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homeimprovements



Collective Custom Build is a web-based advocacy tool that makes the case for developing Collective Custom Build as part of a more diverse housing market in the UK. It uses an animated narrative to curate key research findings, revealing them as peelbacks at key points in its argument.

Collective Custom Build is part of the *Motivating Collective Custom Build* practice-based research project within the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded *Home Improvements Knowledge Exchange* based at the University of Sheffield. *Motivating Collective Custom Build* is led jointly by the University of Sheffield School of Architecture, Ash Sakula Architects and Design for Homes.

POPULAR CULTURE

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

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Summary

There is a growing awareness - and application - in mainstream popular culture of alternative means of production and consumption. Groups of people are finding new ways to come together - both digitally and physically - to engage directly in the means of production and consumption of products that would ordinarily be expected to be provided entirely by others, and to emphasise participatory governance and user-led procurement.

Interest is growing in alternative models of housing development whereby a community group takes the lead in developing housing. Groups often form – or consolidate themselves – around a core idea such as self-providing affordable homes¹, a strong environmental agenda², or simply through a shared community of need or interest, such as groups of single-parent families³. In many cases, the procurement of a bespoke housing solution is often integral to the wider lifestyle or economic aspirations of the founding group’s members.

Becoming constituted as a legal entity is commonly cited as a critical factor in enabling community groups to interact with legal, financial, institutional and other professionals within the construction industry⁴. The lack of such a constitution - and means to consolidate potentially fractious group dynamics - in a group that seeks to self-provide housing can be seen as a barrier to ultimate success.

Some alternative development models have established precedent bases in the UK and are represented by national ‘umbrella organisations’. In particular, the Cohousing movement has an established support structure in the form of UK Cohousing Network (UK Cohousing Network, 2013a),

¹ Providing affordable homes was a key objective of the Low Impact Living Affordable Community (LILAC) group in Leeds, and of the St Minver CLT group in Rock, Cornwall, amongst others.

² The Lancaster Cohousing group set out to develop higher-performance energy-efficient, Passivhaus homes, which ultimately cost the same as an equivalent property in the area of an inferior specification.

³ The LUU ‘Baugruppen’ in Berlin has been formed by a group of single-parent families seeking mutual support (Chan, 2010, p. 59).

⁴ This point was discussed at length during the *Motivating Collective Custom Build* stakeholder workshop, held at Ash Sakula Architects in London on 25th February 2013 (Ash et al., 2013), and has been corroborated in a number of presentations - and accompanying Q+A sessions - made by key figures connected to the housing industry (S. Hill, 2013a, 2013b; Moore, 2013; Urban Design Group, 2013 and others.)

which maintains links with other national and international organisations, as does the Community Land Trust movement, via the National CLT Network (National CLT Network, 2013). These organisations offer support to groups in becoming constituted, although there is an acknowledged need for localised, on-the-ground support in the form of other umbrella organisations that can provide face-to-face support. Examples of these - such as Cornwall CLT Ltd (Cornwall Rural Housing Association, 2013a; and Moore and Northcott, 2010), and The Land Society (The Land Society, 2013) in Devon – have successfully supported community groups in taking ownership of land and building houses, whilst emerging initiatives exist in Bristol (Bristol CLT, 2013), London (East London Community Land Trust, 2013) and the North East of England (Bomken et al., 2013).

Other constitutional models, such as Mutual Home Ownership Societies (MHOSs) are less established in the UK, but still have representative precedent examples, such as the Low-Impact Living Affordable Community (LILAC) scheme in Leeds (LILAC, 2013).

There is also a growing interest in the potential for 'crowd-funding'⁵, 'pro-suming'⁶ and models of collaborative consumption⁷ - ideas already familiar in other fields, such as the music and hospitality industries⁸ - to offer an opportunity to overcome the organisational challenge and financial risk traditionally associated with 'group self-build', particularly with regard to the difficulty of obtaining land, finance and planning permission (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 8). Whilst these models are untested in relation to procuring buildings, their potential is clear when considered in relation to alternative development models that allow groups to form in the physical - and legal - world, such as Cohousing, Community Land Trusts and MHOSs.

Some developers are already trying to harness the power of these technologies to help groups of custom builders coalesce. Custom Build Developer, SolidSpace, has set up a web-based system that - as well as allowing prospective customers to express an interest in having a house custom built for them⁹ - also enables them to identify themselves on an 'Opportunity Map', revealing their location in relation to other interested households, and to development sites 'scouted' or secured by the developer, as well as allowing them to outline the extent of the area in which they would like to live (SolidSpace, 2013b). SolidSpace then use their expertise in identifying and securing development sites, whilst the group – made up of individuals – finances the project up front, sharing the risk of development with the developer and benefitting from the associating reward of cost savings. Developer HAB - famously associated with broadcaster Kevin McCloud - is using online investment website Crowdcube to raise finance for its Custom Build venture, in which it will help - and sometimes form - groups of people to directly procure customised homes (HAB, 2013; Ramchurn, 2013), whilst Brickstarter is an initiative that seeks to create an online platform for making suggestions about how

⁵ The Wikipedia entry for 'Crowdfunding' - citing Ordanini et al. (2011) - describes it as 'the collective effort of individuals who network and pool their money, usually via the Internet, to support efforts initiated by other people or organizations'. The concept is sometimes alternately referred to as 'crowd financing', 'equity crowdfunding' or 'crowd-sourced fundraising' (Wikipedia, 2013a).

⁶ The 'prosumer revolution' is described by Parvin et al. as being represented by platforms such as YouTube, Wordpress, Lulu, MySpace, AirBnB, Kickstarter and Wikipedia, that - driven largely by the internet and technologies that make it easier for ordinary people to both communicate and to produce things for themselves - empower large numbers of dispersed 'prosumers' that together form a powerful, high-volume sector of producers with the ability to aggregate their knowledge and collective purchasing power. (Parvin et al., 2011, pp. 8–9).

⁷ The Wikipedia entry for 'Collaborative Consumption' - citing Botsman and Rogers (2010) - describes collaborative consumption as 'a class of economic arrangements in which participants share access to products or services, rather than having individual ownership', adding that it is often enabled by technology and peer communities (Wikipedia, 2013b).

⁸ Zogolovitch highlights that Custom Build - facilitated by models of 'collaborative consumption' facilitated by digital technology and online platforms is likely to offer a credible alternative model for production and consumption in the house-building industry in the same way that AirBnB does for the hotel industry, that Youtube does for the broadcasting industry and that iTunes and others do for the music industry (Zogolovitch, 2013). Parvin et al. add Wordpress, Lulu and Wikipedia as examples that have introduced 'prosuming' - where producers are also consumers - to the journalism and publishing industries (Parvin et al., 2011, pp. 8–9). Facebook and Twitter represent tools that groups are able to use to meet each other, exchange ideas and consolidate themselves.

⁹ Interested parties first fill out a fairly normal online form. See (SolidSpace, 2013a).

to improve neighbourhoods or environments and then turn those proposals into projects (D. Hill, 2013; see also McGuirk, 2013).

There is clear potential for these models - with the right amount of supported - to provide a conduit for pro-development, community-led dialogue and models of ownership and governance that reflect aspirations for 'resident-owned communities', described by community-development expert Stephen Hill as:

"[an aspiration for qualities such as]...neighbourliness; shared spaces; sustainable buildings; energy efficiency; limited car usage; food growing; genuine and permanent affordability; public benefit...and for these qualities to be normal."

(S. Hill, 2013a)

The mainstream application of such models could be politically desirable - offering an opportunity to overcome NIMBY-ism¹⁰ and offer a politically-popular alternative to speculative house-building as well as a framework for on-going community participation in local governance.

Cohousing

Cohousing is a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighbourhoods and are consciously committed to living as a community (Cohousing.org, 2013). LaFond et al. also add that ideally-defined Cohousing aims to 'develop inclusive living environments and new, attractive qualities of life', and implies that the group are experimenting with ecological building and models of mutual consumption that save energy and other resources (LaFond et al., 2012, p. 17).

Notably, Cohousing developments include private homes that contain all the features of conventional homes, but residents also have access to extensive common facilities such as open space, courtyards, a playground and a common house. The physical design of a cohousing development encourages both social contact and individual space (Cohousing.org, 2013; Devlin, 2013).

Originating in Denmark, with the first residents moving into a purpose built cohousing community at Saettedammen in the late 1960s - the concept of "living community" has spread worldwide. At the time of writing, there are 14 cohousing communities in the UK, hundreds across Denmark and the Netherlands and around 130 in the United States (UK Cohousing Network, 2013b, p. 3). Many more are in development in the UK and around the world, including Canada, Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, Germany, France, Belgium, Austria and elsewhere (Cohousing.org, 2013).

Notable UK examples of Cohousing groups that have provided all or some of their own housing include the Low Impact Living Affordable Community (LILAC) in Leeds, the Threshold Centre in Gillingham and the Lancaster Cohousing group in Lancaster.

The Cohousing Groups Directory - an online map maintained by the UK Cohousing Network¹¹ - not only identifies emerging groups, but also provides a conduit through which interested individuals and organisations can engage with groups and the UK Cohousing Network as an umbrella organisation (UK Cohousing Network, 2013c)

Community Land Trusts

A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a local non-profit organisation created to act as the steward of land and buildings, on behalf of a community, holding it 'in common' so it can remain permanently affordable (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 103).

¹⁰ Based upon an acronym for the phrase 'Not-In'My'Back'Yard'.

¹¹ see www.cohousing.org.uk/groups

CLTs can be a critical part of the mechanism for providing permanently affordable, sustainable new communities, with application in suburban and urban, as well as rural contexts. In particular, they can allow Local Authorities and other public bodies to sell or lease public land in such a way as to ensure that it continues to offer affordable, sustainable housing in community interest (Ibid. 2011, p. 104).

Notable UK examples where CLTs have been critical in facilitating collective self-provision of housing include a number of schemes supported by the umbrella organisation, Cornwall CLT Ltd, such as St Minver and St Just-in-Roseland CLTs (Cornwall Rural Housing Association, 2013a, 2013b). The UK's first urban CLT – the East London CLT - has recently been granted stewardship of a large site in Bow, east London, UK, upon which it intends to build houses for its members, as well as some that will be rented affordably to others (East London Community Land Trust, 2013).

Mutual Home Ownership Societies

A Mutual Home Ownership Society (MHOS) model allows a group to collectively own equity – or shares – in a co-operative that - in turn - owns their homes, rather than owning houses individually (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 109). Essentially, the co-operative is a development company that can purchase land and build houses and, as a constituted entity, can negotiate the basis on which they pay for land (e.g. slowly, over time) with the land-owner (e.g. a Local Authority). The MHOS model can allow individual households who could not otherwise afford it, to attract finance, build their homes and own a shares in them over time (Ibid. 2011, p. 109).

The strength of the MHOS model - set out by co-operatives expert David Rodgers in 2009, in a report entitled 'New Foundations' (Rodgers, 2009) - is that it separates the value of the land from the value of the houses built on it. This means they are not treated as speculative properties, but as consumer durables, like cars and dishwashers, with a certain useful lifetime and an initial cost which must be paid-off over a period of time (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 110) creating the opportunity to ensure they remain affordable despite volatile fluctuations in the land values.

MHOSs are less established in the UK, but still have representative precedent examples, such as the Low-Impact Living Affordable Community (LILAC) scheme in Leeds (LILAC, 2013)

Combining development models

It is widely acknowledged that there are no prescriptive, defined 'types' of self-provided development and that various models – or parts of models – can be combined to open up a *'new field of possibility for ways of developing housing using self-provided models'* (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 124).

For example, the LILAC self-providing group are a Cohousing group that also uses a Mutual Home Ownership Society model to equitably facilitate access to housing for its members. Similarly, a Cohousing group might form to develop housing that affords a 'neighbourly' lifestyle, representing a constituted group of people that might build homes on land owned by a Community Land Trust, which may involve some of or all of the same group of people, and be formed to hold ownership of land in perpetuity on behalf on the local community, of which the Cohousing group are a part. A Community Land Trust could also be established to provide homes for affordable rent, providing housing for individuals and house-holds beyond the immediate membership of the CLT, as is the case with proposals made by the East London CLT (East London Community Land Trust, 2013).

In *'A Right To Build – The Next Mass-Housebuilding Industry'*, Parvin et al. explore three scenarios under which housing can be developed using a combination of alternative development models (Parvin et al., 2011, pp. 123–143) whilst Hunter develops a series of similar models in *'Self Provided Housing - The long tailed future of housebuilding'* (Hunter, 2012, pp. 69–91).

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This excerpt is taken from www.collectivecustombuild.org and forms a single element of a wider research study. Please visit the website or contact us at collectivecustombuild@sheffield.ac.uk for more information.



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