

Research paper

## ASSESSING ATTITUDES TOWARDS COLIVING IN NIŠ: A SURVEY-BASED ANALYSIS OF HOUSING PREFERENCES AND SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

Katarina Medar<sup>1</sup>, Slavisa Kondic<sup>2</sup>, Nemanja Randjelović<sup>3</sup>,  
Sofija Ickovski<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

*This study explores the feasibility and social acceptance of coliving as an alternative housing model in Niš, Serbia. The primary objective of the research is to assess awareness, preferences, and concerns regarding coliving compared to traditional renting among potential users, including students, young professionals, digital nomads, and remote workers. The research employs a quantitative survey methodology, collecting data through an online questionnaire distributed among targeted demographics in Niš. The survey includes multiple-choice questions covering demographic factors, housing preferences, pricing expectations, and cultural attitudes toward shared living arrangements.*

*By analyzing the collected data, this study aims to identify key factors influencing housing choices and perceptions of coliving in Niš. The findings will provide insights into the potential demand for coliving spaces, the main incentives and deterrents for prospective residents, and the economic and social factors that could impact the successful implementation of coliving projects. This study contributes to a broader understanding of how coliving can be adapted to local contexts, offering a potential model for sustainable urban housing development in mid-sized cities. The results of this research will be valuable for architects, urban planners, and investors exploring coliving as a viable housing solution in Niš. Further research will be needed to assess the long-term economic viability and cultural acceptance of coliving in the region.*

**Key words:** *Coliving, Housing preferences, Social acceptance, Economic viability, Sustainable housing*

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<sup>1</sup> PhD student, Research Assistant, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture - Architecture (University of Nis), Serbia, katarina.medar@gaf.ni.ac.rs, ORCID 0000-0002-5876-4797

<sup>2</sup> PhD, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture - Architecture (University of Nis), Serbia, slavisa.kondic@gaf.ni.ac.rs, ORCID 0000-0002-0146-6756

<sup>3</sup> PhD student, Junior Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture - Architecture (University of Nis), Serbia, nemanjarandjelovic@gmail.com, ORCID N/A

<sup>4</sup> PhD student, Junior Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture - Architecture (University of Nis), Serbia, sofijaickovski12@gmail.com, ORCID N/A

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization, technological advancements, and migration—defining features of modern society significantly shape housing dynamics. In response to the growing housing crisis [1], innovative housing typologies are emerging. Coliving, as an alternative and modern housing typology, has been evolving globally for many years, particularly in more developed countries [2].

Coliving has emerged as a transformative housing model, blending private living spaces with shared communal areas to address urban challenges such as rising rental costs, social isolation, and housing shortages [3]. Rooted in the sharing economy [4], coliving emphasizes affordability, flexibility, and community-building, attracting digital nomads, students, and young professionals in cities like Berlin, Lisbon, and Singapore [5].

While academic discourse is largely centered on Western contexts, post-socialist cities in Southeast Europe, with their unstable housing markets and shifting economic conditions [6], present both unique challenges and untapped potential for coliving. The prevailing housing typologies in Serbia are mostly traditional, including single-family and multi-family housing, while living outside the nuclear family primarily involves renting market-rate apartments shared among groups of people who already know each other.

The housing market in Serbia does not sufficiently meet the residential needs of its population, particularly among young individuals striving for independent living. Niš, Serbia's third-largest city with a population of 249,501 [7], reflects these dynamics. As home to a growing IT sector and a transient student population centered around its university, the city presents unique housing pressures. In response, this study explores the feasibility of implementing the coliving housing typology in the context of Niš. The analysis draws on survey data collected from local residents aged 18 to 44 (about 50% of population in Niš), representing the study's target generational cohort. The survey explored key motivations, perceived barriers, and design preferences related to Coliving. By contextualizing global housing innovations within the realities of a mid-sized Serbian city, this research aims to inform future urban policy and contribute to the broader discourse on housing transitions in Southeast Europe.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative-dominant, mixed-methods approach to assess the feasibility and public perception of Coliving in Niš, Serbia. A cross-sectional online survey was conducted in March and April 2025, targeting individuals aged 18 to 44, representing the generation most affected by housing precarity and most likely to engage with alternative living models. A total of 90 respondents participated in the survey. The study was conducted in full compliance with ethical research standards. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, with no personally identifiable information collected. The confidentiality and privacy of all participants were rigorously maintained throughout the research process.

A 17-item online questionnaire developed using Google Forms, structured into six sections:

1. **Introduction** - This section introduced participants to the research topic. It provided a brief explanation of coliving as a contemporary housing model, supported by visual materials

such as infographics and photographs of international examples to ensure clarity and engagement

2. **Basic informations (Demographic)** - Collected basic data such as age, employment status, housing situation, and duration of residence in Niš

3. **Awareness and Perception of Coliving** - This section assessed participants' prior knowledge and exposure to the concept of coliving, including whether they had heard of it, understood it, or personally experienced it. Additionally, it explored how attractive the idea of coliving is to them and which specific aspects (such as affordability, community, flexibility, or amenities) they find most appealing

4. **Housing Preferences and Comparisons** – This section investigates participants' choices between traditional housing and coliving. It explores the key factors influencing their housing decisions, such as cost, privacy, location, and community aspects. Additionally, it measures their willingness to try coliving as an alternative living arrangement

5. **Prices and Expected Services** – This section examines participants' expectations regarding the cost of living in a coliving space and the essential services and facilities they consider important. It aims to identify acceptable price ranges and key amenities such as furnished rooms, utilities, Wi-Fi, cleaning services, coworking spaces, and social events

6. **Cultural and Social Perceptions** – This final section explores respondents' willingness to live in culturally diverse groups and share common facilities with other residents. It also gathers opinions on whether coliving could realistically function and be accepted in the local context of Niš.

This survey serves as a preliminary instrument for collecting essential data aimed at understanding the current state of the housing market in the city of Niš, with a specific focus on young adults. By examining respondents' familiarity with and attitudes toward the concept of coliving, the study provides an initial exploration of this emerging housing typology within a post-socialist urban context. As the first investigation of its kind in the region, the research establishes a foundation for further academic inquiry while assessing the level of public awareness and acceptance. The findings are intended to inform future initiatives and offer strategic directions for promoting coliving as a viable housing alternative among local residents.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISSCUSION

The survey of 90 residents aged 18 to 44 in Niš reveals important insights into the local housing preferences and attitudes toward coliving.

#### 3.1. Demographic Profile

The majority of respondents were young adults aged 18-24 (76.7%), predominantly students (65.6%), reflecting the city's significant student population. Most currently live with family (46.7%) or alone in rented apartments (23.3%).

This demographic profile highlights a crucial opportunity for coliving in Niš. The dominance of young adults, particularly students, suggests a high demand for transitional and flexible housing options. The fact that nearly half of respondents still live with family points to potential economic constraints or a lack of suitable independent housing alternatives. Additionally, the relatively high percentage of those already living alone in rented apartments

indicates a segment of young people actively seeking autonomy—an audience likely to be receptive to the affordability and semi-independent structure that coliving offers.

### 3. Where do you currently live?

90 responses

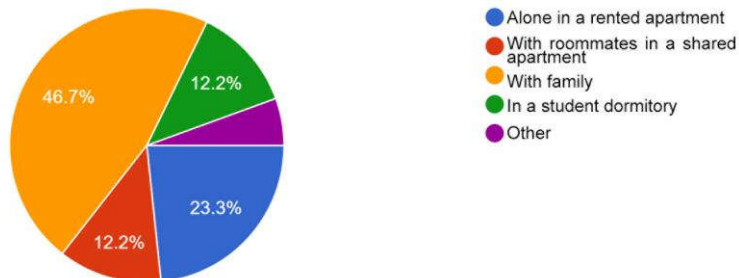


Figure 1. Pie chart, housing status

## 3.2. Awareness and Perceptions of Coliving

Over half of respondents (53.3%) are familiar with coliving, though only a small portion (12.2%) find the concept very attractive. The largest group remains neutral (38.9%), indicating uncertainty or limited experience with this housing model.

### 5. How appealing is the idea of coliving to you?

90 responses

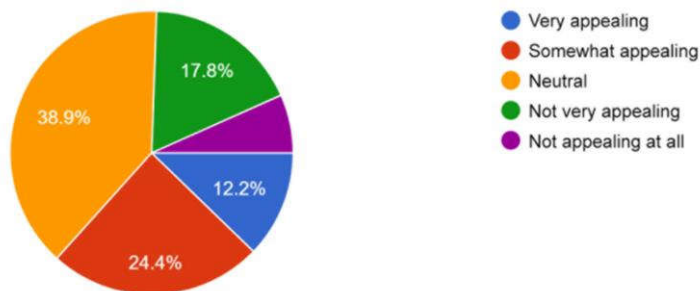


Figure 2. Pie chart, housing preferences

This data suggests that while awareness of coliving is relatively widespread among young adults in Niš, deeper understanding or enthusiasm for the model remains limited. The fact that only 12.2% find coliving very attractive, despite over half being familiar with it, reveals a potential gap between recognition and genuine interest—possibly due to cultural reservations, unfamiliarity with its practical benefits, or a lack of local examples.

The neutral stance held by 38.9% of respondents highlights a crucial opportunity: with targeted education, promotion, and well-adapted pilot projects, many individuals in this group could potentially shift toward a more favorable perception. This neutrality should not be viewed as rejection, but as an open field for further engagement, particularly if coliving is framed as both a practical and socially enriching alternative to traditional housing.

### 3.3. Key Incentives

Affordability (64.4%) and social interaction/community (43.3%) were the leading motivations for considering coliving, alongside the appeal of fully furnished spaces (38.9%) and additional services such as cleaning and events (44.4%). Flexible lease options and coworking spaces also attracted interest.

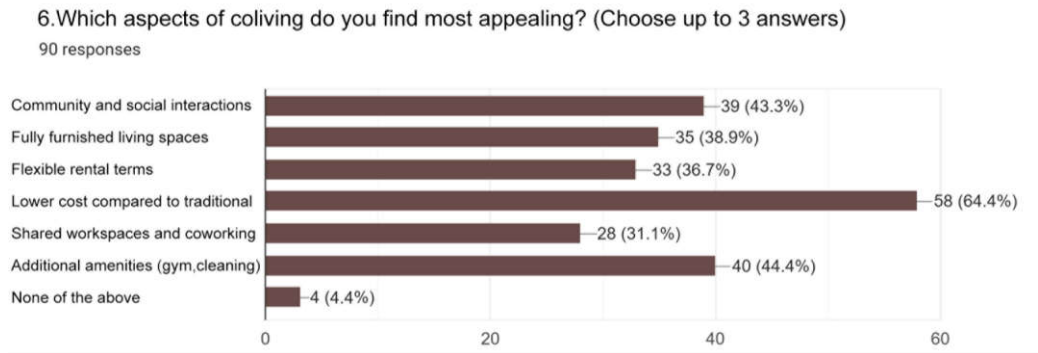


Figure 3. Key Incentives

This highlights the need for careful planning and thoughtful design in future pilot projects. Sustainable models must be developed to keep coliving costs affordable, more budget-friendly than traditional renting. At the same time, these models should encompass a wide range of amenities, as this remains a significant motivator for many residents.

### 3.4. Main Barriers

Privacy concerns (80.0%) and discomfort with sharing living spaces with strangers (74.4%) emerged as the most significant obstacles. Noise and lack of personal space (65.6%) further highlight the preference for privacy and individualism. Cultural differences and unclear rules/responsibilities were lesser but notable concerns.

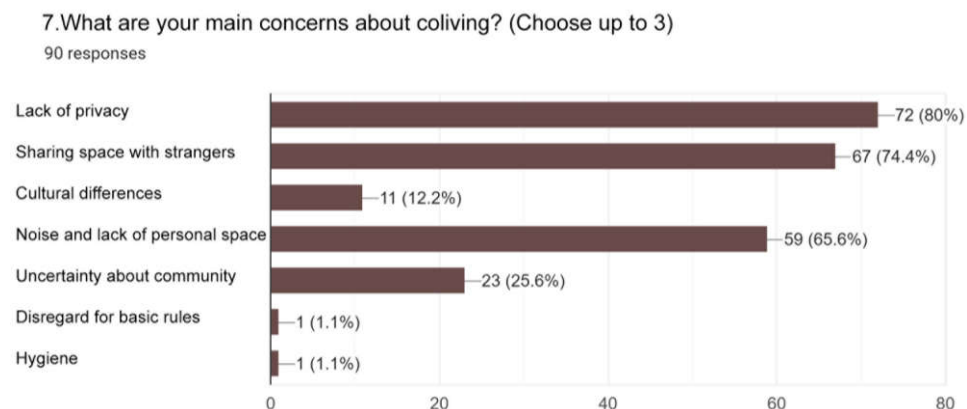


Figure 4. Main Barriers

Therefore, architectural and operational solutions should prioritize private rooms and, where possible, private bathrooms. Sound insulation, well-defined boundaries between personal and communal areas, and optional participation in social activities can help residents maintain their autonomy while still benefiting from the shared aspects of coliving.

### 3.5. Housing Preferences

Traditional renting remains the dominant preference (60.0%), with only 12.2% opting for coliving. Privacy (84.4%) and location (83.3%) are the highest priorities in housing decisions, outweighing community aspects.

9. What factors are most important to you when choosing housing? (Choose up to 3)

90 responses

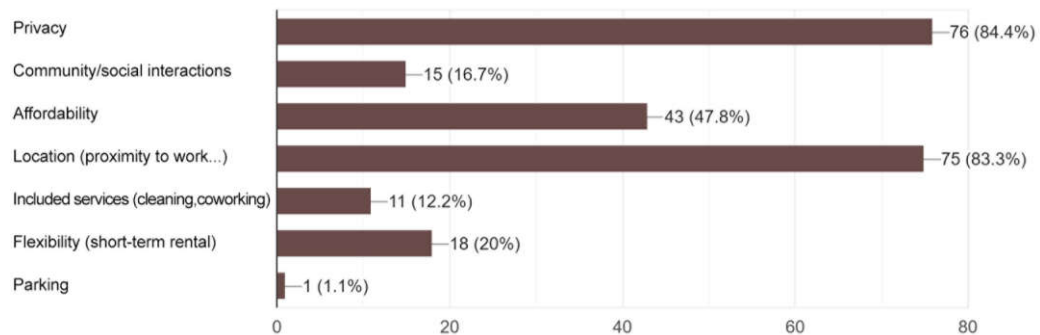


Figure 5. Key factors in housing choice

At first glance, these results may seem concerning, particularly regarding the percentage of respondents willing to choose coliving. However, there is considerable potential in the substantial number of undecided participants—especially given that coliving remains a relatively new and unfamiliar housing typology. These findings underscore the importance of raising awareness among young people about coliving and introducing short-term trial periods in future coliving communities. Such non-binding trial opportunities could encourage greater participation and help mitigate initial hesitation.

In addition to privacy, which emerged from the questionnaire as the most significant barrier, a large number of respondents identified location as an important factor when choosing housing. This indicates that coliving developments should be situated in areas attractive to young adults, particularly near universities and other amenities relevant to this demographic.

10. Would you be willing to live in a coliving space for at least 3-6 months?

90 responses

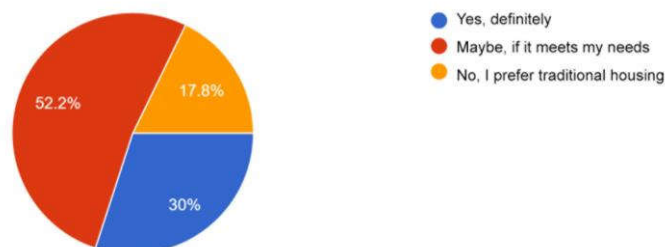


Figure 6. Pie chart, Willingness to Try Coliving

A considerable number of respondents expressed openness to coliving, with 30% willing to try it for a period of 3–6 months and 52.2% responding with “maybe.” In contrast, only 17.8% were not interested. This positive balance suggests a clear interest in more modern forms of living and a readiness among young people to explore new housing experiences.

### 3.6. Pricing Expectations

Around half of respondents (50.0%) are willing to pay €150–€250 for an all-inclusive coliving option, while 17.8% are willing to pay €250–€350.

These results indicate that the majority of respondents are only willing to pay up to 250€ per month for coliving services. This suggests that potential coliving models in Niš would need to be cost-effective to meet the expectations and financial capabilities of the target population. The relatively low willingness to pay may be influenced by current income levels and perceptions of value, and could represent a challenge for developers or investors aiming to establish coliving spaces with higher operating costs.

12. If a coliving space offered an all-inclusive rent (furnished room, utilities, Wi-Fi, cleaning, coworking, events), how much would you be willing to pay?

90 responses

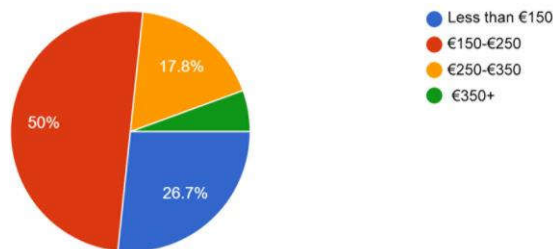


Figure 7. Pie chart, Pricing expectations

### 3.7. Essential Amenities

A vast majority prioritize private rooms (94.4%) and bathrooms (84.4%), emphasizing the need for hybrid coliving models that balance privacy and community. Shared social spaces, cleaning services, and wellness facilities received moderate interest.

13. Which amenities would you consider essential in a coliving space? (Choose up to 3)

90 responses

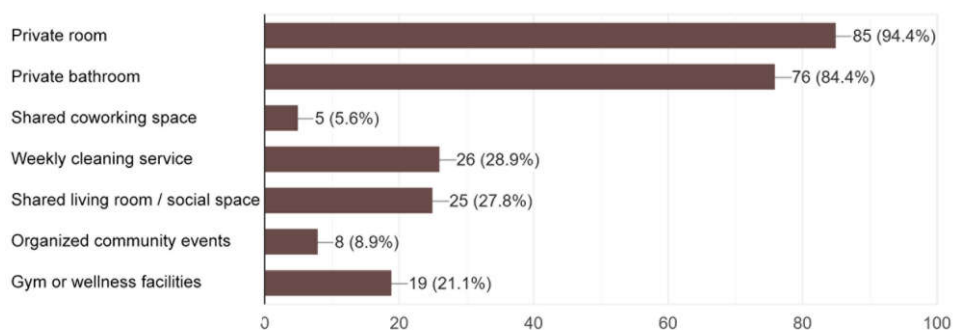


Figure 8. Essential Amenities

### 3.8. Social and Cultural Attitudes

Only a small percentage (8.9%) feel comfortable sharing spaces, while the majority (58.9%) remain neutral—indicating that their comfort depends on the behavior and

compatibility of other residents. A significant portion (32.2%) explicitly feel uncomfortable with the idea of shared living areas.

This highlights a key challenge for coliving implementation: while there is openness to shared living, it must be carefully managed through thoughtful design, clear community guidelines, and possibly options for more private or semi-private shared zones to accommodate different comfort levels.

14. How do you feel about sharing common spaces (kitchen, living room) with others?

90 responses

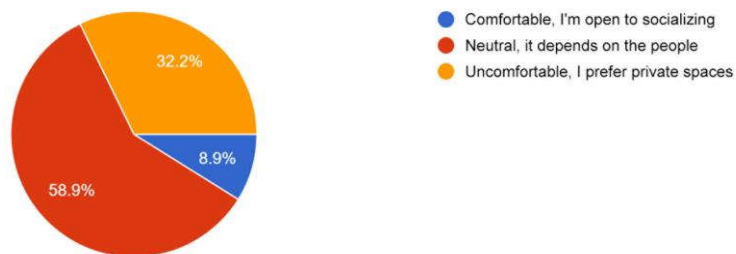


Figure 9. Openness to sharing common spaces

A significant portion of respondents (64.4%) maintain a neutral stance toward living in a multicultural environment, suggesting that openness depends on individual preferences. Meanwhile, 20% of participants expressed full openness to such a living arrangement. This reflects a generally inclusive attitude among young adults in Niš, which could support the development of coliving spaces that bring together diverse groups.

### 3.9. Perceived Viability

While only 25.6% of respondents believe there is already a market for coliving, the overwhelming majority (66.7%) express conditional support, stating that coliving could work with better understanding and adaptation.

16. Do you think coliving could work in Niš?

90 responses



Figure 10. Perceived Viability of Coliving in Niš

This suggests that although awareness and acceptance are not yet fully developed, there is strong latent interest that could be activated through targeted education, promotion, and pilot projects. Notably, only a small minority (7.8%) outright prefer traditional renting, highlighting an openness among the population to explore alternative housing models like coliving if implemented thoughtfully.



## 4. ARCHITECTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SURVEY FINDINGS

The results of the survey allow for the formulation of specific architectural guidelines for designing coliving spaces adapted to the local context of Niš. While the data indicates a degree of openness toward alternative housing models, the broader acceptance of coliving will depend largely on how spatial organization addresses the cultural values, habits, and practical needs of potential residents.

The most prominent concern among respondents is privacy—with 80% expressing discomfort over a lack of private space, and 94.4% identifying private rooms, and 84.4% private bathrooms, as essential. These findings point to the need for hybrid coliving models that combine individual living units with optional shared amenities, rather than fully communal arrangements.

Architecturally, this implies the development of residential units that allow for a high degree of adaptability—both in terms of length of stay and level of engagement with shared spaces. Spatial strategies that can help increase the acceptance of coliving in this context include:

- Sound insulation between private and shared areas
- Clear physical boundaries between public, semi-public, and private zones
- Flexible access to shared amenities (e.g., kitchens, coworking spaces, lounges)
- Retreat zones within communal areas, offering intimacy and personal space

Moreover, a large proportion of respondents (83.3%) highlighted location as a crucial factor in housing decisions. This suggests that coliving developments in Niš should be strategically located—close to universities, IT hubs, and public transportation—to support daily routines and reduce stress related to commuting.

The desire for short-term stays (with 30% of participants willing to try coliving for 3–6 months) further emphasizes the importance of designing easily maintainable, efficient living units that can accommodate high turnover, fast onboarding, and flexible leasing.

In summary, architectural design for coliving in Niš must respond to three core demands:

1. Ensuring a high level of privacy
2. Offering quality but optional shared amenities
3. Providing adaptability in location and duration of residence

In this way, coliving can become not only a socially and economically viable housing alternative, but also an architecturally sustainable model tailored to the real needs of young people living in post-socialist urban environments.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the feasibility and social acceptance of coliving as an alternative housing model in Niš, Serbia, through a survey-based analysis targeting young adults. By contextualizing the findings within broader theoretical frameworks such as the sharing economy and housing precarity, the research highlights both the potential and limitations of implementing coliving in a post-socialist urban environment.

A key paradox emerged between the appeal of affordability and the challenge of privacy. While 65.6% of respondents cited cost-effectiveness as a primary motivator, a significant 80% expressed concerns about privacy—underscoring the need for coliving models that strike a careful balance between community and autonomy. Cultural hesitation also played a

role, with 25.5% of participants preferring to live with people from similar cultural backgrounds. These findings point to the importance of culturally sensitive strategies for social integration, such as optional communal activities and structured onboarding.

From an architectural perspective, the results suggest a strong need for hybrid spatial models that respect the individual's need for privacy while offering the option of community interaction. Future coliving developments should prioritize private rooms and bathrooms, enhanced soundproofing, and clearly defined spatial boundaries between private and communal areas. Additionally, the importance of location—particularly proximity to universities, technology hubs, and transportation—emerged as a central factor in housing preferences, guiding where coliving projects should be situated within the city.

The adaptability of coliving spaces—especially for short-term stays of 3–6 months—was another significant insight. This points to the necessity of modular and flexible architectural designs that can accommodate different lifestyles and durations of occupancy. These architectural responses are critical in making coliving both practically functional and socially acceptable within the context of Niš.

In sum, the successful implementation of coliving in Niš hinges on context-sensitive architectural and urban planning solutions that respond to local cultural norms, economic realities, and evolving lifestyles. By adapting global coliving principles to the specific needs of mid-sized post-socialist cities, this study offers a pathway toward sustainable urban housing models that are both inclusive and resilient.

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