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Title: **A Shared Sense of Belonging: the politics of defining in sustainable community housing typologies**

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A Shared Sense of Belonging: the politics of defining in sustainable community housing typologies

A central principle of sustainability and the foundation for liveable community design and development is the recognition of the interdependence of economic, environmental, and equity issues. These principles are clearly evidenced in the resurgence of non-traditional housing involving forms of shared accommodation, which seek to reduce total housing cost (and total construction), provide opportunities for collective use of space, and increase overall quality of life by enhancing opportunities for social interaction. Literature on these forms of non-traditional housing is dominated by research carried out in Scandinavia, the UK, and the US, with houses being classified as either examples of collective or co-housing, or, of affordable housing. Yet there are other emerging forms of non-traditional sustainable housing which are almost unreported in the literature.

This paper discusses some of the issues at work in using non-traditional housing design typologies. It begins by exploring the current definitions of communal housing and asks whether the definitions are adequate descriptions of emerging housing designs such as conjoined housing, which are not easily classified under the sustainable housing literature. Through an exploration of typology, it illustrates the need to recalibrate the methods in which non-traditional sustainable houses are defined in order to both include those new forms that are currently being designed and built, and to address the ideological constructions of sharing in housing research and literature.

Historical Background

From the late 1800s through to the 1950s, there were manifold examples of non-traditional housing types. However, after World War II the idea of living communally with non-kin or in an extended kin-situation lost desirability, as people sought individualised, private spaces in which to reside. The prototype of post-war housing was the single-family suburban dwelling, which is now the predominant model of housing in the West.

New Zealand lacks alternatives to the single-family house. On par with other Western nations, the composition of New Zealand households is rapidly changing due to demographic and economic variances. According to the DTZ research report "Changes in the Structure of the New Zealand Housing Market" (2004), there is an increase in couple-only and one-person households. Notwithstanding this contraction in the number of household members, dwelling sizes have become manifestly larger, averaging from 146 square meters in the 1970s, to the current size of 194 square meters. The number and diversity of households occupied by ethnic groups has also increased. These groups include Pacific Island peoples and migrants from Asian countries. Unfortunately, this diversity and the attendant change in the structure of households is not reflected in available housing options; New Zealand's housing stock is uniform and the single-family dwelling remains the archetype.

Proponents of sustainable non-traditional housing types discourse on the need to widen options in housing, recognising that household structures are not static, but change as society changes. Authors including Hayden (1984, 1999) and Ahrentzen and Franck (1989), write about how the 'Oscar and Harriet' housing model pervasively keeps hidden the different forms of households which exist in a modern, heterogeneous society. Discussing housing in Australia, Houston (2004) comments that "This idea of

the single-family house is a bit of myth, encouraged after World War II…we think of multigenerational living as a very migrant thing, but there were plenty of Australian families crowding extended family into those Californian bungalows" (2004:6). These authors all call for a diversity in housing types to redress present homogeneity in sustainable housing. Conjoined housing is one such alternative that, along with other sustainable non-traditional housing types, broadens the options of housing available to people, so that they may have more than one choice in how they want to live.

Collective Housing Types

Within the literature on sustainable non-traditional housing 'collective housing' has been used to describe a whole spectrum of types, from 1920s Soviet apartment blocks to post-materialist intentional communities such as cohousing. Collective housing is also the most common term used in translation to describe distinct collective developments in non-English speaking countries[1]. In general, most of this literature deals with late twentieth century forms of communal housing such as cohousing and eco-villages (see Ahrentzen and Franck (1989) and in design consists of either free standing self-contained dwelling clusters or multiple suites in one dwelling. Invariably collective housing designs include a common building or central common space, which provide residents with a shared kitchen, dining hall and depending on the model, a library, laundry or hobby-room. The occupants of collective housing are usually multiple single families, who maintain their own individual households and are home-owners not tenants, as is the case in shared or affordable housing.

The quintessential example of contemporary collective housing is cohousing. Cohousing was first developed in Scandinavia in the 1970s, and was later adopted in the United States in 1991. As a new form of intentional community, cohousing organisations "form with an explicit intention of creating a socially cohesive and mutually supportive community" (Meltzer 2005:2). Although the definitions of what actually constitutes cohousing vary somewhat, differences are only minor.

McCamant and Durrett (1988) who coined the term describe it as resident-owned, developed and managed cooperative communities in which individual households are clustered around a village-like courtyard or street and share facilities in a large common house. The shared facilities are for cooking, dining, social activities and childcare. In some instances there are also shared recreation and workshop areas outside of the main common house. The number of households in cohousing can be from as few as three to over one hundred, however most are made up of ten to forty, with the number of households allowed being set by the collective's members[2].

Numerous publications deal with cohousing, from handbooks for interested groups (Norwood and Smith 1995) to case studies and in-depth analyses of individual cohousing communities (Fromm 1991, Meltzer 2005). All of these publications begin by sketching a brief history of communitarian movements, from the nineteenth century

[1] As Vestbro (2000) and Fromm (1991, 2000) point out, in English translation the term collective housing inadequately describes the different forms of Scandinavian collective developments. Even amongst English-speaking authors there is confusion over what the term actually denotes, for example Vestbro defines collective housing as, "Housing with more communal spaces or collectively organised facilities than in conventional housing" (2000:165), while Fromm defines it as a "Member or worker owned enterprise with three or more people who make decisions democratically" (1991:269).

[2] For an exploratory discussion of McCamant and Durrett (1988) see Meltzer's book *Sustainable Community: learning from the cohousing model* (2005).

utopian communities in the United States, through to the experimental communes of the 1960 and 70s[3].

Meltzer (2005), in a serious attempt to distinguish cohousing from its stigmatised precedents, singles out four key points of difference. In cohousing, he argues, the political philosophy is one of democracy not autocracy; decision-making is always reached by way of consensus. Secondly, cohousing residents are enmeshed in mainstream society, not marginal to it (this he coins the 'Outreach vs. Withdrawal' approach). Thirdly, the amount of private space granted to individuals is larger than what past intentional communities allowed. In fact, privacy is fastidiously debated among residents during the initial design phases[4].

Apart from the points of difference made by Meltzer (2005), contemporary collective housing types, and its precedents, share at least one feature: a credulous belief in the benefits of community, even though what is actually meant by community, and the means by which to create and maintain it, differ according to a group's philosophical approach. The difference in approach, notwithstanding, collective housing groups all perceive malaise in modern society and believe that the only living model equipped to remedy this is a community-centred one. In cohousing an implacable belief in the benefits of community manifests at every possible level. From the initial stage of site planning through to whose turn it is to cook the communal meal that night; all decisions are made consensually and with the strengthening of an ecologically sustainable community in mind.

Cooperatives are more similar to shared housing than cohousing in its emphasis on economic sustainability. Cooperatives are groups who have joint ownership of a building; the total building is owned proportionately by shares in a stock. Therefore, a cooperative building consists of collectively owned self-contained units with some communal facilities. Unlike cohousing, cooperatives are an affordable housing solution for people on low to moderate incomes. They are government or NGO subsidised, but are member-controlled and only in this regard are cooperatives similar to cohousing because members actively participate in decision-making[5].

Affordable Housing Types

According to Ahrentzen and Franck (1989), affordable housing is when individuals, kin or non-kin, share a kitchen, living room and possibly a bathroom. They have little autonomy and minimal private space (1989:17). Examples of shared housing include multi-family dwellings (MFD); single-room occupancy (SRO); mingle units and group homes. This category of housing includes government subsidized housing and other

[3] Vestbro (2000) offers a comprehensive list of references on collectives and sorts the literature into seven different categories. The strength of Vestbro's overview is in his inclusion of Scandinavian literature, which is detailed and extensive. However, because of Vestbro's eurocentric focus, there is a marked insufficiency of non-Northern European references, particularly from countries without a history or established tradition in cohousing type developments such as NZ and Australia.

[4] Norwood and Smith (1995) offer a diagram of the ideal spatial arrangement of private and communal areas. The authors suggest that in order to maintain a stable community, a graduation from public to private space is necessary. At the design level, this requires the placing of patios, porches, walk ways and gardens etc in the zones between the public and private spaces.

[5] For a detailed study of a cooperative see Cooper and Rodman's (1992) *New Neighbours: a case study of Cooperative Housing*, and for an historical analysis of the emergence of cooperatives see Birchall's (1988) *Building Communities the Cooperative Way*.

forms of economically driven housing options for those on limited incomes. The primary focus in shared housing is undoubtedly economic sustainability.

Publications about affordable housing range in focus from those concentrating on housing for single people (Edmonds 1977, Green 1994), to those that give overviews of plans and the types of multi-family dwellings (MFDs) built in Japan, Europe and the US (Cooper and Rodman 1992, Crosbie 2003, Mackay 1977, Raimy 1979). A great deal of the literature traces the emergence and evolution of shared habitation from the late nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century[6]. The main concern in affordable housing literature, both past and present, is how to house the poor or working in liveable dwellings. This perpetual societal and cross-cultural issue is, for the most part, the reason for the mass and breadth of publications on the topic.

The euphemistic term 'affordable housing' is used to describe the modern equivalents of public or social housing (see Bullivant 2003, Fromm 1991, Hemmens 1996, Maclennan and William 1990). Commonly defined, affordable housing is policy driven, subsidised, low-cost housing for people who can't afford to own their own homes. The affordability of affordable housing refers to the amount of rent residents should pay: accepted as being no more than one-third of their gross monthly household income. One of the principal design aims in affordable housing is to make units desirable to live in for occupants, and to move away from the high rise, high density apartment blocks of the past. An essential part of this departure is the change in terminology, as well as that in design.

Examples of commonly discussed affordable housing types include multi-family dwellings (MFDs), single-room occupancy (SRO), and flexible housing, where the function of each room can be modified to suit occupants' requirements[7]. So, for example, a study can be changed into an extra bedroom if another family member joins the household. The prototypical MFD design is a purpose-built, medium-density, three bedroom townhouse unit for single family or extended family-use.[8]. In MFDs the sharing of common space is almost always restricted to kin. As Ahrentzen and Franck (1989) make clear, the motivation for sharing in these types, including more innovative examples such as GoHomes, is still "Largely economic rather than social or practical" (1989:7).

Recent innovative types of affordable housing include 'homesharing' for the elderly or single-parent family[9]. In this situation, a home owner is matched with another person who is seeking a home, for a temporary period of time. This matching is facilitated through an non-governmental organisation, church or homesharing agency such as www.co.abode.com or www.homeshare.org (Zaslow 2002). Shared housing

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[6] See, for example Hayden's seminal work *Redesigning the American Dream: gender, housing and family life* (1984), and *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981).

[7] Single room occupancy (SRO) dwellings vary in design and in household composition. Some SRO dwellings include dormitories, while others consist of small groups of two to four individuals who live permanently in renovated houses. This is the case in British 'cluster flats' or U.S. 'quads' and 'mingles'. In cluster flats, individuals' rooms are clustered around a common kitchen, bathroom and living space. Quads are similar, but have only four bedrooms; mingles are single-family houses built for only two people. In mingles, two unrelated individuals each have private bedroom suites but share all other facilities in the house.

[8] For a visual overview of recent MFD housing designs see Crosbie's Multifamily Housing: the art in sharing (2003)

[9] Although affordability clearly plays a key role in people choosing to homeshare, other benefits are evident too, such as the sharing of housework and babysitting in the case of single-parent families (Horne and Baldwin 1988, McConnell 1980, McDermott 1988, Zaslow 2002).

types are also built to accommodate large numbers. Recent examples include the YWCA Family Village in Washington D.C., which is a residential apartment of two to three floors refitted to include common facilities; and California's Laurel/Norton Intergenerational Complex with multiple self-contained units for families of forty or more (Crosbie 2003).

Conjoined Housing: an emerging type

Conjoined housing is a pastiche of affordable, collective and green housing and depending on the design, is concerned with addressing economic, environmental and social issues. It is both similar to yet *distinct* from the dominant sustainable housing models discussed in the literature.

Designed for non-discrete, non-traditional households, conjoined housing is where a small number of kin and/or non-kin owner-occupants share a dwelling that is designed for both common and private space use. As well as being purpose built, a conjoined house may also be formed from two or more detached houses that are joined together to create shared space(s). The occupants come to reside in a conjoined house for a myriad of reasons; there is no single, stated philosophy in residents' housing choice

In affordable housing, households are mostly founded on non-kin relations, but can also be kin-based, as in the case of MFDs[10]. In collective housing, household relations are nearly always kin, and in cohousing they take the form of a single-family. Furthermore with collective housing, each household is but part of an aggregate corporate body, in which the collective acts as a legal individual in terms of property rights, rules and responsibilities. Socio-politically, each household is subsumed by the whole, with the membrane between them being porous in parts. The number of members in one household follows that of traditional single-families.

Although by definition conjoined households may be formed on either kin or non-kin relations, in general households consist of extended families, stem families, joint families and siblings. Stem families are fuller versions of an extended family; they occur where two single-families in adjacent generations are linked together by one individual who is a member of both families. An example of a stem family household can be found in the article "Making Room for Three Generations" (Viladas 1992). In a nine bedroom Californian house, a single-family of a husband and wife with two children, co-reside with the wife's parents. The total household number is six, and all members are kin. The parents have their own suite, and are joined to the rest of the household via a second story bridge.

The joint family, another form of kin relation, occurs where two or more unrelated single-families create a corporate unit. This was the case with the architect Rudolph Schindler's (1887-1953) Kings Road house in West Hollywood, California (Noever 2003, Smith 2001). In this conjoined housing model built in 1922, Schindler and his wife co-resided with another single-family, the Chaces until 1924, after which a different single-family, the Neutras, moved in. The Schindler house is a one-story, open

[10] One of the most common forms of *shared housing* is SRO, in which the household comprises single, unrelated adults. With MFDs, the household consists of a single-family with the occasional extended family member joining. Generally, household numbers vary greatly in number, from four, as in the case with quads, through to a hundred or more in large, vertically stacked SRO dwellings.

floor plan dwelling, with two adjoining wings, one for each of the two couples with a guest room linking the wings.

Sibling co-residence is another household type of conjoined housing. Three examples of fraternal and sororal co-residence patterns were found in literature: one was of two sisters alone in a two story Italian palazzo, each with their own suites (Weaver 1994), and the other two were of fraternal co-residence (Gatti 1998). In another, twin brothers and their respective families lived with the brother's elderly father in a two story studio-apartment built in 1927 (Calloway 2005). On the bottom floor were the brothers' art studios, the second floor their apartments, and just below the roof terrace was the father's small suite.

Of all the kin-based households, those comprising extended families were most common. This is because most publications featuring conjoined houses were from Japan and this type of co-residence pattern - where an elderly parent/parents live with the oldest son and his family - is a traditional, cultural ideal still observed. In the examples where a son and his two parents lived together, the households generally consisted of two connected wings, with the son's residence being the larger of the two.

With regards to ownership type, conjoined houses are always owned by occupants. This is similar to cohousing ownership, where family households own their own dwellings and have shares in the communal facilities. Unlike cohousing however, the proportion of what is owned may not be entirely equal as it depends on the group's internal dynamics. Shared housing on the other hand, is nearly always rented property, and the occupants are usually tenants. This aspect of ownership pushes conjoined housing closer to the category of collective housing on the continuum of communal housing.

The physical layout and spaces shared in conjoined housing designs depend greatly on the form of relationship occupants have with one another, and on the social dynamics of the group. It is contextual, and varies from household to household. For example Schindler's house (1922) was purposely built for two couples: the Schindlers and Chaces; his design reflected their close, friendly relationship with its two adjoining wings and shared kitchen. This characteristic of conjoined housing makes it different from other sustainable non-traditional housing types. It also relates to the reasons why each member of the household has chosen to live in a shared living arrangement. Principally, conjoined houses are not designed according to one set agenda, but are developed as a contextual response to its occupants' cultural and idiosyncratic needs and desires.

In affordable housing there is a consideration of public versus private space. To save on the cost of housing, occupants willingly trim their private spaces, and curb privacy in order to accommodate common facilities. In shared housing the notion of economic pragmatism determines physical design and layout. This is best demonstrated in the organisation of space in SRO dwellings, where bedrooms are an individual occupant's only private space. With collective housing on the other hand, sharing is seen as edifying and thus an essential part of the process of creating a better new society, made up of environmentally sustainable, cooperative communities[11]. Collective housing is more than a pragmatic response to changes in society, it is choice guided by a deep malcontent with modernity[12].

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[11] Located in the common house, the kitchen is the clearest signifier of the importance of 'community'. It both reflects residents' unfailing belief in community over the individual, and reminds them of the centrality of sharing in this.

[12] Sharing as a mode of behaviour makes explicit the belief that community should replace the individual, as the foundation of society. As such, *collective housing* designs are nearly always purpose-built; this

Conclusion: classifying sustainable housing

Conjoined housing is an emerging non-traditional housing type that in practice incorporates elements of economic, environmental and social sustainability. However within the literature on non-traditional housing types, conjoined housing can not be easily placed as belonging to any one category. Principally, this is because the definitions of the categories are too narrow.

The literature on sustainable housing only captures examples of affordable housing, cohousing and green housing. Historically the literature has been split between housing for economic sustainability—affordable housing—or socio-ecological sustainability as is the case with the philosophically driven cohousing model. In classifying housing types, 'intention' has been commonly used to distinguish between shared housing and cohousing types.

More recently, the notion of sustainability has come to represent ecological sustainable models, as is seen with green housing, while other forms of sustainable housing designs have receded into the background. A search on library research databases reflects the predominance of this particular definition of sustainability, with most if not all articles focused on green housing.

However, sustainability means more than ecological sustainability. It can also include notions of creating a socially sustaining community of individuals who share resources and space; it can mean the creation of a house that costs little to make and maintain, thereby reducing expenditure on resources; and it can also mean flexible housing, which allows for change in use with fewer new buildings being built. Despite the various ways of defining sustainability, for the most part sustainability has come to stand for 'ecologically responsible', single-family homes, which use recyclable materials and are energy efficient: scant attention is given to the option of sharing resources or space as an added method of conservation.

The problem faced with such narrow and slanted definitions within the literature is that different ways of living, which could be understood as being sustainable such as conjoined housing, are not being recognised and researched. This has implications on how we come to understand and analyse the way people live, which in turn affects our understandings of their capacity to adopt sustainable living practices for the future. The definition of sustainable housing designs needs to be widened to include models that may not stand for just one element of sustainability, but may in varying degrees incorporate all, with ecological sustainability being but one.

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communitarian movement does not simply seek a reform of society's social structures: in order to bring about a change the very foundations must be replaced.

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