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Article

From Shared Living to a Life-Service System: Young Residents' Everyday Practices and Service Touchpoints in Seoul Co-living Spaces

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Abstract: Co-living has become an important residential model in Seoul, South Korea, where young single-person households face high housing costs, compact living conditions, and changing expectations of urban life. Existing studies have often examined co-living through spatial typologies, such as private units, community spaces, leisure spaces, and workspaces. However, contemporary co-living increasingly operates as a life-service system in which spatial design, digital platforms, maintenance services, community programs, and management rules jointly shape everyday living. This article examines Seoul co-living as an integrated service ecosystem rather than a purely architectural or real-estate model. Based on a document-based review of academic literature, policy materials, market reports, and publicly available operator descriptions, the study develops a service-touchpoint framework for analyzing how co-living organizes daily routines. The analysis argues that the value of co-living lies not only in shared facilities but also in the coordination of entry, booking, cooking, working, cleaning, maintenance, social participation, and withdrawal from interaction. The article contributes to housing and design research by reframing co-living as a spatial-service assemblage that mediates privacy, convenience, and selective community participation.

Keywords: Co-living; Shared Housing; Service Touchpoints; Young Residents

1. Introduction

The growth of single-person households has become one of the defining social and spatial changes in contemporary South Korea. In Seoul, young adults are often drawn to central districts for education, work, cultural consumption, and professional networking, yet they also encounter high housing costs and limited access to stable, spacious, and socially supportive housing. Conventional options such as officetels, one-room studios, and semi-basement rentals provide physical shelter, but they often do not address the broader organization of everyday life. Cooking, cleaning, receiving deliveries, working remotely, meeting others, and managing repairs remain fragmented tasks that individual tenants must handle alone.

Within this context, co-living has emerged as a hybrid residential model that combines private rooms with shared facilities and bundled services. Earlier forms of shared housing emphasized cost sharing and collective use of kitchens, bathrooms, or living rooms. More recent co-living models, however, are increasingly operated by professional providers that combine space, furniture, digital communication, cleaning, maintenance, events, and community management (Lang et al., 2020). The resident is no longer only renting a room. The resident is also entering a managed system of daily services.

This article examines co-living in Seoul as a life-service system. The concept of a life-service system refers to a residential arrangement in which spatial, digital, operational, and social touchpoints are coordinated to support everyday practices. Such a perspective shifts the focus from the question of what shared spaces exist to the question of how residents move through multiple touchpoints during ordinary routines. A resident may enter through a smart access system, check announcements through a digital platform, use a shared kitchen, reserve a study room, report a maintenance issue, receive cleaning notifications, attend or avoid a community event, and negotiate privacy through spatial and behavioral rules. These actions are not separate from housing. They are part of how co-living is experienced as a residential service environment.

This study focuses on Seoul because it offers a particularly relevant context for examining co-living as a life-service system. Seoul concentrates universities, corporate employment, creative industries, and transport-oriented rental demand. Its young residents frequently move between compact housing, cafés, coworking spaces, delivery services, and mobile platforms in their daily lives. Co-living in this urban setting is therefore not simply a response to housing shortage. It is also connected to broader shifts toward platform-mediated living, flexible rental arrangements, and service-based urban consumption.

The article develops three research questions. RQ1 asks how spatial, digital, and managerial touchpoints are integrated into the co-living service system in Seoul. RQ2 asks how these touchpoints structure everyday routines, including entry, cooking, working, cleaning, socializing, and requesting support. RQ3 asks how the co-living service system negotiates the tension between privacy, convenience, and community participation. By addressing these questions, the article contributes to design and housing research in two ways. First, it extends co-living research beyond spatial classification by foregrounding service touchpoints. Second, it provides a conceptual framework for analyzing how young residents experience co-living as a sequence of ordinary actions rather than as a fixed architectural type.

2. Literature Review/Background

2.1 Co-living and the Transformation of Shared Housing

Co-living is usually understood as a residential model that combines private living space with shared amenities and managed services. It is related to share houses, collective housing, cohousing, serviced apartments, and platform-based rental housing, but it differs from each of these models in important ways. Unlike informal shared housing, co-living is usually professionally managed. Unlike traditional cohousing, which often depends on resident-led governance and long-term collective commitment, contemporary urban co-living often offers flexible rental periods and provider-led service management (Lang et al., 2020). Unlike serviced apartments, it frequently emphasizes community, shared facilities, and peer interaction.

Research on shared housing in South Korea has emphasized the duplicity of shared residential experience. Shared housing can reduce loneliness, provide access to facilities, and create opportunities for mutual support, but it can also generate conflicts around privacy, noise, cleanliness, and interpersonal boundaries (Byun & Shon, 2022). This tension is central to co-living. The model promises both independence and connection. It offers private rooms while encouraging the use of shared kitchens, lounges, workspaces, gyms, rooftops, and events. Its success depends on whether residents can choose when to interact and when to withdraw.

The Korean co-living literature has also examined common spaces through architectural and spatial categories. Studies have classified common spaces into community spaces, leisure activity spaces, and work activity spaces, and have evaluated spatial qualities such as openness, accessibility, expandability, and interactivity (Kim et al., 2022). These categories are useful because they identify how co-living spaces are physically organized. However, they do not fully

explain how residents experience the service process across time. A lounge, for example, is not only a spatial category (Williams, 2005). It is also connected to lighting, seating, access rules, cleaning schedules, event announcements, noise expectations, and digital reservations. In this sense, co-living should be examined as both space and service.

2.2 From Spatial Typology to Service Touchpoints

Service design offers a useful lens for extending co-living research. In service design, a touchpoint refers to any point of interaction between a user and a service provider, system, object, environment, or other actor (Stickdorn et al., 2018). Touchpoints may be physical, digital, human, or procedural. In co-living, touchpoints include websites, application forms, contracts, payment systems, access cards, smart locks, shared kitchens, cleaning notices, maintenance requests, community chats, event posters, resident rules, staff responses, and departure procedures. These touchpoints collectively shape the resident journey.

The concept of service ecosystem further expands this perspective. Service ecosystems are formed by multiple actors, resources, rules, and practices that together create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). In a co-living system, value is not produced only by the operator or by the building. It emerges through the coordination of residents, managers, cleaning staff, digital platforms, spatial layouts, behavioral rules, and surrounding urban services. The resident's experience of convenience or discomfort depends on how these components work together.

For young residents, service touchpoints are especially important because daily life is often organized through mobile platforms and flexible routines. Entry systems, messaging channels, booking tools, delivery reception, and remote work facilities directly influence how residents plan their day. A well-designed co-living system can reduce the effort required to manage household tasks. A poorly coordinated system can produce friction through unclear rules, unavailable spaces, delayed repairs, overexposed social areas, or excessive pressure to participate in community events.

2.3 Everyday Practice and Selective Social Participation

The concept of everyday practice shifts attention from formal design intentions to ordinary actions. Housing is not experienced only through floor plans or amenities. It is experienced through repeated routines such as entering the building, storing food, cooking, eating, doing laundry, working, resting, meeting others, avoiding others, reporting problems, and managing personal belongings. These routines are shaped by spatial affordances, social expectations, and service procedures (Manzini, 2015).

In co-living, the everyday practices of young residents often involve selective social participation. Residents may appreciate the possibility of meeting others without wanting constant interaction. They may value a shared kitchen but prefer to eat alone at certain times. They may enjoy community events occasionally but reject compulsory socialization. This creates a design challenge. If co-living is designed only around maximum interaction, it risks turning shared living into social pressure. If it is designed only around privacy, it loses the distinctive value of shared residential life. The key issue is therefore not whether co-living creates community in a general sense, but how it enables different levels of participation.

2.3 Thesis Statement and Research Questions

This study argues that co-living in Seoul should be understood as a life-service system rather than merely as a shared residential form. In this system, spatial arrangements, digital platforms, operational services, and community rules jointly configure the everyday routines of young single-person residents. The purpose of this article is to develop an analytical framework for examining how co-living organizes daily life through service touchpoints.

RQ1: How are spatial, digital, and managerial touchpoints integrated into the co-living service system in Seoul?

RQ2: How do these touchpoints structure the everyday routines of young residents, including entry, cooking, working, cleaning, socializing, and requesting support?

RQ3: How does the co-living service system negotiate the tension between privacy, convenience, and community participation?

3. Methodolog

3.1 Research Overview

This article adopts a qualitative, document-based analytical approach. It does not claim primary fieldwork, resident interviews, survey data, or on-site observation. Instead, the study synthesizes four types of materials: academic literature on co-living and shared housing, studies on common-space design, policy and market discussions concerning youth housing and co-living development in Seoul, and publicly available descriptions of co-living operations, including shared facilities, digital services, community programs, and management practices.

This method is appropriate for an exploratory conceptual article whose aim is to build a service-touchpoint framework rather than to evaluate resident satisfaction statistically. The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, existing research on co-living spatial organization is reviewed, particularly the distinction between private units and common spaces. Second, recurring service touchpoints in the co-living journey are identified, including pre-move-in information, contract and payment, access control, shared facility use, cleaning, maintenance, community communication, and departure. Third, these touchpoints are interpreted through a service ecosystem perspective in order to examine how co-living supports or constrains everyday routines.

The study is limited by its reliance on documentary and conceptual analysis. It does not measure actual resident behavior, compare operational performance among specific brands, or evaluate satisfaction through first-hand data. Its contribution lies in clarifying a framework that can guide future empirical research. Subsequent studies should test the framework through resident interviews, behavioral observation, platform log analysis, and comparative fieldwork across different districts of Seoul.

3.2 Research Scope

Your views and arguments. Seoul is a useful context for analyzing co-living because it combines housing pressure, youth mobility, digital infrastructure, and service-oriented urban life. Young adults in Seoul often live near universities, transport nodes, business districts, or creative neighborhoods. Their housing decisions are shaped not only by rent but also by commute time, contract flexibility, safety, access to services, and opportunities for social connection. Co-living providers respond to these needs by offering compact private rooms together with shared facilities and managed services.

The most analytically significant areas are districts connected to youth employment, university life, and high rental demand, especially Mapo-gu, Seodaemun-gu, Gangnam-gu, Seocho-gu, and nearby transport-oriented areas. Mapo and Seodaemun are associated with universities, cultural consumption, cafés, and creative youth lifestyles. Gangnam and Seocho are associated with corporate work, commuting convenience, and professional residents. These districts allow co-living to serve different everyday routines. In student-oriented areas, the emphasis may fall on affordability, social activities, study spaces, and flexible contracts. In business-oriented areas, the emphasis may fall on workspaces, privacy, mobility, and professional services.

The uploaded Korean study on co-living common spaces selected cases in Gangnam and Seocho because these areas concentrate companies and are accessible to young employed adults. Its analysis showed that co-living common spaces could be classified into community, leisure activity, and work activity spaces, and that openness appeared strongly while expandability was relatively weak (Kim et al., 2022). This finding is valuable for the present article because it indicates that co-living cannot be judged only by the presence of common spaces. The question becomes how these spaces are connected with service rules, digital systems, and everyday use.

4. Discussion

4.1. Spatial Touchpoints

Spatial touchpoints are the most visible layer of the co-living service system. They include private rooms, shared kitchens, dining areas, lounges, workspaces, laundry rooms, fitness areas, rooftops, corridors, elevators, storage spaces, and entrances. Each spatial touchpoint supports particular actions and also communicates expectations about behavior.

The private room is the core touchpoint of autonomy. It allows residents to sleep, store belongings, work privately, and withdraw from interaction. Its importance should not be underestimated. If the private room is too small, poorly soundproofed, or difficult to personalize, the promise of independent living weakens. Co-living must therefore begin with the protection of individual territory.

Shared kitchens and dining spaces are central to everyday practice because they combine function and social visibility. Cooking requires storage, hygiene, scheduling, appliance access, and cleaning rules. These spaces may create casual encounters, but they may also produce conflict if storage is unclear, cleaning expectations are uneven, or peak-time use is not managed. From a service-touchpoint perspective, the kitchen is not only a room. It is a sequence of actions involving food purchase, storage, cooking, eating, cleaning, waste disposal, and possible conversation.

Workspaces have become increasingly important as young residents combine home life with remote work, study, job preparation, and freelance activity. A shared workspace must provide seating, electricity, Wi-Fi, lighting, acoustic control, and rules for calls or meetings. Its value lies not only in providing desks but in reducing the need to relocate to cafés or external coworking spaces.

Lounges, rooftops, and leisure rooms operate as optional social touchpoints. Their success depends on whether they allow different intensities of participation. A resident may want to sit near others without joining a conversation, read alone in a shared lounge, or attend a planned event. Spaces that only support large-group interaction may exclude quieter users. Spaces that provide multiple seating types, visual gradients, and flexible furniture can better support selective social participation.

4.2 Digital Touchpoints

Digital touchpoints connect the resident to the operational layer of co-living. They may include websites, online inquiry forms, digital contracts, rent payment systems, access control, facility booking, maintenance requests, announcements, community chats, and feedback forms. These touchpoints make co-living different from informal shared housing because they allow the operator to manage repeated interactions at scale.

The first digital touchpoint often appears before move-in. Prospective residents encounter the co-living brand through a website, platform listing, social media page, or virtual tour. At this stage, the service system communicates what kind of lifestyle is being offered. The information provided about room type, shared facilities, rent, deposit, contract length, rules, and community activities shapes expectations before the resident enters the building.

After move-in, digital access and communication become part of daily routine. A resident may use a smart lock, receive cleaning notices, check house announcements, book a shared room, or report a maintenance problem. The quality of these interactions affects trust. If the platform is clear, responsive, and connected to actual staff action, residents may feel that the building is manageable. If the platform is confusing or requests are delayed, digitalization becomes another source of burden.

Digital touchpoints also shape the boundary between community and surveillance. Community chats and announcement platforms can help residents coordinate activities, but they may also create pressure to be constantly visible. The design of digital participation therefore matters. Residents should be able to receive necessary information without being forced into continuous social exposure.

4.3. Operational Touchpoints

Operational touchpoints refer to the managed services that support daily living. These include cleaning, maintenance, laundry management, parcel handling, security, waste disposal, rule enforcement, move-in orientation, and departure procedures. They are often less visible than lounges or rooftops, but they strongly influence whether co-living feels convenient or stressful.

Cleaning is one of the most important operational touchpoints because shared space requires repeated coordination. In informal shared housing, cleaning is often a source of conflict. In professional co-living, the operator may reduce this conflict through scheduled cleaning of common areas, visible hygiene rules, and clear responsibility boundaries between residents and staff. However, professional cleaning does not eliminate the need for resident responsibility. The service system must clarify what is handled by staff and what remains the duty of residents.

Maintenance requests are another key touchpoint. In a small private apartment, a tenant may contact the landlord directly. In co-living, maintenance is mediated by management systems. A broken appliance, door issue, leaking tap, Wi-Fi problem, or lighting failure affects not only one resident but often a shared environment. The speed and clarity of repair procedures become part of the perceived value of co-living.

Rules are also service touchpoints. Quiet hours, guest policies, kitchen use, waste sorting, booking procedures, and event participation rules structure how residents live together. Rules should not be understood only as restrictions. They are mechanisms that make shared living predictable. However, excessive or unclear rules may reduce autonomy. The best service system is not the one with the most rules, but the one in which necessary rules are understandable, proportional, and consistently applied.

4.4. Social Touchpoints

Social touchpoints include planned events, informal encounters, community managers, shared meals, resident announcements, workshops, online groups, and everyday greetings in common areas. These touchpoints distinguish co-living from purely individual rental housing. They are also the most delicate part of the service system because residents differ in their desire for interaction.

Co-living operators often use social programming to create a sense of community. Events may include welcome gatherings, language exchanges, fitness classes, cooking activities, cultural outings, or hobby-based workshops. These programs can help residents overcome isolation, especially in large cities where young adults may lack local networks. Yet the value of social programming depends on voluntary participation. When events become an implied obligation, community may be experienced as pressure.

Informal social touchpoints may be more important than formal events. A small seating area near the kitchen, a notice board near the elevator, or a short greeting in a corridor can support

weak ties among residents. Weak ties are useful because they allow recognition without demanding intimacy. In young urban co-living, this may be more realistic than the ideal of a close household community.

5. Conclusions

This article has reframed Seoul co-living as a life-service system rather than merely a shared residential form. Through a document-based conceptual analysis, it proposed that co-living should be understood through the integration of spatial, digital, operational, and social touchpoints. The study showed that young residents' everyday practices are shaped not only by private rooms and common spaces but also by access systems, booking tools, cleaning routines, maintenance channels, house rules, community programs, and opportunities for withdrawal.

The central argument is that the value of co-living lies in coordinated daily support. Shared facilities are meaningful only when they are connected to clear service procedures and flexible participation. A lounge without appropriate rules, a kitchen without cleaning coordination, or a digital platform without responsive management may fail to improve everyday life. Conversely, a well-coordinated service system can allow residents to balance privacy, convenience, and selective community.

This article contributes to design research by moving beyond spatial typology toward service-touchpoint analysis. It also contributes to housing studies by showing that contemporary co-living is part of a broader shift in which urban housing is increasingly packaged as an integrated service environment. For young residents in Seoul, co-living is not only a way to reduce isolation or access amenities. It is a system through which everyday life is organized, mediated, and negotiated.

Future research should extend this conceptual framework through empirical fieldwork. Resident interviews could examine how people actually use shared spaces and digital systems. Behavioral observation could identify differences between designed use and actual use. Platform log analysis could reveal patterns of booking, maintenance requests, and communication. Comparative research across Seoul districts could show how student-oriented, work-oriented, and lifestyle-oriented co-living models differ. Cross-national comparison with China, Japan, or Singapore could further clarify how policy, culture, and service expectations shape co-living development in East Asia.

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