



# The economics of co-housing

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*Alternative Housing Development  
in London:  
Practices and possibilities*

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# Methodology



Case study site  
and location

# Brief timeline of Featherstone case



## Economics of co-housing: supply, demand and risk

Supply: co-created with consumers so little existing stock

Who is the developer?





**Demand:**

In principle high

--BUT--

In practice  
conditioned by  
limited awareness  
ability to pay  
uncertainty and risk

**'Site first' model with outside developer = Bilateral monopsony: 1 buyer, 1 seller**  
Outcomes depend on relative negotiating strength



Cost of development vs standard  
for-sale model: more or less?





Less:

- Smaller units
- Self build
- Shared facilities

More:

- Co-house etc
- But especially **time**

# Risk: 3 stages

1. Group formation
2. Planning/development
3. Post-completion





- Risks higher for both prospective residents and developer—**but** in this case prospective residents would take no financial risk until construction started
- All financial risk borne by developer
- Higher risks require higher returns
- Outcome

# Current situation



# Conclusions



Risks high because of lack of experience / knowledge

Government rhetoric favours but no specific incentives in place

High risks mean that only those who value rewards highly will stay committed

# 'Professionalisation' of co-housing : UK, Netherlands, US and France



# Types of professions

	role	countries	CoHo typical?
<b>Marketing consultant</b>		<b>US</b>	
<b>'Building coach'</b>	Guides group through decision-making and 'translates' planning vocabulary	<b>Fr-NL-UK-US</b>	<b>New profession</b>
<b>Social consultant/Group facilitator</b>		<b>Fr-NL-UK-US</b>	<b>New profession</b>
<b>Outreach <i>volunteer</i></b>	<b>outreach education</b>	<b>Fr-US</b>	Committee or WG volunteers
<b>CPO specialists</b>	<b>social work with group and hire architects and engineers</b>	<b>NL</b>	<b>Intermediary</b> between initiative and partners
<b>Developers Investors</b>	Financial back-up, institutional support	NL-UK-US	CoHo as risk or pioneers
<b>Architects</b>	Design, sometimes tech briefing / facilitator	<b>Fr-NL-UK-US</b>	Special knowledge common areas
<b>Contractor</b>	Construction/build/refurbishment	<b>Fr-NL-UK-US</b>	May involve self-build
<b>Legal advisor</b>	Drafting charters and contracts, advise on	Fr-UK-US	Organization, collective tenure forms

# UK Context & interviews

	Interviewee UK	Role
1	<b>Specialist in housing and social entrepreneurship</b>	Homelessness expert; Board member of a care and support charity, and of a social purpose housing association group
2	<b>Project manager</b>	Founder and partner of development and regeneration firm with specialism in cohousing
3	<b>Cohousing network manager; Cohousing network director</b>	Advisor and advocate of community housing models
4	<b>Cohousing specialist and group facilitator; Cohousing Network board member; Cohousing author</b>	Steering and organisational role for a group; advocate of the sector
5	<b>Housing development and planning adviser; Cohousing Network board member</b>	Policy advocate for community-led housing

# UK Findings

- “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 recognise 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 countries in your study have a high degree of standardisation in professional services that doesn’t appeal to groups here yet.”



# Comparative highlights

## similarities

- Pioneers became co-housing specialists/consultants
- Valuation of professionals who are/were residents
- New professions as group-development and facilitators
- Gendered division of labour?
- Racial homogeneity
- Discourse of professionalism (as individuals and sector) increasingly important

## differences

- Reasons for strength of professionalism varies
- no direct relationship with state support
- Marketing domain + explicitly relevant to US
- Mainstream policy knowledge + relevant in Europe
- Subsidy policy knowledge less relevant to US
- Training capacity- more developed in US and France

# ISSUES

## **Professional challenges ...**

### **Or: challenging the professions?**

- deep-seated notions about the nuclear family household model inform the documents and procedures of architecture and planning

## **Being and becoming a professional:**

- Key questions of knowledge and 'expertise'-  
*experienced* intermediaries, translators

## **Professional-activist**

- Credibility as passion & objectivity (impassioned practitioner?)

# Next steps in professionalizing ?

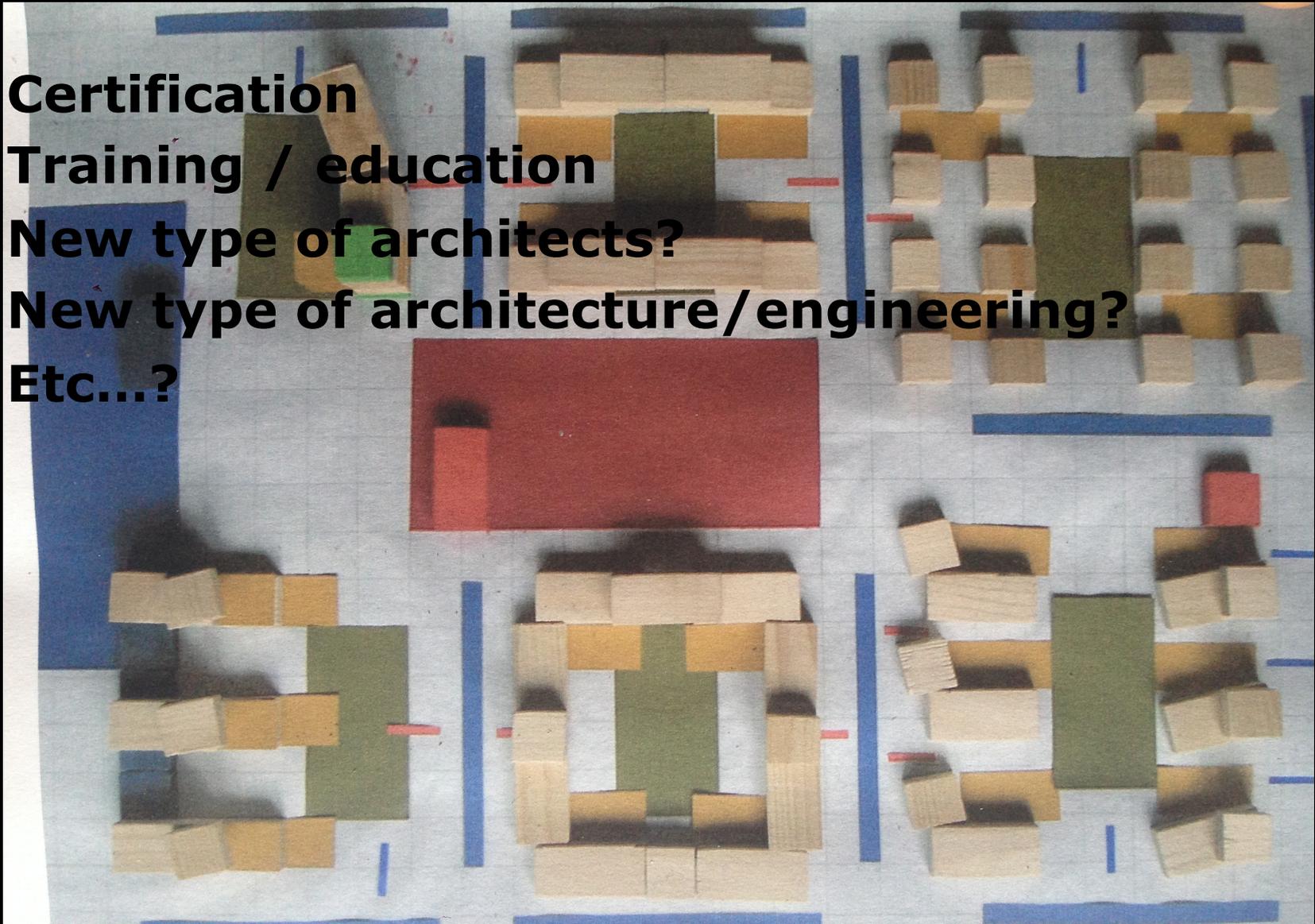
**Certification**

**Training / education**

**New type of architects?**

**New type of architecture/engineering?**

**Etc...?**



# Concluding thoughts...



Relevance of communication between residents and professionals- trust and mutual learning

Need for 'community engagement' throughout the process, and for resident-led and managed community space after

A photograph of a large, leafless tree in a park. The tree has a thick, gnarled trunk and a dense network of bare branches. The ground is covered in green grass with many fallen brown leaves scattered across it. In the background, there are other trees, some with green foliage and some without. The sky is overcast and grey. The text "THANK YOU" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

THANK YOU