

# Collaborative Housing: Resident and Professional Roles

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New forms of self-organized housing are emerging in numerous locations around the globe. This is particularly the case where regulated housing markets and state-provision for vulnerable households are affected by budget cuts and urban speculation, leaving the middle class at the urban periphery. Residents who join forces collectively to realize housing for their own use are known by terms as diverse as 'building groups' (Germany), 'collective custom build' (United Kingdom), 'deliberative development' (Australia) and 'co-housing'. 'Collaborative housing' has become an umbrella term for this housing sector.

Self-organized housing initiatives can address systemic contemporary issues such as housing (un)affordability, social isolation, care for the ageing, active and safe urban environments for children, environmental and community resilience, and climate change. The built results often receive recognition for their architectural quality, reduced costs, and sustainable outcomes. As such, there is interest from local authorities to integrate collective self-organized housing in urban policies and planning procedures. This involves a shift in the institutional framework, moving away from perceiving residents as individual 'clients' or 'beneficiaries' towards acknowledging future residents as proactive and collective clients.

Households engaging in self-organization frequently seek to realize housing which diverges in some ways from that provided by the market. However, their planning, construction and development inevitably take place in the context of mainstream housing production and the regional planning system. For the most part, households setting out to

self-commission, self-procure and self-manage housing clusters lack the experience and expertise required to negotiate the complex procedures that housing provision involves. They also face resistance from mainstream development partners such as designers, engineers, officials, housing associations, and financiers, who frequently perceive such projects as complex, risky, and complicated. In response, new professional roles are emerging to guide groups through development and building procedures. This frequently requires existing professional infrastructures to adapt; to revise structures for decision-making, to reconsider typical contracting procedures, and to reassess the valuing of professional services.

So far, very few studies have researched how the (re-)emergence and growth of self-organized housing initiatives impacts the roles of built environment professionals and professions. This issue of *Built Environment* addresses questions into the professionalism and role of professionals in the development of resident-led housing.

Architects such as Walter Segal, N. John Habraken, and Christopher Alexander have previously pointed to opportunities to develop design models and strategies that enable residents' appropriation of (dwelling)space and of the production of space. The contributions to this issue are similarly interested in realizing systemic change beyond the level of individual projects and to show, once more, that designers are not the only professional category involved in creating innovative housing models. Writing from experiences in multiple jurisdictions, most authors zoom in on the pro-

professionals and consultants that constitute the housing sector, revealing a wide variety of competences, roles and attitudes. The housing initiatives underlying the contributions as case-studies mostly rely on consultants, instead of standard housing providers, to deliver an environment matching the future residents' needs and values. Nonetheless, there is a perceptible influence of the entrenched construction supply chains on the projects' qualities, due to technical, legal and financial regulatory mechanisms. At the same time, established housing producers absorb the discourse of collaboration with residents and, in some cases, generate 'hybrid' collaborative models that widen the scope of mainstream housing.

The contributions to this issue come from almost all continents and can be read independently. However, when read together they offer increased insight into current collaborative housing initiatives globally, providing opportunities for comparison and cross-jurisdictional learning. The contributions are presented in three sections. Firstly, contributions written outside academia report from inside collaborative dwelling and development practices to provide historical and contemporary contexts. Following this contextualization are three contributions on the perspective of professionals from Northern Europe cities, Australian metropolises and Nigerian cooperatives. The third cluster of contributions discusses collaborative housing as a maturing sector and looks at crossovers between niche-models and mainstream housing, in contexts as different as Finland and Uruguay.

The initial section 'from practice' starts with a historical overview of collaborative housing from one of its countries of origin, Sweden. As long-term cohousing advocates and practitioners, Bloomberg and Kärnekull draw on both personal and professional experiences to provide insights into the multiple organizations and initiatives which have contributed to the success of cohousing in Sweden over time. The second contribution in this section outlines the tasks for professionals that support groups to implement their ideas.

Written from the perspective of southern German practice, it holds principles that can be applied largely to other planning contexts.

The second section 'from professionals' discusses professionals' perspectives of collaborative housing, including the dilemmas they face moving between residents' aspirations and development realities. This section begins with the Australian context, with Palmer asking the question 'Without the developer, who does the...?' and demonstrating that the redistribution of the speculative developer's role among other stakeholders can vary substantially, not only across jurisdictions, but between individual projects in one location. It proposes that increased understanding of entrepreneurial roles by both professionals and residents can lead to greater innovation in the Australian collaborative housing sector. The study from Akure, Nigeria by Adegun and Olusoga surveys a variety of professionals involved and looks at how cooperative societies assist in improving access to affordable and professional housing services. This section concludes with further professional perspectives collected by Arrigoitia and Tummers from the USA, the UK and the Netherlands. Framing the empirical data with theories on professionalizing, the authors conclude that collaborative housing not only produces new types of professions, but also brings about new views on quality control. Who can be considered an expert and what guarantee do residents have that their consultant provides the right advice?

The third section 'maturing and mainstreaming' looks at the integration of collaborative housing into mainstream housing policies and planning. This discussion begins in Finland, with Helamaa's analysis of 'translations between the collaborative housing niche and the established housing sector'. The author concludes that while the established housing sector may adopt niche ideas and move goal posts, structural and practical barriers remain for the upscaling of collaborative housing. Duyn Barenstein and Pfister present the institutionalization of professional guidance

provided by housing cooperatives in Uruguay. Their analysis of context-specific factors leads to a general conclusion that the cooperatives' successes depended on a combination of well-organized residents and government facilitation of legal, financial, and land resources. This conclusion is also applicable to other planning contexts, as the contribution by Szemzo, Gerohazi, Droste and Soetanto shows. Discussing how local authorities in Hungary, Germany and the UK respond to resident-led housing initiatives, the authors show that in all three countries the legal framework and planning instruments to integrate new collaborative housing projects are in place, while the number of realized projects differs. They conclude political will influences the effective implementation of resident-led housing initiatives more than housing cultures. Finally, the study by Schelling, Spellerberg and Vollmer reports in more detail on how local governments can implement such instruments, by the example of a more rural setting in southern Germany.

Distributed across the three sections of the issue are multiple project case studies. The cases have been contributed by individual authors to accompany their papers and are presented here in a uniform format that allows for comparison. The case studies provide a range of examples, emphasizing the diversity of collaborative housing project sizes, locations, models, and typologies from different parts of the globe. Amongst this diversity, one can also identify commonalities of purpose, of vision, and ideology: ideals which we hope the insights shared in this issue can contribute to realizing future collaborative housing.

For more project examples, two books are reviewed that will be of interest to professionals entering the field of collaborative housing, as well as to policy-makers: *Small is Necessary* by Anitra Nelson (2018) and *Eco-Homes* by Jenny Pickerill (2016). Both draw on a rich reservoir of resident-led innovative housing projects.

As is true of all research (and development) the contributions presented here all owe a debt of gratitude to the practitioners and researchers who preceded them. One significant contributor to the foundations upon which this issue builds, cohousing researcher and activist Dick Urban Vestbro, died during the preparation of this publication. With the help of *Kollektivhus.nu* we include a tribute to Vestbro, whose relentless efforts to create and to study collaborative living cannot be overestimated.

As building professionals, we appreciate the challenge of creating customized housing together with future occupants. Moreover, we are involved in teaching future professionals and hence take an interest in the direction this pioneering sector will take. The contributions we received for this issue give evidence of a maturing sector of resident-controlled or at least a highly participative and self-determining culture of residential development. Above all the contributions demonstrate that collaborative housing presents an exciting field for innovation. Implicitly, the collaborative housing trend invokes a paradigm in which there is no longer room for housing as commodity, reinstalling dwelling as a condition for citizenship and a key factor in creating liveable cities.

In proposing, compiling, and editing this issue we have conceptually toured the global catalogue of collaborative housing activity. This process has compelled us to interrogate our own practices as building professionals, academics, and educators. We hope the contributions included here will equally prompt consideration of alternative professional pathways for readers.

We thank the authors for responding to our call and sharing their insights. We are especially grateful to a large group of reviewers who gave their time for critical reading and inspiring dialogue.