

# Opportunities and challenges for developing urban cohousing: A brief US and European comparison



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# Introduction

- Context of the study
- Cohousing in five different countries
- Findings
- Further opportunities





# The Research

## Locations

- RIBA Boyd Auger Scholarship
- Multigenerational and senior cohousing
- 88 projects:

### US

Massachusetts  
Washington DC  
Virginia  
Colorado  
New Mexico  
Arizona

Denmark

Sweden

The Netherlands

UK





# The Research Objectives

- Differences between cohousing projects within these countries
- Experiences of older people using cohousing
- Does design make a difference?
- Best practice
- What worked and didn't work





# United States

- Car dependent culture
- Lower development density
- Mainly an adaptation of the Danish model
- Generally private ownership
- Some remote projects
- Basements



Pioneer Valley Cohousing



Takoma Village Cohousing



Camelot Cohousing



# Denmark

- Medium density suburban
- High quality of design and architectural innovation
- Some of the older projects are still some of the most interesting
- Attention to small details
- Mixture of private and state ownership
- Interesting retrofit projects



Jernstøberiet, Roskilde



Munksøgård, Roskilde



Glahusene, Roskilde



Jystrup Savværk, Jystrup



# The Netherlands

- Primarily medium/high density social housing
- Also high level of innovation and experimentation
- Projects originally tended to be sub-divided into clusters of smaller groups
- High number of *Woongroeps* (similar to Senior Cohousing)
- Generous common spaces
- Future adaptability / design compromise
- Big bike and scooter storage



Houtwijk, Den Haag



Kwackershof, Enkhuizen



Woonkollektief Purmerend



Voormekaar, Boxmeer



# Sweden

- Highest density projects located close to city centre
- Some large group sizes
- Innovation in kitchen design
- Primarily social housing
- Shows cohousing can work at very high densities
- Regular communal meals
- Laundry rooms are part of Swedish culture



Trekanten, Stockholm



Munksøgård, Roskilde



Trekanten, Stockholm



Färdknäppen, Stockholm



# UK

- Somewhere on the spectrum between the US and Scandinavia
- Many are retrofits - limiting architectural scope
- Several successful new build projects
- Co-flats project
- Notable new projects



Stroud Cohousing



Stroud 'Coflats'



LILAC Leeds



Baltic Wharf Cohousing, Totnes



# Findings

## General

- Adaptable to different scenarios
- Different sizes
- Private or state ownership
- The model can work long term although a few failed projects



Woongroep Kwackershof, Enkhuizen, The Netherlands



# Findings

## Experience of older people

- Varying levels of community support
- Sensitive to demographic mix
- Reluctance in many cases to accept older people above 70 or with degenerative illnesses
- Reluctance to relocate to smaller units
- Reluctance to invest in one example



Vereniging AWDO Kreilerburcht, Rotterdam, The Netherlands



Woonkollektief Purmerend, Purmerend, The Netherlands



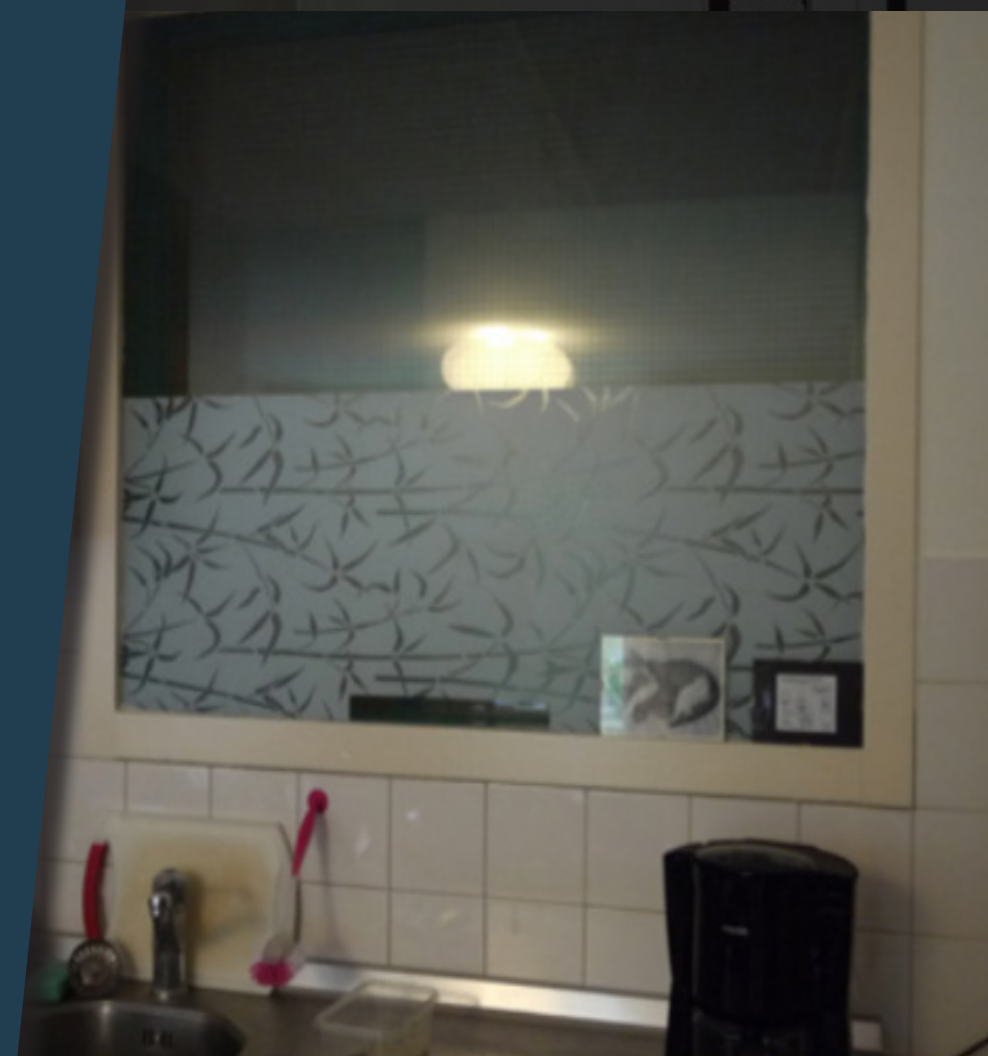
# Findings

## Reasons for failure

- Loss of a key visionary / resident
- Lack of communal space
- Poor location or design of common spaces
- Poor adaptations over time
- A difficult resident or 'bad egg'
- Lack of choice of new residents



Centraal Wonen De Banier, Rotterdam



Centraal Wonen Houtwijk, Den Haag



Tinggården II, Herfølge



# Findings

## Design

- Design is important and integral to the way each community functions
- Small details can make a big difference
- Lots of innovation. Some ideas worked and some didn't - but a surprising lack of post occupancy evaluation
- Repeated mistakes
- Project scale





# Opportunities

- Learning from past mistakes and variety of projects
- Some projects underpublicised
- Thinking beyond the site
- High density projects - London and other cities
- Opportunities for young professionals
- Greater level of support to encourage innovation



Copper Lane, London



The Collective, London



**Full report available at:**

**[www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com)  
search: 'john killock'**