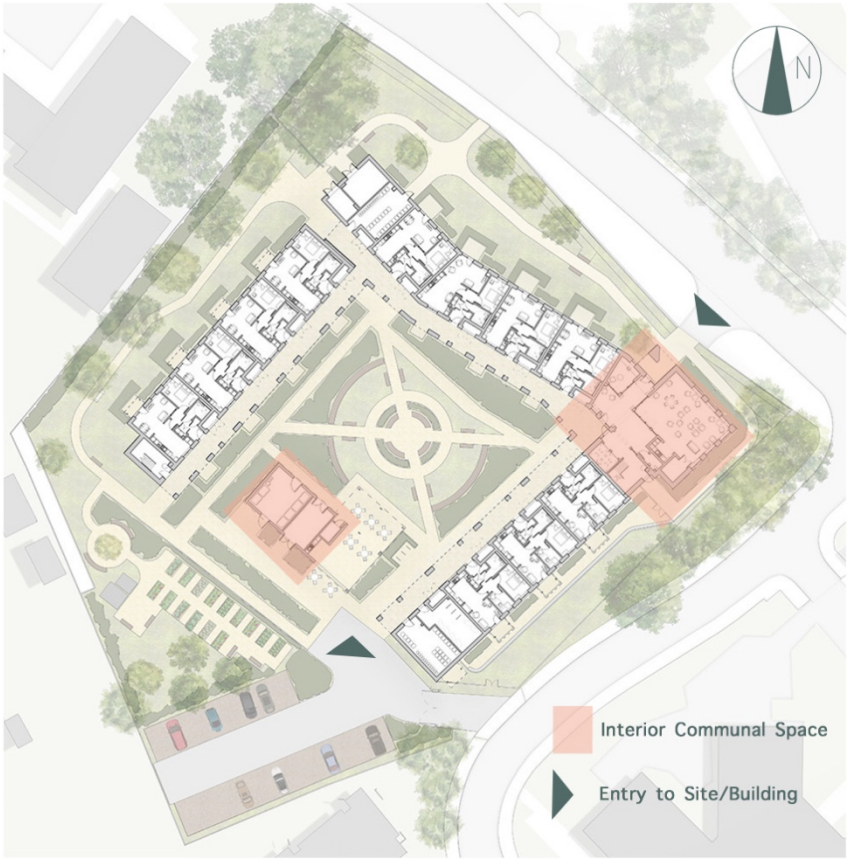


Figure 5: Plan Drawing of Ty Darren with Social Rooms and Entry Points Highlighted. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

In addition to the cloister-like residential apartment blocks, there is a hall that provides a flexible gathering space for the residents of the community daily, whilst allowing the wider community to use and hire it out. The overall design of the hall is to have an open relationship with the courtyard and allotments to encourage people to meander between inside spaces and outside, drawing the public in from the southern side, and residents from the northern side, encouraging intergenerational engagement.

The homes themselves seek to provide accommodation that allows residents to move into a space that supports ageing in place as opposed to 'downsizing', freeing up larger family social homes to the market or housing waiting lists.

Appleby Blue

The Appleby Blue Almshouse won the RIBA Stirling prize in 2025 because it addressed two of the UK's most pressing crises: the housing shortage and the loneliness epidemic. Ali, (2025) described the project overall as "provision of pure delight", praising it for being aspirational social housing. It was seen as a clarion call for a new model of communal living that keeps people rooted in their communities rather than separated into remote and out of site care facilities (Sayer, 2025).



Figure 6: Fly over of Appleby Blue. (Barandy, 2025)

The initial purpose of Appleby Blue was to shift the conversation on ageing and how it is dealt with, from an individual to a national level. Located in the dense, characteristically brick built southeast London district of Bermondsey, Appleby Blue Almshouse includes 59 spacious apartments arranged in a U-shape around a bright central courtyard (Architect Projects, 2025). The apartments range from 55 m2 one bedroom to 79 m2 two bedroom, with 11 wheelchair accessible apartments and 2 studio units for research assistants. The busy high street is ideal for today's older generation who want to lead an active life in the heart of the inner city. With a bus stop on its doorstep, local shops and cafés nearby, the design blurs the boundary between private and public life, enabling residents to remain active participants in the neighbourhood (Skerl, 2026).

Conceptually, the project offers a dignified refresh of the UK's centuries-old almshouse typology: modest, low terraced buildings operated by charities for poor or disabled residents, where feelings of isolation were frequent. Hickman, (2025) notes that WWM's design offers an alternative to the uninspired, dreary nature of contemporary housing for residents aged 65 and over.



Figure 7: The Garden Room. (Vile, 2025)

Social spaces meant to ward off loneliness and foster social interaction, including a shared roof garden and a community kitchen. The building's facilities are not just for residents but are offered as a gift back to the wider neighbourhood (Architecture Today, 2023). Upon entry, there is a garden room and a community kitchen, a double height space used for multigenerational cooking and other classes. The roof terrace, situated on the south facing two storey side of the almshouse, features raised beds for residents to grow vegetables; the height of the

beds allows for all levels of accessibility to participate. Promoting physical activity whilst enabling private, elevated, outdoor spaces with views of London over the terraced house skyline (Housing LIN, 2025).

Politically, Appleby Blue represents an incentive to downsize. By providing a superior alternative to the family council homes of potential residents, it has successfully released over 100 bedrooms back into the local Southwark housing stock (Housing LIN, 2025). The project has shown that downsizing doesn't have to be a dreary, negative concept, proving that high quality architecture for the elderly can solve broader housing issues (Luborsky, Lysack and Van Nuil, 2011).

Chapter 3: Literature Review of Manufacturing a Soviet Community.

What is Social Engineering?

Social engineering refers to the deliberate devices used in architecture and urban planning to subconsciously guide people to behave in a certain way. Kuchenbuch (2015) describes it as readjusting everyday life, like social relations and behaviours, in line with a desired model of community. He goes on to highlight that city planners and architects use scientific or technical means, such as spatial layouts, housing types and infrastructure, to stabilise communities by restoring or fostering social cohesion.

In the Soviet Constructivist context, this took the architectural form of a Social Condenser, buildings and settlements intentionally designed to transform habits by collectivising domestic life and structuring patterns of interaction. The goal is to nudge residents towards a socially superior way of life without direct enforcement from another person or system. This is typically achieved by mixing necessary functions like housing, childcare, exercise and culture within a single space to harbour social encounters.

History of the Social Condenser

In Russia, the October Revolution of 1917 brought the Bolsheviks to power under Vladimir Lenin. Creating the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR). Following this, the Bolsheviks fought the anti-communists in a civil war, which they won in 1922 (Marxists Internet Archive, 1923).

With the direct aim of creating a new socialist man, the Party set about building Social Condensers. The core philosophy was to dissolve old habits, such as privacy, religion and traditional family units, by forcing different social classes into shared, condensed space. While utopian modernists in the West, such as those associated with the Bauhaus or the Weimar-era Siedlungen, also imagined new communal living patterns and used architecture to shape society, the Social Condenser was uniquely radical in its ambition to use spatial design as an active instrument for breaking down class divisions



Figure 8: The First OSA Meeting in 1928, Ginzburg is Centre. (Wolfe, 2023)

and private life, making the Soviet project uncompromising in its drive toward engineered collectivism (Buchli, 2017, pp. 387-402).

Before the Party began building new structures, they tested out their theories in the existing urban fabric. By condensing people into the large, aristocratic apartments and dividing them into Kommunalka (communal apartments). Every family would be given one room to live in, then kitchens and bathrooms were shared by five or six families (Koriakovskaia and Mizono, 2020). Forcing multiple families into one space initially failed because it was too radical for residents to accept, leading to significant friction among the families.

The OSA Group (Organisation of Contemporary Architects) was a state funded architectural association, active from 1925 to 1930, considered to be the first group of constructivist architects. Architects like Moisei Ginzburg and the Vesnin brothers used architectural devices such as overlapping spaces, eliminating isolated rooms in favour of expansive hallways and open common areas to force social interaction. Taking domestic tasks like cooking, laundry and childcare into their separate zones, as public, communal facilities. Idealistically, buildings also included wider community facilities such as libraries, gyms and theatres to keep citizens engaged within the collective (Buckler and Cross, 2015).

As the USSR stabilised further, the Party funded new architecture, leading to specific social engineering prototypes within the Dom-Kommuna (House Commune). Industrial scale kitchens and dining were designed to liberate women from their isolated, traditional roles in the home. Workers' clubs were used for political education, as well as providing children's colonies where children were raised more by the state than by their parents. The state sought to inculcate communist values, reducing the family's role in children's education. Thereby, encouraging women to join the workforce within the condensers or for the union of the RSFSR (Koriakovskaia and Mizono, 2020).

The Narkomfin Building, designed by Moisei Ginzburg, completed in 1930, is a primary example of a Social Condenser (Archibald, 2013). This was different to the other Social Condensers at the time, as it was purpose-built for a specific group of people. Ginzburg recognised that the communities within these buildings would not change overnight, meaning this was a building designed to bridge the gap between the old life and the new Soviet one (Wolfe and Cathcart, 2015). Leading Moisei Ginzburg to develop the transitional type...

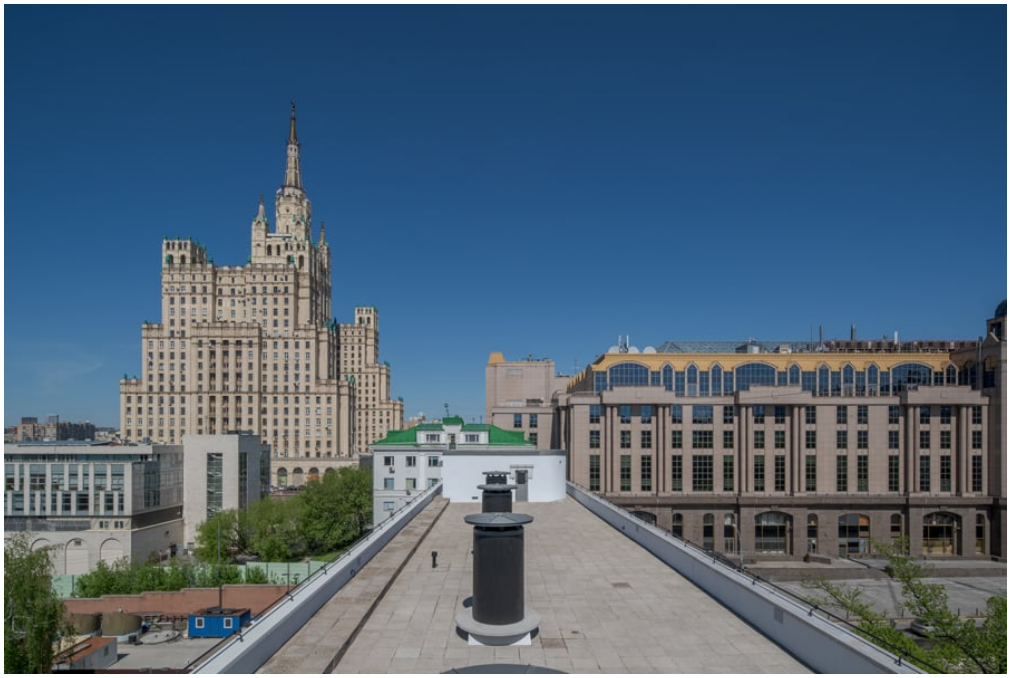


Figure 9: Roof Terrace View from Narkomfin Looking at The Stalin-era Kudrinskaya Square Building. (Muraenko, 2020)

The Narkomfin Building

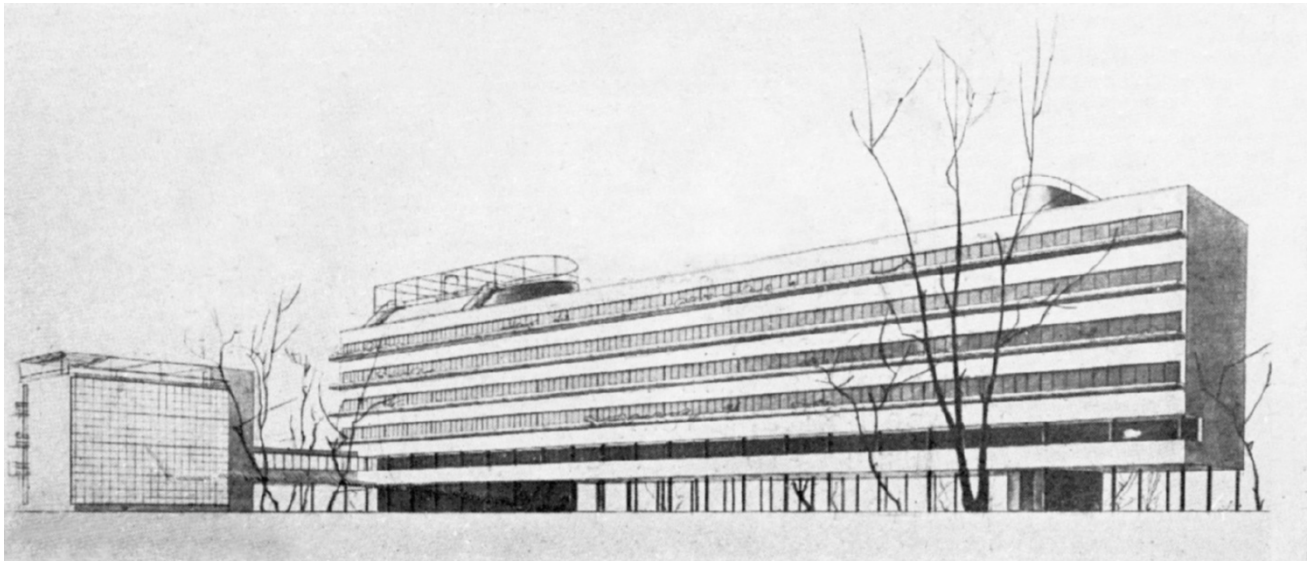


Figure 10: Perspective Drawing of Narkomfin. (Ginzburg and Milinis, 1928)

Moisei Ginzburg and Alexander Pasternak utilised research from the Stroikom committee to create interlocking apartments that maximised space (ArtLark, 2022). The Type-F unit was a duplex, or split-level apartment (Ginzburg, 1982, p. 5). Floor plans show the 'bedroom' on a separate level from the main living area, which created a physical and psychological separation between rest and daily activities (Seo and Sohn, 2016, p. 40). This split-level design was an innovative way to maximise the utility of a small footprint while creating distinct functional zones (Fontenele, 2019).

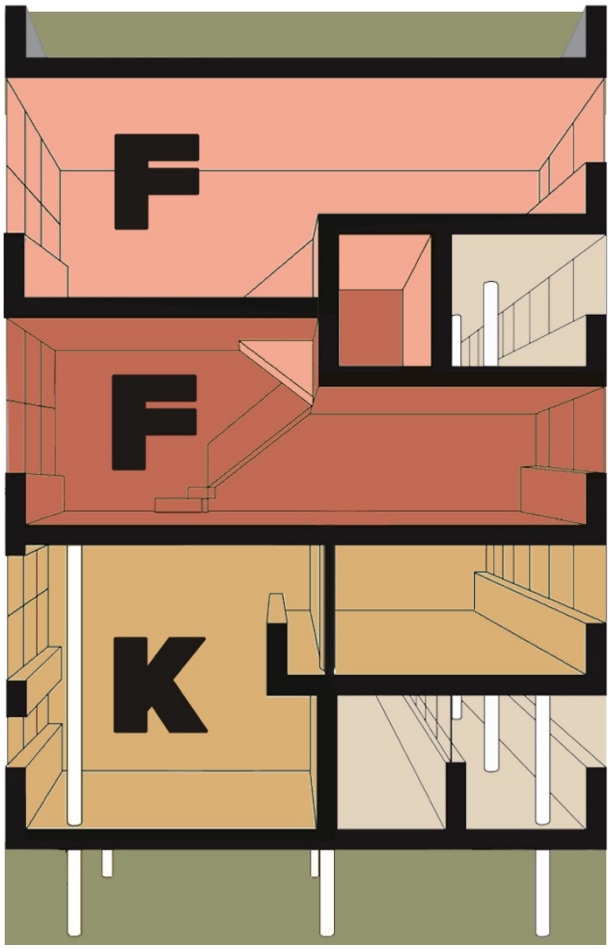


Figure 11: Section of Narkomfin Showing Room Volumes. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Upon entry to the F-Type apartment, before the resident is guided up or down the stairs, despite there being a laundry room, all apartments have small washing machines, a small sink, and a utility space with a small worktop and a cupboard or two. The apartment's overall footprint is 37 square metres (Eliseeva, 2021). The F-Type cell, designed for smaller families than the K-Type, a maximum of a family of three, features a double-height living room measuring 3.6 metres high and a sleeping area with a lower ceiling height of 2.2 metres (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

Due to the building's orientation, the sun casts a beautiful light into the bedroom areas, and you can see the walls' colouration slightly changing tint, as designed by Hinnerk Scheper, who worked with Moisei Ginzburg (Bauhaus Foundation Tel Aviv, 2017). The windows were timber framed ribbon windows on a double set system. Eliseeva (2021)



Figure 12: Sunlight Casting into F-Type. (Vassiliev, 2016)

highlights the external facades where windows had openings, Ginzburg designed supported areas for residents to place window box planters. Not only was this to give the residents their choice of floral flair, but also to make the exterior elevation feature rows of greenery standing out against the stark white rendering, curating a personalised and lived in frontage.

Moisei Ginzburg deliberately created a contrast between the volumes of the open plan living room and the sleeping quarters to influence the occupants' psychological state and daily rhythms in each space. The bedroom was designed as a sleeping niche, intentionally intimate, with a low-slung ceiling height compared to the rest of the unit (Buchli, 1998, p.172). Ginzburg believed that the design of the space would help regulate the occupants' mood and activity levels (Kopp, 1985, p.80). The bedroom zones faced east, so they received natural morning light that filtered through the trees of the park. Although this was not just a volumetric space saving measure. It was researched that the bedroom area would feel like a separate, private and slower mode of life, encouraging sleep and restorative behaviours (Ginzburg, 1982, p.9). In contrast, the open-plan common room was much taller, making it brighter with natural light, as the windows were stacked to double height in these spaces, intending for more vigorous activities during waking hours (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

The two social corridors, on the second and fifth floors, act like the building's arteries (Movilla Vega, 2020, p. 10). They were lit by ribbon windows and heated by large radiators linking the piloti to the edge of the facade's interior. The transition from a resident's own house into the hallway was a move into a semi-public space, done purposefully to blend the communal principles with the residents' apartments.

Psychological Effects of Volume

The interlocking, scissor-like interplay of the apartments enabled dual-aspect ventilation for all units. The organisation of low ceiling bedrooms and tall living rooms was not just a matter of aesthetics; Buchli (2017) argues that it is a

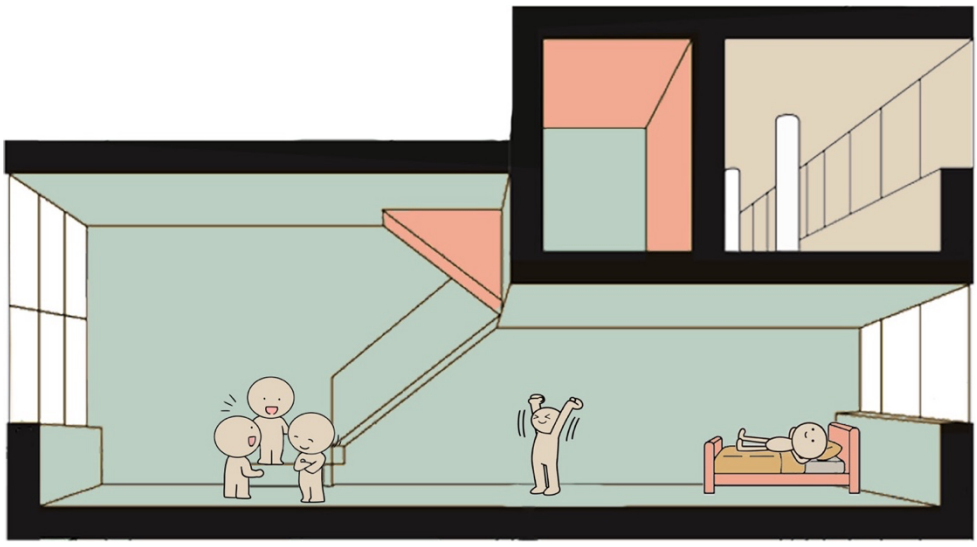


Figure 13: Volumetric effects on Residents. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

deliberate psychological tactic to make small, space-efficient floor plans feel modern and expansive.

Aside from aesthetics, the spaces were tested and designed like this for deeper reasons. As a resident, moving from compressed sleeping niches to soaring living room volumes functions as a sophisticated instrument for psychological self-regulation (Buchli, 1998, p. 174). The design leverages environmental psychology and neuroarchitecture to bridge the gap between private domesticity and the concept of the new socialist collective.

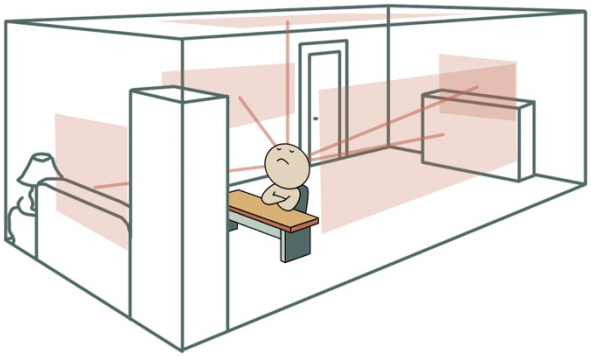


Figure 14: Demonstrating (Para)hippocampal Awareness of Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Christopher Alexander's pattern, Ceiling Height Variety, posits that humans instinctively read ceiling height as a proxy for social distance (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977, p. 881). Low ceilings induce a feeling of intimacy, withdrawal and introspection; ideal states for personal or functional tasks. Conversely, high ceilings facilitate abstract, associative thinking and openness, reducing feelings of confinement. The duality of the compressed bedroom and the double height living space allows the dynamic of privacy and peace to social engagement within the home.

Modern neuroscientific research confirms these effects are processed by the brain's visuospatial networks, including the hippocampus and the parahippocampal area (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 10). These brain regions build cognitive maps of volume, which directly influence arousal, stress and exploratory behaviour. The stark contrast between compression and expansion is critical. Meaning that the tight scale of the bedroom intensifies the sense of release when the resident enters the light filled living area.

This clear spatial hierarchy within each flat directly echoes the social philosophy behind the building. The bedrooms, intended to be the most private and functional spaces, are compressed and practical. The design makes the living room the heart of shared domestic life and the most inviting space, guiding residents from seclusion toward participation and aligning with the building's broader intent (Buckler and Cross, 2015).

Constructivism

Moisei Ginzburg applied the latest architectural techniques to facilitate the goals of the Narkomfin Building. Lifting the structure on piloti not only enables communal gardens and pathways beneath but also symbolically frees shared space for the collective. The ribbon windows do more than provide technical daylight; they are a statement of equality, ensuring that every resident receives the same quality of light, blurring distinctions of individual status (Sayer and Muraenko, 2020). The walls feel light as the load bearing duties are



Figure 15: Elevation View of Narkomfin. (Muraenko, 2020)

transferred to the columns, allowing spaces to be double-height and open plan, supporting the ideals of transparency, openness and communal participation.

Constructivist architects believed that modern housing must provide residents with maximum daylight, fresh air and contact with nature. Kopp (1985) describes how Ginzburg explicitly saw this as “indispensable human environment: air, sun and greenery”. The roof completes this environment's strategy as a sun-exposed recreation zone. Providing communal gardens, a solarium, outdoor leisure areas and a space used for summer dining (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The roof, together with the internal street corridors, was thus part of a deliberately designed social infrastructure that encouraged neighbours to meet, exercise and relax together (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020).



Figure 16: Bridge to Commune Block, Narkomfin. (Palmin, 2020)

Social Infrastructure

The Narkomfin Building was visually honest concerning its layout and how you could move around the spaces. The building was split into two volumes. The residential and the communal, creating a clear distinction between the commune and the residential home. The two blocks are connected by a heated bridge that protects you from the harsh Moscow winters. Entry to the communal block led to a large kitchen and a double-height dining room, much like the apartments but on a larger scale.

The bridge serves as a ritual space for residents; crossing it signifies a shift in identity from the individual to the citizen. Early Soviet theorists liked this shift in identity, from private inhabitant to collectivist citizen, but for some residents the psychological effect could be double-edged. Empowering when communal life functioned well but felt disciplinary when it did not (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 14 & 43).

The food hall is loud when it's full, the clatter of crockery, overlapping conversations, the smell of different dishes. The space reinforces this sense of a shared ritual of collective eating, all at the same time as your neighbours. Elsewhere in the communal block, more intimate rooms supported other aspects of collective life. One floor housed a gymnasium with changing rooms and large showers; another, a library and a reading room where residents could work or attend meetings (Lucarelli, 2016). These spaces were quieter and more specialised than the dining hall: a library session might be hushed and concentrated; the gym noisy and physical; the laundry steamy and pragmatic. Succeeding in their social aims by providing access to culture, hygiene and leisure that a small flat could not.

Holistically, the variety of communal facilities makes Narkomfin’s social infrastructure feel almost like an extension of the residents' homes, with varying degrees of privacy. The wide corridors and stairwells, because they are wide and well-lit and overlook the park, become semi-public living

rooms where you can pause to chat, observe, argue or feel that others are nearby (Kopp, 1985, p. 67, 71 & 75). Offering escape from both the smallness of the apartments and the discipline of the canteen, the roof terrace was a place where the collective is experienced not as an obligation but as a pleasure.

Chapter 3: Community; Coercive & Chosen

Social Political Representation

Buildings are designed by people, for people. The architects designing the spaces have an ambition or goal for how the space is perceived and used. How well that end ideal is received by users is not within the architect's control. Social-political representation within buildings can be the way the architectural form, spatial layout or regime, gives function to social relations and political ideas.

Constructivists defined the Social Condenser as a building or complex whose spatial organisation aspires to condition the collective behaviour of the residents, deliberately guiding everyday life towards a new, more egalitarian social order (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 144). Critical theory on Soviet architecture describes buildings as ‘powerful tools for ideological dissemination’, embodying socialist principles and shaping collective memory and social values while still operating as instruments of power and control, emphasising how design can convey ideological narratives (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 19). Environmental psychology and socio-legal work on architecture argue that the built environment is not psychologically neutral, because architectural devices such as layouts, thresholds and circulation patterns give order to social interaction, and can encode bias in favour of groups or values (Shah and Kesan, 2007, p. 4).

Due to the nature of the OSA with the Narkomfin, residents were allocated to live in the new scheme, so there was a period of adjustment into their new homes, the building and, of course, each other. This took longer than the other schemes as moving to the Narkomfin wasn’t an open housing market choice for all.

After the building's opening, families experienced a strong collective community which had its own difficulties but, in practice, enabled cleaners and ministers' families to live side by side, with their children playing together with little sense of social barriers (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 2). However, because of the influx of workers into cities and the need to build new housing cheaply and quickly, the communal spaces were often repurposed as living spaces, and the flats intended for a single person were occupied by whole families. Resultantly, the concept of the socialist utopia, where everyone lives in harmony with each other, was only partly realised (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020). Under Stalin, many original residents were repressed, and the complex became associated with fear and loss as much as it did utopia.

But since the building's restoration, artists have embraced it more as a gentrified design icon, since it is a lived socialist experiment. According to Eliseeva (2021), a current resident, all the people using the building today enjoy the design through and through. The social spaces are often used for meals or birthday parties, and people have kept all the original features within the apartments.

Because initial residents were effectively placed there by the state and daily routines were tightly scripted, the building is remembered ambivalently: architecturally admired but also often resented. Its social-political script was strong enough to provoke resistance rather than identification (Mandelman, 2021, p. 95).

Whereas in Cambridge, Marmalade Lane, is a resident led, egalitarian cohousing model with an intergenerational focus on collaborative, low-carbon neighbourhood life (TOWN, 2023, p. 6). The architecture and communal governance express cooperative politics within residents’ lives, from private homes and the common house resident control over management and decisions for the establishment. All the residents of Marmalade Lane are living there voluntarily, joining the cohousing

group by buying or renting into the scheme. Conducting an interview with Meredith Bowles, the lead Architect on the scheme, he discussed that the homes were initially “marketed as custom build so there were lots of options as to how people could configure their houses”, encouraging the residents to take ownership and feel proud of their establishment (Appendix F & G). Giving people the opportunity to actively choose the model of their homes and co-create it, they typically identify strongly with what it represents. Things like mutual aid, environmentalism and democratic control of their community and therefore report very positive feelings. The socio-political aims and lived experience are closely aligned.

Ty Darran represents state care and independence in built form. Their perception is likely to hinge on whether the promised non-institutional feel and neighbourly contact materialise; the design is trying to earn trust and provide safety. Due to the project still emerging, having opened its doors to the public in March 2026, there is no post-occupancy resident testimony yet. But the architects, Chris Wilkins and his team, were explicit that they did not want the building to feel institutional. Discussing at interview, that a “personalised wide residential corridor… without passing through institutionalised reception spaces” was imperative to the overall entry and feel to the building (Appendix D & E).

Whereas Appleby Blue Almshouse reimagines the historic model of a retreat from society, in favour of direct contact with urban life. Framed as a response to the housing shortage and the growing loneliness epidemic among older people. It’s an almshouse approach to social housing, with residents selected by application.

Post-occupancy feedback shows reduced loneliness, improved wellbeing and strong place attachment directly to the building’s design and support model. United St Saviours Charity (2025) interviewed some residents one year on from their first day at Appleby; “Moving to Appleby was like jumping out of a plane without a parachute and landing on a bouncy castle.” The effect of voluntary admission to Appleby Blue is that residents are not ideologically conscripted; they seek security, locality and dignity. That makes them generally receptive to the social script the building proposes, such as shared meals, visible presence on the high street, gardening and intergenerational events. Residents often experience it as liberation from previous poor housing or isolation, rather than constraint. The social-political project of ageing with dignity, in community, in the city, is reinforced by lived gratitude and pride (United St Saviours Charity, 2025, p. 8).

In summary, the social-political representation of each of the four schemes show that when residents actively choose to live in the respective buildings, they generally experience better, happier outcomes for longer. This is then enhanced by involvement within the design process alongside the architects, as residents take further pride and ownership of their spaces. But overall, the feeling of living somewhere that is a new age development is exciting and encouraging for residents and therefore, emotionally spurs them on, even if the establishment develops in an unexpected way.

Interaction with External Space

The Narkomfin Building is configured as a narrow white block on piloti, set in a park, with a separately adjoined glazed communal block linked via a bridge on the second floor (Kopp, 1985, p. 70). The ground plane of this space largely flows under and around the bases of the buildings rather than being shaped into defined positive space, despite the building essentially taking the form of an L-shape.



Figure 17: Photograph taken from the corner of the L-shape,



Figure 18: Render of Park and Narkomfin, from Ginsburg Architects During Restoration. (Ginsburg Architects, 2017)

The social life is meant to be internalised within the building's communal areas, in heated streets or on the roof. The residents' engagement with the external ground isn't dictated by the building; the Narkomfin Building prioritised sun, air and views within the construction as opposed to the landscape. Outdoor space is limited due to Moscow's harsh winters, where outdoor spaces can reach temperatures of -42.1°C (Climates to Travel, 2020). Therefore, the Narkomfin reads as an architectural object set within the landscape, handling everything internally.

Marmalade Lane consists of two rows of terraces facing each other with a fully pedestrianised lane between, drawing on the typology of a typical town street and referencing the surrounding neighbourhood of Cambridge. There is a large, shared garden in the complex, as well as each house's small private gardens. The shared garden acts as a primary social space, enclosed and continuously overlooked by front doors, kitchen windows and balconies, curating positive outdoor space, bounded by buildings and community structures. Everyday spills into these central areas, children play in the lane, adults stop to chat in thresholds, residents garden or eat together in the shared green and the main Common House's doors open straight onto the main garden square.



Figure 19: Axonometric of Marmalade Lane, Highlighting Outdoor Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

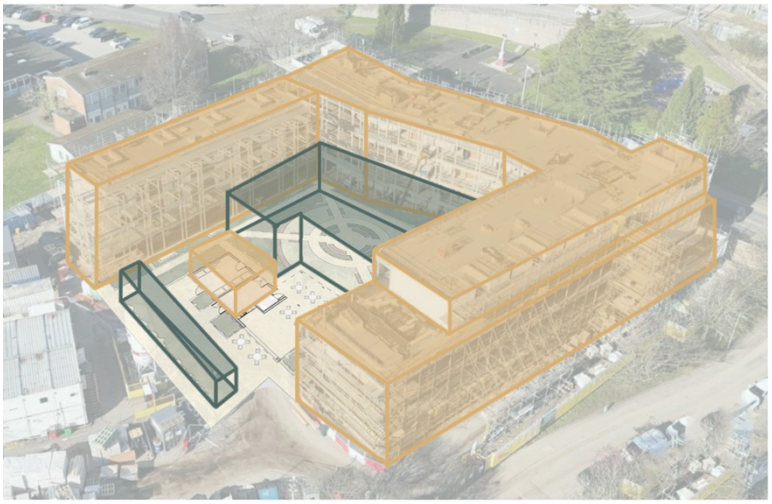


Figure 20: Axonometric of Ty Darren, Highlighting Outdoor Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Ty Darran uses external space as a carefully layered social infrastructure. The scheme uses built form to create positive outdoor space. It wraps around the perimeter of the site, creating three tiers of privacy for the external spaces: public gardens on the edge of the building that members of the community can use, a semi-public community allotment area on the southern side of the site, and, at the most private, the central courtyard and the single storey hall forming the boundary of private and public. The layout is explicitly about graded positive spaces, and paths meander through planting. The community hall and shared rooms sit on the more public edge so that inside and outside activity bleed into each other.

In Appleby Blue, there is an overall configuration of a U-shape, like Ty Darren, but on the first 2 storeys it is connected as a complete loop. Creating a narrow courtyard of 40mx8m with glazed galleries on three sides and a 'garden room' spanning from the street to the courtyard edge, blending the public to private zones above the double storey connection, the connecting floors are used as a roof garden with walkways and roof beds to support communal food growing and summer dining. Designed to be outdoor rooms, the courtyard and roof garden are therefore a visual and social focus, underpinning the design.



Figure 21: Above View of Appleby Blue, Highlighting Outdoor Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

In short, the Narkomfin Building has external space, but it is largely an undifferentiated landscape around an object. Whereas the contemporary case studies are space making ensembles, buildings arranged in a way to form legible bounded courtyards, lanes and gardens, which in themselves function as deliberate Social Condensers.

Materiality and External Perception

The Narkomfin Building stands as a reinforced concrete frame on slender round columns. The facades are finished with a smooth white render with horizontal ribbon windows and semi-circular balconies on the southern end. Plentiful ribbon windows for the residential area and the communal block's facade that faced to the internal gardens has an entirely glazed elevation. As an initial take, industrial modernity can feel austere. Contemporary accounts emphasise its "tough and elemental primary geometry" as the purest expression of 1920s & 30s Constructivism (20th Century



Figure 22: Double Set Timber Frame Ribbon Windows. (20th Century Architecture, 2021a)



Figure 23: Balcony View. (20th Century Architecture, 2021b)

Architecture, 2021). Neuroarchitecture and environmental psychology point out that hard, uniform surfaces and low tactility tend to feel less comforting and lacking in personable ornament (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 2). So, Narkomfin registers as new and anti-bourgeois, which is exactly what it needed to be at the time. Ginzburg's whole method is functional. A thin rectangular form for cross-ventilated duplexes; glazed communal block for shared functions; piloti to free the ground for light/air; strip windows for maximum daylight into narrow units (Ginzburg, 1982, p. 85).

As a form its honest in its appearance, its main mass is for residential, the smaller is for communal, connected via a delicate bridge linking private and collective. Piloti express the structure clearly, allowing the mass to just gently float over the ground. Form follows function here, in a rationalist sense, but the building is legible mainly to those who share that design code, less so to other users. The materiality and aesthetic was intended as a clean break from Moscow's eclectic masonry and ornament of the time (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 26).

Marmalade Lane is socially functionalist; the terraced houses and the low level apartment block are constructed of brick and timber. Utilising simple, robust domestic materials with coloured front doors and timber fencing. The textures of brick, painted timber and planting around doors give what Pallasmaa (2005) calls a "tactile, inhabited" character. Meaning surfaces you can lean on, touch and modify, which help people associate the spaces as their place. At eye level it's very easy to read the hierarchy of spaces blending from public to communal to private. This aligns with what Gehl (2010) calls the importance of active, readable ground floors where people can see doors, windows, planting and, importantly, other people. They can instantly tell where they're welcome to walk or linger. From interviews, residents describe everyday movements like "going out at the same time as someone else or taking out the rubbish" as moments of casual connection in the lane (Appendix: F & G).



Figure 24: Elevated View of Marmalade Lane. (TOWN., 2025a)



Figure 25: Elevated View of Victorian Terrace Housing. (Paget, 2025)

Ty Darren's site has an industrial background, Pentan Architects chose to translate that into vernacular brick buildings, whilst maintaining an articulated communal facility tower-like form, used as a beacon or visual cue for residents to know that they are home. Internally, treating the decks and shared rooms as extensions of home, thereby supporting a legible distinction between private, communal and public spaces, which is important for older people's psychological comfort (Chen et al., 2025, p. 10). Overall, Ty Darran sits between functionalism and symbolic formalism, because of legibility and homage to its historical materiality.

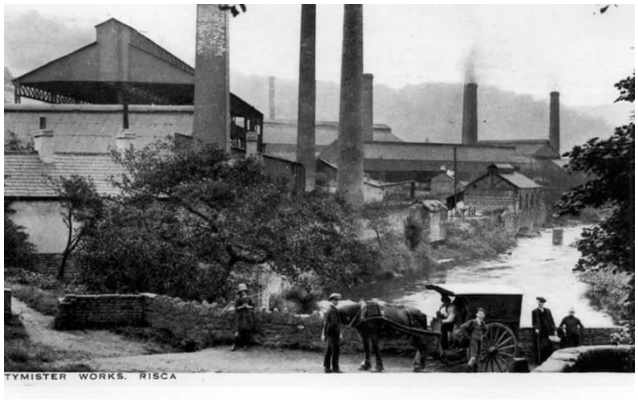


Figure 26: Industrial Wales, Pontymister Works, Risca. (Jenkins, 2016)

Finally, Appleby Blue utilises materiality to pay homage to its surroundings. The street elevation has four storeys of traditional brick with a stepped down rear to only two storeys to gently meet the traditional Victorian terrace housing adjacent to the complex. Whereas the internal materials use timber framing, the structure was designed to resemble a colonnade of trees, with kinks to represent natural growth and to mitigate a clinical feel with repetitive lines. The irregular, kinked wood feels smaller scale and handcrafted, showing the complexity of the carpentry skills, making the residents feel special and worth the architectural investment. Brick and timber, carefully detailed, give an immediate sense of warmth and domesticity.



Figure 27: Walkway in Appleby Blue. (Vile, 2019)

Residents and visitors describe the atmosphere as "vibrant, welcoming, joyful", with laughter and music in the Garden Room and courtyard (Reeves, 2026). Neuroarchitecture suggests that such textured, biophilic, daylight-rich environments support positive affect and reduce stress, especially for older adults. The U-shaped brick mass around a planted Garden Court makes it clear that the courtyard is the shared heart; glazed galleries facing it read as routes and social

thresholds rather than anonymous corridors. Appleby Blue is strongly functionalist in organisation, but its form is also carefully crafted to read as open, civic and homely. Paying homage to both the terraced street tradition and reasserting the historic almshouse's civic presence.

Architectural Devices, The Narkomfin Building

The Narkomfin building utilises different architectural devices to encourage specific behaviours from its users, such as connections to communal facilities, the accentuation of circulation spaces, the apartments themselves, and the use of dual aspect within the homes to allow full absorption of daylight for the residents' circadian rhythm.

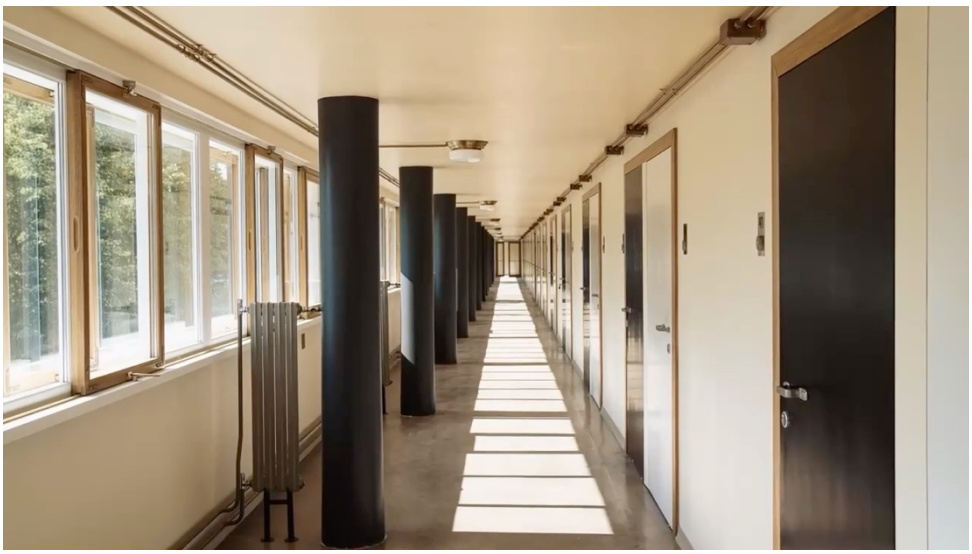


Figure 28: Type-F Walkway. (Ginzburg, 2022)

Constructivists saw circulation itself as a key design tool as the Narkomfin's internal arteries were designed to be sociopetal rather than purely functional (Kopp, 1985, p. 67). The term sociopetal was coined by Humphry Osmond in the 1950's, referring to spaces that promote community, in contrast to sociofugal designs that minimise interaction. These main galleries were placed on the façade, fully glazed, facing the park. Ginzburg described them as forums for collective exchanges, a transitional realm between private cells and communal rooms. Psychologically, these galleries sought to reduce anonymity and encourage weak-tie encounters, the kind of everyday greeting and recognition that contemporary sense of community research shows is strongly correlated with belonging and wellbeing (Farahani, 2016, p. 358).

Narkomfin's flats in themselves are utilised as an architectural device for social change and adaptation. The design explicitly reduced the private sphere of the families to a minimum, encouraging the larger and better spaces to be used as an extension of the home (Fontenele, 2019, p. 6). Constructivists were aware of the health and psychological effects of light and air. This is why the main residential block was intentionally placed stretching from north to south, with long horizontal ribbon windows on the west and east sides to utilise as much natural sunlight as possible. All apartments were enabled to be dual aspect due to their volumetric interlocking, allowing the corridor outside the front door of your apartment to be single loaded, park facing, with your bedroom to be either above or below it, with the same external views.

The roof terrace and solarium provide residents with the opportunity to enjoy midday sun in their own private outdoor space taking advantage of direct sun exposure, sky views and greenery are elements which Ginzburg considers essential for hygiene and mental health (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 19). Modern neuroarchitecture studies support the belief that exposure to natural light and views engages brain regions such as the parahippocampal place area and supports circadian regulation and mood (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 10). Built environment work with older adults similarly finds that green space and

daylight are strongly associated with reduced depression and better mental wellbeing (Chen et al., 2025, p. 8). Therefore, the Narkomfin's dual-aspect units and roof terrace thus prefigure later evidence: light and views are not just aesthetic but fundamental to psychological comfort and sense of vitality.

Architectural Devices, Marmalade Lane

Marmalade Lane uses the configuration of the communal facilities that allow residents to walk along the car free lane, towards the main green or Common House and bump into other residents, like the heated streets in the Narkomfin. Other shared facilities like the laundry, gym, workshop and shop are embedded in the residential fabric at the base of the block of flats, as opposed to a separate building.

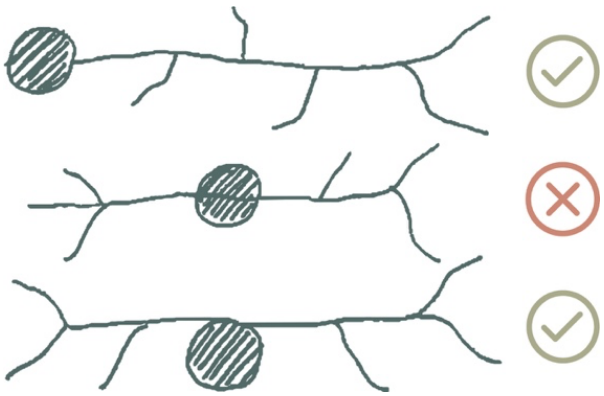


Figure 29: Diagram showing the 'Common Areas at Heart Pattern'. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

This configuration means that daily necessities (laundry, post, car club, picking vegetables, attending children's activities) all run through or alongside communal rooms, effectively realising Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein's (1977) "Common Areas at the Heart" pattern from 'A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction'.

Treating the site's circulation as social infrastructure, all houses have front doors onto the lane and back gardens opening onto the communal garden. Car parking for all residents is pushed to the periphery. Meredith Bowles discussed that this was purposely done; to place them all in one cluster away from the homes, people would walk to their cars together or pass each other and say hello (Appendix F & G). The lane and gardens act as a primary example of a Social Condenser, residents describe children "pretty much always outside" playing; adults stopping to talk en route; an environment where spontaneous contact is normal. Residents report that this environment produces high levels of "neighbourly help and support", and they rank "the community and the connection with other people" as the best



Figure 30: Routes from Residential to Car Park. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

thing about living there (Appendix H, I, J & K). These outcomes match broader Central London Healthcare research showing that schemes with purposeful design of circulation and shared spaces have lower loneliness and a stronger sense of community than conventional housing (Scanlon et al., 2021, p. 7).

The homes' layouts are open-plan on the ground floor, with direct visual connection to the lane or garden, supporting both privacy and casual supervision of children outside. Residents repeatedly emphasise that they value having both their own well-lit open-plan living spaces and immediate access to community; one resident notes that the combination lets them "have a social life just a few steps from my home and be alone also when it suits me" (Appendix H & I).

While not all units are dual aspect, the scheme is designed for good daylight, views and visual integration with the community. Terraced houses are relatively shallow plans with windows front and back, giving through-light from lane to garden. Whereas the apartment blocks use cross-laminated timber construction with large windows and balconies to maximise daylight and natural materials. The Common House's "great hall" has large windows and a roof lantern, giving daylight from two sides and above; personalisation from the residents, timber finishes and views to the large garden square create a psychologically warm environment (TOWN, 2023, p. 16). Aligning with neuroarchitecture and ageing studies that highlight daylight, views and thermal comfort as key contributors to wellbeing and to feeling lifted by one's environment (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 1).

Architectural Devices, Ty Darren

Ty Darren is conceived explicitly as "an exemplar later living development", combining independent flats with shared facilities for residents and the wider community (Wilkins, 2022, p. 21). Upon entry of Ty Darren, all residential floors radiate from the main lift/stair core, leading directly onto a 2000 mm-wide external deck access that wraps the courtyard. These decks intentionally bring residents past the lounge, library and workshop on their way in and out, visually connecting them to the courtyard and communal facilities. The relationship of resident only spaces like the lounge and library with the public facing facilities of the hall and allotments is intentional to avoid age segregated isolation and create a "community village feel" that supports both older residents and the wider neighbourhood.

At interview, Chris Wilkins discussed that the 2m wide external walkways are designed so they can be "occupied, decorated and inhabited by the residents to become places of interaction as if it were a traditional pedestrianised street" (Appendix D & E). These spaces are intended to encourage casual contact and recognition amongst residents because they can look over at the communal gardens and main community hub from their walkway, potentially bumping into a fellow resident and having a light conversation.

Chris Wilkins' interview reinforces that this was a deliberate response to the HAPPI guide's style of thinking that corridors should encourage interaction and avoid an institutional feel, while still allowing privacy (Appendix D & E). The intention is that generous circulation, thresholds and sightlines support confidence and wayfinding while inviting low pressure socialising. This is consistent with ageing research that highlights the importance of supported independence and visually legible routes (Hammond and Saunders, 2021, p. 1). Psychologically, this acknowledges the strong desire of older people to retain autonomy and identity in their own home while still having community available on their doorstep.

Ty Darran's design brief emphasises dual-aspect apartments and plentiful daylight as a non-negotiable. At interview, Chris Wilkins stated that "Regardless of circumstance, our dual aspect apartments deliver access to plentiful daylight, sunlight and fresh air, which are essential for physical and mental wellbeing." (Appendix D & E). Directly aligning with what the Constructivists and Moisei Ginzburg successfully achieved with the Narkomfin's orientation and glazing strategies. All apartments utilise a dual-aspect design tailored to orientation to ensure good sun access and cross-ventilation through the flat.

Aligning closely with HAPPI and "Our Future Homes" guidance, which states that daylight, ventilation and natural views are core to age-friendly design and to supporting mental health in later life (Best et al., 2009). Older residents typically spend more time at home, so visual and thermal comfort are critical in sustaining wellbeing. Ty Darran's design recognises this explicitly.

Architectural Devices, Appleby Blue

Appleby Blue is a 57-home almshouse that "reimagines the historic model of a retreat from society in favour of direct contact with urban life" (Housing LIN, 2025), with communal facilities designed as a catalyst for health and social connection. Double-height Garden Room on the ground floor, directly adjacent to the high street and opening onto the Garden Court. Used for socialising, community events and intergenerational programmes, directly connecting the public outside, through to the heart of the project. A community kitchen is within the gradient from public to private, used for resident meals and community food projects like the LEMONADE Project (Amenyah et al., 2019).

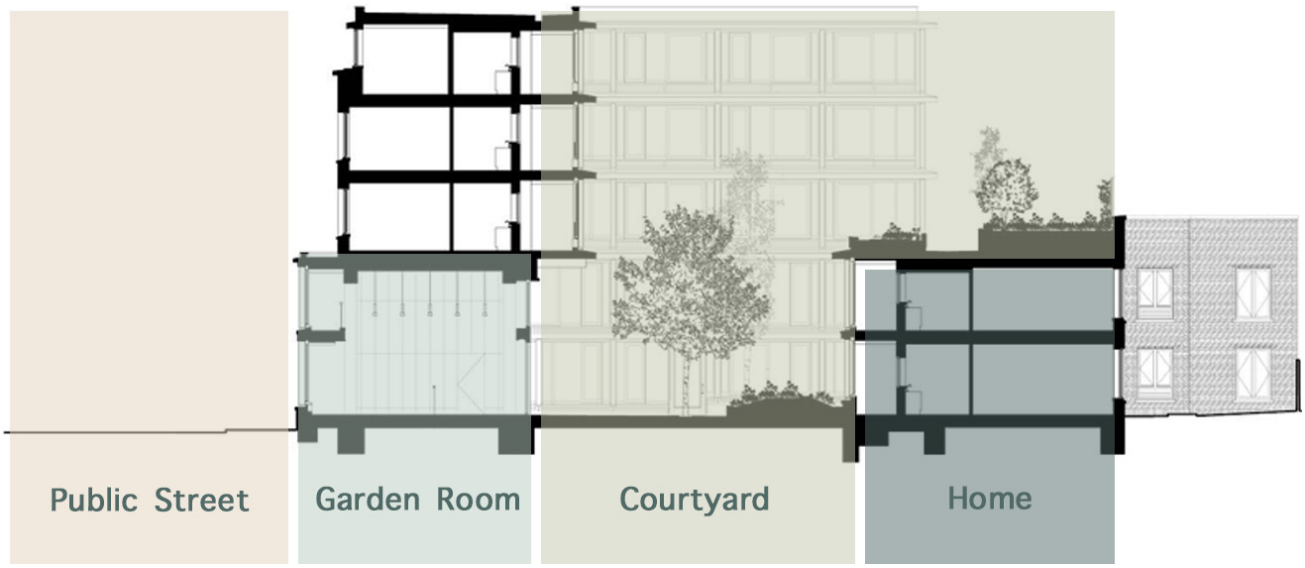


Figure 31: From Public, to Commune, to Private in Appleby Blue. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

The building forms a cloister-like surround to the central garden space. Apartments are arranged on three sides, with the Garden Room and occupying most of the fourth side at ground level. Access to flats is, like Ty Darren, through galleries overlooking the courtyard. These galleries are widened and furnished with planters and benches, explicitly designed as social corridors for the residents to decorate and personalise, again, encouraging lingering and light conversation. The roof terraces are accessed directly from the galleries, so moving vertically through the building brings residents to both internal and external communal spaces. The seating and planting along galleries act as a mini front garden, allowing the residents to sit with neighbours or simply observe life in the courtyard below.

These are small behavioural hooks that environmental psychology identifies as key in creating informal social contact.

This layout creates gradients of communality. Ranging from the busy public high street into the transitional Garden Room, the central garden courtyard, galleries to apartments. It also deliberately opens the communal facilities and community events to the wider neighbourhood, echoing the Social Condenser ethos but at an urban scale. At street level, bay windows give residents direct views to the high street, allowing visual participation in city life and chance interactions with passers-by. All flats are dual aspect via the glazed galleries with sliding windows that open to the garden courtyard.
The design supports both the feeling of being at home in a personal, controllable space whilst also being part of something bigger via constant, low-pressure visual and physical links to community spaces. This balance is known to support older adults' sense of autonomy and competence, which in turn is associated with better mental health (Farahani, 2016, p. 373). Appleby Blue sits consistently with research showing that daylight, external views and thermal comfort are major determinants of older adults' mental wellbeing, and that green views are associated with reduced loneliness and better self-rated health (Ye, Huang and Li, 2023, p. 14).

Architectural Devices: Cross Analysis/Overview

The Narkomfin concentrates communal functions of the kitchen, dining, laundry, childcare and culture into a separate but bridged block, with internal galleries feeding into it (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The connection is strong symbolically but less so behaviourally. The distance from the apartment to the commune block was connected by the hallway but was essentially not on any passing route. Residents had to explicitly want to go there, rather than walking past already and receiving a visual reminder. Whereas Marmalade Lane and Appleby Blue integrate communal facilities into the spatial and functional heart of the schemes, they both sit right on the main circulation routes, serving everyday needs as well as social and cultural ones. Ty Darran uses two focal points of a resident only hub and a public hall knitted together by decks and landscaping, such that movement to and from flats naturally passes shared spaces.

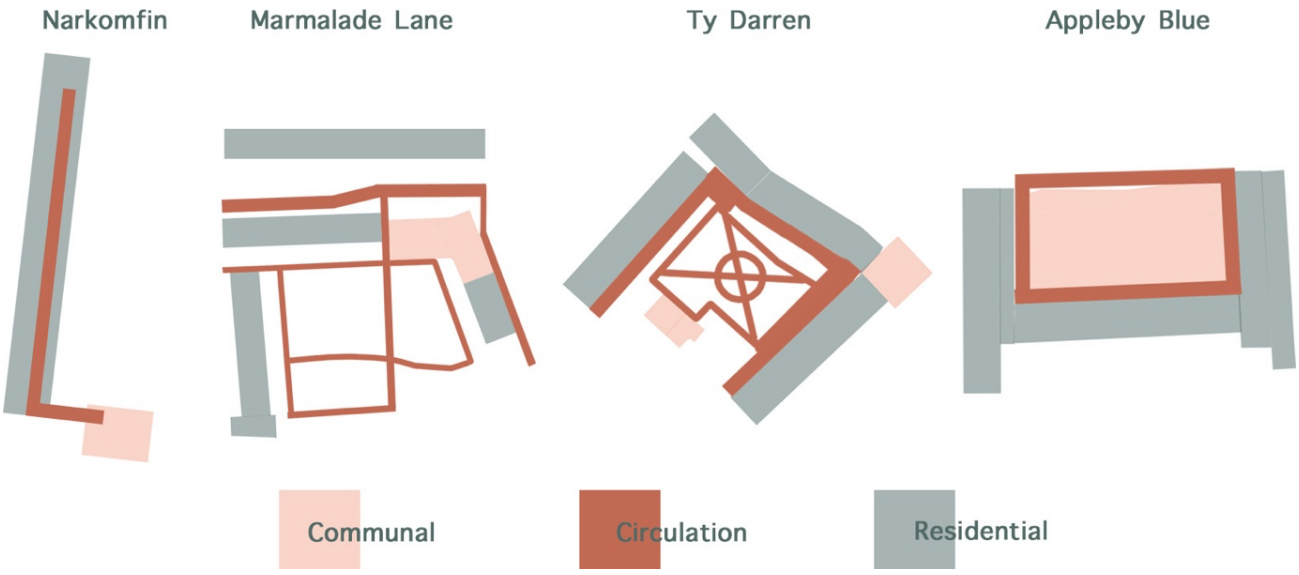


Figure 32: Circulation in all Case Studies. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

From a psychological standpoint, these circulation spaces create low-stress neighbourhood contact environments, they support place attachment and identity. They enhance the feeling of safety and perceived control as they are visible, well lit, human scale circulation. Studies of sense of community repeatedly find that the frequency of neighbourly interaction is a strong predictor of happiness, reduced worry, and better coping (Farahani, 2016, p. 373).

Within the private homes, the Narkomfin tries to shrink the private home to a minimal cell and externalise much of the domestic life into communal facilities, with mixed success. Whereas, Marmalade Lane, Ty Darran and Appleby Blue all treat the flat/house as a fully functioning home, with strong links to the community from the threshold outward. This latter approach better satisfies autonomy for the resident, giving them power, not the building. The presence of common spaces immediately outside the resident's front door increases opportunities for companionship and mutual aid without demanding it.

All the schemes utilise dual aspects within their apartment designs. Arguably, the Narkomfin is the best rendition of this. As the internally facing bedroom windows open out onto fresh air, due to the volumetric interlocking. But Ty Darren and Appleby Blue are both designed for older people, and therefore, stairs would have been largely avoided in the design process. Neuroarchitecture highlights that daylight and visual richness positively stimulate brain networks associated with spatial cognition and emotion, while poor lighting and monotony can induce stress.

Across the four analytical case studies, this shows that communal facilities move from being tools to change behaviour, to resources that support residents' own goals. Circulation shifts from a formal experiment to a recognised behavioural lever, deliberately crafted to support the micro-interactions and place attachment that psychological sense of community research deems critical. Home spaces are platforms for identity, control and psychological safety, with community layered around them instead of replacing them.

The psychological thread through all of this is that people do not simply become what the architect or designer imagines. They respond to spatial affordances in ways shaped by autonomy, attachment social needs as well as prior habits. Environments that address those needs by offering gradients of engagement, opportunities for mutual support and sensory qualities that feel uplifting can still act as powerful Social Condensers, but in a softer, more reciprocal way than early modernist social engineering experimented with.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation has traced the Social Condenser from its origin in the Soviet avant-garde to its contemporary reemergence within the intentional community space, testing whether its architectural devices have shifted from instruments of cultural coercion to enablers of communal autonomy. By systematically comparing Ginzburg's Narkomfin communal house with recent projects like Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue, the study shows the underlying hardware of communal architecture. Highlighting that programmatic layering, shared facilities and socially charged circulation have changed remarkably little in the 100-year difference. But what has altered fundamentally is the software the buildings are injected with, the socio-political scripts through which these devices are deployed, shifting from state led efforts to re-engineer everyday life towards resident led arrangements that support different forms of mutual aid and connection.

The Narkomfin Legacy

In its original Soviet setting, the Social Condenser was conceived as a radical pedagogical device to manufacture a new socialist man (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 12). The dom-kommuna, epitomised by Narkomfin, thus operated as both a dwelling and an instrument of cultural revolution. Its gradient of cell types, from minimal single rooms to more generously sized K-units, was intended to erode the conventional nuclear family and stratified domestic hierarchies, nudging residents towards more collectivised living arrangements. By making private cooking spatially inconvenient and collective eating highly serviced, the architecture attempted to choreograph daily routines in line with Marxist-Leninist ideas about the socialisation of domestic labour and the emancipation of women from household drudgery (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 10).

Yet, as Buchli (1998) and others have shown, the lived reality of Narkomfin was far more ambivalent. Allocated by the state rather than chosen, many residents treated the prescriptive routines and underspecified private spaces with suspicion or frustration, subverting the intended script. Over time, the communal facilities deteriorated, and the house slipped from avant-garde showcase to dilapidated relic, revealing the limits of coercive social engineering when architectural form runs too far ahead of residents' agency, desires and material circumstances.

The 21st Century Evolution

A century later, the core devices pioneered at Narkomfin persist with striking clarity in projects such as Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue. Using layered communal programmes and circulation spaces that double as social arenas or alighting spaces. Rather than a historical curiosity, the Social Condenser has proved to be a durable architectural idea, continually re-appropriated to address contemporary concerns such as loneliness, ageing and the search for everyday community (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 151).

In all three contemporary schemes examined, programmatic layering is deployed in ways that echo, but revise, Ginzburg's logic. Appleby Blue combines independent flats with a Garden Room, community kitchen, hobby and skills spaces, creating overlapping zones of use that invite residents and neighbours into varying intensities of contact. Circulation ceases to be a neutral conduit, becoming a socio-petal infrastructure, consistent with environmental psychology findings that well designed bridging spaces foster gentle weak-tie interactions and a psychological sense of community (Gonzalez, 1978, p. 10).

Appleby Blue can be read as a contemporary benchmark for the Social Condenser. Commissioned by an almshouse charity with a 500-year history in Southwark, the scheme substitutes the Soviet canteen with a generously scaled Garden Room and community kitchen that hosts shared meals, intergenerational food growing projects and skills programmes. These spaces are acoustically and materially calibrated as a sanctuary courtyard heart, yet they open directly onto the high street, bus stop and local networks, ensuring residents remain embedded in the life of Bermondsey rather than withdrawn from it. In this way, Appleby Blue leverages familiar Social Condenser architectural devices refectory to counter isolation while respecting residents' urban attachments and daily routines (Benzimra et al., 2023, p. 4).

Choice vs. Coercion

Taken together, the case studies suggest that the new Social Condenser succeeds where its Soviet antecedent faltered precisely because it replaces coercion with choice. At Narkomfin, collectivisation was to be achieved by constraining private alternatives, whereas at Appleby Blue, Ty Darren and Marmalade Lane, it emerges from a surplus of invitations rather than a deficit of options. Social cohesion here is not an outcome imposed from above, but a process continually negotiated by participants, in line with community psychology research that links sense of community to empowerment, shared decision making and the ability to influence one's environment (Samman, 2025, p. 394).

Crucially, residents consistently link their wellbeing to this ability to calibrate engagement. Marmalade Lane interviewees describe feeling "less alone" yet under no pressure to socialise, joining shared meals or film nights "when you want to". Appleby Blue residents benefit from the proven longevity and health advantages associated of almshouse living and strong micro-communities, while retaining private front doors, views and control over daily rhythms. In environmental psychology terms, these schemes offer both prospect and refuge, enabling psychological self regulation between social vigour and restorative solitude and thereby supporting autonomy and dignity in everyday life (Cighi, 2008, p. 97).

Key Findings for Future Socially Resilient Design

A first key finding is the centrality of circulation as social infrastructure. Deploying external galleries, stair halls, lanes and cloister-like walkways that function as socio-petal spaces, encouraging people into informal encounters at conversational distances.

Secondly, the Social Condenser's long standing use of volumetric modulation remains salient. Contemporary projects similarly exploit ceiling height, outlook and dual-aspect views to mediate between rest and sociability. This volumetric psychology allows residents to choose settings that match their energy and social appetite, an important ingredient in sustaining long term communal life (Dalton, 2000, p. 82).

Thirdly, the most successful contemporary condensers reposition themselves not as retreats from the city but as "gifts" to it. Appleby Blue's active ground floor, with its double height garden room and street facing bay windows, invites neighbours in for events and casual encounters. Marmalade Lane opens its common house and gardens for public open days, and Ty Darren has a communal hall for both residents and community use. Porteus (2018) highlighted in HAPPI how rural schemes demonstrate how well designed community hubs can anchor ageing populations in village and market town settings. This urban embeddedness is particularly significant in countering loneliness, as

it broadens residents' social fields beyond the immediate community to include local networks and services.

Finally, there has been a decisive shift in the role assigned to communal facilities. Whereas Soviet Social Condensers were explicitly tasked with changing behaviour, contemporary projects treat shared spaces as supports for residents' pre-existing aspirations for mutual aid, sociability or purposeful activity. The Appleby Blue community kitchen underpins researched backed food-based intergenerational projects like *'LEMONADE'* (Amenyah et al., 2019). Marmalade Lane's Great Hall hosts clubs, shared meals and governance meetings that emerge from the community itself. Ty Darren's social lounges and gardens provide stages for the kinds of everyday neighbour activities that residents already value. In this sense, the Social Condenser has been re-tooled as an adaptive infrastructure that amplifies resident agency rather than dictating a singular way of life.

The evidence assembled here supports the claim that intentional communities of all kinds are the new Social Condensers. They represent a refinement the Soviet experiment by demonstrating that while architecture can still guide us towards more communal patterns of living, its real potency lies in providing a resilient, forgiving "bouncy castle" of support rather than a parachute-less leap into enforced collectivism. By aligning spatial devices with voluntary association, diversified domestic life and a nuanced understanding of psychological and social needs, these projects point towards a socially resilient design language in which collective life is not imposed, but continually chosen.