

Professional cohousing development: lessons for the UK from U.S.A and the Netherlands

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Delft Cohousing. Source: author.

Background

Cohousing is an umbrella concept referring to a range of communal housing practices. Typically, it refers to a community where people live in separate individual units (owned or rented) but share common spaces and where co-design happens in the first stages between the future resident group and architects, and collaborative management of the shared living spaces (Fernandez Arrigoitia and Scanlon, forthcoming)¹. It can be created by a group of assembled individuals who act as developers (this is broadly termed, community-led), or it can be generated by other kinds of 'mid-way' developers like housing associations corporations (some found in the UK but most common in the Netherlands) or non-profit organisations (as in the USA). On rare occasions, an individual for-profit developer (individual or corporation) is involved (US²). When other developers are *not* the group, their role can vary from finding interested members or working with a pre-existing group (giving them more or less control over the development process) to develop the construction site and deliver the project.

Cohousing's popularity is most evident in Scandinavian countries like Denmark and Sweden, where the concept began. But it is a growing phenomenon in countries like the Netherlands and the USA, where long histories and supportive institutional environments have led to the development of cadres of professional cohousing consulting and training services, whose existence in turn has helped these alternative housing developments to enter the mainstream. The work of such professionals has provided cohousing groups with development and process expertise and enabled them to become more successful more quickly. Strong and supportive local authorities or housing associations, helpful regulatory regimes, favourable economic and policy environments, and entrepreneurial cultures are other factors that have contributed to success.

UK cohousing is at a comparatively newer stage of development but growing in popular interest, with people increasingly looking for social, economic and environmental alternatives to the traditional housing offer. The government is also increasingly offering support for community-oriented schemes, and some housing associations are genuinely interested (and investing) in the possibilities cohousing may offer them. While there are few professionals dedicated only to cohousing development consultancy, there is an established and growing ecosystem of technical and professional expertise across the community-led housing movement that contribute to activities within the cohousing sector. The national [UK Cohousing Network](#) is actively working to support better integration of individuals with professional capabilities in the range of sector-specific projects and activities as a way of consolidating this growing housing sub-sector. New projects and collaborations are also emerging to support and promote community-led housing across the country³. Within this landscape of growth, Co-

¹ See a slideshow about American cohousing here: <http://www.krausfitch.com/project/cohousing-slideshows>

² See, for example, Jim Leach at the Wonderland Hill Development Co. (<http://www.whdc.com/>) and Kathryn McCamant at Cohousing Solutions (<http://cohousing-solutions.com/>).

³ See BSHF's project on this topic, funded by the [Nationwide Foundation](#), on <http://www.bshf.org/ukhpp/community-led-housing/>

North is a housing development and consultancy agency committed to building the social value of housing in the UK. Co.North is uniquely focused on building the social value of housing through developing resilient communities, economic opportunities and sustainable environments across the housing sector. This is achieved through focusing on innovative approaches to community housing and through working closely with the housing sector, government, civil society and communities across the UK.

The report

This report provides a first review of some of the most important opportunities and challenges that have been faced by key cohousing advisory professionals in the US and the Netherlands. It discusses some of the national factors, conditions and settings that have encouraged and facilitated success, as well as those that have limited its expansion. Based on the experiences of professionals in those countries, the report draws lessons for the UK.

Following a brief description of the project's methodology, the report will examine what made the development of cohousing professionals in the Netherlands and US more or less possible. A qualitative analysis of interview material offers a comparative typology of the most important opportunities and barriers relevant to each country. This is followed by an overview of the UK context and its cohousing professional ecosystem. The conclusions provide a discussion of lessons for the UK.

Methodology

The research was framed by the following questions:

- *What factors have enabled or constrained the development of cohousing professionals and consultants in the Netherlands, the US and the UK?*
- *What can the UK learn from the other two country contexts and what they do?*

Two principal methods were used to answer these questions. First, a brief desk-based research phase reviewed the relevant academic, policy, cohousing specific and grey literature (in English) in order to map the range and roles of cohousing professionals in each of the three case-study countries (USA, the Netherlands and the UK), and their relationship to cohousing development types (e.g., developer-led, mid-way developer and community led).

This review found that there is no literature focusing specifically on the role or trajectory of professionals in the cohousing field anywhere. There are passing references to them in broader industry-specific (housing) scholarship, particularly in studies of innovation and technological uptake. This first review generated provisional list of 'enabling' and 'challenging' factors that could influence the creation and spread of cohousing professionals over time. These fed into the design of the next phase of the research.

The second and core research phase was an interview programme with cohousing professionals, developers and scholars across the three countries (see Appendix A for list of interviewees in each country). All but two of the Dutch interviews were carried out in person in the Netherlands in various settings, including cohousing projects and cafes. Except for two face-to-face interviews in the UK, the UK and US interviews were conducted on the phone or via Skype. The author already knew three out of five UK interviewees and one of the Dutch ones from existing research and academic networks. These individuals, and other colleagues who were not interviewed, provided the author with a list of key contacts in their country contexts and the US. This snowballing technique generated a short-list of people representing different varieties of professional practice. These were then emailed requesting interview. Given that this would not be a representation large-scale sample of professionals, the priority was to speak with individuals who had long-term and varied professional experiences with cohousing.

The qualitative interviews were designed to gain a more in-depth understanding of the histories that shaped, encouraged or hindered cohousing consultancy development. We asked the interviewees about:

- their personal professional trajectories;
- their roles and work with cohousing groups;
- the institutional, economic and political contexts that allowed for or blocked their development as cohousing professionals;
- barriers and success factors to the development of a cadre of professionals
- what they thought the future might hold for cohousing and its professionals in their country.

Together, the literature review and interviews provided the framework for a comparative analysis about enabling and constraining factors for professional development, as well as commentary on future potential. The research material is used to think about the lessons and possibilities for a more robust professional cohousing environment in the UK.

Cohousing professionals in the Netherlands

Background

The Netherlands has a long history of progressive housing practices (both architectural and institutional) that since the 1900's responded to the social ideals of the time. These practices included collective private commissioning of housing by housing associations and corporations with strong links to their members' religious or ideological beliefs. The relevance of this type of practice waned as allocation policies changed and privatisation of housing associations ensued (Boelens and Visser 2011: 105).

Self-organised and new-build initiatives have grown since the 1970s and 80s, when the pattern of standardised single-family, privately-built houses which dominated the Dutch residential landscape was challenged by squatter, environmentalist and feminist movements. This led to changes in housing law and subsidies⁴ that allowed for alternatives to the traditional market. Since then, collective and self-managed ways of living (live-work spaces, studios and others) have grown, generating their own internal support networks, manuals and infrastructures. Most cohousing buildings are owned by housing associations that specialise in self-managed groups⁵. They decide who will live there (employing criteria such as income, relationship to locality, etc.) and collect rent, while residents are in charge of daily management. These housing associations hire experts during the development process to help the group in its development (technical and social)—a process that is expanded on further below. The choice and approval of the expert is left up to the residents group. Since the 1990s, only a very few more progressive housing associations have broken this mould and allowed groups to steer themselves.

In the Netherlands, there is a range of collaborative housing options with different motivations and ideologies, levels of resident organisation and involvement, legal configurations and material typologies. This makes definitions difficult: some but not all could be classed as cohousing. The *Centraal wonen* is the most faithful to the traditional notion of cohousing, with community life and self-management at its core. The first three were developed in Hilversum (1977), Delft (1981) and Rotterdam (1980) (Killock 2014). Today, there are hundreds of these *centraal wonen* cohousing groups, comprising a combination of individual houses/apartments with shared community resources that have been co-designed or are self-managed.

But four other forms of development are worth pointing out here and will be referred to throughout this report as ‘cohousing-like’, due to their incorporation (albeit, variable) of some form of collaboration or sharing. Reduced access to the traditional housing market during the financial crisis led to a surge in such citizen-led initiatives (Tummers 2015).

The first cohousing-like variant, and the one most important for this research, is CPO (which stands for *Collectief Particulier Opdrachtgever*, or Collective Private Client). Since 2000, the Dutch government has been facilitating and encouraging collective self-building processes, or CPO, to increase the proportion of self-managed housing and to promote individual home-ownership (Tummers, forthcoming). Some of these operate like cohousing in practice, while in others the residents are not interested in the cohousing concept or lived reality. CPO residents can ‘own’ the entire process: acquire the land themselves, hire an architect and contractor and authorize all development procedures then deciding whether or not to live collaboratively in traditional cohousing style. More often than not, though, these groups hire a cohousing development expert

⁴ *HVAT-regeling* (Housing for Singles and Two-person Household Act) 1975

⁵ For example, Woningbouw Vereniging Gelderland (WBVG), has specialised in self-managed rental contracts since the 1990s and now owns about twenty cohousing and self-managed living sites.

or CPO professional to advice on some and/or all aspects of the process. Despite CPO's relative novelty as a market alternative, an architect said that buying houses as a group in order to re-do them was 'something we always did'.



The Delft cohousing cluster eats their meals communally every day. *Source: author.*

Second, *resident associations* or 'living groups' can also act as developers in the refurbishment of old underused or dilapidated buildings—an increasingly common practice called 'DIY houses'. These groups may or may not operate as cohousing. *Cooperatives* have also emerged to combine a number of CPO 'living groups' (the equivalent of Berlin's 'Baugruppen') with senior and intergenerational living, mutual aid and care. Different communities can partner with a developer who has a long history of working with self-organised collectives to develop brownfield sites⁶. Finally, some mixed-tenure *eco-villages* have been built⁷ and others are being developed. This is a much larger-scale endeavour that combines self-building and cohousing to create new neighbourhoods in collaboration with housing associations and municipal governments.

Professional trajectories and roles

Table 1: Professional roles of Netherlands interviewees

<i>Interviewee no.</i>	<i>Professional title/role</i>
1	Engineering/technical consultant Cohousing expert and resident Urban studies academic
2	Self-build project manager Procedural consultant CPO resident

⁶ See, for example: http://www.ubuntuplein.nl/wp/?page_id=35

⁷ See: <http://strowijknijmegen.nl/>

3	<i>Architect</i> DIY expert and developer
4	<i>Cohousing resident</i> Cohousing Network Board member
5	<i>Self-build project manager</i> Procedural consultant CPO resident and specialist
6	<i>Architect</i> Cohousing network board member Cohousing group founder and resident
7	<i>Social facilitator</i> Governing board member of both cohousing networks Sociologist/academic Cohousing resident

In the Netherlands we interviewed seven professionals in four cities. Their interest in cohousing or ‘cohousing-like’ developments generally stemmed from anti-authoritarian visions alternatives to mainstream housing for traditional nuclear households. Their commitment to residential involvement and cooperation in the development and practice of home building led to their professional histories and pathways. Personal engagement with group self-build was the first experience of collaborative housing development for two of the CPO project managers. Others had been involved in co-living or ‘living groups’ in their university and post-university lives. Those who were cohousing professionals strictly defined had not worked on any CPO projects. They recognized a gap here in terms of their advisory potential for such groups, but felt this was a task better left to the younger generations.



An Eindhoven cohousing resident shows its original design for co-living. *Source: author.*

Some expressed concern that involvement with cohousing was a generational phenomenon ('the 1968 crowd') which would be difficult to spread or replicate now given mainstream domination of traditional household structures, normative pushes for individual homeownership and legal regulations and prohibitions on common ownership or occupation. Training (of young professionals) and education (schools teaching housing alternatives) were seen as key for countering these processes. This resonates with Tummer's (2011: 154) identification of a series of Dutch planning traditions that act as barriers to the effective take-up of co-housing, including

- design and building standards,
- the dominance of large housing companies and developers;
- the fact that deep-seated notions about the nuclear family household model inform the documents and procedures of architecture and planning, including energy performance calculations, energy company requirements and zoning plans; and
- the fact that legal, policy and planning instruments are not well adapted to non-traditional practices of shared property and collective development in cohousing.

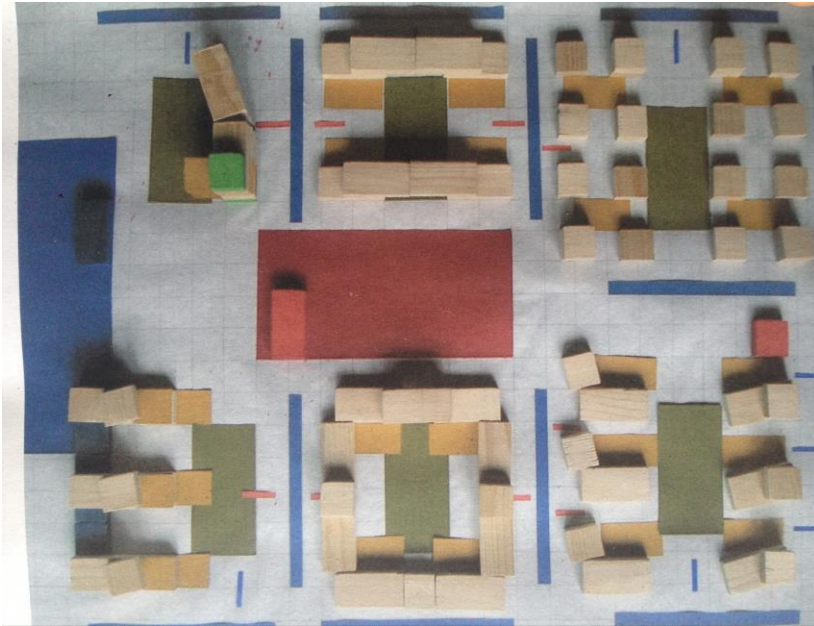


Traditional standard new-build for homeownership in the Netherlands. *Source: author.*

Cohousing-specific consultants

Cohousing professionals (architects and social facilitators in particular) grew organically alongside the development of cohousing. Many of today's self-defined cohousing experts, who continue to form part of the Dutch cohousing and senior networks, were some of the early 1970s and 80s pioneers.

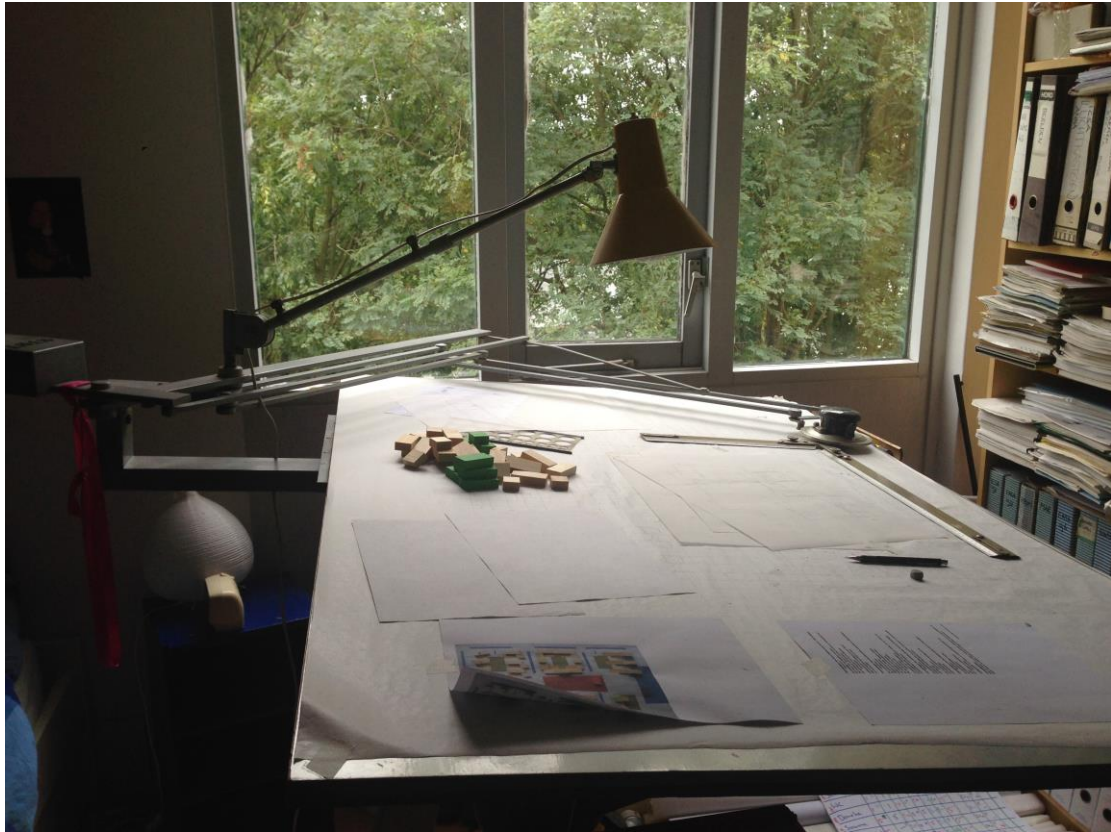
In the 1970s, a group of like-minded architects in Delft who had designed houses for individual ownership but were interested in socially oriented architecture (with common and shared facilities) and co-design processes noticed and discussed the problems associated to existing regulations for developing 'proper group housing projects'. In building his own group, one of these architects gained knowledge about the workings of municipalities, legislation, building regulations and national ministries, which he then passed on as an official consultant, or adviser to others who wanted to live as groups. As a recognised pioneer within the movement, he was approached by other groups.



Block system devised for cohousing co-design process by Flip Krabbendam, an architect and [CW Delft](#) founder and resident. *Source: author.*

But this knowledge was often very local and difficult to transfer between cities that have individual rules and ways of working. Moreover, despite their close engagement with a local officer and support from the government in the early stages, housing corporations still required that future groups negotiate their status on a one-on-one basis. In other words, they were not willing to standardise a product or way of working with groups. The cohousing network responded by developing a magazine (now online platform) to educate other groups and help them overcome practical and political hurdles. This was more possible, I was told, during the 1990s when the (now defunct) Federation of Communal Housing acted as an umbrella organisation that facilitated communication between various professionals across the country, as well as an advice bureau for those interested in communal or cohousing.

One architect criticised the way some cohousing groups today use their own members as architects rather than hiring externally because this, she argued, can lead to situations where the architect-resident takes advantage of their specialist knowledge and group's trust to impose their own agenda, making the whole process lack transparency. Other interviewees also expressed suspicion about what hiring a group member as a consultant could do, preferring the use of outside consultants who have the knowledge yet emotional distance to avoid irreparable group conflict. Some also felt that there is a problematic conflict of interest when individual for-profit developers who happen to be architects act in both roles when developing a scheme.



Flip Krabbendam's design studio in his cluster at [CW Delft](#). Source: author.

Architects, project managers and technical specialists are more common types of cohousing consultants than social facilitators. The latter can be individuals with experience living in cohousing that have the inclination to do this kind of work, or as our respondent, academics doing research on social groups, turning their theoretical knowledge into practice. It is a role that helps people communicate and make better decisions together and with time has become a more established position with “several people that do this as a business, [but] also mostly from their heart’. The cohousing movement registers social consultants on their web sites but the members spoken to suggest this is still a “totally underdeveloped” area of the professional sub-sector, *“also in the minds of people... Because it is the architecture and the legal [that] everybody understands...”* There was no consensus about how to even define this role. The difficulty has to do with the translation of ‘community facilitator’ into Dutch, which ends up sounding like ‘social work’, a field that was said to be different (in terms of its ‘goal oriented’ focus and pathological undertones) to the kind of work their social facilitation implies: “this is more facilitator than to try to reach something in the old fashioned way that you have a goal and you want to reach that and you try to emancipate people. This is different”. To get around this definitional impasse, I was pointed towards the actual similarities between social process and social design- and how these two dynamics—and professions—merge. On the one hand, the social process must involve social design (in terms of rules, decision making processes, etc.) – a kind of ‘re-socialization’; on the other, the architecture must also respond to socially orientated questions.

The often voluntary or very inexpensive nature of this work was not lost on one interviewee who said this often has to do with the fact that groups do not want, or do not have the means to pay a lot. While age and financial security gave her more freedom to take on projects for very little or free, she recognized this had to do with her own previous experiences in asking for money and acknowledged the difficulties in replicating this “time-consuming and energy-depleting” model of work.

Technicians like engineers or environmental sustainability experts can also work alongside social consultants known to them personally or professionally. One engineer had developed these relationships when cohousing was still small and incipient. Knowledge about her work as a technician had travelled over time by ‘word of mouth’. While she used to help some architects that worked with cohousing to choose their engineers, or to give advice on building regulations her independent firm now works directly with groups rather than with cultural or social charities, or CPO organisations.

‘Cohousing-like’ consultants

Beyond strict cohousing, there are many connections between professionals in the ‘cohousing-like’ self-build sector. ‘Cohousing-like’ professionals and consultants were on the main open to working with cohousing groups. For them, a group’s participation in developing, delivering and maintaining the project as built form was very important; therefore, the intense social component involved in cohousing was a natural conductor but not absolute requirement for success.

One of the interviewed architects (who had herself been part of a living group) saw her role as a professional bolstered during the late 1970s and 80s by an environment that supported urban renewal and encouraged rental housing in poorer run-down areas of cities like Rotterdam. While cohousing was fairly new at the time, she and others were able to be ‘very creative in using money from the government’. Specifically, the government was offering subsidies for the development and design of small rental units for ‘special groups’. Another interviewee put it this way: “It was like a crazy experiment where municipal government said, ‘let’s give it away under conditions- only to private individuals who had to unite themselves into an association.’ The local authority allowed groups to buy properties for free—or almost for free.”

Architects like her saw this as an opportunity for working alongside housing corporations, offering the government value for money by transforming the interiors of old factories and schools—located in very nice city locations – that could no longer function as such due to changes in policy or economic environments. Part of her role involved looking for people who wanted to live there. In other cases, her architecture firm works with the housing corporations once they produced a standardised exterior by personalising the interior alongside residents. The integration of the interiors made it a more affordable process. When groups come to her unsolicited, they also work together in a series of workshops on the co-design of the interiors and tenants do the finishings, leaving the exteriors, insulation and principal installations to the construction firm. This process is now very common in CPO procurement and

development, and this architect's particular projects in different cities have served as award-winning models and examples for municipalities, housing corporations and private construction firms to follow. She argued that architects should be creative in their financial approach bypassing some of those obstacles by submitting proposals for national prizes and other government competitions. This can help them develop and deliver their own projects.

Other architects have become increasingly involved in cohousing and CPO initiatives and facilitation since the financial crisis⁸. Fifty per cent lost their jobs and became self-employed leading many into this new business of 'trying to act as real-estate developers with a new style'. These entrepreneurs work independently, or with a team of for example housing, health and welfare experts, to actively search for plots that could function as CPO. Once they find a site that seems suitable, they make sketches or simple plans for the concept of what could be developed there. They then try to sell this concept to private individuals in meetings they arrange at their own cost. Once a group with sufficient quorum is formed, the professionals use their collective skills to bid at the municipal level, arrange all legal and regulatory matters for the group and facilitate their internal mechanisms.

The fact that architects seem to be dominating much of the professional movements in CPO was welcome, but not just celebrated. First, despite the boom in the sector, there did not appear to be any space in which to actively learn from one another (beyond lived everyday work practices). Historically, there had been more communication between architects who did similar work through meetings and other forums of exchange that allowed experiences to be shared and learning to happen. These had dwindled because of the difficulties associated to putting such meetings together. Major cities have other active planning and architecture associations but these "are still in the mood of architects being the designers of everything"; meaning, their vision of ownership of the product is at odds with the principles of cohousing co-design. Moreover, municipalities' reticence to work with large groups has led to 'un-lively architecture' and simplistic, monotone approaches to built form.

⁸ One successful example is the senior cohousing development firm [Kilimanjaro](#), based in Eindhoven, which began in 2010.



A would be group of senior co-housers assembled by the Kilimanjaro consultancy gets together to hear about cohousing development options in Eindhoven and from a network and cohousing expert. *Source: author.*

Finally, for architects with long experience in producing tenders for construction, including calculations, working alongside newer professionals can be complicated. One respondent was very critical of these inexperienced individuals or firms who are creating plans for projects in highly inflexible ways that responds more to local government dictums than to the reality of group projects and their goals. She quoted one example where, in following the very strict regulations of a European Tender some architect consultants miscalculated prices and the project was now six months delayed. She saw such blind 'following of the rules' as evidence that "the architects don't know anything about it [cohousing development]".

Alongside the architect-led firms mentioned before, self-build consultancy companies in major Dutch cities are also key professional players in the CPO scene. Generally, these firms *facilitate* contacts in design rather than doing it themselves, have different roles to play and can come in at different stages in a group's development. They are typically most important during the setting up phase. If there is no group, then they act as a key connector and intermediary for individuals who do not know each other but want to form an association with the proper legal foundation. If groups knew each other beforehand they may have already hired an architect but if not, the company sketches a basic plan and budget with which the group can look for an architect. Once the group is sent a bill by architects and engineers, the firm then comes in as independent project managers and can chair group meetings. They set their fee on a per hour

consultancy basis or based on how much work it takes in bulk. Whether the project is large or small—the end price will always be cheaper per house if there are more houses per project (scalability).

Financing cohousing and ‘cohousing-like’ projects is complicated and professionals like CPO –oriented firms have dedicated much energy towards facilitating and trying to make bank financing more possible. The government ensured certain deals with banks, but banks still saw self and group build as riskier. One project manager said this was counter-intuitive since “in a collective project you are controlled by the group or people like them that keep an eye on everything. But it still has a bad name.” Often, if seen as too risky by a bank who in turn require changes to originals so as to seem safer. These changes then have to suit the original sustainability agreements established by the city.

Professionals involved in ‘cohousing-like’ developments, in general, enable groups to get a better deal than they would have both financially and in terms of ultimate quality of the product. They provide the expertise that wouldn’t otherwise be given by the traditional builder regarding future group maintenance costs – and what the implications of choosing one material over the other may be in developing a site. One of the interesting comments made by a consultant from a self-build firm was that they no longer felt responsible for the social success of the group; rather, now that ‘the pilot stage’ was over and municipalities were more familiar and comfortable with the projects, treating private clients ‘like corporations or real estate developers’, they could focus their energies on making sure the project planning processes are in place⁹. This suggests two things: first, that some see municipal back-up as evidence of the sector’s professionalisation, where *becoming* professional is also seen as having been reached when the government treats you in the same way as they do a corporation or real estate developer. Second, that this process has been qualitatively different for the more ‘market-friendly’ product that is CPO than for cohousing which, as noted in the section before, struggled with standard procedures vis a vis the government and housing corporations—explored further below.

Structural opportunities and constraints

A key structural factor underpinning the successful set-up as well as future of cohousing developments is the relationships and agreements that exist or are possible between housing corporations (acting as developers and managers) and cohousing groups. Cohousing practitioners all noted that housing corporations have historically been reluctant to engage with them – and still are. Beyond a general lack of understanding of what cohousing is, and a risk averse attitude towards non-conventional forms of housing development, there is a generational issue *within* the housing corporations and federations where new members without experience or knowledge ‘hardly know anything about it’ and therefore present more challenges or obstacles for existing and would-be groups.

⁹ It is now common for government, corporations and private individuals to search together for projects in a joint-up way. Where a group commissions could previously take around 5-10 years, this has now been reduced to 2-3 years.

The ownership status and relationship between individuals, groups and the housing corporations is complicated and varies on a case-by-case basis. Generally, old cohousing groups have group licences, where they pay their individual rent or mortgages to a common pot. Some corporations have been completely hands-off in allowing members to set their own allocation rules over time, but these are exceptions and they are cutting down the freedoms historically afforded to these alternative groups. A 1970's Delft cohousing, for example, had previously been allowed to reassign rooms within clusters as they saw fit without any rent changes based on amount of space. Now, the housing corporation is setting rents based on the room being occupied (per sq. metre). This radically alters the hereto-open system that governed this community's living practices and has the potential of inserting competition based on price that was not there before. In other long-standing communities like one in Eindhoven questions of long-term legal ownership status are unclear and groups would like to seek policy amendments to contracts with their housing corporation in order to strengthen their ownership rights, to allow more flexibility in terms of inheritance and of who gets to live in the community.

Another crucial element determining how fast or far cohousing or 'cohousing-like' projects have developed is the amount of land supply, the cost of land, the availability of sites and the amount of new build that may be taking place at a particular point in time within a particular city or municipality. Local policies around these issues make a difference. So while Amsterdam and Rotterdam may look alike and be considered 'big' cities within the country, they do not operate in the same way in terms of how they sell their public land and property, or how they choose to develop or re-develop run-down or underused urban spaces.

Amsterdam, for example, has a strong long-term policy of new-build that included a 10% reserve for community-build, so it has shown greater growth than other regions. Here, where there is great demand for 'special' houses, any building to be redeveloped (like a school or factory) is placed in an open competition. Developers must then: (i) propose a feasible plan, to be (ii) completed within a strict project delivery period, (iii) demonstrate savings in the final unit selling prices (based on a calculation that combines the market value of the product, development investment and the financial efficiencies provided by self-build rather than traditional contracting process); and (iv) show that they have a group in place to live in at least 25% of the final units. The plan with the most sustainable approach, and the best value wins and the final unit selling price is fixed and non-negotiable.

In Rotterdam the final price is also fixed but because there is less demand, the municipality grants more flexibility around the 'finality' of submitted plans and the percentages of pre-occupied units that must be assigned at the planning application stage are more lax. This gives groups more opportunity to co-design in the subsequent process. Other cities like The Hague have a risk-averse government whose approach is to use CPO as a tool that they control. With a hired architect, they would design and develop the exterior of an apartment building and sell individual units to individuals interested in self-build. The group exists here only as an association of apartment owners and do not need to

develop anything together. The fact that this municipality has some notable old examples of successful cohousing does not appear to influence current decision-making processes around alternative group housing. This is similarly the case in Delft, where the municipality was recently more scared of selling between thirty to forty lots within a redevelopment site to a group (to build an apartment building) than of selling to individuals willing to pay a higher price for single homes. An underlying motivation here may be that by selling to private individuals on the market, the city won't need to intervene or interfere thereafter.

Local government inattention to cases of success points towards the larger issue of lack of institutional history. Even those municipalities who were quoted as explicitly supportive—usually because of a few individual key figures operating at particular point in time within the structure—are not consistent in their approach to cohousing. What is worse, one respondent observed, is that they often try to replicate inspiring alternative group models in a simplistic way that reproduces rather than challenges traditional households. Some said that a fundamental misunderstanding of what cohousing is has also led government workers to think of it as ideal for people with disabilities or limitations, rather than for everyone. This attitudinal issue is compounded by the real financial and resource cuts in municipalities like Delft, leading to loss of expertise and support.

For cohousing to develop more swiftly I was told, you need a town that is still building new housing and a housing corporation and government to agree on a specific plan. However, for this agreement to take place the group needs to communicate clearly what cohousing is since 'this kind of living is still not very well known'. There is still a lack of familiarity in the general public about what is possible, especially with the help of established professionals.

In the early days, knowledge was spread by word of mouth and existing social and professional networks. I was told that there was more cooperation or interest during the 1980's and 1990's with cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam acting in favour of these alternative developments, where they had something like a shop where you could find assistance and information about how to start a project, how to buy and refurbish big house appropriate for your group and how to find architects, legal or social orientation.

When the Dutch Cohousing Association ([LVCW](#)) was set up, it also served as key repository and communicator of information. Today, it has about 60 intergenerational communities under their umbrella – the National Association Central Housing. Their website advertises when there is a space in a particular project (developing or developed). People interested in cohousing would go there to automatically find if there is something available (by region, city, group, etc.) The association also hosts an annual open day where 60-70 communities welcome visitors. Each community or even clusters can have their own individual open days. The Dutch Senior Cohousing association ([LVGO](#)) has about 150 communities organised within the National Association of Senior Communal Living. There is also a Dutch Federation of shared/intentional housing ([FGW](#)) that operates on a voluntary basis to share its experience and offer advice and

supports to existing residential communities, as well as to stimulate the creation of new residential communities and new variants of communal living.

Despite a boost in cohousing membership over the last five to eight years, attributed by one interviewee to the turn towards the ecological and its natural affinities with cohousing structures and ethos¹⁰, the three to four thousand total people involved in the movement right now is considered small. Residents spoken to accepted that advertising was not their strong suit and should be worked on to achieve greater numbers. Coho-like developments like CPO, backed up by favourable more 'market friendly' infrastructures (policies, financial and tenure systems) on the other hand, appear to be growing.

A final issue has to do with the way groups self-identify and integrate the notions and ideals of cohousing into their own practices. Many of those who want to associate as a CPO are drawn to it not just by the apparent financial and spatial self-benefits, but by some attraction—however vague—to communal or shared forms of living. All CPO professionals interviewed told me that despite this inclination and the fact that they co-design a 'cohouse' collaboratively in the development phase, groups do not want to be identified as cohousing, and resist this terminology. Interviewees suggested that spending time and money on collaborative decision-making processes for future shared management was not popular; some said it was patronising. However misguided, this apparent opposition to the concept and semantics of cohousing, which is associated to a hippy lifestyles or intense interactions, can have a direct impact on who and how groups select professionals. Arguably, their first choice would not be *Centraal Wonen's* web site but the online self-build portal, or one of the CPO firms' platforms. Once there, the highly organised and accessible CPO professional market offers these groups what they want-- the option to be 'flexible' and to have greater *individual* control of their future household. Their streamlined services extract the logistical hassles and many of the time-consuming processes that go into group building. While cohousing professionals facilitate many of the practical project-management aspects of development, their design and set-up work insists on the need for individuals to be intimately involved in their own decision-making processes as a way to build truly sustainable cohousing groups and communities.

Future

Looking to the future, all professionals agreed of the need to better convince groups of the need for external social consultancy and the projects can be de-risked if guided by professionals. Cohousing professionals agreed that there are difficulties associated to integrating the next generation, but that the more active and involved are 'eco-people' who want sustainable housing with group housing combined into it are a positive development.

There is a looming sense of uncertainty and 'waiting' as to what will happen as the economy stabilises and house prices pick up: will municipalities go back to

¹⁰ This consists, he said of its non-hierarchical structure, the fact that all members share a common passion; mainly, they are interested in social interaction, not interference in internal governance matters and flat organisation.

their old way of working with large contract firms and builders, or will they heed lessons from their experience since the crisis and continue to support and foster the self-build and other community-led developments like cohousing? Most were optimistic and said that while there are a lot of things changing in construction and real estate, many government offices saw that there has been an improvement on, for instance, the quality of streets – and that therefore, these alternatives will remain an option— albeit, a marginal one.

Finally, while there is a clear demand for mixed tenure developments “the investment sector is very conservative” so that those who build homes for rental already have a specific mode of work that prefer large-scale (200+) standard developments that generate efficiencies than talking to those who want to generate twenty or so projects of ten houses each. As demand for renting grows, this may change, but the sector is seen as a limited area for growth given the ingrained desire for standardisation. If education about the models grown, there may be a greater acknowledgment that what groups generally want and build is not ‘weird’ but actually brings extra quality into these homes for the future.

United States

Background

The United States has a well-developed cohousing niche sector, with a key set of individuals from across the country self-defining as professionals or consultants that can help groups develop different aspects of their process. The cohousing culture itself has changed from one that was initially more ‘anti-authority’ (from the hippy era) to one that is willing to accept help from professionals that generally recognizes that groups are not entrepreneurs or business-owners. Yet, while groups are now more willing to have someone caring for their process all the way through, there is still some reticence to pay for professionals, even when they are interested in hiring them.

All US respondents were unanimous in their opinion that it was of crucial importance to have and to hire professionals because cohousing members simply do not speak the language of development. Groups sometimes think they need to communicate their ‘great’ project to a bank, but a bank just wants a safe return on their investment. Equally, they need to be able to put their money on the line early because developers respect that, rather than talk or endless meetings.

But investing, as a concept, is foreign to most groups and professionals are seen as an additional cost, so they will often end up contracting for less hours or for less activities to save, at the same time that ‘they’ll spend endless hours discussing how hard it is to develop’. There is therefore still, in this sense, a lack of understanding that professionals involved in cohousing do so to make a living and not as a hobby.

But, once individuals do put down their investment on their properties, attitudes become much more realistic, and they are willing to make the hard decisions. In fact, ‘very few groups, after they invest, don’t succeed.’ The architects

interviewed find that it is during participatory design, when residents work with actual blocks and physical elements to imagine their future living space that they become more realistic about the constraints and learn to limit their expectations about what's possible, from the professional's perspective.

Professional roles

The four American interviewees had consulting roles that ranged from architects, developers, and project managers to group facilitators and marketing advisers- some combined more than one of those roles. Two had lived in Denmark and been inspired by the cohousing model there before translating it into a US context. Some have strong environmental and ecologically oriented backgrounds that led them to work with cohousing in the first place. Importantly, they all lived in cohousing, which they felt was personally important because it kept them grounded in their professional roles as well as giving them their own space in which to be passionate about *their* cohousing community, which can help serve others better. Living in cohousing also gives them greater credibility with groups and a real capacity to advise them on different processes ('I understand every aspect, and believe in what they do'). Having learnt facilitation skills in running and developing their own community, they can help others with these jobs.

One consultant, for example, uses her +25 years of experience living in cohousing, as well as multiple professional engagements with the sector, to advice groups on all aspects—from marketing, development budgets and process, to who they need to hire when and approaches to investment and return. She often plays an important role in talking directly to banks, setting up investment structures, helping to get group members mortgages, advising on legal aspects and regulations – aspects, she said, groups can be rather oblivious to.

Table 3: United States interviewees per professional category

<i>Interviewee no.</i>	<i>Professional title/role</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>Certified cohousing facilitator</i> Development consultant Cohousing resident Member of national cohousing network Cohousing author and blogger
<i>2</i>	<i>Architect</i> Founder and partner of architectural firm with cohousing specialism. Founding board member of the Cohousing Network Cohousing resident
<i>3</i>	<i>Architect</i> Founder and partner of architectural firm with cohousing specialism. Cohousing resident

4	<i>Cohousing architect, developer and resident</i> Cohousing Network Board member Cohousing author
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Another had moved from being a volunteer community organizer, to being a paid marketing and outreach consultant (paid by a for-profit developer, to find groups and educate them), to becoming a developer and—due to both the financial crisis and personal circumstances—returning to her consultancy role. Her role was to be an educator to both the developer and ‘to leave a functioning, well-developed group’. She can work as a facilitator, hired by the developer; or equally, she can find a developer for a group that approaches her. A key lesson learned through her intermediary role was the importance of using mainstream traditional housing market language to approach banks and lenders. She advises groups to keep their cohousing development going while using different, more ‘common’ terminology with the outside world:

‘If you’re new to a market no matter where you are you just gotta’ get through that. Forget the cohousing thing. You’re a multi-house development, a condominium or coop or homeowners association. That’s it. That’s all they have to know. You’re a 43-unit condo development in the northwest part of X city with 1.5 blocks of X size. Go to a bank with *that* language.’

In terms of working methods, often, for all those interviewed, work was long distance via Skype. They get hired by groups as far as Canada to do either hour-by-hour work (charged at a set hourly fee, which were not disclosed), a pre-set package deal over a particular period of time, or a more bespoke approach to facilitation. The architects facilitate the participatory design process for groups. They bring in the necessary local designers and get them working together to build the community while designing the physical space. Amongst others, they teach compassionate communication mechanisms to the group, and coping mechanisms to avoid burnout to the designers. They can train these other architects about facilitation skills via Skype and later, in a weekend training programme, with the group. To them, this is not seen as training the competition, but rather as contributing to ‘growing the pie’.

In the US, professionals spoken to were open about what their role is, and the limits to those. They described a supportive working environment where recommending other professionals was not a problem, as there was a clear recognition about the importance of locality in hiring architects, contractors, and other specific consultants. In all cases, interviewees said they would advise groups where necessary to hire a local professional. A consultant that does some teamwork and non-violent communication exercises or workshops, for instance, may leave the ‘heavy duty conflict resolution’ matters to other specialists¹¹.

¹¹ In this research, one of many individual sites of group facilitators listed Tree Bressen, from Oregon, as able to teach via: Appreciative Inquiry, Art of Hosting, Dynamic Facilitation, Non-Violent Communication, Open Space, Process Work, Reevaluation Counseling, Work that Reconnects, and World Café.

During interviews, all respondents commented on other professionals or specialists, by name, as holding them in high esteem. They pointed out something 'special' they valued in those professionals, or a key skill, which they had indeed learned and/or adapted from them. This incremental, shared learning appeared to be a constructive way of developing a community of knowledge that worked towards a common goal- even if from different individualistic business perspectives.

These professionals tend to have a clear individual online self-presentation particularly through their cohousing specific company web-pages, the Cohousing Association of the United States portal¹² and individual blogs; to have published or been involved in key publications from within the sector; or to be associated to some of the most influential cohousing businesses known within the sector. This may reflect the highly qualified and experienced nature of the individuals interviewed, as well as their passion and commitment; it could be a standard practice for US professionals in all sectors given the scale of the country, but it could also be connected to what they described as a still very small and rather undeveloped sector.

Selecting professionals

The [US national cohousing association](#) has an online portal that serves not only as a 'go-to' repository of 'how-to' documents for would-be groups, but also provides a database with contact information for the distinct kinds of professionals that may be needed at one stage or another of development. Its user-friendly design means that visitors can filter according to 'finding', 'creating' or 'living in' cohousing. All respondents mentioned this webpage as one of the places where others had found out about their work.

Right now, the cohousing network 'is taking off like a lightning bolt', making strategic alliances with groups and organisations outside the traditional cohousing network; something they had always wanted to do and which the current director is well equipped to carry out. The web of the [Fellowship for Intentional Community](#), a non-profit dedicated to promoting cooperative forms of living, also hosts vast amounts of cohousing specific professional directories, resources and search engines.

But the selection or kind of professional, I was told, can be an issue. Professionals can be a problem if they promote themselves but do not actually understand budgets, for instance. On the other hand, those that do understand (say, a professional developer) do not necessarily grasp this particular realm of real estate development or how to work with groups. This can lead to frustration, broken professional relationships and burn out.

¹² To be listed or featured as a professional in the 'Cohousing Association of the United States' web, where most interested individuals would go look for information, a £300 and \$900 fee must be paid annually to the organisation. At the moment of writing, there were five architecture firms, two development consultancies, two community-building services and one financial organization listed. This suggests that the cost of advertising may be too high for individual professional consultants operating without a large organisation.

The kind of architect chosen can also matter. Groups can sometimes fall in love with the idea of a specific 'green' architect who does not have the knowledge of producing the kind of scale cohousing requires. These architects take on the jobs because, despite their lack of knowledge, they are also enthused by the alternative nature of cohousing. After an initial 'love fest' these arrangements often lead to unexpected delays in outputs, loss of investment in time and finances for the architects, higher budgets for the residents and strained relationships. Even if a project gets built, that professional model of development is un-repeatable. It is important for architects to have a certain amount of fortitude and protect themselves against burning out. In this respect, the architects interviewed for this project had developed workshop systems for working efficiently with groups.

Hiring internally—choosing an architect because they are part of the group, for example—is also, according to one interviewee and akin to comments from the Netherland interviewees, a common mistake. It simply overlays all kinds of complications to an already stressful process. External professionals, on the other hand, can maintain the necessary distance and be the bad 'fall-to' guy, if necessary. They can also provide useful advice about who would be best to hire under individual group circumstances.

A key point here is that professionals—unlike cohousers—understand the business model and are part of the business world. They are the only ones who have established relationships with other experts and technicians over time and, as such are the real repeat customers, which cohousers can never be, as they are a one-off deal. Professional consultants can therefore help keep external fees down for the group. As long-standing members of the cohousing sector, they have their personal list of 'usual suspects' they can trust and would suggest to groups to contract, depending on the location and need.

A missing links highlighted by all US respondents was the crucial role of marketing for groups, and having professional marketing assistants. Residents are typically unable to market themselves and this is very important, particularly in difficult economic times:

'It's a big issue because you always have to be thinking about the sell-ability, or marketing of cohousing...it's all about the marketing. You can have green and sustainable plans, great value systems worked out, a social message out there but if you don't have sold units, you don't have a community. Until that doesn't happen, it's just a theory. So, it's *only* about marketing'.

A respondent said there is a real need, but rare professional understanding or capacity to bring sales, recruitment and group process together. *This*, according to her, is the most understudied piece in developing cohousing as a business. Pulling outreach and process together must be where the energies are focused since a real estate developer can always build the project, but they can't create the community. A savvy marketing consultant can.

Structural opportunities and constraints

Like in the Netherlands, professionals here were measured in their assessments of 'cohousing' or 'cohousing professionals' success in their own country. They recognized the achievements made over time, and the interconnected nature of the ebbs and flows of their niche sector with the wider housing market, which had at times facilitated, and in other moments hindered their movement. Only a few 'legitimate developers' (i.e., those that put up their own funds for cohousing projects and are willing to take the risk) were pointed out—with one calling it 'a small community of repeat offenders'. Recognizing the importance of 'selling' cohousing to developers, one interviewee had developed a book and DVD to teach them about it. Whether for traditional developers or non-profit developers, cohousing 'is a hard sell'. Still, developers that were both affordable and who knew how to work the levers of government were quoted as significant enablers to getting projects off the ground. These kinds of developers understand the policy programmes that are out there that could benefit groups and keep costs down.

In a very different tone from the Netherlands interviewees, I was told that financial crisis of 2008/09 hardly affected existing cohousing communities – prices went down across the entire housing spectrum. It was the ones in development that were particularly hard hit. Developers lost investments, and residents had to accept, five years down the line, that they had paid twice the price than their new neighbours for the same product. Development and group facilitators spent years after that explaining budgetary matters to new groups and the fact that the cost of housing was more than what they were paying. Explaining this context was a challenge.

A key difference between the US context and the European one is the relative lack of importance of knowing about the policy environment since, at a federal level, American housing policies are comparatively weaker and subsidies for 'cohousing-like' developments (other than mortgage interest tax deductibility for owner-occupied housing) are virtually non-existent. The affordable housing subsidies that do exist are also being cut at the federal level¹³. Knowing about finance, construction and the legal processes were seen as much more important in helping groups succeed. Nevertheless, some said that the biggest problems for the sector and its professionals *not* developing further have not been money or a lack of human resources but geography, combined with lack of access to affordable housing: central locations in major cities where most would-be cohousers want to live are financially inaccessible, sites for building were impossible to find and affordable housing is neither truly affordable nor available. Rigid zoning laws that have been designed to restrict residential land use via caps as well as to enable suburban divisions into single-family homes and units work against shared or semi-shared housing arrangements and reject clustered housing typologies¹⁴ (Boyer 2015). Difficult neighbours who 'hear the

¹³ See: <http://www.cohousing.org/affordability>

¹⁴ See: Julie Pennington's piece on Zoning and Housing at: <http://communityenterpriselaw.org/zoning-and-housing/>; Robert Boyer's blog on successful rezoning for an urban eco-village: <http://evolutionarycity.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/dandelion-ecovillage-urban-planning.html> and

co of cohousing and think its hippies that will reduce their property values' were also cited as an additional issue.

There are, however, informal inter-personal subsidies that take place within cohousing communities amongst residents or would-be residents based on trust. This replaces the traditional role of a bank or family as lender. It has also allowed for some communities to remain in place when government support or other forms of subsidies were lacking. This kind of support was only mentioned in the US context, which is not surprising when the strong individual nature of finance and development is taken into account in that country (compared to the Netherlands or even the UK). A willingness to compromise on space and live in smaller apartments was also seen as an informal way of creating affordability.

Future

All interviewees were optimistic about the future of cohousing, for different reasons. The fact that the US has a successful middle-class model to show was seen as a positive factor that can now be presented as evidence or justification for future development finance or subsidy. Some hoped that now, some kind of permanent affordability would be designed in so as to avoid speculation and expand the possibility of this being a more accessible choice to others. At the same time, there was a common defence in all respondents against accusations that cohousing was not affordable enough or too middle class – it was unfair, given the way in which it emerged which never claimed to be cheap, and the lack of financial support over time – to make it stand up to that criteria. Through time, there is an increasing recognition and desire by the cohousing movement to become more diverse and accessible. They are at a stage where they can start thinking about how to be more inclusive or expand to the multi-generational, and how to be create options for people that want to come in at different stages of the development process, as well as to live in different kinds of typologies, with different levels of self-management.

The development consultant had recently begun an online training programme ([500 homes](#)) to repeat the business model and teach a new cadre of professional project managers how to work with cohousing- so they can develop relationships with different developers and can help get groups to the stage where groups have spent the money more effectively. The goal is to create community of collaborative consultants because 'it's hard to be project manager out there alone'. The group facilitator who had wide experience with the national cohousing association saw her future role as one that while retaining some consultancy work and keeping an eye out for development opportunities, would focus more centrally on using her experience to move the cohousing movement forward and addressing crucial policy questions.

With the advent of ageing baby boomers, elder cohousing is also seen as the next wave in this country. There is also the potential for cohousing and 'cohousing-like' developments to expand into other areas to include models like the [Generations of Hope](#) with its inter-generational 'intentional neighbouring' focus

http://wiki.commonstransition.org/wiki/Policies_for_Shareable_Cities:_Shareable_Housing#Reduce_zoning_restrictions_on_co-habitation

on vulnerable individuals and families (including new foster families and support); the N-Street Model based on the unique consensus process originated at Davis, California's [N-Street Cohousing](#)¹⁵ consensus; or [Pocket Neighborhoods](#), a developer-led model that designs up to 12 homes within small areas to foster a sense of community, preserve household identity and privacy, and integrate into surrounding neighbourhoods (Chapin 2011).

In all these models, synergies between those looking for stable senior homes and those with special social needs or disabilities could be generated. This is about being sufficiently flexible (in both social and physical terms) to accommodate a range of future models.

Cohousing in the United Kingdom

Background

The UK has a long history of communal housing. Pre-modern examples with co-operative-like elements designed into them were built mainly to suit the demand for servants and shared housekeeping; a practice that diminished with the advent of domestic appliances but picked up again in modernist times. The socially oriented practice of shared living came more squarely into being during the 1960s and 1970s through communes and as cohousing during the 1990s. The initial cases were rural and involved retrofitting of existing structures (Killock 2014: 45-47). New-build cohousing began with Springfield Cohousing in 2004 and has been developing ever since. To date, there are nineteen built communities and over sixty-five groups in development¹⁶.

Most recently, a climate of financial austerity has led to the retrenchment of old welfare regimes while localism and Big Society policies have promoted a 'handing over' of many of the social tasks previously afforded to government to non-state actors—whether private sector or civil society. During this period, community-based self-help housing that bring empty homes back into use¹⁷ and Community Land Trusts (CLTs¹⁸) have been on the rise. Self-build has also entered the policy domain strongly over the past few years, with national and local subsidies more available and directed at this form of 'custom-build' product.

At least three of the UK interviewees mentioned the US and Dutch contexts as inspirational comparators. In the US, the for profit developer-led model and models of women collaborating in senior cohousing environments was noted as exemplary, whereas in the Netherlands, the resources and support offered by local governments as well as the engagement housing corporations have had

¹⁵ See: <http://l.cohousing.org/n-st-consensus.pdf>

¹⁶ See: <http://cohousing.org.uk/cohousing-uk> and <http://cohousing.org.uk/groups>

¹⁷ Self-help here is defined as 'a collective enterprise by groups of people at neighbourhood level in order to address common problems and shared concerns based on their lived experience of local issues), typically characterised by independence from external interests, direct bottom-up approaches to issues left un-addressed by others, including in this case, housing.

¹⁸ CLTs are defined as 'an innovative [voluntary] approach to housing ownership, as they construct new-build affordable homes sold on a shared ownership basis with equity between the CLT and income-eligible households' where future use and resale of home is controlled to suppress speculative activity and remain affordable in perpetuity' (Moore and Mullins 2013: 12).

with groups were all seen as evidence of a robust professional ecosystem. One respondent put it down partially to a culture of innovation and risk-taking that the UK lacks,

“Here, if something fails, then it’s scrapped rather than improved on. We don’t allow ourselves to fail here, and it’s a real negative.”

Professionals

Compared to the previous two countries, the development of cohousing professionals in the UK is a relatively new phenomenon with those who know and work directly with cohousing reluctant—perhaps because of the novelty of this niche sector—to identify solely as a cohousing professional. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the degree of social sector housing and planning intricacies in local government, four out of the five interviewees in this project had all worked with local authorities in the past and were very aware of what council and planning issues look like (e.g., land-use conversion restrictions, land and site scarcity). More than the other two countries, individuals here were more adept at linking mainstream housing policies and macro-developments to cohousing’s fortunes.

An unconsolidated cohousing professional system does not mean, however, that there is a lack of experts and advisers that those involved with cohousing will call upon during different stages of group and project development, including:

- financial advise (for revenue capital, forecasting expenditure and costs);
- legal guidance (for property, tax and governance);
- built environment experts (architects, landscape people, raft of survey materials);
- housing enablers (policy, regeneration, health and social care and other advocacy professionals);and
- construction experts.

There is also involvement by intermediaries or secondary level actors in the financial and legal fronts like conveyancers and estate or land agents as well as other training professionals offering educational support around governance or organisational development. General facilitators (versus specialists like architects) can constitute a raft of people that comes onto the scene with great passion and enthusiasm for cohousing but often have very little experience of enabling community-led housing and end up leading groups down wrong path or missing critical spots. A respondent made the case for more support in professional accreditation and training, especially as development processes, legal and financial structures are changing quickly – to make sure that they’re up to date, giving the right advise.

With the correct knowledge in place, intermediaries can offer the skills and technical expertise needed from beginning to end (See Appendix C). Their role is to mix an understanding of community housing process with the government, finance, and legal requirements to enable the routes to market, while having a thorough professional understanding of mainstream policy, financial and legal

matters. A clever intermediary, I was told, balances those two processes while bearing in mind that the cohousing group they are advising will still be learning them as they go along. In this sense, they are not about working with the development journey, but with helping the group through critical steps, knowing how to articulate what's right from the group to the public and private sector and when it's right, for instance, to get a local councilor to endorse a project. With a 'double knowledge base' they need to know when the group can take that leap. It was argued that some US organisations offer this kind of expertise.

In their report about how community-based groups like CLTs be 'scaled up', Moore and Mullins (2013) similarly argue that intermediary organisations or bodies—whether private/professional or public— play a crucial enabling role in helping such niche groups access the necessary skills, knowledge and resources they need to succeed. They identify three key functions for these 'middle' organisations at the neighbourhood level:

1. To offer technical advice and guidance (financial, legal, organisational);
2. To identify resource needs and sources; and
3. To disseminate self-help best practice as a local solution for neighbourhoods.

This body can offer practical, specialist expertise as well as act as an arbiter between groups and any potentially conflictive relations with, for example, the state. Crucially, they should do so, 'without diluting the underlying autonomy and independence that distinguish self-help activity and help create social value' (*ibid*: 5). The fear here is that the professionalization of mediating bodies can end up losing touch with their original 'clients', that a top-down technical approach to community-led groups may become paternalistic in practice and that a need to comply with public funding rules or priorities can lead to a co-optation of groups' original goals and values. Social enterprises, too, can experience conflicts between their sometimes-contradictory social and business goals (Teasdale 2012¹⁹; Harris 2010).

Table 4: UK interviewees per professional category

Interviewee no.	Professional title/role
1	<i>Specialist in housing and social entrepreneurship</i> Homelessness expert Board member of a care and support charity, and of a social purpose housing association group
2	<i>Project manager</i> Founder and partner of development and regeneration firm with specialism in cohousing
3	<i>Cohousing network director</i> Cohousing network manager

¹⁹ While his critiques are wider, Teasdale's research is specifically about the tensions this produces in work integration social enterprises within the homelessness field.

	Advisor and advocate of community housing models
4	<i>Cohousing specialist and group facilitator</i> Cohousing Network board member Cohousing author
5	<i>Housing development and planning adviser</i> Cohousing Network board member

One professional interviewed in this project who self-identified as working in/with the niche area of co-housing said that while “there are enough people with overlapping interests that are getting traction [in cohousing], the grittier area of consulting is still quite new”. There are no company or organisations that labels themselves specifically in cohousing development support. But there a number of individuals that are well known in the community-led development scene who enable cohousing development not only through sound community facilitation skills but also by their ability to advocate for the sector and develop awareness. These individuals are likely to be working under different umbrellas such as ‘development trusts’, ‘empty homes’ ‘CLTs’ or ‘cooperatives’.

As best practices get off the ground, architects and some housing association personnel are increasingly self-identifying as experts (or supporters) in the field. A project management consultancy firm that has worked with cohousing became involved initially through a council who knew their firm and was nervous about working directly with a group that did not have professional guidance. They first helped support the acquisition of a site, which then led to full client management, handling all of the group’s legal, procedural and project time- management and planning through construction and scheme delivery. They were, however, not involved in the social consultancy side of things and do not see themselves as advisers or connectors on this front: “how they want to set themselves up is outside the bounds of our responsibility.”

LILAC, inaugurated in 2014, was mentioned by all interviewees and is held as a key example of what is possible in the UK. It has paved a practical path for certain professionals who were previously disconnected from the cohousing scene as well as generating a surge of new demand in the cohousing model through good outreach and far-reaching publicity, including stories in national media. But, it was noted, without the facilities or resources with which to share what they have done or are doing, this popular interest cannot be translated into further practices. Indeed, most argued that having successful examples to refer to was crucial for future up-take.

Opportunities and constraints

For those who worked with the LILAC scheme, its success has enabled their practices (architects and project management) to reach new heights. Both have been able to use that experience to continue working with other cohousing groups or to branch out or specialise in other areas like the self-build and custom-build sector. Such successful post-project engagement suggests “having those examples in place are key”. But two issues remain: money and time. Project management consultants charge a fee that depends on the service provided. For

acquisition support, the fee scale is based on the full project, whereas support with group's financial plans are a set fee. "But for rest of it, it's pretty much pro-bono or incremental, to get them to point where machine is working and be able to have money to pay." This donation of time and energy, like with the social consultant in the Netherlands, is not sustainable long-term.

The relatively slower pace and amount of time cohousing groups take to develop their projects is still something professional consultants find problematic and are getting used to. One possible way to improve these time-periods, I was told, could be to split the design stages into an early outline phase, with details coming in later. Moreover, while experts can learn from their experiences, no two communities looks alike and groups tend to have very different projects in terms of procurement (and financial and governance arrangements): "it's not a one size fits all". This has implications for the kinds of professional services that are sought or appealing to groups in the UK. As one respondent explained,

"...for those groups that are forming, there needs to be a challenging perspective. They're risk takers and they want to create something that challenges the mainstream for different reasons- whether socially, ecologically- they recognize the gap. So at its very nature, they're not looking at a standardised product. So to what extent this can be pushed. There's potentially huge appetite [for it] but the other two countries in your study have a high degree of standardisation in professional services that doesn't appeal to groups here yet."

Everyone agreed that strategic local authority support was key. These organisations traditionally operate in siloes and are difficult to deal with because of it, but they often stretch rules a little to accommodate different or new models. At the moment, I was told, they are all still playing catch up with the various models being implemented. Localism allowed many groups to get funding because they ticked certain boxes that LAs were trying to tick at the time. Right to build is now filling in that void. What's important for cohousing is to capitalize on those potential synergies and to have a champion within the system. These individuals can be well positioned in planning, highways, environment, social and adult care or regeneration to help communicate the project and support it through its various stages. Depending on the type of project, whether it requires an asset transfer (at the upper end of spectrum of local involvement) to a lesser investment in wider community engagement, a champion within an enabling council can bring in crucial capital revenue grant funding or help with planning conditions. As a partner, their endorsement can encourage other professionals to get involved.

Housing associations are also seen as a potentially important partner but this can be complicated. First, only a small numbers of associations are currently involved, and they have very different scales of operation. Like in the Netherlands, larger ones can have existing standardized processes or communication styles for dealing with traditional 'clients' that does not easily coexist to cohousing groups. While some housing associations have learned from individual journeys with cohousing, none are gearing themselves up to be

cohousing enablers or development partners. From the housing association perspective, there are many distractions to do with regulations and finances which make it difficult for them to engage meaningfully, especially under current constrained and stripped government budgets, that is making them have to cut out non-essentials and cut them out. There are opportunities for partnerships in the form of site sharing or borrowing from procurement resources, but generally, they either do not understand or they do not feel that cohousing offers them anything additional to what their typical (and quicker to deliver) options do. One respondent offered three key elements that can lead to better housing association engagement with alternative housing models:

1. Good finances: this means not having to focus on keeping your head above water and benefits in cohousing development in anti-social behavior; they see that this is an attractive model;
2. Smaller organization: usually, the smaller and more local, living close to the community they are working with, the better. These tend to genuinely care about their customers and recognise the needs of the individuals they are housing; and
3. Strong Chief Executives and leadership teams: this is key and is reflected in the organisation's boards.

Conclusions: lessons/recommendations for the UK

In the US and the Netherlands, most professionals were initially motivated by belief in alternatives to mainstream forms of building, living or nuclear household typologies. In the UK, however, broader interests and histories in the social sector, as well as welfare and sustainability, seem to motivate professionals. This does not mean that the counter-cultural ethos is not present here, but that the kinds of individuals encountered may be more 'traditional' in their own living practices and committed to public service than in the other two countries. It is important to **recognise the variety of trajectories** because, in developing and supporting a future cadre of professionals, their motivations, interests and aspirations must be tapped into and supported.

After decades of experience, the US has learned the **importance of training professionals and creating a community of expertise** in which individuals can draw on and learn from each other's experience. The UK, where a 'raft' of people are becoming involved in cohousing development in rather haphazard ways, could begin to develop a 'school' for cohousing professionals to develop the right tools and instruments with which to help groups achieve their greatest potential and success, as well as teaching those professionals how to negotiate legal, financial, planning, group and other matters. In the Netherlands, the problematic lack of knowledge of some 'expert consultants' advising groups suggests that more training, accreditation or forms of professional exchange and association would benefit the sector.

Another lesson from experience in both the USA and the Netherlands is the importance of **good advertising and publicity**. While national network webpages are ideal for reaching people who are already interested in this kind of alternative housing, they do nothing to recruit potential residents who are so far

unaware that cohousing exists. To turn people's attention to cohousing, and to recruit members for it, various audiences must be targeted via distinct campaigns and publicity. This can include reaching out to communities via newspapers and other media, but it can also involve advertising appropriately within the industry, networking with the right individuals located in the right policy and planning circles, and 'selling' the product to would-be developers.

In the UK the bigger issue—which is more akin to the Dutch context—is the **lack of land and available sites for development**. Linking up with local urban renewal and regeneration strategies via the collective refurbishment of buildings or lots to be sold for redevelopment is a possible avenue that can be less costly than new-build, engage different kinds of customers, attract local authorities and demonstrate success quicker. Given the way asset transfers are designed for traditional housing products, and the pressures local authorities find themselves under to realise more capital than before with their existing assets, links to renewal will probably need to happen in the first instance in local authority properties located in areas that do not automatically signal themselves as 'prime' for residential.

The US story tells us that there may be a need—at least in the initial stages when showing success is so important—for **developers to adopt a profit-led approach to cohousing**. The national networks and organisations can play an important role in a sub-sector culture change, offering training and information as well as generating the contacts necessary to interested individuals or groups. This model may go a long way into solving some of the land availability problems groups currently face, providing the up-front cash needed to buy expensive land or property, and get a project underway and delivered on time. But as with the housing market more generally, this makes cohousing developments vulnerable to the ups and downs of the market in a way that can be more difficult for groups to assimilate than traditional buyers. In mixed-tenure developments increased income is necessary to subsidise rental or low-income units and get full investment recovery. In the American context, this has been difficult to do and tenure tends to be uniform (but their policy and subsidy context, as described above, is also more constrained than in the UK).

Given the difficulties of producing housing piecemeal, **some degree of standardisation of the cohousing process and design** is advisable. This should be carried out in a way that can still incorporate the challenges laid out by groups (socially or ecologically). Even though this means that communities may end up looking rather similar, it could help support groups structurally, save money in the long term and still allow them to determine some design aspects. By standardising, chances are that more key success stories will be completed quicker. These are necessary not only to fulfil the latent demand, but also to demonstrate to potential financial, development and political partners that embarking on cohousing development is both possible and safe. Standardising group processes, at least to some extent, in order to meet shorter deadlines would be part and parcel of this

So far, funding and products developed under the ‘right to build’ and ‘custom build’ have not benefitted any cohousing groups directly. This segmentation between naturally complementary sub-sectors should be combatted and **synergies sought**. While still far from ideal, the Dutch CPO developments for example, have created an ample-enough space for cohousing to happen within it. Those looking to develop new projects benefit from the that larger professional ecosystem. Recent UK policy changes that support shared ownership and mixed tenure could be drawn upon to support more partnerships in this vein.

In the Netherlands, groups that had flexible working arrangements with housing corporations valued that flexibility while seeking more control over their future ownership status. As the UK groups think more carefully about how to enlist housing associations as partners, **designing-in long-term flexibility** (in terms of allocation policies, internal management practices, group tenancies, etc.) with long-term security (secure tenancies or stronger inheritance rights) should be a priority.

The picture we get in all countries reviewed, but particularly the USA and the Netherlands, is of a variety of professionals – especially architects and ‘group development experts’—who have developed a language and practice that fits in with cohousing, while maintaining their ‘mainstream’ work. In understanding and moulding their practices to this playing field, they become the ‘go to’ individuals or companies for cohousing developments. There are also robust national organisations or associations representing cohousing that serve as platforms for those professionals. A key gap that remains in the UK context is the **necessary connection between this professional landscape with leaders in local authorities**. The possibility of a steadier future stream of new cohousing developments and focused enabling policy appears to be at least partially hinged upon that link.

Yet we learnt from the Netherlands that it is **not sufficient to have one local authority champion** in place at a particular time as this may be suitable for a particular project but does not ensure long-term replicability or sustainability. In order to achieve this, national legislation must change to better support cohousing groups and their building processes. Given the often time-consuming and difficult endeavour of national lobbying, local policies must also be used strategically to enhance the role councils play in subsidy grants for alternative groups, helping to achieve long-term affordability targets, where possible.

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Appendix A: List of interviewees per country

		Interviewee	City
The Netherlands	1	Lidewij Tummers Engineering/technical consultant and cohousing expert; urban studies academic	Rotterdam
	2	Martijn Schutte Urbannerdam	Rotterdam
	3	Ineke Hulshof Founder and Director, Hulshof Architecten	Delft
	4	Peter Bakker Board Member, LVCW; Lismortel resident	Eindhoven
	5	Marcel Kastein Founder and Director, De Regie bv	Amsterdam
	6	Flip Krabbendam Architect and CW Delft founder and resident	Delft
	7	Ana Dijkhuis Governing board member at the Federatie Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (FGW) and member of the Landelijke Vereniging Centraal Wonen (LVCW).	Delft
UK	8	Louise Cannon Board member, Trident Social Investment Group	Birmingham
	9	Jimm Reed Practitioner and project manager, CoHo	York
	10	Maria Brenton Cohousing specialist and OWCH facilitator	London
	11	Jo Gooding Executive Director, UK Cohousing Network	Newcastle upon Tyne
	12	Stephen Hill Director, C20 futureplanners	London
U.S.	13	Ann Zabaldo Past-president of The Cohousing association of the United States; founder and current board member of Mid Atlantic Cohousing.	Washington, D.C.
	14/15	Mary Kraus and Laura Fitch Founders and partners Kraus-Fitch Architects, Inc.	Amherst, MA
	16	Kathryn McCamant President, CoHousing Solutions	Nevada City, CA

Appendix B: Cohousing professional/consulting typologies

Title	Role/Description	NL	US	UK
Marketing consultant	Someone who can bring sales, recruitment and group process together.		X	
Development or procedural consultant/ 'building coach'/ Development or project manager	A type of profession (procedural consultant) who guides a group through decision-making and 'translates' the technocratic planning vocabulary; they can come in at various points in the project, or advise from start to finish, including managing timelines and advising on finances	X	X	X
Social consultant/Group facilitator	Similar to the above, helping groups in internal decision-making policies and procedures. Orientating towards future self-management and conflict resolution strategies.	X	X	X
Outreach volunteer	Working to benefit cohousing communities through education, or spreading the message of cohousing to other areas.		X	
Architects	Commissioned by the housing association, developer or the group itself to design homes with common areas; they sometimes also act as group and process facilitators.	X	X	X
Developers	Can be a housing association, individual or group: negotiates with the group's wishes and realizes the residential complex.	X	X	X
CPO specialists	Work with the individuals or group in one or all of: finding land; assembling group; referring design; facilitation and built-form specialists; arranging legal, financial and regulatory matters.	X		
Contractor	Carries out all aspects related to the construction/build/refurbishment;	X	X	X
Legal specialist	Advises on legal aspects or regulatory constraints	X	X	X
Unions and educational centres	Often offer courses or seminars	X		

Appendix C:

In their study, Moore and Mullins (2013) found that the formalised institutional framework that led to the rapid replication of CLTs in the UK context was (thus far) more effective than the 'viral approach'²⁰ that led to the expansion and diffusion of local self-help housing groups. A team of consultants (Community Finance Solutions- CFS, in collaboration with other technical consultants) originally led CLTs as a demonstration and empowerment programme. They provided technical assistance and specialist documentation, as well as targeted training events and seminars to existing CLT groups. One of the key benefits of that early work was to help develop a common language and 'conceptual construct' that enabled different CLTs to communicate more effectively with outside partners while maintaining their focus on locality and community ownership (14). While CFSs involvement was time-limited, they supported the idea of having 'secondary agencies who can work directly with community activists providing mentoring/consultancy support...who are available to support CLTs in development business plans and understanding the legal, financial and technical issues- (CFS 2008: 21 in Moore and Mullins 2013: 16). Their recommendations led to the creation of unique sub-regional CLT umbrella organisations, most of which advise local groups in their area. Some also act as developers of their own housing. They can:

- Provide bespoke advice about financial and organizational processes at the crucial inception period;
- Buy land before a group is fully formed, which is then transferred into community ownership;
- Develop new financial models to enable further development;
- Promote the concept locally and safeguard the identity and reputation;
- Identify and broker potential enabling partnerships (e.g., housing associations)

These umbrellas do not usually act independently, but in partnership with other networks, intermediaries, housing associations or local authorities. But community-led groups engaged with self-help housing and CLTs have shown a reluctance to partner with more professional bodies like housing associations because of: (a) negative experiences of individual groups related to finances that led to a lack of trust; (b) a sense that decision-making takes place without their participation or consultation, thereby defeating many of the goals of control enshrined in community-led housing; and (c) pronounced differences between the ethos and logic of community-led groups and larger housing providers.

There is, ultimately, a fear that the values that fuel these alternative groups and small scale local providers can be co-opted, diminished or eliminated via partnerships with the more professional housing sector (Moore and Mullins 2013: 26). These findings show the need for two key conditions to be in place if

²⁰ '...a loose network of support, led by a national intermediary [that] aims to broker partnerships and stimulate the exchange of good practice between projects at a local level, aiming to expand the number of locally-rooted groups rather than conventional scaling-up of existing organisations' (Moore and Mullins 2013: 11).

such intermediary roles are to be undertaken: first, the values of a group need to match those (or at least be fundamentally understood and promoted by) their facilitators; and second, the technical organisation chosen as a partner or developer needs to be of a scale that does not remove local control from the process, or decision-making from the group.



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